



Considerations for  
planning your outdoor provision

## **Outdoor learning-developing provision**

Outdoor play and learning is essential for all aspects of a child's development. It can provide children with experiences which enable them to develop intellectually, emotionally, socially and physically. In doing so it provides a rich context for the development of their language and encourages positive attitudes towards a healthy lifestyle.

Outdoor play should be seen as an integral part of early years provision. The aim of both indoor and outdoor play is to provide a stimulating environment for children's learning in all areas of the preschool curriculum. Close observation is essential in order to assess children's ability and to ensure appropriate planning and continuity for the outdoor curriculum.

The provision and planning for outdoor play, just as indoor play, must reflect the diversity and richness of the experience and developing interests of the children.

### **The Outdoor Area**

The outdoor area should be mapped out to ensure zones of learning are created (See appendix 1.) and that it is well laid out and provides for

- challenging and exciting play.
- safety.
- grassed, hard and safety surfaced areas.
- shady areas.
- growing/digging areas - garden soil, compost, tubs, vegetable and flower beds.
- planting tubs – gardening for different seasons, sowing seeds, harvesting vegetables, providing opportunities for environmental science, caring and responsibility.

- exploring area with trees, shrubs to attract insects, bark and log piles to provide opportunities for finding mini-beasts.
- a covered sandpit which protects the sand from animals and is roofed to give some shelter from the weather.
- quiet, reflective areas and busy, moving play areas.
- developing exploration and imagination.
- opportunities for large scale experiences.

### **Planning Outdoor Play**

Adults must consider the following points

- the specific purpose of the outdoor play.
- individual, co-operative and parallel play.
- skills, knowledge, concepts and attitudes to be acquired/developed by the children.
- appropriate use of resources.
- staff interaction, guidance and support.
- balance/breadth of curriculum provision.
- alteration, addition or removal of resources.
- quality play.

To ensure balance and breadth of provision, adults planning outdoor learning, need to think carefully about what it should include and why. They need to have clear goals for children's learning, at the same time they need to be responsive to children's enthusiasm and their interests. Within the planning there

should be flexibility to meet individual children's needs as they arise during the session. Resources should be available to enhance and extend their play. Staff will make notes of children's' achievements (through observation) to record in individual profiles.

### **The Role of the Adult Outdoors**

Adults should be actively involved with children in their games and activities where appropriate and should not be solely in a supervisory role.

Adults should be

- talking with children in a variety of ways (conversing, discussing, questioning, modelling and commentating).
- helping children to find solutions to problems.
- supporting, encouraging.
- extending their activities by making extra resources available and providing new ideas.
- initiating games and activities.
- joining in games and activities when invited by children.
- observing, assessing and recording.
- being aware of safety issues.
- being aware of every child's equal right of access to a full outdoor curriculum which is broad, balanced, relevant and differentiated regardless of race, culture, religion, gender or disability.
- evaluating observations in order to plan appropriate resources and experiences.
- promoting Irish language by modelling language and using immersion methodology.

In these ways adults are making positive contributions to the children's play and learning and setting up challenging situations for children to experience.

### **Learning Opportunities in the Outdoors**

There are many opportunities for the following developmental areas to be enhanced outdoors in varied and challenging ways:

Personal, Social and Emotional Development

Language and Literacy

Early Mathematical Experiences

World Around Us

Physical Development

Arts

Irish language acquisition

## **PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

For children to develop in this area many experiences are necessary. The outdoor area can contribute immensely to development in this area.

- dispositions and attitudes
- space to play, following their own interests, for extended periods of time e.g. making an obstacle course for others to use
- freedom to use a wide variety of large equipment e.g. climbing frame/slide self-confidence and self-esteem
- children plant own vegetables/flowers plants and take care of them
- take equipment to shed at end of free play session/finding ways to move heavy equipment
- listen to the birds singing
- opportunity to develop an awareness of nature
- reflecting/a chance to be thoughtful making relationships
- can choose to work/play with a variety of children/adults in the nursery from any group
- freedom of movement between outdoor areas for all children at the same time enables children to build a variety of friendships behaviour and self-control
- share tricycles/scooters with others
- take care of growing plants - watering them in the dry weather self-care
- wash hands independently after gardening
- observe events in the immediate area e.g. sound of a police car, ambulance, birds passing aeroplanes overhead.

