Karen Hope:

Mary, in the webinar, Planning For Under Threes, using the VCAA Early Years Planning Cycle Resource, you said, what we write down about children becomes the basis of our planning, and it helps us to determine what to offer next. How important is this stage of collecting information in shaping what we offer to children, and the assessment opportunities that might be revealed?

Mary Holwell:

That's an interesting question, Karen. And I couldn't help but think, that for me, collecting information is a bit like the spark that lights the fire. In many ways, the success of everything else we do, as educators, is dependent on what we notice and record. All of us think we will remember everything, but education and care settings are such busy places, and we just can't hold all of the insights we get into what children know and are learning and doing without some kind of recording process. If you think about the planning cycle, collecting information is prominently positioned. I'm not sure it's the beginning point, because there is an element of reflection needed there at the beginning, as you consider what it is you will pay attention to. So with this in mind, I think that writing or recording is part of the collecting information stage.

Mary Holwell:

The best decisions about what you offer next are made when the information you collected is a reliable and accurate representation of where the child is on their learning and development journey. The physical act of writing something down, or recording it in some other way, gives you the opportunity to think more deeply about it. It reminds you that this was something worth noticing, a piece of new information that gives you an insight into the child that maybe you didn't have before. You can use this to begin to consider if it is a holistic representation of the child. Can you see evidence of this learning in other areas? Or is it dependent on who the child is working or playing with, as they still require some scaffolding, as the learning isn't yet consolidated? This is part of the analysis and interpretation that is such an important part of the planning cycle, because they inform what you will plan next.

Mary Holwell:

Let's just use an example from the Early Years Planning Cycle Resource to illustrate this idea. So this observation, you will see at the top of the page, is quite brief. It's possibly something that an educator could miss and not use to develop further learning opportunities. Instead, this educator has made a note of it, and then analysed it to make a connection to the VEYLDF evidence marker of identity. The idea that children are open to new challenges and make new discoveries, and that children initiate interactions and conversations with trusted educators. Please don't be concerned if you can't read the writing on the screen at the moment, because you will be able to go to the Planning Cycle Resource after this and look at this in more detail. It's really just to illustrate a couple of points. Then, after creating that link to the identity evidence markers, the next part is the plan with specific aims that have been linked by the educator to the VEYLDF identity evidence marker that children will respond to ideas and suggestions from others.

Mary Holwell:

The example goes on to describe the act and do part of the cycle. Writing this information down makes it available to all of the adults in the room, consolidates the approach that the educators will take, and reminds them, too, of vocabulary they will introduce to expand learning. Writing something down will also provide you with detail that you can discuss with other professionals and families to support collaboration and a deeper knowledge of the child. Giving you a rich and more complete picture of the child and their dispositions, what they know and can do, their strengths, their interests, abilities, and needs, so that the, what next, is relevant and responsive. The discussion that you have with other colleagues brings other perspectives to your notes and may open new opportunities for learning.

Mary Holwell:

I think the process of writing something down, no matter how that is done, whether it's a sticky note, a journal entry, in a format like the examples in the Early Years Planning Cycle Resource, goes a long way to helping you to evaluate and improve curriculum decision-making, so that what you plan has rigour. That is, it is meaningful and worth children knowing and doing. Over time, you will develop a series of written insights into the child and their learning, and each one of those records that you've made is an assessment piece that involves an interpretation. And together, they will provide information about the child's learning and development progression.

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