

Early Learning Initiative

National College of Ireland



National
College of
Ireland

60th
Anniversary
1951 - 2011

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What is working?

Evaluation of Early Learning Initiative

The evaluation of the ELI's professional development programme for community childcare settings in the Docklands by the Children's Research Centre, Trinity College has been completed. This evaluation, which was funded by Pobal Dormant Account Funds – Flagship Projects, found that there were 'big changes' in the centres as a result of the Parental Involvement in Children's Learning (PICL) Programme, which the Children's Research Centre described as both ambitious and innovative in the Irish context. Relationships with parents have improved and staff are more aware of the important role played by parents in their children's learning. In addition, staff have learned new skills and a new language in relation to child development.

It is hoped that the evaluation report will inform national policy in the early years sector and be used as a source of information for parents, early childhood care and education managers and practitioners, and policy makers.

Even though the report is published, the work has not stopped! ELI and the community childcare settings are now busy implementing Síolta and Aistear, the Irish Early Years Quality and Curriculum Frameworks. The Children's Research Centre is continuing its evaluation of ELI's programme, in particular the Parent Child Home Programme (PCHP) and the Stretch to Learn Programmes. These reports will be available later in the year.



After a long and cold winter, longer days and better weather are finally here. Take the opportunity to go outside and try our ideas for simple outdoor activities that make learning fun!

- Get Dressed for Success!- Whether it's a sunny or a rainy day, being prepared and dressed appropriately for the weather can make a big difference to the child's enjoyment of the experience. Don't forget to 'slip-slap-slop' this summer- slip on a t-shirt, slop on sunscreen, and slap on a hat!
- Try planting flowers, herbs or vegetables. Enjoy getting messy and mucky during activities like this!
- Read a book outside- find a shady spot, make yourselves comfortable and settle down to read your favourite book together, bring teddies along as an audience and finish off with a picnic!
- Hunt for creepy-crawlies- children love exploring and searching for little insects, you can also discuss how we care for all living things, looking at and exploring the insects without hurting them.



Little girl from Little Treasures Community Creche enjoys playing swing ball in the sunshine

- Art outside- bring some paper and colours or chalk, and be inspired- draw what you see around you! Use leaves and barks to trace using crayons, use paint to make prints with leaves or even paint the leaves in lovely bright colours.
- Make a tent or a crawly space outside using old sheets or blankets- children enjoy being 'hidden' and this gives them lots of opportunities for developing skills such as imagination and creativity.
- Water Play- a large basin of water, containers and empty bottles of various sizes for measuring and pouring, straws and washing-up liquid can create hours of fun!
- The outdoors provides many important opportunities for babies- the smells, sounds, sights and textures, and changing light and temperatures outdoors add an enhanced dimension to babies' well-being and development. Consider experiences such as sleeping outside, being laid on their back or tummy on the ground to observe all the interesting things going on around them.



zoom
ahead with books

Wednesday the 6th April was a day of celebration for the 5 schools in Docklands, who took part in the Zoom Ahead with Books project during the month of March.

The project is designed to encourage children in the junior classes to read for fun at home with their book buddy, who can be a parent, grandparent, older sibling, or family member. After reading and talking about the book, both the child and book buddy draw pictures of their favourite part of the story and keep a record of them in their Zoom Ahead copybook. At the end of the project a selection of pictures are framed and exhibited at a celebration event for the children and their book buddies. Over 280 families took part this year and exhibitions were held in local schools and at the NCI on the 6th April. The excitement for books generated by the project was evident at the celebration events and the quality of the artwork was equally impressive!



A selection of artwork from the Zoom Ahead with Books Project 2011

Count Down

National Early Years Access Initiative (NEYAI)

Good News! Funding has been secured from the National Early Years Access Initiative to develop a programme to improve children's (0-6 years) numeracy and mathematical skills in the Docklands. The community childcare centres and primary schools will work with ELI to choose curriculum priorities e.g. developing children's understanding of number and use of Mathematical language in everyday situations. Over the next three years, children, their families and educators will be taking part in all kinds of fun Maths activities such as games, number hunts, storytelling and outdoor play sessions. There will also be talks for staff and parents to help them support children's early mathematical learning. We are really excited about working on this project next year, in partnership with children, parents, educators and the wider community!



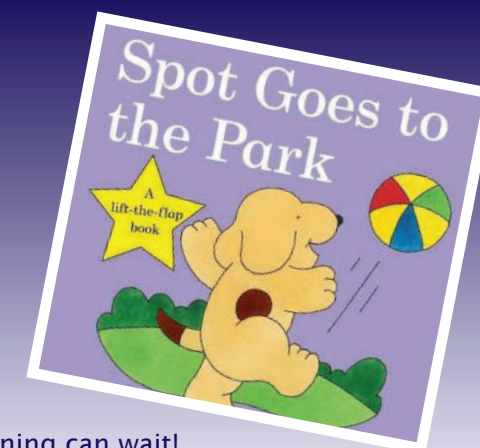
Treasure Hunts

Everyday walking with a small child can turn into a treasure hunt if you have the time to stop, look and maybe even collect a few 'treasures'. Children will point out things that we adults have missed for years! Living in the Docklands with both canals feeding into the Liffey and then onward to the sea means there is lots to look at – little birds gathering bits and pieces for their nests, the swans and ducks on the waterways (many have nests along the banks), the seal that comes to soak up the rays on the Sean O'Casey bridge, blossoms on the trees. And most of these bring 'treasures' with them – a feather, fallen blooms, and every child loves having a few stones or rocks in their pockets. Children love telling stories and the 'treasures' will help remind the child of all s/he has seen along the way.



