



# Early Learning Initiative at National College of Ireland

## Learning Through Play

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Play is the main way that children learn. Your child will use play to help them learn about their world, practice new skills and test their new ideas. Playing with your child can help support their talking and listening, thinking skills, social interactions and physical development.

Really great play doesn't need expensive toys, exciting equipment or specially trained professionals. All you need is a safe space, a little imagination and a play companion or two or three or four! Some of children's favourite toys are already in homes all over Ireland. They can be found in kitchens and cupboards and include cardboard boxes, home made play dough, bubbles, pasta necklaces and shaving foam. Have a look at our messy play feature on the back page to find out more!

At the Early Learning Initiative we believe that play is an important way to help children of all ages learn and develop. We try and include play in all of our programmes, from toddlers right up to primary school level. We are working with parents, teachers, pre-schools, primary schools and toddler groups to spread the word that play is our brain and body's favourite way of learning.



Cian Rubinos Koesling, aged 2 years, gets down and dirty at 'Messy Play' at National College of Ireland.

## 'Sport is Spraoi' Parent and Toddler Groups

The Early Learning Initiative has been running a pilot of Parent and Toddler groups called *Sport is Spraoi* in three Docklands locations. The groups emphasise the importance of play as a vehicle for learning in the early years.

As part of this pilot, a messy play session was held in the National College of Ireland giving parents and children the opportunity for messy play where they do not have to clean up afterwards!

Water, sand, playdough, paint, gloop and shaving foam were provided and the Early Learning Initiative staff joined in the fun with children and parents!

## Upcoming Events

**Stretch to Learn  
Primary Awards**  
- 12th May 2009

**Stretch to Learn  
Second Level Awards**  
- 14th May 2009

**PCHP Graduation**  
- 18th May 2009

**State and College Exams**  
- June 2009  
We would like to wish all the Junior and Leaving Cert. and college students the best of luck in their exams.

## PCHP Easter Egg Hunt

The Parent Child Home Programme (PCHP) is continuing its work in Dublin's Inner City docklands area, bringing books and toys to preschool children in their own homes. The programme now employs seven home visitors and visits 34 children and their families twice a week.

To celebrate Easter, we hosted our first Easter Egg Hunt for the children and families participating in the PCHP Programme.

19 families including mummies, daddies, siblings and grannies, came to the Arts Garden at NCI for the event on 31st March. It was a beautiful day and the children and their families spent the morning searching for Lego bricks which were then exchanged for little chocolate bunnies or small chocolate eggs. Each child received a copy of Spot's Easter Surprise and full-sized Easter Egg as a parting gift. The event was a great success.

If you are interested in being part of the home visiting next year, you can contact Beth Fagan at 01 4498618.



Molly Byrne enjoys her Easter Egg at the PCHP Easter Egg Hunt.



From left to right, Kayleigh Ann Meehan, Lauren Hand, Courtney O'Toole, Lisa Kinlan and Claudine Arkins from 4th class in St Laurence O'Toole's Girls School at the NCI Table Quiz on March 5th.

Six schools from the docklands entered teams in this event. The winning team were suitably named "The Champs" and were from St. Joseph's National School in East Wall.

We would like to say thank you to the teachers, principals, parents and children involved in this successful project.

## Training for Childcare workers in the Docklands

### Parental Involvement in their Children's Learning (PICL)

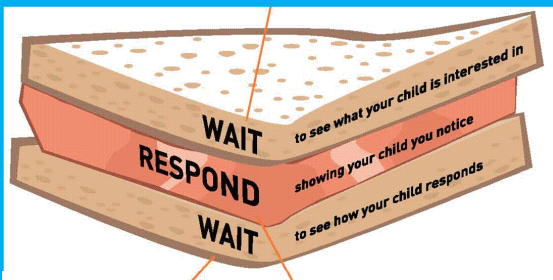
In March, twelve more childcare workers travelled to Pen Green in the UK to do the PICL Training. PICL involves staff looking to see children's schemas, well being and involvement and talking to their parents about them. Children use schemas to work out ideas and concepts they have in their head. Schemas are actions that are repeated over and over again in different situations. This training helps the childcare staff to recognise the children's learning and also to share this with the parents.

### Play Workshop Series

Two workshops were held last term on how to incorporate play into Early Years Literacy and Drama in the Early Years. These play workshops are open to any childcare worker in the Docklands to attend. More workshops will be held next year.



# Parents Together Community Course



keep the play Sandwich in mind when playing with children:

## Wait

- o What are they doing?
- o What are they feeling?
- o What are they looking at/talking about?

## Respond

- o Repeat what they say
- o Describe what they do
- o Name their feelings
- o Show them that you notice and smile

## Wait again!

- o How do they respond?
- o Are they encouraged?
- o What are they doing now?

The Parents Together Community Course has been running in 3 schools over the last school term. Teachers in St Laurence O'Toole's Junior Boys, St Patrick's Boys School Ringsend and City Quay National School have been delivering the course with great support from parents.

Parents Together focuses on ways to strengthen your relationship with your children and how to deal with discipline without damaging this relationship. All children love having their parents time and attention and by playing with them, you can increase your bond with them. When playing with young children, get down to their level and follow their lead, as small children need more time to think about their ideas.



Sarah Maher from St Patrick's Girls NS, Ringsend competes at the NCI Monopoly Challenge on 2nd April.

## Zoom Ahead with Books



Adrienne Anene and her son Justin, from St Laurence O'Toole's Junior Boys School, at the *Zoom Ahead with Books* Exhibition, at National College of Ireland. The *Zoom Ahead with Books* Project was a six week family reading project in St Laurence O'Toole's Junior Boys School where the children and their 'book buddy' read a book at home every night, discussed the book, and drew a picture based on their reading. Between them, the 70 children and book buddies read 1682 books over the 6 weeks. The project ended with an exhibition of the artwork at NCI on 22nd April and the response from the teachers, parents and children was very positive. We hope to roll out this programme to other schools next year.

## Long Live the Mess!

Messy play is an important early childhood experience as it allows children to explore a variety of different textures and smells. Many of us can remember from our own childhoods the enjoyment we got from mixing shampoo bottles together or playing in the mud. What seems like a "mess" is a valuable learning experience that helps develop children's communication and social skills. It also helps to develop their problem solving abilities, thinking and understanding as well as areas of physical development. Parents should allow children to have messy play and join in too!



Aoife Reid, 20 months old, has fun at 'Messy Play' at National College of Ireland.

### Hints and tips for Messy Play at Home!

#### **Altogether now**

Children love getting their hands dirty but they will love it even more when Mum, Dad, Nanny or Grandad takes part!

#### **Raid the cupboard**

You may already have all the best ingredients for a messy play session in your kitchen or bathroom. Flour, water, shaving foam, packet jelly and pasta all make for terrific textures and super sensations.

#### **Dress down**

In all the excitement sleeves, tops and even shoes may get covered in gloop. Remember to wear old clothes or put an old shirt on backwards for a makeshift apron!

#### **The Great Outdoors**

If your lovely home is not quite ready for paint covered hands, floury kids or slimey gloop, think about having your messy play session in your garden or local park.

#### **Enjoy**

Take it from us, messy play is FUN. Delve in and explore, remember all for fun and fun for all!