**[Karen Hope]:** Thinking about the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework, which an outcome for all, which is that children are confident and involved learners, it says, "Young children begin to develop explanations for observed phenomena and consider what they can learn from experiences." What are some of the ways we might consider documenting? And I know that word's going to be something that people are now going to launch onto, because documentation is very important. But what are the ways that we might document this evidence of children's thinking and illustrate this theory-making?

**[Sandra Cheeseman]:**

Yes. Well, very nice to leave this one until the last, I think, Karen.

**[Karen Hope]:** Yes.

**[Sandra Cheeseman]:** There's another three-week episode of talking about documentation, I think. And I think it’s the great conundrum for all early childhood people is when is it too much, when is it not enough, and why are we doing it? I think that that 'why' question is the most important question in working with infants and toddlers. And so there is a strong narrative, I think, that documentation is for regulatory purposes, and it's to show evidence of our cycle of planning. But actually, I think that's the function of documenting. It's not the purpose of it. And so if we think about that as the function and the result of what we do, then I think we have a completely different way of thinking about why we document.

So for me, the number one reason for documenting is to help me be a better educator. The act of capturing in writing or in photography what we are seeing, helps us to really see things in more complex ways. And I think anyone who's kept a journal, or is into just keeping notes after a meeting, knows that when you write it down, you think more deeply about it and you start to see other dimensions of it. And so for me, when I stop and pause and write down what I've seen, and the example of the child with the beads, that child played with those beads for about 12, I think, minutes, before he was distracted and went to something else. But to actually write down that 12-minute episode took about three minutes. But the act of writing it down made me think about what he was really doing, and all the things that I couldn't see in the action, but were likely things that were learning for him.

I should have told you too, when he was doing that, he was counting. And so he was vocalising. He was a very young baby, struggling to get those things over his head, but going, "Uh, oh, ah." And the pattern of it and the crispness of the vocalisation was counting. As he was putting them over his head, he was vocalising and he was counting them. But he didn't have the sequence of numbers or anything, but he'd witnessed this before. So it was really important to write that down and to capture that moment, and to then share that with families.

And I think that's then the second reason for documenting and why it's important, is that it's our opportunity to share what we're seeing and what we're understanding about the complexity of children's learning, with families, with our colleagues, and ultimately, with children. So as we write down our impressions and our observations, those threads of learning begin to weave into a fabric, where we start to see more clearly the patterns that occur over time. The textures or the relationships become easier to see and to feel. And then we see this inspiration of the children, and helps us think about what next and what the next encounter might be.

So for me, the documentation part is joyous and it should be joyous. It should not be the chore that we have to do for some regulatory purpose, important though that is. If we see it as informing our teaching, and we see it as informing families about the sophistication of our work and the sophistication of their children's thinking, then it becomes a joy to do it. But we make it quite burdensome, I think, because I think many of us, not me, many people are perfectionists and they want it to look pretty and they want it to present in a particular way. And yet if we ask that why question, why are we doing this? Why is it important? Then we might have a completely different approach to the way we do it.

For me, these purposes then act as the evidence that we need to show that we have a cycle of planning, and that we have noticed what children have been responsive to that. And that's what we're being asked to do in the Early Years Learning Framework and in the VEYLDF. But what to document, there's so much possibility with babies. And as I say, as you become better at noticing, well, then it becomes overwhelming, because you've got so much to document. You really have got to pick and choose. And my key here is don't wait for the big fiasco, as I call it. We're waiting for the big event. It never happens, so we never document. Jot down the little bits and pieces, and start to see the patterns. And this makes it easier for educators to actually do, because it's essentially jottings that you're building up a bigger picture. And that episode of the child scooping up the spoon, that was just a less than a minute episode. Takes 30 seconds to write down a few notes about it. But when you start to see the patterns in the child's behaviour, you start to be able to build a bigger picture of documentation for you and for families.

**[Karen Hope]:** I think you're right at the start there, Sandra, when you said we could have webinar after webinar on this. I was almost going to say, what are you doing next Wednesday night? Because it is something that people continually come back to. It just doesn't seem to get any less traction, year after year.

And I totally agree that it's become aligned in such a regulatory space, that I really love this idea that you've said, that documentation should be joyous. And maybe if educators could reframe their thinking to make it documentation should be joyous, and I would add into that that documentation is a search for meaning, it might actually revolutionise what you see and then how you document it in a really subtle, but not unsophisticated mind shift.

**[Sandra Cheeseman]:** Yeah. Absolutely. One of the things that I played with during my PhD studies was how narratives might work and how (inaudible) a story. And I'm not talking about learning stories. I'm talking about a narrative where I'm narrating what I'm seeing. I'm not owning it. And I'm not saying, "I know how you feel, and this is what I saw you do." I'm just saying, "I noticed this, the child did this, and Sammy encountered this piece of equipment." But writing it as a story really helped me to enjoy it, and also to make sense to families.

And so it wasn't written as a clinical observation with an observation and analysis. It was written as a narrative that had analysis embedded within it. And they're really beautiful stories, but that does take a little bit more time. But as I said, if you've got the jottings, then you can start to pull those together and draw in the narrative. And you might write one narrative a fortnight, or something like that. But again, it's an art form, but it's something that you can enjoy doing. And then when you revisit that narrative with families and with children, because they love to have it read to them, it becomes a really valuable piece of documentation. But also, I think a really genuine piece. It's not forced, it's just the story. It's the story of what you saw. Yeah, I do think that there's a whole other world of sessions to have about documentation.

**[Karen Hope]:** I believe you're right, but I am aware that we have come to the end of our conversation for you and I tonight. So I thank you for this. I know that I'm going to think deeply tonight and over the next following days about, I've made lots of notes myself.

I'm wondering whether there's a take-home message you'd like to say to people listening, for people that will dial in to see the videos when they're available. Is there a take-home thing you'd just like to leave them with?

**[Sandra Cheeseman]:**

Yeah, I think probably two things. I think one is that the more that I see the complexity of the work done with infants, the more I think there is a need for a specialised area. And that it makes me want to have a post-qualification specialist credential that's recognised and rewarded with pay and conditions, that says these people are real specialists, they are artists in this particular form of early childhood education. So I think that's something that we can work towards.

And I'd like to see us having many more everyday conversations with families about children's thinking and theorising. We talk about their routines. We talk about all of those other important things that children have done. But how many conversations do we have, and how many times do we enlighten families about these light bulb moments that we've seen, that have been in the minutiae? And how can we then turn families onto looking at their children in this way as well?

So I think it could be really contagious, and we could change the world and the way the world sees babies and responds to them, if we can really talk up the ideas of infants as thinkers and theorisers. So that'd be my take-homes.

[Copyright Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority](https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Footer/Pages/Copyright.aspx) 2021