

# 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.

## 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.

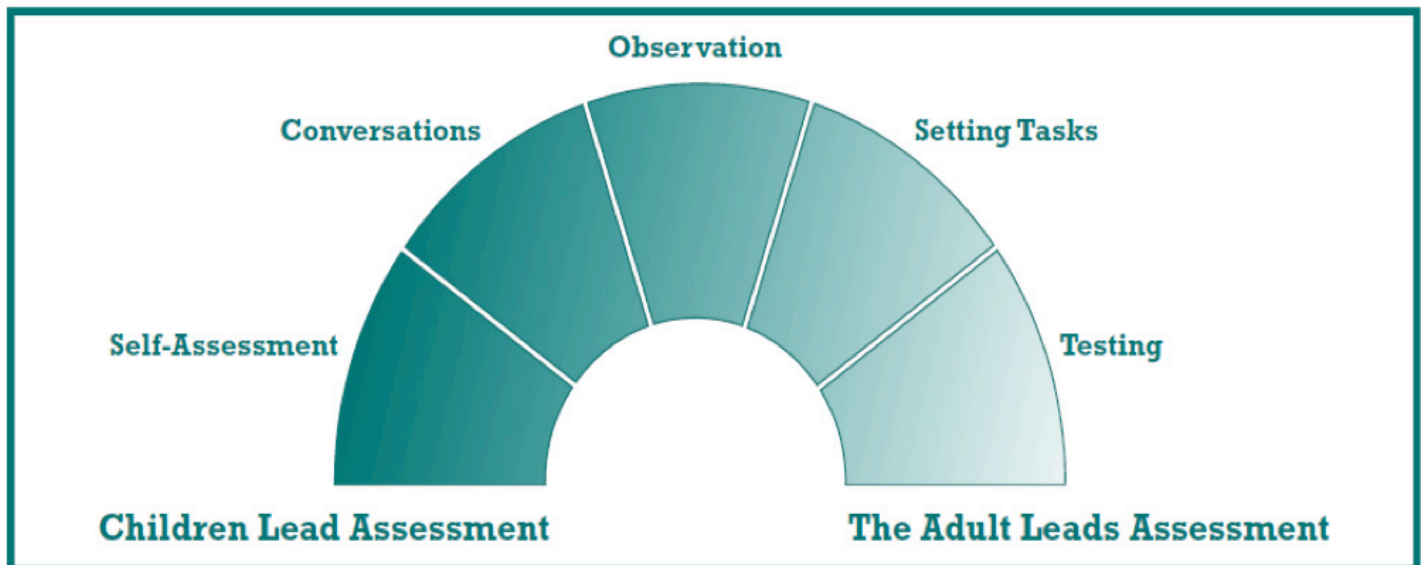
*Planning and Assessing* using Aistear's Themes is one of the pillars in the *Aistear Síolta Practice Guide*. This pillar has a number of connections to other pillars including *Building Partnership with Parents, Creating and Using the Learning Environment, Learning through Play, Nurturing and Extending 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

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.

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.

### 2. Examples and Ideas for Practice

These materials show examples of how different early childhood settings plan for and assess children's learning and development.

### 3. Resources for Sharing

These materials include a variety of resources to support planning and assessing. Samples are provided for different age groups.

### 4. 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.

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.aistearsiolta.ie](http://www.aistearsiolta.ie). The *Action Planning Tools* can then help you plan specific changes you want to make in your setting.