

Aistear

Creatchuraclam na Luath-Óige
The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework



Well-being:
Learning 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 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 12: A big move**Theme: Well-being, Aim 1 and Learning goal 3****Age group: Babies****Setting: Home and childminding**

John has been a stay at home Dad for the past six months. He and his partner Bernice are now looking for a setting to look after their baby, Eimear (1 year) three days per week, as John is returning to work part-time. They would like to find a childminder as they are keen for Eimear to experience a setting similar to her own home. John and Bernice contact the local Health Service Executive for a list of notified childminders in their area. They have short-listed three and have made arrangements to visit them. They prepare a number of questions they want to ask. Each childminder describes her training and qualifications. All three have first-aid training. Through the childminding grant from the local County Childcare Committee all three have bought a range of toys and safety equipment. Each childminder has access to an outdoor area.

When they get home John and Bernice go through their notes and they agree that Liz's home would suit Eimear the best. It is a bungalow with easy access to a garden with lots of grass and a plant area. Liz minds two other pre-school aged children which John and Bernice think is important for helping Eimear to learn to interact with other children. Liz interacted very well with Eimear, and Eimear seemed to like being with her. Liz made John and Bernice feel welcome and at ease. She gave them a booklet with information about her childminding service, including the types of activities she organises and the routines she follows with the children. She also explained to them that she uses a little notebook each day to record basic care provision and the child's activities, expressions and achievements. She takes regular photographs and gives these to the parents. John and Bernice appreciate these as a way of sharing information. They ask Liz for references from other parents. After checking these out they contact Liz. Together they fill out an application form and discuss Eimear's preferences, medical conditions, allergies, vaccinations, comfort items, games she likes to play, routines, and general contact information. Eimear spends a short time each day with Liz over the coming two weeks. Liz uses the information from John and Bernice to help Eimear settle in and feel happy and content in her new setting.



Reflection: What information should I gather from parents to help children settle in my setting?

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?

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?

Leispéireas 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 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 26: Our place**Theme: Well-being, Aim 1 and Learning goal 1****Age group: Babies****Setting: Full and part-time daycare (crèche)**

Diane is the manager of the baby room in a crèche. She and her assistant Monique give special attention to structuring the environment for the six babies in their care. They talk to the parents, observe and talk to the babies, and plan accordingly. Diane and Monique check regularly that everybody is safe and happy. They provide toys, natural materials, and items from home of different textures, colours, shapes, and sizes in order to stimulate the babies' senses. They display photographs of the babies and their families on the walls with the babies' names and words like *mammy* and *daddy* beside them. Some babies have photographs of their pets on the wall too. The double doors to the garden are often open and there is a ramp for babies who want to crawl outside. The less mobile babies are often placed near the window so that they can watch what is going on outside. There is a garden seat, as well as roll-along toys, rugs, and a variety of other toys and equipment to play with. All the toys and equipment are routinely checked for safety and added to regularly so that each baby's interests are extended. Diane and Monique position themselves near the babies at all times, and use a key worker system so that each baby is cared for by the same person as much as possible.



Reflection: Do I make children feel welcome and motivated to explore and discover?

Learning experience 34: Making dinner with Granny**Theme: *Well-being*, Aim 3 and Learning goal 2****Age group: Babies****Setting: Home**

Granny minds her twin grand daughters Abi and Ava (17 months) two days a week. The girls regularly watch Granny in the kitchen as she makes the dinner. Granny chats to them about what she is doing. Today she brings some old pots, pans, spoons, carrots, and potatoes out into the garden so that the girls can play together. She models making the dinner, stirring the potatoes and carrots in the pot. Granny talks to the girls about cooking the dinner for Mummy when she gets home from work. Granny ensures that materials are plentiful and occasionally provides a commentary on what the girls are doing. She watches as they become engrossed in the activity, stirring the vegetables in the pots and feeding them to their teddies. Later the two girls help her wash the potatoes in the sink when she is cooking the dinner.



Reflection: What can I do to encourage children to interact with each other during their play?

