

## Glossary

**Active learning** involves children learning by doing, using their senses to explore and work with the objects and materials around them. Through these experiences, children develop the dispositions, attitudes and values, skills, knowledge, and understanding that will help them to grow as confident and competent learners.

**Adaptive devices** are any supports that help a child with a disability to increase, improve or maintain their ability to perform a task or to play or interact with others.

**Adult** refers to all those who care for and educate children from birth to six in Ireland. This includes parents/guardians and other significant adults in children's lives including practitioners, and other professionals, such as therapists and social workers.

**Aistear** is the early childhood curriculum framework in Ireland. Aistear is the Irish word for journey.

**Assessment** is the ongoing process of collecting, documenting, reflecting on, and using information to develop rich pictures of children as learners in order to support and enhance their future learning.

**Assistive communication technology** refers to any device which enables children with disabilities to communicate. It can range from a page with picture choices to sophisticated touch screen technology and speaking computers.

**Attention Deficit Hyperactive disorder (ADHD)** is a developmental disorder characterised by distractibility, impulsive behaviours and the inability to stay focused on tasks or activities.

**Autistic spectrum disorder** is a developmental disorder characterised by difficulties with social interaction, verbal and non-verbal communication, and unusual, repetitive behaviours, or severely limited interests and activities. These behaviours can range in impact from mild to disabling.

**Background** refers to family background, and to an individual's social and economic status.

**Buddy systems** involve children being assigned a 'special' friend to work and play with. (See also *Peer mentoring*.)

**Cerebral palsy** is an umbrella term for physical impairments affecting muscle control and movement. Children with it have problems with walking, eating, talking, and playing.

**Child-initiated activities** involve children having the opportunity to follow a particular interest or to be involved in deciding to do a particular activity.

**Childminder** refers to a person who looks after children either in his/her own home or in the children's home. A notified childminder is a person who has informed the local Health Service Executive (HSE) office of his/her work. Childminders who look after more than three pre-school children with the exception of those who mind multiple birth children or siblings are required by law to notify the HSE. Other childminders can voluntarily notify themselves.

**County and city childcare committees** were established nationally in 2001 to encourage the development of childcare locally. The 33 committees offer information and advice to the general public on a range of issues in relation to childcare. In particular they offer advice and support on applying for grants under national childcare schemes.

**Culture** refers to a sense of belonging, a shared understanding and identity. Everybody has a culture and it is the way we learn to think, communicate and behave. While we are born into a culture, it is nevertheless learned rather than given. (See also *Ethnicity*.) Culture evolves for individuals and communities over time.

**Curriculum** refers to all the experiences, formal and informal, planned and unplanned in the indoor and outdoor environment, which contribute to children's learning and development.

**Curriculum framework** is a scaffold or support which helps adults to develop a curriculum for the children in their setting.

**Cystic fibrosis** is an inherited disease which primarily affects the lungs and the digestive system. It causes a thick sticky mucus to be produced, blocking the bronchial tubes and preventing the body's natural enzymes from digesting food.

**Development** is the process by which a person changes and grows over time, influenced by both experiences and physiological changes. It has two dimensions: normative which follows a prescribed pattern and dynamic which depends on time and experience.

**Disability** refers to a physical, sensory or psychological impairment that can create challenges for children in taking part in everyday activities. Specific levels of learning disability have been classified (mild general learning disability, moderate general learning disability, severe/profound general learning disability).

**Discrimination** includes policies, practices or behaviours that lead to unfair treatment of individuals or groups on the basis of their identity or perceived identity. It can be intentional or unintentional, and may be direct or indirect.

**Dispositions** are enduring habits of mind and action. A disposition is the tendency to respond to situations in characteristic ways.

**Down syndrome** is a condition in which extra genetic material results in varying degrees of developmental delay, both psychological and physical. It is characterised by physical features and occasionally medical problems including heart problems.

**Dyspraxia** is a condition where children have difficulties with motor skills. They can appear clumsy and fall over often. They can also have difficulties with organisational and social skills.

**Early childhood** is the period that extends from birth to six years.

**Emergent literacy** is concerned with children developing a growing understanding of print and language as a foundation for reading and writing. Through play and hands-on experiences children see and interact with print as they build an awareness of its functions and conventions.

**Emergent speech** refers to all the sounds that children make to communicate from birth, including babbling, gurgling and words.

**Equality and Diversity** is important in early childhood. Diversity refers to individual and group differences in society. It is about welcoming and valuing difference as part of life. Promoting equality is about creating a fairer society where everyone can participate equally with the opportunity to fulfil his/her potential. It includes the importance of recognising different individual needs and ensuring equity, and is not about treating all children the same.

**Ethnicity** includes children's identification with a group having some or all of the following shared characteristics: culture, food, language, forms of dress, religion, lifestyle, traditions, customs, and nationality. An ethnic group is a group that sees itself or is regarded by others as a distinct community by virtue of certain characteristics that help distinguish it from other groups.

**Family support workers** are employed by the Health Service Executive and offer home based practical and emotional support to families during difficult times with a view to maintaining children at home with their families where possible.

