Mary Holwell:

When children experience acknowledgment and respect for diversity, their sense of identity becomes even stronger. What do you think are some of the ways that children's sense of identity can be supported through the everyday practices of educators?

Rhonda Livingstone:

Yeah, that's a great question. Because it's so embedded in the VEYLDF isn't it, in terms of describing entity being unique to each child in the early years learning framework, it's that focused on who I am and how I belong, and what's my influence, as well. And I think too it's so embedded and defined in the U.N. convention on the rights of the child, advancing every rights child to preserve his or her identity, including nationality and name and family relations. And I just think that as early childhood educators, we really have a strong sense of what identity looks like and how it develops over time. And, we recognise that it's not fixed, that it is shaped by experiences.

Rhonda Livingstone:

And I just keep coming back to those relationships with people, and places and things, and interactions and responses. And of course, we know that when children feel safe and secure and supported, they grow in confidence, and they're more willing and able to get out and take risks and explore the environment. And I just think that, in terms of thinking about what educators can do, that thinking about the identity being intrinsic to that belonging, being and becoming, helping children to know where and who they are and where they belong and that being the significance of the here and now and knowing themselves and building relationships and engaging with life and of course, the belonging focuses on that how children grow and learn, and identity is a component of this change as well.

Mary Holwell:

That's right. I thought of something, as you were talking there, Rhonda, which relates to another one of our resources, which was the literature review that we had developed relating to the outcome identity and a subsequent practice guide. And one of the discussions we had as part of refining those pieces of work was that idea, that not only is children's identity not fixed but they can have multiple identities almost at any one time and that they will portray themselves and behave or act in particular ways with a particular group of peers or with a particular group of adults, or at kindergarten compared to at home or childcare compared to with grandma or whatever it might be. And I think it's important that educators think about that sometimes and think, "I wonder if I change the way I respond with children, will it influence the information I get back? And therefore, is that consolidating and building their identity as each day passes?"

Rhonda Livingstone:

Absolutely. And I think that the continual reflection on our practices is such an important part of our work, as well isn't it and critically thinking about things like that and how we interact with children and how, as you say, they do have different identities. And so do we in some, in many respects to don't we.

Mary Holwell:

Yes, that's right.

Karen:

I was just thinking on that point, Mary and Rhonda too about identity that, we talk a lot about children's identity, but you don't hear about educator identity as much. And we want educators working with our youngest citizens who are constantly checking in or developing their own sense of belonging and identity. And we want educators who can tune in emotionally and socially to children. And it would almost follow that the more time and attention you pay to that as an educator, there might be some trickle-down effects for children here, when you have a robust sense of self and multiple identities. We all have multiple roles in our life, whether we're at work or home, or with children or not with children, we all have different parts of lives and the characters that we play and paying attention to that, and really concentrating on that has value for children.

Rhonda Livingstone:

Yeah, I absolutely agree. And it comes back to that point about reflecting on our interactions with children, our practices, our pedagogy, and how that impacts on individual children building that sense of belonging and that sense of identity and that sense of being included. I think it's important as well.

Mary Holwell:

Yeah. And I think we can even tie that idea of our relationship with children to aspects of observation or assessment and being conscious of noting how children might respond differently when we act in particular ways or change our interactional style with children that can give us a wealth of information. And often we think about it going out, but we forget about the observational aspect that provides for us as well or the collection, the data that we can collect that follows on from that.

Rhonda Livingstone:

Absolutely. Yeah, I agree. And I just thought, it's probably helpful just if we could put up the slide, just going back to the learning outcomes and without being prescriptive or giving a recipe or a particular approach, just thinking about going back to the learning outcome 1 in the early year's learning framework give some insights into ways that we as educators and service leaders can support children's development of identity and those things that you were just talking about, Mary and Karen.

Mary Holwell:

And I would hope that all our participants would be familiar with those learning outcomes and can now see connections there that either consolidate their thinking or enrich their thinking a little bit as to why these things are important. If we think even just about that first one, that first key component of children feel safe, secure, and supported. Well, we've already spoken about the fact that, that's when we will best understand, gather information about children because they will be more likely to share. So, then we'll be able to respond more equitably. We will understand the diversity of the group that we're working with. So these things all feed down or trickle down in various ways into the pedagogies that we use and the way we implement the programmes that we deliver.

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