AistearSíolta
Practice Guide

Planning and Assessing using *Aistear's* Themes: *Overview*

Connections to *Aistear* and *Síolta*

Aistear

Themes: Well-being, Identity and Belonging, Communicating, *Exploring and Thinking*

Guidelines for good practice: Supporting learning and development through assessment (pp.72-102)

User Guide (pp.12-22)

Síolta Standards

1: Rights of the Child, C1.1, 1.2, 1.3
6: Play, C6.3, 6.5, 6.7
7: Curriculum, C7.1, 7.5, 7.6
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, **Planning and Assessing using *Aistear's* Themes.** This pillar has a range of resources to help you in planning and assessing in your setting.

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

Why focus on assessing and planning using *Aistear's* themes?

Aistear and *Síolta* highlight the importance of planning for and assessing children's early learning and development. The two frameworks provide ideas and suggestions on how to do this. Guided by *Aistear*'s themes, aims and learning goals, practitioners use a variety of methods to gather information on and to document children's learning and development. This material is recorded from different perspectives including that of children, practitioners and at times, parents. This documentary evidence provides rich pictures of babies, toddlers and young children as learners and serves a number of purposes. It demonstrates children's competence and their achievements and progress in terms of dispositions, skills, attitudes and values, and knowledge and understanding. It also makes this learning visible to practitioners, children, parents and other stakeholders. In doing this, documentation provides important information to help practitioners plan for children's further learning.

In early childhood settings, planning and assessing are interwoven and inform each other.

Planning and Assessing using *Aistear's* Themes is one of the pillars in the *Aistear Síolta Practice Guide*. This pillar has a number of connections to other pillars including *Building Partnership with Parents*, *Creating and Using the Learning Environment*, *Learning through Play*, *Nurturing and Extending Interactions* and *Supporting Transitions*. This short introduction reminds us why planning and assessing are important and gives a brief overview of the set of resources in this part of the Practice Guide and how you might use these.

Aistear's principle on relevant and meaningful experiences states that,

On-going assessment of what children can do, say and make, and reflection on these experiences helps practitioners plan more developmentally appropriate and meaningful learning experiences for children. This also enables them to improve their practice. Assessment is about building a picture of children's individual strengths, interests, abilities and needs and using this to support and plan for their future learning and development (*Principles and themes*, 2009, p.11).

Síolta's Standard 7 on *Curriculum* also highlights the importance of documenting children's experiences and stresses the importance of systematic observation and assessment for learning. Standard 6 on *Play* highlights the importance of opportunities for play and exploration that mirror the child's stage of development and that challenge the child to make the transition to new learning. This requires the practitioner to know each child well in order to support his/her learning and development. *Síolta's* Research Digests on Curriculum and Play provide further information and references.

Aistear's guidelines, *Supporting learning and development through assessment* define assessment as *the on-going process of **collecting, documenting, reflecting on and using** information to develop rich portraits of children as learners in order to support and enhance their future learning* (p.72). The guidelines outline how practitioners can use assessment to find out what children understand, how they are thinking and what they are able to do and then use this information to build rich pictures of the children in their setting in order to plan relevant and interesting experiences for them. Figure 1 shows the assessment methods outlined in *Aistear's* guidelines. The Practice Guide focuses mainly on self-assessment, conversations and observations.

Figure 1: Aistear's assessment methods
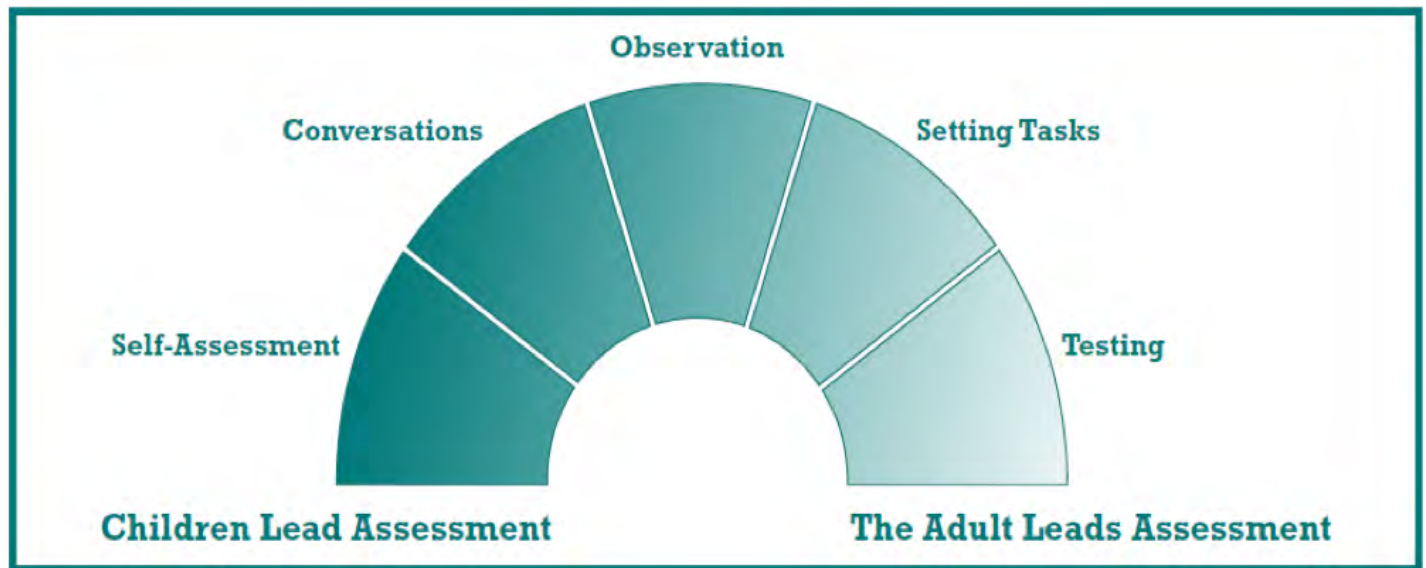
Using the resources in this pillar

As with all the pillars in the Practice Guide, there are five categories of resources in *Planning and Assessing using Aistear's Themes*:

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 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 planning and assessing for learning as well as noting changes you would like to make. 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.