## **LANGUAGE AND LITERACY**

Children are able to try out a lot of the pre-writing skills in the outdoor area, by building up first their gross and then their fine motor skills. Opportunities for large scale drawings are numerous e.g. chalking on ground and boards, using water and brush, and painting on a large scale.

Children can retell familiar stories, and take part as one of the characters.

They can enrich their vocabulary by listening to others and by exploring, investigating and interacting with peers and adults. Gender imbalances regarding boys' writing and pre reading skills can be addressed.

### Language for Communication and Thinking

- Children talking together in co-operative play situations e.g. when making play dens.
- Adult/child conversations where adult may extend or introduce new vocabulary.
- Children negotiating for turns or objects e.g. "Can I have a go after?"
- Children recalling particular processes and events they experienced during the session e.g. "I played with Aoife. We used the hats and bags to be mums."
- Children listening to and solving problems with language support as necessary e.g. "I'll get the sand-timer to have a go on the bike."
- Inviting others to join in collaborative games e.g. "Let's play Goldilocks together."
- Describing particular objects or natural phenomena e.g. "It's soft, it's crawling quickly to me."
- Talking about activities they are engaged in e.g. water, sound, wheeled toys, and using appropriate vocabulary
- In all practical activities the adult needs to give children the time and space to describe what they are doing and what is happening and to use opportunities for recalling, questioning, prediction, estimating and discussing cause and effect.

- Children using non-verbal communication, particularly body gestures, facial expressions and glancing at things in order to communicate and respond to events and other people.
- Listening to natural and man made sounds e.g. thunder, chime bars.
- Listening to instructions, conversations and explanations.
- Listening to rhymes, poems, songs and chants.

### **Reading**

- Looking at books e.g. sitting on the cushions or a rug with the book box, 'reading' to a friend
- Enjoy rhyming and rhythmic activities e.g. rhymes and simple poems.
- Chalked, pencil marks or tally-like marks
- Decoding visual information to complete puzzles e.g. looking at shape carefully
- Following road systems e.g. pathway and road signs
- Table top and construction toys e.g. large rabbits
- 'Reading' own names from the magnetic letter board
- Making role-play signs and displaying these around the garden e.g. car wash
- Reference books placed near objects e.g. near planting tray, fictional books near puppet box

### **Writing**

- Imitating adults by 'jotting down notes' e.g. using a notebook and pencil to scribble and draw

- With the magnetic letters
- At the garden centre, shop or noting down orders in the café
- With a clipboard and pencil, moving around outdoor areas
- On the wall, using both fine and chunky chalks
- On the ground using giant chalks

## **EARLY MATHEMATICAL EXPERIENCES**

A carefully planned outdoor provision offers children opportunities to experience mathematical activities which extend/contrast with those provided indoors and so extend the scope of the curriculum.

Children should have opportunities to experience:-

- mathematical language measurement
- sorting and matching number
- classifying and sequencing
- spatial/positional awareness estimation
- directions problem solving
- time

Mathematical Language should be encouraged when appropriate. Opportunities could include discussion, questioning, predicting, estimating through working with materials and observation. Refer to Altram language visual for mathematical language.

- Counting buckets in the sand, throwing bean bags into a bucket, planting seeds
- Ordering First, second and third with cars, skittles, tubes in the sand
- Cooking in the sand/soil e.g. 1 : 1 correspondence with bun tins
- Picnics
- Tallying when knocking skittles over, throwing bean bags into buckets
- Reading numbers on objects – skittles, cars
- Writing numbers on chalkboard, on path with big chalks, puzzles, on vehicles and create corresponding parking bays, number on licences also.

