

Aistear

Creatchuraclam na Luath-Óige
The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework



**Learning experiences
for young children**

Learning experience 1: Jack's New Zealand roots**Theme: *Exploring and Thinking*, Aim 1 and Learning goal 5****Age group: Babies and young children****Setting: Home and childminding**

Every evening Luke reads a bedtime story to his son Jack (5½ years) and his baby daughter Kate (16 months). As they snuggle up to their Daddy, Kate helps to turn the pages and points to her favourite characters. She loves 'lift the flap' books and Luke told Kate's childminder, Mags, about this when she was starting with Mags a few months ago. Mags has a number of these books and Kate loves to sit on her knee on the garden seat looking at them.

Luke also told Mags about Jack's interest in books, especially books about sport. Luke is originally from New Zealand and he and Jack love to read about rugby. Jack has taught the other children at Mags' to play rugby, and a few weeks ago Luke arranged for Mags and the four children she minds to go to a local school rugby match. She also purchased two books about New Zealand as Jack and his family are planning a trip there during the summer to visit his grandparents. The children and Mags are learning a lot about New Zealand. They are finding out about the weather, the sports people play, the food they eat, and the types of farms they have. They are also comparing these with the village in Co. Tipperary where they live. The children are really excited about Jack and his family flying on a huge aeroplane. They are even building one just like it in Mags' playroom. It's massive!



Reflection: How can I build on children's interests to enhance their learning and development, and to strengthen their sense of identity?

Learning experience 3: Helping me to learn**Theme: *Communicating, Aim 3 and Learning goal 2*****Age group: Young children****Setting: Home and infant class (primary school)**

Kara (4 years) is in junior infants. Her parents left school early. They have difficulties with literacy and know this is a disadvantage. They really want Kara to do well in school and to get a good education. But Kara says she doesn't like school. Kara and her family have the support of a Home School Community Liaison co-ordinator, Betty. Betty encourages Kara's parents to talk to her teacher, Ms. Nugent, and she suggests some questions they might ask. Ms. Nugent encourages them to help Kara in whatever way they can. She suggests that they use a picture book to read a story or to tell her stories themselves about when they were children. They can draw pictures together at home and talk about them. If they have time they can come in some days and help out in the classroom.

Ms. Nugent also encourages Kara in school by asking her what kind of books she likes to look at and read. Kara replies, *Books about babies are good and books about dressing up and going to my friend's house.* Ms. Nugent regularly uses books on these topics when reading stories to Kara and her friends. She puts dress-up clothes and props such as tiaras, dolls, buggies, and hand-bags in the pretend play area. Ms. Nugent regularly talks to Kara's mam to see how they can continue to work together to support Kara at home and in school. Betty also liaises with Ms. Nugent and Kara's parents regularly to ensure Kara and her family have positive school experiences.



Reflection: What can I do to give extra support and encouragement to some parents?

Learning experience 4: An open-door policy**Theme: *Well-being*, Aim 1 and Learning goal 3****Age group: Toddlers and young children****Setting: Home and sessional service (playgroup)**

Mina greets the children and their parents as they arrive at the playgroup every morning. She finds these few minutes of contact invaluable. Parents can let her know if they would like more time to chat about their children and she arranges a time to suit. At the beginning of the year she also lets them know that she can be contacted by phone every day from 1 p.m. to 1.30 p.m. if they have any concerns, or just want to chat about how their child is getting on in the playgroup. She reminds them of this regularly, and many of them find it reassuring that they can keep in touch like this. Some children are brought by relatives or childminders, and this form of contact is invaluable for their parents as they can ring Mina during their lunchtime.

Mikie (2 years and 11 months) started in the playgroup a month ago. His mam, Lucy, is very shy and Mina makes a special effort to have a chat with her once a week. Mina shows Lucy something, such as a photograph of him playing or a picture that Mikie has made. She uses this to encourage Lucy to talk about Mikie. She asks about things he likes to do at home and she offers ideas to Lucy to help extend what he is learning in the setting.



Reflection: What strategies could I use to help parents to feel more confident in talking to me about their children?

Learning experience 5: The newsletter**Theme: *Exploring and Thinking*, Aim 4 and Learning goal 3****Age group: Toddlers and young children****Setting: Home and full and part-time daycare (nursery)**

The staff of the Happy Start Nursery have made a welcome pack for parents of new children. The pack includes the nursery's mission statement and information about how the staff support children's learning and development. They also send home a short newsletter each month so that parents know what songs, stories and activities the children are doing. Children are involved in deciding what information is included. An example of a recent newsletter available in English, French and Polish (the main home languages of the children) is included below. The staff also plan to use text messages for parents who want to receive reminders about events in the nursery.



Reflection: How can I share more information with parents about what their children are doing in my setting?

See the newsletter on the next page.

May 2009

Doing Great Things Together!

Happy Start Nursery: Senior toddlers and pre-schoolers

Our day out in the woods!

A big thank you to all the parents who came with us on our trip to Glengarra woods. A great day was had by all. The children tell us that they enjoyed the trip on the bus and the picnic the best! They also loved splashing in the puddles in their wellies. Since our return we have been learning about the trees and flowers that grow in the woods. We have also begun to learn about making honey since we discovered the bee hives hidden in the corner of the woods. Mr Mackey, who supplies honey to the local shops, is visiting the pre-school on **June 12**. He will bring some honey and show a video of the bees. Why not join us at 10 a.m. that day?

Photos of the Glengarra trip are on display in the main hall.

Time for more stories

We are going to the library as usual on the **last Friday of this month**. Thanks to the parents who came with us last month.

Have you spotted our bus?

Since the children enjoyed the trip on the bus to Glengarra Wood so much we decided to make our own bus. Thanks to Darren's daddy who gave us some lovely big cardboard boxes to work with. After much hard work we now have our own colourful buses complete with steering wheels, horns and seats. To build on the topic of transport Ava's mam Nora is coming in next week to talk to us about her job as the driver of the primary school bus. Many of the children in the pre-school will be travelling on this bus when they start school in September. Nora will be here at 10.30 on Thursday morning **May 14**. Come along if you can and stay for a cup of tea/coffee afterwards in the parent room.

Rhymes

As you know we always include a nursery rhyme or a poem in our newsletter. This month the children asked us to give you the words of the song, *The Wheels on the bus*. They'll teach you the actions. Hope you enjoy it.

- The wheels on the bus go round and round, round and round, round and round,
- The wheels on the bus go round and round, All through the town.
- The wipers on the bus go swish, swish, swish ...
- The doors on the bus go open and shut ...
- The horn on the bus goes beep, beep, beep ...
- The gas on the bus goes glug, glug, glug ...
- The money on the bus goes clink, clink, clink ...
- The people on the bus go chatter, chatter, chatter ...
- The wheels on the bus go round and round ...



Look who has a birthday in May

Rarish Obert will be 2 on May 1st.

Sharon O'Brien will be 3 on May 7th.

Fiachra Long will be 4 on May 15th.

Kia Mihas will be 5 on May 17th.

We hope you all have a lovely birthday.

Important date for your diary

During the **first two weeks in June** we hope to meet you and your child for a short while. Your child will show you his/her portfolio so you can see what he/she has been doing and learning through the year. If the time and date don't suit please contact Michelle on 084 6655437.

Learning experience 6: Paul's daily diary

Theme: Identity and Belonging, Aim 1 and Learning goal 5

Age group: Young children

Setting: Home and infant class (special primary school)

Paul (5 years) has moderate general learning disabilities. He goes on a bus every morning to attend Holy Angels' Special School seventeen miles from home. His parents rarely visit his school because of the distance, so they and his teacher use a daily diary to keep each other up-to-date on how Paul is getting on. This means that his parents can talk to him about what happens at school and can reinforce his learning at home. It also means that his practitioners are able to take what happens at home into account, as Paul has difficulty communicating this himself.

Paul was very excited recently when his family got a new puppy. His mam wrote about this in his diary. His teacher used this information when planning his activities for the week. Paul screeched excitedly when Miss O'Malley knew the name of the puppy and he seemed to really enjoy it when she read him a story about a sheepdog working on a farm. An example of an extract from Paul's diary is included below.



Reflection: What special arrangements can I put in place to share information with parents I don't often see?

Figure 2: Extract from Paul's daily diary

February 28

Hi Fiona

Paul had a poor night's sleep. Seemed fine when he came home from school. Had his tea and we went for a walk with him in the wheelchair. Toby, the puppy came too. As usual Paul had his bath and we read him a story but for some reason he never settled. He may be tired in school today. I know I am!

Regards

Aileen

February 28

Thanks Aileen. Jackie, Paul's physio did a session with him today. I told her he might be a little tired. She did some gentle exercises with him and when she brought him back to class he seemed very tired so we put him in the quiet area with his teddy and his blanket and he went for a short sleep. He had a good lunch and seemed in good form after that. He's still enjoying the books about animals. He's also getting very good at knocking the towers of blocks with his head and your practice at home is really showing. Hope you sleep tonight.

As always, give me a call on 087227569 at any time,

Fiona

Learning experience 7: Showing empathy**Theme: Identity and Belonging, Aim 4 and Learning goal 3****Age group: Young children****Setting: Home, childminding and infant class (primary school)**

Mike, a widower visits his daughter Saoirse's school today to hear how she is getting on in senior infants. The school has a policy of giving parents a written mid-year report in February at the parent/teacher meetings and again towards the end of June. This is Mike's first face-to-face meeting with Saoirse's teacher. His wife Mary used to look after all contacts with the school. Saoirse's childminder, Niamh, drops and collects Saoirse from school every day while Mike is at work and she fills Mike in about how things are going at school. She knows Saoirse's teacher well and has an informal chat with her regularly, especially since Mike asked her to do this for him. The school has been very good about supporting Saoirse since her Mammy died five months ago. Miss Buckley, Saoirse's teacher, has been in regular phone contact with Mike since then. However, Mike is still a bit nervous about the meeting.

Miss Buckley immediately puts Mike at ease and reassures him that Saoirse is doing very well. She goes through the report card in detail with him and regularly asks him if he has any questions. She also shows him samples of Saoirse's work on display on the walls, in her books, and in her portfolio. She shares some photographs with him. Two of these show Saoirse minding two babies while playing with a friend. The caption beside the photographs reads, *Don't worry Lucy. I'll look after you.* Miss Buckley explains that Saoirse and her friend were pretending that Lucy's mammy was sick and died. She asks Mike how Saoirse is getting on at home and he tells her about the things she enjoys and the things that she finds hard, now that her Mammy is gone. Miss Buckley gives Mike the report card to take home and tells him to call or to send in a note if he wants to talk to her about Saoirse. She reassures him that she will continue to keep a close eye on Saoirse and that she will give him a call in a few weeks to give him an update. She re-emphasises that Saoirse is doing well in her learning and is coping well at school after losing her Mammy.



Reflection: Do I give enough thought to the events and circumstances in families' lives which can impact on children's learning and development?

Learning experience 8: Dan the music man**Theme: *Communicating*, Aim 4 and Learning goal 3****Age group: Babies, toddlers and young children****Setting: Home and childminding**

Dan is a musician. His own children love music, and he has sung with them at home since they were babies. Now he comes to their childminding setting once a fortnight on one of his days off work to play his guitar and sing songs with the children. They are fascinated by his guitar. They want to know how heavy it is, what it is made from, and how strings make music. Dan shows them how it works. One day he brings along his drums and introduces them to drumming. He uses spoken rhythms to help them tap out the beat: *An-nie Lou-ber* (names with the younger children) and *Do you want a cup of tea?* (sentences with the older children). The children look forward to his visits. They practise almost every day so they can show Dan how good their clapping is when he returns. Before his next visit Noeleen the minder and the children make guitars and drums from junk materials. They can't wait to show Dan their band!



