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Whole School Plan for Aistear

Background

Aistear was introduced for Junior Infants in September 2012. The following year it was introduced into Senior Infants and it has been an integral part of our Infant Education Curriculum ever since. Teachers involved with Infants have pursued training in the form of Summer Courses. The Board of Management have been integral in funding this play based methodology throughout the years, replenishing equipment and resources and purchasing furniture and outdoor equipment. Parents from within the school community have also assisted and supported this initiative over the years donating their time, expertise and resources.

Introduction

This plan forms the basis of infant teachers' long and short-term planning and so will influence teaching and learning in individual classrooms. It also informs new or temporary teachers of our approaches and teaching methodologies in the infant classrooms.

Rationale

It is important that teachers throughout the school understand how Aistear is used as a methodology in the infant classrooms so that our approach is implemented consistently to ensure continuity and progression in children's learning. It is essential that the needs and abilities of all children are understood, and that resources and teaching styles are adapted to meet the needs of individual pupils.

What is Aistear?

Aistear is a curriculum framework for children from birth to six years, in Ireland. It describes the types of learning that are important for children in their early years. As a curriculum framework, Aistear can work as a guide for primary schools and teachers in planning practical learning programmes for children in infant classes. Aistear should be used together with the Infant Curriculum to plan fun and challenging experiences for the children in the Junior and Senior Infant classrooms.

The importance of play in our school:

Play is often described as children's 'work'. It can make a unique contribution to the development of the child. It is the child's way of making sense of the world – a learning tool that engages, motivates, challenges and pleases. Its purpose provides the means by which the child can achieve an enhanced awareness of self and can experience a unique mode of learning.

Play can :

- Give each child a rich oral language experience and afford the opportunity to experiment with different forms of communication whilst developing a rich and varied vocabulary.
- Assist each child in developing social skills and interactions.
- Give each child the opportunity to approach new knowledge through the use of imaginative activity and experience.
- Give each child the opportunity to approach knowledge in the ways that are most suitable to him/her
- Create the motivation and interest that can spur the child to foster an attitude that views knowledge as essential in adapting his/her perception of the world.
- Provide the means by which the child can relate knowledge, in a special way, to previous learning and experience.
- Facilitate the child's imaginative, intellectual, emotional and physical development in a holistic way.
- Foster the child's creativity, invention, insight, discovery and problem solving.
- Allow the child, through the medium of play, to experience, understand and practise the life skills needed in reality.
- Promote empathy with the ideas, attitudes and feelings of others.
- Build confidence
- Feel loved, happy and safe
- Develop physical skills
- Learn about caring for others and the environment

Vision

We seek to use the Aistear framework to provide information for teachers to help them plan for and provide enjoyable and challenging learning experiences, so that all children can grow and develop as competent and confident learners. We seek to use the Aistear methodology as part of early intervention in the infant classes. We intend for all children to be exposed to a wide range of vocabulary in a practical setting to improve language fluency and comprehension.

Aims

We endorse the themes and aims of the Aistear framework:

Themes	Aims
Well-being	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Children will be strong psychologically and socially.• Children will be as healthy and fit as they can be.• Children will be creative and spiritual.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children will have positive outlooks on learning and on life.
Identity and Belonging	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children will have strong self-identities and will feel respected and affirmed as unique individuals with their own life stories. • Children will have a sense of group identity where links with their family and community are acknowledged and extended. • Children will be able to express their rights and show an understanding and regard for the identity, rights and views of others. • Children will see themselves as capable learners.
Communicating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children will use non-verbal communication skills. • Children will use language (listening, speaking, signing, drawing, and writing). • Children will broaden their understanding of the world by making sense of experiences through language (listening, speaking, signing, drawing, and writing). • Children will express themselves creatively and imaginatively.
Exploring and Thinking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children will learn about and make sense of the world around them. • Children will develop and use skills and strategies for observing, questioning, investigating, understanding, negotiating, and problem-solving, and come to see themselves as explorers and thinkers. • Children will explore ways to represent ideas, feelings, thoughts, objects, and actions through symbols. • Children will have positive attitudes towards learning and develop

	dispositions like curiosity, playfulness, perseverance, confidence, resourcefulness, and risk-taking.
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Types of play

Teachers will plan for a variety of play during Aistear sessions using a variety of areas, resources and equipment.

