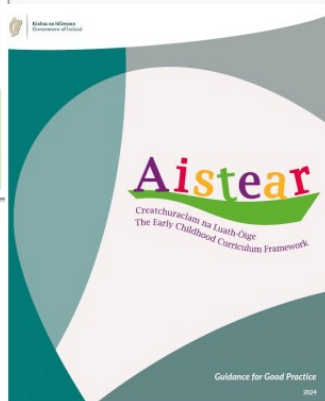
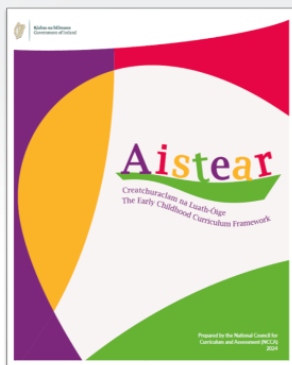


# Babies' rights, voice and the Arts in *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework: Connecting policy and practice*

Dr Sharon Skehill  
 National Council for Curriculum and Assessment

1

## Overview of the session



- Introducing *Aistear*
- Consultations with babies, toddlers and young children in the updating processes
- Rights-based framework
- *Aistear* and the Arts
- Play and provocations in the baby rooms and gardens
- Child version of *Aistear*

2

## Who is the NCCA?

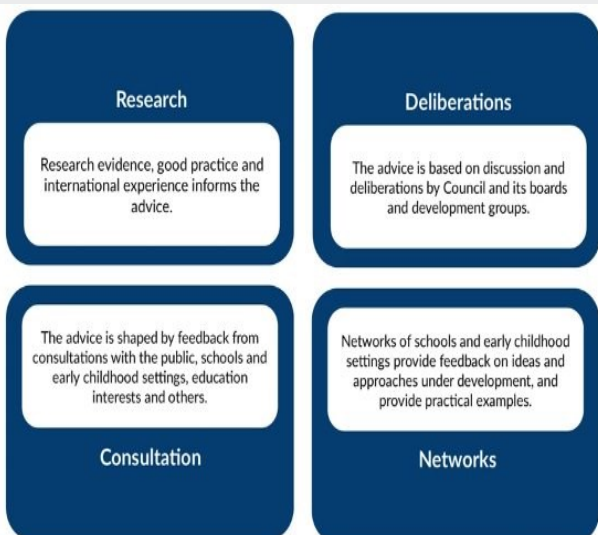
The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) is a statutory body responsible for advising the Minister for Education on curriculum and assessment matters from early childhood to primary to post-primary school.

In carrying out this work, the NCCA works with a large cohort of stakeholders to shape the curriculum for children and young people in Ireland.



3

## Methodology: Updating Aistear

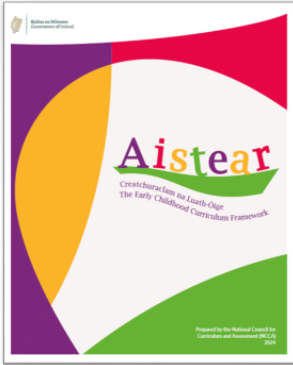


- Consultation – What is working well and what needs to be updated?
- Commissioned research with babies, toddlers and young children (O’Toole *et al.*, 2023; 2024)
- Literature Review to inform *Aistear’s* Themes (French and Mckenna, 2022)
- Online questionnaires, focus groups, written submissions (NCCA, 2023; 2024)
- 'Seldom-heard' voices