Reflection: What special talents do the parents have that I could tap into and share with the children I mind?

Learning experience 9: It's never too late**Theme: *Communicating*, Aim 3 and Learning goal 2****Age group: Young children****Setting: Home and sessional service (pre-school)**

When Sonia was young she missed a lot of school. As a result, she had difficulties reading and she found it hard to work with written information. When her children's pre-school sent notes home she had to ask her sister to read them for her. Over time she got to know Maggie, another parent. Maggie persuaded her to go along with her to the classes in the parents' room. There was a crèche in an adjoining room where Sonia's toddler could stay. Sonia and Maggie chose a craft course for beginners. Sonia's four-year-old Evan was delighted to see her coming into his pre-school. Sonia enjoyed the course and felt more confident about talking to Evan's practitioner. Next, she attended a parenting course and felt that she was able to contribute a lot to it from her own experience. The teacher who organised the courses encouraged her to enrol in an adult literacy class. Sonia is making good progress. She especially enjoys reading to her children and looks forward to notes coming home, which she can now read herself.



Reflection: What can my colleagues and I do in our setting to help parents in their role as their children's educators?

Learning experience 10: Bláithín's dad**Theme: *Well-being, Aim 4 and Learning goal 6*****Age group: Young children****Setting: Home and infant class (primary school)**

Joan and Con have three children at primary school. They are both active members of the Parents' Association (PA) and take turns going to meetings. They have built good relationships with the teachers and other parents since their first child started school. A new housing estate has been built locally and the number of children attending the school has greatly increased. The PA and the school staff recently helped to organise an open day for parents of new children. Patrick whose daughter Bláithín started junior infants this year, went along. The PA are also developing an outdoor play area for the infants which includes a place for planting. Con suggested to the teachers that Patrick might be interested in getting involved in setting up the outdoor area. Patrick looks after his children each weekend since he and his wife separated. He is a part-time builder. Patrick is delighted to be asked and especially so when the teacher suggests that the children might help him out. His daughter Bláithín is delighted about this. Patrick feels that he is contributing positively to his children's learning and development and also benefiting the school community by using his skills.

Over the next few weeks Patrick, the class teacher, children, and some other parents enjoy working together and have the play area ready for the sun in June!



Reflection: Are there ways in which I can encourage dads to become more involved in their children's learning and development?

Learning experience 13: Transitions**Theme: *Well-being*, Aim 1 and Learning goal 3****Age: Young children****Setting: Home, sessional service (pre-school) and infant class (primary school)**

Simon (almost 6 years) attends his local primary school. His parents became concerned about his behaviour when he was around two-and-a-half. Simon had difficulty concentrating and completing activities. They spoke to the public health nurse. She felt that there was no immediate cause for concern and advised them to send Simon to pre-school the following September. He settled in well. The ratio of adults to children was very good and Simon was assigned a Key Worker, Kelly, who often spent time in one-to-one interactions with him and helped him to play and interact with other children in the group. Kelly helped break down tasks for Simon and modelled things for him a number of times. She gave one piece of information or direction at a time which helped him to join in activities with others. Simon especially liked water play and being outdoors. Kelly helped set up a buddy system and Rachel really enjoyed being Simon's special friend. Simon spent two years in the pre-school.

Simon's parents were concerned about his transfer to primary school. He was going to the local school where there were 19 junior infants, senior infants and first class children in the classroom. Simon's parents met the principal and his teacher before he started school and they outlined their concerns and the additional help Simon had received at pre-school. They arranged to meet again in mid-October when the teacher had a chance to get to know Simon. After that meeting Simon was referred for an educational assessment. Following his assessment, an Individual Education Plan was drawn up and a special needs assistant was appointed to help him in the classroom for 10 hours per week.

Simon is now in senior infants. He spends time with the school's special education teacher working on specific skills that will help him to learn. His parents are pleased with Simon's progress and the work his teachers are doing to ensure that his needs are met. They get regular feedback from the school and they talk to his teacher once a fortnight by phone to find out what they can do to help Simon progress.



Reflection: How can I improve how I work with parents of children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) to involve them more in their children's learning and development?

Eispéireas foghlama 16a: Téann Ruairí go dtí an t-ospidéal

Téama: Taiscéaladh agus Smaointeoireacht, Aidhm 2 agus Sprioc foghlama 5**Aoisghrúpa:** Leanaí**Suíomh:** Rang naíonán (Gael scoil)

(Thosaigh an t-eispéireas seo le linn an tseisiúin chomhrá Ghaeilge)

Bhí Múinteoir Seán ag labhairt lena rang de 23 naíonán sóisearach agus sinsearach. Bhí inní ar Ruairí, an puipéad, toisc go raibh air dul go dtí an t-ospidéal chun go mbainfí a chéislíní. D'fhiafraigh Múinteoir Seán de na leanaí conas a bhraithfeadh siad dá mbeadh orthu dul go dtí an t-ospidéal. Fuair sé freagraí éagsúla. Ansin d'fhiafraigh sé de na leanaí conas a d'fhéadfaidís cuidiú le Ruairí brath níos fearr mar gheall ar an gcuairt ar an ospidéal. Rinne roinnt mhaith de na leanaí comhbhá le mothúcháin inní agus neirbhíse Ruairí agus faoi bheith ina aonair agus scoite amach ón theaghlach agus a chairde.

Thosaigh Myra (beagnach 6 bliana d'aois), a bhfuil fiobrós chisteach uirthi, ag labhairt ar na sealanna fada a chaith sí san ospidéal. Bhí gach duine ag éisteach léi go cúramach. Thosaigh sí le plé ar an ospidéal agus ar an gcúis a mbíonn ar dhaoine dul ann. Chuir roinnt de na leanaí a scéalta féin in iúl mar gheall orthu féin agus chuir Múinteoir Seán leis an méid a bhí le rá acu. D'éascair sraith comhráite as an bplé thar an gcéad chúpla lá eile maidir le cén fáth a n-éiríonn daoine tinn, conas a thagann biseach orthu, agus cén fáth a bhfaigheann roinnt daoine bás de bharr tinnis.

Níos déanaí i rith na seachtaine, agus tar éis roinnt acmhainní a thabhairt ón mbaile, thiomsaigh Múinteoir Seán agus na leanaí bailiúchán frapaí agus éadaí maiseacha chun ospidéal a dhéanamh. Bhí ceathrar tinn ann —Ruairí, Teidí, Nóra, agus Múinteoir Seán. Roinn sé an grúpa leanaí i gceithre ghrúpa agus d'iarr orthu oibriú le chéile chun freastal ar riachtanais duine amháin de na hothair. Gan mhoill shroich ceithre fhoireann de dhochtúirí agus altraí chomh maith le cuairteoirí an t-ospidéal chun Ruairí, Teidí, Nóra agus Múinteoir Seán a fheiceáil. Thar an gcéad seachtain eile, bhí deis ag na grúpaí cóireáil a chur ar na hothair seo agus ar othair nua, agus fuair gach leanbh an deis a bheith ina dhochtúir, altra, chuairteoir agus othar. Chuir an phleanáil seo ar chumas Mhúinteoir Seán am a chaitheamh le gach ceann de na ceithre ghrúpa agus thug seo an deis dó teanga nua a thabhairt isteach sa chomhthéacs agus a dtuiscint ar bheith san ospidéal a fhorbairt.

Tá sé beartaithe ag Múinteoir Seán úsáid a bhaint as roinnt suíomhanna ina mbeadh daoine i sáinn chun plé a spreagadh agus foghlaim a chur chun cinn i réimsí éagsúla den churaclam thar na seachtainí le teacht.



Ábhar Machnaimh: Conas is féidir liom cuidiú leis na leanaí iniúchadh a dhéanamh ar shuíomhanna agus ar eispéiris nua trí mheán an phlé agus trí shúgradh samhlaíoch?

Learning experience 16b: Ruairí goes to the hospital**Theme: *Exploring and Thinking*, Aim 2 and Learning goal 5****Age group: Young children****Setting: Infant class (Gaelscoil)**

(This experience begins during an Irish conversation session.)

Múinteoir Seán is talking to his class of 23 junior and senior infants. Ruairí, the puppet is worried because he has to go to hospital to have his tonsils removed. Múinteoir Seán asks the children how they would feel if they had to go to hospital. He gets a variety of responses. He then asks the children how they could help Ruairí to feel better about the trip to hospital. Many children empathise with Ruairí's feelings of worry and nervousness, and about being alone and away from family and friends.

Myra (almost 6 years), who has cystic fibrosis, starts to talk about her long and frequent stays in hospital. She has a captive audience. Her contribution starts a discussion about hospital and why you go there. Many of the children share their own stories and Múinteoir Seán adds his. The discussion leads to a series of conversations over the next few days when the children explore why people get sick, what makes them better, and why some people die when they're sick.

Later in the week, and after much collecting of resources from home, Múinteoir Seán and the children assemble a collection of props and dressing-up clothes to make a hospital. There are four very sick people—Ruairí, Teddy, Nora the SNA, and Múinteoir Seán. Múinteoir Seán divides the children into four groups and asks each group to work together to attend to the needs of one of the four patients. Within minutes four teams of doctors and nurses appear as do visitors for Ruairí, Teddy, Nora and Múinteoir Seán. Over the next week, the groups have opportunities to treat each of the patients as well as new patients, and all the children get opportunities to be doctors, nurses, visitors, and patients. This planning enables Múinteoir Seán to spend time with each of the four groups introducing new language in context and developing their understanding of being in hospital.

Múinteoir Seán plans to use some of the quandaries and ponderings raised in the discussions and play scenarios to promote learning in different areas of the curriculum over the following few weeks.



Reflection: How can I help children explore new situations and experiences through discussion and pretend play?

Learning experience 18: Apple, jam and mud tarts**Theme: *Exploring and Thinking*, Aim 3 and Learning goal 4****Age group: Toddlers and young children****Setting: Childminding**

Margaret looks after two children in her own home while their parents are at work. Today she and the children are baking. They start by washing their hands and putting on aprons. John (2 years and 2 months), Orla (5 years) and Margaret are making apple tarts. Orla helps slice up some apples and John sprinkles on the sugar. When the apple tarts are in the oven John and Orla use leftover pastry to make jam tarts. They have great fun rolling out the pastry just as Margaret did, and put jam in the middle before brushing on milk to seal the edges. John has great fun sprinkling on the flour so the pastry doesn't stick to the table. When they are finished they help Margaret to tidy up. Orla sweeps the floor while John uses the dustpan and brush.

Later Orla and John go outside to play. Outside they make mud tarts and Orla gives John a stone and instructs him, *Roll out the pastry John 'cos we need a tart for dinner. A yummy tart. Here you can do this bit. Good job, that's great baking John.* She asks John to help her to tidy up when they are finished just as Margaret did. He readily agrees. When the mud tart is baked the children share it with teddy and Orla's baby doll, Babs, just as they did earlier in the day with Margaret.



Reflection: What are the children learning through watching and copying my actions?