Creative play: involves children exploring and using their bodies and materials to create things and to share their feelings, ideas and thoughts. Activities can include dancing, painting, playing with junk and recycled materials, working with play-dough and clay, and using their imaginations.

Language play: involves children playing with sounds and words. It includes unrehearsed and spontaneous manipulation of these, often with rhythmic and repetitive elements. Activities should encourage children to play with language – enjoy patterns, jokes, stories, sounds and nonsense words.

Physical & Manipulative play: involves children developing, practising and refining bodily movements and control. It includes whole body and limb movements, co-ordination and balance. Exploratory play involves children using physical skills and their senses to find out what things feel like and what can be done with them. **Manipulative play** involves practising and refining motor skills. This type of play enhances physical dexterity and hand-eye co-ordination. **Constructive play** involves building something using natural and manufactured materials. This type of play can become more complex and intricate.

Pretend play: involves children using their imaginations. It includes pretending with objects, actions and situations. Children use their developing language to move from thinking in the concrete to thinking in the abstract. They make up stories and scenarios. Children act out real events and they also take part in fantasy play about things that are not real, such as fairies or super heroes. Children try out roles, occupations and experiences in their pretend play. Small world play involves children using small-scale representations of real things like animals, people, cars, and train sets as play props.

Inclusion and Differentiation

It is the policy of our school that all children will have the opportunity to participate in and benefit from the full range of experiences offered in play. In planning for play account should be taken of the range of differences in the school so that all children will be given the opportunity to obtain maximum benefit from every session.

- Teachers will support and ensure the participation of children with additional needs by being aware of the level and pace at which these children are learning.
- All children are enabled to make an important contribution regardless of academic achievement.
- We adapt and modify activities so that all children in the class can participate.

Roles and Responsibilities

It is recognised that in order for play to flourish as a truly enjoyable, cognitive, and socially adaptive human ability, adult support is necessary. Where possible, support staff will take part in Aistear sessions and make observation notes alongside the mainstream teacher.

The Classroom Teacher

- To plan a range of interesting learning activities and opportunities based on agreed themes and topics on a weekly or monthly basis
- To observe and assess progress of all children
- To guide and support the children in their discovery
- To audit and provide resources and equipment which are interesting, safe, practical and topical.
- To remember that they are an equal participant and will not take over the play session.
- To collaborate with the SET and SNA to ensure inclusion and integration of all children in the class
- To ensure that everyone shares good practice, reviewing this on a regular basis, to ensure there is continuity.

The SET

- To collaborate with the class teacher and SNA to ensure inclusion and integration of all children in the class
- To ensure children's progress is assessed on a regular basis and that this is used to inform future planning.
- To observe and assess on a more formal basis if needed.
- Will alter the type and amount of support as the children grow in confidence and competence.

The SNA

- To collaborate with the SET and SNA to ensure inclusion and integration of all children in the class
- To ensure the safety of the child in their care and those around them.

The plan will be supported, developed and implemented by all staff members.

Parental Involvement

Parents have an important role to play by discussing their child's playtime experiences with them. This gives the parent a valuable role in facilitating the children's playtime experiences with them.

- Parents can become directly involved in the organisation of projects associated with Aistear.
- Parents can also assist with the gathering and sourcing of toys, props and costumes.

- Parents will be made aware of the contribution that play makes to their child’s learning and development.
- Information on Aistear can be gained from <https://ncca.ie/en/search-ncca/?q=aistear>
- Parents can assist by giving their children time to play every day.
- Parents can participate by asking the child what they were playing at in school – this will place a value on the importance of play.
- Parents should inform their child’s teacher about the games, activities and books their child enjoys.

