



Topic thirteen: Agency in practice

The Early Years Learning Framework and the Framework for School Age Care define children's agency as *'being able to make choices and decisions, to influence events and to have an impact on one's world'* (EYLF p45 and FSAC p41). So what does agency mean for children who attend early childhood services?

Children's agency is based on the idea that all children:

- are capable of making choices and decisions
- can initiate and lead their own learning
- have a right to participate in decisions that affect them.

In promoting agency, educators enable children with real choices and support them to make decisions about how they participate. Children's participation is encouraged by shared understandings and collaboration between adults and children.

For educators to support agency they must be aware of the capabilities and interests of the children they work with. Children are competent, capable learners when they are fully engaged and supported to participate in meaningful learning experiences that follow their interests. These experiences can be planned or spontaneous.

Educators can design open-ended learning environments with children, setting up activities of interest together and sharing the outcomes from these activities. This can be as simple as providing a range of materials for children to use as they choose.

For toddlers, as they move towards independence, educators can support agency by offering them real choices in activities and routines. For example, toddlers can participate in preparing and serving morning tea to themselves and others.

Under the United Nations Convention for the Rights of the Child, children have a right to be active participants in all matters affecting their lives. Children with agency develop strong dispositions for learning. They are more:

- confident in making decisions about their learning
- able to work successfully with other children in a variety of situations
- able to persist when there are challenges
- able to communicate their ideas with adults and their peers.

In some jurisdictions the educator to child ratios are changing and these improved ratios have the potential to provide greater opportunities for educators to give more individual attention to children and support their agency and educational outcomes. Information about ratio changes coming into effect in 2016 is available [here](#).



Children actively explore and make sense of their world from birth. By '*viewing children as active participants and decision makers opens up possibilities ... to move beyond pre-conceived expectations about what children can do and learn*' (EYLF p9, FSAC p7).

Reflecting on your practice, how do educators at your service:

- encourage children's agency through meaningful interactions?
- include children's perspectives?
- work with children as co-constructors of curriculum?