**[Karen Hope]:** How do we make visible the learning and development of under 3s using the early years planning cycle resource? This resource is available from our website as a download or hard copies can be ordered. It's important to know that the learning plans and their sample evidence markers are examples of planning and not comprehensive lists. This is one way, but it is not the only way. My name's Karen Hope and I'm the Program Manager of the Early Years Unit at the VCAA. And joining me today in this conversation is Mary Holwell, who is the Manager of the Early Years Unit at the VCAA. Welcome Mary.

**[Mary Holwell]:** Hello, Karen. Glad to be here.

**[Karen Hope]:** I know. How good is this that we get to talk about such an interesting topic for an extended period of time. Dr. Sandra Cheeseman in her webinar in April said, about observation taking, that when you write it down, you think more deeply about it. Can you talk a little bit about how this approach to taking observations of young children ultimately supports rich documentation. So what should we be writing down?

**[Mary Holwell]:** Well, Karen, I think that's a really interesting question. And I think there are a couple of ways that I could start by answering it, and I've thought a little bit about which direction I should take. I think firstly I want to say that I think Sandra is right, that when we do write something down or when we document something it does make us think more deeply about it. We have to think about the words that we choose if we're writing a document as text, we have to decide on the pictures that we choose if we're thinking about documentation as being some photographic evidence, or we need to think about which snippets of video we might use if we're going to document by reference to some video footage.

And in doing that, we need to be thinking not just about the words that we use or how we describe it, but we need to think about the value of those things. Are they contributing to what we know and understand about children? Because that's what we should be writing down, that's what we should be documenting. Something that enriches our view of children, enriches our understanding of their attitudes and dispositions, and enriches our understanding of what learning they might be doing and how they are doing that learning. Because they're the things that ultimately we need to reflect on and analyse. So when we're thinking about what to document, we need enough evidence there, enough documentation in a sense, for us to be able to reflect on it and to analyse it. Because it's in that analysis or interpretation of it that the documentation comes to have some meaning for us. We want the documentation to have meaning, it's not just a roped process so we need to think, so what is it? What is of value to us? What is it contributing to our understanding of children?

The other thing that I think about when I think about, what should we be documenting? It takes me to that idea of do we wait for the big moment, the big developmental milestone? Is that what we need to look for? So we need to be very mindful that we don't begin the, let's call it the process of documentation, which I'm going to say includes observation, but we don't begin that process already with an idea of what it is we want to find. We need to be open to all those little everyday moments that the very young child might have throughout their day, where they show us some element of their learning. They might be fleeting, they might be little moments, but they can be incredibly rich and valuable to further our understanding of children and where they are.

The other thing about what we document needs to come back to that idea of our documentation should show us evidence of a child's progression over time. So we need enough information there that we can locate our thinking in that to say, "Oh, the child knew this at this point or could do this at this point. And now three months later, six weeks later, six months later, look, they can now do this." So we need enough written down to, to provoke our thinking. We also need enough written down that there's enough there for us to engage in a conversation with somebody. Because it's when we engage in the conversation about what we've noticed that our understanding is enriched as well. It's part of that reflection process, it allows other people to bring a different lens to us and help us to understand a little bit more.

I think it's worth my while saying there's no real magic recipe for what it is we should document because every context is different. Educators need to be using their professional knowledge, their deep thinking, their capacity to see a lot of what is going on around them, and to really utilise what Sandra, I think, referred to as their noticing skills. They need to be open to noticing, they need to position themselves in ways that allow them to notice. Because it's the noticing that will guide what it is they then document, which then becomes the rich and meaningful data that they have to do something with later.

**[Karen Hope]:** I really like this idea that you just touched on there, that planning or programming is not a predetermined thing and that you need to be open to the ideas of possibilities. It is not a package that you have already have decided upon as an educator, that you really do need to be open to all of the possibilities. And in that way it isn't a recipe, is it?

**[Mary Holwell]:** No, no. And I think that takes me to another thing that I didn't mention. I think there are two aspects when we think about documentation, I think there are two aspects to that. There's that initial piece of documentation that we might take or might develop that references an observation, that begins a planning cycle for us, that starts us off on, "Ah, I could offer this to this child because that will extend that or that will consolidate whatever it is I reflected and analysed."

But then there's another element of documentation that's very strongly tied to that. And that is that as you go on to deliver whatever those next steps are, you need to be observing for change, for your success, I suppose, in achieving the learning goal that you might've set for that child. So there's an element of learning goals in there, but it's still not a predetermined project or aspect that you are delivering to. There are lots of ways that we can meet those learning goals, and that's where that further observation comes in. Because you might've needed to change midstream in terms of how you approach something, something that you wanted to achieve. So then that observation becomes part of that, it reflects the fact that you needed to change what you were doing to support the child as well.

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