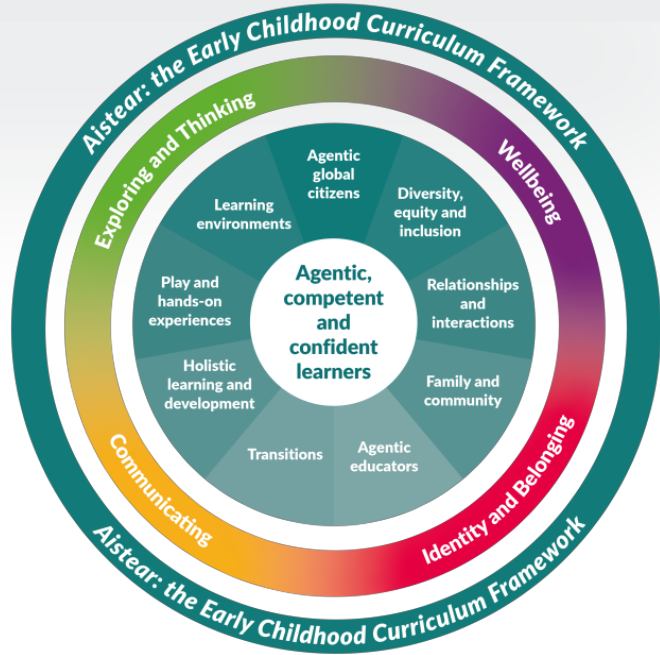


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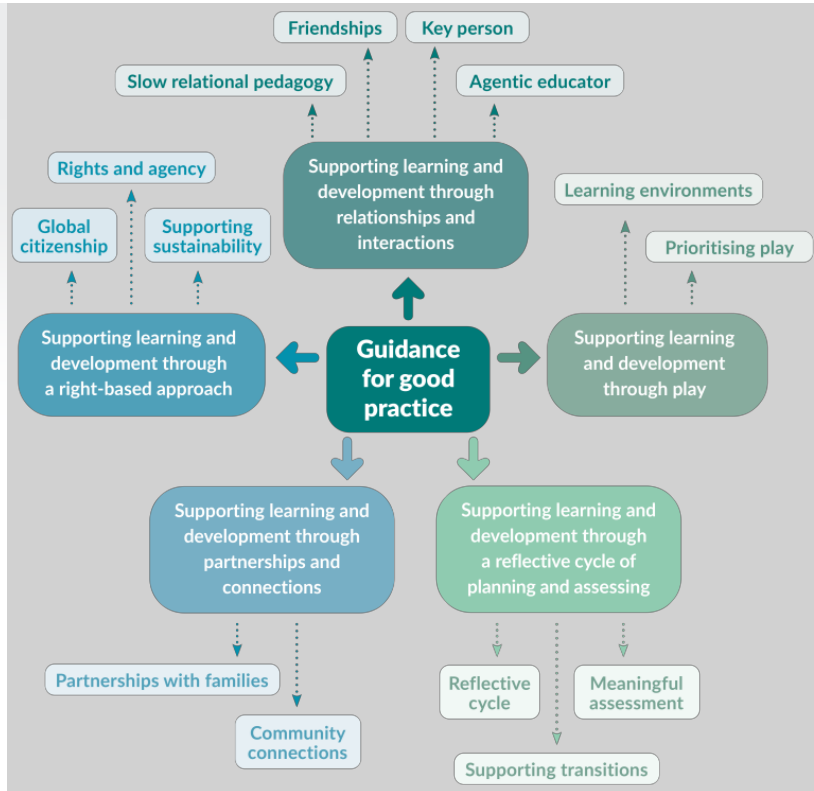
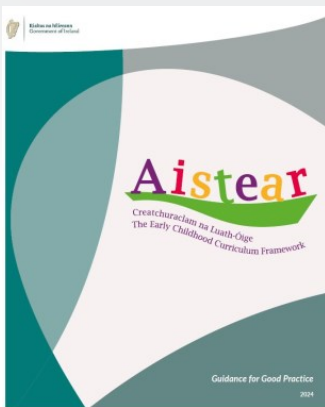
# Updated Aistear contents



- Framework:
- Introduction
  - Vision
  - Purpose
  - Principles
  - Themes
  - Glossary



5



6

## Image of the baby, toddler and young child

- Respectful image of babies, toddlers and young children as agentic, competent and confident.
- Loving relationships where their individual life stories acknowledged with kindness and consideration.
- Strengths-based approach, seeing the potential in every baby, toddler and young child.



