

# Element 1: Developing your Curriculum and Curriculum Statement

## Activity B: Developing an emergent and inquiry-based curriculum

This activity involves you thinking about your curriculum **after** working on **Curriculum Foundations** in the Practice Guide.

Standard 7 in *Síolta* focuses on curriculum and explains that *encouraging each child's holistic development requires the implementation of a verifiable, broad-based, documented and flexible curriculum or programme (Full and Part-time Daycare Manual, p.55).*

*Aistear* defines curriculum as *all of the experiences, both formal and informal, planned and unplanned in the indoor and outdoor environment, which contribute to children's learning and development (Principles and themes, p.54).* As a framework, *Aistear* provides building blocks to develop an emergent and inquiry-based curriculum that works for children in your setting and that works for you, their practitioner. In doing this, it sets out four broad outcomes for children as described through its four themes. Children will

1. be confident, happy and healthy  
(*Well-being*)
2. have a positive sense of who they are, develop a sense of their culture and heritage and feel valued and respected as part of a family and community  
(*Identity and Belonging*)

3. share their experiences, thoughts, ideas and feelings with growing confidence and competence in a variety of ways and for a variety of purposes  
(*Communicating*)
4. make sense of the things, places and people in their world  
(*Exploring and Thinking*).

An emergent and inquiry-based curriculum uses children's and practitioners' interests, questions and experiences as starting points for curriculum planning. At times, practitioners introduce specific topics to support children's learning and development linked to *Aistear's* learning goals. In partnership with children, practitioners identify ideas or inquiries that become the focus for learning. At other times, topics emerge from children's interests. Their engagement with people, materials, ideas and events triggers their curiosity and motivation to learn. Observant, skilled and supportive practitioners harness this child-initiated interest and enquiry and they also know when it is appropriate and helpful to provide new opportunities and topics for children to explore or when to use adult interests as a stimulus for learning to create a relevant, meaningful and stimulating curriculum for *all* children.

*Aistear* and *Síolta* show that developing an early childhood curriculum involves a practitioner:

- getting to **know children** well and remembering that they bring a wealth of experience from home and are learning all the time through play and planned experiences, and from conversations, actions and interactions throughout the day.
- understanding that **children have individual abilities**, knowledge, dispositions, needs, interests, challenges as well as theories about how the world works and acknowledging the importance of a curriculum that responds to this diversity.
- knowing **how** to support and extend this learning and development at this early stage in children's lives.
- using information gathered through daily work to review and reflect on the **impact of the curriculum** and of **his/her work** on children's learning and development to ensure that all children's holistic development is being supported appropriately.
- using ***Aistear's* learning goals** which outline dispositions, skills, values and attitudes, and knowledge and understanding in order to plan for and assess children's learning and development.
- **sharing this vision** of early learning and development with others such as colleagues, children's families and professionals such as mentors, inspectors, speech and language therapists and primary school teachers.

Activity B asks you to think about your curriculum and the extent to which it is emergent and inquiry-based. You might like to listen to the following podcasts before completing this activity

- Defining curriculum and curriculum planning
- Practitioner Beliefs
- Explaining the term funds of knowledge
- Moving to an emergent curriculum
- Explaining a play-based, emergent curriculum to parents

## Activity B: Developing an emergent and inquiry-based curriculum

1. What *features*, if any, of your curriculum would you describe as being emergent and inquiry-based?

2. What *benefits*, if any, would you see with an emergent and inquiry-based curriculum?

3. What *challenges*, if any, would you see with an emergent and inquiry-based?

**4. How might some of these *challenges be overcome*?**



**5. What small *changes* could you make to work toward a more emergent and inquiry-based curriculum?**

