Mary Holwell:

So the Victoria Early Years Learning and Development framework, or as we refer to it in Victoria, the VEYLDF, has eight practice principles. One of these practice principles is titled Equity and Diversity. What are some of the ways that educators can ensure that the interests, abilities and culture of every child and their family are understood and valued?

Rhonda Livingstone:

And I think both the VEYLDF and the Early Years Learning framework do a really good job in terms of supporting and promoting those key aspects, and I think there are a number of ways, when you think about it, probably for me, understanding and valuing are two different processes, and thinking about understanding involving gaining knowledge, and we're very good at building those relationships and gaining knowledge, but also, I think for me, valuing attributes worth and importance to that knowledge, and using that knowledge. And you can understand something, but you might not necessarily value it or consider it to be important. And I think as educational professionals we are always thinking about how we can promote positive outcomes for children and families, and that to me is part of the understanding and valuing, and it's critical.

Rhonda Livingstone:

And also, they're thinking about the alignment with the VEYLDF and those principles around partnerships with families and respectful relationships, and responsive engagement as well. And I think the partnerships that we have, the collaborative partnership arrangements and relationships that we have with families, because we all know that families have lots of knowledge about their children and I think those respectful relationships really allow us to get to know children's strengths and their abilities, and their knowledge, and their interests, and their cultures, but also their challenges. And of course, as educators, we all get to know children and that helps us to make curriculum decisions and to develop educational programmes.

Rhonda Livingstone:

But I do think the fact that we focus so heavily and importantly on hearing children's voices and including that in our planning, and that we're always thinking about experiences that reflects the interests and the capabilities, and the aspirations, and we're doing our assessments and reflections, and plans collaboratively with not only families, but also with children. And I guess when I think back to when the National Quality Standard was first developed and thinking about the OECD report, Starting Strong report, that talked about paying attention to both process and structural quality, and we learnt such a lot from that. And of course there are so many different ways that we can support that understanding and that respect for diversity, and having culturally safe spaces, our physical environments that are culturally safe, but also welcoming and promote that sense of belonging and inclusion, and relationship buildings.

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