Linkage and Integration

Linkage within the play session will occur where a lesson based on one particular strand may also draw on another strand. For example: a group of children reflecting on the drama that they created in role play.

Integration across curricular areas will occur where the teacher draws on another subject topic as a stimulus for the play session or uses play to aid consolidation of a particular topic.

Aistear can be used to integrate all areas of the curriculum. For example, a play session about “The Opticians” might include:

- Socio-dramatic play where children play in role using pre-taught vocabulary
- An investigation area where children record items “near and far” using magnifying glasses.
- A story bag where children sequence and re-tell a known story using props.
- A creative area where children design glasses and use problem solving skills when discussing how to cut and assemble them.

Assessment and Record Keeping

Aistear provides lots of information on and examples of assessment-in-action in different types of early childhood settings. The framework uses five assessment methods to gather evidence of children's learning and development across Aistear's themes. This evidence helps practitioners to build rich portraits of children as learners in order to celebrate their achievements and to help them take the next steps in their learning.

Records of assessment will be kept in observation notes, pupil profiles and pupil scrapbooks. Mainstream teachers will record reflections of play sessions. Where possible, SETs will take part in Aistear sessions and make observation notes alongside the mainstream teacher. Assessment methods:

- Self-assessment: using samples of work.
- Checklists
- Conversations: one to one, paired, group and whole class.
- Observation: teacher as an observer and teacher in role.
- Setting tasks: worksheets and activities

- Testing/Questioning: reporting and reflecting on play using photos and video clips.

What should be assessed?

- Dispositions: curiosity, concentration, resilience, and perseverance.
- Skills: walking, cutting, writing, and problem-solving.
- Attitudes and values: respect for themselves and others, care for the environment, and positive attitudes to learning and to life.
- Knowledge and understanding: classifying objects using colour and size, learning 'rules' for interacting with others, finding out about people in their community, and understanding that words have meaning.

Organisational Planning

An Aistear session should include the following stages:

- Inspiration (5/10 mins): Elklan Language web, Story, Aistear Wheel, Recall, mini lesson.
- Planning (5/10 mins): Oral - paired or group oral discussions using future tense. Whole class planning. Drawn or written – In copies the children may be asked to draw what they plan to make or do, teachers will then write what the plan was. The children will be encouraged to use the print rich environment to find vocabulary.
- Play (25 mins): engaging with activities/material at assigned play areas.
- Tidy up (5 mins).
- Reviewing (10 mins): can include oral reporting (knee to knee), guided writing and free writing, Artist's chair, Hot seating, oral reports, using photos and videos to recall. Children will also be encouraged to self-assess noting what went well, what didn't go well and what they would change if they were doing it again.

Sample Questions to guide self-assessment :

- **If you were doing the activity again, would you do anything differently?**
- **Do you have any advice for the group that will be playing in that area tomorrow?**
- **How did your play plan compare to your play? Did you stick to your plan?**
- **Did you learn anything during playtime?**

Health and Safety

- Activities must be assigned to an appropriate area in the classroom. There must be a safe distance between play areas.
- Playtime resources/props are to be stored away on shelves or on a portable toy trolley.
- Consideration must be given to the health and safety of all children when selecting appropriate props and resources for playtime.
- Rules and routines (around the use and tidying away of all equipment and resources) are taught to the children

- Rough behaviour is not tolerated even within the context of role play and children are made aware of this beforehand.

Individual Teachers' Planning and Reporting

Teachers consult this Whole School Plan and the curriculum documents for curriculum subjects being integrated in Aistear sessions when they are drawing up their long and short term plans.

Teachers use Aistear as a methodology to aid curricular integration. Where suitable, Aistear will be used in a thematic way to integrate with the other curricular subjects. Each teacher will have a long term plan for the year and will tailor them to the needs of their own classes in their short term planning.

Teachers should not use the term "Aistear" on their timetable. Aistear is a play methodology. The phrase "integrated play" should be used, to be followed by a short English slot for reviewing play.

