**[Catharine Hydon]:** Which probably takes me to another point in this notion about definition, and sort of understanding it in a bit more detail. It strikes me that this is not just about children, this is about us as well. So, as professionals who work with children, do we need to have a conversation with ourselves about what we understand to be our own agency? Because I don't know about you, but I don't sort of walk around all the time going, 'hello, do you have a sense of agency?'. And I don't sort of, I don't know, I don't think about it a great deal. But maybe we ought to? Can you talk a little bit about how we understand our own sense of agency and being agentic? Um, and how that might impact on the work that we do with children?

**[Dr Caroline Scott]:** Yeah, I think it really is quite a deep reflection that is needed, um. Certainly, my participants had all come to their practice, which was very strongly underpinned by children's agency, through different ways, different learnings. For one of them in particular, it was a professional development that she went to that flipped her understanding. She said she was a very teacher-led practitioner, um, you know, fortnight plan up on the wall. Um. Very rigid. And she said whatever happened in that PD, really made her reflect on what she was doing, and whether it really was the best thing for children. She then with her co-educator, on the weekend went into the service and just changed everything. And from then on, started to, started to practice in a way that children's agency was first and foremost. And so that had been soul searching for her. And very much looking at her position as the teacher. So. You know, there's um. Not just looking at your position as a teacher in terms of, with regards to children, but then, also, there's this idea that you need to look at your role as a teacher with regards to the regulation and the policies. And the things that also are sometimes taking away your agency. So, there's lots to consider in terms of, well, how can I push the boundaries here in the way that I engage as a teacher? Not just to allow children to enact their agency, but for me to be agentic in my practice as well.

**[Catharine Hydon]:** And I guess all people who are joining us, from all different parts of the early years space, they're thinking about their professional role, as well as their own experience of agency. You know this idea of being able to make decisions in matters that affect you. And some of us experiencing that to a great extent and feeling like we're really supported in that and we have a really good understanding of that. You know, I feel like, you know, I can remember conversations with my grandfather, you know, he was very much, I don't think he called it agency, but he believed in our opinion about things and he believed we have the capacity to make those decisions. But you might, you may or may not have had really positive experiences about that. You may have gone through the education system, not feeling some of those things. So. You're right, it's a bit, I suppose this is where reflective practice comes in. You've got to think with your peeps.

**[Dr Caroline Scott]:** Yeah, yeah, and the conversations with peers. And, you know, sometimes it could be helpful for somebody in the team to have not had a particularly agentic upbringing because then the conversations that can happen and the ways in which you can understand where different children are coming from and how they're feeling, are much richer. So, getting together with colleagues and saying, right you know, what was your experience of school? And were your opinions and was your voice taken seriously? And how did that make you feel when, when it wasn't? If it wasn't. Or if it was, you know, how did that affect the rest of your life? So having those conversations and making those connections with personal experience, I think can be really powerful.

**[Catharine Hydon]:** And it sounds like there were people in your PhD study, who had made a paradigm shift, you know, they're done this big, big moment and thought, 'Ok I need to think very differently about this'. Does, engaging with agency actually require you to do some of that, make that big decision? Or can you just sore of tinker at the edges?

**[Dr Caroline Scott]:** Well, my participants all did. Um, so firstly I should say that my group of participants were all chosen for already practicing facilitating agency well. Um, but for them, agency underpins their whole program. It underpinned all their planning, the way in which they spoke, all the interactions with parents, other educators, with the children, the things they planned, or didn't plan, the way in which they stepped in to interact with children or didn't, was all driven by an understanding of children needing to enact and strengthen their own agency and make their own decisions. Depending on the level of capability in the child. So you would know, you know, this idea that you need to know your children really, really well, to say oh, yeah, I trust that those two children can work out that quarrel. You know, I'm going to leave them to do that, because I know that they're capable of that. Um, but there might be another child where you think, okay I need to step in and assist here.

**[Catharine Hydon]:** But they might, they might also be in another situation where another child might be very good at, you know, or have strong capabilities in another area, where then another child, so. You've got different sorts of agency happening in different places.

**[Dr Caroline Scott]:** Yeah, yes and also, but also the, um different times of the year as well. So, yeah, it is like I said before about these intentional interactions, knowing all your children, knowing the dynamics. Which, which goes without saying, I know that early childhood educators know their children and families really well. That's something that we do really, really well. And so you'll know what that child might be capable of. Whether that child makes decisions at home? Are they allowed to choose their own clothes? Um, and if not, how does that then impact on them dressing themselves at kinder or. You know, that's kind of an example of how it might differ from child to child, so, you know, when to sort of step in and support, and you know when to stand back and let them sort it out themselves.

**[Catharine Hydon]:** And while we're here, and I know this is just going off on a little bit of a tangent, we probably didn't talk about this a lot before. But I am interested in the way that the community sees agency. So we've got people here who are on online at the moment who work really strongly with families and members of the community, in all sorts of different ways. You know, advocates of early childhood, educators, people who work in maybe community services, et cetera. So do you think our community is ready for a bit of a conversation about children's agency? Or do you think it's still a bit of a radical thought?

**[Dr Caroline Scott]:** Yeah, in some areas it is.

**[Catharine Hydon]:** That was a sigh there Caroline [laughs].

**[Dr Caroline Scott]:** These poor children, they go from kindergarten, you know, sometimes go from these early childhood services where they are really listened to, um, and their input is taken very seriously, and they go to school where they really don't have much of a say, where they're not sort of able to, to pursue their own interests. Although I must say that some schools are getting a lot better at having some play-based pedagogy in in the early years. Um, but, yeah, I do, I do worry about that. But, when done well, there's this um, you know, this real sense that children then understand that their decisions have consequences, that they are given rules and regulations and boundaries for good reason. So when you have conversations with children around, well, we're not going to climb that tree. I want to climb that tree. I know that's a definitely a thing that happens in services where children might want to climb a tree or go up a bit higher. So there will be ‘of course you can’, because you know your child's capabilities, or the children's capabilities. So you let them push a little bit, or you say ‘no’ and this is why, this is why we're not going to do this. So that follow through of saying this is why we're not going to do that, really helps them when it comes to time to go to school and there are lots of rules and regulations. Hopefully they've internalised that idea that well, I know that these adults make these rules and regulations for good reasons, and it's not just that, you know, be quiet or don't do that or stop doing that. So yes, I don't know whether. No, society is definitely moving towards children being heard, not 'not seen and not heard' that kind of thing, and that children certainly can have a say over things, but, but there's lots of, um, dismissal of that as well.

**[Catharine Hydon]:** And maybe there's a role for us to try and clarify what it means. And also, of course, there is most likely to be colleagues here joining us from primary school, the early years of primary, who are saying, 'actually no, we are doing lots of things to support children's sense of agency in the, in the early years of school, and I certainly know that that's the case’. And perhaps we've got to also address some of the myths, you know to say, maybe there are different things that are happening out there. Which is one of the reasons we want to get to know each other a bit more, and say what are you doing that supports children's agency? What am I doing? Let's make sure it's not too much of a mystery.

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