

Aistear

Creatchuraclam na Luath-Óige
The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework



**Learning experiences
for toddlers**

Learning experience 2: The beat of the drum**Theme: *Identity and Belonging*, Aim 2 and Learning goal 2****Age group:** Toddlers**Setting:** Home and full and part-time daycare (crèche)

Gloria moved to Ireland from North Nigeria three years ago. She speaks English and helps out in the toddler room on a Tuesday morning every two weeks. Her grandson Lee (2½ years) has been attending the crèche since September and is in the toddler room. On each visit, Gloria brings along something from North Nigeria for the children to see, play with, and learn about. These items are all familiar to Lee. Today she brings an African drum. She plays it while she sings an African song. The children gather round her. Some sway and some clap while others dance to the beat. Lee and some of his friends join in with some of the repeated words and phrases. Afterwards, the children take turns to play the drum. Next time, Gloria plans to play some outdoor games with the toddlers. Sorcha, the room leader, takes a few minutes of video which she shows the children after Gloria goes home.



Reflection: In what ways can I involve parents and grandparents in giving the children rich experiences?

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,
- 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 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 11: Do you understand my culture and traditions?**Theme: *Identity and Belonging*, Aim 2 and Learning goal 3****Age group: Toddlers****Setting: Home and sessional service (playgroup)**

Joseph (2 years and 11 months) and his family are Travellers. They recently moved to the area and Joseph's mammy, Kathleen, enrolled him for two mornings a week in the local playgroup. The manager, Joan, meets with Kathleen and explains how the service works and shows her the different rooms and the outdoor play area. Joan asks Kathleen about Joseph and his likes and dislikes. She explains that she knows very little about Traveller culture and traditions. Joan asks Kathleen to tell her a little about their way of life and the Traveller traditions that are important to her. Understanding these will help the staff to support Joseph. Kathleen tells Joan that as a family they generally travel in their trailer during the summer months and settle in one area for the rest of the year. She also explains that most Travellers are not as nomadic as they used to be. Kathleen says that Joseph loves animals, especially horses and dogs. She tells Joan that she doesn't want Joseph to be discriminated against because he is a Traveller. She is worried because her older children had negative experiences in other settings.

In preparation for Joseph's arrival, and with Kathleen's help, Joan gets some books and jigsaws that depict Traveller life today. She organises displays of animals for Joseph to look at when he arrives. She tells the children that a new boy is joining them. A few days after Joseph's arrival Joan talks to the children about their homes. She uses wall displays to reinforce some of the points they talk about. These include pictures of the children's homes such as trailers, flats and terraced houses. They use these to talk about 'where we live'. The children bring photographs of their families and homes, and make lollipop stick models of them using junk materials, fabrics, wool, glitter, fancy paper, and card. They display these beside their photographs. Over the coming days they enjoy sharing stories about their family, pets and outings. Joan observes the children during their activities and ensures Joseph is included and that he is beginning to form friendships. She updates Kathleen regularly on how he is settling in.



Reflection: How much do the children and I know about each other's family life and community?

Learning experience 15: Working in the quarry

Theme: Exploring and Thinking, Aim 2 and Learning goal 1**Age group: Toddlers****Setting: Sessional service (parent and toddler group)**

Azeed, a father at the local parent and toddler group is kneeling beside two children at the sand tray. His own child Zyta (2½ years) is with David (almost 3 years). The children love the sand tray and are concentrating really hard as they move large volumes of sand making noises of mighty machines at work. As Zyta moves off to do something else David looks at Azeed and smiles.

Azeed (smiling back): *I like what you have done. Can you tell me about it?*

David: *I making quarry.*

Azeed: *It is good that you are making a quarry. I really like it. Tell me how you did it.*

David: *I got dones (stones) and put the diggers and tacors (tractors) in (pointing to the sand tray).*

Azeed: *So, you got stones first and then put the diggers and tractors in the sand. Why did you want to make a quarry?*

David: *My daddy wok (work) in quarry.*

Azeed: *I see, so you thought you would make a quarry like the one your daddy works in. Is that right?*

David nods his head in agreement.