**Full and part-time daycare** means an early childhood setting which offers a structured day care service for children. **Part-time daycare** is for more than three and a half hours but less than five hours per day, while full-time is for more than five hours. **Nurseries/crèches/childcare settings** are early childhood settings offering full and part-time daycare service for babies, toddlers and young children. The words nursery, crèche and childcare setting are often used interchangeably.

**Gaelscoil** is a school where the Irish language is the medium of teaching and is also the language of communication between teachers, children, parents, and boards of management. Irish may or may not be the home language of the children.

**Gaeltacht** is an area in Ireland where the majority of inhabitants are active Irish speakers.

**Gaeltacht school** is a school in an area defined as a Gaeltacht. In these areas Irish is typically the language of the home and is the medium of teaching in the school.

**Hands-on experiences** provide opportunities for children to touch, taste, smell, hear, see and do as they explore social, physical and imaginary worlds.

**Health Service Executive** is a government agency which provides services that improve, promote and protect the health and welfare of everyone living in Ireland.

**Higher-order thinking skills** involve manipulating ideas and information. These skills include problem-solving, predicting, critiquing, analysing, questioning, and justifying. Lower order thinking skills include remembering and learning facts. (See also *Thinking skills* below.)

**Home School Community Liaison** co-ordinators are employed by schools to build effective partnerships between parents and teachers in the interests of children's learning and development. Selected primary schools, largely in urban areas and to a lesser degree in rural areas, with high concentrations of children experiencing educational disadvantage are invited to join the scheme.

**Hypothesise** is to wonder why and make an informed suggestion about why something is the way it is.

**Individual education plan** is a written document prepared for a child with a specific special educational need. The plan uses information gathered through assessment to identify short-term and medium-term learning targets for the child. The plan outlines the learning activities, resources and supports necessary to achieve those targets.

**Information Communication Technology** refers to all devices that communicate and manipulate information. This includes mobile phones, computers, scanners, and digital cameras.

**Invented spelling** refers to children's attempts to spell, using the sound of the word (phonetic spelling). It is the practice of encouraging and facilitating beginning writers to write and spell as they want. The act of writing is more important than the correct spelling. Eventually the child will learn and use the correct form of spelling.

**Junior and senior infants** refer to children in the first two years of primary school.

**Key worker** refers to a specific member of staff allocated to a child in the early childhood setting. He/she provides continuity between home and setting and has a 'special' responsibility for the child and the relationship with the child's family.

**Learning** is a complex, dynamic and interactive process whereby knowledge, skills and attitudes are created through experience. Formal learning consists of learning experiences which have been planned for the child. Informal learning occurs on a continuous basis as the child interacts with the environment.

**Literacy** is more than having the ability to read and write. It is about helping children to communicate with others and to make sense of the world. It includes oral and written language and other sign systems such as mathematics, art, sound, pictures, Braille, sign language and music. Literacy also acknowledges the changing nature of information communication technology and the many forms of representation relevant to children including screen-based (electronic games, computers, the internet, television).

**Meta-cognitive skills** are used by children to think about their own learning. This can involve children remembering, reflecting on their work and the usefulness of their current strategies for a particular task or activity. It includes the ability to evaluate and to think about thinking.

**Muscular dystrophy** is the name for a group of inherited disorders in which muscles progressively weaken.

**Naíonra** is a pre-school service for young children delivered through the medium of the Irish language, under the guidance of stiúrthóirí (pre-school practitioners).

**New communities** are groups of people of a common heritage that have immigrated to Ireland in recent years.

**Numeracy** involves developing an understanding of numbers and mathematical concepts. (See also *Literacy*.)

**Out-of-home settings** include all settings with the exception of the child's own home that children under six years of age attend such as childminding settings, nurseries/crèches, naíonraí, playgroups, parent and toddler groups, pre-schools, hospitals, after schools, and primary schools.

**Parents** refers to the child's primary caregivers and educators. These include the father and mother and/or guardians.

**Parents' Associations** (also known as *Parents' Councils*) are a way for parents to be involved in their children's primary schools. They have two broad tasks - to support the Principal or the Board of Management on matters relating to the school, and to adopt a programme of activities which will promote the involvement of parents in the operation of the school, in consultation with the principal.

**Pedagogy** refers to all the practitioner's actions or work in supporting children's learning and development. It infers a negotiated, respectful and reflective learning experience for all involved. In *Aistear*, the terms 'pedagogy' and 'practice' are used interchangeably.

**Peer mentoring** involves children helping and supporting each other to share knowledge and skills, to teach each other, to work in pairs as appropriate, and to play together when they want to. (See also *Buddy system*.)

**Picture exchange communication systems** is a form of augmentative and alternative communication which can be used for children with autistic spectrum disorders. It involves using pictures instead of words to communicate.

**Portfolio** is a way of compiling information about children's learning and development. It can take the form of a folder, a scrapbook, a shoe, cereal or pizza box, or something similar in which objects made/drawn by the children, photographs, stories, notes, records of care, checklists, and test scores (where relevant), are kept. This collection tells the story of each child's learning journey—his/her efforts, progress and achievement over time.

