

Element 2: Principles, including Rights of the Child and Practitioner Image of the Child

Introduction

Aistear and *Síolta* share a common set of principles. *Aistear*'s principles are found on pp.7-12, *Principles and themes* section of the *Aistear* book. *Síolta*'s principles are found on pp.6-10 in the *Full and Part-time Daycare Manual*. These can assist in developing your curriculum as they can be used as a basis for continuing review, evaluation and improvement. These principles are based on national and international research and are important for early childhood curricula across different philosophies. The principles focus on what we know about how children think and learn, who and what is important to them, and how their own interests are the foundation for their enquiry and learning. The principles together with the themes of *Aistear*, can help you plan and develop a curriculum to support each child's holistic development.

Drawing on the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (UNCRC, 1989), *Aistear* and *Síolta* highlight the importance of children being involved in decisions that affect them and having their opinions and choices respected. Articles 3 and 12 of the UNCRC are especially relevant for early childhood. Article 3 states that *the best interests of children must be of paramount concern in all actions concerning children* and Article 12 states that *the child's views must be considered in all matters affecting him/her*. The principles of *Aistear* and *Síolta* place children at the centre of their

own learning and development and view them as citizens with rights and responsibilities, free from any form of discrimination. The Frameworks also view children as confident, competent, curious and creative learners.

Building a curriculum that reflects this view of children involves practitioners standing back, observing and listening, involving children, and giving them opportunities to show their competence and confidence, reflecting on this and providing experiences to support them to progress to the next stages in their learning and development journey. An important starting point in curriculum development therefore involves asking, *what is my image of the child? Do I share the view of Aistear and Síolta? And if so, how is this reflected in children's experiences, in the environment and in my interactions with children?* Your image of each individual child and your interpretation of his/her rights has important implications for the curriculum.

It is also important that you are able to explain the principles which underpin your curriculum. The Practice Guide provides a number of activities to help you become familiar with the principles of *Aistear* and *Síolta* and to explore what they mean to you, your fellow practitioners and to the children in your setting.

If working a team, coming together to decide on shared principles of practice will help to facilitate consistent practice across all areas and rooms in your setting. As you reflect on your practice and develop your view of the child as competent and confident you will be bringing the UNCRC (1989) to life in your setting.

Aistear's and *Síolta's* principles are broadly similar and have been grouped under three headings. Each group has a short paragraph which summaries the key ideas in that group and a list of the relevant principles from the two frameworks. Each principle has a code with an A representing a principle in *Aistear* and an S representing a principle in *Síolta*. For most principles, there is an A and an S so the principle underpins both frameworks. Some of the principles are also very similar although referred to by a different name. See Table 1 on page 3 for the principle paragraph and grouping.

This work should help you to agree on a set of principles that suits your setting and the children you work with.

Table 1: Underpinning Principles of *Aistear* and *Siolta*

Group 1: Children and their lives in early childhood	
<p>Early childhood is a significant and distinct time in life that needs to be valued, respected and nurtured. Each child has his/her own set of experiences and unique life story and is confident and competent. Recognition of the child's individuality, strengths, rights and needs as citizens are central and contribute to a quality early childhood experience where an understanding of equality, rights and responsibilities is promoted.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equality (A and S) • Diversity (A and S) • Child's uniqueness (A) and Children First (S) • Children as citizens (A) and Value of early childhood (S)
Group 2: Children's connections with others	
<p>Children learn and develop through loving, nurturing, respectful relationships with adults and other children. Adults working with children strive to develop meaningful relationships with them as well as developing partnerships with their parents. Recognition and links to extended family and community are also important. These reciprocal connections contribute to a shared knowledge and understanding which supports children's holistic development. Staff work effectively as a team and on-going reflective practice is valued as part of this process.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationships (A and S) and Welfare (S) • Parents, family and community (A and S) • Adult's role (A and S), Pedagogy (S) and Teamwork (S)
Group 3: How children learn and develop	
<p>Children learn lots of things at the same time and in many different ways. They build on their knowledge and experience through play and active learning with hands-on experiences and in this way they develop dispositions, skills, attitudes and values, knowledge and understanding. On-going assessment ensures that experiences are built on and are relevant and meaningful. Communication and language are at the heart of early learning and development. An environment, indoor and outdoor which is representative of all children, influences what and how children learn, with good environments fostering independence, curiosity and a sense of belonging.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Play (A and S) • Environment (A and S) • Holistic learning and development (A) • Active learning (A) • Relevant and meaningful experiences (A) • Communication and language (A)