

Documenting children's learning and development

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**

Documentation helps show how you plan for and support babies', toddlers' and young children's learning and development. It makes children's learning visible and is an important part of the planning and assessment process. Involving children in the documenting process enables them to feel part of the process. It also helps them to reflect on their experiences and to deepen their understanding of their learning and development. It gives you, the practitioner, the opportunity to see what aspect of an experience was especially meaningful for individual children and how it supported their learning and development. It also helps you plan what you can do next to further engage and extend the children's learning and development. It gives parents and others (for example speech therapists or inspectors) insight and evidence into what and how the children in your setting are learning and developing.

For documentation to be useful and meaningful it needs to be done regularly. Doing a little every day keeps the information current. However, sometimes documentation can be seen as time consuming. There are a number of things you can do to make it less time consuming. When thinking about documentation these pointers may be helpful:

- Keep it simple... a photo with a short note can be very effective.
- Use a template with headings, so you don't have to write the same headings all the time.
- Sticky notes can mean you don't have to rewrite anecdotal notes, just stick them to the template or wall display.
- Involve the children as much as possible. This means you can document with the children a lot of the time, rather than outside of the time children are with you.
- Find a system that works for you.
- Let parents know where documentation is and encourage them to review it regularly. As parents have access to this kind of documentation remember to only include general information about children. Confidential information must be stored securely, perhaps in the office.

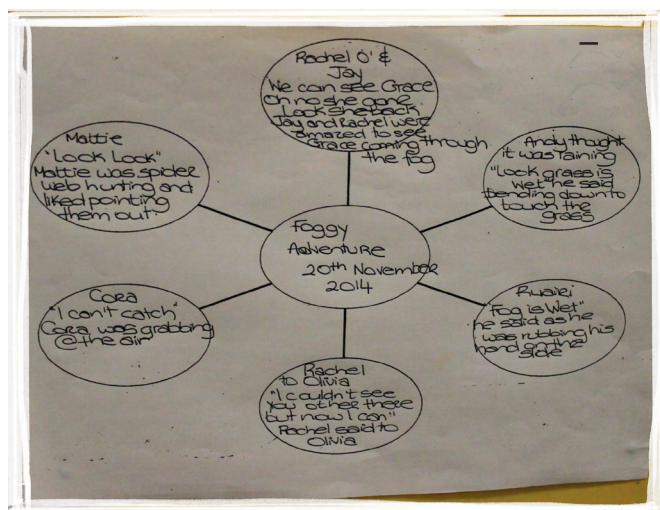
In this tip sheet we look at some examples of documenting that are effective, but that don't take too much time in a busy day. These methods can be used with all age-groups babies, toddlers and young children.

Example 1: Photo with caption

Here we see one photo, with a short caption, *The wheel of the tractor was the same height as Amy, Joshua and Grace.* From this comment the practitioner shows that conversations about height took place, showing young children's growing mathematical awareness. The children helped choose the photo and decide the caption.

Example 2: A webbing format

This web type template means that you can jot down simple ideas as they happen. Later, you can reflect and discuss how to support this interest further, as well as adding a few photographs of what happened.



Foggy Adventure!

The circle in the centre of the web is dated and the title *Foggy Adventure* is written in. The children in the Toddler room were fascinated and their comments as they discussed fog are noted:

One child thought it was raining *Look, grass is wet* he said bending down to touch the grass.

Another child said *Fog is wet* as he was rubbing his hand on the slide.

One child said to the other *I couldn't see you over there but now I can.*

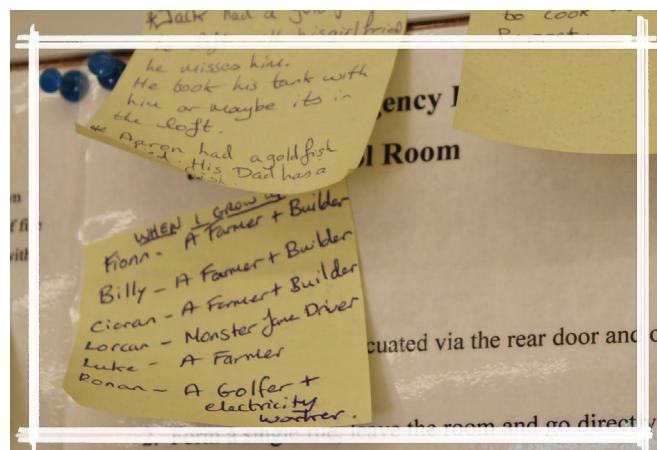
I can't catch it said another child as she grabbed the air.