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 Caitriona (nearly 3 years). Caitriona was born prematurely and has some special educational needs, including communication difficulties. Caitriona 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 Caitriona 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. Caitriona's buddy is Clare, and since the introduction of this new system she and Caitriona 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 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 41: Playful routines**Theme: Well-being, Aim 1 and Learning goal 1****Age group: Babies****Setting: Home and childminding**

Charlie (10 months) has a special relationship with his daddy, Luca. During care routines Daddy interacts and plays with him. Charlie loves it when Daddy says and plays *This little piggy* with his toes when he is changing his nappy. He also loves to play *peek-a-boo* with him when Daddy hides behind the door and pops his head in and out, much to Charlie's delight. Charlie also likes it when Daddy pretends his spoon is an aeroplane when he is feeding him. Charlie especially loves when Daddy flies him up into the air pretending he is the aeroplane. His childminder Linda also interacts with Charlie in a playful way. Luca has told Linda about the games he plays at home with Charlie. Linda plays these games with him too, making the transitions between his home and her home a happy experience for Charlie. Linda gradually introduces new games and other playful routines to Charlie and she in turn shares these with Luca when he collects Charlie in the evenings.



Reflection: Do I know what playful routines children enjoy at home, and how can I use these to make their transitions between settings easier?

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 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 57: Look Mia, I did it too!**Theme: Well-being, Aim 4 and Learning goal 3****Age group: Babies****Setting: Full and part-time daycare (crèche)**

Mia (13 months) and Josh (11 months) are playing side by side on the floor. Taking turns, they lift objects including wooden spoons, colanders and lids, show them to each other, and screech with glee. Mia notices a small chair close by and speedily crawls to it. Pulling herself to her feet she grabs the back of the chair and pulls herself onto the seat. She smiles, screeches and claps her hands in delight at her accomplishment. Not wanting to be left out, Josh slides on his bottom to the chair. Wanting a turn at sitting on the chair, he shouts loudly at Mia and waves his arms. The two babies become upset—Mia not wanting to leave the chair and Josh wanting to sit on it. Their shouting gets louder. Deirdre, their Key Worker, has been observing from a distance and joins them. She places a second chair close to Mia's. Josh makes his way to it and grabbing the back of the chair, pulls himself to his feet and tries to get onto the seat. He falls back to the floor. He pulls himself to his feet again only to fall once more. Deirdre observes from a distance and offers gentle encouragement to Josh: *You can do it, I know you can.* Screeching a little, he pulls himself to his feet a third time. He looks carefully at the seat and noticing the handles, grasps these and pulls himself onto the seat. Delighted, he looks towards Deirdre and Mia screeching loudly and bouncing on his seat.



Reflection: Do I give children opportunities to set and pursue their own learning goals?

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 63: I want that cube

Theme: Well-being, Aim 4 and Learning goal 2**Age group: Babies****Setting: Full and part-time daycare (crèche)**

Miriam, the crèche room leader, is encouraging Liam (10 months) to crawl. She knows he can do it as his mum has told Miriam about him crawling at home. For some reason he rarely crawls while in the crèche. Miriam places the sorting cube, that Liam loves to play with, out of his reach. It is near him although he will have to move closer to get it. Within a few seconds he shows his frustration as he yells and shakes his hands. He looks at Miriam as he yells louder. Miriam crawls to the toy and encourages him to crawl too: *Let's crawl together, will we?* She places the cube a little closer to him, all the time modelling crawling and encouraging Liam to have a go. He loses interest and picks up a spoon close by and bangs the floor with it. After lunch, as Miriam plays with another baby in the room, she observes Liam making one or two false starts at crawling. She moves a little closer so she can observe him better. He moves onto all fours and reaches forward while balancing himself with the other hand to grab the cube. Eventually, he makes it and Miriam claps her hands as he reaches the cube. Meanwhile, Lisa, the room assistant, recorded the achievement on video while Miriam observed and stayed ready to assist Liam if necessary. Miriam claps hands and congratulates Liam on his achievement. Liam claps too and laughs loudly. He proceeds to play with the cube. Miriam shares the footage on the video recorder with Liam's parents that evening and notes his achievement in his Record of Care. Over the coming days Miriam provides lots of opportunities that encourage Liam to crawl, and by the end of the following week he is delighted with his new mobility and the options for exploration that it brings!



Reflection: How can I use observations to greater effect in supporting and encouraging children to set their own learning goals?

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 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 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?