



Agentic

Ensuring that children have voice in their learning. Their ideas and interests initiate, support and extend learning possibilities in order to build on their real-world understandings and experiences.

Young learners' sense of agency

Young learners are agentic with opinions, interests, knowledge and experiences that shape their views of the world and their place within it. How young learners demonstrate their sense of agency is nevertheless dependent on the learning experiences in which they are engaged, their levels of personal confidence to participate and contribute ideas, and the culture of support offered by adults. A young learner's sense of agency is also influenced by past educational experiences, cultural expectations in the home, and his/her relationships with peers and teachers. While some young learners may enthusiastically and confidently demonstrate agency in interactions, others may find the prospect of making decisions and choices overwhelming at times, particularly when faced with unfamiliar situations or new experiences. Differentiating the strategies used to promote agency is necessary to support the individual strengths and needs of young learners.

Scaffolding the decision-making process through the use of photographs and icons also helps to reduce the cognitive load involved in making choices. Each young learner may benefit from a visual chart that represents their choices, to act as a visual cue and reminder.

As part of teacher decision-making processes, consider how agency can be supported through the organisation of the learning environment, interactions and approaches to teaching and learning, and a careful balance of familiar and open-ended resources.

*'All people however young, are entitled to be participants in their own lives, to influence what happens to them, to be involved in creating their own environments, to exercise choices and to have their views respected and valued.'*¹

Organisation of the learning environment

Consider how young learners may be involved in decisions about the organisation of the classroom space.

- What opportunities do young learners have to share in planning the layout of furniture, classroom resources, and in the selection of commercial and open-ended materials on offer?
- How are young learners invited to contribute to displays and represent their ideas?
- Are there opportunities for young learners to engage with classroom resources without having to seek adult permission?
- Do opportunities exist for young learners to select materials to complete a project?
- What say do young learners have in classroom grouping or seating arrangements?
- How are young learners encouraged to take responsibility for decisions?

Promoting agency through interactions

Classroom discussions that draw on young learners' ideas and interests support their sense of agency. Opportunities to share their knowledge and interests send messages to young learners that their ideas are valued. Regular allocation of time for discussion, to question and to ponder, also signals that enquiry and research matter as a way of learning, and in thinking about learning.

Some interests or questions that young learners share may lead to an inquiry-based learning experience, or a project over several weeks, linked to particular curriculum requirements. How the questions are addressed may involve the teacher, young learners, parents and other staff members, and may be communicated multi-modally through

¹ Lansdown, G. (2005). *Can you hear me? The rights of young children to participate in decisions affecting them. Working Papers in Early Childhood*, 36, p.40. Retrieved from: <http://www.bibalex.org/Search4Dev/Files/282624/114976.Pdf>



mapping, drawing diagrams, planning, photography, digital technologies and constructions. Not all of young learners' questions, interests and curiosities will lead to classroom events or projects. Some ideas may arise spontaneously and be addressed in the moment. The key goal is create a community of learners where curiosity and expression of ideas are encouraged in multi-modal ways that draw on young learners' knowledge and strengths. A simple practice to initiate is the use of a white board or laminated 'I wonder?' chart, affording opportunities for young learners to raise a question and record it for discussion. If a question cannot be immediately addressed, recording a question demonstrates that young learners' ideas are valued and not forgotten.

Collaborating with young learners when planning learning experiences across the day and throughout the week encourages their interest and ownership of the learning. When young learners have a say in their learning they are more likely to be invested in the experience. To create a range and balance in the timetable when young learner can make choices, a helpful strategy to try is a 'Can do, must do' approach. For example, during an English focused block of time, the 'Must do' activity might be a modelled writing experience that young learners are required to complete with the teacher at a given time. On completion of this task, young learners may select from a range of previously negotiated activities that could include, a vocabulary building game, a 'listen, draw and write' activity using a listening post, or a tablet word search game. In addition to these suggestions, learning experiences may also reflect a current class investigation or an activity developed in response to a local event, celebration, or artefact that a young learner shares with the class. The key is to become very familiar with curriculum requirements in order to seize opportunities as they arise.

*'Developing a sense of agency in children means providing opportunities for children to make choices in their day to day environment, recognising and cultivating learning dispositions (such as curiosity and imagination) that support children to make autonomous choices, and supporting opportunities in the curriculum for inquiry, experimentation and investigation.'*²

² Lansdown, G. (2005). *Can you hear me? The rights of young children to participate in decisions affecting them. Working Papers in Early Childhood*, 36, p.40. Retrieved from: <http://www.bibalex.org/Search4Dev/Files/282624/114976.Pdf>