Azeed: *You've made a great big quarry here. I'd love to make one like that. So, tell me again David what I do.*

David: *'Ere (here). Make a hole (as he gives Azeed a digger and shows him how to move the sand using its front bucket).*

Azeed: *Wow, this is great. I'm moving the sand and making a quarry just like yours.*

David and Azeed continue with their quarry building and digging making noises for the machines and discussing their actions.



Reflection: To what extent do I observe and listen attentively to children and use my conversations with them to develop their thinking?

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

Patrick (almost 3 years) is feeling sad because his dog, Rover, died at the weekend. Patrick's mam has informed the staff in the pre-school and they are keeping a close eye on him. Patrick is reluctant to join in activities and Rita, his Key Worker, sits down beside him. She is sympathetic and acknowledges his feelings, *You're feeling sad today Patrick*. Patrick starts to cry and Rita asks him if he would like to go to the quiet corner to read a story and have a cuddle. He nods. They sit on a bean bag together and when Patrick is ready they read his favourite story. Patrick's buddy Liam spots them and comes over and invites Patrick to join him at the construction table. Slowly, Patrick gets up and joins Liam.

Over the coming days, when Patrick is ready, Rita begins to talk about what happened. She invites Patrick to bring in a photo of Rover so he can look at it and talk about Rover whenever he wants. These discussions enable Patrick to express how he feels. Rita listens and gives him new descriptive words. She talks about feeling sad, upset and angry, and how when you are unhappy sometimes you cry on the outside and sometimes it feels like you are crying inside too. Rita asks Patrick if he would like to make a model of Rover and himself using play-dough. She takes a picture of Patrick's creation and promises to give him a copy. Rita encourages him to tell the other children about his model and to share his sad story with them. She helps Patrick to tell his story using some of the new descriptive words.

The staff and children return to the topic of feelings many times over the next few weeks. They read books about different feelings. Some of the children speak about being excited going on holidays, being scared going to the dentist, being happy when it is their birthdays and feeling sad when they lose their favourite teddy. The topic of feelings comes up during day-to-day activities, also, for example in the pretend play area through sharing, taking turns, and when conflicts arise. The staff affirm and support the children, and help build their vocabulary to describe how they are feeling and why.



Reflection: Can I do more to help children identify and express their feelings?

Eispéireas foghlama 24a: Is féidir liom é a dhéanamh as mo stuaim féin!

Téama: Folláine agus Leas, Aidhm 4 agus Sprioc foghlama 2**Aoisghrúpa: Mamailínigh****Suíomh: Seisiún naíonra**

Tá pairilis cheirbreach ar Christy (beagnach 3 bliana d'aois). Is é an Béarla máthairtheanga a thuismitheoirí. Teastaíonn uathu go bhfaighidh Christy an deis Gaeilge a fhoghlaim mar dhara teanga ionas gur féidir leo socrú a dhéanamh go bhfreastalóidh sé ar naíonra áitiúil.