Staff Development

- Teachers will have access to reference books, resource materials and websites dealing with Aistear.
- All staff will be encouraged to observe Aistear sessions in infant classrooms.
- All teachers will be responsible for cataloguing resources and will arrange for opportunities for resources to be assessed for purchase.
- Access to Aistear Toolkit: <http://www.ncca.ie/aistear toolkit>
- The culture in our school is one that encourages the sharing of experience and good practice.
- Course and workshop details are continually shared amongst staff.
- All staff considering teaching infants will be asked to complete a summer course

Success Criteria

We shall review this whole school plan in the future under the following headings:

- How individual teacher preparation, planning and teaching reflects this plan.
- How the Aistear play methodology is working in the classroom
- Resources
- Progression in the use and understanding of new vocabulary, aiding fluency and comprehension skills.

Means of assessing the outcomes of the plan will include

- Revisiting the aims of this plan as a staff
- Teacher / Parent feedback
- Children's feedback
- Inspector's reports / suggestions
- Results of class assessment

Review

It will be necessary to review this plan on a regular basis to ensure optimum implementation of Aistear as a teaching methodology. We aim to review this plan during the 2022/23 school year. On this date we will refer to the tasks in our action plan and check that they have been completed in accordance with the agreed time frame.

Those involved in the review will be: Principal, All staff, BOM, Parents

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Planning and reviewing objectives

Appendix 2 – Sample Scheme of work

Appendix 3 – Resources

Appendix 4 – Suggested vocabulary for Role Play area

Appendix 5 – Role of Teacher during Play

Appendix 6 – Documenting Assessment

Appendix 7 – Maths through Role Play

Appendix 8 – Area Overview

Appendix 1 - Planning and Reviewing Objectives

Sample of Teacher's Questions which develop planning skills and use of future tense:

- What are you going to do in your area today?
- What toys are you going to choose? / What equipment are you going to use?
- How are you going to make that?
- Why are you going to choose that?
- Who are you going to play with?

Sample of Teacher's Questions which develop recount skills and use of past tense:

- Who did you play with today?
- What area did you play in?
- What did you do in that area?
- What did you play with? / What equipment did you use?
- What was your favourite part of playtime? Why?

Reviewing play

Reviewing happens at the end of the play session. The child considers four questions when reviewing: Who? What? Where? and How? The teacher should challenge easy answers, model correct grammar and model a clear speaking voice. The teacher will draw attention to vocabulary as it arises in conversation. There should be a balance between individual, group and whole class discussion. A balance should be struck between reflecting, listening, speaking, writing and questioning. Reviewing can be enhanced by use of photos and video clips of the play session. Children should be encouraged to imagine what might happen in the future – make choices and consider consequences.

Appendix 2 - Sample Schemes of Work

Junior Infants

***If play becomes “stale”, a sub-theme can be used to introduce new elements to the play session.**

Month	Theme
September	Myself, My Family The home /Goldilocks
October	Bears Fire Safety/Halloween
November	Minibeasts
December	Winter /Toys
January	Growth
February	People At Work
March	Birthdays
April	The Zoo/Wild Animals
May	Space
June	Pirates/Transport

Senior Infants

***If play becomes “stale”, a sub-theme can be used to introduce new elements to the play session.**

Month	Theme
September	Pets Pets & Vets
October	Fire Safety Fire Station/Halloween
November	People in our community – Garda People in our community - Dentist
December	The Post Office Santa’s Workshop Christmas Around the World The Nativity Story
January	Winter Arctic Animals
February	Spring Friendship
March	Weather Seasons
April	Easter
May	The Airport

