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Border Counties Childhood Network

After School

Providing an Inspirational After School Programme of Activities for 4–12 Year Olds

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An Roinn Leanaí agus Gnóthaí Óige
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After School: Providing an Inspirational After School Programme of Activities for 4–12 Year Olds

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Barnardos supports children whose well-being is under threat, by working with them, their families and communities and by campaigning for the rights of children. Barnardos was established in Ireland in 1962 and is Ireland's leading independent children's charity.

The Border Counties Childhood Network exists to support the attainment of high quality standards in both Early Childhood and After School services through the provision of information, training, on site mentoring as well as networking with other agencies to increase levels of support to services. The Network operates at local, regional, cross border and national levels with both voluntary and statutory agencies.

Contents

Contents of the CD

The CD accompanying this book offers a wide range of over 230 activities. The CD activities are listed in Appendix 5.

Foreword

As principal of a rural primary school in Co. Meath for over 20 years, I encountered many changes and challenges, as an ever increasing numbers of families moved out from the city into the commuter belt surrounding the capital. Not least among these challenges was the rapid growth of poverty, social exclusion and educational disadvantage which followed.

Many children found these challenges all too much and it became increasingly obvious that access to the curriculum had become far from fair for many pupils in the school, old and new. While I was considering possible options to address these inequalities, I was blessed to meet with a very pragmatic, creative and innovative lady in the person of Marie Daly. And so began an eventful and wonderful journey!

Marie, who had a background in youth and community development, had already been exploring the concept of after school services in Trim. It had become blindingly obvious to her, from her initial research, that children who were hungry for food have a reduced appetite for education too, and so, not surprisingly, she proposed actively pursuing a more holistic approach to dealing with the needs of these disadvantaged children.

Marie was never one to turn her back on a challenge. Together, we organised the running of an after school service in the school, cooking in the little kitchenette attached to my classroom, and organising homework in age-appropriate groups in other nearby classrooms. The initiative quickly gained traction and, following a long and eventful journey, using every available facility, from an abandoned parochial house to cold community halls, we now have custom-built facilities in Ballivor, Trim and Navan, and a range of after school services across the county.

Of all the innovative developments I've encountered during my time as school principal, none have had more impact on educational disadvantage than the development of after school services in making it possible for children from the most acute disadvantaged families to present themselves confidently for school, happy in the knowledge that they can participate as equals in the activities of the day. Indeed, after school services have done more to close the self-esteem gap than any other initiative I've witnessed over my career in education.

Both Marie and I are very excited at the emergence of this new book from Barnardos and BCCN, a rich, well-researched wealth of strategies, guidelines and activities, carefully selected and crafted to appeal to and excite children in after school settings, along with strong and very clear guidelines to assist educators in delivering quality educationally-rich programmes in after school settings.

We welcome the publication of this volume like manna from heaven at this time, and we anticipate it will become a well-thumbed resource, regularly reached for whenever imaginative and inexpensive ideas are needed to add to programmes of activities for groups of children. I'd imagine its use may not be confined to after school settings, but

I can see it being sought after by parents too, anxious to fill some hours on those rainy days. The sheer simplicity and clarity of its many suggested activities make it a 'must have' wherever children are cared for.

As for Marie and I, we warmly welcome this publication as a valuable resource, which we will certainly be recommending to all our services. We feel it is that missing element, that final piece of the jigsaw that will enrich and enhance the quality of our after school services in Meath and beyond.

With the help of Barnardos and BCCN, we now feel we have the wind on our backs and we are more confident in the quality of our service. Maybe the next stage of our journey will be more sure-footed and focused, thanks to this wonderful publication.

William Keegan, Retired Principal, St. Columbanus' NS, Ballivor, Co. Meath

Marie Daly, CEO Crann Support Group, Co. Meath

Introduction

> A comprehensive school age childcare programme… addresses the social, physical, developmental, recreational and creative needs of the child in a happy and caring environment.
>
> … The school age childcare service should plan and provide a range of play opportunities and activities to foster the development of children's social, physical, intellectual, creative and emotional capabilities.

(Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, 2005)

Working in an after school service can be challenging and demanding, but is also very rewarding as you see the children in your charge progress and develop.

In the early years of after school provision, many service providers and parents were content just to keep children occupied, safe, out of trouble and off the streets between school finish time and tea time. What the children did during that time didn't matter so much as long they were kept from getting into mischief or trouble. Some services, in particular those established by Area Based Partnership Companies, provided a homework support facility for children in disadvantaged areas. However, after school settings can and must be far more than just safe places for children to receive homework support and stay until their parents or carers are finished work.

NOTE: When children arrive at an after school service they have already had a full and busy day at school; they come in with varying temperaments and levels of energy. Some children will want to pursue familiar, relaxing and non-challenging activities. Others will look forward to the opportunity to develop their interests, skills and abilities.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) states:

1. States Parties recognise the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.

2. States Parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity. *(Article 31, UNCRC, 1989)*

After school hours offer an invaluable chance to provide opportunities and activities that will capture the imagination of children such as involvement in the arts, exploring technology, visiting museums, learning to work on projects in teams, developing social and emotional skills, being physically active, playing and exploring outdoors. These opportunities will enhance children's school routine and offer enriching experiences that have long-lasting benefits for their overall development.

After school provision can be an opportunity to expose children to different forms of learning that trigger their interest and help to develop intrinsic motivation. Activities can include cooking, baking, swimming, nature walks, natural science, drama, ceramics, puppetry, woodwork, sewing, photography, language and cultural awareness activities, community involvement, computer skills, gardening and many, many more. The children will be able to offer valuable insight into the activities they would like to have included in their service. Parents should also have the opportunity to make suggestions and offer their skills for the development of programmes and activities, for example, a parent who is a chef, gardener, online-games developer or beautician may be willing to come in and demonstrate their skills.

While after school services are not formal sites of learning, after school educators will find it beneficial to understand other aspects of the child's world, including the primary school curriculum (see Appendix 1). Recognising and connecting with this important area of the child's life will assist in developing activities for the programme and help set the various experiences in the child's life in the broader context of life-long learning.

Who is this Publication For?

After School: Providing an Inspirational After School Programme of Activities for 4–12 Year Olds is for anyone who is interested in promoting the wellbeing, learning and development of those children aged four to twelve years who spend any part of their time in after school services on a regular basis. It is particularly aimed at after school managers and educators working in services, providing them with details of a variety of activities, both individual and group-based, that can be offered as part of a balanced programme[1].

NOTE: Barnardos and Border Counties Childhood Network (BCCN) have chosen the term 'educator' to refer to staff in after school settings to highlight the important role they play in promoting children's holistic development.

In addition, this publication should provide a useful reference for members of decision-making bodies, such as after school service management committee members who are involved in setting up new programmes or developing quality in existing programmes; members of school boards who may be planning or already providing after school services; private service providers; trainers and students of child care and education courses; and those who provide supports for after school services.

The Aims and Ethos of this Publication

After School: Providing an Inspirational After School Programme of Activities for 4–12 Year Olds consists of a book and a CD, both of which aim to provide support, knowledge and ideas for those working in the after school sector so that they can meet the needs of the children who attend their services and enhance their experiences therein.

The book sets out the context for after school work by providing a brief overview of provision in Ireland and other countries, information on children's social and emotional learning, an understanding of the importance of play and types of learning modalities for children in this age group within a programme that is well-balanced. The book also looks at particular issues in relation to after school, such as transitions, homework, project-based learning activities, technology, the arts and natural environments.

The CD then sets out activities that can be carried out in an after school setting to enhance children's learning and support their ongoing development.

NOTE: The main focus of this publication is to enhance understanding of what children of this age need in after school settings and to support those delivering services to meet those needs through a high quality programme of engaging activities.

1. The term 'programme' is used in this publication to refer to the totality of experiences, or curriculum, being offered.

The provision of a rich programme of activities will benefit children and also support parents. By knowing more about the experiences of their children, parents can share and discuss these with them and in some cases become engaged in follow-on activities in the home and wider family. The community will also benefit – as the children move toward an engagement with the world outside the family, they have the opportunity to develop an increased civic awareness that can be enhanced through a comprehensive after school programme.

This publication is based on a view of after school that builds upon core elements such as the principles of Siolta, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education (CECDE, 2006) (see Appendix 2), and Aistear, the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework (NCCA, 2009). While both of these frameworks were developed for children under six, their principles can be usefully adopted to reflect the needs of the older child. An example of further principles that reflect those of the Irish early years frameworks and build upon them are outlined in the 'CHILD' covenant. These principles were developed at an international conference, *Teaching and Learning at Home and at School: A Conference for Educators and Parents*, in 2012 with many leading educators and are set out as follows:

Covenant to Help Inspire Learning and Development (C.H.I.L.D.)

Children's engagement

1. Nurture each child's great curiosity, interest and potential to achieve high levels of success.
2. Allow learning to develop at a pace determined by the child's needs and interest.
3. Honour the voice of children and promote self-awareness and expression.
4. Honour children's questions and value their opinions.
5. Develop independent thought and self-efficacy in a community of engaged learners.
6. Provide explicit opportunities for unstructured and uninterrupted play – especially outdoors.

Character and community

7. Foster interdependence and collective responsibility as members of a learning community.
8. Encourage resilience, persistence and responsibility in the face of ambiguity, challenge or conflict.
9. Promote ethical decision-making with a balance of critical thought and compassion.
10. Develop children's cultural competencies to include, respect and support each other.

Deeper learning

11. Promote learning in meaningful contexts of experience and 'real world' challenges.
12. Develop children's abilities to solve problems creatively and collaboratively.
13. Support critical thought about information and media to which children have access.
14. Promote interdisciplinary (cross-curricular) learning without compartmentalising 'subjects'.
15. Connect children's learning to opportunities to make a better world.
16. Ensure that no practices or policies are likely to undermine a child's love of learning.

(Centre for the Future of Elementary Education at Curtis School, 2012)

How to Use this Book

This book is broken into sections that look at the what, the why, and the how of after school services. Throughout, there are a variety of tools, such as background information, things to think about, ideas for practice and examples of activities that are all designed to help after school educators to understand and learn in as many ways as possible. These will ensure that educators really get the most out of the publication by triggering thoughts, developing understanding and helping to make sense of what delivering a quality after school service is all about.

The Accompanying CD

There are examples of activities that can be carried out in an after school service throughout this book and many more on the CD that accompanies it. On the CD, suggestions for activities are given in alphabetical order in each of the three categories outlined below.

CD Section One – Everyday opportunities

Everyday opportunities cover a wide a range of activities that are always available for children to explore and experiment or relax with. Provide familiar daily options that allow children to choose how they spend their time at the service.

CD Section Two – Experiential or project-based learning opportunities

Experiential or project-based learning opportunities give children a chance to develop hobbies, skills and interests, and get excited about learning. They also provide opportunities for children and young people to develop self confidence as they find new talents in areas they might not otherwise have the chance to explore and that are not typically addressed by the majority of after school services.

CD Section Three – Community service learning experiences

Community service learning experiences will provide various opportunities to prepare and / or engage children and young people in the positive activities of their community. Such experiences teach children valuable skills, helping them to realise their potential to meet community needs and fostering a sense of civic responsibility or active citizenship.

For each of the activities, information is provided under the following headings:

ACTIVITY: The name of the activity

Suitable to Support:	**Areas of development** **Subjects in the primary school curriculum** The named activity has the potential to support children's learning in both developmental and primary school subject areas. As many staff working in the area of after school have come from an early childhood care and education background and are possibly more familiar with the various domains of children's development (physical, emotional, social, intellectual, linguistic) than they are with the primary school curriculum, we include information on how activities enhance each area of a child's development as well as subject areas within the primary school curriculum. While the experiences that children have in after school may complement their learning in school, the focus within the after school setting should be on providing a variety of rich opportunities that extend beyond the school curriculum. A brief overview of the primary school curriculum has been included in Appendix 1.
Age Range Suitability:	Some activities are more suitable to specific age groups, however in many cases they can be adapted to suit various age ranges. This may depend on the training and experience of staff or the type of materials and equipment provided.
Space Required:	The space available for an activity will depend on the type of building the service is housed in. For some activities a larger space is required. Don't forget, many activities could be taken outside or other community space could be used.
Equipment and Materials:	The basic equipment and materials are listed and services can use their imagination to introduce other suitable items. Also ask the children what they would like to include.
Course of Action: 	The guidance provided on the CD gives a basic outline of how to proceed with each activity. Weblinks are given for most of the activities for further information. For the children to enjoy the best experience from each activity, careful planning is required. Research the activities thoroughly. Use publications, the internet and ask the experts in your area. Ask the children how they would like to extend the experience.

SECTION 1
An Introduction to After School

> Child focused programmes which develop children's skills for building relationships, regulating their emotions, and coping with stress may help to improve children's outcomes.
>
> *(Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2012)*

What is Meant by After School?

There are various terms used to describe the care and education of children during after school hours – school age care, after school, playwork, free-time clubs. QDOSS (Quality Development of Out of School Services), a network of stakeholders interested in promoting quality experiences and positive educational outcomes for school-going children and young people (see page 20 for further information), uses the term Out-of-School services or OSS:

> Out-of-School services refer to a range of structured developmental programmes, clubs and activities for school-age children and young people (4-18) which take place within supervised environments outside of formal school time and include school age childcare services, after school clubs, breakfast clubs, youth groups and programmes. They take place in a variety of settings, which include community childcare services, schools and various community venues. *(QDOSS, 2013)*

In 2012, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) described what they termed Out of School Hours:

> Out-of-School-Hours (OSH) care services provide a range of activities to children in pre-schools and primary schools before, between (lunch) and after school hours, as well as during school holidays. These services are frequently, but by no means always, based in school facilities or youth centres, and provide safe care to children who may use them to do homework and/or engage in recreational activities, while at the same time helping parents to find a better match between school and working hours.

The common features that distinguish after school services, therefore, are that they are conducted outside typical school hours and offer varied experiences to children and young people, usually from the age of around four years up to the age of 18. For children between 12 and 18, provision often involves youth services.

After School: Providing an Inspirational After School Programme of Activities for 4–12 Year Olds is aimed at those services who work with children aged four to twelve years but the ideas and activities can be adapted for both older and younger children. Services will develop their own vision of what after school means to them, and through this will be able to make decisions and develop their programmes based on their goals for the children with whom they work.

Distinctions between After School and School

A core difference between school and after school is that schools must follow a prescribed national standardised curriculum, with distinct lessons for children to follow on a variety of subject matters. In primary school, children do not have a choice in the subjects they must study. After school services are not required to follow a prescribed programme. Children are provided with and consulted about the range of activities and opportunities available and can choose to participate in what is of interest to them.

NOTE: It is important for after schools to avoid replicating classroom type activities which the children might be undertaking in school.

It is helpful for children if the experiences they have in their after school hours complement the learning they gain in school, but lessons in school should not be duplicated in the after school setting. They are not the same types of experiences. The many activity ideas included on the CD that accompanies this book illustrate how fun and interesting activities can fulfil this purpose.

Learning in school usually differs from learning outside school and children need to be supported to engage in the smooth transition from one to the other. The differences may include:

Learning in school…	Learning out of school…
▪ is de-contextualised	▪ has 'real' context
▪ is second-hand	▪ is first-hand
▪ needs motivating	▪ comes easily
▪ tends to be individualistic	▪ is co-operative / shared
▪ is assessed by others	▪ is self-assessed
▪ has a formal structure	▪ has few structures

Table 1: The differences between learning in school and out of school *(Resnick, 1987)*

Why Are After School Services Required?

There are a number of societal changes and issues that have led to the need and desire for after school care and education for children.

Family structure

Much in relation to the family has changed in Irish society over the last 20 years including increased separation and divorce, families spread across a number of households, a change in the work-life balance, mothers in employment and more equitable gender relationships. All of these changes contribute to the need for after school care as a support to children and families.

Social demographics

The diminution of support available from extended family, due to a more mobile work force, means that grandparents and other family members are less available to help in caring for children outside of school hours.

Challenging circumstances

After school can play an important role in the lives of children; it can provide a nurturing environment that is different from school but still provides structure and a variety of enjoyable learning activities. Where home life presents challenges, after school can provide a space where a child or young person can relax, do homework, have time to reflect with appropriate support and engage in activities that they enjoy pursuing.

Need for play and friends

Some children have a strong desire to play with friends and to carry out a range of activities that may not be available at home.

Non-traditional approaches to learning

The approaches that are needed for learning in the 21st Century may not all come from within traditional educational systems, but rather from sectors that are able to innovate and focus on children's needs free from the constraints of entrenched systems (Cisco, 2010, p. 19). Good after school provision has the potential to bring these and other benefits to children and young people.

The Benefits of After School

The benefits for children

A key challenge in working with children is to expose them to different forms of learning that captures their attention and motivates them to learn.

> After school programmes offer that opportunity and freedom. A child bored with maths may be a great chess player or musician… Children in a group who learn CPR from a nurse get a hands-on science experience that is far more interesting, engaging and exciting than reading about it in a book.
>
> *(Petersen & Fix, 2007)*

Internationally, research has been conducted on the effects of after school, with many benefits for children being highlighted. Evidence from such research has enhanced the development of after school services in many countries. For example, in Australia, Caldwell and Longmuir, when developing an educational framework for after school (OSH Club, 2011), outlined four core areas that children should experience – these are **play, discover, share** and **engage**.

Play

Play has the potential to improve all aspects of children's wellbeing: physical, emotional, social and cognitive (Burdette & Whitaker, 2005). The importance of play to children's learning is well researched and supported, including by some of the leaders of learning theory such as Piaget and Vygotsky. With students spending much of their day in the normally highly structured learning environment of a classroom, a focus on play in the hours outside school time is essential (Monro-Miller, 2001). See page 47 for more information on play.

Discover

Time and space to explore areas of interest with appropriate levels of guidance from adults is essential to learning through discovery. This is particularly applicable to after school learning environments where children's interests can regularly contribute to the planning of activities and their enthusiasm for an idea or project can be accommodated through the flexible nature of the setting.

Share

A particularly important value of learning together is the opportunity for students to engage in talking about their experiences. Vygotsky (1978) studied the connections between language and thought, and suggested that children develop intellectual function through internalising social communications. Dewey (1916) suggested that thinking and learning together is the only way that individual learning can be fully realised.

An after school setting is inherently social because relationships are regularly entered into with other children and educators. As well as children interacting with peers from the same age group when participating in activities and projects, they are also often interacting with younger and/or older children (see page 64 for information on mixed age groups). The sharing of ideas, achievements, concerns and backgrounds is a naturally occurring feature of after school programmes.

Engage

Engagement improves the likelihood of learning by adding to the depth and quality of the experience (Loader, 2007). Learning is likely to be internalised if children are engaged in activities in which they have an interest. Furthermore, engagement has a self-perpetuating aspect. If children are interested and receiving intrinsic reward from their engagement in an activity, they are more likely to continue or extend their experiences and therefore develop deeper understandings. Through the practice of allowing children to have a choice in what, where and how they participate in activities, and also involving them in the planning of activities, engagement becomes an important principle of after school programmes. See page 46 for more information on extrinsic and intrinsic motivation.