7

## Image of the educator

- *Aistear* presents an image of the educator as competent, confident, agentic and reflective.
- Reflects the professional role of the educator.
- Belief in the competencies of babies, toddlers and young children



8

## Rights of the baby, toddler and young child

- To be cared for, nurtured and supported to learn and develop

*(Article 6)*

- To be treated fairly and without discrimination

*(Article 2)*

- Their best interests at the centre of early childhood experiences

*(Article 3)*

- Their 'voice' listened to and taken seriously

*(Article 12)*



9

## Relationships and interactions

- Slow relational pedagogy underpins a rights-based approach to EC education
- Time and space to **be** with babies, toddlers and young children
- Valuing learning experiences within daily routines
- Role of the educator (key person approach) in making decisions on what matters – Valuing all children's 'voices'



10

## Interconnectivity of care and education

- Role of the early years setting
- Maslow's hierarchy of needs: best interests
- Nurturing independence, creativity and resilience
- Education for sustainability:  
Caring for self  
Caring for others  
Caring for the environment



## Nondiscrimination: Diversity



- Diversity is about all the ways in which people differ, and how they live their lives as individuals, within groups, and as part of a wider social group.
- Diversity of self, *baile* (home) and community are respected and celebrated while also noticing and valuing our similarities and connectedness.
- Importance of learning 'experiences' rather than 'activities' to come to know important concepts

## Equity



- Equity in early childhood is about fairness in addressing any challenges that a baby, toddler or young child might experience because of their background or ability.

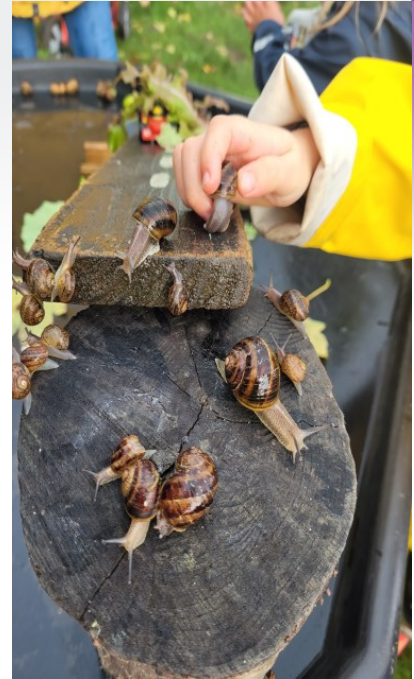
## Inclusion

- Inclusion means each baby, toddler and young child is supported, empowered and enabled to participate and progress in meaningful early childhood experiences.



## Partnerships with families

- Importance of relationships with families
- 'Slow relational pedagogy' to build relationships
- Funds of knowledge from home
- Language, cultural skills, song, music, dance and *scéal* (story)



## Community connections

- Babies, toddlers and young children hold a special place in the community
- Bring joy and *dóchas* (hope) into the lives of people around them
- *Ómós áite* (value of place)
- Place-based learning – importance of belonging



## Lundy's Model of Participation (2007)



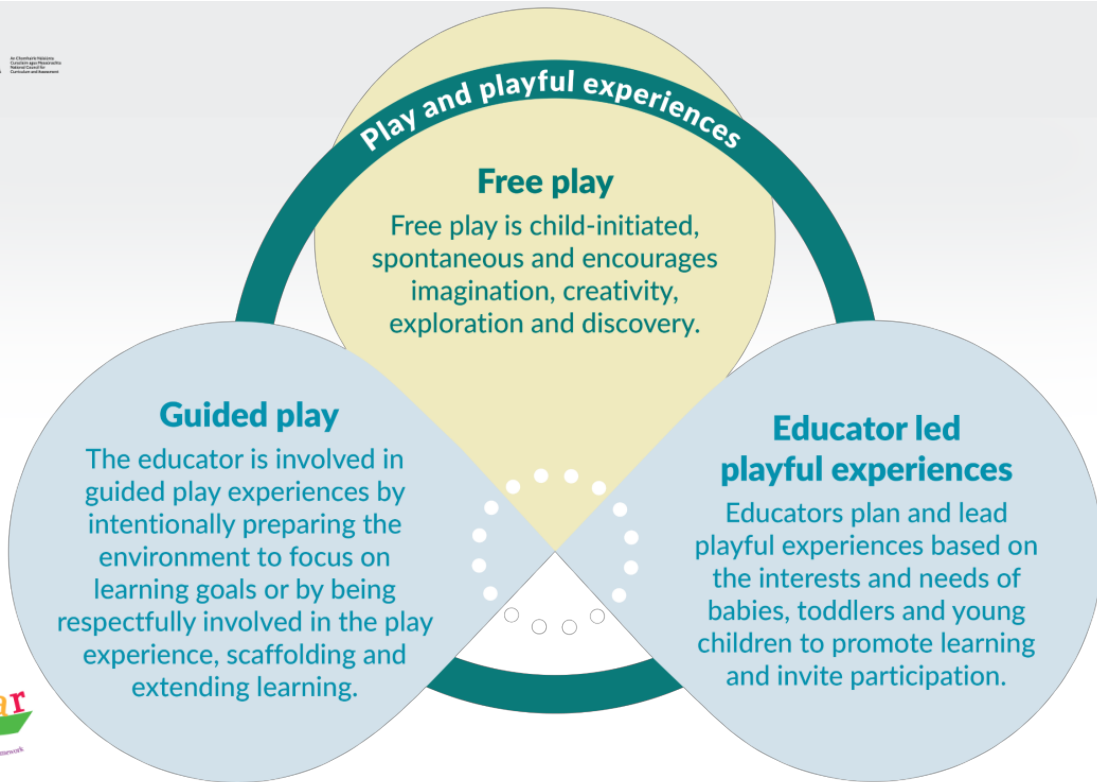
## Multimodality of 'voice'



