

Aistear

Creatchuraclam na Luath-Óige
The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework



**Learning experiences
for sessional services**

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

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



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

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

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

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



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

Learning experience 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 15: Working in the quarry

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

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

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

David: *I making quarry.*

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

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

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

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

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

David nods his head in agreement.

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

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

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

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



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

Learning experience 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 bloic 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 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 37: My buddy Clare

Theme: *Well-being, Aim 1 and Learning goal 1*

Age group: Toddlers

Setting: Sessional service (pre-school)

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



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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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



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

Learning experience 61: Afraid of the dark

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

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

Killian: *I no like dark. It scary.*

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

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

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

Killian nods in agreement.

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

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



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

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

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

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

Colm: *Girls can't be pilots!*

Róisín and Amy: *Yes they can.*

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

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

Amy storms off.

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

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

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

Róisín: *He pushed me too.*

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

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

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

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

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

Áine: *Could there be two planes?*

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

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

Fionnán: *Yeah.*

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

Áine: *That sounds like a good plan.*

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

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



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

Learning experience 65: Look, the ball spins!

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

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

Photo 1

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

**Photo 2**

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

**Photo 3**

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



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



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

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

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

Samplaí de nótaí Eimear ina comhad cleachtóra.

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

Monday 18 February, 12.10 p.m. Outside play

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

Wednesday 27 February, 9.40 a.m. Indoor play

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



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

Learning experience 69: A fun outdoor challenge on camera

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

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

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

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

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



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

Learning experience 70: A rainbow of colours

Theme: Communicating, Aim 2 and Learning goal 4

Age group: Young children

Setting: Sessional service (playgroup)

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

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

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

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

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



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

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?