Table 2 : Resources in the Planning and Assessing using Aistear's Themes pillar

Category and Purpose	Resource Title
Self-evaluation Tools These provide prompts to help practitioners reflect on their work on planning and assessing in order to identify successes and challenges and to note changes they would like to make.	*Planning and Assessing using Aistear's Themes: Self-evaluation Tool (Birth-6 years)* This tool looks at three elements: 1. Observing, talking and gathering assessment information 2. Documenting children's learning and development 3. Planning for children's learning and development.
Examples and Ideas for Practice These materials show examples of how different early childhood settings plan for and assess children's learning and development.	**Podcasts and Photo Presentations** • Using Documentation • Sharing learning experiences with parents • Curriculum planning based on children's ideas • Using Documentation to Support Learning and Development • ICT Supporting Reflective Practice • Planning a play-based, emergent curriculum: Bugs and Old MacDonald (1-2 years) • Planning a play-based, emergent curriculum: Gingerbread Man (2-3 years) • Supporting emergent literacy and numeracy: Making shapes and symbols (3-6 years) • What is a curriculum statement? • Creating a Curriculum Statement(Birth-6 years) • Planning and Assessing using Aistear's themes (Birth-3 years) • Using Aistear to plan and assess (Birth-6 years) • A Practitioner describes using Aistear templates to document and plan • Supporting emergent literacy: The writing table (3-6 years) • The benefits in guiding children's mathematical play • Supporting mathematics: Key messages for practitioners • Supporting emergent literacy and numeracy • Importance of assessing • Key messages on planning and assessing • Documentation: Why and how? (Birth-6 years) • Planning, documenting and assessing an emergent and inquiry-based curriculum

Category and Purpose	Resource Title
Examples and Ideas for Practice These materials show examples of how different early childhood settings plan for and assess children's learning and development.	**Podcasts and Photo Presentations** • The adult's role in an emergent and inquiry-based curriculum (Birth-6 years) • How can adults encourage the development of self-regulation in children (3- 6 years) • Mo Turas sa Naoínra (páistí 3-6 bliana) • *Síolta* agus *Aistear* sa Naíonra • Grianghraif á gcomhroinnt le tuismitheoirí • Sharing photos with parents (3-6 years) • Gruaige catach Ag úsáid ábhair suime na bpáistí mar bhonn pleanála (3-6 bliana) • Bláthanna deasa buí Ag úsáid ábhair suime na bpáistí mar bhonn pleanála (3-6 bliana) **Video Clips** • Our Special Books • Holly's Special Book • George's Special Book • Discussing our work (3-6 years) • Describing my picture **Learning Experiences** • Learning experiences for babies, toddlers and young children from Aistear's guidelines support learning and development through assessment **Aistear theme presentations** • Well-being (Birth-3 years) • Well-being (3-6 years) • Identity and Belonging (Birth-3 years) • Identity and Belonging (3-6 years) • Communicating (Birth-3 years) • Communicating (3-6 years) • Exploring and Thinking (Birth-3 years) • Exploring and Thinking (3-6 years)

Category and Purpose	Resource Title
Resources for Sharing These materials include a variety of resources to support planning and assessing. Samples are provided for different age groups.	**Templates** • Information booklet: Planning and assessing for children's learning and development (Birth-6 years) • Documenting children's learning and development (Birth-6 years) • Short Term Planning Sheet Template • Sample Short Term Planning Sheet (Babies) • Sample Short Term Planning Sheets (Toddlers) • Sample Short term Planning Sheet (Young Children) • Learning Record Template • Sample Learning Record Template (Babies) • Sample Learning Record Template (Toddlers) • Sample Learning Record Template (Young children) • Sharing curriculum updates with parents (3-6 years) • Sharing curriculum updates with parents (Birth-3 years) • Sharing personal learning portfolios with parents (3-6 years) • Sharing personal learning portfolios with parents (Birth-3 years) • Sample Learning Story: I did it! • Aistear's User Guide (pp. 12-22): Sample planning templates • Medium-term planning template: spider diagram
Resources for Sharing These materials include a variety of resources to support planning and assessing. Samples are provided for different age groups.	**Tip Sheets** • Using a Key Person approach • Enhancing language (Birth-3 years) • Enhancing language (3-6 years) • Supporting children to become bilingual (Birth-6 years) • Introducing Irish to pre-school children in English-medium settings • Fundamental movement skills (3-6 years) • Childrens Schema's

Category and Purpose	Resource Title
Resources for Sharing These materials include a variety of resources to support planning and assessing. Samples are provided for different age groups	***Aistear* posters and supporting documents** • Themes and principles poster • Well-being poster • Identity and Belonging poster • Communicating poster • Exploring and Thinking poster • Well-being theme document • Identity and Belonging theme document • Communicating theme document • Exploring and Thinking theme document
Action Planning Tools A template is provided to help practitioners plan for changes in a particular area of their work in planning for and assessing children's learning and development.	*Planning and Assessing using Aistear's Themes: Action Planning Template*
Gallery Photos from a range of early childhood settings offer additional ideas about planning and assessing.	Gallery