

Aistear

Creatchuraclam na Luath-Óige
The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework



Exploring and Thinking:
Learning experiences

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

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

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



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

Learning experience 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 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?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

(This experience begins during an Irish conversation session.)

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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



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

Learning experience 20: I did it, I stood up!**Theme: *Exploring and Thinking*, Aim 4 and Learning goal 4****Age group: Babies****Setting: Home, and full and part-time daycare (crèche)**

Baby Daniel (10 months) is learning to pull himself up to a standing position. Monica, his Key Worker, is watching closely nearby. Daniel has tried several times to pull himself up by holding on to a roll-along toy but as soon as he grabs it the toy tends to move and Daniel slides back down on the floor. He is starting to get frustrated. Monica describes what Daniel is doing, *You are trying to stand up on your own, aren't you?* She encourages him to persevere by smiling at him and telling him how well he is doing. *I think we could stop these wheels moving*, she suggests as Daniel falls again. She encourages him to try once more by showing him that the toy will not roll because it is now locked. Daniel grabs onto the toy again and slowly pulls himself up. He screeches with delight at Monica once he stands upright. Monica affirms his achievement by clapping her hands, describing what he has done and calling to her colleague to come and see. Her close proximity and keen interest act both as physical and emotional supports. She takes a photograph later in the day of him standing which she shows to him and uses to again describe his great achievement. She also shows it to his dad when he is collecting him that evening. She then puts it on display in the hallway with the date and a short description of the endeavour! Daniel's mam stops to look at it in the morning when she drops him off, and talks to him about what he did. They exchange smiles.



Reflection: How can I encourage children to persevere with difficult tasks?

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 29: Jelly play!**Theme: *Exploring and Thinking*, Aim 4 and Learning goal 6****Age group: Babies****Setting: Full and part-time daycare (crèche)**

Darragh (14 months) and Ian (16 months) are playing outside. Susan, their Key Worker, makes some red jelly, and when it is set she gives it to Darragh and Ian to explore. The boys are sitting on a rug beside a sheet of paper which is stuck to the grass. Susan scoops out a little jelly and offers it to Darragh and Ian. Ian is eager to get his hands on some of the jelly and squeals to make sure Susan knows he wants it. Darragh doesn't appear to be interested. Ian rubs his jelly into the paper and is delighted to see red marks appearing. Susan makes some marks of her own. *You are having great fun with the jelly, aren't you Ian*, she comments, *What about you Darragh would you like to try some?* Darragh watches Susan and Ian and puts his hand out tentatively towards the jelly. Susan encourages him to explore it and to make marks on the paper with it. Darragh watches as Susan makes long red lines on the paper. Susan is observing his reactions closely. She kneels beside him and helps him to make a mark. She describes the jelly and Darragh and Ian's mark-making activities. Darragh puts some of the jelly in his mouth; he likes the taste of it and has another piece. Ian follows. After a few minutes Darragh starts to take pieces of jelly out of the bowl and offers some to Ian. The boys place the jelly on the paper and then pick it up to put it back in the bowl again. Darragh and Ian become engrossed in what they are doing. Not wanting to interrupt their concentration and thinking, Susan sits quietly beside them. Ian and Darragh's body language and the smears of red jelly on their faces show that they are loving the experience!



Reflection: What new experiences can I provide for children which will capture their curiosity and encourage them to try new things?

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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



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

Learning experience 32: Water play**Theme: *Exploring and Thinking*, Aim 1 and Learning goal 1****Age group: Babies****Setting: Home**

Mammy puts baby Alisha (8 months) on the towel beside her baby cousin Leah (10 months) so that the two of them can put their hands into a basin of tepid water. Mammy sits on the ground and models putting her own hands in and out of the water. Her splashes make bubbles. Leah watches her intently and copies her actions but Alisha is a bit reluctant to join in. Mammy describes what she is doing while making eye contact with Alisha. She explains: *Look Alisha, Mammy and Leah are putting our hands in and out of the water. Look I am touching Leah's hands in the nice warm water. You can do it too!* Mammy gently takes Alisha's hand and places it in the water. She watches Alisha's body language, which is now positive, and continues with her descriptive comments on the girls' actions and emotions while using their names frequently. As soon as she notices a waning of interest in the water play she suggests another activity for the two babies.



Reflection: How can I help children try new activities together with confidence?

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

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



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

Learning experience 53: Getting to know you**Theme: *Exploring and Thinking*, Aim 1 and Learning goal 2****Age group: Babies****Setting: Home**

Meagan (5 months) is lying near her cousin Doireann (8 months). The girls are on a mat which has lots of play objects attached to it, such as mirrors, crinkly materials, rattles, animal sounds, fabric flaps, and dangling animals. Meagan shows Doireann that she is enjoying her young cousin's company. She stretches out her hand and touches Doireann's leg. Both children smile and coo with delight. Meagan's mum, Niamh, shows the girls the different features of the mat. She lies beside the two children and presses buttons to hear the animal sounds. She encourages the girls to feel the different materials. She holds their hands to help them use the rattles. When the girls appear to lose interest she sings *Round and round the garden* using actions with each of the girls. The girls let her know they love the tickly feel of her finger doing a circular movement on their hands as she sings with them. Doireann holds her hand out many times signalling for more. After singing, Niamh points to their clothes and body parts and describes these. *Doireann has white socks on, Meagan has blue ones. Doireann is touching Meagan's fingers nice and gently. Do you like that Meagan? I think you do.* And so the exploring and talking continue.



Reflection: What can I do to help children interact with and learn more about each other through play?

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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



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



Learning experience 59: Autumn pictures

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

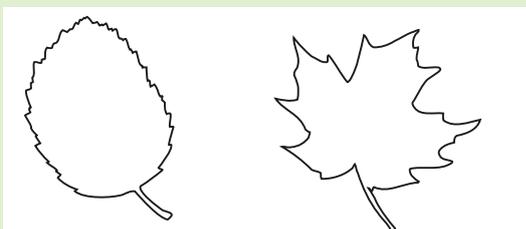
Age group: Young children

Setting: Infant class (primary school)

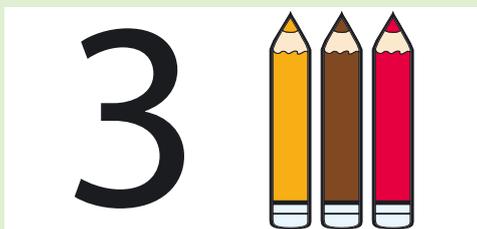
Ms. O'Connor, the senior infant teacher, notes that Val (5 years and 9 months) tends to contribute to class or group discussions only very occasionally. He has a stammer and his teacher is concerned that he may be becoming increasingly self-conscious about speaking in front of his peers.

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

I did two leaf rubbings.



I used three autumn colours in my picture.



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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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



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

Learning experience 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 68: What's inside the feely bag?**Theme: *Exploring and Thinking*, Aim 4 and Learning goal 1****Age group: Babies and young children****Setting: Childminding**

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

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

Tamzin: *Let me see Mary.*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In Chris' daily record Mary notes.

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

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



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

Learning experience 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?