	Travel Agents
June	The Farm

Sample Thematic Plan

Theme: Food Sub theme: At the restaurant	
Storybooks: <i>Stone Soup, What's it like to be a chef</i> by Susan Cornell	
<p>Possible activities prior to engaging in play:</p> <p>Reading lesson – Children engage in shared reading of the above stories.</p> <p>Oral language lesson – The teacher brainstorms with the children all of the language relevant to the theme of <i>At the restaurant</i>. Much of the language can be found by the children in their class library which should be well stocked with books relating to both the general theme of <i>Food</i> and the more specific theme of <i>At the restaurant</i>. This vocabulary should be displayed somewhere in the classroom - ideally near the area that will be used for role-play so the children can use it as inspiration for their interactions and for writing activities that might present themselves e.g. writing a menu for the restaurant, taking a customer's order, writing labels/signs etc.</p> <p>Guest speaker – Perhaps a local chef could visit the children and talk about their experience. This would be an ideal time to include parents. There may be a parent who works as a chef/waiter/waitress/restaurant manager. Linkage/Integration: Geography(Living in the local community: People at work)</p> <p>Visit to a restaurant – There may be a local café/restaurant that the children could visit as a class. Here they could see the workings of a restaurant/cafe and speak to those who work there. Linkage/Integration: SPHE(Developing citizenship: Living in the local community)</p> <p>Making relevant resources – Children could be given the opportunity to write labels for items in the restaurant, signs to inform their customers(e.g. open/closed, special offers), write a menu etc. Linkage/Integration: English(Creating and fostering the impulse to write,Developing competence, confidence and the ability to write independently, Clarifying thought through writing, Developing emotional and imaginative life through writing</p>	
Suggested play areas	
Role-play area (Pretend play)	<i>At the restaurant:</i> Children set up and stock a restaurant with appropriate resources(provided by the teacher). They can then take on the roles of chef, waiter/waitress, customer, manager etc. and engage in role-play with their peers.
Sand play area (Exploratory play)	Resources: Sand pit, plastic fruits and vegetables, spades, shovels, rakes. Children are free to play with the resources in whatever manner they wish.

<p>Construction area (Physical play – constructive/manipulative)</p>	<p>Resources: Jaggo blocks, marla The children are free to build/construct whatever they wish using the resources provided. They may choose to build a restaurant. They could then use the marla to construct people/furniture and this area could potentially be a cross between construction and small world play.</p>
<p>Junk Art area (Creative play)</p>	<p>Resources: Cardboards boxes, egg and milk cartons, paper, masking tape. The children are free to make whatever they wish using the resources provided. They may decide to make additional products for the role-play area but it is their choice.</p>
<p>Permanent literacy and maths table</p>	<p>At this table the children will have a variety of writing and maths materials. They may wish to create a new menu, make a poster informing customers of new offers. They might create a takeaway menu or design an advertisement about the restaurant to be placed in a local newspaper. They may use a weighing scales to weigh ingredients for recipes. Customers might want to add up the cost of their meal. These activities might be explored with/suggested to the children prior to engaging in play.</p>

Appendix 3 - Resources

- Twinkl: role play packs and worksheets <http://www.twinkl.co.uk/>
- Primary Treasure Chest (lots of editable resources) <http://www.primarytreasurechest.com/>
- Aistear toolkit <http://www.ncca.ie/aistear toolkit>
- NCCA Aistear planning/reflection template (page 18)
http://www.nccaplanning.ie/support/pdf/short_term_planning.pdf
- A large variety of fiction and non-fiction big books and stories
- Aistear resource boxes (available in infant classrooms)
- Dress up boxes (available in infant classrooms)
- Outdoor play equipment stored in the shed
- Outdoor mud pit
- Outdoor sandpit

