



# Learner focused

Recognising that all children learn in different ways and that learning is a highly individual process. They also acknowledge differences in children's physical, intellectual, cultural, social and personal experiences and perspectives.

Learner-focused classrooms are the result of careful decision-making, planning, organisation and reflection. Learner focused practice is shaped by teachers':

- beliefs about young learners, teaching and learning
- understanding and knowledge of individual young learners' strengths, needs and interests
- expectations of young learners
- knowledge of the curriculum content
- interactions and patterns of communication with young learners.

Each of these factors contributes to the quality of the learning opportunities that young learners experience.

## Knowing young learners

Becoming attuned to individual likes and dislikes, interests, strengths and preferred modes of learning relies on the positive relationships that teachers build with young learners. Knowing young learners at a relational level is an ongoing process that is developed through sustained conversations with each individual over time. As agentic individuals it is important to draw on young learners' insights and reflections about their learning, and their learning interests and goals, to inform decisions. Teachers also gather knowledge of young learners through kindergarten transition statements and artefacts, parent-teacher discussions, professional dialogue with staff, observations, reports and assessment data. This information shapes teachers' understandings of each young learner in relation to curriculum, learning and assessment.

## Knowing curriculum

To be a learner-focused teacher requires thorough knowledge of curriculum content and clarity about what it is that you want young learners to know, understand, apply, demonstrate or transfer to another learning context. Combined knowledge of young learners and familiarity with curriculum content enables teachers to maximise opportunities for holistic and academic learning.

## Knowing yourself: Reflective practice in action

Knowing young learners and knowing curriculum are fundamental features of teachers' repertoires of practice. When combined with beliefs about teaching and learning, knowledge of young learners and curriculum shapes the pedagogical lens teachers use in decision-making, interactions and the expectations they hold of young learners.

Teachers' expectations of young learners are also mirrored in actions which send powerful messages to them about their capacities as learners. It is essential to hold high expectations for every young learner to maximise their sense of belonging, confidence as a learner, and dispositions to learning.

*A learner-focused 'learning environment for young children is one in which age-appropriate activities are available, interesting practical activities are carried out, teachers have high expectations of children, and children and adults work together as part of a team.'*<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Walsh, G., Sproule, L., McGuinness, C., Trew, K., Rafferty, H., & Sheehy, N. (2006). An appropriate curriculum for 4-5-year-old children in Northern Ireland: Comparing play-based and formal approaches. *Early Years*, 26(2), 201-221.



