Learning Experience: Fire, fire!

Setting: Rathcoole Playschool, Rathcoole, Co Cork

Setting type: Sessional

Age group: Young children

Theme: Exploring and Thinking

Aim 2: 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.

Learning goal 3: In partnership with the adult, children will use their experiences and information to explore and develop working theories about how the world works, and think about how and why they learn things.

This learning experience is an example of how one service supports one of the learning goals in Aistear’s theme of Exploring and Thinking.

We regularly hold fire drills. For the first drill in September we explained to the children what we were going to do and why we needed to do it. Prior to this we read a story about fire. The children really liked pressing the siren button on the book to make the nee-naw, nee-naw sound of the fire engine. We also used props like a fire blanket and fire extinguisher and we had a discussion with the children about their experiences of fire and fire safety.

Another day we talked about the fire-station in our nearest town and as the children were really interested we arranged for the fire-fighters to visit the playschool. They brought the fire engine along with them and the children had a fantastic time exploring it. They loved it when the fire-fighters put the siren on and they enjoyed taking turns using the hose with the water squirting out. They also enjoyed sitting in the driver’s seat touching the huge steering wheel.

Trying the fire hose
The fire-fighters provided the children with lots of important factual information about the special mask they wear to protect their hair and the oxygen tank they carry on their backs to help them breathe when they enter a burning building. One of the children asked a question about whether they would bump into things and the fire-fighter explained that because of the smoke it is really hard to see things but they are trained to keep their hands on the walls as they search inside a building. He also explained that if you are stuck in a burning building you should get down on the ground as smoke rises and to crawl to the nearest exit.

The fire chief showed us his alerter which he carries with him all the time. The alerter beeps to tell him there is a fire. At the end of the visit the fire-fighters gave each child a book about fire safety and reminded them to practice their fire drills at home!

We provided lots of props for the children to play fire scenes themselves. We have plenty of fire-fighter suits, hats and hosepipes and children were keen to play with these.
Over the coming days the children showed great interest in all things connected with fire-fighting. They role-played, drew pictures and made models, they completed jigsaws and we added lots of the photos and pieces of art work as well as captions of what they said about the topic, to the learning journals.

Idea to extend the children’s learning

- Work with the children to write a story about the visit that could be sent with some photos to the local newspaper.
- Provide materials to construct a fire station – boxes, paint, glue, empty rolls.
- Think about other people in the community who could visit the service – litter warden, ambulance driver, mechanic and so on.

This experience also links to:

- Identity and Belonging, Aim 2, Learning goals 5 and 6
- Communicating, Aim 2, Learning goals 1 and 4
The play leader’s reflections

The visit by the fire-fighters was a great success and everyone learned about the important work these people do in our communities.

The topic provided lots of opportunities to learn new vocabulary, for example, siren, oxygen tank, alerter and to use these words in a variety of contexts while playing over a number of days.

The message about doing the fire drill at home was taken very seriously by the children and many parents told us they had to do a fire drill at home that evening.