

## ***Stepping Stones Early Learning Centre***

### ***Silage Making Time on the Farm***

On Thursday 26<sup>th</sup> September the children of Stepping Stones Pre School were quietly playing indoors when Davin asked what the loud noise was outside. We stopped playing and listened.....we could hear a noise that was not an everyday sound. We asked the children could they describe it....Ryan said "it's very noisy...maybe it's an aeroplane." Evan suggested it was a helicopter. Josh was listening intently and suggested it was a tractor. Davin was getting very excited and suggested that we should go outside to investigate.

Lorraine asked the children should we go out to investigate and there was a resounding....YES!!!

So we lined up and prepared to go outside. When we got outside we saw a tractor and baler making silage! The children were jumping up in down in excitement and were loudly debating what it was we could see. Jack O B, our resident expert on all things agricultural informed us that "the man driving the John Deere was baling the silage that the other man must have mowed down yesterday"

The children chatted animatedly about what they could see. The mentioned shapes, colours, and the reason the bales were being wrapped... Again Jack O B came to the rescue with the answer "it's going to wrap them all bales up so the crows and the cows can't get them"

**The children enjoying the silage being baled and wrapped.**



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Later that day in circle time we discussed with the children what they had seen. The discussion led on to farms and farm animals and Oran suggested that we sing Old McDonald had a Farm.

The next day we went outside. Davin, Ryan, Josh and Oscar gathered together in a corner near the sand pit. They gathered two tractors and trailers and began to pull grass from the lawn and pile it into the trailers. Lorraine asked them what they were doing and they responded that they were making silage like Farmer Tom. This is a lovely example of the children engaging with Aistears theme, Exploring & Thinking. They are using this play opportunity to learn and make sense of the world around them.

They continued for all of playtime to cut the grass, pile it up and draw it to the silage pit. Josh took the lead on directing proceedings and could be heard issuing instructions like “pile it a bit higher there” and “back that trailer in there now”

Ryan came along with his digger tractor and offered to help load the silage with his “front end loader”

Later in the week the children were working indoors. Oscar, Josh, Evan, Ryan and Jack O B were at the table. They were all sharing the Montessori Colour Tablets and using them in an unconventional manner to make fences... “Let’s make a longer fence” says Oscar. The other four boys follow suit and begin to line the colour tablets up.

What is your fence for? Asks Lorraine. It’s for to keep all the cows in says Oscar. Yeah, says Jack O B, we can’t let them out in the grass. Here the children demonstrate aspects from Well Being where they demonstrate the ability to think creatively, seek challenge and express themselves through role play.



**The children using the Montessori colour tablets to make fences for the farm**



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Throughout the week the children's learning and engagement with the farming and silage in particular continued. Another day they were outside and Ryan, Josh & Davin head for the sand pit. Immediately they begin digging and filling the trailers with sand.

"Guys, lets fill all the trailers up so we can sow the grass for the farmer" says Davin. The boys work contentedly filling the trailers, emptying the trailers and raking the land for the duration of playtime.

The children were enjoying this topic so much that our original plan for the month was placed to one side and we incorporated farming life into our art, crafts, circle times and discussions. One day we decided to draw farms and all associated with farms as understood by the children. A number of children chose to engage in this activity. Lorraine recorded their descriptions of their own pictures. She shared these pictures and descriptions with the other children at circle time, with the parents over the course of the week and displayed them on the wall alongside their descriptions and photos we had taken earlier of the children watching the silage being baled and wrapped and pictures of children engaging in personal play representing their farming experiences.

Again we see links with Aistear here, relating to Identity & Belonging. The children show a sense of group identity where links with their family and community are acknowledged and extended.

**The children preparing the land to sow the grass for the farmer**



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One week later the theme of farming is still going strongly among the children. During free time the children have combined the Montessori materials with the farm animals to make their own farm. They are using the long rods as fencing and the pink tower is bales of hay and silage to feed the animals with. The children can be heard herding (counting) the cattle to make sure they are all there and bringing them to feed.

Later the same week we are outside. The same group of children make their way over to the toy tractors and begin to pile the trailers high with silage and start to transport it to the silage pit made a week ago. Lorraine asks them what they are doing and they respond that the silage they made last week is all gone so they have to do a second cut. Jack O B pipes up that the weather is very good so we can get a second cut, no problem! This again links in with Exploring & thinking, aim 2. The children are observing, questioning and understanding the topic at hand and clearly see themselves as explorers and thinkers.

Later in the day, Lorraine was speaking to a parent and relaying the story from the playground earlier in the day. This parent told us that her son loves reading the farmers journal and would we like some for our book corner for the children to read. We jumped at this and she brought them in a few days later. The children loved having their own newspapers to read and there were many discussions over the pictures of cows, calves, lambs, tractors, combine harvesters and front end loaders to name a few! Good communication practises between parents & professionals resulted in this lovely extension of learning.

**The children reading the Farmers Journal that a parent kindly donated when she heard of our agricultural learning**





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During discussions over the pictures in the Farmers Journal, Darragh C told us that his daddy had hay at home in the shed for feeding the cattle. Lorraine suggested that he bring some in for the nature table the next day. The following day Darragh arrived in with a bag full of hay which he proudly added to the nature table. This is a lovely example of listening, discussing and taking turns in conversation between teacher and child. (Communicating, 2.1)

The other children were very interested in the texture and the smell of the hay and was an attraction to the nature table for the morning! It was then suggested we take the hay outside so the 'real' tractors could load it!

