

Introduction

Assessment is part of adults' day-to-day interactions with children. Adults continually make judgements about children's learning and development and use the information they gather to help children to progress. Children too make judgements about what they are good at, what they enjoy doing, what they can do now with a little help, and what they would like to be able to do in the future.

These guidelines describe what assessment is and show what it can look like in early childhood. At times, specific references are made to infant classes in primary schools where assessment practice is informed by legislation.

What is assessment? Why is it important?

Figure 3: Definition of assessment

Assessment is the ongoing 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.

Assessment enables the adult to find out what children understand, how they think, what they are able to do, and what their dispositions and interests are. This information helps the adult to build rich stories of children as capable and competent learners in order to support further learning and development. In doing this, he/she uses the assessment information to give on-going feedback to children about how they are getting on in their learning, to provide challenging and enjoyable experiences for them, to choose appropriate supports for them, and to document, celebrate and plan the next steps in their learning.

Put simply, the adult considers the following questions when thinking about assessment.

Table 11: Thinking about assessment

Element	Questions
Making a judgement	<p>What aspects of children's learning and development do I want to focus on in my assessment?</p> <p>Who will make the judgement - me, the children, or both of us?</p>
Recording	<p>How will I record the judgement—as a mental note, as a written note, as a comment or story, as a drawing, as a photograph or video-recording, on a checklist?</p> <p>How will I ensure that, over time, I am building up rich portraits of children's learning and development?</p> <p>Will I give children opportunities to record their own judgements? How?</p>
Sharing	<p>What do I want to say to children about their learning and development?</p> <p>What do I want to share with children's parents?</p> <p>How will I share the assessment information?</p>

Assessment for Learning and **Assessment of Learning** are two approaches to assessment. The two differ in **how** the adult uses the information he/she collects. The main purpose of Assessment of Learning is to inform others, like parents and professionals, such as therapists, about children’s achievement. Assessment for Learning focuses on using assessment information to help children with the next steps in their learning and development. While both approaches are important, these guidelines focus on the adult using assessment on a daily basis to help children progress in their learning and development across *Aistear’s* four themes. This is Assessment for Learning.



‘Doing’ assessment

The four assessment actions — **collecting, documenting, reflecting on,** and **using** information — overlap and often happen at the same time. At times the adult uses all four actions at once and at other times undertakes just one or two. On occasions the adult assesses within a few seconds or minutes, but often assessment takes place over a number of days or weeks. Sometimes the adult assesses without even planning to. At other times, he/she plans to focus on particular aspects of learning and development across *Aistear’s* themes. Table 12 summarises some key features of good assessment practice.

Table 12: Features of good assessment practice

Assessment	The adult
Benefits children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ gives feedback to children on their learning and development as part of his/her daily interactions with them ■ makes decisions that build on past experiences and support new learning and development
Involves children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ talks with children to understand their learning and development ■ gives children opportunities to think about what they did, said, made, and learned, and helps them plan what they will do next
Makes sense for children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ assesses as part of everyday activities, events, routines, and interactions, and uses objects, places and people which are familiar and interesting to children
Involves children’s families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ provides parents with insights into their children’s learning and gives suggestions for how they might support learning at home ■ gives parents opportunities to share information about their children’s learning and development
Uses many methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ uses methods such as self-assessment, conversations, observations, tasks, and tests ■ uses methods in a way that is appropriate, given children’s ages, backgrounds and stages of learning and development
Happens over time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ collects and uses information on a daily basis ■ over time, builds a rich portrait of each child as a learner
Celebrates the breadth and depth of children’s learning and development.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ provides evidence of children’s learning and development across the dispositions, skills, attitudes and values, knowledge, and understanding as set out in <i>Aistear’s</i> themes.