Sa naíonra bailíonn an fhoireann eolas ar bhonn laethúil faoi gach leanbh agus baineann úsáid as an eolas seo chun planáil agus tacú leis/léi. Is cainteoir dúchais í Niamh, Oibrí Bunriachtanach Christy. Baineann sí úsáid as geáitsí aghaidhe, agus as noda neamhbhriathartha eile chun cuidiú leis tuiscint a fháil ar an nGaeilge de réir mar a úsáideann sí an teanga chun cumarsáid a dhéanamh leis. Tá aithne mhaith ag Niamh ar Christy. Tuigeann sí céard is féidir leis a dhéanamh, cad iad na rudaí atá dúshlánach dó, agus tuigeann sí a thuiscint ar fhocail agus ar fhrásaí as Gaeilge. Díríonn Niamh ar chuidiú leis réimse scileanna a fhorbairt – scileanna teanga san áireamh. De réir mar a théann foghlaim Christy chun cinn, bíonn Niamh ann chun tacú leis agus cuireann deiseanna ar fáil dó i leith a bhfuil ar siúl aige. Cuireann sí ceist air i gcónaí sula ndéanann sí rud ar a shon mar go bhfuil sé ag éirí níos neamhspleáiche gach lá. Lá ar leith d'fhiafraigh sí de an raibh cúnaimh uaidh ag bailiú na mbloc ón urlár mar go mbíonn sé deacair air uaireanta greim a bhreith ar rudaí. Dúirt Christy os ard, *No, mise é*. D'aithin Niamh gur theastaigh uaidh a bheith ag obair as a stuaim féin agus rinne aithris air chun cuidiú leis lena fhoclaíocht agus lean ghramadach, *Déanfaidh mise é mé féin*. Thug sí an t-am do Christy chun an tasc a dhéanamh agus thacaigh leis, mar go raibh gá tréaniarracht chun na bloc go léir a chur sa bhuicéad. Ghlac Niamh grianghraf de Christy in aice na mbloc, chlóigh amach an grianghraf agus chuir é ar taispeáint ar an mballa leis an abairt faoina bhun, *Christy ag glanadh suas*. Ar an Aoine thaispeáin Christy é dá dhaideo nuair a tháinig sé chun é a bhailiú.



Ábhar Machnaimh: An dtugaim dóthain ama agus spáis do leanaí chun a spriocanna foghlama féin a shocrú?

Learning experience 24b: I can do it myself!**Theme: Well-being, Aim 4 and Learning goal 2****Age group: Toddlers****Setting: Sessional service (naíonra)**

Christy (almost 3 years) has mild cerebral palsy. His parents speak English as a first language at home. They want Christy to have the opportunity to learn Irish as a second language and so they arrange for him to attend the local naíonra.

At the naíonra staff gather information on a daily basis about each child and use this to plan and support him/her. Niamh, Christy's Key Worker, is a native Irish speaker. She uses facial expressions, gestures and other non-verbal cues to help him understand the Irish language as she uses it to communicate with him. Niamh understands Christy well. She knows the things he can do, the things he finds challenging, and his understanding of words and phrases in Irish. Niamh focuses on helping him develop a range of skills including his language skills. As Christy's learning progresses, Niamh is there to support him, and offers him choices about what he is doing. She always asks before doing things for him because every day he is becoming more independent. One day she asks if he needs help picking up the blocks as sometimes he finds it hard to grasp things. Christy exclaims, *No, I do it*. Niamh acknowledges his wish to work independently and repeats his intention using correct vocabulary and grammar, *I will do it myself*. She gives Christy the time he needs and encourages him, as it takes a great deal of effort on his part to get all the blocks into the bucket. Niamh photographs Christy beside the blocks, prints the photograph and displays it on the wall with the caption, *Christy is helping to tidy up*. On Friday Christy shows it to his granda who collects him.



Reflection: Do I give enough time and space to children to set their own learning goals?

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 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 35: A mat with a difference**Theme: *Communicating*, Aim 1 and Learning goal 3****Age group: Toddlers****Setting: Childminding**

Zoe (20 months) can't do her zip so Emma, her childminder, asks Conor (nearly 3 years) to help her to do it. She observes from nearby to make sure that Conor is able to do up the zip and thanks him for his help. She asks Zoe and Conor if they would like to hold hands on the way out to the garden and supports them in playing together outside with the clothes pegs, which they give her as she hangs the clothes on the washing-line. Spotting the doormat at the entrance to the utility room, Conor begins to attach the pegs making a decorative edge for the mat. Intrigued by what he is doing, Zoe joins him and together they empty Emma's clothes peg basket. Though Zoe has few words, her big smile and her body language show she is clearly delighted to be playing with Conor.



Reflection: Do children have lots of opportunities to spend and enjoy time with each other?