- Talking, silences, facial expressions, gestures, behaviours, body movements, crying, cooing, babbling, language(s) and Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC).
- Irish Sign Language, Lámh or Braille
- Expression through the arts, mark-making, dance, drama, music, poetry, pictures, writing and stories.

## Interconnectivity in the Principles





## Learning environment

- The inclusive learning environment is understood as the **physical space** and **resources**, both indoors and outdoors, the **daily routines** and **transitions**, and the **relationships** and **interactions** in the setting.



## Provocations

- Provocations are resources that are set out and/or set up to spark *fiosracht* (curiosity) and engagement.
- Learning Goals



## Aistear and the arts



- To enjoy and benefit from expressing themselves creatively and imaginatively.
- Music, dance, art and drama awaken joy, freedom and *spraíúlacht* (playfulness), not only for the babies, toddlers and young children, but for the educators too.
- Sharing and nurturing the processes of creativity and artistic interpretation inspires *muinín* (confidence), resilience and *sonas* (happiness).

## Aistear and the (Draft) Arts Principles (Gol, 2022)

Babies, toddlers and young children are **creative** – learning to share feelings, thoughts and ideas through creative expression.



Their **creative expression** must be nurtured – emphasising the intentionality of the educator in nurturing this creativity.



They are challenged to extend their knowledge, refine their skills, and work together to solve problems so that they are curious and resilient explorers and **creative thinkers**.

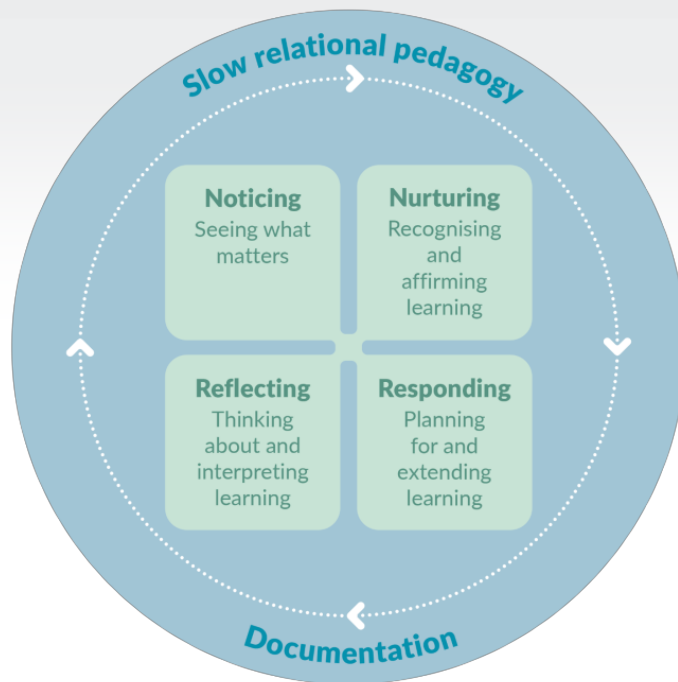
**Processes** of creative experiences the arts, dance, drama, music, song and scéal (story).