Appendix 4 – Suggested Vocabulary for Role Play Areas

Theme	Description	Suggested Vocabulary
Homes	Various home scenes: sitting room, kitchen...etc	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I'm hungry! • What would you like to eat? • I'd like... • Dinner's ready. • Could you set the table? • Could you pass me the ...? • This is delicious/ tasty! • Thank you so much. • Could you help me wash up/stack the dishwasher? • Go make your bed! • Go tidy your room! • How was school? • Would you like to read a story? • Time for homework!
Weather	News desk set up. Children sit on chairs in front pretending to be a family watching TV.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good morning/afternoon/evening. • Welcome to the SETNS weather forecast! • The weather today is ... • Tomorrow it/the weather will be ... • Tomorrow there will be ... • cold, hot, wet, dry, cloudy, sunny, stormy, thunder and lightning, frosty, foggy, hail, freezing fog, raining, snowing, • In the north, south, east, west • And now over to ... with the news! • Make sure you bring a coat/umbrella/sunscreen/sunglasses/wellington boots
Winter	Toy Workshop. Assembly and quality check areas.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can you please pass me the hammer? • I'm looking for • a present for a young boy/girl. • Have you any suggestions/ideas? • How many dolls have been ordered? • This toy is ready for quality check. • This toy has to go back to the assembly area. • This toy is ready to be shipped out. ☐ doll/puzzle/football/basketball/building bricks/Lego/Match Attacks/computer game • Does it need batteries? • Are batteries included? Batteries are included. • Could you send this toy to the wrapping area?
Opticians	Shop set up with waiting area and reception.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hello. May I help you? • I'd like to get my eyesight checked. • I can't see very well. • My eyes have been hurting me.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Of course.• Follow me.• Take a seat, the optician will be ready in a moment.• What is your name?• How old are you?• Have you been here before?• Have you ever had your eyes tested before?• Which pair of glasses would you like?• Do these suit me?• Do you have these in another colour/style?• This pair is too tight/too loose.• Your eyesight is perfect. You don't need glasses.• Would you like to try contact lenses?• Can you read the letters on this chart?
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Appendix 5 – Role of Teacher during Play

Role of Teacher during Play

Sustained Shared Thinking

Scaffolding

Scaffolding an interaction which requires the teacher to know the child's level of knowledge, and to stretch his/her abilities through a series of questions or comments in order to take the child to a higher level than s/he would have done before. Scaffolding is explored in Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development.

Extending

Extending is generally a quicker interaction when the teacher makes a suggestion to allow the child to see other possibilities in the activity in which s/he is taking part. For example, the child is arranging farm animals within a fence, the teacher approaches and asks how the animals will get out. This then encourages the child to consider the need for a gate within the fence and his/her play takes a new direction.

Discussing

The teacher engages in a prolonged discussion with the child. It is more than a series of questions from teacher to child, rather it allows for an interchange of information and ideas.

Discrete language teaching

The teacher can help support and extend children's vocabulary and conversations by teaching appropriate vocabulary during timetabled lessons. For example: teaching children the correct vocabulary for the items in a doctor's set to help support their socio-dramatic play in the doctor's surgery.

Other Approaches

Some further strategies that could be used when they are engaging in sustained shared conversations with children include:

- Tuning in: listening carefully to what is being said, observing body language and what the child is doing.
- Showing genuine interest: giving their whole attention to the child, maintaining eye contact, affirming, smiling, nodding.
- Respecting children's own decisions and choices by inviting children to elaborate: saying things like 'I really want to know more about this' and listening and engaging in the response.
- Re-capping: 'So you think that ...'
- Offering the adult's own experience: 'I like to listen to music when I cook supper at home.'
- Clarifying ideas: 'Right Darren, so you think that this stone will melt if I boil it in water?'
- Suggesting: 'You might like to try doing it this way.'
- Reminding: 'Don't forget that you said that this stone will melt if I boil it.'
- Using encouragement to further thinking: 'You have really thought hard about where to put this door in the palace – where will you put the windows?'

- Offering an alternative viewpoint: 'Maybe Goldilocks wasn't naughty when she ate the porridge?'
- Speculating: 'Do you think the three bears would have liked Goldilocks to come to live with them as their friend?'
- Reciprocating: 'Thank goodness that you were wearing wellington boots when you jumped in those puddles Kwame. Look at my feet, they are soaking wet!'
- Asking open questions: 'How did you ... ?' 'Why does this ... ?' 'What happens next?' 'What do you think?' 'I wonder what would happen if... ?'
- Modelling thinking: 'I have to think hard about what I do this evening. I need to take my dog to the vet because he has a sore foot, take my library books back to the library and buy some food for dinner tonight. But I just won't have time to do all of these things.'
- Using positive questioning such as
 - 'I don't know, what do you think?'
 - 'That's an interesting idea.'
 - 'I like what you have done there.'
 - 'Have you seen what X has done – why?'
 - 'I wondered why you had ... ?'
 - 'I've never thought about that before.'
 - 'You've really made me think.'
 - 'What would happen if we did ... ?'

