



IMAGE MATTERS

EXAMINING THE IMAGE WE HOLD OF CHILDREN AND HOW IT INFLUENCES PARENTS' AND EDUCATORS' INTERACTIONS WITH THEM.

What are your views and beliefs about how children learn? Do you see them as blank slates ready to receive information from adults? Or are they capable little dynamos who can take charge of their own learning?

What people assume and understand about children is often referred to by early childhood educators as the image of the child. It highlights how one's assumptions and beliefs about a child's development, learning and motivation can affect day-to-day classroom decisions and teaching practices.

One's image of the child evolves from factors such as culture and past experiences. You may not even be consciously aware of your preconceived notions and ideas, but these deserve close scrutiny. "As young children are very sensitive to the psychological and physical environments they experience, the adults around them play a critical role in creating these environments. We need to be aware that our beliefs guide our practices," says Professor Nirmala Rao, an early childhood expert from The University of Hong Kong. "It is particularly important for educators to reflect on their beliefs of the children in their care, as this will influence the interactions and opportunities they will provide for the children. Evidence tells us that children benefit from caregiving that is sensitive to their individual characteristics and provides opportunities for learning."

Beanstalk finds out how educators and parents perceive the children in their care, and how it shapes the interactions and relationship between adult and child.

TEACHERS, WHAT COMES TO MIND IN RESPONSE TO THE TERM 'IMAGE OF THE CHILD'?

Mabel Eu: Each child is a unique individual. Children can be competent, capable, independent, communicative, fragile, dependent and so on. As educators, we need to be attuned to their different developmental needs and stages of growth.

Siti Farhana Binte Hamid: I believe children are born curious and full of imagination. Imagination

“As educators, we must be flexible and adaptable in guiding and supporting children's interests.”

MDM MABEL EU, 46
Principal, Kanooka School House

stimulates self-expression and creativity. It helps develop higher-order thinking such as problem-solving, visualisation and idea generation.

WHAT IMPACT DOES AN EDUCATOR'S IMAGE OF THE CHILD HAVE ON HIS OR HER INTERACTIONS WITH CHILDREN, THEIR LEARNING AND WELLBEING?

Mabel: As educators, we scaffold children's learning experiences based on our understanding of the child's interests, abilities, needs and background. For instance, if a child appears shy, we would try to find out the reasons for this shyness and plan experiences to engage the child positively.

Farhana: When a teacher believes there are endless possibilities to a child's potential, and couples it with lessons and activities designed around the child's abilities and interests, it sets the child up for success.

PARENTS, DO YOU SEE CHILDREN AS DEPENDENT ON ADULTS TO LEAD THEM? OR ARE THEY CREATIVE BEINGS WITH UNLIMITED POTENTIAL TO LEARN?

Ahmad Zaki Bin Abdul Rahman: Children are dependent on their immediate caregiver to shield them from the harsh realities which they are not ready to deal with. That said, I think we should give our children a calibrated degree of autonomy so that they can explore and find their feet. In my case, apart from some non-negotiables like limited screen time, we give Ali some autonomy in other areas, such as how to spend his spare time. We give him two options and let him choose what he wants to do.

Sun Jianxia: Children are like seeds striving to grow and blossom. Along the way, they will be exposed to storms and we need to guide them so that they know how to weather the storm of life. At the playground, we let Chloe choose what equipment to play with, while making sure she doesn't get injured. Once we taught her how to grip the ladder on the slide, and hold on to the swing chains, we stepped away and let her try it herself.