Learning experience 36: A problem solved**Theme: *Identity and Belonging*, Aim 3 and Learning goal 6****Age group:** Toddlers**Setting:** Childminding

Jean, a childminder, works four days a week looking after four children, two of school going age and two pre-school age. She is playing in the garden with two sisters, Aoife (2 years and 9 months) and Siobhán (nearly 4 years). Jean steps in to help the sisters sort out their problem about sharing the dolls' clothes, as Aoife is becoming very frustrated. She asks the girls what the problem is and then asks for suggestions on how to deal with it. After some discussion the girls agree to divide the clothes between them. Jean stays with the girls and talks to them about what they are doing. She encourages them to help each other and she asks Siobhán to help Aoife to put the socks on her baby doll. Jean suggests that they might pack the clothes and take the dolls on a holiday in the lovely sunny weather. Jean brings out the baby bath and the girls pretend it's a swimming pool for the dolls in sunny Spain. She encourages and acknowledges their efforts at playing together and they have great fun, ending up having a water fight between themselves and Jean!



Reflection: How can I help children to work together in solving problems and resolving conflicts?

Learning experience 37: My buddy Clare**Theme: *Well-being, Aim 1 and Learning goal 1*****Age group: Toddlers****Setting: Sessional service (pre-school)**

Melanie, the pre-school leader, is concerned about Caitríona (nearly 3 years). Caitríona was born prematurely and has some special educational needs, including communication difficulties. Caitríona finds it hard to mix with the other children as often they cannot understand her very well. Melanie observes her closely and speaks to her parents. They decide to get some advice from the speech therapist to help Caitríona with her speech and language. Melanie also sets up a buddy system whereby each child has a special friend to work and play with. In their pairs the children help tidy up the room, give out lunches, and play together inside and outside. Caitríona's buddy is Clare, and since the introduction of this new system she and Caitríona have become good friends. They enjoy playing at going to the beauty salon (Clare's mum is a beautician). They also love playing ball and skittle games. Melanie observes from a distance and regularly plays with the girls to extend their activity or to model language.



Reflection: What methods can I use to help children make friends?

Learning experience 42: Helping me join in the fun**Theme: Well-being, Aim 2 and Learning goal 3****Age group: Toddlers****Setting: Sessional service (special pre-school), and full and part-time daycare (nursery)**

The toddlers in the nursery spend a lot of time outdoors all year round. Some of the children who are quite shy and timid inside become much more active and enthusiastic outside. They run, climb the ladder, go down the slide, kick football, play in the outdoor café, get fuel for their vehicles at the pumps, play with the water and sand, and cycle their tricycles. The staff members play *Hide and seek* with them, organise races, play football, join them for a latte in the café, and chat about what they are doing and learning. On cold days they all dress up warmly in their coats and hats before going outside, and on wet days they splash in the puddles in their wellies and listen to the rain fall on their tinfoil covered umbrellas.

Daniel (almost 3 years) attends a special pre-school three mornings a week. He joins the children in the toddler room in the nursery on the other two days. He can't move any of his limbs so is reliant on the staff to carry him outside. He squeals with delight when they lift him up in the air and when they put him on the slide. The staff talk to Daniel, building up and reinforcing his language, spatial awareness and physical skills, saying, for example, *Now Daniel, you are up, up, up ... now down, down, down*. They place Daniel on the ground and put a ball beside his head. He gets great pleasure from moving the ball slowly with his head and getting it right under the bench. They say, *Well done Daniel ... under, under the bench*. These physical experiences help Daniel's gross motor development and enable him to understand spatial concepts like over/under, up/down, and in/out. The other children regularly run over to Daniel and gently push the ball to him or wave at him. He smiles and giggles when they do this.



Reflection: Do all children in my setting have opportunities to get involved in and enjoy play?

Learning experience 46: Fire, fire!**Theme: *Identity and Belonging*, Aim 2 and Learning goal 5****Age group: Toddlers****Setting: Full and part-time daycare (nursery)**

Cáit (nearly 3 years) attends a nursery while her parents work. Cáit's daddy is a fireman and she often talks about him in the nursery. The room leader asks Cait's daddy, Mike, if it would be possible for the nine children in Cait's room to visit the fire station. Mike organises the visit and the children really enjoy the trip. They sit on the engine and get to hold the hosepipe.