In regional consultations undertaken by QDOSS in 2013, the benefits to children were outlined as follows:

Practical benefits	Social benefits
▪ Safety ▪ Hot meals ▪ Continuity ▪ Transition support as the child moves through various stages	▪ Friendships with peers ▪ Positive behaviour ▪ Mixed age groups ▪ Community/civic engagement
Academic outcomes	**Emotional outcomes**
▪ Engagement with formal schooling, supporting those at risk of early school leaving in particular ▪ Homework support ▪ Fresh engagement with school subjects, through the deeper opportunities afforded in after school ▪ New activities and chances to explore untried areas	▪ Confidence boosted ▪ Isolation decreased ▪ Self-esteem enhanced

Table 2: The benefit of after school to children *(QDOSS, 2013)*

Other emotional outcomes include enhanced existing and new social relationships, increased empathy and the development of interpersonal skills.

The benefits for parents

The benefits of after school for parents include peace of mind, knowing that their child is in a safe, nurturing place and that they are able to return to education/training and/or to participate in the workforce. Homework completion has also been indentified as a positive for parents as is the issue of their child's nutrition, for example, the assurance that their child has had a hot meal (QDOSS, 2013).

Engaging with parents in an after school service is discussed on page 74.

The benefits for the community

The community can benefit if after schools link with schools as well as groups or projects in the community. It has also been suggested that the community may experience reduced 'levels of anti-social behaviour' (QDOSS, 2013) as a result of children being positively engaged in programmes. Community morale and civic awareness in children can be built through community service learning activities related to after school such as fundraising, litter clean-ups, gift-making for hospital or nursing home patients and concert giving (see Section 3 of the CD).

Think about the benefits provided to children, families and community by your after school service.

- What does your service offer in terms of playing, discovering, sharing and engaging?
- What can you do to expand on these?
- What activities could you introduce to further enhance your programme?

After School in Ireland

In Ireland, after school services are in the early stages of development. The after school sector does not have specific regulations at present and while the early years sector (birth to six years) has Síolta, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education, and Aistear, the National Curriculum Framework, the after school sector, which caters for children as young as four years old, has seen no such developments as yet. However, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) has stated that after school services are due to become subject to regulation in 2014 and specific standards will be developed for them in the near future.

There have been some positive initiatives related to the quality of after school provision in recent years. One such initiative was *Developing School Age Childcare: the Report of a Working Group of the National Childcare Co-ordinating Committee* published in 2005 by the Childcare Directorate Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform Ireland. This report reviewed provision for after school in Ireland and in other jurisdictions, developed guidelines on quality standards for after school and made proposals for the development of after school services.

QDOSS

One national after school initiative has been the establishment of QDOSS (Quality Development of Out-of-School Services)[2]. QDOSS is a network of stakeholders committed to the development of quality out of school services for children and young people, particularly those experiencing educational and social disadvantage. QDOSS are committed to the reality that after school services play a key role in overcoming both educational and social disadvantage – helping children and young people's personal and social development, their motivation and confidence to learn, preventing early school leaving and anti-social behaviour (QDOSS, 2013).

QDOSS is currently developing a number of policy documents to inform government policy and establishing a national network, which is aimed at giving the after school sector a clear voice in advocating for the development of after school provision.

SACCI

SACCI (School-Age Childcare Collaborative Initiative)[3] was a two-year project that ran from 2005 to 2007 with funding from the National Childcare Investment Programme (NCIP). It was undertaken to further the education and training of those working in this sector in order to enhance quality of after school provision. SACCI focused on the research, design, development and implementation of a full FETAC School Age Childcare Award at Level Five, along with basic groundwork for a Level Six Award (SACCI, 2007).

School Age Childcare Working Group of Dublin City Childcare Committee

The main aim of this group is to present and discuss the key issues concerning school age childcare and after school services in Dublin City; to respond to any issues in school age childcare by seeking actions that address these issues; and to provide an information forum for various stakeholders to present and update on developments within their agencies in relation to school age childcare in Dublin City. Membership consists of Dublin City Childcare Committee, partnership companies, QDOSS, Barnardos, Early Childhood Ireland, along with private and community school age childcare providers.

2. QDOSS Member Organisations consist of Barnardos; Border Counties Childhood Network; Children's Research Centre, Trinity College Dublin; Educational Disadvantage Centre, St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra; Foróige; Limerick City Childcare Committee; National Voluntary Childcare Collaborative; PLANET, School Completion Programme, Transforming Education through Dialogue; Mary Immaculate College, Limerick; Crann, Youth Work Ireland; Roscommon County Childcare Committee; Dublin City Childcare Committee.

3. SACCI Member Organisations were Barnardos; TIDE (Trim and Ballivor Community Development, now Crann); IPPA and NCNA (now Early Childhood Ireland); Border Counties Childhood Network; Limerick City Childcare Committee.

The Rural Respecting Difference Programme (RRDP)

The RRDP is an example of an after school initiative taking place at present in Ireland. It is based on the Media Initiative for Children (MIFC) Respecting Difference Programme developed by Early Years – the organisation for young children in Northern Ireland and Pii, the Peace Initiatives Institute in the USA. It includes cartoon media messages around diversity to promote positive attitudes to physical, social and cultural differences among young children, practitioners and parents. The messages also address bullying behaviours.

The programme has been funded under the PEACE III Programme thanks to funding secured through collaboration between the BCCN, Early Years, the organisation for young children, and the Rural Development Council. The programme is specifically aimed at rural-based primary schools and after school services in a number of geographic areas along the border in both Northern Ireland and the Southern Border counties. The RRDP is aimed at young children aged 4–8, their parents and teachers through the rural primary school and rural after school environment.

Quality support resources

BCCN resources

Funding from the National Childcare Investment Programme (NCIP) enabled the BCCN to consult with interested staff from a number of County and City Childcare Committees to agree the principles felt necessary to underpin the delivery of quality after school services. Following this consultation, BCCN produced two resources to inform the delivery of quality services which were launched in 2010 by Moira O Mara, former Principal Officer at the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs. These included an information pack and service evaluation system focusing on key areas of service delivery. Use of the resources is currently being piloted in a number of after school services by Dublin City Childcare Committee and also in after school services in the Southern Border Counties and Northern Ireland involved in the Rural School Initiative developed by BCCN, Early Years – the organisation for young children and the Rural Development Council in Northern Ireland (see www.bccn.ie for further details).

Other resources

In 2005, Limerick City Childcare Committee, Limerick County Childcare Committee and North Tipperary Childcare Committee produced *School's Out*, a resource on how to plan, implement and evaluate quality school age programmes. This resource pack was designed for school age programme managers, team leaders, trainers, other programme staff as well as volunteers who wish to enhance the quality of children's school age childcare programmes.

Another resource, *Voice and Choice*, the result of a three year partnership between Mary Immaculate College, Limerick and Limerick City Childcare Committee and funded through the 'Partnership for Quality Childcare Initiative', within the Equal Opportunities

Childcare Programme within the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform. This resource was designed to support and inform personnel who work with children in the school age childcare sector.

See www.limerickcitychildcare.ie for more information on both of these resources.

National policy positions

The Childcare Act in 1991 and the subsequent Pre-School Regulations in 1996 (revised in 2007) sought to guide and implement the legislative requirements in respect of pre-school children. The Expert Working Group (Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, 2005) noted that:

> There is a growing need for locally based programmes which provide children with social, recreational and development activities outside school hours and during holiday time. This need arises because of women's increased labour force participation and because of the diminishing supply of part-time childcare places. Such provision could be provided on school premises or in community buildings.

The National Economic and Social Forum (NESF) in 2005 reported on Early Childhood Care and Education, suggesting that:

> Key steps to be taken should include supporting the existing community- and school-based infrastructure to provide school age childcare, developing a suitable programme with a strong emphasis on play and design and delivery of training for staff working with children up to the age of 14.

The previous Office of the Minister for Children was reconstituted in recent times to the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA), which provides a clearly focused home for the whole spectrum of children's needs. The DCYA has stated that after school services are due to become subject to regulation in 2014 and specific standards will be developed for them. QDOSS research (2013) indicates that the sector is keen to have regulations established, and to have a clear national policy reflecting the benefits of after school provision.

Some of the priorities identified by the after school sector and published in the *QDOSS Regional Consultations Report* in 2013 are outlined below:

- The integration and interlinking of all elements of the sector and its recognition as a unified sector.
- Making explicit to the Government the value to children from attendance at after school, especially where after school acts in a preventative and key support role for vulnerable children.
- The establishment of standards, regulation and a national framework for the sector, all of which would support quality delivery of after school.
- Emphasising the great opportunities afforded through after school.
- The provision of needs-based services.
- Consulting with children and involving parents.

After School in Other Countries

After school in many other Western countries is longer established as a sector than it is in Ireland. The role of after school services in the emotional, social, physical and academic development of children and young people is the subject of much debate internationally and service provision around the world varies; it has been differentiated and driven by local purpose, policy and philosophy.

In Australia, for example, the debate centres currently on the balance in Outside School Hours programmes, away from childcare alone towards an educational experience, but not necessarily a school experience. The Australian 2011 Framework *My Time Our Place* emphasises the importance of developing life skills and a sense of enjoyment, recognising the importance of social and emotional development and communication in learning through play and leisure.

The Finnish National Board of Education also launched a new Framework in 2011. Before- and after school activities in Finland are based on the values of basic education, which include human rights, equality, democracy, preservation of natural diversity and viability of the environment and acknowledgement of multiculturalism.

In Denmark, childcare centres are an integral and independent part of the Danish welfare system and not a part of the educational system. They are considered to be places where children can participate 'on their own terms in the creation of child life' (BUPL, 2006). The importance of play and the child's social and comprehensive development are stressed and the child's intellectual, social, emotional, neuromuscular, ethical, moral and aesthetic development are considered.

In England, the introduction of Extended Services/Extended Schools has been an important aspect of educational policy since 2002 when the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) first began to actively promote the concept. It is a significant element of the *Every Child Matters* policy (DfES, 2004). In 2005, a DfES prospectus *Extended schooling: Access to opportunities and services to all* made the commitment that by 2010 all children should have access to a variety of activities beyond the school day. Extended schools were defined as schools that 'provide a range of services and activities, often beyond the school day, to help meet the needs of children, their families and the wider community' (DfES 2005).

In the U.S. the 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) initiative is the only federal funding source dedicated exclusively to after school programmes. The *No Child Left Behind Act* (2001) narrowed the focus of 21st CCLC from a community learning centre model, where all members of the community benefited from access to school resources such as teachers, computer labs, gymnasiums and classrooms, to an after school programme model that provides services to students attending high-poverty, low-performing schools. Roughly nine out of 10 such centres are located in schools. Academic assistance, enrichment activities and recreational activities are the most common services offered.

Overall, these countries provide rich examples of a possible future direction for the Irish after school sector.

Quality in After School

It is essential for after school services to attain quality standards in all areas of service provision. This includes: governance and management of the service to ensure compliance with existing regulations, for example, child protection, health and safety and employment law requirements; preparation of policies and procedures; development of a comprehensive programme; qualifications and skills of the educators as well as access to a programme of on-going professional development; and preparation and maintenance of the environment in which the service operates. Above all, quality means meeting children's rights and needs in a professional manner.

Initial Irish aims towards quality in after school care stated that a service 'needs to be developed to ensure that the facilities and programmes being offered lead to an enjoyable, creative, stimulating, developmental and holistic experience for the child' (Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, 2005).

QDOSS research (2013) highlights the importance of continuing professional development for educators in after school services suggesting, in particular, the need for staff to have additional training in the areas of mediation, understanding the behaviour of older children, coaching and mindfulness. See page 66 for more information about after school educator competencies.

In Ireland, as mentioned earlier in this section, there are no formal quality standards set out for after school as yet and no specific regulations particularly applying to after school provision. *After School Quality Development Information Pack* (BCCN, 2010) sets out sets out a list of principles underpinning the delivery of quality after school services which provides a useful starting point for services to examine their own provision.

NOTE: A quality programme offers a well-rounded variety of activities and opportunities that support the emotional, physical, social and cognitive growth and development of all participants.

Principles underpinning the delivery of quality after school services

After school services should…

- ✓ Be delivered in the best interest of and in close consultation with children, families, staff and the wider community.
- ✓ Have a shared belief between parents, management and staff in the importance of the overall philosophy of the service.
- ✓ Have clear, written aims, objectives, policies and procedures.
- ✓ Have a management structure that adheres to all legal, financial, personnel and administrative requirements of running a business.
- ✓ Ensure that premises are suitable and meet the requirements of relevant legislation.
- ✓ Provide a safe, clean, secure, well planned physical learning environment that offers a wide range of stimulating and satisfying experiences to children and young people that promotes their health, wellbeing, learning and development.

- ✓ Acknowledge and respect the views of parents and families.
- ✓ Value, respect and promote the diversity and culture of families.
- ✓ Provide equal opportunities for all children, young people and families attending.
- ✓ Be accessible to all parents and children wishing to use the service.
- ✓ Ensure management and staff are appropriately trained and committed to accessing ongoing training, information and development opportunities.
- ✓ Ensure staff are valued, supported and adequately remunerated.
- ✓ Ensure staff promote the rights of all children and young people and nurture their overall developmental needs.
- ✓ Promote effective relationships between staff members, management and staff, staff with children, staff with parents and children with children.
- ✓ Encourage and develop a positive attitude towards the Irish language.
- ✓ Ensure an appropriate adult/child ratio.
- ✓ Develop links with other individuals and groups working in the area of after school.
- ✓ Develop links and positive attitudes in the community.

In considering the quality of a service, educators need to engage in reflective practice. Reflective practice refers to a way of working whereby you regularly think, in a critical way, about whether your practice is supporting the aims and objectives of your service. Reflection is central to the delivery of a quality service and to promoting the children's development. The main aim should be to provide a good quality service to the children, in order to contribute positively to their wellbeing, learning and development.

For more information on reflective practice see page 68.

Think about

- How does your after school service check out in comparison to this list?
- What aspects of your service do you need to build on?

SECTION 2
Children and After School

> As children reach developmental milestones, they gain skills and capacities which allow them to function and interact in positive ways with the world around them.
>
> *(Barnardos, 2013)*

Children's Needs and Development in their Primary School Years

During their primary school years, children need time to play, explore, create, learn new skills and, importantly, to relax. In order to meet these needs, an understanding of the characteristics of children, their development and how they learn is essential for after school educators.

A useful framework to help understand children's needs has been developed by the Search Institute in the US. This framework combines many pieces of research into what is described as a comprehensive vision of what children and young people need to thrive. This Developmental Assets framework sets out both external and internal assets, there are 40 in total and some of these are given below (see www.search-institute.org for the full list).

External developmental assets

The external assets that children need to thrive include positive experiences from the world around them that empower, set boundaries, convey clear expectations about acceptable behaviours and nurture constructive use of time. For example, for children aged eight to twelve years, under the heading of 'support', the framework suggests they need to have:

- **Family support:** Family life provides high levels of love and support.
- **Positive family communication:** Parent(s) and child communicate positively. Child feels comfortable seeking advice and counsel from parent(s).
- **Other adult relationships:** Child receives support from adults other than her or his parent(s).
- **Caring neighbourhood:** Child experiences caring neighbours.
- **Caring school climate:** Relationships with teachers and peers provide a caring, encouraging environment.

Internal developmental assets

Internal assets needed for children to thrive include social competencies, positive values and identities, and commitment to learning. Children need to experience support, be valued and have opportunities to contribute to others (civic activities), and so feel empowered. For example, for children aged eight to twelve, under the heading of 'commitment to learning', the following is highlighted as necessary:

- **Achievement motivation:** Child is motivated and strives to do well in school.
- **Learning engagement:** Child is responsive, attentive and actively engaged in learning at school and enjoys participating in learning activities outside of school.
- **Homework:** Child usually hands in homework on time.
- **Bonding to school:** Child cares about teachers and other adults at school.
- **Reading for pleasure:** Child enjoys and engages in reading for fun most days of the week.

After school settings provide many opportunities for children's needs to be met and for internal and external assets to be nurtured.

Developmental characteristics

The physical development of the brain plays an important role in all areas of children's development – emotional, social, cognitive, linguistic etc. The brain changes due to the maturation process and environmental factors throughout the lifespan, although it has more plasticity during infancy and early childhood. Environmental factors include daily interactions, exposure to toxic stress, brain injury and/or malnutrition. Research suggests that activities involving music, sport and education during childhood and adolescence support brain development (Dahl, 2004). In contrast, excessive time spent on certain activities, such as watching TV or playing video games, can impede brain development (Dahl, 2004).

Although children of the same chronological age can vary in their developmental levels, understanding the general developmental characteristics of children of different ages is helpful in meeting children's needs, and also in facilitating the formation of mixed-age groups. For example, social-emotional characteristics developing during the ages of five to eight include: forming inner control, progressing from self-centeredness to beginning to see others' viewpoints, seeking security in groups and needing friends. Although physical capabilities are increasing, muscle coordination and the ability to combine skills are still in the formative stages. Cognitive development benefits from the child's longer attention span (15-20 minutes) and increased problem-solving skills.

Between the ages of nine to 11, social-emotional characteristics include increased patience and a greater ability to resolve conflict due to an appreciation of other viewpoints. Physically, strength, balance and coordination are coming together to achieve mastery of complex skills. Cognitively, children are learning to plan ahead, pursue their interests through their own initiative, and talk through problem-solving steps. They are also better able to understand abstract thought.

Social and Emotional Learning

What is social and emotional learning?

> Social-emotional learning is sometimes called 'the missing piece', because it represents a part of education that links academic knowledge with a specific set of skills important to success in schools, families, communities, workplaces and life in general… a combination of academic and social-emotional learning is the true standard for effective education. *(Elias, 2003)*

Definition of emotional health 'A state of wellbeing in which every individual realises his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community.'

(World Health Organisation, 2011)

Social and emotional learning is the process through which children and adults acquire the knowledge, attitudes and skills to:

- Recognise and manage their emotions.
- Set and achieve positive goals.
- Understand the emotions and behaviour of others.
- Demonstrate caring and concern for others.
- Establish and maintain positive relationships.
- Make responsible decisions.
- Handle interpersonal situations effectively.

These critical social-emotional competencies involve skills that enable children to calm themselves when angry, initiate friendships and resolve conflicts respectfully, make ethical and safe choices, and contribute constructively to their community.

Emotional wellbeing is affected positively and negatively by a child's own temperament; the influence of their parents, carers, families and wider communities; and by their everyday experiences in places such as pre-schools, schools, after schools and youth services.

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) has identified five groups of inter-related core social and emotional competencies that Social and Emotional Learning programmes should address as shown in the diagram below.

Figure 1: Inter-related core social and emotional competencies *(adapted from Payton et al, 2008)*

How after school can impact on social and emotional learning

After school services can help to promote a child's social and emotional health in a number of ways. In addition to supporting parents, examples include helping children to develop emotional skills and resilience, creating environments for them to spend time constructively with friends, and supporting positive behaviour.

Helping Children to Develop Emotional Skills

Just as physical development occurs in 'ages and stages', so too does social and emotional growth and development. Being familiar with the appropriate ages and stages of social and emotional development is important to be able to accurately understand children's behaviour. For more information on stages of development see *Child Development Guide* (Barnardos, 2013).

