

# Developing planning skills in young children



**M**any children have their lives rigidly planned for them at home, at school and in leisure activities. They drift along waiting to be taken to venues and attend activities pre-structured for them. Others have a complete lack of any organisation in their lives and events appear to them to happen at random – if at all! How can we develop their ability to think creatively and to begin to take some control over their lives?

At our school we focussed on teaching problem-solving and planning skills. These are taught not as separate entities – an

addition to an already overloaded curriculum – but as an integral part of school life. Children are shown how to anticipate complications or problems within a plan and to prepare for them.

For example, a school plan is made for a trip to local woodland. All children are asked what they see as the purpose or target for the visit. This becomes our “goal” or Ambitious Target.

Children then come up with all the obstacles that will prevent us from reaching our goal – and they have superb intuition on this subject!

These objectives are then written

onto sticky notes and arranged in an order that ensures logical progression towards the goal (see Figure 1). Target dates are set and we have a plan! This is monitored as the day of the trip approaches. Children learn the value of forethought and also appreciate the many different tasks required to organise a visit.

The technique, once learnt, becomes a valuable tool to use in any aspect of life.

Children can use it to set their own targets for academic improvement and also to analyse what went wrong in unsuccessful ventures. Planning school parties,

## Goal – Have a great day out at Bestwood Park

Obstacles	Objectives
Not booked park	Park is booked
Not booked bus	Bus is booked
No date	Date arranged
Don't know how much it costs	Cost calculated
Our mums and dads don't know we're going	Letter sent out
Don't know what the weather will be like	Check weather forecast
Don't know what to wear	Take correct clothes
No lunch arranged	Kitchen informed - lunch arrangements made
No helpers	Helpers organised
No equipment ready	Equipment organised
Teachers haven't planned what we'll do	Teachers plan activities



Figure 1



Figure 2

sports day and leavers' party/disco all become ventures children can be involved in. On a deeper level, children can begin to set life goals/career plans and develop the idea that any goal is possible if you plan effectively and are aware of the problems facing you, On a curriculum level it is possible to take topics e.g. Elizabethans, and have as a target "To know about Elizabethans and the lives they led". Children are then asked to speculate what they don't know about the subject and how they will find out in some form of logical order. This is an excellent extension activity for more able pupils.

Many people may say why don't you concentrate on what the children do know? My answer to that is, it's what the children don't know that worries me!

The technique has many applications for school managers.

*Planning a successful OFSTED Inspection? Try it!*

*Introducing a new Government Initiative? Try it!*

If all stakeholders are involved in the surfacing of obstacles this gives the pessimists and cynics their

chance to raise all the reasons why the goal won't be achieved. There then follows the opportunity to involve them in setting up the programme to overcome the obstacles. The resulting plan has involvement from all. Everybody enjoys "moaning" and this target harnesses that quintessential educational skill in a positive way. *Do you think, "My class are too young to do that"?*

Then see (figure 2) done by a 6 year old to plan Prince Edward's wedding for the Queen a few years back...

The use of this technique is based on the work done by Dr Eli Goldratt within the world of Business and Industry (Theory of Constraints or TOC). He is now committed to extending the range of the "tools" developed to encourage problem solving, decision-making and conflict resolution in the field of education (TOCFE). The development of such transferable, generic skills prepares our children to face the world of work in the future as well as helping them make sense of the present.

Useful reference sites include:

- [www.tocforeducation.com](http://www.tocforeducation.com)
- [www.tocforschools.com](http://www.tocforschools.com)

On page 35 you will find a copy of the template used to develop an Ambitious Target/Goal/Dream. Here are some instructions to go with it!



- Decide on what you want to achieve.
- Verbalise your target clearly.
- Write it at the top of the chart.
- Under the Obstacles column raise all the obstacles/problems you might encounter in pursuit of your target/goal/dream.
- Then in the Intermediate objectives column list the ways you will overcome these obstacles and how you might achieve that.
- Put each Intermediate objective onto a post-it note and number it to match the obstacle.
- Go through the post-it notes and begin to rank the objectives/actions in the order you would need to do them.
- Use the sticky notes to structure a plan of action (as Fig.1).

Further information and details of training packages available to schools and other organisations can be obtained from:

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