

## Introduction

In Attendance: Teresa Howes, Gemma Freeman and Emily Barnes

Details: We decided to run our workshops all in one day between the hours of 9am and 6pm in The Hilton Hotel in Kilmainham, Dublin 8. We decided to run workshops under two blanket age groups, 3-6 years and 7-10. We also decided to run separate English and Irish language workshops, depending on the fluency of the children in attendance. We decided that for the younger group we should focus on the Alphabet Poster and begin work on handwriting recognition through the skiing activity. With the older group we decided that it was a good idea to bring them through the alphabet poster to start with and then move onto the handwriting practice. For both groups after they had become tired with the exercises we allowed some freestyle drawing time where they could have the opportunity to draw whatever came to their head at that moment.

We ran the first workshop from 9am to 11am for 3-6 year olds but, nobody showed up, so we used this time as a practice session for ourselves to get warmed up and further practice the coordination of Emily's voice and my movements during the Irish language alphabet poster.

Who were the children: I did some recruiting for the workshops through Ballyfermot Gymnastics, with whom I am a volunteer and I also reached out to close friends on Facebook. Both Gemma and Emily recruited from friends and family. The response was hugely encouraging for future workshops, but due to school commitments and holidays the attendance for these workshops was quite limited.

## The workshops

The next session was from 11:15 to 13:15 for 7-10 year olds. For this session we only had one child. This was a challenge on many levels. The child's name was Isabelle and she was 7 years old and attended an Irish speaking school. We decided not to cancel the session, because this would be our first attempt at the Irish alphabet poster and it would be a shame to waste the opportunity. Isabelle was uncomfortable to start with, but we decided to sit on the floor and her grandmother stayed in the room with us so she gradually felt at ease with us. After this initial hurdle she then began to take control of the activities, including us in her games and ended up not wanting to leave.

What went wrong: Taking her by herself was hard for both her and us because, firstly she was quite a social child and would have loved other children there with her. Secondly, it put quite a bit of pressure on us to keep her entertained and keep her as interested as possible.

What went right: I know that when meeting a child for the first time its important not to dominate them so as to put them at ease with the situation and in order to do this I always lower myself so I'm the same height or smaller than them. Myself and Emily sat on the floor for the whole time, and Isabelle preferred to stand until she felt confident, then she sat on a chair and then eventually she joined us on the floor. It turned out that Isabelle loved anything to do with arts and crafts and so when we introduced the handwriting activity she was in her element. We turned the activity into a race where we each had a character trace and we timed each other as we drove around the tracks in our chosen vehicles.

What could I have done better: It would have been ideal to have had more children for Isabelle to interact with, but I think maybe if we all sat in chairs to start with, this might have been more of a half way point and she would have felt more comfortable quicker.

What can I do in the future: I think I should have prepared for spontaneous activities that occurred as a result of creating the colourful letter drawings. It would have been nice to have something the children use their letter drawings for, so maybe I could try and think of an activity that uses what they've done and creates something new.

The next session was from 14:00 to 16:00 for 3-6 year olds, but some children arrived at this time for the older session so we decided to cut the younger session by 45mins, finishing at 15:15 so that the older children weren't waiting too long and so that we could go straight into the older session without needing to take a break. We had three children for this session, Lucia, Siabh and Harry. Lucia and Siabh both attended the local

Irish school and were best friends. Harry was the only boy in the group and he was attending an English speaking school, but learning Irish.

What went wrong: Harry began to exclude himself from the group, due to a possible language barrier. We tried to explain everything as we went in English, but not too much, because the two girls understood everything so we didn't want to hold them back from fluency at the same time. As a result of investigation into his behaviour we discovered that he was receiving some extra support with speech in school. As we did not have this information before we started, it was very interesting to see his gradual withdrawal from the activities and his need to roll around the floor and desire to jump out the window. I tried some physical activities to engage him, but I think there were too many factors fighting against his concentration at this point and all he wanted was his lunch.

What went right: The girls really felt comfortable with the whole thing and their Irish was fantastic, which made our lives very easy and made the workshop flow really well. We were able to ask them questions in Irish and English and they could easily change from language to language.

What could I have done better: When I started to perform the skiing activity, I asked the children to choose their favourite characters from the story and that is where we started with the task. Everything was working fine, but I was a little bit nervous and I made an error at one point by facing the children to do a letter and I did it right, but only right for me so I should have turned around in order for the children to follow me correctly. I did finally do the exercise with my back to the children so they could follow me, but I just made the error on the first letter and I was annoyed.

What can I do in the future: Utilise the local Gaelscoileanna (Irish schools) for volunteers in future workshops. There was great interest in the project from parents connected with Irish schools and they were completely on board for more workshops in September.

In the last session we invited back the two older children who happened to be Harry's older brother and sister. This session ran from 15:15 until 16:15 and we performed the English language poster and skiing activities. Harry's siblings were Isabella and Alex and initially they were very quiet and reserved with their responses, but towards the end they were enjoying themselves and getting involved in the story and the activities. We allowed Harry to join in this session as he had felt so excluded in the previous session. This ended up being very interesting, because even though he seemed so disinterested before, he had remembered quite a lot about the main characters from the Irish story which also feature in the English story and confidently spoke his mind about the way they made him feel.

What went wrong: The children started the skiing activity before I fully explained it and it meant that they began to trace the letter shape exactly instead of loosely moving around the shape with their colours. Also Alex wanted to begin his letter shape with a black marker, luckily I spotted this and suggested he use a lighter colour so that we can go over it again. In order to eliminate this from happening I should have selected the colours more carefully and accidentally forget the black marker.

What went right: Harry was so engaged and happy to do some work, half way through the skiing activity he got bored so I suggested he could go sit down and have his lunch as he had done plenty of work. Alex and Isabella were so enthusiastic and they continued to draw in a nice chilled out atmosphere.

What could I have done better: Maybe for next time with the skiing activity we should always **start it with** the movement element, the **air drawing** in order to loosen the children up and to take away the rigidity when it comes to the writing part.

What can I do in the future: It would be nice to have some **music** to perform the physical **skiing activity** to, so as to enhance the click method by synching the movement with the rhythm of the music. This might also intrigue the older groups and focus their attention on what the point of the session is.

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