

AistearSíolta

Practice Guide



Learning through Play: 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 play (pp.52-70)

Síolta Standards

1: Rights of the Child, C1.1, 1.2, 1.3

6: Play, C6.1, 6.2, 6.3, 6.4, 6.5 6.6, 6.7

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, **Learning through Play**. This pillar has a range of resources to help you support and enable children to learn through play in your setting.

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

Why focus on learning through play?

Aistear and *Síolta* highlight the important role of play in children's lives and provide ideas and suggestions to support learning and development through play. Time, resources and support from practitioners all help children to maximise their fun in, and their learning and development through play.

Learning through Play is one of the pillars in the *Aistear Síolta Practice Guide*. It has connections to the other pillars, *Building Partnership with Parents*, *Creating and Using the Learning Environment*, *Nurturing and Extending Interactions*, *Planning and Assessing using Aistear's Themes*, and *Supporting Transitions*. This short **introduction** reminds us why learning through play is important, 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 play and hands-on experiences says,

Much of children's early learning and development takes place through play and hands-on experiences. Through these, children explore social, physical and imaginary worlds. These experiences help them to manage their feelings, develop as thinkers and language users, develop socially, be creative and imaginative and lay the foundations for becoming effective communicators and learners (Principles and themes, 2009, p.11).

Similarly, Síolta's principle on play acknowledges that,

Play is an important medium through which the child interacts with, explores and makes sense of the world around her/him. These interactions with, for example, other children, adults, materials, events and ideas are key to the child's well-being, development and learning. Play is a source of joy and fulfilment

for the child. It provides an important context and opportunity to enhance and optimise quality early childhood experiences. As such, play will be a primary focus in quality early childhood settings (2006, p.9).

Standard 6 of Síolta, *Play*, highlights the importance of each child having ample time to engage in freely available and accessible, developmentally appropriate and well-resourced opportunities for exploration, creativity and 'meaning making' in the company of other children, with participating and supportive adults, and alone. Aistear's guidelines, *Learning and developing through play* (pp.54- 70) provide information on play including its characteristics as shown in Table 1 below.

The guidelines also highlight the adult's key role in planning, supporting and reviewing play as well as in organising for, and resourcing play. A list of resources for different types of play is included in Appendix 1 (pp.103-106).

Table 1 : Characteristics of play

Characteristic	Description
Active	Children use their bodies and minds in their play. They interact with the environment, with materials and with other people.
Adventurous and risky	Play helps children to explore the unknown. The pretend element offers a safety net that encourages children to take risks.
Communicative	Children share information and knowledge through their play. Their communication can be verbal or non-verbal, simple or complex.
Enjoyable	Play is fun and exciting and involves a sense of humour.
Involved	Children become deeply absorbed and focused in their play, concentrating and thinking about what they are doing.
Meaningful	Children play about what they have seen and heard, and what they know. Play helps them to build and extend their knowledge, understanding and skills in a way that makes sense to them.
Sociable and interactive	Children play alongside or with others. Sometimes they also like and need to play alone.
Symbolic	Children imagine and pretend when they are playing. They try out ideas, feelings and roles. They re-enact the past and rehearse the future. This can involve them 'reading' and 'writing' long before they develop these skills.
Therapeutic	Play helps children to express and work through emotions and experiences.
Voluntary	Children choose to play. Their play is spontaneous. They shape it as they go, changing the characters, events, objects and locations.

Using the resources in this pillar

As with all the pillars in the Practice Guide, there are five categories of resources in *Learning through Play*:

1. Self-evaluation Tools
2. Examples and Ideas for Practice
3. Resources for Sharing
4. Action Planning Tools
5. Gallery.

Each category has resources to help you reflect on your practice. You might like to look at the **Self-evaluation Tools** first to help identify your strengths in supporting children's learning and development through play as well as noting changes you would like to make.

There are two of these tools:

- one for practitioners working with children birth-3 years
- one 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.aistearsiolta.ie. The **Action Planning Tools** can then help you plan specific changes you want to make in your setting. Finally, a **Gallery** of captioned photos from a variety of early childhood settings, offers additional ideas about supporting learning through play. Table 2 below provides an overview of all resources available in this pillar.

Table 2 : Resources in the Learning through Play pillar

Category and Purpose	Resource Title
<p>Self-evaluation Tools</p> <p>These provide prompts to help practitioners reflect on their work in order to identify successes and challenges and to note changes they would like to make.</p>	<p><i>Learning through Play: Self-evaluation Tool - Babies and Toddlers(birth-3 years)</i></p> <p><i>Learning through Play: Self-evaluation Tool - Young Children (3-6 years)</i></p> <p>This tool looks at three elements:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The importance of play 2. The practitioner's role in supporting learning and development through play 3. Time and resources for play and playful activity.