Learning experience 19: I don't want you to come to my birthday party**Theme: Identity and Belonging, Aim 3 and Learning goal 4****Age group: Young children****Setting: Infant class (primary school)**

The junior infant class has children from a range of cultures including Traveller children and children from Nigeria, China and Egypt. Early in the first term the teacher, Mrs O'Reilly, notices that some children are using racist and discriminatory remarks when interacting with certain children in the class. This seems to be happening mainly at playtime in the yard.

One day she overhears a conversation in which one child says to another child, *I don't want you to come to my birthday party 'cos you're brown.* The teacher talks to both children, reassuring Zara (who moved to Ireland from Nigeria two years ago) first and talking to her about how she is feeling. She then focuses on finding out why the other child, Anna, acted in such a way. Mrs O'Reilly is conscious there may be a number of reasons for Anna's behaviour. Did the girls disagree about something? Did Anna hear someone else saying what she said? Did Anna want to hurt Zara and use her skin colour to do this? Mrs O'Reilly talks with Anna about why she used hurtful comments when playing with Zara. She explains the hurt this can cause to Zara and that it is not ok to do that. She tries to help Anna think about how she would feel if it happened to her.

Mrs O'Reilly looks for support as to how she might deal with this situation. She does some reading about young children and prejudice and discrimination. She refers to the school policy on inclusion and uses the document, *Intercultural Education in the Primary School: Guidelines for Schools* (NCCA, 2005). She visits www.action.ncca.ie for examples of practice from other teachers in responding to conflict. She also speaks to the principal.

Mrs O'Reilly knows it is important to address this issue immediately in order to support Zara and Anna as well as the other children. She follows up in the classroom through initial work on feelings. She uses storybooks to explore 'being left out' and 'name-calling'. Through this, she and the children think about the actions and thoughts of a perpetrator, a recipient, and an onlooker to a negative situation. She reviews the images of people displayed in the classroom through posters and photographs and changes some of these to reflect a greater variety of cultures. She also sources multicultural dolls (male and female with realistic physical features) for the pretend play area as well as a variety of skin coloured crayons and paints. If a similar incident happens she will talk to the parents of the children involved. For now, she will observe closely the relationship between Zara and Anna, and will work with the whole class on making the school experience positive for everyone.



Reflection: Am I unintentionally making it acceptable for children to hurt each other through words and actions?

Learning experience 22: Happy St. Patrick's Day

Theme: Communicating, Aim 3 and Learning goal 5**Age group: Young children****Setting: Infant class (primary school)**

The group of 25 senior infants are making St Patrick's Day cards. They have been working on them for a couple of days sticking, gluing and making pictures. Today they are writing messages to their families on them. The children have lots of opportunities to write each day, for example shopping lists and phone messages in the pretend play area, labels for working in the block corner, names for junk art designs, chalk and mini blackboards in the writing corner to write messages and news, copy-books for writing stories, and letter games on the computer and interactive white board. Alongside these the teacher uses mini lessons to show the children how to form letters.

John (5½ years) doesn't like making mistakes when writing. He asks Ms Fogarty if she will scribe the words for him as she does when the class are telling and creating stories. Trying to build his confidence with writing, Ms Fogarty encourages him to have a go. *No, I will mess it all up*, he responds. Ms Fogarty takes a note from John's portfolio, which he made for the elves in the story, *The Elves and the Shoemaker*. She kneels beside John saying, *Do you remember the day you wrote the note for the elves?*

That was a great note. Look, let's read it together. John smiles as he looks at his note. She also reminds him of the shopping lists they made earlier in the week, and about the books and posters with words around the room. Ms Fogarty suggests, *I'll stay beside you and help if you need me to.* John nods. The teacher asks him what he would like to put on the card. He responds, *Happy St Patrick's Day Mammy and Daddy. Love John.* Suddenly John jumps out of his seat and goes to the wall where there is a poster with 'Happy St Patrick's Day' on it. *I can write this*, he exclaims with delight. John carefully copies it. He asks the teacher to spell mammy and daddy. Ms Fogarty wonders if any of the other children are using those words, and a discussion with the rest of the group results in suggestions. John makes a stab at spelling mammy, M-A-M-Y. Ms Fogarty uses positive body language to support him. She explains that there are two ms in mammy. As each word is completed she affirms his efforts and encourages him: *I think your mammy and daddy will get a lovely surprise when they open your card and read your message that you wrote yourself.* John is delighted with himself when he finishes. At 2 p.m. he rushes out the door to greet his mammy with the card in hand.



Reflection: Do I help children to see the progress they are making and to build on this?

Learning experience 25: We can decide**Theme: *Well-being*, Aim 4 and Learning goal 1****Age group:** Young children**Setting:** Full and part-time daycare (after-school)

The children go from the infant classes of the primary school to the after-school club. Ray, the after-school worker, helps them to plan their activities. He tries to promote an atmosphere of democracy and independence. There is usually a flexible structure to the session with outdoor time, one or two group activities indoors (one decided by Ray, the other agreed on by the children), free play, and then a group activity before going home. A meeting is held with the eight children and they negotiate what they will do for the 2½ hours before their parents collect them. Direct access to the outdoor area is not available, so children go out as a group for activities that Ray has organised or for a particular activity or project they have decided on themselves. During the free play session children can choose from a variety of resources and materials, for example the computer area, the pretend area, the arts and crafts area, the sand and water area, the construction area, and the quiet area with books and jigsaws.

Ray has a magnet board on which each child can stick his/her photograph and/or write his/her name. The children put pictures of all the activities they intend to do during the session beside their names and/or photographs. Ray keeps a close watch to make sure that the children are experiencing a range of activities. Before going home the children come together again as a group to hear a story or to sing songs, and to talk about what they have done.



Reflection: How can I involve children more in deciding what they do in the setting?

Learning experience 27: Boxes galore!**Theme: *Exploring and Thinking*, Aim 3 and Learning goal 1****Age group: Toddlers and young children****Setting: Home**

Jenna is a single parent and is at home with her two children, Robert (2½ years) and Rebecca (5 years). They live in a disadvantaged area in the city centre. At times Jenna finds it hard to cope with the children, especially as the flat has no access to a garden and the nearest park is a bus ride away. Pat, the family support worker, has been helping Jenna to join in with the children in their play. Pat and the family have been to the local electrical shop to get an assortment of empty boxes. Jenna and the children play together to turn these into garages and apartment complexes. Pat provides paints, glitter and glue, and the whole family work together happily in the kitchen deciding who is going to do what. At school Rebecca paints pictures, which she takes home to decorate the apartments. Jenna helps Robert to make a ramp for his car to get into the garage. Later that week, Jenna, Robert and Rebecca go for a walk and compare their garages and apartments to the ones in their locality. They have fun walking along and suggesting things to add to their cardboard apartments.



Reflection: What resources and materials can I get in my community to help improve the learning environment for my children?

Learning experience 28: A grand design for my classroom**Theme: *Identity and Belonging*, Aim 2 and Learning goal 1****Age group: Young children****Setting: Infant class (primary school)**

Miss O'Brien is getting ready for her new junior infant class. She divides the room into five interest areas: a messy play area (sand, water, play-dough, and paint), a pretend play area, a quiet area (library), a construction area, and a seated area with tables and chairs. She uses pictures to label the areas for the children. This year she will have four Polish children in the class. English and Irish will be second and third languages for these children. To support emergent literacy Miss O'Brien uses words in English, Irish and Polish when making the labels. She puts pictures and multilingual signs over the shelves and storage areas so that tidy-up time will be easier for everyone. She also provides welcome signs in the children's home languages, and borrows some displays of their work and family photographs from parents and feeder pre-schools.

Miss O'Brien uses colour codes to assist the children in recognising their assigned groups. She arranges the tables into five groups with a different colour assigned to each. She plans to use the colour coding to rotate and manage various activities among the groups on a daily, weekly and termly basis. She will review and vary the activities, resources and choices regularly. Miss O'Brien also hopes to move some activities like PE, group art projects, and pretend play outdoors throughout the year: at least once a month in the winter and once a week during the other terms.

Sally, a Special Needs Assistant, will be in the classroom to support Fergal who has autism. Fergal uses the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) to communicate. Miss O'Brien puts a number of sequence pictures around the room to help Fergal understand what is happening and what will happen next.

Planning and structuring the environment is a very important part of Miss O'Brien's work. She knows that many changes will have to be made once the children arrive, and even on a daily basis after that, as she gets to know the children and they share in making decisions about their learning environment inside and outside the classroom.



Reflection: How can I design and organise the classroom so that the children enjoy being in it, and so that it helps them to be as independent as possible?

Learning experience 30: Tractors in difficulty!**Theme: *Exploring and Thinking*, Aim 2 and Learning goal 3****Age group: Toddlers and young children****Setting: Sessional service (pre-school)**

Twins Claire and Robert (nearly 3 years), Lauren (3½ years) and Oisín (4 years) are playing with the tractors, trailers and diggers outside. They are busy digging foundations for a new house they are building. They have filled two trailers with wet earth and stones. The next task is to transport this to the dumping area which is across a stretch of grass. Oisín and Claire set off on the tractors. They quickly realise that no matter how hard they push on the peddles the tractor wheels will not move. The ground is very bumpy and the loads are heavy! Robert and Lauren suggest they might be stronger. Drivers are switched but the problem persists.

They proceed to empty some of the contents of one trailer. This helps a little but it still takes a lot of effort to get the tractor wheels to move. Claire calls the playgroup leader, Rosaleen, to come and have a look. Rosaleen kneels down to see what is happening. Claire jumps on to the tractor and presses down on the peddles with all her might. *See the tractor's got stuck*, explains Claire. Rosaleen announces: ***My goodness, why are those wheels not turning?*** Jamie (4 years), standing nearby and overhearing the conversation, joins them and takes a look at the tractor wheels. *Granda uses long things of wood when his tractor is stuck in muck*, he explains. *Can we do that Rosaleen?* asks Robert. With Rosaleen's help, they find a large cardboard box which they cut into a long strip. Discovering the strip is not long enough to stretch across the grass area, they cut it in two to make a long path. All five children work together to manoeuvre the tractor on to the cardboard. Claire jumps back on board and presses down on the peddles again. Slowly, to everyone's delight, the tractor begins to move. Soon a convoy of tractors is using the new cardboard road, and the earth and stones get deposited in the dumping area. As the children play together Rosaleen explores with them why the cardboard helped the tractors to move. A whole conversation on friction ensues!



Reflection: Do I use children's discoveries to help extend their thinking and problem-solving skills?

Learning experience 31: What's that black stuff?**Theme: *Exploring and Thinking*, Aim 2 and Learning goal 5****Age group: Young children****Setting: Infant class (primary school)**

Miss O'Meara teaches 23 junior and senior infants. During a hot spell of weather the children notice soft black tar on the road outside the school gate. Some step in it and discover it's very sticky! This sparks off a conversation in class about what the 'black stuff' is and how it got there. To help the children understand the effect of heat on materials she plans an investigation for the next day.

During structured play Miss O'Meara works with six children at a time, while the other children are in other areas including the pretend play area, the music and art area, and the construction area. The group has six containers and dishes of chocolate, ice-cream and butter. The children work in pairs and each pair is responsible for one of the three materials. Miss O'Meara shows the children her cooler box full of ice and a cupboard which is very warm as the heating pipes run behind it. She asks the children to think about what would happen the chocolate, the ice-cream and the butter if they were placed in the cooler and in the cupboard. She records the children's predictions on a large sheet of paper. The children proceed to test their theories. They place containers with the three materials (each one containing a different material) in the cooler box and the remaining three containers in the cupboard. They leave them overnight.