### **Calculating**

- how many more? e.g. when laying the table in the house, flowers in shop
- buckets in the sand
- counting cars - how many? are they the same?
- tidy-up time - solving problems, are they all there?
- ordering numbered skittles
- playing magnetic fishing games - adding dots on fish, comparing one with another
- lining up cars - more than, less than

## **Shape, Space and Measure**

- use of indoor table-top activities e.g. wild/farm animals
- block play (large and small)
- throwing coloured beanbags into buckets
- sorting seeds by colour, shape and size
- making collections of natural objects
- making patterns with natural objects
- sequencing found natural objects
- obstacle courses (hoops, tunnels, boxes, barrels, planks and logs) giving opportunities for positional language e.g. high/low, under/over, through, along, upside-down, in/out
- straight/curved pathways, edge of garden
- setting up the train track
- assorted puzzles
- volume and capacity in sandpit and water tray
- lengths of ribbon/crepe paper on windy days
- weaving
- using tape measures

- sand timers
- noticing how long plants/seeds take to grow
- changes to garden
- seasonal change
- use of speed on/in wheeled toys

## **WORLD AROUND US**

In this area children are given opportunities to make sense of their world. The outdoor area provides many opportunities for real experiences including exploring the weather, the natural environment and building on a large scale. Children should have opportunities to develop the following knowledge/skills:

### **Exploration and investigation**

- noticing different weather conditions and impact of the weather on them
- noticing the plants in the garden/taking care of them
- planting seeds and bulbs
- exploring mini-beasts
- identifying objects that float/sink
- exploring different speeds cars go down a ramp

## **Designing and Making Skills**

- a variety of construction toys
- large blocks
- a variety of large equipment e.g. tyres, planks, spools
- wet sand
- woodwork bench and tools
- den making equipment

## **A sense of time**

- notice changes in the garden through the seasons
- talk about when different things happen in the garden e.g. planting vegetables, raking leaves,

## **A sense of place**

- talk about different parts of the nursery outdoor e.g. garden area, steps, front and back playgrounds
- notice features of local area when walking to the post box, other schools

## **PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT**

Daily opportunities are planned to develop children's gross and fine motor skills. Some examples of appropriate activities are as follows:

### **Movement with confidence, imagination and in safety**

- Pulling/pushing wooden trucks in firefighters game
- Carrying house equipment to set up in a different location
- Playing musical instruments in a moving band

### **With control and co-ordination**

- Riding scooters and tricycles, prams and pushchairs
- Large scale painting and drawing
- Climbing scramble nets.
- Travel around, under, over and through balancing and climbing equipment
- Obstacle course constructed with planks, spools, tyres, wooden steps and boxes

### **Sense of Space**

- Movement/dance
- Building and climbing inside dens and hidey holes

### **Health and Bodily Awareness**

Adults communicating and explaining, describing and feeding back to children as they access health promoting activities in the náiscoil environment

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- Healthy eating café (role play)
- Vegetable gardening
- Noticing breathlessness, increased heat and perspiration after exercise
- Noticing tiredness in body, legs and arms, feet and fingers after exercise

### **Using Equipment**

- Aiming beanbags into buckets and large ball into basketball net
- Bat and ball games, throwing/catching balls, kicking balls into football net
- Range of gardening tools
- Painting with water and paint, large chalking
- Skittles

### **Using Tools and Equipment**

- Woodworking, clay, cooking tools, joining and cutting tools
- Sticklebricks, lego, small and large wooden blocks
- 10 green bottles
- Using broom, scrubbing brushes and dustpan and brush

## **THE ARTS**

### **Exploring Media and Materials**

- looking at colours of leaves and flowers
- building obstacle courses, towers, bridges, sculptures
- describing texture of grass, wood, sand, soil, worms, snails, snow ice
- mixing sand and water
- playing with cardboard boxes
- large scale painting, weaving, chalking

### **Music**

- playing a wide variety of musical instruments
- singing songs i.e. songs inspired by the things outdoors like worms, snails, the weather, plants and trees
- playing ring games
- making up dances to music made by children on the instruments
- marching and being a band

### **Imagination**

- large scale painting in 2D and 3D
- drawing with large chalks/pastels

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- mark making with large paint brushes and rollers
- pattern making with found objects
- designing and building dens, sand castles, sculptures, collages, weaving,
- obstacle course, props for role play (boats, rockets, helicopters)
- large block building
- dens
- hospital
- boats builders and workmen
- pirate ship, car train
- dressing up
- café
- builders and workmen (in sand using bricks and trowels)
- firefighter clothes

#### **Responding to Experiences, and Expressing and Communicating Ideas**

- noticing weather, vegetable garden. minibeasts
- smelling herbs
- listening to bird song, sirens

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- making maps
- painting from observation
- drawing on chalkboard

#### **IRISH LANGUAGE ACQUISITION**

In participating with children in outdoor learning it is important that staff:

- use Irish at all times
- keep the level of verbal interaction high
- maintain a sustained flow of language by,
  - describing, discussing and keeping-up an on-going commentary on what is happening,
  - making observations and comments,
  - offering suggestions,
  - asking questions.