Ideas for practice to promote emotional skills

There are a number of ways in which after school educators can model and support the development of emotional health in daily interactions:

- ✓ **Respect and demonstrate kindness towards children.** Children should be greeted by name as often as possible, especially at the beginning of each session. Interact frequently and positively with children, be available and responsive to them. Speak to all children in a calm, friendly, positive, respectful manner.
- ✓ **Promote a sense of belonging and ownership.** Children can participate by helping, doing errands, being peer mediators, picking up rubbish, tutoring younger children or children with special needs, or contributing in other areas. After school involvement in arts and crafts, drama, sports teams, clubs and activities can also increase school bonding.
- ✓ **Recognise and believe in each child's worth.** Challenge children to do their best and express confidence in their ability to do many things well. Make expectations clear and encourage perseverance and critical thinking. Encourage independence in children – when they express original thoughts or unique points of view, acknowledge their ideas. Recognise their efforts, achievements and feelings with sincere encouragement.

- **Accentuate cooperation rather than competition.** Structure environments so that children feel safe, secure and ready to learn. Acknowledge individual improvement rather than emphasise who is smartest, fastest or most talented. Give recognition freely and compliment individual and team effort. Create an atmosphere which fosters trust, security and comfort by giving children time and attention to enable them to talk and express their feelings.
- **Teach social interaction skills.** Empathy, communication and responsiveness need to be modelled and stressed. Be aware of and prevent teasing, gossiping, excluding or other bullying behaviours. When behaviour is unacceptable, clearly explain why. Have the children role-play friendship and assertiveness skills. Have realistic expectations for children's social behaviour, taking into account their level of understanding and maturity.
- **Teach problem-solving skills.** Explain steps involved in problem solving and have children practise these to foster self-awareness and self-control.
- **Foster leadership skills and good will.** Provide opportunities for children to discuss their ideas and make decisions regarding activities. Establish a children's council that acknowledges children's interests and concerns, and promotes character development. Increase kindness by having children and adults write down observed caring behaviours.
- **Help children discover their strengths and talents.** Provide time for children to imagine themselves doing something outstanding and worthwhile. After they set goals for themselves, discuss ways to reach their goals, and brainstorm choices they may need to make.
- **Model tenacity, emotional maturity and healthy attitudes.** Be organised, consistent and use appropriate coping skills. Be genuine and do not embarrass anyone or use sarcasm. Never humiliate or segregate children. Acknowledge that the emotions experienced by children are significant. For example, an adult who is not scared of thunder should not trivialise the fear or anxiety expressed by a child. Respond to and acknowledge children's emotions such as happiness, anger, pleasure, fear, anxiety, frustration, sadness and pride.
- **Negotiate choices between the adult and child.** This can help children to take appropriate responsibility and prepares them with positive life skills such as listening and reasoning.
- **Balance active, loud and energetic play spaces with passive, quiet and peaceful areas.** The way in which physical space is used can either encourage or discourage desired behaviour. Space which is aesthetically pleasing, well planned and well organised diminishes the potential for problems. Ensure that children are generally comfortable, relaxed, and happy and involved in play and other activities.
- **Involve parents to foster a nurturing parent-child relationship.** Acknowledge parents as their child's most important teachers, and their role as role models who need to spend quality time teaching, training and exhibiting those habits and values they want their child to have.

(Partly adapted from the Kelly Bear website www.kellybear.com, Davies, undated)

There are many activities that can be included in the after school programme to support emotional development. Two examples are:

1. Cooperative games, such as ball-playing, where the child needs to develop awareness of others and to regulate their own emotions, especially when losing.

ACTIVITY: Ball games

Suitable to Support:	**Areas of development:** Physical, social, intellectual, emotional and language development **Subjects in the primary school curriculum:** English, Mathematics, History, Physical Education, Social, Personal and Health Education
Age Range Suitability:	Adaptable
Space Required:	Large space. Indoor and outdoor
Equipment and Materials:	Balls of all sizes
Course of Action:	Brainstorm the types of ball games that the children know about and research others. Find out the rules and trace the history of these games. Try them out. Let the children make up their own ball games.

2. Diary keeping, which can develop reflective habits and knowledge of one's own feelings, and give a chance to express emotions safely.

ACTIVITY: Diary keeping

Suitable to Support:	**Areas of development:** Intellectual, emotional and language development **Subjects in the primary school curriculum:** English, Gaeilge, Social, Personal and Health Education
Age Range Suitability:	All
Space Required:	Table top
Equipment and Materials:	Art materials
Course of Action:	Keeping a diary can sometimes seem boring, the secret is to make it fun. Brainstorm various names for the children's diaries such as 'This is Me', 'My Book', 'Tis I' or encourage children to give their book a name, as if it were a friend. Encourage them to use various ways of recording text (in various languages), photographs, illustrations, magazine cuttings.

Children and resilience

> Resilient children are better equipped to resist stress and adversity, cope with change and uncertainty and to recover faster and more completely from traumatic events or episodes. *(Newman and Blackburn, 2002)*

Resilience is an important quality for children to develop. It can be described as the capacity to resist or bounce back from adversity. While it is not innate in all children, there are factors that promote resilience that after school educators can develop and support with the children in their service.

The International Resilience Project surveyed almost 600 children (aged 11 years and under) and their families in 30 countries. The 12 most frequently mentioned adversities were (in order of frequency) death of parents/grandparents, divorce, parental separation, illness of parent/siblings, poverty, moving home, accidents, abuse, abandonment, suicide, remarriage and homelessness (Grotberg, 1997). The findings of this project identified 36 factors, relevant to differing degrees in all cultures, which promoted resilience, some of which are outlined in the table below.

I HAVE	I AM	I CAN
Trusting and loving relationships with others: Parents, siblings, teachers, friends.	**Loveable:** The child possesses, or is helped to develop, qualities that appeal to others.	**Communicate:** The child is able to express feelings and thoughts, and listen to those of others.
Structure at home: Clear rules and routines, comprehensible and fair sanctions when breached, praise when followed.	**Loving:** The child is able to express affection to others, and is sensitive to their distress.	**Solve problems:** The child can apply themselves to problems, involve others where necessary, and be persistent.
Role models: Parents, other adults, peers, siblings, who model good behaviour and morality.	**Proud of myself:** The child feels they have the capacity for achievement and resists discouragement.	**Manage my feelings:** The child knows and understands emotions, recognises the feelings of others and can control impulsive behaviour.
Encouragement to be independent: People who offer praise for growing autonomy.	**Responsible:** The child accepts and is given responsibilities, and believes that their actions can make a difference.	**Understand my temperament:** The child has insight into their personality and that of others.
Access to health, education and social care: Consistent direct or indirect protection for physical and emotional health.	**Hopeful and trustful:** The child has faith in institutions and people, is optimistic for the future and is able to express their faith within a moral structure.	**Seek out trusting relationships:** The child has the ability to find people – peers or adults – in whom they can confide and develop mutual trust.

Table 3: Factors that promote resilience

Families, schools and communities have a profound influence on children's ability to be persistent, overcome obstacles and develop hope for their future. After school settings also have an important role to play in strengthening children's development and dispositions. When children are influenced by caring adults with high expectations for their success, they are more likely to withstand negative pressures and become responsible adults.

Supporting Friendships and Peer Relationships

Friendships and peer relationships influence emotional health in childhood and into adult life. Rejection by peers can lead to loneliness and behaviour problems in childhood. Warm and constructive friendships can help children understand themselves and other people, provide a source of advice, reassurance and support, provide a foundation for future relationships and improve attitudes towards and involvement in school. Card games are a fun way for children to interact with peers.

ACTIVITY: Card games

Suitable to Support:	**Areas of development:** Social, intellectual, emotional and language development **Subjects in the primary school curriculum:** English, Mathematics, Social, Personal and Health Education
Age Range Suitability:	All
Space Required:	Table top
Equipment and Materials:	Playing cards
Course of Action:	Brainstorm all of the card games you know with the children and make a large list for the wall. Ask children to collect others from their families and friends to add to the list. Go through the list from time to time and teach each other the various games.

Understanding Behaviour

NOTE: Supporting children in learning how to manage their own emotions and behaviour is an ongoing challenge for educators in all types of settings.

For the adults who are involved in supporting children to learn how to manage their own behaviour, discipline involves modeling appropriate behaviour, acknowledging children's positive behaviour, and helping them to understand through word and deed about what behaviour is appropriate and what behaviour is inappropriate.

In an after school, the quality of the relationship between the educators and the children is key. Adults must be loving, patient and firm to help children learn that it makes sense to act in certain ways. Discipline based on trust, respect, love, patience, fairness, understanding and consistency helps young people to build self-esteem and self-discipline.

Modeling appropriate behaviour, rather than simply instructing them to do things, means children can see what to do and learn from positive examples. An example of this is joining in and encouraging children to clear up materials after a session and making this fun, which will end the session in a positive way.

Educators can help children avoid inappropriate behaviour by helping them to understand rules and guidelines, explaining why they shouldn't do certain things and what appropriate alternatives might be. The best way to do this is to involve children in developing their own set of rules or guidelines for the service and to frame these rules in terms of rights and responsibilities rather than 'dos' and 'don'ts'. See page 55 for ways to involve children.

When children do something inappropriate, educators can help them to look at the consequences of their actions and think about what they can do to make things better. It is essential to phrase any limitations to children's behaviour in a positive way, focusing on 'what to do' rather than 'what not to do'. Using positive statements reinforces for children appropriate and desirable ways of communication. It also decreases the likelihood of them responding with resistance or defensiveness.

Influences on a child's behaviour

It is important to understand that there are many influences on a child's behaviour – these include:

- Age and development.
- General health and wellbeing.
- Relationships with and within their family.
- The environment, which includes the physical indoor and outdoor settings, the weather, the time of year, the time of day.
- The nature of adults' interactions with the child.
- Relationships with other children and others such as students, volunteers and visitors.
- External factors, such as family, home life, school or peer group experiences.

Personal issues that can lead to behaviour problems

There may be ongoing personal issues for a child that affects their behaviour. Some of the following causes of behaviour problems can be quickly remedied while others require after school educators to work with the child long-term and involve parents and/or school teachers. Some require outside help from specialists.

- Family issues – concern over a sickness, divorce, death or other issue in the family.
- Differing norms – what may be acceptable at home or at school is not acceptable in the after school service or vice versa. For example, at home inappropriate behaviour is ignored or rules are not enforced therefore the child has learned not to take rules seriously.
- Physical issues – the child may be grumpy, tired, hungry or feeling unwell.
- Testing limits – children often 'try' adults to see if they will follow through on consequences.
- Having a bad day – something may have happened earlier in the day that is affecting the child.
- Undiagnosed developmental delays – in some areas, local early intervention teams may liaise with after school or pre-school services where there is a query over a child's development; the service and parents will be supported in working towards a diagnosis if required.

The role of the family

It is essential to keep lines of communication open with children's families on an ongoing basis in relation to behaviour guidance strategies and practices, in order to ensure consistency and avoid confusion for children. For example, in the Incredible Years Programme parents and schools work together to develop a consistent approach in supporting the parenting of children (see www.incredibleyears.com).

The role that families play, especially parents, is crucial to the success of the behaviour guidance approach that the service plans to adopt. Parents should be provided with regular opportunities to contribute to the development and review of their child's behaviour guidance plan, along with the service's overall approaches to promote positive outcomes for the child.

Service issues that can lead to behaviour problems

It is possible to minimise the chances of misbehaviour by providing a stimulating, safe environment in which children grow, learn and relax. After all, if children are challenged, motivated and occupied, there is a much greater chance of positive behaviour. Lyons et al. identify the ingredients for this as excitement, engagement, challenge, success and support.

Aspects of the after school programme that can contribute to children's inappropriate behaviour include:

- Boredom – not enough to do, no interest in the current project or topic.
- Too many restrictions and rules which children can't possibly keep. During their after-school time, children need a more casual atmosphere allowing for self-directed activities and discussion.
- Too few rules, rules that do not make sense, or undefined rules – children do not have an explicit understanding of what is appropriate and what is not and/or do not understand why certain rules exist.

Think about

- Do the activities and materials in your service involve the children?
- Are activities challenging and motivating?
- What have children indicated that they would like to do?
- How do the staff interact with the children?

- Not enough opportunity for control – if children have too few choices and feel that they don't have enough control, they act out to exert control.
- Groups are too large – it will be difficult for children if they are being asked to work in groups that are too large for their developmental stage, younger children typically need to work in pairs or threes.
- Inappropriate environment – if there are no separate areas for different activities, children get in each other's way, the noise level is high and the environment is not comfortable.
- Lack of materials – when there is a lack of paper, paints, games, balls, etc., there will likely be conflict if children have to compete for scarce resources.
- Activities and programme are not well planned – chaos results when educators are not prepared with well thought-out activities and contingency plans.
- Not enough adults – children are under-supervised and do not feel a sense of safety and control.

Challenging behaviour and conflict resolution

Sometimes children can exhibit more challenging behaviour and can become embroiled in arguments and disagreements that can rapidly escalate to a more serious level. As children grow older and approach adolescence, for example, this can present a more challenging situation for educators than that presented by conflicts among younger children, and it is important to have effective strategies for such occasions. Policy and procedures that recognise particular circumstances such as these and ensure the safety of all involved need to be in place.

Think about

Jack (aged 12) comes to after school one afternoon in a bad mood, slamming his bags on the floor. He goes to the computer where Patrick (11) is working. He pushes Patrick off the chair and sits down. Patrick pushes him back and a fight breaks out. Both boys are tall and physically strong, and are hurting each other.

- How would you deal with this situation?
- Do you know any strategies to de-escalate such a volatile situation?
- Do you have a back-up procedure for dealing with more serious incidents?

Effective strategies in dealing with challenging behaviour

When a child becomes so angry, anxious or frustrated to the extent that they themselves and others have been unsettled, it is important to remain calm and settle the situation for this child and the others around.

- Stop a child's aggressive or destructive behaviour such as kicking or hitting. If the child is older and more powerful this may require support from other educators to maintain a safe environment.
- Model positive behaviour to the child and never mirror the child's behaviour by raising tone of voice or acting inappropriately.
- When the situation has been diffused, it is important to offer support, time and further discussion with the child, to reflect on what happened and to plan an alternative coping strategy in case a similar issue arises again.
- Reinforce a positive approach that the child may use in the future, such as walking away and playing elsewhere or by stating clearly that they don't like that and it hurts.

Ideas for practice for conflict resolution

HighScope's six-step conflict resolution process is a useful problem-solving strategy for children of all ages. Children can often carry out this sequence on their own by the end of the programme to settle disputes and conflicts.

1. **Approach calmly, stopping any hurtful actions.** Place yourself between the children; use a calm voice and gentle touch; remain neutral and don't take sides.
2. **Acknowledge children's feelings.** Say something simple such as 'You look really upset/ angry/annoyed.' Let children know you need to hold any object in question.
3. **Gather information.** Ask open questions rather than 'why' questions. 'What's the problem?'
4. **Restate the problem.** 'So the problem is...' Use and extend the children's vocabulary, substituting neutral words for hurtful or judgmental ones (such as 'stupid') if needed.
5. **Ask for solutions and choose one together.** Ask 'What can we do to solve this problem?' Encourage children to think of a solution but offer options if the children are unable to at first.
6. **Be prepared to give follow-up support.** Stay nearby in case anyone is not happy with the solution and the process needs repeating.

Respect children's ideas for solving problems, even if the options they offer don't seem fair. What's important is that children agree on the solution and see themselves as competent problem-solvers. When the situation has been resolved, follow up with the children and encourage them to reflect on their actions to build on their problem-solving skills.

Children and Learning

> Tell me and I'll forget, show me and I may remember,
> involve me and I'll understand. *Chinese Proverb*

Considerable research has been conducted into gaining an understanding of learning among children. Learning can be an outcome of the child's experiences: in an academic setting with direct instruction there will be expected outcomes whereas in a setting where opportunities for varied and rich experiences are provided, the learning may be less explicit and may surface gradually over a long period of time.

Think about

- How varied is the programme that you offer?
- Are the activities flexible and open-ended?

Looking at learning using a process approach emphasises treating each child as a whole person with a unique developmental rate and style. Using this approach, after school educators can provide a range of opportunities and open-ended activities or projects in which all children can participate at their own developmental level. The challenge is to establish an environment conducive to learning where children can pursue various choices according to their interests.

If, for example, the topic is dinosaurs, there are opportunities for children to write about dinosaurs, draw dinosaurs, build dinosaurs, research dinosaurs, create a real or a virtual habitat for dinosaurs. This flexibility allows children to become involved at their own interest and skill levels. Moreover, children benefit from seeing what others are doing and gain an understanding of the same topic from different viewpoints.

Styles of learning

When planning activities and programmes, after school educators need to think about the different styles, or what Hutinger (2001) calls 'learning modalities', the children in the group use to concentrate, process and retain information. Gardner (1983) argued that there are many dimensions of human intelligence other than the logical and linguistic skills that are usually valued in most school environments. He suggests educators recognise the following areas of intelligence as tools to use in learning:

- **Linguistic/Language:** Learns by listening, reading, verbalising, enjoys discussion, likes word games, books, and records, and remembers verses, lyrics and trivia.
- **Logical/Mathematical:** Thinks conceptually, uses clear reasoning, looks for abstract patterns and relationships, likes experimenting and testing things, likes classifying and categorising.
- **Musical:** Thinks in tones, learns through rhythm and melody, enjoys playing musical instruments, remembers songs, and notices non-verbal sounds in the environment.
- **Spatial:** Likes mazes and jigsaw puzzles, likes to draw and design things, likes to build models, and likes films, slides, DVDs, diagrams, maps and charts.
- **Bodily kinesthetic:** Processes knowledge through bodily sensations, communicates through gestures, moves or fidgets while sitting, learns by touching and manipulating, likes role playing, creative movement and physical activity, enjoys fixing and building things.
- **Interpersonal:** Understands and cares about people, is the social child, has lots of friends, learns from cooperative learning experiences and likes group games.
- **Intrapersonal:** Enjoys working independently, likes to be alone, appears to be self-motivated, and needs quiet space and time.

- **Naturalist:** Investigates, experiments, questions and finds out about elements of science, the phenomena of the natural world, weather patterns, growing things, animals, conditions that change characteristics (for example, water changes from liquid to solid when frozen).

Hutinger provides ideas on how to determine what are the stronger learning modalities for each child. After school educators can use these to help them to decide which activities are appropriate for a child or group of children.

- Be careful observers and keep notes or a checklist to document children's behaviours and sort them according to Gardner's multiple intelligences listed above.
- Listen to children's questions and conversations and watch what children do when they are given choices:
  - What do they resist or ignore?
  - What are they drawn to and what do they return to day after day?
  - Are they more likely to engage in dramatic play or construction work or go to the book corner and settle down with a familiar book?
  - Do they sing and hum as they go, enthusiastically moving to music?
  - Do they seem to prefer verbal directions or watching a demonstration?
  - Do they spend time drawing and painting, or working in three-dimensional clay, papier mache or block sculpture?
  - Do they try things out to solve problems?
  - Do they work alone or with others?
  - What kind of software do they prefer if they use a computer – puzzles, games and stories, or graphics?

Think about

- Answers to these questions can help you to figure out how individual children approach learning, and to provide the rich and varied opportunities that will engage them.
- How could you apply these to a particular child in your service?