The next day Miss O'Meara and the children remind themselves of their predictions. Excitedly, the children retrieve their containers from the cooler box and the cupboard. The children are amazed by some of the changes. They are delighted that the ice-cream hasn't melted in the cooler box, but Aisling points out, *I might need a straw instead of a spoon to eat that ice-cream*, referring to the ice-cream in the cupboard. Peter is very disappointed that none of the chocolate can be eaten, because even when he bangs the one that was in the cooler box on the table he can't break a piece off, and the one that was in the cupboard *is all mushy like baby food*. Anna thinks that her mam would like the butter that was in the cupboard, *because it's nice and soft and won't rip holes in the bread for my sandwiches*. But the children are sure Anna's mam wouldn't like the butter that was in the cooler box because it is so hard.

The children and Miss O'Meara use what they see to explain where the sticky black tar came from. Over the next few days the children have great fun keeping watch on the tar at the school gate and setting up 'melting' investigations at home with siblings.



Reflection: How can I provide opportunities to predict and explore everyday happenings to help children to make sense of their world?

Learning experience 38: We both love dinosaurs**Theme: *Exploring and Thinking*, Aim 2 and Learning goal 2****Age group: Young children****Setting: Infant class (primary school)**

Jason (4½ years) is in junior infants. He asks his teacher a question about dinosaurs. The teacher suggests he ask Sarah (5½ years) because she knows a lot about them. Sarah is able to answer his question and the two children start playing at the small world table with the dinosaurs. The following day Sarah brings in her scrapbook about dinosaurs to show Jason. Jason tells his mammy all about Sarah and she arranges for Sarah to come and play at Jason's house. The two children become good friends during their year in junior infants.



Reflection: Do I create opportunities for children to share their interests with each other and use this as a basis for learning?

Learning experience 39: Lots of different families**Theme: *Identity and Belonging*, Aim 2 and Learning goal 2****Age group: Young children****Setting: Full and part-time daycare (crèche)**

Today the children in the local crèche are making pictures about their families. When they're finished their pictures their room leader, Dervla, asks them to tell the other children at their tables about their picture. Amer draws a picture of his mummies and his big brother. Alan paints his mammy, daddy and dog. Diarmuid draws his daddy, and his mammy with a big tummy with a new baby inside, while Emma draws her mum and pet gold fish in their home and a picture of her dad and his other family in their house. Dervla kneels down beside each pair. She listens, comments and sometimes asks a question. Through this experience the children begin to develop an appreciation of differences in each other's home lives and families.



Reflection: What can I do to help children see difference as part of life?

Learning experience 40: Don't hurt me because I'm different**Theme: Well-being, Aim 1 and Learning goal 5****Age group: Young children****Setting: Sessional service (pre-school)**

There are two Traveller children, Winnie (3 years) and David (4½ years), in the pre-school. The children live in a trailer on an official halting site on the outskirts of the town. Some of the children have made unkind comments about Travellers and where they live. Sarah, the pre-school manager, wants to deal with the name-calling and unkind comments immediately so that she can help the Traveller children feel proud of who they are. She also wants to make sure they feel they belong in the setting. Sarah thinks that, if the other children learn about Traveller life and come to understand that people have different backgrounds and traditions, Winnie and David will be able to make friends more easily. Sarah introduces a puppet, Ollie, who talks about how he feels when someone makes hurtful comments about him. She involves the children in the discussion and she explains that it is not nice to make nasty comments about people or about where they live. Sarah plans a number of small group activities in which two or three children play and work with Winnie and David. Sarah will support the children as they play together and will join in herself until the children are more comfortable with each other.



Reflection: How do I help children value and respect each other's background and traditions, and encourage them to play and work together?

Learning experience 43: The spider's web**Theme: Well-being, Aim 3 and Learning goal 3****Age group: Young children****Setting: Sessional service (playgroup)**

The children in the playgroup are outside on a frosty morning. Two boys, Fiachra and James, (both 4 years) discover a large spider's web. They call the playgroup assistant, Zola, over to have a look at it. They are fascinated by the different colours. Zola explains that it is the sun's reflection on the frost that is doing this. Zola is French and she tells them that the French word for spider's web is *toile d'araignée*. They laugh at each other's attempts to say it! She asks the boys if they would like to take a photograph of the web and they race inside to get the camera, each trying to go faster than the other. Zola uploads the photograph to the computer. The boys study it trying to work out how the spider made the web. The boys tell Zola that they want to make a web too. They assemble a range of materials including glue, paper, markers, string, knitting wool, and tinfoil. They spend a long time making their webs and proudly take photographs of them. *Ils sont magnifique, quelles couleurs (They are brilliant, what colours)*, Zola says.

After lunch the boys run out to see the web but have trouble finding it because the ice has melted. They are disappointed. During circle time the group have a discussion about how ice and snow melt and how the ice melting made it difficult for Fiachra and James to find their web. The following day another child brings in a DVD about a spider. They all watch it. Over the following weeks some children do projects on spiders while others investigate ice.



Reflection: How often do I encourage children to get involved in projects on things that interest them?

Learning experience 44: Recreating history**Theme: Well-being, Aim 4 and Learning goal 3****Age group: Young children****Setting: Infant class (primary school)**

The junior infants live in a town where there is a large castle. They, along with their teacher and some parents, visited it a few weeks ago. The teacher and children took many digital photographs. The children saw and discussed the various features of the castle and learned about who lived there and the purposes of its different parts. One day shortly after the visit the teacher invites the children to make castles of their own. They are working in groups of four and can use whatever materials they like. Some choose blocks, others Lego, some recycled materials, while others draw pictures.

One group decides to make a model of the castle with recycled materials, including a sturdy cardboard box and small world people. Dylan (almost 5 years) who has spina bifida takes an active part. Lisa, his special needs assistant, has to make some modifications to the materials so that Dylan can take part as independently as possible. She makes sure the castle base has been securely taped to the table and some of the pieces of material already have double-sided tape on them for Dylan to use. As Dylan has some physical disabilities he often needs a little help from his class buddy, Liam, who is always eager to lend a hand. The group is very pleased with the finished article and spend much time playing with it.

Sometimes they take the castle outside at playtime. Dylan holds it on his lap in the wheelchair while one of the others pushes him. One day they forget to bring it back in and the children arrive the following morning to find a wet soggy castle! They see the impact of rain on cardboard but don't seem too upset. They decide to become the sentries and wild animals and they divide the playground into different areas of the castle. Dylan speeds around in his wheelchair fighting off the wild animals.

The castle theme is developed over the following days when the children learn more about the history of the castle and when they read books and watch a relevant TV programme. Their interest in castle life deepens and after many discussions and much research involving interviews with the local librarian the children make period costumes and armour which they model for other classes at assembly.



Reflection: To what extent do I encourage children to think of their individual strengths when they take on roles in their play?

Learning experience 47: No, it's my turn**Theme: Identity and Belonging, Aim 3 and Learning goal 6****Age group: Young children****Setting: Sessional service (pre-school)**

A group of four young children (between 3 and 4 years) are playing outside with the bikes and tractors in the pre-school. A dispute arises. Two children approach Breda, a staff member. She talks to the group of four and asks them to tell her what the problem is. *It's my turn to have a bike*, Robert explains. *And it's my turn to have the tractor*, Jenny exclaims. *No it's not*, David shouts, *I got it first*. Claire sits solidly on her tractor without entering into the argument while Jenny tries to push her off. Breda realises from the children's comments that there aren't enough bikes and tractors for everyone. *So there aren't enough for all of you to have one each. I wonder what we can do about this*, Breda responds: *I'm trying to remember how we sorted the problem about taking turns at the computer last week. Can anyone think how?* The children start arguing again. Then Robert shouts: *I know, the egg-timer. That's how. I'll get it*. He returns a minute later with the large egg-timer to time the turns. After some discussion the four children agree to use the timer, and Robert takes charge of putting it on the step nearby so they can all see it.

Robert and Jenny set up a car wash while they are waiting. When the time is up they run over to tell the others that it is now their turn. Claire grudgingly gives the tractor to Jenny while David refuses to get off the bike. Jenny points to the egg-timer and tells David that his turn is over. He looks at Robert and hands the bike over. Breda keeps a watchful eye as the children manage to share the playthings as they agreed.



Reflection: Do I help children to solve problems and to resolve conflicts among themselves?

Eispéireas foghlama 48a: Margadh an fheirmeora

Téama: Féiniúlacht agus Muintearas, Aidhm 4 agus Sprioc foghlama 3**Aoisghrúpa:** Leanaí**Suíomh:** Rang naíonáin (bunscoil sa Ghaeltacht)

Le linn sraith ceachtanna drámaíochta bhunaigh grúpa leanaí i rang na naíonán sóisear agus sinsear, in éineacht le Múinteoir Síle, stalláí margaidh sa spás súgartha. Thugadh roinnt mhaith de na leanaí cuairt ar an margadh áitiúil feirmeora maidineacha Sathairn lena dtuismitheoirí agus bhí fhios ag na leanaí eile ina thaobh seo ó na hamanna roinnte nuachta. Fuair Múinteoir Síle frapaí súgartha, mar shampla ábhair scríbhneoireachta agus airgead, soithigh bhia fholmha, agus prócaí. Ghlan sí an bord taispeántais agus d'úsáid é mar chuntar. Ghlac na leanaí ról éagsúla agus thug cuireadh do Mhúinteoir Síle bheith ina custaiméir. Thar an gcéad chúpla lá eile thug siad boinn airgid 1, 2, 5, agus 10 cent isteach ar scoil chun

táirge a cheannach. D'fhorbair an sùgradh le linn na seachtaine de réir mar a bhunaigh leanaí stalláí níos speisialaithe. Ag an bpointe sin bhí an spás sa seomra ranga le haghaidh na stalláí an-teoranta. Mhol Múinteoir Síle go bhféadadís athshocrú a dhéanamh ar na boird agus na cathaoireacha

chun spás a dhéanamh. Agus iad ar cipíní, chuidigh na leanaí léi é seo a dhéanamh. Bhí cead pleanála i bhfeidhm anois chun síneadh a chur leis an margadh! Thosaigh níos mó agus níos mó stalláí nua ag teacht ar an bhfód de réir mar a rinne leanaí nithe as taos súgartha agus de réir mar a thug siad cartáin fholmha ón mbaile. Bhunaigh siad stalláí áit a raibh a bpéintéireachta agus a mbláthanna féin á ndíol acu. Thug siad seanbhréagáin agus leabhair ón mbaile leo agus dhíol iad lena chéile. Bhídís ina gcustaiméirí agus ansin ina n-úinéirí stalláí. Chuidigh Múinteoir Síle leo comharthaí a dhéanamh le haghaidh na stalláí éagsúla. Rinne roinnt leanaí comharthaí a thaispeáin praghas a n-earraí.