Another child was spider web hunting and pointed out the webs he was finding.

Two other children were amazed that they could see someone coming in and out of sight through the fog.

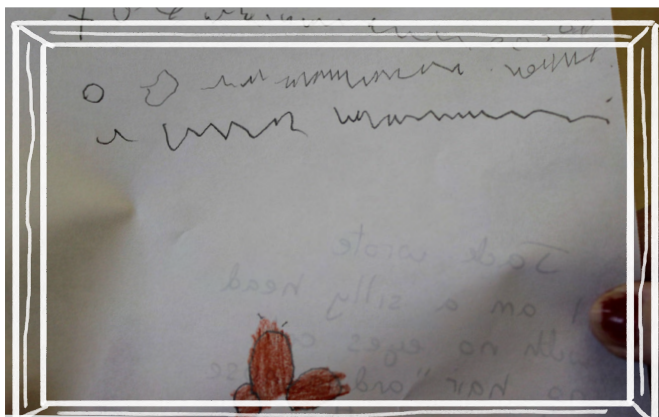
Example 3: Using sticky notes

Keep sticky notes handy and jot down interesting things you see the children doing or hear them saying. As much as possible, add enough detail so you don't have to spend time rewriting them later. You can add these to children's individual portfolios or to group learning journals. Remember to add the date, your initials and make links to *Aistear's* themes to make the learning more visible.



Example 4: Involve children in their own portfolios

Jonathon takes his paper and pencil and draws a picture.



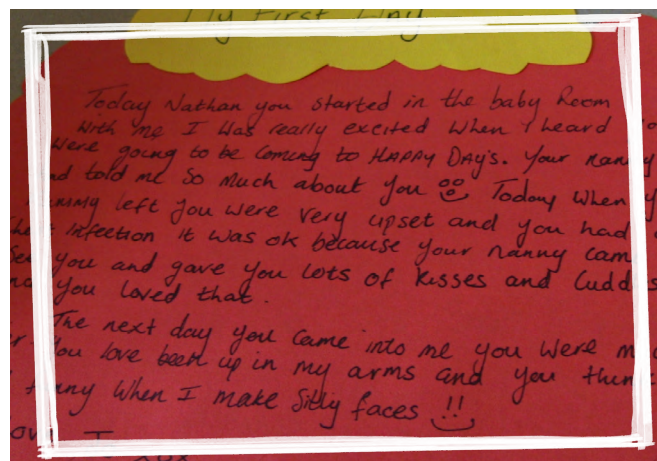
When he is finished, he goes to where the individual learning portfolios are kept, gets his own portfolio and opens the plastic pocket to put his picture in.



Breda, his Key Person, sees him and asks if he would like to her to write something about the picture and he responds, *yes*. He tells her, *I am a silly head with no eyes and no hair and no nose and no mouth*. Breda writes this down and Jonathon puts the page in the portfolio.

Through this experience, Jonathon learns that Breda is interested in his picture and his thoughts about it. Breda thinks this connected to Jonathon's sense of **Identity and Belonging** and notes this in his journal, saying *Jonathon shows that he has a strong self-identity (Aim 1) and appreciates the features that make a person special and unique (LG2). He is able to have fun with words and also to know that people have eyes, ears, nose, mouth and hair*. She draws his Dad's attention to the journal when he is collecting Johnathon.

Example 5: Narrative feedback



On this baby's first day at crèche the practitioner gives feedback to his parents in the form of a letter to the little boy, with a photograph. It shows how the practitioner responded to the information the little boy's Mam had given about her son and how the little boy is settling in.

Conclusion

Using these simple, but meaningful ways to document children's learning and development helps you gather rich information on each child. Documentation also ensures that their learning is visible. It can be a valuable tool in assisting you to plan and support further learning and development. Different methods work for different situations. Choose from these or come up with your own ideas. Keep it simple!