

# 'ENABLING THE ENABLERS'

## Cultivating Agentic Educators

McMonagle, A. 2025

Aistear 2024 employs the term the **'agentic educator'** to describe the educator who has the freedom to use their knowledge and skills to interpret Aistear to support children's learning and development.

Yet, it would be remiss to believe that the agentic educator *'just is'*, or will simultaneously materialise once qualified. Becoming a proficient (or agentic) educator takes time, cultivation, support from a pedagogical lead, self-reflection and an openness to grow.

One of the many important functions of the agentic educator is to facilitate meaningful assessment and documentation. The Aistear Guidance for Good Practice describes assessment and documentation as:

*'the ongoing and intentional process of collecting, documenting, reflecting on, and using information to develop rich portraits of babies, toddlers and young children as learners to support and enhance their learning' p34.*

**This article considers the wider supports that need to be in place to cultivate documentation expertise.**

### Powerful Pedagogy

**Pedagogical assessment and documentation are among some of the most powerful and effective strategies that educators have at their disposal.**

**When used appropriately, it gives the educator a mechanism to view the child's interactions and play through a meaningful lens to understand and support learning.**

**These skills can only be honed and perfected when working in an educator role and require ongoing support.**



### What makes Documentation Meaningful?

Meaningful documentation is **progressive and builds over time**. It tells a story of learning including time, place, process and who was involved. It is always **individual to the child** and does not focus on academic achievements in isolation.

Instead it considers a **holistic view** of the child highlighting their interests, strengths and needs. It does not pass judgement but instead focuses on what the child can do independently and with adult support. It is **shared with family in real time** so that meaningful learning moments are acknowledged and supported at home.

Documentation begins with noticing and observing. However, knowing what to do with what has been noticed and observed is more complex than it sounds. **Participative documentation** requires the educator is present, have knowledge of the child, their lived experiences, interests and learning preferences.

## Challenges facing Assessment and Documentation

Documentation itself is not a challenge, but there are challenges to documentation. This can include the 'We don't assess children misconception', the 'I'd rather spend time with children than document' or 'We have no time for documenting'.

Time is always a factor in such a participative role, however an unenthusiastic or misinformed attitude places assessment and documentation outside the curriculum, as an 'optional extra' or something that is carried out for inspection bodies.

Any function, including formative assessment and documentation, when not understood or valued for what it can offer children becomes a chore or is dismissed as unimportant. Educators may spend precious time collating information that has very little meaning for children or function for good practice.

**For this reason, it is important to get it right.**



Educators need support to navigate and become familiar with the full documentation system used in the early childhood setting. This includes **documentation for care, documentation for learning and documentation to share information.**

The role of the Pedagogical Lead is essential to oversee this process. This person requires **sound assessment and documentation expertise** and the ability to guide educators within the team. If this is not possible, then pedagogical support should be sought externally.

## Enabling the Enablers

For assessment and documentation to be carried out to a high standard, consideration must be given to the support available to achieve this. Like any skill, participative assessment and documentation must be practiced and refined.

Educators come to their role with varied training experiences, attitudes and expertise. Some educators understand what documentation is but may not have the practical experience to transfer theory to practice.

Others may have been taught multiple methods of 'textbook' observation but lack confidence to use observations to analyse or scaffold learning in real-life situations.



# Characteristics of a Meaningful Assessment and Documentation System in Early Childhood Settings

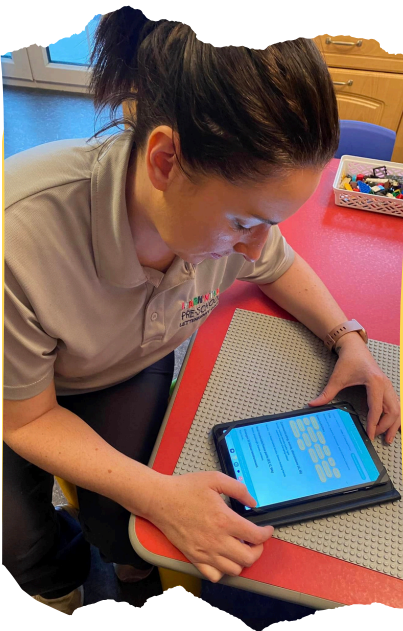
3 key characteristics are apparent where a meaningful and effective system of assessment and documentation is in place - **Organisational buy-in, Professional development and capacity building and Systems and resources.**

## 1. Organisational buy-in

The early childhood setting recognises the benefits of an ongoing cycle of assessment and documentation. Educators are provided with a range of pedagogical tools to support their documentation responsibilities and a whole service approach is used.