Sheol Múinteoir Síle nóta abhaile ag insint do na tuismitheoirí céard a bhí ar siúl ag na leanaí agus thug cuireadh dóibh cuairt a thabhairt ar mhargadh na leanaí nuair a bhí siad ag fágáil na leanaí ar scoil nó á mbailiú. Rinne sí fistéip de roinnt de na heipeasóid súgartha. Lá eile bhain sí úsáid as an margadh chun fadhb a chur faoi bhráid na leanaí, agus d'fhiafraigh sí di féin os ard ar chóir di na boinn airgid a bhí aici a úsáid chun íoc as planda a chosain 5c (naíonáin shóisearacha) nó 10c (naíonáin shinsearacha). De réir mar a rinne gach leanbh na fíorbhoinn airgid a láimhseáil (1c, 2c, 5c, agus 10c), spreag sí na leanaí le hiniúchadh a dhéanamh ar na meascáin éagsúla de bhoinn airgid a d'fhéadfaidís a úsáid le haghaidh na bplandaí.



Ábhar Machnaimh: *Conas is féidir liom úsáid níos mó a bhaint as an sùgradh samhlaíoch chun cur le forbairt scileanna litearthachta agus uimhearthachta na leanaí?*

Learning experience 48b: The farmer's market**Theme: Identity and Belonging, Aim 4 and Learning goal 3****Age group: Young children****Setting: Infant class (primary school in the Gaeltacht)**

During a series of drama lessons a group of children in junior and senior infants and their teacher, Múinteoir Síle, set up a market stall in the pretend play area. Many of the children visit the local farmer's market on Saturday mornings with their parents and mention it during news-time. Múinteoir Síle gets play props, including writing materials and money, empty food containers, and jars. She clears the display table and uses this as a counter. The children take on different roles and ask Múinteoir Síle to be a customer. Over the next few days they bring 1, 2, 5, and 10 cent coins to school for buying the produce. The play develops during the week as groups of children set up more specialised stalls. Space in the classroom for stalls begins to pose a problem. Múinteoir Síle suggests that they could rearrange the tables and chairs to make room. Excitedly, the children help her do this. Planning permission to extend the market is now in place! More and more stalls begin to appear as children make produce from play-dough and bring empty food cartons from home. They set up a stall selling their own paintings and the flowers they are growing. They bring old toys and books from home and sell them to each other. They take turns playing customers and stall owners. Múinteoir Síle helps them to make signs for the different stalls. Some children make signs that show the price of their merchandise.

Múinteoir Síle sends a note home telling parents what the children are doing and invites them to visit the children's market when they drop off or collect the children. She videos some of the play episodes. On another day she uses the market to pose a problem for the children; she wonders aloud how she can use the coins she has to pay for a 5c plant (junior infants) or a 10c plant (senior infants). With each child handling, observing and exploring real coins (1c, 2c, 5c, and 10c), she encourages the children to explore the combinations they could use to pay for the plants.



Reflection: How can I use pretend play to a greater extent to develop children's literacy and numeracy skills?

Learning experience 51: Re-enacting the match**Theme: *Communicating*, Aim 3 and Learning goal 1****Age group: Young children****Setting: Sessional service (playgroup)**

Brazil and Ireland are due to play a friendly soccer match. There are a number of children from Brazil in the playgroup so there is great excitement. Many of the children are wearing their team jerseys. During the morning they make banners and flags. Some of the children are going to watch the match that evening at home and some of their parents are actually going to the match in Dublin. The children and Liz, the playgroup leader, talk about what this will be like at circle time. Some of the children use Portuguese, the official language in Brazil, which promotes additional discussion and curiosity from other children. Liz listens to their stories about who is going to win and what players are the best. After the discussion the children draw pictures related to the football theme. As they draw, Liz listens to the stories about their drawings and writes a sentence beside each picture based on what the children say. She reads this with the children. Some of them join in and help her read their 'stories'.

Outside in the yard some of the children want to be the soccer players on the Irish and Brazilian teams. They make goalposts with their jackets. Liz encourages the other children to come and support the teams. She suggests they charge matchgoers for tickets. They use stones for money and leaves as tickets and Seán and Rianna run inside to get the banners and flags. Other children take chairs outside and organise the viewing stand. Olivia decides she wants to sell ice creams at the match and uses pieces of paper for ice creams. Again, stones are a great currency for making purchases!

Teams are chosen and the rules of the game are clearly outlined. Liz lends the referee, Ciara, a whistle. She blows it loudly and the match begins. The matchgoers scream when the goals are scored and shout words of encouragement when they are not. They wave their flags and banners enthusiastically. The referee blows the whistle a number of times to signal the end of the match, which finishes in a draw. Both sides shake hands and are affirmed by the crowd. Back inside, Liz organises a pretend microphone and she interviews the teams. She extends the conversation by commenting and asking questions.



Reflection: How can I provide opportunities to extend children's play outside as well as inside?

Learning experience 52: Going to the dentist**Theme: *Communicating*, Aim 2 and Learning goal 4****Age group: Young children****Setting: Infant class (primary school)**

Ms Murphy, the junior and senior infant class teacher, uses the pretend play corner to support children's learning across *Aistear's* themes, as well as language, maths, SESE and SPHE in the *Primary School Curriculum*. Every fortnight or so the play focus changes. Children use the corner to pretend they are cooking and baking or minding babies, in the café, at the doctor's, at the local social welfare office, at the garage, at the library, in the garda station, fishing on a trawler, or going on holidays. This month due to the number of children expressing an interest in teeth, Ms Murphy and the children have decided to play *going to the dentist*. Several children have started to lose their baby teeth while others have gone on visits to the dentist themselves or with older siblings or parents.

The pretend play corner is used as the children arrive in school and at different times of the day and the week, depending on what activities the children are doing. Ms Murphy organises the pretend play corner so that it includes relevant play materials to support children's learning and development, including literacy and numeracy skills. For example, there is a telephone and computer for the dentist's receptionist. There is also a notepad and pencil for making appointments and there are books and magazines in the waiting area.

The children are really excited about creating their own dentist's surgery. Over the next week they organise and reorganise the surgery expanding their patient list as they go. They make posters and price lists for the services on offer. Sometimes Ms Murphy plays with the children; at other times she observes the play from a distance. Occasionally she intervenes to extend the play, especially when it seems to become repetitive. She sometimes adds a new prop, introduces a new word or idea, makes a suggestion, helps resolve a conflict, or models a new role. During the course of the week, as well as playing in the pretend area, the children have conversations about their visits to the dentist. They listen to stories about the dentist and read relevant books in the library corner. They play with props such as goggles, mouthwash, dental picks, toothbrushes, toothpaste, white coats, drills, magnifying lenses, mirrors, and injections. They play games such as *I spy*, *Spot the difference*, *Pick the odd one out* using pictures and objects connected to the dentist. Most children are using lots of words associated with the dentist. On Friday the dental nurse from the local health clinic comes in. She uses a giant brush and teeth to explain how to brush your teeth. By the end of the week business is booming in the dental surgery with treatments such as making false teeth and fitting braces being offered.



Reflection: How regularly do I observe and listen to children in pretend play scenarios, and identify ways to extend their play?

Learning experience 55: The power of music and story**Theme: Exploring and Thinking, Aim 3 and Learning goal 4****Age group: Young children****Setting: Full and part-time daycare (crèche)**

Abi (almost 4 years) has Down syndrome and attends her local crèche. The staff use music a lot during the day. They sing a special chant to ease transitions from one activity to another and use upbeat songs to raise energy levels, especially during the afternoon. Mella, the room leader, notices that Abi responds very positively to music. Abi helps tidy up energetically when they sing the tidy up song. She loves it when they sing the welcome song, *Hello Abi, how are you today?* (going through the names of all the children). She smiles and takes a bow when her name is sung.

Abi especially loves it when they sing, *When you're happy and you know it*. She becomes very animated and responds enthusiastically. Mella also uses lots of language play to help Abi and other children with their language development. They play rhyming games and Abi laughs when her friends make up jokes and nonsense words. She also loves to listen to tongue twisters.

Mella uses creative storytelling to introduce the children to new words and ideas. She wears a special storytelling hat and cloak to help everyone get into the mood for stories. The children sit on beanbags. Mella sometimes uses music for her storytelling. She tries to match pieces of music to the stories. Abi loves this part.

With help from the children and their families Mella has developed a range of props which she places in a story bag to help bring stories to life. For example, in the bag (a colourful pillowcase) there might be four or five props that connect with the story. These might include small world people, transport and animal figures, pieces of fruit, pictures of characters with their names printed underneath like *The Gruffalo*, *Alfie* or *Spot the dog*, key words printed in large font like *Not I said the pig, not I said the duck* in the story of *The Little Red Hen*, masks displaying different feelings, pieces of cutlery, a baby doll or teddy bear, a hat, shoes, items of clothes, different types of food, a flash lamp, a stethoscope, keys, a mobile phone, coins, photographs, toys such as a puppet fox or a cardboard cut out for the *Gingerbread Man*, vegetables such as a turnip for the story, *The Enormous Turnip*. The list of props is endless! Mella also tries to include a factual book that relates to the story. It might be about the country that the story is set in, a book on gardening, a book on sports or animals. Mella's local librarian is a great help to her in sourcing all her books. Abi is always enthralled listening to the story and wonders what Mella will produce next!



Reflection: What play props can I use to bring stories to life?

Learning experience 56: Story time**Theme: *Exploring and Thinking*, Aim 4 and Learning goal 5****Age group: Young children****Setting: Infant class (primary school)**

The senior infant class of 28 boys are getting ready for story time. They make themselves comfortable on the mats on the floor at the back of the classroom near the library area. The teacher has his storytelling hat on and has a series of props ready to assist him in his telling of *Jack and the Beanstalk*. He reads the story with the help of some of the boys who have been chosen to take on the different roles in the story.

During discussion time Mr O'Donnell asks the boys to describe the different characters in the story. He also asks some questions such as: *Was it right for Jack's mother to send him off on his own to sell the cow? Was it okay for Jack to keep stealing things from the giant?* Some very interesting conversations ensue. Later that day the boys play word games with some key words from the story. They love doing this and especially like making up nonsense words.

The following day Mr O'Donnell revisits the story and asks them to think of alternative endings for it. Later during drama time the boys re-enact the story of *Jack and the Beanstalk*. They incorporate the new endings such as Jack and the giant becoming friends, Jack selling the cow for a lot of money, running away and not giving the money to his mother, the guards catching Jack walking along the road with the cow and taking him to the station, the principal of his school ringing his Mam to see why he isn't at school. The teacher builds on their ideas and helps them to develop their stories. Over the next two days, working in pairs, the boys write their own story of Jack. They use words from the whiteboard based on their various discussions and they use their own spelling for other words. The children add illustrations to their story. When Mr. O'Donnell suggests to them that they could staple the pages together to make little story books, some children decide to add their names as authors and illustrators. They add page numbers and some even add ISBN codes! The following week the boys visit the junior infants classroom to read to the children in small groups. Parents get a chance to read the books when they drop the boys off in the morning or when they are collecting them in the afternoon.



Reflection: How can I use storytelling to promote higher-order thinking skills?

Learning experience 59: Autumn pictures

Theme: Exploring and thinking, Aim 4 and Learning goal 4

Age group: Young children

Setting: Infant class (primary school)

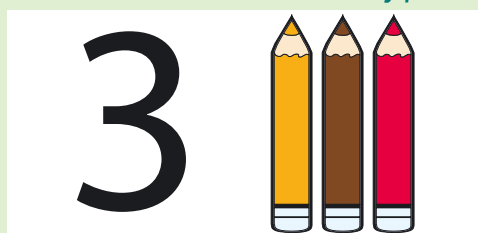
Ms. O'Connor, the senior infant teacher, notes that Val (5 years and 9 months) tends to contribute to class or group discussions only very occasionally. He has a stammer and his teacher is concerned that he may be becoming increasingly self-conscious about speaking in front of his peers.