The psychological principles on the opposite page adapted from *How Children Learn*, the International Academy of Education & International Bureau of Education's Educational Practices Series (Vosniadou, 2001), summarise some of the important results of research on learning from educational, developmental, cognitive, social and clinical psychology. The principles focus on understanding and thinking rather than on memorisation, drill and practice.

How children learn

Active involvement

Learning requires the active, constructive involvement of the learner. After school educators must help children to become active and goal-oriented by building on their natural desire to explore, to understand new things and to master them.

Meaningful activities

Children learn best when they participate in activities that are perceived to be useful in real life and are culturally relevant. Educators can make activities more meaningful by situating them in an authentic context, one in which the activity is typically used in real life. For example, debates, preparing newsletters or taking part in community environmental projects.

Being strategic

Children learn by employing effective and flexible strategies that help them to understand, reason, memorise and solve problems.

Relating new information to prior knowledge

Relating new information to prior knowledge is critical for learning. It is not possible for someone to understand, remember or learn something that is completely unfamiliar.

Engaging in self-regulation and being reflective

Learners must know how to plan and monitor their learning, how to set their own learning goals and how to correct errors.

Developmental and individual differences

Children learn best when their individual differences are taken into consideration.

Aiming towards understanding rather than memorisation

Learning is better when material is organised around general principles and explanations, rather than when it is based on the memorisation of isolated facts and procedures. When information is superficially memorised it is easily forgotten. When something is understood, it is not forgotten easily and it can be transferred to other situations

Taking time to practice

Learning is a complex cognitive activity that cannot be rushed. It requires considerable time and periods of practice to start building expertise in an area.

Creating motivated learners

Learning is critically influenced by learner motivation. Psychologists distinguish between two kinds of motivation: extrinsic motivation and intrinsic motivation:

- *Extrinsic motivation* results when positive rewards are used to increase the frequency of a target behaviour. Praise, awards, money and food can be used for that effect.
- *Intrinsic motivation* is when learners actively participate in activities without having to be rewarded for it. The child who likes to put together puzzles for the fun of it is intrinsically motivated. An important characteristic of intrinsically motivated learners is their belief that effort is important for success.

In an after school, educators will find that a focus on intrinsic motivation is effective in producing positive results. Children are more inclined to participate in activities in which they are truly interested.

Think about

- Does your programme offer a range of activities that the children can choose from?
- How can you ensure that children are really motivated to learn?

The Importance of Play

> Play is the highest form of research. *(Einstein)*

> Play is one of the essential experiences of childhood. It is central to all aspects of young children's development and learning. All childcare services, therefore, should provide children with opportunities, materials, time and space (both indoors and outdoors) to play.
>
> *(Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, 2005)*

Play is what children and young people do when they follow their own ideas and interests, in their own way and for their own reasons. Affording opportunities for play that are freely chosen and child-led is a fundamental requisite of after school provision.

There are many forms of play in childhood: exploratory play, object play, construction play, physical play (sensory-motor play, rough-and-tumble play), dramatic play (solitary pretend play), socio-dramatic play (pretend play with peers, fantasy play, make-believe or symbolic play), games with pre-determined rules and games with invented rules (rules that the players can change).

> All children and young people need to play. The impulse to play is innate. Play is a biological, psychological and social necessity, and is fundamental to the healthy development and well-being of individuals and communities. *(Skills Active)*

'Free' or 'Unstructured' Play

Many group settings such as after school services, where children are spending substantial time, focus on structured educational and recreational activities and leave little time for participation in open-ended, self-initiated free play. Long uninterrupted periods of time for children to play – by themselves and with peers, indoors and especially outdoors – are becoming increasingly rare. Another threat to children's play is the priority given to academic achievement. Furthermore, children are frequently confined to spending their outdoor time in carefully constructed outdoor playgrounds that limit challenge in the name of safety. The need for natural environments in children's play is further discussed on page 97.

NOTE: 'Free' or 'unstructured' play can be defined as children doing as they wish in their own time and in their own way, and it is this kind of play that is increasingly recognised as essential to healthy childhoods.

(Moore and Cosco, 2009)

Think about

How much free choice regarding activities do the children have in your service?

Play, wellbeing and development

Through play, children can develop new, broad learning – as their brain develops through stimulus, they learn things that cannot be taught, such as hurt and courage. Children learn more through self-directed play, rather than direct instruction, and, according to Aistear (NCCA, 2009), play helps children to develop as thinkers. Play also helps to develop the inclination to learn, to be curious and to be persistent.

> In play, children construct knowledge by combining their ideas, impressions and intuitions with experiences and opinions. They create theories about their world and share them with one another. They establish a culture and a social world with their peers. In play, children make sense of their experience. They discover the intimacy and joy of friendship as they explore their own emerging identity. Because it is self-directed, play leads to feelings of competence and self-confidence. *(Hewes, undated)*

Play and physical wellbeing

The importance of play in contributing to the general health and wellbeing of children, extending through childhood and beyond, is universally acknowledged. A recent report from the U.K. Department of Health (2011) argues that the levels of physical activity required in childhood to help achieve healthy weight, bone and cardio-metabolic health, and psychological wellbeing are higher than previously estimated. Unstructured play is perceived as vital to achieving this level of physical activity as young children 'need the freedom to create their own opportunities for active play, lead their own activities, direct their own play and engage in imaginary play' (Department of Health [UK], 2011).

Examples of outdoor play activities to support physical development

ACTIVITY: Pavement games

Suitable to Support:	**Areas of development:** Physical, social, intellectual, emotional and language development **Subjects in the primary school curriculum:** English, Gaeilge, Social, Personal and Health Education
Age Range Suitability:	All
Space Required:	Paving slabs around your service or draw similar-sized rectangles on a hard surface
Equipment and Materials:	Various
Course of Action:	Research and practise and play as many games as you can such as hop-scotch, switching places, Xs & Os, kick the disk, etc.

ACTIVITY: Frisbee games

Suitable to Support:	**Areas of development:** Physical and social development **Subjects in the primary school curriculum:** Mathematics, Music, Physical Education, Social, Personal and Health Education
Age Range Suitability:	All
Space Required:	Outdoor space
Equipment and Materials:	Frisbee or paper plates
Course of Action:	Allow the children to become competent by throwing and catching, then introduce games.

http://www.afda.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1203

Check out the website...

Play and cognitive development

From the child's point of view, make-believe play is worth doing because it's fun. In the process, children 'grasp' a wide range of concepts and problem-solving skills. They spontaneously improvise from moment to moment in a hypothetical situation and they fit their experiences with other previous experiences and learning, and construct meaning from them. In other words, make-believe presents complex intellectual challenges for young children that are intrinsically motivating[4]. The more children engage in such play, the more proficient they become at it, especially at symbolically representing actions, objects, and abstract situations with language and gestures (Cordes and Miller, undated).

Example of pretend play activity to support cognitive and emotional development

ACTIVITY: Imaginary play

Suitable to Support:	**Areas of development:** Physical, social, intellectual, emotional and language development **Subjects in the primary school curriculum:** English, Arts, Drama, Music, Physical Education, Social, Personal and Health Education
Age Range Suitability:	All
Space Required:	Various
Equipment and Materials:	Various
Course of Action:	As children get older their imaginary play becomes more complex. Encourage children to make up plays, give them themes and let them do the rest. Together, make up prop boxes to support their imaginations.

http://www.childcare-resources.net/imaginative_play.html

4. As we saw on page 46 intrinsic motivation is when learners actively participate in activities without having to be rewarded for it. An important characteristic of intrinsically motivated learners is their belief that effort is important for success.

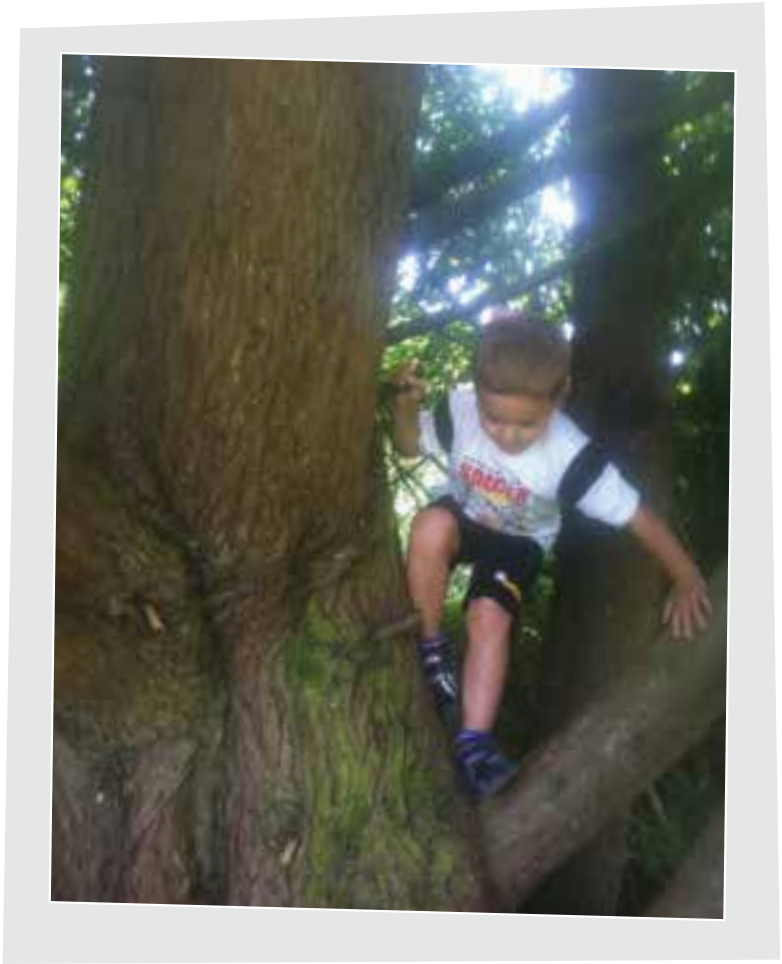
Adventurous and risky play

> Some activities using natural materials that may include risky play experience are mud play, water features, field trips, climbing trees, tending to open fires; woodwork etc. will require an appropriate risk assessment and procedures for safely managing this. However the promotion of safe play should not be used to avoid giving children experiences of 'risky' play activities, which when carefully done by skilled practitioners can provide thrilling experiences, eliminate certain phobias, and provide valuable opportunist for children to learn how to safely assess and manage such risks themselves
>
> *(HSE, 2013)*

The opportunity for adventurous play, which may involve some risk, is one that is of great value to children. Children benefit from this type of play in a number of ways. They:

- Are able to handle risks
- Feel brave
- Feel frightened and cope with it
- Feel very tall, fast, strong (for young child)
- Are confident
- Are curious
- Are motivated

The need for taking risks can be met through climbing, campfires and other outdoor activities as well as taking other types of risks such as participating in debates and dramas (see activities on the CD for further examples).



Case Study – Using Fire

While most types of childcare settings don't seem to have a problem with earth, air and water, we do seem to have a problem with fire. In fact, of all the forms of potentially 'risky' play this is probably the one that raises the most concerns and is almost always absent in Irish settings. But this is not the case in other cultures around the world.

Think about

What adventurous play opportunities do you provide in your service?

In the Scandinavian and Nordic countries in particular it is common to see fire pits in the outside spaces of childcare settings. Where we have a very negative attitude to fire, seeing it as destructive and harmful, the Scandinavians see it as a vital, life-giving element that should be respected but not feared. It is interesting to note that instances of deliberate fire damage by teenagers in Sweden, for example, are virtually nil whereas in Ireland and the UK fire damage is common. At least part of the reason for that is that Scandinavian children know, not only how to light a fire, but how to control it and how to put it out. A significant number of arson attacks by teenagers here are actually fires that have simply got out of control.

Fire is unique – there is nothing like it for the noise it makes or how it looks or the obvious power it has – and that fascinates children who want to experience it. A properly constructed and located fire pit can allow them to experience this in a controlled way and at the same time enhance the outdoor experience in a great variety of ways, especially during the darker and colder winter months.

Cooking around a fire pit is very different to making biscuits indoors and cooking them in the oven – in this case children can actually see things cooking in front of their eyes and changing from one thing into another. Story telling is also a completely different experience when huddled around a warm, crackling fire adding to a unique story-telling atmosphere. In fact, the most important element of all in a communal fire pit is the sense of gathering and the light and heat it produces, all of which makes for a welcoming atmosphere.

(adapted from Armitage, 2011)

SECTION 3

Developing the After School: Issues to Consider

> Contemporary constructs of childhood describe the child as a competent, capable and active participant in their own learning, constructing their knowledge, meanings and understanding through interactions in their physical and social environment. This view emphasises the importance of listening to and respecting children's voices and rights, resulting in an increase in children's involvement in decision making. Such an understanding of the child emphasises the significance of working with children, rather than for children, in environments in which they are engaged.
>
> *(Cartmel, 2011)*

Vision and Purpose

An after school service's vision should state the service providers' core beliefs and ideals for working with children. The vision will also outline what the service seeks to achieve and the outcomes it hopes that the children will experience. This will help to guide the development of the service's policies and procedures, and the programme that will bring the vision and goals to life.

NOTE: Children and parents have the right to be included in the formulation of this vision and in all developments in the service. This will ensure that it is a truly participative service with real engagement by all involved.

Developing a vision and goals for your service

The steps below outline how those responsible for the management of the after school service and the educators working directly with children can develop the vision and goals that reflect their beliefs and values that shape their attitude to children and determine the programme for the service.

To create your vision:

1. Each staff member bring a picture or image of a child to a team meeting.
2. Write down as many words or phrases that describe what being a child means to you individually.
3. Discuss first of all in pairs or groups of three what statements you agree upon, then, as a whole group, agree a final list of words and phrases.
4. Agree on one image of a child from the pictures.
5. Develop a statement together that begins something like: *We believe that childhood…*
6. Display your vision statement, with picture if you wish, somewhere for all to see near the entrance to the service.

To create your goals for children:

1. Choose the most important attributes your service would like children to have (e.g. safe, brave, happy, confident, caring, independent…)
2. Consult with the children. Find out from them what they would like for themselves as they grow up, an individual or group discussion may suit, perhaps with collage, photographs, poems.
3. Consult with parents about the aspirations they have for their children.
4. Examine both children's lists and adults' lists. Consider any differences and any similarities. Develop a final list of aspirations, in consultation with all participants. These are your goals for the children in your service.
5. Prepare a mission statement. Your mission statement for the year sets out what your service, including the children, wants for their future. Children's drawings and journals can be included. Your joint mission statement for the year can then be displayed alongside your vision, and shared with families.
6. Check your policies and procedures to see if any need to be revised or changed in light of your fresh mission and goals.

Consulting With and Involving Children

Children are citizens with rights and responsibilities. They have opinions that are worth listening to, and have the right to be involved in making decisions about matters which affect them. In this way, they have a right to experience democracy. From this experience they learn that, as well as having rights, they also have a responsibility to respect and help others, and to care for their environment. *(Aistear Principles, NCCA, 2009)*

When children are involved in developing the vision, policies and procedures that directly impact upon them, they learn about civic engagement, rights and responsibilities. They are more likely to actively participate and contribute valuable ideas and opinions as they see how this all works in practice. Involvement supports children's recognition of the impact of guidelines and how their own expectations can be met in the setting.

Hyndland After School Club[5]

Rights and Responsibilities

1. I have the **Right** to be happy. It is my **Responsibility** not to do anything that could make others unhappy.
2. I have the **Right** to be heard. It is my **Responsibility** to show courtesy, consideration and respect for what others are saying.
3. I have the **Right** to be respected at this Club. It is my **Responsibility** not to tease or annoy other people, or hurt their feelings.
4. I have the **Right** to be safe at this Club. It is my **Responsibility** not to threaten or physically harm anyone.
5. I have the **Right** to privacy and my own possessions and space. It is my **Responsibility** to respect the property of others and to accept their right to privacy.

There are many mechanisms for consulting with children, such as engaging directly in consultation and using surveys and observations. A combination is usually beneficial, such as direct talks and observations. The MOSAIC approach (Clark, 2005) is an effective example of ways to successfully consult with children of various age groups. This approach suggests a blend, or mosaic, of methods which help to build a clear picture of the children's points of view. This can mean using drawings or photographs taken by the children, small group interviews and getting feedback on particular things such as the activity areas. Individually, each method may not tell a lot, however when combined they can provide much useful relevant information.

5. The Hyndland After School Club is affectionately known as 'the Afty' and provides a service for primary school children in Glasgow. The aim of the Club is to provide a fun, caring environment offering a range of active, stimulating and restful activities for children until their parents are able to collect them.

Special Issues

The rest of this section outlines some of the particular issues that those running an after school service need to consider when developing their service.

Transitions

When adults finish work for the day, they find many different ways to unwind and relax. Everyone has different needs as they transition from the work day into their evening activities. Similarly, as children finish school for the day, they have different wants and needs. Some would like to relax and socialise for a while before they start structured activities. Some are hungry and need a snack. Some really need a chance to run around and engage in physical play. Some need quiet time to read or just be left alone.

Depending on space, staffing constraints and other issues, services should aim to offer all of the activities outlined above to children as they come into the programme after school. Different staff members or volunteers can be assigned to oversee each of these types of activities.

As well as the activities described above, a warm, welcoming and relaxed atmosphere is important to make the daily greeting and departing routine pleasant. Younger children need special consideration for their safety as they transition from school to after school. Although older school age children are more independent, they still need to feel welcome. HighScope emphasises the need to create a warm and nurturing environment, not only because this helps children form trusting relationships with others, but also because of its impact on learning in all areas. The more that the service's social climate is positive and supportive, the more likely it is for children to become engaged and motivated learners.

Homework[6]

> Homework which merely fills up pupils' time... is unlikely to be productive and may prevent valuable development that would otherwise occur through play and other interests.
>
> *(Hubble and Boyd, undated)*

Think about

What is the balance in your after school service between activities and homework?

NOTE: It is important that children have a balance of activities in their lives. They need to have time to relax, play, exercise, make friends, try out skills and projects that aren't normally done in school.

Many families want after school services to help with homework to reduce stress and time pressures on the family and this section is to help after school services to consider what their role in relation to homework help can or should be.

There is often concern in after school services that providing homework help will compromise other programme goals. Many feel strongly that extending the school day and spending additional time on school work is not in the best interests of children. The time for children to relax and for active play and opportunities to learn in different ways from those in school are really important. Children need time to interact with each other and with adults to develop their communication skills, to share their feelings and to learn to work out problems. Developing social skills is an important life skill and is essential for doing well in school.

Children who do not get on well in school need opportunities to learn in new ways which are more in tune with their learning styles. After school services are ideal places for children to learn by doing, in particular those children who thrive when they are provided with experiences in the arts, in the community and exploration of any kind.

It makes sense to be flexible about how much time a child will spend on homework. Younger children may need very little time. If one child generally spends more time on their homework than others in the same class, this needs to be looked into. It may be that the child works at a slower, more methodical pace than others, but it may also be that they are struggling to complete homework that exceeds their current skills (see page 77 on Linking with Schools).

