Learning Experience: Personal books and welcome poster

Setting: Happy Days Childcare Centre, Ballyporeen, Co Tipperary

Setting type: Full and part-time daycare

Age group: Young children

Theme: Well-being

Aim 1: Children will be strong psychologically and socially.

Learning goal 3: In partnership with the adult, children will handle transitions and changes well.

This learning experience is an example of how one service supports one of the learning goals in Aistear’s theme of Well-being.

To help the children settle into their new setting at the start of the year, we asked parents for photos of the children, their families, homes and pets. We had at least a few photos for every child so we organised a small group activity to give the children opportunities to make ‘All about me’ books. During this activity each child picked what photos they wanted to include in his/her own book. We provided pages stapled together and each child could stick on the photos they wanted. We also had crayons, glitter, stickers, ribbon and children could choose how to decorate their book. They put a photograph of themselves on the outside and a staff member acted as scribe, writing the names and birthdays as well as writing important messages beside the photos like My cat, My baby sister Aoife, Me and my teddy or Our pet pig.

Reading their books
We also made a ‘welcome board’ and put photos of all the children and their families on it. The children absolutely loved this and they were constantly going over to look at all the pictures on it in the first few weeks of the term.

But as the months have gone by we have noticed that some mornings when a child comes in and is feeling a little bit sad or quiet they often go over to the welcome corner and get his/her book and sit down to look at the pictures. It has become a great comfort for them. At other times they show a friend something in the book like a pet or their favourite toy.
Ideas to extend the children’s learning

■ Make sure that children can see the daily routine chart (in picture format) and know what is coming next and when they will be going home.

■ Read stories about how it feels to have a new experience like starting pre-school or going on a trip. Talk about what it feels like and what might be helpful like having a favourite toy from home in their bag.

■ Provide lots of open-ended experiences like play dough, sand and water play so children can express themselves.

This experience also links to
Well-being, Aim 1, Learning goal 1
Identity and Belonging, Aim 1, Learning goals 2, 4 and 5 and Aim 2, Learning goals 1, 2 and 3
The play leader’s reflections

This proved to be a really worthwhile learning experience and what we envisaged as a settling in activity resulted in something much more meaningful for the children.

The welcome board worked well both for the children and their parents. They love to look at it and it has become a great way of encouraging parents to talk with their children and with us, the practitioners.

Children love to talk about their books and it is a great way to find out about their interests. As we are in a rural area lambs, pigs and ponies are nearly always a topic of interest. However, we also discovered through the books that one of our children was a real expert on dinosaurs!