There should be frequent reiteration of key language within the focus of the current planning cycle. Opportunities should be sought to consolidate and practice language of previous planning cycles. Language should be simple with the appropriate range of contextual and visual clues in place to support understanding, including body language, facial expression and tone of voice, non-verbal clues.

It is also important that staff:

- interact with one another through staged dialogue in order to,
  - increase frequency of exposure to key language areas or items,
  - make meaning clear,
  - model physical actions,
  - model verbal responses.

Through optimum Irish language exposure, children will have opportunities to acquire the language, develop their comprehension of social, instructional and theme language. Evidence of emerging language production will also be apparent. This is outlined below.

### **Comprehension**

Children will have opportunities to;

- Develop comprehension of instructional/organisational/social language e.g.
  - Goitse
  - Seas suas, suigh síos
  - Cuir sin síos ar an....
  - Taispeáin dom an....
- Develop comprehension of some important high frequency questions e.g.
  - An bhfuil...?
  - Cá bhfuil an ...?
  - Cé leis an ... ?
  - An dtig leat... ?
  - An maith leat... ?
  - Cé rinne ... ?
  - An raibh... ?

- Develop comprehension of high-frequency key words associated with other areas of learning
- Develop comprehension of a broad base of high-frequency key words such as;
  - Nouns relating to family, toys, animals, transport, weather, clothes, food, body parts
  - Verbs e.g. run, walk, jump, throw, kick
  - Common adjectives e.g. big, small, fast slow
  - Adverbs e.g. here, there, quickly, slowly, inside, outside
- Develop comprehension at a level where the importance of non-language clues e.g. pictures, facial expression, tone of voice, gestures **is becoming of less importance**
- Develop comprehension in:
  - One to one situations
  - Small group situations
  - Large group situations

### **Production**

Children will have opportunities to;

- Participate verbally in songs, rhymes and stories
- Mimic adult verbalisation in an appropriate context
- Use basic routine social language or fixed phrases, spontaneously and appropriately
- Use single word or single phrase prompted answers
- Use single word or single phrase answers, spontaneously and appropriately
- Insert Irish words or phrases, spontaneously and appropriately into English communication.
- Develop significant non-dependency on non-verbal clues

## **SAFETY IN THE OUTDOOR AREA**

- When setting out the equipment each day and during sessions, staff must look out for safety and remove any objects such as cans, bottles etc. which may have been left by others. Before children go outside a member of staff must check the main gate is closed. Recorded Risk Assessment is carried out daily.
- Staff outdoors must always be aware of the safety of the children in their care, be vigilant at all times and never leave the play area for any reason unless another member of staff has taken over responsibility.
- It is most important for staff to move around the area constantly so that all areas are adequately supervised. Each person should position him/herself in separate areas so that no area is unsupervised.
- Hot drinks should not be taken into the outdoor areas.
- All equipment should be stored away sensibly and carefully, to allow for safe and easy removal next day.
- If a child is injured he/she should be taken indoors for treatment quickly as possible if necessary; if possible the child should be treated with the portable first aid kit outdoors. Both child and staff member should remain within sight of another member of staff while treatment takes place.
- Details of the accident must be written up as soon as possible in the first aid book. The child's parent must be informed of the accident and treatment.
- Wheeled toys should only be used in the back play area.
- If it is necessary for an adult to put toys away whilst children are still in the play areas, there must always be at least one other member of staff supervising remaining children in the area.
- Encourage children always to look before they move or when jumping off apparatus; also encourage children to leave space between themselves and the child in front when crossing planks etc..
- Whenever children are tidying up, they should be shown how to do it and adults should be aware of any risks and minimise them to ensure safety.