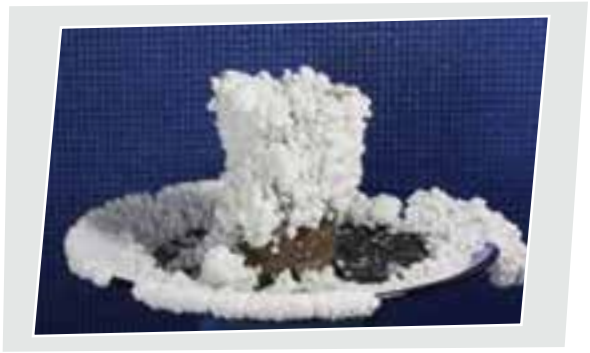
6. This section is partly adapted from O'Connor and McGuire, 1998.

Even if one of the programme goals is to improve academic skills, supporting homework is only one way to achieve this – tutoring, cooperative activities, recreational reading and involvement in science activities are other examples of activities that will support academic achievement. A couple of examples are given below and there are many examples of such activities on the CD that accompanies this book.

Examples of activities that will support academic achievement

ACTIVITY: Salt garden

Suitable to Support:	**Areas of development:** Physical, social, intellectual, emotional and language development **Subjects in the primary school curriculum:** Science, Visual Arts, Social, Personal and Health Education
Age Range Suitability:	All
Space Required:	Small space
Equipment and Materials:	Container, sponge cut into shapes or other porous material such as pipe cleaners for the crystals to grow on, blotting paper or twigs from trees, liquid blue (a fabric whitener), table salt, spoon and water
Course of Action:	This activity is simple, creative and scientific. Arrange your terrain with the porous materials in a flat bottomed container. Add bits of blotting paper and twigs. Put water in the container and make sure all of the porous materials touch the base to absorb the liquid. Pour the salt over evenly. Add two tablespoons of liquid blue over the salt. Then sprinkle two tablespoons of water on top. Leave to stand in a dry place overnight. The dry air will allow the moisture to evaporate and the crystallisation to begin. When you see the crystals begin to form, add two more tablespoons of salt over the entire area.



Check out the website...

http://laundry.about.com/od/laundrycraftsgames/ss/How-To-Make-A-Salt-Crystal-Garden-Salt-Garden-Craft.htm

ACTIVITY: Library – borrowing, reading, research

Suitable to Support:	**Areas of development:** Social, intellectual, emotional and language development **Subjects in the primary school curriculum:** English, Gaeilge, Mathematics, History, Geography, Science, Social, Personal and Health Education
Age Range Suitability:	All
Course of Action:	Not all children have the opportunity to visit the library. Start with a library of your own. Classify books by fiction / non-fiction, age related or subject area. Go on library visits, show children the benefit of using books to read and discover.

Issues to consider when developing a homework policy

It is important to develop a homework policy for the service. Keep in mind:

- The most effective homework policy will be developed when the opinions and needs of children, families and the after school educators are taken into consideration.
- Homework assistance and enrichment activities are especially important for children at risk of school failure. Some families cannot provide the quiet space, resources and assistance needed for children to successfully complete homework.
- Homework is only one way to support academic achievement. Children's academic needs must be balanced with their physical, emotional and social needs. Children need time to have snacks, play with friends, build relationships with caring adults and develop their own talents and hobbies.

It is essential to work with parents to strike a balance between homework and other programme goals through careful programme planning and design.

Issues relating to homework for parents

When families are asked about whether they want homework assistance to be provided by the after school service they usually answer yes for one or more of the following reasons:

- **They just want to get the homework out of the way before teatime:** Parents are trying to juggle work, their responsibilities for their children and other things. An increasing number of children are being raised by a single parent, grandparents or other carers. Many just don't have the time or the energy for homework.
- **Family stress:** Some families also have to deal with further family stresses such as illness, poverty and substance abuse.
- **Wanting their children to do well in school:** Families want to be sure their children do well in school and are well prepared for their adult life. Some families rely on schools or others to make sure their children succeed.
- **Feeling ill-equipped to help themselves:** Parents who are not proficient at speaking English or who have not completed their own schooling may not have the skill to support homework. Approaches to teaching have changed and they may not know how to help with subjects such as maths in the same way as children are learning in school today.

Think about

Does your service have a homework policy? See Appendix 3 for more ideas on developing one.

These are important considerations for an after school service in deciding whether or not, or to what degree to provide homework help as part of the service they offer.

Issues relating to homework for after school educators

While some educators feel that providing homework support is an important part of what they do, others feel that it is difficult to fit it in to the schedule or that they do not have the resources or skills necessary to provide it. Some wonder if homework should be prioritised over the goal of helping to support children's social and emotional development. Many valuable life skills are not the focus of academic learning.

Services often have little time for programme planning, team meetings, training and supervision, all of which are important for the provision of a quality after school service including a quality homework help component. Staff ratios are also an issue. For example, if one person is working with one or just a few children on tough homework problems, how do the other educators maintain a high quality programme for the other children in the group? Ideally a staff ratio of 1:10 or better is needed to provide homework help.

There are different options for a service to consider when deciding on their approach homework assistance as shown in the table below.

Options	Advantages	Disadvantages
Homework as one activity choice		
This involves creating a space where homework can be done and letting the children choose whether or not to work on homework. Children may choose to go to the homework area at any time during their time at the service or there may be one or two blocks of time when homework is an option.	This allows children to be self-regulating about how much work they do. It provides them with the chance to make decisions about what is most important – to relax, let off steam, develop new hobbies and interests, spend time developing relationships with peers and adults or do homework.	Homework may not be completed, especially for children who find it a difficult task or because they are distracted by friends or all the other choices. It may not be a good approach for children who have a lot to do when they get home or for those who cannot access assistance at home. Uncompleted homework can become a source of tension at home and lead to a sense of falling behind at school.
Homework as a contracted activity choice		
This involves asking parents to sign a homework contract. The contract requires children and families to come to an agreement about whether a child will do homework at the after school service and, if so, how much homework they will complete.	This approach gives everyone involved a say about how the issues around homework are to be approached. Children and families are encouraged to come to a decision together. Services can spell out how much support they are able to provide. The contract outlines the responsibilities of each stakeholder and the agreement takes the after school educators out of the role of policing homework. The contract also reminds families that they should check homework and be in touch with the school when there are problems. The contract also allows educators to discuss with parents how best to support the child.	For some settings, adding another layer of paperwork seems unmanageable. Some families may pressure a child into a contract they do not agree with, in which case the child may refuse to cooperate when the parent is not present.
Homework as part of the daily schedule for every child		
This involves having a time when all the children must work on homework. If a child does not have homework, they are asked to read or to do another quiet activity.	Children who are easily distracted by other activity choices may be more willing to focus on their homework if everyone is working on it at the same time. Also, if space is limited, this approach can ensure that all children will be quiet to help concentration.	This approach does not give children a choice. While some like to do homework first and get it out of the way, others need to have a snack or time for active play or socialising before they can concentrate. Those who don't have any homework will still be expected to sit quietly or may be given inappropriate worksheets to keep them busy.

Table 4: Homework options for consideration

Resources for the homework area

The most important resource for homework is a comfortable space. Some children have trouble concentrating if there is noise of any kind. Other children may be comfortable with quiet conversations and are able to work in small groups. If possible try to provide two spaces – one with a table and chairs. The area needs to be well lit. Lamps provide direct but softer lighting than flourescent lighting.

Provide

- Pencils, pens, erasers, crayons, markers, coloured pencils
- Hole punch, scissors
- Dictionary, Thesaurus, Encyclopaedia, Atlas, Globe
- Paper
- Newspapers, a variety of magazines
- Computer/s
- Whiteboard or flipchart

It is very important that the adults are supportive and positive in providing homework help. A person who provides homework support is helpful when they:

- Are patient, kind and genuine.
- Walk you through problems one step at a time.
- Find out what you do know then asks open questions to encourage problem solving.
- Guide you to the answer.

It is not helpful when people:

- Are too busy to help.
- Are condescending, judgemental and/or sarcastic.
- Go into lecture mode.
- Take over and do it for you.

One of the main purposes of homework is to provide a link between home and school. Families who are involved in homework learn what their child is working on in school, have a sense of how their child is progressing with new skills and can support and advocate for the child in the school. It is important that services and families develop a partnership for supporting the child and for communicating with the school. An important consideration is to ensure that the family's involvement in homework or their role in communicating directly with the school is not taken over or diluted. See later in this section for information about linking with parents and with schools.

Mixed Age Groups

A key difference between after school groups and classes in school is that most after school settings cater for mixed age groups. It is essential to plan activities and create an environment that is suitable for all the children, regardless of their age, abilities or developmental stage.

Rasmussen (2005) discusses how the approach of having mixed age groups in after school services has many advantages over the school model, which places children in class groups with approximately a 12-month age difference among them. The expectation in schools is that all of the children in the group will be ready for the same learning experience at the same time. In fact, children who are the same age may vary by more than two years in their individual development. Children progress sequentially through stages of development, with occasional regressions, but do not progress through stages at the same pace. Some develop quickly, some develop slowly, according to the child's own unique nature. A six-year-old may have the cognitive skills associated with a seven-year-old but the social/emotional skills associated with a five-year-old. Therefore, chronological age is not an accurate indicator of a child's maturation or skill level.

Siolta and Aistear both reflect a growing awareness of the value of mixed age groups, and also of siblings being enabled to mix as well. Vygotsky also recognised the value of mixed age groups: when referring to the concept of scaffolding he used the term 'a more capable other', meaning older children.

- Age differences can be seen as an opportunity that can be used to foster leadership and cooperation, as well as cognitive and social skill development.
- There are rich intellectual, social and emotional benefits to be got from mixed-age groups.
- A mixed age experience allows a child to form friendships with both older and younger children, something that occurs naturally in families and in communities.
- Many positive social interactions result when younger and older children spend time together, such as cooperation, inclusion and sharing.
- Re-mixing groups offers each child an opportunity to be both a younger member and an older member of a group, presenting the child with multiple perspectives on group interaction and involvement. Because children progress through developmental stages at different rates, children in a mixed-age group may possess similar skill levels, despite the differences in chronological age. This can reduce the pressure on an older child who is developmentally similar to a younger child.
- In a mixed-age group, children freely exchange information. A child who has recently mastered a new skill can gain immediate reinforcement and recognition for this accomplishment by teaching it to another child. Furthermore, younger children may find themselves capable of participating in more complex activities when working in partnership with older children. *(Rasmussen, 2005)*

Ideas for practice to meet the needs of a mixed age group

- ✓ Keep the groups of children small to provide for maximum participation by everyone and to minimise the potential for older children dominating the group.
- ✓ Prepare a visual set of instructions for any game, activity or project. Instructions should include step-by-step directions, illustrated whenever possible. This gives children autonomy from the staff, appeals to children of various skill levels, and allows for frequent review of the procedures, so that each group can progress at its own pace. Although time-consuming to prepare, if the instructions are laminated or covered with clear adhesive paper, they can be re-used from year to year.
- ✓ Plan a topic or theme in small units. Time management in after school programmes is challenging, especially toward the end of the day, when parents may arrive unexpectedly to pick up children. If each unit is small, children can complete one activity, and then proceed to another if time permits. Create units of varying difficulty levels. Within a theme, there should be some units that build on previous skills to appeal to and challenge different skill levels.
- ✓ When playing physical games, consider grouping children by skill ability rather than by age. More physically developed children may not realise their strength, causing injuries to less able children and leading to frustration for the more able children.
- ✓ If it is necessary to include all children in a physical activity, choose games that emphasise basic skills and large muscle movements, such as running and jumping.
- ✓ Support children to create new games. If children are given some basic equipment, they can make up new games or variations of traditional games. Provide a variety of materials that are non-structured or open-ended, such as balls of various sizes, socks (rolled up in a ball or used as flags), bean bags, hoops, large baskets/boxes and cones.

(Rasmussen, 2005)

The Role of After School Educators

> There is strong evidence that there is a link between adults' competence (their relationships with children and their pedagogy) and children's wellbeing and involvement in learning. *(Winter, 2003)*

The recruitment and selection of well qualified staff members with the appropriate competencies to do their job is key to the provision of any quality service. In the case of services for children and families – which involves meeting the specific needs of children, nurturing children's physical, social, emotional and intellectual development in partnership with parents, families and other adults, and conducting oneself in a professional and ethical manner – it is particularly important.

While demonstrating skills and knowledge, competent after school professionals must also demonstrate personal qualities such as fairness, humour, sympathy, understanding, integrity, flexibility and an effective communication style with school-age children and their families. They must aim to build respectful and trusting relationships with children, families, colleagues and other professionals.

After school educators who are attuned to children's thoughts and feelings support their physical, personal, social, emotional and spiritual wellbeing as well as cognitive aspects of learning. They foster independence and initiative thereby nurturing children's agency and leadership skills.

Competencies of after school educators

With no nationally recognised after school standards in Ireland, we can look to standards in the US as a model of what competency standards for quality would look like. The New York State School-Age Care Credential[7] competency standards were developed to evaluate a candidate's performance with children and families during the school-age care accreditation process. The standards can also be used to identify the roles and responsibilities of after school educators to guide performance evaluations and inform professional development.

7. The New York State School-Age Care Credential was developed by the New York State Office of Children and Family Services, Cornell University and the New York State School-Age Care Coalition (now After School Works! New York).

Examples of some of the standards are given below and all can be applied to after school educators in Ireland (with the exception of 1.1, printed in grey, which refers to the After School Works! New York Standards and Regulations). The full list is given in Appendix 4.

1. Skill area: Professionalism

1–1 Demonstrates knowledge of regulations and standards.

1–2 Views self as professional in current work with children.

1–3 Has and is continually developing competencies in child development, programming, communication skills and other topics related to children.

2. Skill area: Child development knowledge

2–1 Uses systematic, objective observations to anticipate individual children's needs as well as the needs their developmental stage might predict.

2–2 Demonstrates reasonable expectations for what children of various developmental stages are able to do physically, emotionally, socially, cognitively and creatively.

2–3 Plans, organises and provides programming that meets the developmental needs of children.

2–4 Includes children of all ability levels, including those with special needs

7. Skill area: Out-of-school environments

7–1 Separates interest areas so that simultaneous activities of different natures can occur.

7–2 Provides space in which children can enjoy quiet and privacy.

7–3 Provides space for children to engage in active play.

7–4 Provides materials which engage children's interests.

7–5 Establishes schedules and routines that give children freedom within structure.

7–6 Creates a systematic storage plan and area.

7–7 Demonstrates an ability to articulate and advocate for positive spaces for children.

12. Skill area: Social positive… community

12–1 Models positive ways to interact with people of all ages.

12–2 Employs observation skills to understand the social needs of each child.

12–3 Helps children develop and practice the skills to get along with others.

It is clear that the work of the professional after school educator is complex and requires a broad range of skills and competencies if it is to be performed to the standard that will make a real difference in children's lives. Those responsible for training after school educators must be clear on what the role of the educator requires, and those providing or planning to provide after school services have a responsibility to recruit educators with the appropriate dispositions, skills and competencies.

Observing, Reflecting and Documenting Practice

Reflective practice

Quality experiences for children and their families do not just happen – everyone involved in providing and delivering the service must work at it continuously. In a similar way, reflective practice requires a strong commitment to continuous improvement and to ongoing learning.

Engaging in reflective practice requires that you:

- Understand what your setting's aims are.
- Have appropriate levels of skill and knowledge to help you assess the quality of both your practice and the environment.
- Are able to recognise and document the positive aspects of practice and the environment that can be maintained.
- Are able to be challenging and critical (in a constructive and positive manner) of your practice in order to identify potential for improvement.
- Are able to locate and take on board new information that will help to improve your practice/environment.

(Síolta Quality Assurance Programme, CECDE, 2006)

Reflective practice offers a way of bringing theory and practice together to enable learning from experiences and to adapt and develop practices in light of new understandings (Russell, 2009). The process of reflection facilitates both ongoing improvement to practice and decision-making as it enables after school educators to think critically about why certain practices or experiences do or don't work, and how to use this information to support change.

In this way, children's learning and development can be supported and enriched, and educators can build on their own knowledge and skills.

Skills required for reflective practice

The following skills are integral to reflective practice. Each of these skills takes time and practice to acquire.

- **Describing your practice** – recounting a particular event with all relevant details about the adults and children present, interactions and the environment.
- **Identifying your feelings** – recounting how you reacted emotionally to an event, so that you can explore how the event affected you.
- **Investigating your values** – recognising what is important to you so that you can understand how these influenced the event.
- **Moving towards self-awareness** – recognising your assumptions and identifying the impact on your practice, understanding your own culture, valuing what you know and recognising your needs for further learning.
- **Gathering theoretical knowledge** – integrating new knowledge into your practice, even though it may challenge your thinking, and using theory to help explain an event.
- **Having reflective conversations** – exploring the events and theories that affect your practice with colleagues and other professionals.
- **Changing your thinking and practice** – developing new ways of thinking about different aspects of your practice and planning carefully for the changes you will make to your practice.
- **Asking reflective questions** – using questions to begin your reflection and link theory to your practice.
- **Thinking about the outcomes of practices** – considering the perspectives of others (children, families and colleagues).
- **Seeking information or support** – improving practice through professional development opportunities.
- **Assessing the outcomes of changes or improvements** – reviewing practice after they have been implemented.

(adapted from O'Connor & Diggins, 2002)

Reflecting as a team

> Whether you are working as an individual practitioner or in a large group setting, being able to get together with other colleagues is a very valuable opportunity to support reflection on practice.
>
> *(Síolta, CECDE, 2006)*

Team discussions provide an opportunity for staff to challenge each other and to use their collective knowledge to improve practice. Teams may reflect on a routine or practice and ask questions such as:

- What is the rationale for the way we do that?
- Does it reflect our service philosophy?
- Have we always done it that way?
- Is the practice consistent with our beliefs, values and philosophy?
- Does the practice meet the needs of all children and families?
- What happens in other services? Why do they do that?
- What is best practice?
- If we change it, how will we monitor it?
- When and how should we review and evaluate the change?

Think about

- How do you and the rest of your team work together to reflect on your practice?
- How does this help to shape the programme of activities you provide?

Looking beyond the service

Looking outside the after school service and engaging with people, ideas and innovations happening in the wider community may also be appropriate. This can assist after school educators to ask questions such as:

- How do others see the issue?
- What are others doing?
- What does the research tell us?

Regularly meeting with people in the wider community and networking with other services can provide insights into the way the service and the work of after school educators are perceived by others. This provides opportunities to explore ways in which the service can then become more responsive to the interests and needs of families and children in the local community.

Documenting practice

Rather than focusing on children's achievement and developmental norms, it is important that the focus of documentation in after school is on the impact of the overall environment, including the programme, on children's wellbeing and involvement. Educators need to consider documentation that answers two key questions:

1. How is each child doing?
2. Are the efforts being made by educators sufficient to secure emotional health and real development in all important areas and for each of the children?

Children's level of involvement and wellbeing are two of the most conclusive indicators of how well an educational setting is meeting the learning and developmental priorities of children (Government of South Australia, 2008). Children's involvement can be regarded as a direct measure of the power of the learning environment provided. Observing levels of involvement provides a solid ground to identify where, when, how and for which children the quality of the service's approach can be improved.

The responsibility for children's engagement and achievement lies with the educators and the environment provided rather than with the children.

