

Section 2: Children's experiences

Introduction

This section presents the eleven portraits from the NCCA's study. The portraits are organised in three groupings according to the over-lapping age-phases outlined in the NCCA's consultative document, *Towards a Framework for Early Learning* (2004):

- babies, (birth to 18 months)
- toddlers (12 months to 3 years)
- young children (2½ to 6 years)

Each portrait begins with a short description of the child followed by some background information on the setting in which the researcher worked with the child. Each child's experiences and reflections are then presented using the *Framework for Early Learning's* four broad and interlinked themes:

- Well-being
- Identity and Belonging
- Communicating
- Exploring and Thinking.

A brief description of the themes as presented in the consultative document, *Towards a Framework for Early Learning* and its Executive Summary (NCCA, 2004) is outlined below.

Well-being

The child's physical, emotional and intellectual well-being is nurtured within the context of warm and supportive relationships with others.

Well-being can be defined as being content and healthy. While this is important for all learning, it is especially so for early learning. Well-being is encouraged within warm and supportive relationships with others. The child's emotional well-being is related to

the quality of his/her early attachments with adults. Warm and trusting relationships, where the child feels loved and where he/she is encouraged to express himself/herself, help the child to be positive about learning. This, in turn, helps him/her to become more independent, and able to cope with change and challenge. Physical well-being is also important for learning as this enables the child to explore, to investigate, and to physically challenge himself/herself in the environment. (*Towards a Framework for Early Learning*, Executive summary, 2004, p.13)

Identity and Belonging

Strong feelings of identity and belonging contribute to inner well-being and security.

Identity is about the characteristics, behaviours and understandings children have, both individually and shared with others. Belonging is about having a secure relationship with or connection to a particular group. It is important that children develop a healthy and positive sense of their own identity, and their place in society. Positive messages about their family, culture, faith/no faith, and language help them to feel valued and respected in society. Relationships with others also contribute to the child's sense of identity and belonging. It is essential that each child is surrounded by messages of respect, love, praise, and encouragement. (*Towards a Framework for Early Learning*, Executive summary, 2004, p.13)

Communicating

The child's ability to communicate is at the very heart of early learning and development.

Communicating is about expressing and sharing thoughts, information and feelings. It helps children to indicate their needs, to build relationships with others, to explore their feelings, to create knowledge, and to represent and understand the world around them. Children give and receive information in different ways. These different forms of communication generally reflect developmental stages during early childhood. While most children will eventually master oral language as their main form of communication, others may need to use a range of non-verbal means of communication, including pictures, symbols or gestures. All children should be supported and helped to communicate to the best of their ability from the earliest

possible age. (*Towards a Framework for Early Learning*, Executive summary, 2004, p.13-14)

Exploring and Thinking

The child makes sense of his/her environment in a multi-sensorial way. Through active exploration, the child has opportunities to develop in many ways, including cognitively and physically.

Exploring and thinking involve investigating and making sense of the world. Early childhood is a time of great opportunities for exploring, investigating and interpreting these experiences to form ideas and theories about the world. In exploring and thinking, children use their communication, physical, and sensory-motor skills. Trusting and loving relationships with adults provide the security for the child to explore and to find things out. In doing this, the child builds ideas about how things work and why things are the way they are. Interactions between the child and the adult, as well as interactions between peers, enrich and extend this exploring and thinking. (*Towards a Framework for Early Learning*, Executive summary, 2004, p.14)

The portraits are presented on pages 29 to 163 of this document.