As part of their work on autumn, the children are making pictures using leaf rubbings. Ms. O'Connor and the children talk about WILFs (What I am looking for) for their pictures which Ms. O'Connor writes on the blackboard. She draws pictures beside them to help the children read the WILF.

I did two leaf rubbings.



I used three autumn colours in my picture.



Since September, Ms. O'Connor has met with Val's parents on two occasions to talk about the approaches they use to help Val with his speech. They put her in touch with his speech therapist. Using strategies suggested by the therapist, she tries to give a few minutes of one-to-one attention to Val each day. One of the strategies she uses is to speak slowly to him while she acts as a role model helping him to slow his speech down. This helps Val in overcoming his stammer.

Today, while the children are doing their leaf rubbings, Ms. O'Connor kneels at Val's group and talks to him and the other children in the group about their pictures. She asks Val what he found easy and difficult in the activity, and what he is happy with in his picture. She comments on the colours he has used and the shapes of the leaves. She notes that asking Val questions seems to make him anxious, and in turn his stammer becomes more pronounced. He seems more comfortable when she uses a conversational approach, making comments to which Val can respond if he likes. Noticing this, she asks few questions and instead uses phrases and comments which invite Val to talk to her about his work using key words and phrases, such as autumn colours, reds and oranges, jagged edges, and gives Val's lots of opportunities to use these. The children want to use their leaf rubbings to create a large autumn picture outside their classroom door for their parents and the principal to see. As part of this, Ms. O'Connor plans to model using the autumn words and phrases for Val again and to give him small group opportunities to use these.

Ms. O'Connor makes the following notes in Val's record in her practitioner's file.

Val	30/09/08	Uses good pronunciation of autumn words and phrases when he speaks slowly and in small groups.
	Next steps	Comment on what Val is doing as a way of inviting him to talk.



Reflection: Am I open to 'messages' from children about how best to support them in their learning?

Learning experience 60: Number chats**Theme: Exploring and Thinking, Aim 3 and Learning goal 2****Age group: Babies, toddlers and young children****Setting: Childminding**

Bernie, a childminder, looks after Jack (16 months), Sorcha (3 years) and Rhiannon (5 years) in her home. Bernie plans lots of activities for the week to build on some of what Sorcha has been doing in playgroup, and Rhiannon in school.

On Monday they all go for a walk to the shops. On the way they count the red cars parked along the street; Rhiannon and Sorcha look for 1, 2 and 3 on car number plates (Rhiannon does this for 4, 5 and 6 too). Rhiannon spots numbers on houses and shop doors. They identify these and Bernie explains their purpose. They reach the post box. Sorcha and Rhiannon each take a letter for posting and Rhiannon notices a 5 on the stamp. They ask Bernie what the number is and she explains about the cost of the stamp. Bernie makes sure Jack is included by drawing his attention to things. From time to time she kneels beside Jack in his pushchair and points to and describes things around him.

On Wednesday Bernie bakes with the children. Jack sits at the table in his highchair and the girls sit on chairs in their aprons. They are making top hats. Bernie gives Jack a dish of softened fruit and a spoon for him to mix and eat while she and the girls count out bun cases, making sure there is one for each person and their mam, dad and siblings. *How do we make these buns, Bernie?*, enquires Rhiannon. Bernie explains. She adds the melted chocolate and the girls put a marshmallow in each case followed by a small strawberry, which they picked in Bernie's garden that morning.

On other days they look for numbers in the kitchen, for example on the washing machine dials, on food packets, and in story books. *2! What that for?*, asks Sorcha as she and Rhiannon help Bernie load clothes in the washing machine and set the correct cycle. Bernie describes these experiences to Jack and involves him in the conversations. The children also help Bernie in her day-to-day activities in caring for the house and Bernie talks to them about how and what they are learning through these hands-on experiences.



Reflection: Do I encourage children to ask me questions as part of their conversations with me?

Learning experience 62: Tapping into an interest**Theme: *Exploring and thinking, Aim 2 and Learning goal 1*****Age group: Young children****Setting: Infant class (primary school)**

The junior infant children have been on a trip to an open farm. They have lots of photographs and Mr Shaw their teacher is using these to help them recall the experience, and to find out what they enjoyed and what they learned. He is working with a group of twelve children, while six children are playing in the farm corner and the other six are building a veterinary practice using small world toys and play-dough. The children talk about sitting beside their friends on the bus, eating lunch outside, wearing their wellies, feeding the lambs, holding fluffy chicks, and seeing the baby calves drinking from their mothers' udders. Then one child notes: *The man told us that the donkey pulls a cart.* Another child adds: *That's 'cos (because) they don't have much tractors on that farm and that's what you do if you can't get a tractor. My granda told me that.* Another comments: *The man at the farm said there are not many donkeys left but my granda has hundreds.* Mr Shaw encourages and assists the children to move beyond description and to hypothesise, imagine and speculate. He does this by using phrases such as, *I wonder what was on the carts the donkey pulled. Suppose the farmer needed to plant more crops, I'm not sure how he would do that if he didn't have tractors. I wonder how the donkey might feel after his work on the farm.* The children enter into a conversation about what life on a farm might have been like for their grandparents. When Mr Shaw poses the question, *How could we find out?*, one little girl suggests asking them. This conversation heralds a class project on farm life when my granny and granda were young. In engaging with the project the children interview grandparents, look at old photographs, see, touch and find out about 'old' farm implements, learn farm songs, and build an 'old' farm with small world and construction toys. Throughout the project, the children learn new farm language and how farm life has changed since their grandparents were young, which helps them develop a sense of time.



Reflection: Are children's conversations and interests a focus for further learning in my setting?

Learning experience 64: Pilots are boys!**Themes: Well-being, Aim 1 and Learning goal 1****Age group: Toddlers and young children****Setting: Sessional service (playgroup)**

Amy, Fionnán, Colm, and Róisín (between 2 years and 11 months and 4 years and 3 months) are playing outside. They are pretending they are going to France on an aeroplane. The playgroup leader, Joan, is recording their play using the video camera. Áine, the playgroup assistant, is playing with some of the other children and also keeping an eye on the play that is developing between Colm and the others. The children have arranged a number of props to set up the plane and now they are deciding roles. Colm is very clear that he is going to be the pilot and Fionnán is to be his assistant in the cockpit. Colm explains that the two girls can be air-hostesses, giving out the drinks and showing people what to do in an emergency.

Amy and Róisín are not happy with the roles they have been given. Amy wants to be a pilot too.

Colm: *Girls can't be pilots!*

Róisín and Amy: *Yes they can.*

Colm: *You are the air-hostess and you help the people on the plane. Right? Pilots are boys. So, me and Fionnán have to be the pilots who fly.* (Fionnán nods his head in agreement.)

Amy: *We can be girl pilots. I'm not playing.*

Amy storms off.

Róisín: *Girls can be pilots if they want.* Róisín pushes Colm and he pushes her back. Both children start to cry. Observing at a distance, Áine joins them and asks the children what happened. Amy notices this and comes back to join the group.

Róisín: *Colm says girls can't be pilots.*

Colm: *Pilots are boys and she pushed me.*

Róisín: *He pushed me too.*

Áine: *Now guys you know there's no hurting each other here, don't you? I get really upset when I hear you are being unkind to each other. Let's see if we can sort out this problem. You all want to be pilots, is that right?*

Amy, Fionnán, Colm, and Róisín nod their heads in agreement.

Áine: *I went on my holidays to America last year and the pilot was a girl so I know that girls can be pilots too. We know that boys and girls can do lots of different jobs. Remember the story about Rosie the truck driver who took her truck to buy food for her neighbour's cows? Or what about Bert the nurse who looked after Neena when she broke her leg and had to go to the A and E? So I don't think that only boys can be pilots. Now let's see how we can sort this problem. Have you any ideas on what we can do?*

Róisín: *Me and Amy could be the pilots and the boys could be in the plane.*

Colm: *Not fair, I want to be a pilot too.*

Áine: *Could there be two planes?*

Amy: *Yeah. You and Fionnán be the boy pilots in that plane. And me and Róisín will be pilots on the girl plane.*

Colm: *Yeah, and we'll fly to France together. Me and Fionnán will go in front and you can follow us.*

Fionnán: *Yeah.*

Róisín: *And we'll park the planes beside each other in the plane park and go shopping. We'll give you money.*

Áine: *That sounds like a good plan.*

The four children busy themselves building the second plane and soon all four pilots are in the air on their way to France.

When the children go home Áine and Joan look at the video footage. They take four photographs from it and use these to record a story of the children's learning experience. They make a copy of the story for each child. The children show and tell their story to their parents, and then add it to their learning portfolios. In their practitioner's file, Áine and Joan make a note of the children's ideas about what boys and girls can and can't do. They plan to get more posters and stories of males and females in non-stereotypical roles and to discuss these with the children. They also plan to develop some play scenarios in which children's ideas about gender stereotyping are challenged.



Reflection: How can I show respect for children's play and their ideas while helping them to work through a problem to find a solution which works for everyone?

Learning experience 65: Look, the ball spins!

Theme: Exploring and Thinking, Aim 2 and Learning goal 3**Age group: Toddlers and young children****Setting: Sessional service (pre-school)**

Mary, the pre-school leader, creates the following story to document Claire's, Robert's and Kyle's learning through an activity at the water table.

Photo 1

Twins Claire and Robert (4 years) and their friend Kyle (nearly 3 years) are playing at the water tray. They are filling and emptying containers and pouring water into waterwheels and watching them turn.

**Photo 2**

The children experiment placing different objects such as balls and cubes in the waterwheels. Claire likes to use the teapot to pour water. Robert joins her in doing this. He uses the small watering can from the vegetable patch to put water over the blocks he has placed in the waterwheel. Kyle watches, quietly choosing not to do any pouring at the waterwheel.

**Photo 3**

Claire picks up an orange ball and puts it on top of the waterwheel. Robert and Kyle watch as she pours water from the teapot. The ball begins to rotate at the top of the waterwheel. *Mary, come quick. Look what happens,* she shouts excitedly. Mary kneels down to see what is happening. Kyle kneels too. Mary asks Claire to pour more water. They all watch carefully as the ball rotates. *My goodness, look at that,* responds Mary. Robert pours more water on top of his cubes. *Mine don't spin. That's not fair,* he concludes. *Maybe try a ball like Claire did,* Mary suggests. Robert takes out the cubes and inserts the ball he has been holding in his hand. He pours water over it with the watering can and it begins to spin too. *Yes,* shouts Robert in delight. Kyle smiles. He visits the water tray again by himself later in the day and tries out the spinning balls.



Mary shares the story and the photographs with the children the next day. They put the story on display on the pre-school wall. Over the next few days Mary and the children investigate further why the cube wouldn't spin while the balls did.



Reflection: How can I make time to document some of children's learning and development using the storytelling approach?

