Mary Holwell:

What are some of the ways of ensuring that your observations are accurate and meaningful accounts of what children are thinking or learning?

Karen Hope:

So I think these two words have accurate and meaningful, are really useful to consider when designing programmes for children and using the early years planning cycle. And I really do believe that educators sometimes when they think about them like that, it pulls them back to their base camp, if you like, of what they should be documenting in the first place. So you consider that all planning cycles include this phase of collecting information, and we can almost see that visual in our head. And we see that at the top of the circle that's going around, this idea of collecting information. This is a key element, and this is where we use all of our observational materials. And I think that close attention paid to this stage of the planning cycle really helps ensure that your observations are meaningful and accurate. So let's think about the observation itself. This is about noticing the details. So we're back again to this idea of noticing. Three things that I often used to ask myself when I was an educator was what do I want to understand?

Karen Hope:

So if I've made the decision to take an observation of a child or document something, what is it that I want to understand? Or what is it that I do not know here and what theories can I see in practise or in play? Where am I going to link this in? And what do I want to find out more about? So back to this idea of questioning for children and questioning for us. So one way of ensuring, I think that you're collecting useful, meaningful, accurate documentation is to ask yourself a few questions before you start. How do these observations and understanding, connect to previous learning experiences? So each cycle, while we might be focusing on something different has a lot of this, pre-thinking behind it. What are you revisiting? And what's informing into this cycle. So how do my observations and understandings connect to previous learning experiences? What is happening in this observation? Try to consider your workaround observation as being highly focused work. This is high-level observation going on here, and it should offer you a glimpse into who the child or children.

Karen Hope:

What does the child know how to do? What's the context here? Where does this sit? What's the role of the adults? What ideas or predictions can you see the children throwing up? What might the child's point of view be about the experiences? And I think this idea of trying to practise daily if you like trying to see a child's mind at work, and this is a way to start viewing observations. To sit down and take a look at a child and see if you can start to see how their mind might be working, what processes are they using to figure things out? And you only need to work in a baby's room, which I think requires those very honed, noticing skills to sit down and look at a baby and see how they figure things out. It really is fascinating, and generate such rich observational material.

Karen Hope:

So this observation from the earliest planning cycle resource is around a sensory garden of watching plants go and you'll see, or you might notice. And if the text is not clear here, you can definitely download this resource on our resource professional learning page, professional resources page, sorry. And it looks quite small, this little licked information, 18-month-old Jesse and four year old, Emma are outside in the garden. And Emma finds a flower on the ground and gives it to Jesse, Jesse crouches down and looks at the flower. Emma says, "Jesse, you are meant to smell it." Jesse smiles and sniffs at the flower. And Emma tells Jesse, "We only pick flowers that are full on the ground, Jesse. We don't pull them off the plants." And so this observation of these two children has Jesse at 18 months of age and indicates that he's starting to develop an understanding of the natural world through his senses, and he smells the flower. It's what he's showing us here.

Karen Hope:

Emma being four demonstrates that she can appreciate the natural environment and respect living things. And she shows cares [inaudible 00:04:38] to the plants and a responsibility for her actions. In these two quite short observation, these two children demonstrating some pretty interesting things. They're demonstrating their capacity to infer and predict and hypothesise. They are exploring their world with living and non-living things, and they are able to observe and notice change. This observation also is language and scaffolding. So what this observation provides an example of, is how an observation can transform your practice and it is important to remember that they are really never subjective. So this has taken by an educator who has decided to hone in on something or pull that one strand at the spaghetti pot out of the spaghetti and focus on something particularly. We can have the slide down now. Thanks, Sam. I like to think about this idea about ensuring observations are accurate.

Karen Hope:

There was a quote that was once told to me by Donald Hoffman. Donald Hoffman didn't tell me, the quote was relayed to me by Donald Hoffman who wrote a book called Visual Intelligence. How will we create what we see? And he says, "We walk around believing that what we see with our eyes is real. When in truth, each of us constructs our own understanding of what we are seeing." And I like that quote because it really highlights the fact that we all see things differently and all educators in a room will see things differently. And it's this recognition and inclusion of the differences that gives you the two things you need. Accurate and meaningful. I think once I was told, I think actually by somebody that taught me when I was doing my training, that there are four elements to making your observations accurate and meaningful.

Karen Hope:

That there is the child's story. There is the learning and development or the theory story, there's the educator story, and there's the family story. And if you have elements of these stories included in your planning and your design, then you know you have rich and meaningful and accurate observational data.

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