Category and Purpose	Resource Title
<p>Examples and Ideas for Practice</p> <p>These materials show examples of how different early childhood settings support learning through play.</p>	<p>Podcasts and Photo Presentations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning environments for babies • Learning environments for toddlers • Creating outdoor environments for babies and toddlers • Creating challenging outdoor environments for 3-6 year olds • Playful routines and engaging interactions (Birth-3 years) • Planning a play-based, emergent curriculum: Gingerbread Man (2-3 years) • Planning a play-based, emergent curriculum: Old MacDonald (1-2 years) • The links between play, learning and development (3-6 years) • Making the most of play and learning (3-6 years) • Types of play including physical play (3-6 years) • Creative and language play (3-6 years) • Pretend play and games with rules (3-6 years) • Supporting children's holistic development through play (3-5 years) • Pedagogical interactions to support oral language and early literacy development in play (3-6 years) • Supporting early mathematical abilities in play (3-6 years) • Using play in pre-school settings to think and talk about measure (3-6 years) • Using books in pre-school settings to think and talk about measure (3-6 years) • Supporting language development in the pre-school year (3-6 years) • Reviewing and adapting the daily routine (3-6 years) • Supporting emergent literacy and numeracy: Making shapes and symbols (3-6 years) • Supporting emergent literacy: The writing table (3-6 years) • Enriching play with the language of mathematics • Supporting emergent literacy and numeracy • Making adequate time for play • Supporting progression in play • Learning high quality mathematics through high quality play • Play and an emergent and inquiry-based curriculum (Birth-6 years)

Category and Purpose	Resource Title
<p>Examples and Ideas for Practice These materials show examples of how different early childhood settings support learning through play.</p>	<p>Podcasts and Photo Presentations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can play support self-regulation (3-6 years) • Why is play import for babies and toddlers (Birth-3 years) • Why is play import for young children (3-6 years) • How can practitioners support children's learning through play (3-6 years) • How can parents and practitioners support children's self-regulation (Birth-6 years) <p>Video Clips (Birth-3 years)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Story-time Toddlers • Ice-cream car • The treasure basket • Pretend play: Toddlers' spatial awareness • Pretend play: Toddlers dressing the dollies • Pretend play: Toddlers' tea-time • Reading Old MacDonald • Nursery rhymes <p>Video Clips (3-6 years)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making pancakes • Making shapes in the sand • Choosing to write during free-play • Solving a problem • Literacy and numeracy in the café • Counting cheese • My favourite things • Me and my body • Peer mentoring • Exploding interest in numbers • Mr Potato Head • Walking the plank • Playing with octons • Washing the bike • Dressing the baby • Story-time pre-schoolers • Walking on stilts • Learning about sinking and floating • Nurturing dispositions

Category and Purpose	Resource Title
<p>Examples and Ideas for Practice</p> <p>These materials show examples of how different early childhood settings support learning through play.</p>	<p>Learning Experiences (Birth-3 years)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Learning Experiences for babies, toddlers and young children from Aistear's guidelines</u> <p>Learning Experiences (3-6 years)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Personal books</u> • <u>Warm Day</u> • <u>Hospital</u> • <u>Glengarra Wood</u> • <u>Shadows</u> • <u>The nurse's visit</u> • <u>Babies</u> • <u>Posting letters</u> • <u>Trains</u> • <u>Hen</u> • <u>Ice</u> • <u>Feeding birds</u> • <u>Fire, fire</u> • <u>Reindeer visit</u> • <u>Sun flowers</u> • <u>Dinosaurs</u>

Category and Purpose	Resource Title
<p>Resources for Sharing These materials include tip sheets for practitioners on different aspects of learning through play.</p>	<p>Tip Sheets</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appendix 1: Resources for play • Play for babies (available in 7 languages) • Play for toddlers (available in 7 languages) • Play for young children (available in 7 languages) • Enjoying books with your baby • Enjoying books with your toddler • Suggested list of books to read with toddlers • Books that promote discussion with young children • Using a Treasure Basket with babies • Learning about measure (3-6 years) • Caregiving routines (Birth-3 years) • Enhancing language (Birth-3 years) • Enhancing language (3-6 years) • Open-ended materials • Fundamental movement skills (3-6 years) • Childrens Schema's • Helping babies and toddlers to develop positive learning dispositions (Birth-3 years) • Helping young children to develop positive learning dispositions (3-6 years)
<p>Action Planning Tools A template is provided to help practitioners plan for changes in a particular area of their work in supporting learning through play.</p>	<p><i>Learning through play: Action planning template</i></p>
<p>Gallery Photos from a range of early childhood settings offer additional ideas about supporting learning through play.</p>	<p>Gallery</p>