Mary Holwell:

Karen, what type of pre-thinking needs to happen when you start to think about a new cycle of planning for a child or a group of children?

Karen Hope:

That's a terrific question, Mary. And I imagine that if I said the words pre-thinking to lots of educators, they might go to the default position of what things you need to have in place, that could be your programme and your early years planning cycle resource, and some more infrastructure ideas, I guess. But for me, when you sit down to plan a new cycle of learning for a child or for children, it all starts with your image of the child. And I know that we hear this a lot about what is your image of the child and that the image of the child is very important, but each new cycle requires a belief from educators that children possess their own theories and interpretations and knowledge and questions and our actual co-constructors or co-protagonists in this knowledge building process. The pre-thinking is around, what am I thinking?

Karen Hope:

What are children thinking? Within this context then of shared understandings, the educator is recognising that children are experts about themselves and that they too have ideas about their own learning and their own learning strategies. It starts there and then an educator needs to follow the children's footprints. And I like this idea of footprints, of following the directions that children are taking. This is only possible through really in-depth reading and in-depth interpretation of your documentation materials, the things that you bring to the table, your observation work, and using the triangulation of approaches in what kind of observation work that you are generating, or the observations that you're generating about children. With this idea in mind, this pre-thinking is almost like you're looking back to look forward, if that makes sense. What do you know about children and what don't you know about children?

Karen Hope:

Linking quite strongly to your previous discussion, Mary, about the importance of the question. It's the importance of the questions. And it's the importance of looking for the clues, I like to call them, that children are giving you. They're dropping clues all the time about their learning and development and what they're interested in. In fact, pre-thinking for me, almost starts from a place of uncertainty. Planning should not be a pre-packaged, predetermined set of ideas and outcomes. It should start from a place of uncertainty. What don't you know? And then you do what I like to call, and I was given this word in Reggio Emilia, they call it the reconnaissance. And I think it's a terrific word. And they explained it like a flight over the materials, a flight over the documentation to have a look what you've got and what you don't have and what it might mean.

Karen Hope:

They describe that as a way of gathering clues, which then adds great value to the design of your programmes. And it all starts with the questions. There is a great value in the questions that you ask of yourself and children and what direction you're taking children with them. I think the other part of pre-thinking is about relaunching the work, so going back through your documentation and making design choices based on what that information is giving you. There are lots of directions you can go when you are thinking about a planning cycle, and this is a good thing. There are so many ways, so many threads that can be unravelled.

Karen Hope:

And I think it's about sometimes pulling out one of those threads. It's almost like a pot of pasta, a pot of spaghetti, and you're pulling out a couple of those threads and going as deep as you can. And that then feeds into the complexity of the work. And the last thing about this pre-thinking is this. And you have referred to this earlier, Mary, about the views and ideas of others. It's what I've heard referred as the gaze of solidarity. Planning can often be a very subjective and quite isolating process sometimes. It's your opinions and what you have come up with. And this can be a strength and not a limitation because it enables you to take ownership. The educator takes ownership of that strand of spaghetti that they have pulled out, but we do require the gaze of others, the other informants into the work, and this is your co-educators and children and families. I think this pre-thinking activity is an active one of listening and noticing, and this listening and noticing is done by deep engagement. And I've said it before, and I'll say it again, a deep sense of curiosity by an educator.

Mary Holwell:

Yeah, I think that's a really fantastic answer, Karen. I can't help, but think that idea of pulling out the strand of pasta is something that really resonates for me. And that idea that I might pull this particular piece of pasta and take it in this direction, but someone else might actually see the same experience and have a different knowledge of the child or of the context, and actually choose a different thread to follow. And if people can share those things, then it enriches what's available for the child.

[Copyright Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority](https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Footer/Pages/Copyright.aspx) 2020