This led to further discussions on what the animals eat and when they eat it. Lorraine found some nonfiction books in the store relating to animals and what they eat and added it to the book corner. The children are clearly enjoying using these books and are doing so in a meaningful way. (Communication, Aim 3.5)

The children noticed the new additions and could be heard happily discussing with each other what animals like to eat.



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This has been a great learning story for the children and indeed its continuing every day. This theme emerged very spontaneously as the result of a farmer cutting silage unexpectedly in the next field. The children took charge of their own learning and directed this topic in ways that adults alone could not have imagined. It has been exciting to see the emerging language and friendships that have formed throughout this topic.

A number of times during the past few weeks the early years staff felt the topic had come to a natural end but the children surprised us a number of times by re-engaging with the topic and extending it in another direction.

We had so many opportunities to extend and develop language skills and interpersonal skills. We have involved parents in this topic and the local community! We had invited the local farmer to come to talk to the children and he had offered to bring a baled and wrapped bale of silage for them to see but unfortunately the farmer fell ill and was unable to visit. He has promised to do so when he is back on his feet.

We have used this spontaneous topic to link our learning with Aistear & Síolta and have shared our story with the children and the parents in our setting.

A thoroughly enjoyable learning experience for children, staff and parents alike. Thank you for taking the time to read our story.

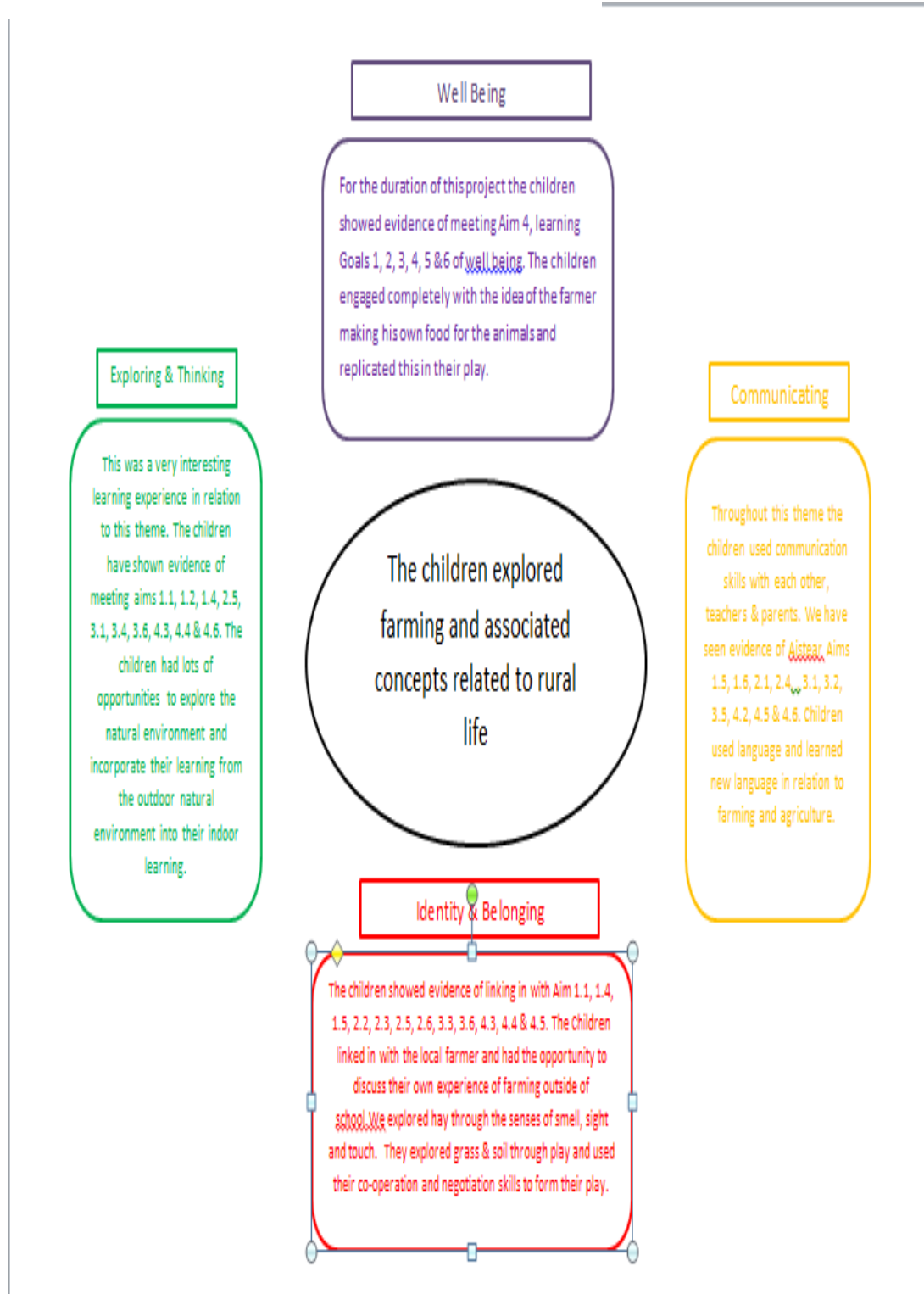
**The children using the hay with the 'real' tractors outside.**



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### Our links to Aistear



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**Silage Making Time on the Farm**

# Links to Siolta

