**[Mary Holwell]:** Dr Andi Salamon in her fact sheet that accompanies her February webinar said that we must critically evaluate the learning that babies demonstrate before us against the theory, developmental milestones and taken for granted knowledge that we have traditionally used to interpret it. When we are planning for infants, what then is the first place for us to start?

**[Karen Hope]:** That is a great question, Mary. And I think for those of you that haven't watched the February webinar with Dr. Andi Salamon, might be interested in some of these ideas. You can take a look at that on our website. Andi, I think, in her first provocation around this space really talked about the undervaluing or underestimating of babies' thinking and that babies know a lot more than we think that they do. And that's where this idea about assessing against predetermined outcomes and theories really needs to be challenged every day in your practice as an educator, because I'm sure we are all surprised sometimes by the things that babies do. And you might think, well, I didn't know they could do that or I didn't know they understood what I was saying, but there you go. They do.

And child development theory and child development is important. You do need to know these things. But you have to be very open in the way that you approach working and thinking about babies and not get, I suppose, tunneled into a view that doesn't take into account all the other things that impact on little children's development.

So the first place to start when we're thinking about programming for little children is with the children themselves. And I know Andi said 'start with the babies'. So I'd like to extend that a little bit more in terms of the practicality around that and say that you need to get off the wall and onto the floor. And by that, I mean, for sure documentation is very important, but if you don't know the children, it's very hard to document meaningfully, which is what you've just been talking about, meaningful observations. So I always used to say to staff teams, I'd like a little less of the paper and a little more of the floor work, which is being down with babies, getting to know them, seeing what they do, seeing their thought process and their thinking processes, letting them get to know you. It's almost very in the wild stuff, I think really, but spend that time really deeply getting to know who these children are.

And that has to be a documentation decision that you make as an educator, or as a team, which is often why in the first part of the year, or when children first start in early learning services, there might not be reams and reams and folders and folders of paper around these children and how many puzzles they can do. They might be just very deep, sustained periods of time with educators and children.

Once you get to know those children, you really need to follow their direction and see where they take you, rather than the other way around. So joining your attention to their attention. And I like to think about it as finding a thread in their play and their learning and their thinking. And then following that thread as deep as you can go. So really nuancing your approach, I think, and being really intentional about what you decide to document.

And lastly, I think, and I did this when I was working in a babies room many years ago, I used to have a piece of A3 paper and I divided that into three columns. And in one column I had, "I see" in the other column I had, "I think", and in the third column I had, "I wonder". And I would feel that was my way of thinking about them and programming for them. But in that I was thinking about what I see, what do I see, what do children see? What do they think? What do I think? And what are they wondering about and what am I wondering about? So really feeding into what you just said previously, Mary, about educator and child thinking alongside each other. Yeah, I see, I think, I wonder.

**[Mary Holwell]:** Yeah, I think that's really interesting, Karen, because I think that "I wonder" is so much a part of that analysis and interpretation, particularly for starting to think about, "I wonder if I did this rather than that, what might happen?". Or, "I wonder why I got the result that I did there, could it be because of X or Y or Z?". And that's such a very important part of the documentation process because it's what shifts it from simply a record of what the child did to a much deeper understanding both of the child and their learning, but also supports our intentionality moving forward and opens up new ways for us to think about what we provide to children. So thank you very much for that answer.

**[Karen Hope]:** Absolutely. And I just would add to that, that I think we often say that children or babies are some of the great hypothesis and theorises in the world and something gets lost for us as educators. And I think if you would go into a space and say to an educator, "What's your theory, what theories are you testing this week?", that might be a challenging question because we forgot to have our own theories and to have our own wonderings. And when you think about the very important ways that you are shaping children's brains through your interactions with them, I really want someone working with babies who is a theoriser and a thinker.

**[Mary Holwell]:** That's right. That's very true. And I think we, as you said, we often think about children as being researchers, but there is no doubt in my mind that a skillful educator is also a researcher. They're collecting data, they're changing the variables, they're collecting more data. They're wondering, "Well, if I change those variables and I got this result, what will happen if I do this? What result will I get next?". And that preparedness to keep on altering things, just a little to see what happens with the child, with your interaction with them, how hard will it be to attune yourself to them? They're all the things that are important.

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