

Updating *Aistear*

Written submission template for organisations, groups and individuals

This template is intended to help you (and your colleagues) develop a written submission in relation to Updating *Aistear*. Please e-mail your completed submission to aistearsubmissions@ncca.ie

Individual submission details

Name	
Date	
E-mail	

Organisation submission details

Name	Éilis Ryan
Position	
Organisation	Trócaire
Date	
E-mail	

Do you consent to this submission being posted online including your name and organisation*?

Yes

No

Please provide some brief background information on your organisation (if applicable).

Trócaire is an overseas development organisation which, as an agency of the Catholic Church, works to challenge injustice around the world and provide support to people living with the effects of injustice. Trócaire has a mandate to carry out this work both overseas, and through awareness raising, education and campaigning, in Ireland.

As part of its educational work in Ireland, Trócaire designs resources about the countries it works in and the issues it works on, tailored for early childhood education, and provides support through workshops at Initial Teacher Education and CPD level to early childhood educators. Our early childhood education work spans both pre-school and junior primary.

Please email your submission to aistearsubmissions@ncca.ie

The remainder of the template includes two sections. Section 1 invites your overall comments and observations on *Aistear: The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework*. Section 2 is structured according to the Principles, Themes and Guidelines for Good Practice. Each section is briefly summarised as a support for working on the submission.

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Section 1

Please outline your overall comments and observations on updating *Aistear: The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework*

1. Aistear has placed a welcome emphasis on diversity and inclusion both through its Principles, in particular Principle 1 ('The Child's Community,' and 'Equality and Diversity'), and through Department of Children and Youth Affairs' 2016 *Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Charter and Guidelines for Early Childhood Educators*. Through its work with early childhood educators, Trócaire has seen the effectiveness of this emphasis on diversity and inclusion as it relates to young children and families from different parts of the world, and with various cultures and beliefs.
2. The content of the Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Guidelines should be mainstreamed into the body of Aistear itself, in particular concrete best practice in relation to the use of materials, language, imagery and stories which challenge, rather than reinforce, stereotypes and bias, as part of the relevant learning opportunities of the revised Framework. The definitions used in relation to equality and inclusion should include reference to global dimensions of inequality and exclusion, and the complex relationship between introducing issues of global exclusion to young children, whilst ensuring the inclusion of children of all ethnicities and nationalities in the classroom.
3. In addition to maintaining Aistear's emphasis on diversity and inclusion, the revised curriculum framework should include an explicit reference to Development Education¹ (DE), how its principles are relevant across a range of Aistear Principles and Themes, and evidence about how young children best learn about the wider world, fairness and justice.
4. The existing references to the child as citizen within Aistear should be expanded, and more clearly linked to diversity and inclusion. For example, reasonably abstract components of the existing Framework ('Model democracy in action;' 'Help me to learn about my rights and responsibility;' 'Be active citizens.')

¹ Trócaire uses the term Development Education (DE) to describe work done in countries in the Global North to raise critical awareness about injustice and poverty in the Global South. Other organisations, including the government agency Irish Aid, use the term Global Citizenship Education (GCE), which is largely interchangeable with DE.

like, in order to support educators in identifying the potential for activities which nurture the child as a citizen.

5. In linking the importance of citizenship to the importance of diversity and inclusion, the Framework should establish clearly the difference between Development Education, which emphasises all global citizens' responsibilities, and education about the world which exposes the child to faraway places without reference to their relationship to them. This can be done by providing clear exemplars of learning opportunities which reference, in the same exemplar, global learning, diversity and inclusion, and the child as citizen.

Section 2

Principles of *Aistear*

Aistear is based on 12 Principles of early learning and development. Each principle is presented using a short statement. This is followed by an explanation of the Principle from the child's perspective. This explanation highlights the adult's role in supporting children's early learning and development. The Principles can be accessed [here](#).

Please give your feedback in relation to updating the Principles of *Aistear*. Please indicate what is working well with the principles and what might need to be enhanced or updated.

Trócaire's work is most relevant to Principle 1 of Aistear (Children and their lives in early childhood), and so this submission focusses primarily on this Principle.

Principle 1

Aistear has placed a welcome emphasis on diversity and inclusion within Principles 1. From the perspective of Development Education, the components of Principle 1 which refer to 'The Child's Community,' and 'Equality and Diversity' are of great relevance to countering bias and stereotyping, and this is very welcome. In its work with early childhood educators, Trócaire has seen the effectiveness of this emphasis on diversity, and educators clearly identify the relevance of intercultural education to their work.