**Practitioner** is the term used for all those working in a specialised manner with children in early childhood settings. Practitioners may have a diversity of experience and qualifications ranging from unaccredited through to post-graduate level. The term includes childminders and teachers in junior and senior infant classes in primary schools.

**Pre-reading or early reading skills** include those developed in young children which support the emergence of literacy. Such skills include knowing basic terminology and conventions in English and Irish books—author and illustrator, predicting the story from the pictures, going from left to right and from top to bottom, turning pages in sequence, using page numbers to locate a story and drawing attention to action words.

**Pre-school regulations** are formally known as the *Child Care (Pre-School Services) Regulations 2006*. These revised regulations were developed under *Part VII of the Child Care Act, 1991*. They require minimum standards for early childhood services and oblige providers covered by the Act to notify the Health Service Executive of their service and to be available for inspection. Regulation 5 emphasises facilitating each child's learning, development and well-being by providing appropriate learning opportunities, experiences, activities, and interactions.

**Primary school** is the setting children of school going age attend. While compulsory education begins in Ireland at age 6 years, approximately half of all 4-year-olds and 95 % of 5-year-olds start school before the compulsory school age.

**Primary School Curriculum** is the curriculum used in all primary schools in Ireland. It was developed by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) and launched in 1999. It is presented in 6 curriculum areas comprising 11 subjects. The NCCA reviews the curriculum on an on-going basis.

**Problem-solving** refers to children's ability to overcome obstacles that they meet while playing and undertaking activities. (See also *Thinking skills*.) A problem-solving approach in the context of social conflicts, involves asking children what happened or what the problem is, restating the problem, helping children to find a solution, providing subsequent support and ensuring all involved are supported, comforted and reassured.

**Pro-social behaviour** describes any action that benefits another individual. The behaviours include helping, comforting and sharing. It involves the ability to connect with others in a meaningful way.

**Racism** is a specific form of discrimination and exclusion. It involves a pattern of attitudes and behaviours grounded in the belief that one group of people, defined by race, skin colour, nationality, ethnicity or cultural identity, is inherently superior to others.

**Scaffolding** describes the process by which adults (and more capable peers) support and guide children's learning, enabling children to reach the next level of ability, beyond their own personal capability at that particular time.

**Scribe** is the role played by adults or older children when they model writing by recording on paper children's own words, and then reading back to the children what they said.

**Sensory impairment** refers to a problem with the visual and auditory senses.

**Sessional setting** is an early childhood service which offers a planned programme of activities to young children for less than three and a half hours per day. It includes playgroups, playschools, pre-schools and naíonraí (Irish medium pre-schools).

**Shared reading** is an interactive process in which an adult or an older child reads a story to one child or a group of children. All participants take turns in reading or telling the story.

**Síolta** is the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education in Ireland. It was developed in consultation with the early childhood sector by the Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education (CECDE) in 2006. It is a quality assurance programme designed to support practitioners to improve their practice in all areas of service delivery in settings where children from birth to six years spend time out of their homes.

**Spatial awareness** involves children being aware of themselves and their bodies in space and knowing they can move themselves and objects. Spatial skills include fitting things together and taking them apart, lining things up, surrounding or containing things, building, filling and emptying, looking at things from different physical perspectives, being able to recognise distance in two dimensional images, such as photos or paintings. This helps children understand concepts like over/under, near/far, up/down, and in/out.

**Special educational need** refers to a limitation in the ability of a person to benefit from or participate in education due to a continuing sensory/physical/learning disability, mental health or other condition.

**Special education settings** are developed specifically to support children with special educational needs. The settings include special schools, special classes, special units, and resource rooms.

**Special needs assistants** (SNAs) provide one-to-one support and assistance to children with special educational needs in an educational context.

**Spina bifida** is a defect in which the spine is malformed before birth. It causes varying degrees of disability and in severe cases can result in paralysis.

**Stereotype** is an over-simplified generalisation or widely held assumption about a particular group, creating false expectations that individual members of the group will conform to certain (often negative) traits, behaviours or characteristics.

**Thinking skills** include questioning (babies having their curiosity interpreted by attentive adults, and when older asking questions); making connections (between people, places and things); reasoning (working things out and later explaining); evaluating (reviewing what they learned or have done); problem-solving (the learner recognising something can be changed and that they have the ability to do it), and creative thinking (seeing many different ways of doing, exploring, discovering, finding out about the world).

**Travellers** are an indigenous minority documented as being part of Irish society for centuries. Travellers have a long shared history, cultural values, language, customs, and traditions which make them a self-defined group, and one which is recognisable and distinct. Their culture and way of life, of which nomadism (moving from one place to another) is an important factor, distinguishes them from the settled population. Travellers may or may not live a nomadic lifestyle. Trailer is the name given to the mobile home that some Traveller families live in.

**Working theories** are the ideas children develop about how the world works. These theories develop in response to children's own questions: what? why? when? where? and who? These theories are developed by children who are given opportunities to solve problems, to explore and who are supported to access appropriate information. They learn to be creative and adventurous, and to make decisions about themselves as learners.