An overview of the curriculum, assessment and documentation framework is included in the Curriculum Statement of the service. This includes principles and objectives and a recognition that babies, toddlers and young children are valued as active, participative learners.

The early childhood setting adopts a consistent and systematic approach to assessment and documentation utilising a Key Person approach. All educators working within the setting are given instruction, understand the process and are supported when needed.



## 2. Professional development and capacity building

The early childhood setting has a proactive approach to **continuing professional development** (CPD) regarding the refinement of pedagogical techniques and strategies.

This includes **strength-based writing techniques, interaction and engagement strategies, reflective practice, seeing and hearing the voice of the child and planning an emergent child-led curriculum.**

Educator support needs are identified through ongoing engagement with the Pedagogical Lead and during team and Support and Supervision meetings.

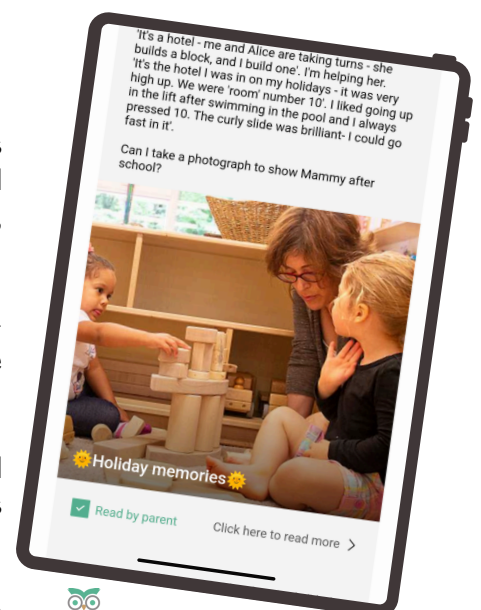
## 3. Systems and Resources

The early childhood service adopts a documentation system that is individual to the child and is embedded in ongoing practice. All documentation components such as observation, assessment, emergent planning and transition are linked and progressive.

Learning and development is captured using multiple modalities – including child voice, narrative, photographs, video and creative expression.

The system and documentation practice of the early childhood setting is communicated to children, educators and family and is supervised by the Pedagogical Lead.

Sufficient time to enable participative documentation is rooted in the daily routine and shared with family.



In summary, assessment and documentation are powerful mechanisms to interpret children's strengths and interests and to support their learning and development.

Good documentation requires not only the skillset of the educator, but specialised pedagogical tools, buy-in and support from the early childhood setting.

In addition to educator proficiency, adequate time, mental energy and confidence are prerequisites for engagement with purposeful assessment and documentation.

**A collective responsibility to cultivate educator agency for the benefit of all children is vital.**

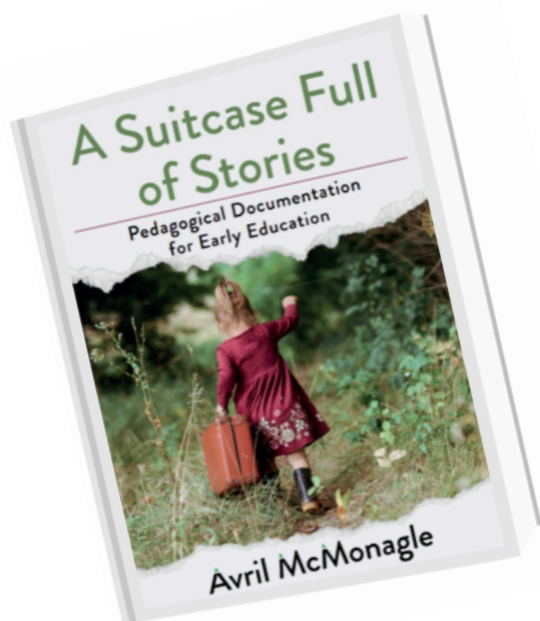
### References:

Aistear The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework (2024) NCCA. Ireland

Aistear Guidance for Good Practice (2024) NCCA. Ireland

McMonagle. A. (2024) A Suitcase Full of Stories: Pedagogical Documentation for Early Education, Orla Kelly Publishing, Ireland (available on Amazon.com)

For more on the MOSAIC Educator Pedagogical Documentation System see [www.mosaicearlyed.com](http://www.mosaicearlyed.com)



For more on Pedagogical Documentation and multiple examples of practice recorded in early childhood settings - see 'A Suitcase Full of Stories - Pedagogical Documentation for Early Education' McMonagle. A. (2024)

Available from [www.mosaicearlyed.com](http://www.mosaicearlyed.com) (Books and Blogs section OR from Amazon).



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