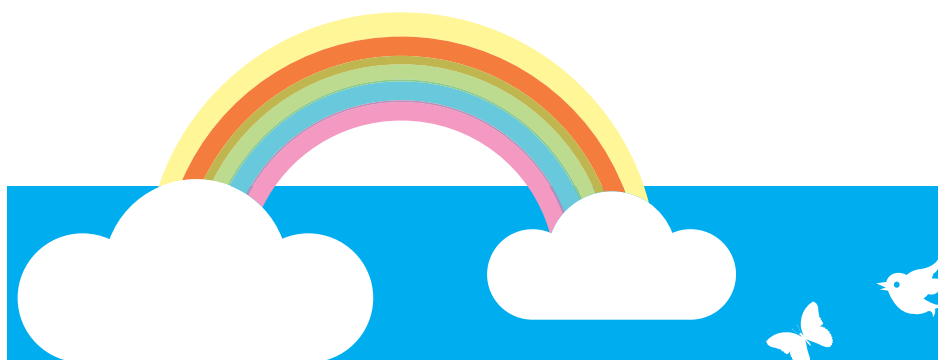
Spot Goes to the Park

A delightful book by Eric Hill, it tells the story of Spot playing in the park. Little Spot has a wonderful time playing with his friends and running after his ball – a perfect reminder that small children (and big ones too!) need plenty of air and exercise. Going to the park provides opportunities for children to meet and play with other children, work on their social skills (taking turns) as well as their gross motor skills (climbing, running).



With the longer evenings and warmer days here's some tips to get you moving:

- ☐ Walk home from the school/crèche with the kids. Take your time, the ironing can wait! Chat to your kids about their day in school, the surroundings and the weather.
- ☐ Bring your children to the playground, park or beach. Let them explore. There's so much for them to learn while they're having fun.
- ☐ When the weather doesn't hold up, you could bring your kids to The Museum of Natural History, on Merrion Square West, it's free and you and the kids will learn a lot about the animal world. Check out this website www.stickyfingerstravel.com for a full list of family friendly activities, play grounds, parks and beaches in Ireland, as well as festivals and family events. So go on, enjoy the warm sunshine and fresh air and have fun, fun, and more fun!



The Education Guidance programme for 5th and 6th class in the primary schools helps children to start thinking about topics like going to secondary school, going to college and potential careers they might like depending on their individual skills and interests. It includes classroom lessons, group-work, school visits from third-level students and information talks for parents.

This year the 5th class students worked in groups to design posters on different careers, outlining personal attributes, duties of the role and qualifications and training routes. The 6th class students completed their own research projects in the community on topics such as the usefulness of Induction Week for students starting secondary school, what subjects students most struggle with throughout school, and whether there should be career guidance for children at primary level.

The children displayed their projects at NCI in February with principals, teachers, parents and families attending to celebrate their achievements. Well done to all who were involved and for the time and dedication they put into it!



National College of Ireland
& St Patrick's College

Upcoming Events

24th May
Stretch to Learn Primary Awards

25th May
Stretch to Learn Second level Awards

30th May
Launch of CPD Research Report

1st June
PCHP Graduation Ceremony

20th – 24th June
Storytelling in the ECCE centres

Outdoor Play in Norway

My name is Aoife O' Gorman and my role within ELI involves supporting and facilitating a number of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) settings in the Docklands in their work with *Síolta* and *Aistear*, the new quality and curriculum frameworks for early childhood settings. At the end of March, I was delighted to be selected for a Professional Development study week in Norway. This trip was organised by the National Children's Nurseries Association (NCNA) in partnership with Queen Maud University of Early Childhood Education and funded by the *Léargas* Lifelong Learning Programme.

The focus of this study trip was to learn about the approach to ECCE in Norway, particularly outdoor play environments and physical play, men working in ECCE, and the Norwegian ECCE framework curriculum. Among the many highlights of this trip was the opportunity to visit five 'kindergartens', to observe and document indoor and outdoor practice, and to compare approaches to practice in Ireland and Norway.

We were surprised by the amount of time dedicated to outdoor play, particularly risky play in the outdoors, such as climbing high trees or small children skiing down steep slopes or use of craft tools such as sharp knives in some kindergartens. We were delighted to see a greater number of men working in the ECCE sector in Norway. The contrasts we observed prompted us to think about the impact of the lack of men working in ECCE in Ireland, and the possibilities for providing increased creative outdoor play opportunities for children of all ages in Irish ECCE settings.



Risky Play!



Skiing for the smallest children!



Lighting the kindergarten bonfire



Play with natural materials

We were very proud to tell Norwegian educators all about *Síolta* and *Aistear*, and the changes these frameworks have made to ECCE policy and practice in Ireland. I look forward to sharing the learning from this inspirational trip, and linking it with our on-going commitment to development of quality practice in ECCE in docklands.



Shauna Rooney, a former student of St. Laurence O'Toole's Girls School and Marino College, will soon finish her B.A.(Honours) Degree in Accounting and Human Resource Management at NCI. Shauna has been actively involved in the Stretch to Learn programme for the past 3 years as a volunteer and mentor and we are delighted to congratulate her on her achievements and wish her all the best for the future!

Finally, best of luck to all of the students in secondary school and college who are facing exams at the moment. It can be a stressful time for everybody, but it will be worth it!