Gathering information

While the main focus needs to be on the educators' practice, it is also important to consider the ways in which information about children's development and learning is gathered and documented:

- Does the documentation record what children know and can do (their strengths, interests and abilities), as well as indicate areas where children may need additional support?
- Does the information that is collected and documented create a record of each child's learning and development that can be shared with them and their families?
- Is the information in a form that can be shared with other professionals who work with the child and family (for example, social workers)?
- Does the information collected reflect children's and families' perspectives?
- How are children's ideas and points of view heard and respected?
- How is the family's perspective collected, respected, responded to and recorded?
- How are these views shared with families?
- Is information recorded about all aspects of the day, including relationships, play experiences, transitions, routines, small and large group experiences?
- How is information about individual children or children as a group of learners documented and recorded?
- Is information collected from sources such as:
  - families
  - observations, learning stories, running records, narratives, comments, explanations
  - photos, sketches of children's experiences
  - dated examples of children's work, event samples, transcripts of children's conversations, and audio and/or video recordings.

(adapted from Harris Helm and Gronlund, 2000)

Ideas for documenting practice

- ✓ Plan your documentation and assessment process to take advantage of natural outcomes of routine activities. For example, many educators include journal writing as part of their daily routine for children which will give an indication of children's emotional and language development. Routine activities provide integral, connected and natural ways to document learning.
- ✓ Provide for children's individual learning styles. Matching the method of documentation to the learning style of the child ensures that the documentation represents what he or she knows and can do (see page 43 for more on learning styles).
- ✓ Consider the natural products of learning experiences. Observations or photographs of children's work with manipulatives such as woodworking materials, Lego, Meccano informs their physical and cognitive development.

(adapted from Harris Helm and Gronlund, 2000)

Engaging with Parents

> The principle guiding *[educators']* work is educational partnership, which refers to professional educators' commitment to work together with parents in order to support children's growth, development and learning.
>
> *(Finnish National Board of Education, 2011)*

Think about

How would greater engagement with parents help you to meet the children's needs?

As children grow older, their world expands beyond the immediate family. However, it is still vitally important that strong links and partnerships are developed and maintained between all parts of their lives, including after school.

As seen in the section on resilience on page 35, the presence of at least one unconditionally supportive parent or parent substitute has been seen to help children overcome adversities. After schools can play a part in supporting this through providing opportunities for parents to become and stay engaged.

When after schools have clear expectations around sharing and consulting with parents and children, treating the relationship as a real partnership, this partnership will enable them to provide a more child-centred and needs-led programme. Discussions and exchange of information between children, parents and educators about what types of activities children are interested in and what brings them joy and recreation will have a bearing on the content of the programme and its practical implementation.

After schools can develop policy around the engagement with parents, and while this engagement can often focus on the homework situation, the policy needs to also take into account the best ways and means of actively involving parents at all levels in whatever way each parent or family is able.

What does partnership look like in your setting?

Level 1: The Contributions Approach

This is very much top-down – staff tell parents/families news and information *(Newsletters, noticeboard, leaflets)*

Level 2: The Add-on Approach

There are some two-way exchanges, items are added without any real structural change.

(The service asks for photographs and news from home.)

Level 3: The Transformation Approach

Parents are aware that children benefit from their involvement; they are enabled to participate and contribute in various ways.

(Parents can participate in decisions being made in the service with genuine consultation taking place and policy and procedural changes allowing for all perspectives.)

Level 4: The Social Action Approach

Participation is visible, genuine; it is integral to the service.

(Educators and parents, with children, make decisions on important issues and take collective action to implement/ solve them.)

Figure 2: Partnership with parents *(adapted from Banks, 2001)*

Example of an activity that can strengthen links between after school services and families

ACTIVITY: Family games, parties, picnics, suppers

Suitable to Support:	**Areas of development:** Physical, social, intellectual, emotional and language development **Subjects in the primary school curriculum:** Social, Personal and Health Education
Age Range Suitability:	All
Equipment and Materials:	Various
Course of Action:	This can be fun to organise and is a great way of involving parents in your service and helping families to get to know each other. Always let the children be involved in the organisation by using their ideas, giving them a role to encourage responsibility.

Linking with Schools

Many working familes find it hard to have frequent communication with their child's school due to time contraints on both sides. Some parents do not have the confidence to approach school staff members in relation to issues and problems – their own experience of school may have been negative or some have difficulties with speaking English.

Whenever possible, it is important to support direct contact between the family and the school. Some parents just need encouragement and help in knowing how to approach the school about issues. Some services offer to accompany family members to help them get over the first hurdles.

There will be times when the service needs to have direct communication with the school. In this case it is important to be clear on rules of confidentiality and to ask families for written consent for the release of information before speaking to school personnel about a child.

Some services invite schools to share the curriculum and their philosophy about homework. This type of communication creates a common language between services and schools which is supportive of a partnership approach.

Ideas for practice for the service or the families to maintain good communication with the school

- ✓ Establish communication with the school early to understand their approach to homework, to agree on goals for homework and to share information about the child's learning style.
- ✓ Give feedback to the teacher when:
  - assignments are too hard
  - assignments are repetitive or too easy for a child
  - instructions are unclear
  - a child is overwhelmed with too much homework
  - a child has missed school and needs a reasonable schedule for making up the work
- ✓ Work together to solve problems.
- ✓ Follow up to make sure the approach is working.

(adapted from Harris Helm and Gronlund, 2000)

Linking with the Community

As children mature, they develop more awareness of the community in which they live. After schools can support this emerging civic awareness and responsibility by incorporating links with the wider local community in the programme being offered. These will provide real experiences for the children, where they can see their involvement contributing to actual change and improvement of their local community, whether environmentally, such as through engaging in community gardening projects or Tidy Town Campaigns, or perhaps socially through fundraising efforts. Many examples are provided on the CD in Section 3.

Example of an activity linking with the community

ACTIVITY: Fundraising: Community or special person or cause

Suitable to Support:	**Areas of development:** Physical, social, intellectual, emotional and language development **Subjects in the primary school curriculum:** English, Gaeilge, Mathematics, History, Geography, Science, Visual Arts, Drama, Music, Physical Education, Social, Personal and Health Education
Age Range Suitability:	All
Space Required:	Varied
Equipment and Materials:	Various
Course of Action:	If you have a cause to fundraise for, form a committee consisting of staff, parents and children of various ages. Carefully plan what you are going to do and try to involve as many as possible.

SECTION 4
The After School Programme

> In its fullest sense the term 'mind' includes not only knowledge and skills but also social, emotional, moral, aesthetic and spiritual sensibilities. An appropriate education for young children should address the full scope of their growing minds as they strive to make better and fuller sense of their experiences. It encourages them to pose questions, pursue and solve puzzles, and increase their awareness of significant phenomena around them.
>
> (Katz and Chard, 1989)

Building a Quality Programme

After school educators must take many things into consideration when building a quality programme of activities.

Section 1 of this publication examines quality and provides a list of principles underpinning the delivery of quality provision in after school services.

Section 2 sets out many aspects of children's needs and development and the types of activities that would support these, such as the creation of a code of practice around behaviour and the importance of play. It also looks at the importance of understanding how children learn.

Section 3 outlines the need for a service to determine their vision and goals as a starting point for developing a quality programme, the need to involve children, parents, schools and the wider community, how to reflect on the service's capacity and resources, and how to determine the elements that are considered essential.

Based on all of the above, an effective after school service offers a flexible programme consisting of homework time, outdoor play in natural environments, relaxation, and free and unstructured time. It also provides a wide variety of structured activities that are fun and interactive and that help to develop or enhance leadership and social skills, self-esteem, conflict resolution skills, academic skills, interests and hobbies.

The specific elements of the programme can include opportunities to participate in group projects and special interest clubs, work on homework, participate in tutoring and mentoring, go on field trips, and be involved in community projects. Quality after school programmes are balanced and tailored to children's interests and developmental needs as well as the needs and desires of their parents.

There is no one 'ideal' daily or weekly schedule for an after school programme as every group of children has different needs and interests; children need time to play, explore, create, learn new skills and to relax. Consideration will also need to be given as to when the children can eat and avail of a snack or, in some cases, a hot meal.

Effective programming includes:

- **Structure with flexibility:** A sense of structure and order through an established schedule and a fair amount of flexibility built into the schedule to allow children to pursue interests and finish projects beyond scheduled activities.
- **A variety of appropriate activities:** Children need a wide variety of age-appropriate activities such as outdoor play, arts projects, games, field trips, sports and clubs; having such a variety will help to ensure that each child can have a varied experience.
- **Educators who are committed, caring and well prepared:** Experienced, trained staff who plan activities carefully and involve children in planning; staff who get to know children and connect well with them.
- **Choices:** Daily choices for the children about how they spend their time.
- **Opportunities to give input and develop responsibility:** Opportunities for children to gain a sense of ownership, develop responsibility, and select activities that reflect their interests as they help plan and lead activities.
- **Exploration of skills and interests:** Chances to develop hobbies, skills and interests and get excited about learning; opportunities to develop self-confidence as they find new talents in areas typically not addressed by the regular school curriculum.
- **Development of emotional wellbeing and social skills:** Activities, experiences and discussion that offers children opportunities to develop social skills and positive dispositions.
- **Opportunities to do something real:** Hands-on activities that help children see tangible results.
- **Nutrition:** Opportunities to eat nutritious snacks and informally socialise with each other and with adults.

(*National Institute on Out-of-School Time*, 2000)

Programme Planning

When planning the programme, educators need to consider three kinds of information:

1. **Age appropriateness** – what is known about child development and learning so that activities, materials, interactions and experiences will be safe, interesting, achievable and challenging.
2. **Individual appropriateness** – what is known about the strengths, interests and needs of each individual child in the group to be able to adapt for, and respond to, individual variation.
3. **Cultural appropriateness** – what is known of the social and cultural context in which the children live to ensure that learning experiences are meaningful, relevant and respectful.

Themed activities

Creating activities around themes is an important strategy. Selecting a theme or big idea for the week or for the month is a great way to organise programming, materials, supplies and field trips. Addressing a theme over time challenges children to explore a topic in depth. As children return to a topic, they approach it from different perspectives or in a more complex way. The advantage of a mixed age group (see page 64) is that children of various ages should be able to approach a single topic together at different levels.

Environment and resources

Another key strategy in programme planning is the establishment of a rich learning environment.

> The quality of the environment affects how the children/young people and the staff feel… The most appropriate environments for children after the school day should complement, rather than duplicate the school experience. *(BCCN, 2010a)*

Interactions and relationships within the service are an important element to the development of a warm, welcoming environment, but thought must also be given to the physical environment and how this can be best used in providing a quality programme. Getting the environment right is not easy with such a diverse age range and many services face additional challenges due to shared/inadequate space, especially those operating within a pre-school setting who may also have to contend with smaller furnishings.

By thinking creatively and involving children and parents in consultation about the space available and the various activities planned (not forgetting the need for a quiet, chill out area), educators can ensure that different areas are created appropriately for a diverse programme.

In terms of resources, a service filled with a variety of materials – books, art supplies, maps, audio/video tapes, theatrical props, building materials and more – is ideal, but again this can be a challenge for after school services that operate in a shared area as very little space may be available for storage. If it is difficult to establish a physical centre, consider self-contained boxes or tubs of supplies, which have been specifically selected to support the programme. These can be brought out for each session.

> After school services should endeavour to create environments that are comfortable, well-equipped and appropriate for the service's activities and the age, size, stage of development and needs of the children and young people who attend. *(BCCN, 2010a)*

Example of an after school service

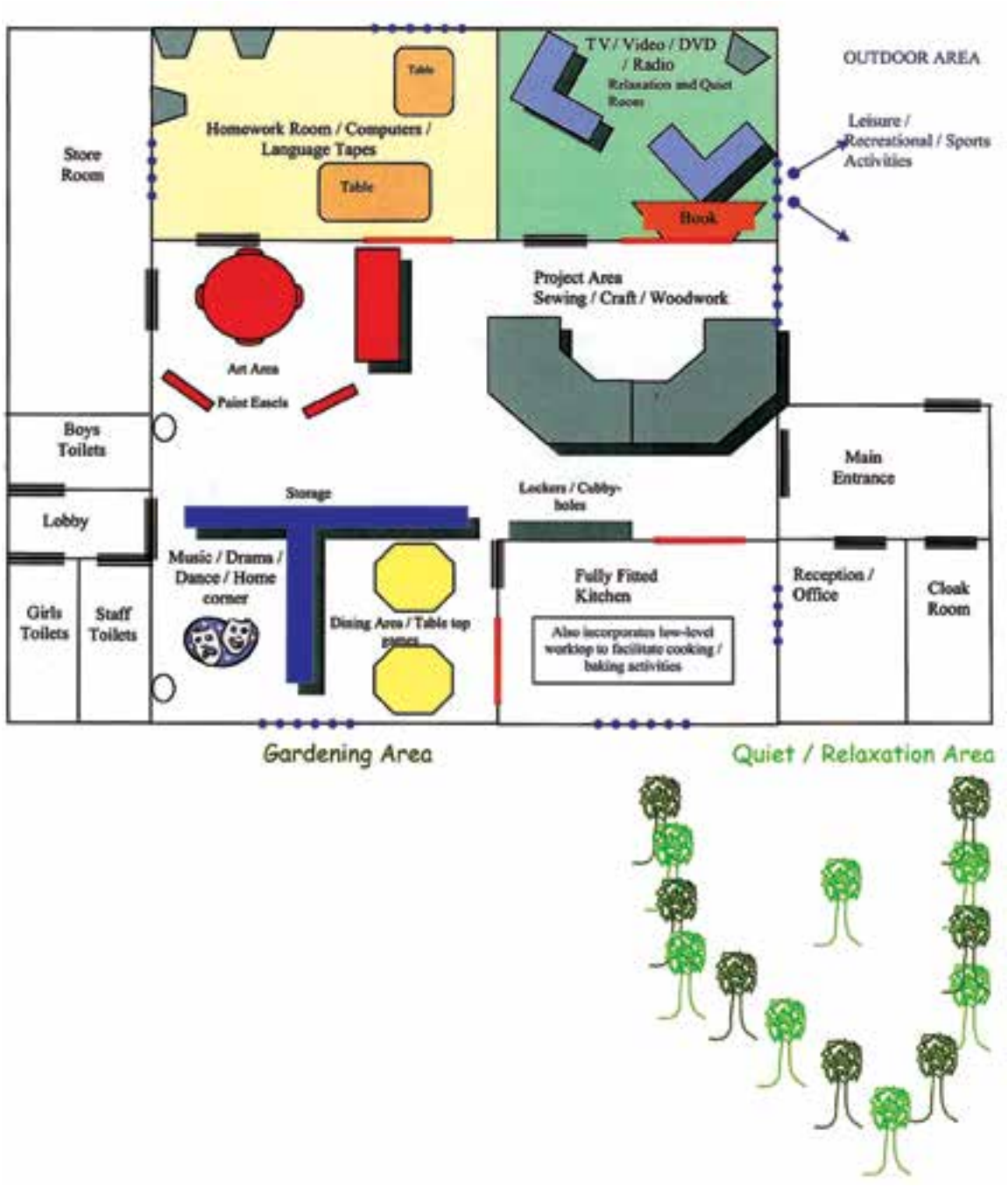


Figure 3: Example of an after school service *(BCCN, 2010a)*

A Project-based Approach

The programme of activities on offer can include longer-term, ongoing work using a project-based aproach. This is in addition to regular activities and can be undertaken by individual children or by groups of children.

A project is an in-depth study of a particular topic – children work on the same project for a period of days or even weeks, depending on their age and the size of the project. Project activities are open-ended, challenging and experimental in nature, and can build on and further children's learning in a stimulating and creative way, thus maintaining the positives associated with play, while also helping children to develop new skills and learn new information (Alexander, 2002).

Katz and Chard (1989) speak of how teachers with whom they worked were amazed and delighted at how eagerly most children make choices, show initiative and leadership, contribute to group efforts and respond to adult suggestions when working on a project.

Project work stimulates emerging skills and helps children to master them because it provides a context in which they are applied with a clear purpose. It can complement and enhance what young children learn from spontaneous play as well as from instruction.

> It has long been a central tenet of early childhood philosophy and theory that play is a child's natural way of learning… However play is not the only way that children learn. It is just as natural for them to learn from observation and investigation.
>
> *(Katz and Chard, 2000)*

Alexander (2002) says that children typically enjoy project-based experiences so much that while they are involved in the planning and designing, the risk taking and the collaboration, and the delight with the job being well done, it may look like play to an adult onlooker.

> As in play, children will get bright-eyed and excited as they realise they have an idea for how to meet the project challenges. They get their peers to join them in implementing an idea. They are industriously busy and perhaps noisy in their involvement. However, the tasks associated with the project require a different kind of thinking than play requires. The children also need a different kind of involvement on the *[educator's]* part than is needed during play. *(Alexander, 2002)*

In project-based activity where the emphasis is on collaborative activity, there is more opportunity to imitate, and to be taught only what needs to be learned to do the project than there is in school, where the relevance for what is being taught is not always clear to the learner (Alexander, 2002).

NOTE: We know that children learn to read by reading, they learn to solve problems by solving problems and they learn to plan by planning and implementing these plans – project-based activities provides a context where children need to read, problem-solve and plan.

Adult involvement in project-based activities

Key components of adult involvement in successful project-based activities include:

- Encouraging the child to talk about what they are planning.
- Helping to break the project task down into do-able chunks of activity.
- If needs be, suggesting routes the child might take to accomplish a task.
- Supporting and applauding the child's efforts.
- Giving hints when the child attempts to take over the task but gets stuck.

All of this requires much more adult intervention than the activities generally associated with any kind of play. Project-based activities are worth the effort, both in terms of children's enjoyment and their learning, but they require more from the adults including time to plan and to prepare the appropriate resources, and an abundance of creativity.

Examples of project-based activities

ACTIVITY: Compost creation

Suitable to Support:	**Areas of development:** Physical, social, intellectual, emotional and language development **Subjects in the primary school curriculum:** Science, Social, Personal and Health Education
Age Range Suitability:	All
Space Required:	Outdoor space
Course of Action:	Explain the ecological and scientific benefits of composting to the children and ask them to find out more. The following websites provide information and methods of both outdoor and indoor composting.

http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/kindergarden/kidscompost/compostingforkids.pdf

http://voices.yahoo.com/how-mini-compost-bin-classroom-869509.

ACTIVITY: Fashions design, shows

Suitable to Support:	**Areas of development:** Physical, social, intellectual, emotional and language development **Subjects in the primary school curriculum:** Mathematics, Visual Arts, Drama, Physical Education, Social, Personal and Health Education
Age Range Suitability:	All
Space Required:	Table top
Equipment and Materials:	Unwanted clothes and accessories
Course of Action:	Many children are interested in fashion design. Help them to express themselves by encouraging them to create their own looks using clothes, shoes, jewellery, purses, belts, hats and other accessories. Redesign and repurpose clothes and accessories. When you have a 'collection', help the children to organise a fashion show.

www.ehow.com/how_8160732_teach-fashion-design-kids.html

ACTIVITY: Bird feeding and watching

Suitable to Support:	**Areas of development:** Social, intellectual, emotional and language development **Subjects in the primary school curriculum:** English, Mathematics, Science, Geography
Age Range Suitability:	Adaptable
Space Required:	Small space outdoors
Equipment and Materials:	Bird feeders, feed, pens, notebooks, charts, binoculars, cameras
Course of Action:	You can buy or make your own feed, bird feeders and bird table. Organise rotas to fill the feeders. Feed could be measured and weighed. How long does it take to empty the feeder? How many birds are using it? Can you devise a way to calculate how much one bird eats? Watch and record the birds that the children see, research where they come from and their emmigration patterns. Make a chart of how often birds are seen, what time of the year etc.

