**[Catharine Hydon]:** So, um Caroline what I might do now is take you a bit more formally, into some of the expectations that we have in the National Quality Standards space. And I know this is particularly pertinent for our colleagues who work in early childhood education and care. I think it's something we need to go to because you know, it's really helpful for us to clarify what we mean here. We know that agency is part of quality area one. Some of you sitting here online are going oh, yes that's absolutely right, I've just been filling in my quality improvement plan. If you are from the school setting, then there's lots of things that, that a part of inquiry-based methodologies, that might be very relevant to this conversation. It's an area that I think presents some challenges for educators. How do they plan for those things, how do they facilitate them? And I wonder whether there are some things that you can suggest to us, that we might see or hear? Sort of, as Mary was saying before, that showcase, or give an exemplary sense of what it means to support children's agency. To do that um, that relational piece that we talked about before, which is an educator really facilitating. And I'm, I'm sort of hesitating with my words here because I think, is it ours to give away? You know?

**[Dr Caroline Scott]:** No.

**[Catharine Hydon]:** But I think it's important that you clarify what is my role and what would I be doing if I was sort of, I was really doing a really good job of it.

**[Dr Caroline Scott]:** All right, so that makes me think that we should talk a little bit about power. And this, and this was a beautiful contribution from one of my participants, which was more, we don't give agency because that puts all the power onto us as educators. So, you know, it's so you know, you could say that's just really about language, but of course it does position the child as, um, as not already possessing that, and us needing to enable that and make sure that the environment, fosters it. So, but the original question, what are some tips.

**[Catharine Hydon]:** Yeah. And I think maybe what we would expect to see, we'll go to tips in a minute, but maybe just sort of elaborate a bit. You know, if I was seeing agency, um, you know, and this could be, you know, in an early childhood education and care setting, could be in a community service of some description, could be in the early years of school. We know we've got some colleagues online from there, but what can I expect to be seeing?

**[Dr Caroline Scott]:** You'd see some mess. When children are able to make some decisions around what it is that they want to do, and not be too restricted by time and resources that have to be in particular areas. Then you're probably going to get some mess. The other thing is, you would see.

**[Catharine Hydon]:** Hold on before we keep going what, do you mean by mess? You mean it’s just going to go take off, it's going to go off on tangents?

**[Dr Caroline Scott]:** It might go off on a few tangents.

**[Catharine Hydon]:** Because there would be multiple children that want to have a say, it's probably going to be a bit noisy.

**[Dr Caroline Scott]:** Yeah, there might be a bit of noise and it would be, um, you know, there's this, this real need to constantly negotiate. Because if you're talking to children about well, gosh, I really want to take the Lego and I want to put the Lego out there with the water play. And so rather than saying, no that needs to stay in that particular place. You think, well, what kind of amazing opportunities is going to happen if I allow these mixing and matching of things to happen? But of course, you've got to have that conversation too, okay, well we're going to do this, but what are some of the things we need to be careful of? We've got the water outside, we need to make sure that we don't leave tiny pieces of Lego on the ground so that children don't step on them. We've got to make sure that the Lego gets dried. How are you going to dry the logo and put it back to where it belongs?

**[Catharine Hydon]:** Without the tan bark stuck in the holes.

**[Dr Caroline Scott]:** Yeah. Yes. What are you going to do? What is this. And this is me speaking as an educator, you could say, that's why I don't really want it out there. But can you tell me children, how are we going to get over that? Because I don't want to restrict this opportunity that you're really keen to do, um, because I'm worried about the tan bark getting into there. And you can come up with a solution. Well okay, I will make sure that we allocate 5 minutes after pack up time, we're going to sit down and we're going to make sure that there's no tan bark in the Lego, we're going to rinse it and dry it off, and we're going to pop it all back in the tub. You know, trying to think of those ways of facilitating what it is that children really want to do. Yeah, so yeah.

**[Catharine Hydon]:** There's a, there's a colleague of ours, thank you Julie for reminding us about student agency and learning and amplifying the high impact teaching strategies to, which of course, are in that early years of school and in schooling settings, that really engage children in thinking, inquiry-based methodologies where they're thinking through problems and working together. So that's where it could be a little bit noisy. A little. It looks a little bit less like, um, stuff's going outside, but it could be a bit noisy and a bit disorganised. And children trying to figure it all out. But I guess that's where the teacher comes in, the early childhood educator.

**[Dr Caroline Scott]:** Yeah. Yeah.

**[Catharine Hydon]:** Comes in to support and scaffold that process. So we are not bowing out, we're not bowing out, we're getting involved in the mess?

**[Dr Caroline Scott]:** Yeah, very, very involved. But also, knowing, when not to get involved. So that's the tricky thing. Something that came out of the research was knowing when to step in and knowing when to step back. So, allowing, something that's really important with agency is allowing children to show initiative. Now they can't show initiative very well, if we've got really specific things that are happening in specific areas of the room, and really quite rigid things around how children might use the resources. So, for children to show initiative, then they really need to be thinking of an idea of their own. So, you know, imagine having well, I know that there's some, certainly some educators out there, who aren't setting up their outside yard until the children are there.

**[Catharine Hydon]:** And doing it with them?

**[Dr Caroline Scott]:** Yeah, doing it with them, that sort of thing. I mean, imagine my, I'm, I'm sure this will make many teachers and educators just think no way, but imagine having nothing, nothing in the room. Things packed away. Children arrive, parents would be just mortified. But imagine just saying, ‘okay, let's, let's get some stuff. What are we going to do? What are we going to do guys?’. And just allowing them to say, well, you know, and having a bit of a, a real say.