The children discuss their visit on returning to the nursery. They talk about the fire engine, what colour it is, how many wheels it has, how it gets the water, and who drives it. During the course of the week they sing songs and read stories about fires and fire engines, and make siren noises and draw pictures of fire engines, fires and fire-fighters. They make models of the fire engine with play-dough. They sort red items to match the fire engine and they play with the small world figures and vehicles to create their own emergencies.

The room leader provides the group with a series of large boxes for them to make their own fire engine that they can sit in. She helps them to cut out windows and doors and to paint it. They love sitting in it, and make siren noises and dress up as fire-fighters. One day during the free play session some of the children decide that the room is on fire and they use the old mobile phone to call the fire brigade. The children are very familiar with what to do having undertaken a fire drill on many occasions. They ask

the room leader to get the register to make sure everyone is accounted for and they all move over to a corner of the room that is well away from the fire. Help comes quickly when two fire-fighters jump out of the fire engine with hard hats and a large hose pipe. The fire is quickly quenched and the room leader is firmly reprimanded for starting the fire!

Over the next few days the staff and children work together to display photographs and paintings and pictures of their trip, alongside their fire engine, for their parents to see.



Reflection: What trip can I organise in the coming weeks to support the children's learning and development?

Learning experience 50: I love to dance and sing**Theme: *Communicating*, Aim 4 and Learning goal 3****Age group: Toddlers****Setting: Full and part-time daycare (nursery)**

Emily (2½ years) is a shy, quiet little girl. She attends the local nursery everyday while her ma, a lone parent, works. When she dances in the nursery Emily's whole expression changes and her sense of happiness and delight are clearly communicated. She particularly enjoys the songs, *I'm a dingle dangle scarecrow* and *Five fat sausages*. She also loves singing and doing the actions for *I'm a little teapot* and *Ring-a-ring a rosy*, particularly when they are sung in Latvian. She and her two special friends, Victoros and Seán, fall about the place laughing at the end. Victoros loves to hear his home language being used in the setting and starts to talk excitedly in Latvian when he hears it in the nursery rhymes.

Emily also enjoys it when the room leader suggests they take out the musical instruments. She loves marching around the room with her friends making lots of music and noise. She loves it, especially, when she gets the opportunity to do this outside. Máire, the room-leader often makes video recordings of the children's music making and dancing so that the children can share these experiences with their parents. Expressing herself in a variety of ways is important for Emily. Although her mastery of language is excellent she is quite reserved when interacting with other children, yet she loves to dance and move to music.



Reflection: How can I help children express themselves in a variety of ways?

Learning experience 54: We love horses so let's be friends**Theme: *Exploring and Thinking*, Aim 2 and Learning goal 5****Age group: Toddlers****Setting: Sessional service (playgroup)**

Bernadette, a Traveller child (2 years and 10 months), is newly arrived to the playgroup in the middle of the year. Her family keep horses and travel to fairs all around the country. As part of their fortnightly team meeting the staff discuss what they can do to help Bernadette make the transition to the playgroup. They agree to source posters of horses and fairs to display on the walls. They also ask the local training centre to make a small trailer and a model halting site to add to the small world play area. They add more horses to the farm set.

Michael (3 years) who lives on a farm loves everything to do with farming—animals, tractors and books about farming. Michael spends long sessions every day setting up and playing with the farm. He arranges gates to keep the cattle in and makes sure all the animals have water. This play mirrors the real life things he loves to do with his Mam and Dad who both work on the farm. Michael is delighted with the addition of the new horses. Bernadette likes to stand nearby and watch Michael play. She often sits beside him, too, taking part in onlooker play. The staff observe this.

After a few days, with a little prompting from Nora, the playgroup leader, Bernadette decides to join Michael in playing with the horses. They start to form a friendship. Nora supports this by asking them to do things like tidying up in pairs and she encourages them to play together outside. They love to play horsey games. Bernadette really likes this as she often goes to watch her Da in sulky races with their own horse. Sometimes Michael pretends to be the horse and Bernadette pretends to be her Da. Bernadette holds on to his jumper as he runs around. Bernadette tells him to giddy-up and slow down. Occasionally Bernadette uses 'cant' words while she is playing. Nora is interested in finding out more about this from Bernadette's parents. At the next team meeting she suggests to her colleagues that they learn and use some cant words to help Bernadette feel happier and more comfortable in the playgroup. This would also help the other children to learn more about Traveller life.