The Arts

> The experiences we offer to many young people outside of school are often limited in their purpose and resulting impact. They provide recreation, but no sense of creation. They provide recess, but no sense of success. Arts learning outside of schools can also enhance the sense of accomplishment and well-being among our young people. *(Fiske, 1999)*

'The arts' are an important element in an after school service where the mission is to address the needs of the whole child. Through the arts, children are often able to make sense of their world and their roles within it. The arts includes everything from books and literature, music, film, painting and visual arts, to dance and drama/theatre.

What engaging in the arts does for children

Extra time for more satisfactory opportunities for self-expression or development of abilities in one or more art forms enables children to develop the motivation, skills and discipline necessary to make meaningful contributions to individual or group projects. Children learn about the importance of high standards of achievement for themselves and others. They experience what it means to stay focused on something and how sustained practice can lead to higher levels of skill such as playing an instrument. Making art is about making meaning. For children to be able to make meaning for themselves, adults need to encourage them to work on their own ideas.

In a report from two years of work exploring interactions between the arts and human development and achievement, several independent researchers concluded that engagement in the arts nurtures the development of cognitive, social and personal competencies (Fiske, 1999).

Arts and cognitive development

Artistic lessons encourage self-discipline, imagination, critical thinking, originality, flexibility and divergent thinking, and the ability to use a wide range of symbolic tools. Every form of art – music, dance, drama, sculpture – provides children with another set of symbols for thinking about and expressing ideas and meaning.

More specifically, researchers found that learning in and through the arts (Fiske, 1999):

- Contributes significantly to improved critical thinking, problem posing, problem solving and decision making.
- Involves the communication, manipulation, interpretation and understanding of complex symbols, in the same way as language and mathematics.
- Fosters higher-order thinking skills.
- Regularly engages multiple skills and abilities.
- Develops a person's imagination and judgment.

Arts and social and emotional development

The arts teach practical emotional skills, including the self-discipline that comes from practice over time, persistence, the ability to delay gratification, healthy ways to reflect on and express own feelings and the feelings of others, and the self-motivation for learning that stems from the active, emotionally engaging challenges that the arts can bring to all other subjects.

The arts can also develop critical social skills. Children who perform together in a choir or orchestra, for example, sharpen their communication skills and learn powerful lessons about collaboration and the value of each individual's gifts and commitment if any group is to make music together (Cordes and Miller, undated).

10 Lessons the Arts Teach

1. The arts teach children to make good judgments about qualitative relationships. Unlike much of the school curriculum in which correct answers and rules prevail, in the arts, it is judgment rather than rules that prevail.
2. The arts teach children that problems can have more than one solution and that questions can have more than one answer.
3. The arts celebrate multiple perspectives. One of their large lessons is that there are many ways to see and interpret the world.
4. The arts teach children that in complex forms of problem solving, purposes are seldom fixed, but change with circumstance and opportunity. Learning in the arts requires the ability and a willingness to surrender to the unanticipated possibilities of the work as it unfolds.
5. The arts make vivid the fact that neither words in their literal form nor numbers exhaust what we can know. The limits of our language do not define the limits of our cognition.
6. The arts teach children that small differences can have large effects.
7. The arts teach children to think through and within a material. All art forms employ some means through which images become real.
8. The arts help children learn to say what cannot be said. When children are invited to disclose what a work of art helps them feel, they must reach into their poetic capacities to find the words that will do the job.
9. The arts enable us to have experience we can have from no other source and through such experience to discover the range and variety of what we are capable of feeling.
10. The position the arts is given in the school curriculum or after school programme symbolises to the children what adults believe is important.

(adapted from Eisner, 2002)

Ideas for practice in providing art activities

When considering how to approach the use of art and art-making materials in after school settings, some of the following ideas on best practices may be helpful:

- ✓ Respect each child's abilities to create.
- ✓ Encourage a broad range of solutions to problems.
- ✓ Let children do their own work and make their own decisions.
- ✓ Do not over direct; art where children have little or no voice is of little value to children or to their artistic development.
- ✓ Ensure that the inspirations for guiding groups of children are appropriate for the age level of the children and are open ended so that children can create meaningful work.
- ✓ Keep materials simple and use them in experimental ways.
- ✓ Never use printed sheets for children to colour in the drawings of others. Instead, allow children to draw for themselves.
- ✓ Vary materials and approaches to creating to enliven the programme.
- ✓ Encourage children to respect materials and use and care for tools appropriately.
- ✓ Give children choices.
- ✓ Make children responsible for cleaning up their work areas.
- ✓ Instruction for complex processes is appropriate, but the content of the pieces made using the processes should come from the children.
- ✓ Encourage constructive responses to work between and among children.
- ✓ Model encouraging behaviours toward children as they work and in response to the work created.
- ✓ If possible, put away work in process and invite children to continue with their work for several sessions.
- ✓ Establish guidelines for what is acceptable and unacceptable in both content and behaviours.

- ✓ Ensure that the environment created by adults is supportive and safe for the children, free of opportunities for ridicule, and encourages a variety of expressions.
- ✓ When new processes or tools are introduced, show children how to use them through demonstration and how to care for them.
- ✓ In a large setting, several smaller centres, such as a painting centre, a drawing centre, and a construction area may produce more positive results than large group instruction.
- ✓ If possible, one member of staff should be qualified in some art form to give focus to the planning and implementation of art instruction and creation of art learning centres.

(adapted from Erikson Institute, 2004)

Arts and crafts

An arts and crafts programme can be as simple as a drawing centre or as complex as a guided instruction in a variety of art forms such as ceramics, printmaking or painting (NAEA, 2008). Historically, craft-related activities such as woodworking, carpentry, basket weaving, beadwork, clay work and drawing were often included in post-World War II after school programmes (Halpern, 2002).

Example of an arts and crafts activity

ACTIVITY: Calligraphy

Suitable to Support:	**Areas of development:** Social, intellectual, emotional and language development **Subjects in the primary school curriculum:** English, History, Visual Arts
Age Range Suitability:	Older age range
Space Required:	Table top
Equipment and Materials:	Although calligraphy pens with slanted tips can be used, children can practise with markers, pencils, or regular pens.
Course of Action:	Encourage children's creativity by allowing them to create their own calligraphic alphabet. Search for examples of beautiful penmanship in books, on the internet, in art, in graffiti, on postcards or anywhere expressive lettering is found. Using the examples as inspiration, children can create their own unique alphabet. Let the children create art projects such as nameplates and poems using their personal alphabet.

Arts and drama/music

Arts education enables the child to express ideas, feelings and experiences in language, gesture and movement. Together with music and the visual arts, the use of drama in the classroom encourages the child to express ideas that are creative and explorative.

Arts learning experiences can alter the attitudes of children toward themselves and each other. For example, those involved in theatre arts (acting techniques, dramatic or musical theatre production) over time often show gains not only in reading ability, but also in self-control and motivation, and in empathy and tolerance for others. Arts activities can provide for the experience of a shared purpose and team spirit, for example, to perform in a music group or a play.

Engaging children in activities related to music, either listening and enjoying it or more direct participation through music making such as singing or on instruments, affords them opportunities that can meet their developmental needs. Creating music is also a pleasurable experience that may extend through their lifetime, even to a future career behind or in front of the music scenes.

In a study involving 96 four-year-olds in joint music making, for example, Kirschner and Tomasello (2010) found that children significantly increased subsequent spontaneous cooperative and helpful behaviour, relative to a carefully matched control condition with the same level of social and linguistic interaction but no music.

> Musical play, partly as a consequence of its powerfully social and interactive characteristics, supports a wide range of children's developing abilities, including those related to social interaction, communication, emotion understanding, memory, self-regulation and creativity. *(Pound, 2010)*

Examples of drama and music activities

ACTIVITY: Drama

Suitable to Support:	**Areas of development:** Physical, social, intellectual, emotional and language development **Subjects in the primary school curriculum:** English, Gaeilge, Visual Arts, Drama, Music, Physical Education, Social, Personal and Health Education
Age Range Suitability:	All
Space Required:	Large space, indoor or outdoor
Equipment and Materials:	Various
Course of Action:	All aspects of drama can be covered with various talents being explored. Examples include role play with and without scripts, playwriting, costuming, make-up, scenery, props, music and song composition, directing, movement choreography, improvisation. Let the children choose their own roles. Hold an 'in-service' production once a month or once a term.

ACTIVITY: Music experiences

Suitable to Support:	**Areas of development:** Physical, social, intellectual, emotional and language development **Subjects in the primary school curriculum:** Drama, Music, Physical Education, Social, Personal and Health Education
Age Range Suitability:	All
Space Required:	Various
Equipment and Materials:	Various
Course of Action:	There are numerous ways to experience music. Present various ways for children to enjoy and familiarise themselves with music. Music appreciation – listen to all different types of music such as classical, jazz, sea shanties, chamber music, orchestral, etc. Make lists of all of the various types of music and encourage discussion after listening to each. Instrument playing – see what is available in your community or among parents.

- band
- chorus
- composition
- dance
- singing
- note reading
- rapping
- taping
- carol singing

Technology

Technology is now such an important part of children's everyday lives that an after school service without it would be completely out of touch with their experience outside of the service.

Children in families with fewer resources may have little or no access to the latest technologies. It is important that after school services provide opportunities for exploring digital cameras, audio and video recorders, printers, and other technologies to children who otherwise might not have access to these tools. Well-designed computer games offering open-ended or problem-solving challenges to children are likely to share some of the benefits of problem-solving or constructional play with objects (Siraj-Blatchford and Whitebread, 2003).

Passive use of technology, however, and any type of screen media is an inappropriate replacement for active play, engagement with other children and interactions with adults. Educators who are very familiar with digital technology and who are grounded in child development theory and practice have the knowledge, skills and experience to select and use technology tools and interactive media that suit the ages and developmental levels of the children, and they know when and how to integrate technology into the programme effectively. Educators who lack technology skills and digital literacy are at risk of making inappropriate choices and using technology with young children in ways that can negatively impact learning and development (NAEYC and Fred Rogers Center, 2012).

> If the amount of time children spend playing outdoors has declined, this appears to be a result of changing attitudes to risk in urban environments rather than to an increase in video game technology. However, excessive, solitary screen-based play in early childhood is recognised to be problematic if it limits the development of children's other play skills, and links have been established in this case with difficulties in social development, obesity and so on. *(Whitebread, 2012)*

School-age children who are proficient in using technology can harness these tools to communicate ideas and feelings, investigate the environment, and locate information. As devices and applications (apps) become more user-friendly, younger children are becoming increasingly proficient in using technological tools to accomplish a task such as making a picture, playing a game, recording a story, taking a photo, making a book, or engaging in other age-appropriate learning activities.

Concerns that television viewing and computer games are taking time away from physical activities and outdoor play can be offset by the use of technology and interactive media that encourage outdoor exploration and documentation of nature. Screen media can expose children to animals, objects, people, landscapes, activities, and places that they cannot experience in person. Technology can also help children save, document, revisit, and share their real-life experiences through images, stories, and sounds.

Examples of activities using technology

ACTIVITY: Film making

Suitable to Support:	**Areas of development:** Physical, social, intellectual, emotional and language development **Subjects in the primary school curriculum:** English, Gaeilge, Visual Arts, Drama, Music, Social, Personal and Health Education
Age Range Suitability:	All
Space Required:	Computer
Equipment and Materials:	Digital camera, computer
Course of Action:	Have children capture events with both stills and video. Using Windows Movie Maker or another similar programme, encourage children to sequence them onto the movie programme. Add captions, titles and credits, music and voiceovers.

After School and Safe Internet Use

An agreed policy approach promotes good practice and safe, responsible use of the internet. While the web can be a great learning tool, it also contains some dangerous content and can be abused. An Acceptable Use Policy (AUP) is a document, signed by the children and their parents/carers, detailing the ways in which the Internet, mobile phones and related devices can and cannot be used in your service.

An AUP which addresses all rights, privileges, responsibilities and sanctions associated with computer use is essential. It also provides a service with some legal protection. Like all policies it needs to be effectively implemented, monitored, reviewed and regularly updated.

Who to involve in developing a policy

All service stakeholders should be involved in the formation of an internet Acceptable Use Policy (AUP) – educators, children, parents and boards of management. An after school educator can lead the process of setting up a co-ordinating group or committee which can begin the process. To be effective, the AUP needs to be tailored to the individual needs of your service and not just copied from somewhere else.

What are the issues?

It is important that many issues be considered, like how email use will be managed, access to social networks such as Facebook and likely sanctions to be imposed for breaches of policy. Including a section on rules governing the plagiarising and use of other people's work online is a good idea, as is securing a commitment from children that they keep personal information private while online. Rules governing the reporting of cyberbullying as well as attempts to access inappropriate material are particularly important areas. Further information and resources are available on these and other issues relevant to after schools, on www.webwise.ie

Webwise AUP (Acceptable Usage Policy) Guidelines: developing internet policy in your school, from the National Centre for Technology in Education (2012) can be downloaded free from www.webwise.ie/WebwiseAUPGuidelines.pdf

It provides some guidance in putting together a good AUP, and also has a sample AUP, permission slip, checklist, and other sample correspondence.

Natural Environments

The elimination of natural environments from the immediate living environment and a reduction in the freedom of movement are depleting the opportunities for contact with nature. It is possible that children cannot recover from stress as quickly when there are not enough green spaces in their surroundings, and stressful experiences early in life can have a long-term effect on their behaviour and health.

(Health Council of the Netherlands and Dutch Advisory Council for Research on Spatial Planning, Nature and the Environment, 2004)

The growth of virtual, as opposed to reality-based play, as well as other factors such as urban living, reduction in access to wild spaces and safety concerns is having a profound effect on children's lives. Outdoor experiences for children are becoming less and less routine and, as a result, dramatic and worrying consequences are emerging such as physical health problems including obesity, mental health problems, and children's growing inability to assess risks to themselves and others.

Nature Deficit Disorder, the phrase that has come to define the problem, describes the human costs of alienation from nature, among them: diminished use of the senses, attention difficulties, and higher rates of physical and emotional illnesses (Louv, 2005).

> …children are also missing out on the pure joy of connection with the natural world; and as a result, as adults they lack an understanding of the importance of nature to human society. If we do not reverse this trend towards a sedentary, indoor childhood – and soon – we risk storing up social, medical and environmental problems for the future. *Moss, 2012*

We know that in the UK:

- Fewer than a quarter of children regularly use their local 'patch of nature', compared to over half of all adults when they were children.
- Fewer than one in ten children regularly play in wild places; compared to almost half a generation ago.
- Children spend so little time outdoors that they are unfamiliar with some of the commonest wild creatures. According to a 2008 National Trust survey, one in three could not identify a magpie; half could not tell the difference between a bee and a wasp; yet nine out of ten could recognise a Dalek. (Moss, 2012)

Think about

- Do you think a lack of natural experiences is a relevant issue in Ireland?
- What activities could you introduce into your service to counteract this?

Remember the powerful feeling of being at the top of a tree, the exhilaration of rolling down a hill, or the sense of accomplishment from turning the earth using a real shovel? The natural world offers children open space with grass, hills, sky, and trees that call out to their innate quest for action, adventure, and competence using their bodies. Children deserve and benefit from these experiences. Yet because much of what goes on outdoors involves risk, we are limiting these opportunities in children's lives.

(World Forum Foundation: Nature Action Collaborative for Children and Community Playthings, 2004)

How children learn in natural environments

Tim Gill, one of the UK's leading commentators on childhood, says that, unlike designed playgrounds, natural environments allow children to play in far more varied and imaginative ways. Compared with playgrounds, the natural world has lots of places to hide and explore, it is untidy – which may be off-putting for adults, but adds to its attraction for children – and it is dynamic, varying from day to day, season to season and year to year. Children also have greater freedom outdoors to shout and make noise, run around and make larger, more expansive movements. Outdoor learning gives children direct experience, making subjects more interesting and enhancing their understanding. It also enables them to develop the vital connections between the outside world and what educationalists call children's 'interior, hidden, affective world' (Robin Moore in Louv, 2005).

Children learn differently from play in natural environments, experiencing improvements in four specific ways:

1. Cognitive impacts (greater knowledge and understanding)
2. Affective impacts (attitudes, values, beliefs and self-perceptions)
3. Interpersonal and social impacts (communication skills, leadership and teamwork)
4. Physical and behavioural impacts (fitness, personal behaviours and social actions)

(Dillon, 2005)

Child psychologist Sigman found that children exposed to nature scored higher on concentration and self-discipline; improved their awareness, reasoning and observational skills; did better in reading, writing, maths, science and social studies; were better at working in teams; and showed improved behaviour overall (Sigman, 2007).

NOTE: Children who are provided with adequate chances in the after school to play outdoors will know more, understand more, feel better, behave better, work more cooperatively and are physically healthier simply by changing the environment in which they are learning.

Example of outdoor activities

ACTIVITY: Ducks in the rain

Suitable to Support:	**Areas of development:** Physical, social, intellectual, emotional and language development **Subjects in the primary school curriculum:** Mathematics, Science, Visual Arts, Drama, Music, Physical Education, Social, Personal and Health Education
Age Range Suitability:	All
Equipment and Materials:	Various
Course of Action:	Children love to play in the rain (it's the adults who don't). Ensure all are properly dressed and organise activities for the rain, e.g. paper boats on puddles, chalk art on wet paths, tubes and funnels to direct the water. You could also go for a walk and observe how rain forms on the path, how it drips off the leaves and runs down the bark of a tree. Gently pick up a rock and look underneath. Are there certain trees that provide more shelter from the rain than others? Measure the rainfall on different days and compare.

www.squidoo.com/raining

ACTIVITY: Insect observations

Suitable to Support:	**Areas of development:** Physical, social, intellectual, emotional and language development **Subjects in the primary school curriculum:** Geography, Science, Social, Personal and Health Education
Age Range Suitability:	All
Equipment and Materials:	Magnifying glass, clear containers
Course of Action:	Observing insects in their natural habitat is extremely interesting. Go on a safari around your building and establish where the habitats are. Make notes and draw the type of environment, e.g. web, under a rock. Identify, research, ask questions – What do they eat? Can they fly? What colour are they? How fast can they move? How many are there? – count at regular intervals. Photograph and display findings.

www.ehow.com/how_6581137_teach-young-kids-bugs-insects.html

http://notjustcute.com/2010/05/24/creating-preschool-entymologists-bringing-the-bugs-inside/

ACTIVITY: Star gazing

Suitable to Support:	**Areas of development:** Intellectual and language development **Subjects in the primary school curriculum:** Science, Visual Arts
Age Range Suitability:	All
Course of Action:	Use the early clear, dark winter evenings to examine the skies. Learn about constellation, stars and planets.

www.astronomy.ie/outreach.php

www.astronomy.ie/junior/SolarSystem.php

Moving the indoors outdoors

After school educators can enhance outdoor experiences further by providing high-quality, stimulating activities – many of which are usually provided indoors – outdoors. Educators can also bring the natural environment into the service, for example, using twigs, leaves, stones, mud and water in art activities.