Moving beyond intercultural education towards the inclusion of Development Education (or Global Citizenship Education) will require greater clarity and emphasis on the component of Principle 1 which refers to 'Children as citizens.' This component provides enormous opportunities for DE, but falls short in making these opportunities concrete as learning opportunities. The component should be expanded to make clear what teaching and learning about young children's rights *and responsibilities* looks like.

Where the Principle refers to the importance of encouraging the child to care for the environment, this should be expanded to include reference to teaching the child to care for others who live far away in other parts of the planet.

Principle 2

In reference to the importance of the child's connections with others, reference should be made to evidence that children can and do feel empathy with children and people not in

their immediate environment, in particular through photographs and stories, and that experiences such as this enhance the strength of children's social connections.

Principal 3

The importance of active learning and hands-on experiences to forming critical citizens should be referenced.

Section 3

Themes of *Aistear*

Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework presents children’s learning and development using four Themes. These are:

1. Well-being
2. Identity and Belonging
3. Communicating
4. Exploring and Thinking.

The themes describe what children learn—the dispositions, attitudes and values, skills, knowledge, and understanding. Each theme begins with a short overview of its importance for children as young learners. The theme is then presented using four aims. Each aim is divided into six learning goals. *Aistear*’s Themes can be accessed [here](#)

Please give your overall feedback in relation to the themes of *Aistear*. Please indicate what is working well with the themes and what might need to be enhanced or updated.

Themes 1 and 2 of the current *Aistear* Curriculum Framework already reference the importance of social justice, citizenship and care for the environment to early childhood education. These can and should be further expanded to include reference to the global dimension, and how children, as citizens, can engage with stories of children from other parts of the world to build their sense of social and environmental justice.

Theme 1: Well-Being

The current Framework clearly recognises understanding diversity and our role in the world are part and parcel of the child’s well-being. In particular, this is achieved by the below aims and learning goals.

Aim 3: Children will be creative and spiritual

- *Care for the environment*
- *Understand that others may have beliefs and values different to their own*

Aim 4: Children will have positive outlooks on learning and on life

- *Respect life, their own and others, and know that life has a meaning and purpose*
- *Be active citizens*

Within Theme 1, a learning goal which explicitly refers to the global dimension of diversity, respect for life, and active citizenship, should be included. This might, for example, state that ‘In partnership with the adult, children will engage with stories and images of children from other parts of a world in a way which enables them to explore similarities and differences, and fairness and unfairness in the context of those stories.’

The sample learning experiences which support these are also welcome. In particular in relation to Aim 4’s learning goal that children will ‘be active citizens,’ more concrete learning experiences would help to make this reasonably abstract goal more achievable. Sample learning experiences in relation to citizenship and social justice should include reference to fairness beyond the immediate environment of the child (i.e. fairness / unfairness in relation to children from other communities / backgrounds, including from other countries).

Learning experiences should include reference to the importance of choosing photos and stories which challenge bias and portray people in other parts of the world as active and unique human beings.

Theme 2: Identity and Belonging

Aim 3: Children will be able to express their rights and show an understanding and regard for the identity, rights and views of others.

- *Be aware of and respect others’ needs, rights, feelings, culture, language, background, and religious beliefs*
- *Have a sense of social justice and recognise and deal with unfair behaviour*

The above component of Aim 3 should be expanded to include reference to the global dimension, and that children’s sense of social justice should be developed not just in relation to their own immediate experiences of fairness and unfairness, but also with reference to the stories of children in other places and from other backgrounds.

Sample learning experiences which emphasis pretend play, small world play and their role in encouraging empathy, should be expanded to include reference to the stories, dilemmas and challenges faced by children in other countries, and both similarities and differences between children in Ireland and children in those countries.

Sample learning experiences should provide guidance to educators on how to choose stories and photographs which challenge stereotypes and bias in relation to those who experience poverty and exclusion.

Sample learning experiences should include both discussion of fairness and unfairness (already present in the Curriculum Framework), but also strategies for encouraging young children to consider actions they can take to address these scenarios, to enhance the child's sense of citizenship.

Section 4

Guidelines for Good Practice

Aistear has four sets of guidelines, focusing on different aspects of practice:

1. Building partnerships between parents and practitioners
2. Learning and developing through interactions
3. Learning and developing through play
4. Supporting learning and development through assessment

These describe how the adult can support children's learning and development across *Aistear's* principles and themes. *Aistear's* Guidelines for Good Practice can be accessed [here](#)

Please give your overall feedback in relation to updating *Aistear's* Guidelines for Good Practice. Please indicate what is working well with the guidelines and what might need to be enhanced or updated.

Data Protection

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