Reflection: Do the play props in my setting reflect the cultures and backgrounds of all the children?

Learning experience 58: The winning tower**Theme: Identity and Belonging, Aim 3 and Learning goal 3****Age group: Toddlers****Setting: Sessional service (playgroup)**

Patrick, Zyta and Johnny (each almost 3 years) are making a big tower. They talk to Aileen, the playgroup leader, about it and occasionally invite her to add a block or two to their construction while warning her to be careful! Johnny explains that they made it because he and Patrick (cousins) stayed in a big hotel on their holidays that was like a tower. *It's 'normous' (enormous) tower, isn't it, and we made it all by ourselves*, Patrick notes looking at Aileen. Zyta draws Aileen's attention to the coloured blocks they used in the tower and comments: *It's got loads o' (of) colours like red and green and orange and ... and it could win a big medal*. Johnny adds, *We did good job*. Aileen suggests she could photograph the children with their tower. Using the digital camera, computer and printer, Aileen makes three copies of the photograph, and offers the children the opportunity to include them in their portfolios. Alongside the photograph, she writes each child's comment about the tower. The children tell Aileen that they'd like to add the photographs and comments to their learning portfolios. Meanwhile, Aileen makes some notes in her practitioner's file about each child's concentration to detail in building the tower and their ability to work together.

Through previous observations and conversations with Zyta, Aileen knows she is competitive and likes to be 'the best'. While Zyta's reference to getting a medal here reinforces this assessment, Aileen records how working collaboratively with Patrick and Johnny seemed to lessen her wish for Aileen to comment on how 'good' the tower was and what a great job she had done in building it. Aileen makes a note on her weekly plan to create more opportunities for co-operative learning for Zyta.



Reflection: Do I create a climate in which children feel confident to make decisions about what should go in their learning portfolios?

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 61: Afraid of the dark

Theme: Well-being, Aim 1 and Learning goal 1**Age group: Toddlers****Setting: Sessional service (playgroup)**

Kathleen, the playgroup leader, reads the story of *Can't You Sleep Little Bear* (Martin Waddell) to the nine children in the group (between 2½ and 3 years). Kathleen talks to them about the story. She uses a number of strategies to encourage them to talk, including thinking aloud with them. Kathleen notices that Killian who is usually talkative is quiet. After the discussion she talks to him. Killian becomes teary-eyed. She gently encourages him to share why he is feeling sad: *I see you're sad at the moment Killian. I wonder why.* Kathleen learns that he is worried about Little Bear in the story because he might be afraid again the next night.

Killian: I no like dark. It scary.

Kathleen: (Offers comfort and a listening ear.) *It can be scary yes. That's why Big Bear put a big light in Little Bear's room, and then showed him the moonlight. Does your ma or da do something like that for you?*

Killian: I have light in my room but still scary.

Kathleen: *Remember what Little Bear did when he was scared in the story? He told his daddy. Perhaps, if you feel scared you could tell your ma or da. Would that be a good idea?*

Killian nods in agreement.

The following day, using the story, *Can't You Sleep Little Bear*, Kathleen explores the feeling of being scared with the children. She asks them to think about times when they felt a little bit frightened. Many of the children tell stories about getting lost in the shop, losing their favourite toy and thinking they might not find it again, and hearing a scary noise. Killian shares his story of being scared in the dark like Little Bear. Other children agree about the dark making them feel frightened. They talk about things they can do to help when they feel scared, such as telling a parent or grandparent, keeping a flash lamp under the bed in case the electricity doesn't work, and words they can use to help them describe how they feel. Later, they learn about animals who love the dark. A few weeks later Killian informs Kathleen, *I love dark now!*

Kathleen makes notes in her file about Killian's fear of the dark and the progress he makes over the coming weeks in exploring this emotion. She does likewise for the other children.



Reflection: How can I help children share their experiences and feelings in a way that is appropriate for their stage of development?

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 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?