Essential features of exploring, thinking, creating, imagination and communicating.



## The reflective cycle of planning and assessing

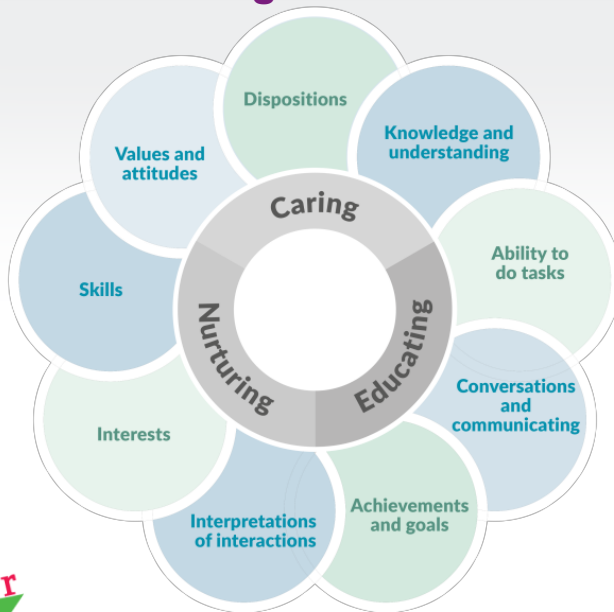


## Noticing: Seeing what matters

- Their uniqueness
- Their interests
- Their achievements
- Their intentions
- Their worries

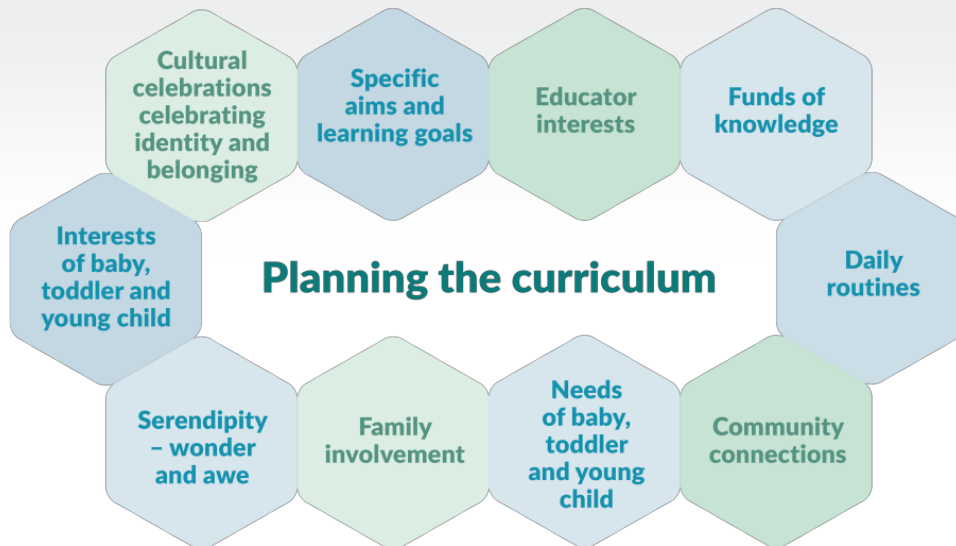


## Nurturing: Recognising, naming and affirming learning





## Responding: Planning for and extending learning



## Reflecting: Thinking about and interpreting learning

- Thinking about experiences and incidents from different perspectives
- Creating space to acknowledge feelings and emotions
- Image of the educator:

*‘Educators hold a genuine belief in the competencies of babies, toddlers and young children and hold them in a respectful and protective space. They know the value of their role as advocates for the rights of children. In doing so they also demonstrate and celebrate the importance of early childhood education and care’.*

*Aistear, Gol, 2024, p. 11*

## Child version of Aistear

- Bringing Lundy's model full circle and reverting back to babies, toddlers and young children
- Joy of data collection
- From a policy perspective
- From a practice perspective



35



36



## Keep in touch

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