The Play-Based Curriculum for Early Childhood

The play-based curriculum is the most common curriculum used in preschools – because most people in Ireland believe that young children have a right to play. They recognise that play is children's way of learning and of coming to terms with the world around them. We call it the play-based curriculum because it involves a range of activities and learning approaches – but the child’s right to learn through play is at the centre of the curriculum.

Why Play

Every parent sees how their children show off their competences in play. They hear them talk and act like parents, pirates, princesses and professionals of all sorts and in so doing demonstrate knowledge and skills way beyond their years. Play offers children the opportunity to set up pretend real life scenarios where they can practice, share and learn the skills they need for real life, for relationships and for exploring and thinking.

Through their play, children learn about language and literacy, mathematical and scientific concepts, and how to make, build, design and record their ideas.

How the Play-Based Curriculum is structured

The job of the educator working with a play-based curriculum is to facilitate play and draw out and extend what children learn through play. In a play-based preschool you will see that the indoor and outdoor environments are structured so that children

- **Play house, shop, work etc.** – explore roles, relationships, skills – the skills needed to be a parent, shopkeeper, doctor and carpenter – including language and numeracy skills, thinking and relationship skills.
- **Building with Lego/blocks etc.** – to develop mathematical, design, collaboration and negotiation skills.
- **Sand and water play** – to explore science concepts about volume, capacity, consistency, etc. Unless children have first-hand experience of materials and their properties – they cannot understand them at a mental level
- **Art** – the purpose here is to encourage creative expression. What are the experiences, ideas and feelings that children want to express? What are the different ways of doing that? We want to open up the 100 languages of children, rather than limiting them to talking, reading and writing. Creativity creates alert minds that are able to invent and think outside the box.
• Stories, songs, rhymes – Children love them and they are a real help in developing language, rhythm, movement and a sense of community.

• Big movement play – where children stretch themselves – learn to manage risk – develop a sense of adventure and well-being as well as important physical and mental skills.

• Large Group time - this could be a time for stories, songs, rhyme, and movement.

• Tidy up times and meal times - are also part of the learning experience for children.

The Daily Routine

The daily routine is structured so that there is time for Free play - indoors and outdoors – where children choose their activities and explore and experiment with the materials around them, either on their own or in collaboration with other children.

• Small Group time – when children further explore issues and interests that arise in play. For example, if a group of children are playing holidays, the educator might pursue this interest by discussing holidays and travel with children to extend their knowledge and skills.

Role of Educator

The educator’s role is to help children to develop:

• the skills of interacting and playing with others
• the ability to contribute ideas to the play themes and stories
• a strong sense of well-being, identity and belonging
• skills for thinking and exploring
• skills for communicating
• skills for school and work life

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