Model making-sense words such as

- I think
- I agree
- I imagine
- I disagree
- I like
- I don't like
- I wonder

High Scope Strategies

Other strategies used in the High/Scope program that can help support sustained shared conversations include:

- Repeat/use children's words – restate.
- Be active about introducing new and interesting words to children.
- Limit questioning – sometimes it makes children feel as if they are being quizzed.
- Encourage children to describe their efforts, ideas and products.
- Use encouragement rather than praise – too much praise can be insidious in that it can make children dependent on it.
- When using praise, be specific – focus on children's actions and what they are doing rather than whether the adult is pleased. Rather than saying 'that's a lovely painting' try something like 'I wonder how you made all of the layers of colour in this corner' – this sort of approach shows the teachers real interest and leads to natural conversation.

Appendix 6 – Maths through Role Play

Maths Curriculum in Role-play development across the Maths Curriculum in Role-play:

- Collect food and grocery items and label them with prices
- Introduce scales to the shop and order items by weight
- Counting the customers in the Pet Shop
- Filling in order forms
- Writing opening/closing times
- Writing addresses and telephone numbers
- Sorting coins in the cash register
- Sorting plant pots by size or colour in the Garden Centre
- Recording times of deliveries
- Giving change
- Estimating /measuring length of bandages
- Recording the temperatures in the Pet Shop
- Weighing parcels in the post-office

From these examples it is clear that the Role play station supports children's learning across all learning outcomes in the Maths Curriculum and are based on the child's own experiences and real-life examples. Learning through play offers valuable and enjoyable real-life contexts to develop mathematical skills.

Appendix 7 – Moving from Rota Play to Free Play

Moving from Rota Play to Free Play



If you are at the stage that you have your groups well established and working well with their rota, you might like to move them towards free choice of activity or what is termed "free play". We mentioned this briefly in the previous module.

Preparing for free play

Much preparation must be done prior to implementing free play in your classroom. It would be advisable to have lots of Circle Time sessions in relation to free play before you allow the children to engage with play in this manner.

You might discuss the possible challenges that the children may encounter during free play.

For example, there may be as many as 8/9 children who wish to play at the same area.

You would need to establish what an appropriate number is for each area and have this clearly displayed. Children would then need to compromise and take turns at areas.

One option is that children could write their name on a designated section of the whiteboard to indicate that they are waiting to join a particular group. This means that when a child from that group moves to another play area, they then know who is due to take their place.

Children planning their free play

As children may move from one area to another during the hour, this will have an impact on the planning of their play. Before they start they would need to decide what types of play they would like to engage in during the hour, including if they are going to play in several different areas, and they would then plan what they hope to do/achieve in those areas.

However, they would need to establish if there is space for them in their preferred area. If there is not, then the children should be encouraged to problem solve. They may decide to write/draw and engage with the materials at the literacy/numeracy table while they wait. Or they may just play in a different area.

What do I do if a child wishes to play in the same area every day?

This is an issue that many teachers find hard to address within free play. The children need to be closely monitored during free play – if you notice that a particular child is continually choosing the same activity it may be worth introducing a system whereby the children are only allowed to go to a particular area once or twice in the week.

This could be monitored by the teacher or perhaps the children could be provided with a checklist. They could then monitor and record the type of play they engage in on a daily basis.

When do I move to free play?

Some teachers find that the free play sessions will not suit their class until later in the year, when the children are familiar with the workings of the play hour and they are used to the structures/systems put in place.

Some teachers may engage in free play for several weeks at a time. Others will have the structured play rota from Monday to Thursday and then they will allow the children engage in free play on Fridays.

The best approach for you is to give it some time and to move to free play gradually, resolving challenges with the children as they arise.