Learning experience 66: Including others**Theme: Identity and Belonging, Aim 3 and Learning goal 5****Age group: Young children****Setting: Infant class (primary school)**

Five of the nine girls from senior infants are playing in a group outside at lunchtime. Miss Davison is on yard duty. She overhears another girl, Louise, trying to join them. Louise's best friend Síle is absent today. The girls tell Louise that they don't want to play with her. Miss Davison immediately goes to Louise and acknowledges her hurt: *Louise, I can see that you are feeling sad and lonely. I need someone to help me mind everyone in the yard. Would you like to help me please?* Miss Davison and Louise keep each other company for the remaining few minutes of lunchtime. After lunch Miss Davison tells Louise's teacher about the incident in the yard. Later that day the teacher organises the children for circle time. She replaces her planned work with the discussion: *What do we do if someone wants to join in our play and we already have enough people?* She introduces the discussion using Ruby the class life-sized doll. Ruby tells the children about having to sit by herself one day on a school trip. She describes feeling very upset and wishing she was at home with her Mam and Gran. The teacher asks the children what Ruby's school-mates could have done to help her feel better. They suggest strategies such as taking turns to sit with her, singing songs together so that everyone was involved even if someone was sitting on his/her own, or taking a teddy to sit with. The teacher and children develop this conversation further over the following days.

The teacher notes in her planner to check how Louise copes socially on future days, and especially when Síle is absent. She also makes a note in her practitioner's file.



Reflection: How can I make greater on-the-spot use of assessment information I gather through watching and listening to children?

Eispéireas foghlama 67a: Mothúcháin a chur in iúl**Téama: Cumarsáid, Aidhm 1 agus Sprioc foghlama 1****Aoisghrúpa: Leanaí****Suíomh: Seisiún naíonra**

Freastalaíonn Caoimhín (3 bliana d'aois) ar naíonra. Is breá leis ceol. Phléigh a thuismitheoirí leis an stiúrthóir, Eimear, an chaoi a bhfuil sé deacair air a mhothúcháin a chur in iúl i gceart agus an chaoi a gcuireann sé sin as dó. Le cúpla seachtain anuas bhí Eimear ag múineadh amhrán do Chaoimhín agus do na leanaí eile sa ghrúpa i dtaobh mothúcháin éagsúla. Bhí úsáid á baint acu as uirlisí ceoil freisin fad is a bhí na hamhráin á gcanadh acu agus ag bhí siad bogadh leis an gceol chun cuidiú leo mothúcháin éagsúla a chur in iúl. Lena linn seo go léir, agus le linn am sùgartha, bhí Eimear ag breathnú ar Chaoimhín chun a fháil amach conas a chuir sé é féin in iúl. Ghlac sí nótaí mionsonraithe mar gheall ar a eispéiris foghlama. Léirigh na nóta sin go raibh dul chun cinn á dhéanamh ag Caoimhín ag léiriú do na leanaí eile conas a bhraith sé. Chuir Eimear an t-eolas seo in iúl dá mhamaí agus dá dhaidí an chéad uair eile a chonaic sí iad.

Samplaí de nótaí Eimear ina comhad cleachtóra.

Dé Luain 18 Feabhra, 12.10 i.n. Súgradh lasmuigh

Bhí Caoimhín ag súgradh ina aonar sa chlais ghainimh. Rinne sé an gaineamh a chur isteach i dtrucail. Tháinig Anraí agus Sorcha sall chun cuidiú leis. Dúirt Caoimhín, "Ná déan" agus rinne buicéad eile in aice leis a thairiscint dóibh.

Dé Céadaoin 27 Feabhra, 9.40 r.n. Súgradh laistigh

Bhí Caoimhín, Eoin, Niamh, agus Amy ag imirt le foireann taeghréithe. Thug Eoin cupán tae do Chaoimhín. D'fhiafraigh Amy de Eoin an bhféadfadh sí roinnt tae a bheith aici. Rinne Eoin neamhaird den iarratas seo agus d'éirigh Amy corraithe. Rinne Caoimhín a chupán tae a thairiscint di.



Ábhar Machnaimh: An gcuirim am ar leataobh chun athbhreithniú a dhéanamh ar mo bhreathnadóireachtaí ar eispéiris foghlama na leanaí mar bhealach le feiceáil cén dul chun cinn atá ar siúl acu?

Learning experience 67b: Sharing emotions**Theme: *Communicating*, Aim 1 and Learning goal 1****Age group: Young children****Setting: Sessional service (naíonra)**

Caoimhín (3 years) attends a naíonra. He enjoys responding to music. His parents have discussed with Eimear, the stiurthóir (playgroup leader), how he finds it difficult to express his emotions clearly and how this frustrates him. Over recent weeks Eimear has taught Caoimhín and the other children action songs about different emotions. They have also been using instruments while singing the songs and moving to different pieces of music, in order to help them express different feelings. Throughout these experiences, and during play, Eimear has been observing Caoimhín to see how he expresses himself. She makes detailed notes about some of his learning experiences. This documentation shows the progress Caoimhín is making in showing his peers how he feels. Eimear shares this information with his mammy and daddy the next time she is talking to one of them.

Examples of Eimear's notes in her practitioner's file.

Monday 18 February, 12.10 p.m. Outside play

*Caoimhín plays by himself in the sand pit. He shovels sand into a play truck. Anraí and Sorcha come over and try to help him. Caoimhín says, *Ná déan* (don't) and offers them a spare bucket beside him.*

Wednesday 27 February, 9.40 a.m. Indoor play

Caoimhín, Eoin, Niamh, and Amy are playing with the tea set. Eoin serves Caoimhín tea. Amy asks Eoin can she have some tea, Eoin ignores the request and Amy gets upset. Caoimhín offers her his cup of tea.



Reflection: Do I take time to review my detailed observations of children's learning experiences as a way of seeing the progress they are making?

Learning experience 68: What's inside the feely bag?

Theme: Exploring and Thinking, Aim 4 and Learning goal 1**Age group: Babies and young children****Setting: Childminding**

Mary looks after Chris (14 months), who has Down syndrome, and his sister Tamzin (nearly 4 years) in her own home. Chris is sitting on the carpet in the living room propped up by cushions. Mary sits on the floor beside him and invites Tamzin to join them. Mary has a *Feely Bag* with lots of items inside which she collected around the house.

Mary: *Chris and Tamzin look*, (giving the bag a shake), *what do you think is inside?*

Tamzin: *Let me see Mary.*

Mary: *Okay, now eyes closed as you pop your hand in and feel something. Can you think what it is?*

Tamzin: (Shuts her eyes and feels inside the bag.) *OOOH! I feel something fluffy and furry. Is it a cat?*

Mary: *I'm not sure. Could it be a cat?*

Tamzin: *I don't know.* (Takes the object out of the bag.) *It's a glove. Silly me.* (Hands the glove to Chris.)

Chris stretches forward excitedly and takes the glove with the soft fur trim from Tamzin. He touches the fur tentatively, gurgles noisily, and hands the glove to Mary as he turns his attention back to Tamzin and the bag.

Mary: *Let's give Chris a go now shall we?*

Chris eagerly dips his hand into the bag and takes out the lid of a biscuit tin. Turning the lid over he catches his reflection and stares at it before handing the lid back to Mary.

Mary: *Who is that?* (Offers the lid back to Chris and holds it so he can see himself.)

Tamzin: *Let me see too. Look it's you Chris, look. And it's me.* (Leans in close to Chris so they can both see themselves in the lid.)

Tamzin then hits the lid with her hand making a loud noise. Chris looks startled and whimpers. Mary takes the lid and taps it again slightly quieter and explains to Chris what she is doing. Chris shows he is not interested in the lid. Instead, he returns to the bag and takes out a sealed plastic cup containing dried pasta. He gives the cup a shake and, hearing the noise that the pasta makes, he smiles and does it again and again. This continues until Chris and Tamzin have removed all the items from the *Feely Bag*. Tamzin then proceeds to put each item back in the bag, and begins the activity again.

In Chris' daily record Mary notes.

- *Excited and curious about the Feely Bag.*
- *Sat up well with support from the cushions.*
- *Was apprehensive of loud noise.*

Mary sends the daily record home, and also refers to the experience with the Feely Bag when she talks to Chris' dad on Friday about what Chris and Tamzin have been doing that week when he collects the children. Chris' dad uses this information to update the physiotherapist on Chris' progress.



Reflection: Do I use objects and activities that interest children and capture their curiosity when setting tasks to gather information about how well they are getting on?

Learning experience 69: A fun outdoor challenge on camera

Theme: Well-being, Aim 2 and Learning goal 1**Age group: Toddlers and young children****Setting: Sessional service (pre-school)**

Liam and Jean, two of the pre-school staff, and the sixteen toddlers and young children (between 2½ and 4 years) are playing outside. Liam surprises the children with new, large, soft balls. The children are delighted with the balls, grabbing one each and beginning to throw, kick and roll them. The balls are available to the children each day when they're outside. Liam sets tasks on occasion to provide focused opportunities for the children to develop hand-eye co-ordination skills, and for him to build up a picture of their progress in these skills and how he can help the children.

Outside on Monday, Liam and Jean explain to the children that they are going to play some rolling games. They will roll their soft ball in front of them, to the side, and to each other. Dividing the group in two, Liam asks the group of eight children working with him, *I wonder how many balls we will need? Five. No, three. Five Liam*, come the responses. *Let's get five and see if we have enough*, he responds. Two children count out five and bring them to Liam. In turn, he invites each child to take one. Realising there aren't enough, the children ask him to get more! They talk about needing one for each person. A similar conversation takes place in Jean's group.

Sorted with the balls, the children spend the next few minutes rolling their balls. Laughter breaks out as balls hit people's feet and go off in lots of directions. This instantly sends the children running. Some children show frustration when their balls don't go in the direction they want. Liam and Jean empathise with them and offer support. They model rolling.

Over the coming weeks Liam and Jean plan a number of rolling activities, and then move to throwing in order to develop the children's co-ordination skills. They use a variety of objects such as beanbags, balls of different sizes, and soft toys. They record the children on video in the first week and again four months later. They show the video footage to the children and talk to them about how well they have learned to roll and throw. The children love seeing the footage and comment: *Look at my throw! That was 'normous (enormous). My brover (brother) can't do it.*



Reflection: How can I make better use of video footage to help me extend children's learning and to show the children the progress they are making?

Learning experience 70: A rainbow of colours

Theme: *Communicating, Aim 2 and Learning goal 4*

Age group: Young children

Setting: Sessional service (playgroup)

Ten children (between 3 years and 4 years and 4 months) attend the playgroup. Eilis, the playgroup leader, noted the children’s excitement and interest the day they saw a rainbow in the garden. She immediately brought crayons and paper outside and the children each drew their own rainbow as they observed it in the sky. She noted their interest in some of the names of the colours, especially indigo and violet. Over the next few weeks Eilis plans a number of experiences designed to help the children learn more about colours.

With Eilis’ assistance the children talk about and name colours as they walk in the nearby park, do various painting and play-dough activities, sort vegetables and fruit in the play supermarket, and make costumes for Cinderella’s ball. They also experiment with mixing colours, and declare that they have done ‘magic’ when they generate, under Eilis’ guidance, green from a mixture of blue and yellow, and orange from a mixture of red and yellow. As the month progresses Eilis sets up colour areas in the room. Each area features a character such as Blue Bird and Red the Fire Engine, as well as objects in the matching colours. During the following weeks she uses a variety of tasks to assess the children’s ability to match, name and select individual colours. One of these involves a sock shop which the children enjoy. Each day she asks two children to play the shopkeeper role. The customers (including Eilis) ask for particular colours of socks. Eilis observes how each shopkeeper fills the customer orders. As the days progress, she notices that some children begin to request socks with particular patterns and combinations of colours and, not content with the range on offer in the shop, bring socks from home to the playgroup! A busy shop selling multicoloured socks and socks with exotic designs is soon trading in the playgroup. News spreads, and the children’s parents and minders visit to make purchases as they drop off and collect the children. Building on this, Eilis shares stories with the children that include references to patterns, and she introduces them to factual books which illustrate patterns on animals’ coats.