Examples of activities that can be provided outdoors

ACTIVITY: Outdoor theatre

Suitable to Support:	**Areas of development:** Physical, social, intellectual, emotional and language development **Subjects in the primary school curriculum:** English, Gaeilge, History, Visual Arts, Drama, Music, Physical Education, Social, Personal and Health Education
Age Range Suitability:	All
Space Required:	Outdoor space
Equipment and Materials:	Various
Course of Action:	Taking drama outside encourages a larger than life experience. It gives children confidence to use louder voices, larger movements and to be more expressive. It is particularly good for the quieter, more reserved children.

ACTIVITY: Outdoor twister

Suitable to Support:	**Areas of development:** Physical, social, intellectual, emotional and language development **Subjects in the primary school curriculum:** Physical Education, Social, Personal and Health Education
Age Range Suitability:	All
Space Required:	Small outdoor area
Equipment and Materials:	Coloured paint, twister wheel
Course of Action:	Paint coloured spots on to a grassed area. The bigger you make it, the more children can play at the same time.

http://pinterest.com/pin/127367495681061025/

Caring for the environment

Children are naturally curious and open to learning about nature, but in an increasingly urban society we often need to consciously create opportunities to help children bond with nature and learn about the environment. Being outdoors gives children a natural opportunity to learn to appreciate and care for nature and the environment.

After school services are ideally placed to help children to develop environmentally-friendly values and behaviours, help them to understand the environmental challenges we face, and answer their questions about the threat of climate change. Educators can explore issues such as our carbon footprint and the importance of recycling and renewable energy sources.

Children can be very quick to grasp problems and are able to apply great energy and enthusiasm to putting solutions in place. The good thing about environmental problems is that we know what many of the solutions are, and many of them are very simple. Indeed, children are often reported to be better at getting going with environmental solutions than adults are.

Examples of activities that teach about caring for the environment

ACTIVITY: Adopting 1 – Adopt a garden, wasteland, street, stream, etc.

Suitable to Support:	**Areas of development:** Physical, social, intellectual, emotional and language development **Subjects in the primary school curriculum:** English, Geography, Science, Visual Arts, Social, Personal and Health Education
Age Range Suitability:	Older age group
Space Required:	Varied
Equipment and Materials:	Various
Course of Action:	Have a look around your local area. Are there unused wastelands or elderly people who are not able to look after their gardens? Is there rubbish littering your street or does a local stream need cleaning up? Ask children and parents for ideas and together draw up a plan of how you could help to tackle these issues. Safety must be a serious consideration when selecting and planning such activities.

Conclusion

"I heard a great story recently, I love telling it, of a little girl who was in a drawing lesson, she was 6 and she was at the back, drawing, and the teacher said this little girl hardly paid attention, and in this drawing lesson she did. The teacher was fascinated and she went over to her and she said, "What are you drawing?" and the girl said, "I'm drawing a picture of God." And the teacher said, "But nobody knows what God looks like." And the girl said, "They will in a minute."

(Sir Ken Robinson, 2008)

After school services offer a unique space – a space where children have the opportunity to relax, to develop new interests and skills, and to explore familiar activities, all at their own pace. After school educators must provide quality programmes that are balanced within a welcoming environment where children feel valued and are offered experiences that enrich their wellbeing and development as they emerge from their early years into the wider world around them.

After School: Providing an Inspirational After School Programme of Activities for 4–12 Year Olds endeavours to support after school educators in developing a quality programme of activities. Provision of a quality programme must be informed by an awareness of children's rights and individual needs. Within this context, this publication examines after school provision and guides the educator to carry out their particular role of supporting and stimulating children's holistic development.

Suggestions are made in this publication for both children's individual needs and for group activities, including general activities and activities in particular areas such as the arts, technology and music. Accommodating the typical mixed age groups that attend after schools is also discussed. Ideas are given too for activities that offer children the chance to develop civic engagement through community-based projects.

Special issues, such as transitions, homework and parental engagement, are discussed in order to develop an understanding of the wider issues involved in providing after school services.

Many after school educators in Ireland work to deliver services of a high standard. We hope that this resource supports those involved in service delivery currently or in the future to further consider and enhance their role in providing inspirational after school programmes for children aged 4–12 years.

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Sources of Further Information

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E: resources@barnardos.ie
W: www.barnardos.ie

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E: info@bccn.ie
W: www.bccn.ie

Childminding Ireland
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Kilcoole,
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W: www.childminding.ie

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Government Publications Sales Office
T: 01 6476834
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Health Service Executive
T: 1850 241 850
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National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA)
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Contact details for City/County Childcare committees can be found on www.pobal.ie/childcare

Appendix 1

The Primary School Curriculum

The primary school curriculum is presented in six subject areas: language, mathematics, social environmental and scientific education (SESE), arts education, physical education, social, personal and health education (SPHE). It comprises of 11 subjects:

- English
- Gaeilge
- Mathematics
- History
- Geography
- Science
- Visual Arts
- Drama
- Music
- Physical Education
- Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE)

Having an understanding of the primary school curriculum will help with the types of activities offered, the way in which they are presented, the language used and how various experiences will support children's homework and learning.

Appendix 2

Síolta Principles

The following principles from Síolta, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education can also be applied to children aged 4–12.

1. Early childhood is a significant and distinct time in life that must be nurtured, respected, valued and supported in its own right.
2. The child's individuality, strengths, rights and needs are central in the provision of quality early childhood experiences.
3. Parents/carers are the primary educators of the child and have a pre-eminent role in promoting her or his well-being, learning and development.
4. Responsive, sensitive and reciprocal relationships, which are consistent over time, are essential to the well-being, learning and development of the young child.
5. Equality is an essential characteristic of quality early childhood care and education. Quality early childhood settings acknowledge and respect diversity and ensure that all children and families have their individual, personal, cultural and linguistic identity validated.
6. The physical environment of the young child has a direct impact on her or his well-being, learning and development.
7. The safety, welfare and well-being of all children must be protected and promoted in all early childhood environments.
8. The role of the adult in providing quality early childhood experiences is fundamental.
9. The provision of quality early childhood experiences requires cooperation, communication and mutual respect.
10. Pedagogy in early childhood is expressed by curricula or programmes of activities which take a holistic approach to the development and learning of the child and reflect the inseparable nature of care and education.
11. Play is central to the well-being, development and learning of the young child.

Appendix 3

Developing a Homework Policy with All Involved

The following questions are provided to assist after school services in considering the opinions of all involved when setting about preparing for the development of a centre policy on homework:

Questions to ask children

1. When do you do your homework now?
2. Do you have the time you need to do it?
3. Do you have the things and the help you need to do it?
4. Would you like to do homework at the after school service?
5. What are the advantages and disadvantages of doing your homework at the service?
6. What's easy about doing your homework? What do you need help with?

Questions to ask the after school educators

1. What are the advantages and disadvantages of providing homework assistance?
2. Would it benefit the children to do homework at the service?
3. Would it benefit families?
4. How would this affect your job?
5. Would you feel comfortable helping children with their homework?
6. What kind of training do you think would help you to provide quality homework assistance to children?

Questions to ask parents/families

1. When does the child do their homework now?
2. How does that affect your family?
3. Would you like them to do it at the service? What are the advantages and disadvantages of this for your child? For you as a family?
4. What kind of help would your child need?
5. What can be done to create and maintain good communication between educators at the service, you the family and the school about homework?

Questions to ask school staff

1. Do you think that after school educators should provide homework assistance?
2. What resources could you provide to support homework assistance (e.g. communication about children, learning goals etc)?
3. What are the schools learning themes that can be reinforced through activities in the after school programme?

Questions to consider in a team discussion

1. Should the service offer homework help? What are the advantages and disadvantages for children, families and educators? What do parents want? What do the children want? What are the views of the local schools on this matter?
2. Should every child be required to work on homework? Or should the schedule be arranged so that children can choose when and if they would like to work on homework?
3. How much time should be set aside for homework? Should children have to complete homework?
4. Where can we locate a homework area?
5. Will we just offer the time and place to do homework, or will we offer homework assistance? Who will offer it? (Centre staff, volunteers, tutors…)
6. What training and supervision will they need?
7. What resources are needed?
8. How can good communication be maintained between families, school and centre staff if homework is to be done at the centre?
9. Will homework assistance compromise other programme goals?

Appendix 4

The New York State School-Age Care Credential Competency Standards

1. Skill area: Professionalism

1–1 Demonstrates knowledge of regulations and standards.

1–2 Views self as professional in current work with children.

1–3 Has and is continually developing competencies in child development, programming, communication skills and other topics related to children.

2. Skill area: Child development knowledge

2–1 Uses systematic, objective observations to anticipate individual children's needs as well as the needs their developmental stage might predict.

2–2 Demonstrates reasonable expectations for what children of various developmental stages are able to do physically, emotionally, socially, cognitively and creatively.

2–3 Plans, organises and provides programming that meets the developmental needs of children.

2–4 Includes children of all ability levels, including those with special needs

3. Skill area: Safety

3–1 Follows … safety regulations as well as programme policies and procedures designed to keep children safe.

3–2 Actively works to prevent injuries and harm to children.

3–3 Prepares to act quickly if an accident or injury should occur.

3–4 Responds quickly and calmly in the event of an emergency.

4. Skill area: Health

4–1 Follows the required regulations that address health, sanitation, and food handling practices.

4–2 Models and teaches habits that promote good health and nutrition.

4–3 Maintains and makes accessible supplies that help children practice healthy habits.

4–4 Acts to detect and prevent child maltreatment.

4–5 Maintains a high standard of cleanliness and sanitation practices.

4–6 Is prepared to deal with medical emergencies or illness.

4–7 Provides healthful, nutritious and pleasant snack and food experiences for children.

4–8 Provides resources on health and hygiene such as magazines, books, pamphlets and visiting health professionals.

5. Skill area: Self

5–1 Respects the individuality of children.

5–2 Helps children identify, plan, and pursue their own interests and talents.

5–3 Helps children learn about and appreciate a variety of cultures and ethnic groups, including their own.

5–4 Provides opportunities for children to experience success and encourages them to see and acknowledge their own progress and successes.

5–5 Encourages children to solve their own problems, intervening only when it seems they cannot find a solution or when someone might get hurt.

5–6 Involves children in activities that help them learn positive social values.

6. Skill area: Guidance

6–1 Creates an environment of respect where it is not acceptable to hurt anyone.

6–2 Guides children's behaviour in a positive manner.

6–3 Uses positive problem solving and problem prevention methods.

6–4 Follows a daily schedule that allows children freedom within structure.

6–5 Helps children develop and practice positive conflict management skills.

6–6 Communicates discipline policies clearly.

7. Skill area: Out-of-school environments

7–1 Separates interest areas so that simultaneous activities of different natures can occur.

7–2 Provides space in which children can enjoy quiet and privacy.

7–3 Provides space for children to engage in active play.

7–4 Provides materials which engage children's interests.

7–5 Establishes schedules and routines that give children freedom within structure.

7–6 Creates a systematic storage plan and area.

7–7 Demonstrates an ability to articulate and advocate for positive spaces for children.

8. Skill area: Creative

8–1 Models and offers enthusiastic leadership for creative thinking and projects.

8–2 Creates an environment that encourages children's creativity.

8–3 Provides sufficient time in the daily schedule for children to make plans and carry them out.

8–4 Introduces new, creative processes, ideas, and activities to children.

8–5 Encourages children to develop their creative abilities.

9. Skill area: Physical

9–1 Provides a variety of materials, equipment, and activities.

9–2 Provides space and time for children to engage in active play every day.

9–3 Provides leadership and enthusiasm that encourages children's physical activity.

9–4 Provides developmentally appropriate activities.

9–5 Makes sure that children take breaks from vigorous activity and drink plenty of water to prevent dehydration.

10. Skill area: Cognitive

10–1 Creates an environment where learning means fun.

10–2 Encourages children to be in charge of their own learning.

10–3 Encourages children to develop their inter- and intra-personal intelligences (knowing themselves and others).

10–4 Taps into children's desire to explore adult skills to make and produce things.

10–5 Helps children develop their language skills.

10–6 Balances children's academic needs with their need to relax, learn new skills, get exercise, and develop social skills.

10–7 Helps children develop curiosity about science and the natural world.

10–8 Exposes children to experiences involving new information, ideas, and concepts.

11. Skill area: Communication

11–1 Models positive communication skills in interactions with other staff members, parents, families and children.

11–2 Provides materials that encourage language development activities.

11–3 Builds opportunities for children to develop and use communication skills in all programme activities, not just those specifically related to reading, writing, and speaking.

11–4 Asks open-ended questions to encourage children to think and express their ideas.

11–5 Observes children's nonverbal cues and uses these cues to ask questions about their ideas and feelings.

11–6 Introduces complex communication skills such as assertiveness, conflict resolution, and refusal skills as children develop and demonstrate a grasp of more basic skills.

12. Skill area: Social positive… community

12–1 Models positive ways to interact with people of all ages.

12–2 Employs observation skills to understand the social needs of each child.

12–3 Helps children develop and practice the skills to get along with others.

13. Skill area: Families

13–1 Demonstrates an understanding that it is important to establish a relationship with children's parents / families as they are the primary caretakers of their child and the most important individuals in a child's life.

13–2 Develops a system of regular communication with parents and families.

13–3 Provides information on the programme and programme activities as they relate to the developmental stages of children.

13–4 Encourages parent/family involvement in working with children in the programme.

13–5 Works constructively with parents to resolves behaviour issues.

13–6 Serves as a resource to families.

14. Skill area: Operational programme management

14–1 Engages parents and families in developing programme for children.

14–2 Works with staff to ensure programme excellence.

14–3 Develops a responsive, high-quality programme.

14–4 Demonstrates understanding of programme policies.

14–5 Manages business operations.

(After School Works!, 2012)

Appendix 5

Activities on CD

Section 1 – Everyday Opportunities

Art and craft
Ball games
Basket weaving
Bead craft
Board games
Books 1 – Reading
Books 2 – Writing
Books 3 – Binding
Books 4 – Browsing and library selections
Building
Calligraphy
Card games
Card-making 1 – Occasions and holidays
Card-making 2 – Playing cards
Card-making 3 – Postcards
Carpentry
Cat's Cradle and string games
Cartooning
Charades
Collections
Comic book writing
Computers
Crocheting
Door design and decoration
Design activities – sports cars, costumes, T-shirts, skateboards, hair styles, trainers
Diary keeping
Encyclopaedia browsing
Fabric design with batik, crayon, paint, sewing, tie-dye
Face painting
Felt board fantasies
Frisbee games
Games – make up new games, make up new rules for old games, try international games, share ideas
Hopscotch
Hula hoops
Imaginary play
Jacks
Jewellery making
Juggling
Knot tying
Leather work
Lip-synching
Mask making
Mime
Mind games
Mobile making
Mud-pie sculpture
Origami
Pavement art
Pavement games
Paper and pencil games
Poster making
Printing
Paper aeroplanes
Paper dolls
Quilling
Rap sessions or round table discussion
Reading and book browsing
Reading to others
Riddles and jokes
Rock painting
Sand environments
Sand painting
Scrapbook making
Shadows
Shell art
Skipping rope games
Snow globes
Snow play
Table top games
Table top theatres
Velcro-art story boards
Velcro dart ball game
Water activities
Weaving
Word games
Zany creations

Section 2 – Experiential or Project-based Learning Opportunities

After School Advisory Council
Astrology
Astronomy
Backyard camping
Backyard cinema
Balloons 1 – basketball
Balloons 2 – sculpture
Balloons 3 – water balloons
Birds 1 – bird feeding
Birds 2 – bird feeder construction
Birds 3 – birdhouse construction
Birds 5 – bird sound recording
Birds 4 – bird watching and recording
Birthday celebrations for children, family members, famous people, staff
Body fitness
Bread making
Bubble-making, blowing
Buddy systems
Bulletin board designing
Campfires
Candle making
Cardboard box carpentry
Cloud watching
Communication methods: sign language, Braille, Morse code, semaphore
Compost creation
Current events discussion
Dancing with and without music: disco, ballroom, street, country, modern, ethnic, folk, jazz, breakdance, round, square, tap, social,set, line, original choreographies
Debating
Drama
Ducks in the rain
Elections
Environmental projects
Fashions design, shows
Film making
Film and slide shows
Financial management – money, bank accounts, budgeting, investing, currencies
Fingerprinting
First Aid
Flower arranging
Flower pressing
Food preparation
Fortune-cookie making
Gardening – planning, growing vegetables, flowers, herbs, trees, mosses, ferns, indoor and outdoor plants, building a green house, lawn care
Genealogy – coats of arms, family trees, treasures, interviews, pictures, meaning of family names, family stories
History with timelines
History of a particular time period
Holiday celebrations – dances, decorations, costumes, customs, food, songs
Ice play – painting, ice sculpture, ice cube block building, cracking, skating, sliding
Insect hotel
Insect observations
Interest clubs
Jobs in the after school service
Kite construction
Kite flying
Knitting
Lawn bowling
Library – borrowing, reading, research
Life skills
Map activities
Microscopic work
Miniature golf course construction
Model building kits
Music experiences
Music journalism
Obstacle course
Orienteering
Outdoor theatre
Outdoor twister
Pavement café
Pavement fundraiser
Pantomime
Parachute play
Personal physical improvement
Pet experiences
Photography
Picnic – organisation skills
Play area – minibeasts
Play area – pond
Poetry

Puppetry
Puzzles
Quoits
Role-play
Rope games
Rug making
Salt garden
Scarecrow making
Sculpture
Self-affirmation games
Set designs
Sewing
Sign language
Sing-a-longs
Sledging
Snowball targeting
Soap making
Sports
Spring cleaning
Sprouting seeds
Stage make-up
Star gazing
Stilt walking
Story telling
Story writing
Stuffed animal zoo
Sweep netting for insects
Swimming Spaghetti
Talent shows
Tee shirt design
Television
Terrarium – bottle gardens
Tent construction
Theme ideas
Time capsule creation
Treasure hunts
Trips
Trust games
Ventriloquism
Volcano simulation
Walking
Water pistol painting
Weather predicting
Weathervane making
Worm farming
Yo-yos

Section 3 – Community Service Learning Experiences

Adopting 1 – adopt a garden, wasteland, street, stream, etc.
Adopting 2 – adopt a grandparent
Adopting 3 – adopt an Irish speaker
Animal care at farms, animal homes, zoos
Art exhibitions
Berry picking
Bicycle repair, maintenance, riding, safety, trips, obstacle course
Community interviews
Community projects (exhibits, ethnic celebrations, street fairs, sport events)
Community visitors representing a variety of careers, talents, hobbies, ages, cultures
Concert-giving
Cross-generation partnerships with an adult friend – cook, bus driver, maintenance person, school principal, shopkeeper, artist, neighbour, etc.
Fairs – choose your own theme (animal, art, hobby, music, dance, food etc)
Family games, parties, picnics, suppers
Food tasting parties
Foreign culture and ethnic experiences (celebrations, cookery, discussions, dress, games)
Fundraising – community or special person or cause
Gift-making for family, friends, hospital or nursing home patients, homeless shelters, paediatric waiting rooms
History – school, community
Interviewing members of the community
Journalism
Leadership training skills
Litter clean up
Nature trail creation
Prevention programmes
Pen-pals
Scarecrow trail
Special days
Trail making
Toy lending library
Twinning with another after school service in the community, in another town or in another country