**[Catharine Hydon]:** And does it mean Caroline that we don't have a plan in mind?

**[Dr Caroline Scott]:** No.

**[Catharine Hydon]:** Because, you know, this is sort of, our idea of emergent curriculum, really, is that we have a plan in mind, but we are opening up ourselves, and this is the courage to do this, opening up ourselves to the possibility of children taking it in different directions.

**[Dr Caroline Scott]:** Yeah, yeah, which I know it can be scary.

**[Catharine Hydon]:** It can be scary. How do you stop yourself from wanting to be a control freak? Because I think I might have had a little bit of that tendency myself.

**[Dr Caroline Scott]:** Yeah, it's it. And they've got to be, you know, you've got to be comfortable as a teacher, don't you? You can't just suddenly become someone that you're not. If you are a particularly, you know, neat and organised person. I know there's some teachers who are very happy to be in mess and some teachers who really like to be particularly organised. So, this isn't, this isn't me sitting here going, 'you've got to let the kids do whatever they want to do or they're going to suffer'. But it is about just asking those questions of yourself. Maybe I could just have it a bit fuzzy around the edges here, letting go a little bit of that control, because that's when children are able to enact their agency. Which brings me back to the power thing, when you are able to really share the power.

**[Catharine Hydon]:** Ooh Mary's got a question for us. I think, or Mary has got a statement that she, Mary you'll have to put yourself off mute.

**[Mary Holwell]:** Yeah, I've got, I've got a comment that I just want to, um, ask Caroline to perhaps speak further to, and that is that idea of initiative. Moving children beyond the idea of just responding to a choice. Because I think often when educators are thinking about agency, and we've talked a lot about children's capacity to make a choice, make a decision. But it sounds like we've shifted that thinking a little bit, from simply responding to the choice to initiating the whole decision-making process. Would that be what you're talking to us about here, in terms of agency, Caroline?

**[Dr Caroline Scott]:** You're so spot on. And I know I had one of these 'a ha' moments when I was reading, and in the literature I read about a ‘responsive action’. And so if, if you give anyone, not just a child, if you give somebody some options, so do you want the red, green, yellow or blue cup? Then they are not showing agency, what they're doing is responding to the options that you gave them. So trying to get away from the idea that, of course, we're still going to give children options, whether it might be, you know, well. See, so this is the thing too, is that there always will be restrictions won't there? Because you can't sit in a classroom and the children go, I want to go to Queensland. Oh, yeah. Let's go. There's always going to be some restrictions there, but within the limitations of what you can do in your program, remembering that you can sometimes push the boundaries a little bit, allowing children the space to come up with something themselves. Rather than hey, I'm thinking we're going to put the dragons over there or something else, and then making the choice, they haven't really showed any initiative. So that's, that's really the difference. And I think you're right I think there is this idea that um, because that's in the definition, that children making choices and decisions is agency. Now, it's part of it, but if it's from a range of options given to them by somebody else, then it's not really an authentic indication of agency.

**[Catharine Hydon]:** So, we've got some colleagues here who, who are working in primary settings. And I do think it's interesting to think about, you know, within a curriculum, there is a curriculum there, the Victorian curriculum is pretty clear. But within each of those spaces is an opportunity to say we're talking about this subject matter. But let's think about the ways we might explore that.

**[Dr Caroline Scott]:** Totally.

**[Catharine Hydon]:** And this is where inquiry-based projects, inquiry-based methodologies, call it what you will, becomes really interesting for children, particularly in those younger and those early years of school. So giving children, you know, ‘what do you want to investigate?’. And I guess the skill of the teacher in that setting is to say, can I weave in the opportunities for exploration of the curriculum components, um, into a exploration of the grand final? You know, or whatever it is that the children are very, very interested in. Or it could be something happening within the school setting, or within the neighbourhood, that is particularly important for them, that everybody seems to be talking about, that could be woven in. So that's about children. It's opportunities I guess, all those methodologies. Like, meeting with children, planning with children. You know those conversations with children where we'll say, ‘what are we going to do now? How can we organise the classroom? How can we organise this? How can we solve problems together?’. These are all opportunities for children's ideas. You got to be prepared Caroline, to you've got to be prepared to go with it, though you can't go ask the question and then children go 'let's go to Queensland', and you go that's a dumb idea we're not doing that.

**[Dr Caroline Scott]:** Yeah, yeah, so there's, well, there's two things I wanted to say. One was yes, that idea of leaving it a bit open. So saying, okay, what is the learning outcome that I'm aiming for here? And how, no, asking the children, how can we get there? How can you demonstrate this to me? Rather than saying, 'okay, we're all going to do a a booklet on the lifecycle of ants', which, you know, for you as a teacher is a bit boring. But to to say to them, 'okay, this is what we need to find out. I need you to understand, we need to understand about lifecycles, about this about that. How are we going to demonstrate that? How are we going to investigate that?’. What lifecycles do you want to learn about? But that's messy too, isn't it? That's really messy. Because yeah, you're not quite sure where that's going to go. And I know that that can be tricky because it's, I mean, is it easier? I'm not sure. I'd be really interested to hear from some school teachers.

**[Catharine Hydon]:** I actually think that one of the things that's really interesting about this too, is they, is the opportunities that people have to share some of their insights too. So, if you are in foundation or year one for example, and you've been doing some interesting projects with children. When you say ok we need to learn about lifecycles, which lifecycles do we want to learn about? And that children guide you in that conversation. Those shared with colleagues. I mean, a community of practice is fantastic, and you could do that across the early years too. You know, we could say, this is what the early childhood education and care people have been doing with their colleagues also in the early years of primary. So, and maybe we can get the librarian to be involved, and somebody else. So it's, it becomes a bit more of a collaborative, and families of course, to be part of those conversations. So you're right it. I think I said to you before when we were planning, it does require us to slow down a bit.

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