In her practitioner’s file Eilis makes a checklist to record her observations in the sock shop during the course of the week, and uses this information to plan further colour and pattern experiences.

Exploring and Thinking, Aim 1 and Learning goal 1, Sock shop

	Date - Oct	red	orange	yellow	violet	green	blue	purple	brown	black	while	stripey	spotty
Fion	15	✓	✓	✓							✓		✓
Deirdre	15	✓				✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Sasha	16	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓			✓
Billy	16	✓					✓						
Yussef	17	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
George	17		✓	✓		✓	✓						✓
Alisha	18												
Cara	18												
Leon	19												
Aesha	19												



Reflection: Do I set tasks which capture the children’s interest and imagination?

Eispéireas foghlama 71a: Forbairt scríbhneoireachta

Téama: Cumarsáid, Aidhm 2 agus Sprioc foghlama 4**Aoisghrúpa: Leanaí****Suíomh: Rang naíonáin (Gaelscoil)**

Tá rang naíonáin á mhúineadh ag Iníon Uí Mhurchú i ngaelscoil. An tseachtain seo bhí sí féin agus an rang ag léamh agus ag plé an scéil, *Goldilocks agus na trí bhéar*. Mar chuid de seo bhí plé ann i dtaobh céard a dhéanfadh na trí bhéar dá mbeadh fhios acu cá raibh cónaí ar Goldilocks. Chuir siad tuairimí in iúl maidir lena dtarlódh agus ceann de na moltaí ná go ndéanfadh na beáir praiseach de theach Goldilocks. Thug Iníon Uí Mhurchú tasc do na leanaí agus d'iarr orthu scéalta a scríobh faoi *Goldilocks agus na trí bhéar*. Thug sí tascanna éagsúla do leanaí éagsúla sa rang. Do roinnt de na leanaí thug sí sé phictiúr chun iad a chur in ord an scéil agus chun an focal cuí a roghnú ó liosta focal le cur faoin ngrianghraf cuí. Scríobh grúpa eile leanaí an scéal ina bhfocail féin ina leabhair - leabhair a raibh cruth teachín tuaithe orthu. Scríobh an tríú grúpa leanaí an scéal ina bhfocail féin agus rinne iarracht a shamhlú conas mar a bheadh an scéal dá dtabharfadh na beáir cuairt ar theach Goldilocks. Chuir an múinteoir na príomhfhocail agus na príomhfhrásaí ar fáil bunaithe ar phlé an ranga.

D'imigh Iníon Uí Mhurchú ó ghrúpa go grúpa de réir mar a d'oibrigh na scríbhneoirí óga ar a scéalta. Spreag sí iad le litriú a úsáid nuair nach raibh an focal a bhí á lorg acu ar an gclár bán. Uaireanta bhí sí ag smaoineamh os ard in éineacht leo chun cuidiú leo deireadh an scéil a phleanáil: ***Chuir Goldilocks gaoch ar a mamaí nuair a chonaic sí an praiseach a bhí déanta!*** Gach lá ag am inste scéil thug sí an deis do sheisear a scéalta a léamh, ag léiriú a gcuid leabhar nó na pictiúir a chuir siad in ord an scéil. Gach tráthnóna nuair a bhí na leanaí imithe abhaile scríobh sí cuntas gearr ar scríbhneoireacht na sé leabh agus chuir leis an eolas a bhí ar taifead aici cheana féin faoina scileanna scríbhneoireachta. Chuir sí freisin cóip d'obair na leanaí ina bhfillteáin oibre.

Sampla de nótaí Iníon Uí Mhurchú ar scéal Mheadhbh ina comhad cleachtóra.

10 Márta 2009: Choinnigh sí na buncharachtair mar an gcéanna; thug sí isteach carachtar amháin nua (mamaí Goldilocks) ar bhealach loighciúil. D'úsáid sí a litriú féin ag léiriú feasacht mhaith fóineolaíochta. Chuir sí ceithre abairt nua sa bhreis leis chun deireadh eile a chur leis an scéal. Dul chun cinn an-mhaith.



Ábhar Machnaimh: Conas a bhainfidh mé úsáid níos fearr as eolas measúnaithe chun tascanna éagsúla a thabhairt do leanaí éagsúla agus ar an gcaoi seo cuidiú leo lena bhfoghlaim agus a bhforbairt?

Learning experience 71b: Emergent writing**Theme: Communicating, Aim 2 and Learning goal 4****Age group: Young children****Setting: Infant class (Gaelscoil)**

Iníon Uí Mhurchú is a senior infant teacher in a Gaelscoil. This week she and her class have been reading and discussing the story, *Goldilocks agus na trí bhéar*. Part of this has involved the children speculating about what the three bears might do if they knew where Goldilocks lived. They predict many actions for her some of which involve a messy ending for her house. Iníon Uí Mhurchú sets the children a task that involves them in writing stories about *Goldilocks agus na trí bhéar*. She differentiates the task for the class. Some children are given six pictures to sequence the story and to write the relevant word for each from a list. Another group of children write the story in their own words in their books, shaped like a cottage. A third group of children write the story in their own words, including how they imagine the story might end with the bears visiting Goldilocks' house. The teacher provides key words and phrases based on the class discussions.

Iníon Uí Mhurchú moves from group to group as the young writers work on their stories. She encourages them to try spellings when their words are not on the whiteboard. She sometimes thinks aloud with them to help them plan their story ending: *Goldilocks rings her mammy when she sees all the fuss!* Each day at story time she invites six children to read their stories, showing their books or sequenced pictures. Each afternoon when the children have gone home she adds a comment on the writing of the six children to the information she has already recorded about their writing skills. She also adds a copy of the children's work to their learning portfolios.

Example of Iníon Uí Mhurchú's notes on Meadhb's story recorded in her practitioner's file.

10th March 2009: Retained original characters; introduced new one (Goldilocks' mammy) in logical way. Used her own spellings showing good phonological awareness. Added four sentences for new story ending. Great progress.



Reflection: How can I make better use of assessment information to differentiate for children's learning and development?

Learning experience 72: Screening in senior infants**Theme: *Communicating*, Aim 2 and Learning goal 1****Age group: Young children****Setting: Infant class (primary school)**

Ms Clarke teaches 29 senior infant boys. As part of the school's assessment policy Ms Clarke uses a literacy screening test with the whole class in late January. When correcting the tests she identifies six boys who score below the test threshold. Through observations and conversations, she has been carefully monitoring these boys as she knows they sometimes find letter sounds challenging, and two require ongoing support in developing listening skills. She considers the possibility that their low scores on the test may be attributable to factors other than difficulties in literacy. She takes account of particular factors, such as the language, the complexity of the instructions, and the anxiety that the testing situation can create for some children. Having talked with the boys' parents, Ms Clarke refers them to the Learning-support teacher, Mrs Fitzgerald. After establishing a good relationship with the children this teacher carries out individual diagnostic tests.

Having considered all the available information, Mrs Fitzgerald invites the parents of the six boys to take part in an early intervention programme for 6-8 weeks, in order to assist them in supporting specific aspects of their children's learning. Ms Clarke and Mrs Fitzgerald also agree on some additional learning activities that Ms Clarke can use to work with the boys on both an individual and group basis.

At the end of the early intervention programme the six children are re-tested. Five now score well. While the sixth child has made some progress, Ms Clarke plans to continue to give one-to-one support to him in class. He will also have further diagnostic assessment and support with Mrs Fitzgerald.



Reflection: Does my school have a screening policy in place to help identify children who may need extra and/or specialised support?

Learning experience 73: Supporting learning and development through an IEP**Theme: Well-being, Aim 1 and Learning goal 2****Age group: Young children****Setting: Sessional service (pre-school)**

Eoin (3½ years) is attending the local pre-school. Eoin was recently diagnosed with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Louise, the pre-school leader and Emily (Eoin's SNA), spend September gathering information on Eoin through direct observations while he takes part in various daily activities, routines and interactions with peers and adults. At the end of the month they meet to discuss how best to support Eoin's learning and development. They focus, in particular, on the challenges he experiences while playing and working with his peers.

Following this Louise and Emily meet with Eoin's parents. Eoin's mum outlines the treatments and therapies Eoin is receiving. An Individual Education Plan (IEP) is developed for the first term, with help from the Early Intervention Team in the local Health Service Executive office. Helping Eoin to interact with others is one of their goals. Louise designs a programme of activities with short-term objectives for Eoin that will enable him achieve them. These include using pictures to help Eoin understand different facial expressions and using social stories to support Eoin in coping with social situations. Louise and Emily identify a buddy for Eoin from among his peers who will join him in pair activities and play dates. Eoin's progress in interacting with others is documented and reviewed in January when some new short-term objectives will be developed in the IEP to help him interact with others.



Reflection: How can I use the information gathered from my observations to feed into the IEP and therefore help children with SEN to progress in their learning in a way which is most appropriate for them at a particular point in time?

Learning experience 74: Working in a special education setting**Theme: Aims and Learning goals across the four themes****Age group: Young children****Setting: Infant class (special primary school)**

Stephen (6 years) attends a special school. He has muscular dystrophy and mild general learning disabilities. His parents tell his teacher Linda that he loves his cat, Tabby and dislikes noise. Based on assessments of Stephen's learning and development, Linda and the team of therapists working in the school devise a programme of learning experiences for him.

Linda focuses on Stephen's language, his challenging behaviour, his motor skills, and his early reading. She observes, assesses and records his speech and language: he shows delayed expressive language, for example calling a train a *choo choo*. He also finds sentence structure challenging and experiences articulation difficulties, for example calling a doggy a *goggy* and substituting *t* for *s* and *ch*. Linda shares this information with the speech therapist Nora who carries out further testing and, using the information from this, designs a daily language and speech programme for Stephen.

Based on Kate's (Special Needs Assistant) and her own observations of Stephen's challenging behaviours, Linda changes Stephen's afternoon routine. She refers him to Joan the physiotherapist who takes Stephen to the clinic's hydrotherapy pool for two afternoons per week, and to Gill the occupational therapist who takes Stephen to the Snoozaleen Relaxation Room on two other afternoons.

To support the development of Stephen's motor skills Joan provides Linda with suitable physical exercises, which include altering the time he spends sitting and standing. To make it easier for Stephen to move around the classroom Gill investigates the possibility of accessing an electric wheelchair for him. She also organises a range of aids to help him overcome some of the difficulties he is experiencing with fine motor skills. These aids include a pencil-grip and a modified computer keyboard.

Finally, Linda's assessment of Stephen's early reading skills shows his sight-word recognition is confined to his own name. Various tests have shown that he also experiences challenges with visual discrimination, sequential memory, and auditory sequencing. Considering this information, Gill suggests that Linda would arrange for Stephen to have sensory integration sessions.



Reflection: How can I continually build the practice of interdisciplinary work in order to provide children, where necessary, with specialised support to help them progress in their learning and development?