Learning Experience: Sunflower project

Setting: Bansha Pre-school, Bansha, Co. Tipperary

Setting type: Sessional

Age group: Young children

Theme: Exploring and Thinking

Aim 4: Children will have positive attitudes towards learning and develop dispositions like curiosity, playfulness, perseverance, confidence, resourcefulness, and risk-taking.

Learning goal 1: In partnership with the adult, children will demonstrate growing confidence in being able to do things for themselves.

Because it was spring and the weather had improved we decided it was time to start planting. We had received some sunflower seeds from Early Childhood Ireland on Pyjama Day so we decided to plant these. The children filled their own pots with compost and inserted their seeds. Then they watered them. We put stickers on each pot with the initials of the child plus their own special mark so that there wouldn’t be confusion about who owned which flower!

Afterwards we looked at a book we have in the library on sunflowers. The children learned about roots and stems and found out how tall sunflowers can grow. We got string to show the children how high this really was. They were intrigued by this as most of them were only familiar with smaller flowers.

This learning experience is an example of how one service supports one of the learning goals in Aistear’s theme of Exploring and Thinking.
Later we showed the children Van Gogh’s painting *Sunflowers* on the laptop and we explained who he was. The children were very interested and wanted to see more of his paintings.

We also provided materials to make textured paintings, an idea Christine and Deirdre, our two playgroup assistants had brought home from a conference they attended a few weeks before. The paint was such a big hit that we made it available for the rest of the week and the children loved using it. We have used it at least once a week throughout the year.

The children watched in wonder over the coming weeks as the sunflowers grew. They were very consistent about watering them and were so delighted when the flowers appeared.
Ideas to extend the children’s learning

- Create two raised beds, one for planting fruit and vegetables like strawberries, lettuce, carrots that can be harvested before the end of June. Provide another raised bed for digging and having fun. Plant herbs in pots so children can experience the different smells and textures.

- Measure the children using ribbons and strings and make a display on the wall showing the children’s sizes. Do this again a couple of months later and see how much each child has grown. Help children become familiar with terms like *tall, taller, tallest, height, measurement*.

- Organise a local artist to work with children.

This experience also links to:
*Well-being, Aim 1, Learning goal 5;*
*Aim 3, Learning goals 1, 3 and 5*
*Exploring and thinking, Aim 1, Learning goals 3, 4 and 5*
The play leader’s reflections

The children really enjoyed this experience and it helped them to develop patience as it took quite a significant amount of time for the flowers to blossom. They observed carefully week-by-week the changes as they occurred. A couple of the plants died and that was a learning experience in itself!

The children were interested in Van Gogh’s picture of the sunflowers. Some of them had copies of it at home but a couple of them told us that the picture didn’t show you how ‘normous the flowers were!

The textured paint was really easy to make and the children really loved using it.