Nurturing and Extending Interactions Pillar: Overview

Connections to *Aistear* and *Síolta*

Aistear

Themes: Well-being, Identity and Belonging, Communicating, Exploring and Thinking
Guidelines for good practice: Learning and developing through interactions (pp.27-51)

Síolta Standards

1: Rights of the Child, C1.1, 1.2, 1.3
5: Interactions, C5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 5.4, 5.5
Research Digests linked to the above *Standards*

The *Aistear Síolta Practice Guide* is intended to help you in your role as curriculum-developer to build, reflect on and extend your curriculum to support babies', toddlers' and young children's early learning and development. Drawing on the early childhood sector's experiences of using *Aistear* and *Síolta*, the Practice Guide includes:

• **Curriculum Foundations** and

• six interconnected **Curriculum Pillars**:
    1. Building Partnerships with Parents
    2. Creating and Using the Learning Environment
    3. Learning through Play
    4. Nurturing and Extending Interactions
    5. Planning and Assessing using *Aistear's* Themes
    6. Supporting Transitions.

This document gives an overview of the pillar; **Nurturing and Extending Interactions**. This pillar has a range of

> Before working with this pillar, we recommend you work on *Curriculum Foundations*.

resources to help you enhance your interactions with children in your setting.

Why focus on nurturing and extending interactions?

Aistear and *Síolta* highlight the importance of interactions in children's learning and development in early childhood. The two frameworks provide ideas and suggestions on how to nurture and extend interactions to build quality relationships. Practitioners play an important role in building these relationships through consistent quality interactions. Babies, toddlers and young children need a secure attachment to at least one of the adults in their setting. This relationship provides comfort, reassurance and security. Interactions that are respectful and consistent increase the child's confidence and competence to respect, explore, develop and learn. Peer interactions also play an important role in children's learning and development.

Nurturing and Extending Interactions is one of the pillars in the *Aistear Síolta Practice Guide*. This pillar has a number of connections to other pillars including *Building Partnerships with Parents*, *Creating and Using the Learning Environment*, *Learning through Play* and *Supporting Transitions*. This short introduction reminds us why interactions are so important and gives a brief overview of

the set of resources in this part of the Practice Guide and provides suggestions on how you might use these.

Aistear's principle on relationships states,

Children have a fundamental need to be with other people. They learn and develop through loving and nurturing relationships with adults and other children, and the quality of these interactions impacts on their learning and development (Principles and themes, 2009, p.9).

Similarly, *Síolta's* principle on relationships acknowledges that,

Responsive, sensitive and reciprocal relationships, which are consistent over time, are essential to the well-being, learning and development of the young child (Síolta Principle, 2006, p.7).

Standard 5 of *Síolta*, Interactions, highlights that fostering constructive interactions requires explicit policies, procedures and practice that emphasise the value of process and are based on mutual respect, equal partnership and sensitivity. The components focus on the types of interactions that take place, supporting positive interactions, using all aspects of the daily routine to interact positively and also the importance of adults both in terms of their interactive style and their interactions with each other. *Síolta's* Research Digest on Interactions provides further information and references.

Aistear's guidelines, *Learning and developing through interactions* identify a range of interaction strategies that can be used to nurture and extend children's learning and development. See Table 1.

Table 1 : Aistear's continuum of interaction strategies

Building Relationships	Facilitating	Organising	Directing
Children learn by being with others. This strategy includes methods which the adult uses to build relationships and to create an environment in which children feel secure and confident enough to take risks, to explore, to take part in challenging experiences and to direct and co-direct their own learning.	Children learn by being involved in making choices and decisions and by feeling in control. Learning is enjoyable and rewarding for them when they challenge themselves and when they can use and build on their existing knowledge, understanding and skills. They enjoy learning through child-initiated activites. This strategy includes methods which the adult uses to encourage children to take the lead or to share the lead with adults.	Children learn in a well-planned and well-resourced environment. The environment represents all children in the setting and makes learning challenging and fun. This strategy includes methods which the adult uses to create and maintain such an environment, including reflecting on the learning that is occurring in the environment and planning ways to enhance it.	Children learn through planned and guided activities which build on their interests and experiences. This strategy includes methods which the adult uses to focus on children's learning and to develop particular dispositions, values and attitudes, skills, knowledge and understanding.

Children lead learning • **The adult leads learning**

In the *Practice Guide*, the 'Organising' interaction strategy is addressed in the pillars: *Creating and Using the Learning Environment*, *Supporting Transitions*, and *Planning and Assessing using Aistear's Themes*.

Using the resources in this pillar

As with all the pillars in the Practice Guide, there are five categories of resources in *Nurturing and Extending Interactions*:

1. **Self-evaluation Tools**
   These provide prompts to help practitioners reflect on their interactions in order to identify successes and challenges and to note changes they would like to make.

   These tools look at 3 elements:

   1. Building relationships
   2. Facilitating learning
   3. Directing and leading learning.

2. **Examples and Ideas for Practice**
   These materials show examples of how different settings support children's learning and development through interactions.

3. **Resources for Sharing**
   These materials include tip sheets for practitioners on how they can support children's learning and development through interactions.

4. **Action Planning Tools**
   A template is provided to help practitioners plan for changes in a particular area of their work in developing interactions.

Each category has resources to support you as you reflect on your practice. You might like to look at the **Self-evaluation Tools** first to help you identify your strengths in nurturing and extending interactions as well as noting changes you would like to make. There are two of these, one for practitioners working with children birth-3 years and the other for practitioners working with children aged 3-6 years.

After this, you might be interested in looking at examples and ideas from other practitioners. You will find these in Learning Experiences linked to *Aistear's* themes, short podcasts, photo presentations, video clips and practical tip sheets in the sections, *Examples and Ideas for Practice* and *Resources for Sharing* at www.aistearsíolta.ie. The *Action Planning Tools* can then help you plan specific changes you want to make in your setting.