Early Years Twilight Seminar Video

What should educators consider when choosing an assessment tool?

So, once we've defined learning, and decided how this related to the VELDYF, our task was then to go out and find tools for assessing learning. So, the literature review takes you through these different tools. We also had to come up with some criteria for which tools to choose and how to decide whether they were any good.

You can see on the slide that relevance to those constructs that we talked about,usefulness to educators - that it's something you can actually use - and their validity, reliability and fairness were all key considerations in deciding whether we wrote about one of these tools in the literature review.

So, I'll elaborate on those criteria just a little bit. The one about relevance is pretty clear. There's plenty of tools around that measure something that's not actually that relevant to children's learning, so by starting by defining what learning we were looking for, we could say, "Well, does that tool actually measure what we're interested in?"

Our next criterion - there's a couple more that aren't in the diagram there - but Dan mentioned learning being a progression. So, ideally we want assessment tools that tell you where a child is and where the next step is, so you can help move them along that continuum.

We wanted assessments that were valid, reliable and fair, that would perform the same for different groups of children no matter what your context, no matter what kinds of children and families you work with, and we were hoping to find ones that were actually proven - scientifically proven to be valid and reliable. Although that can look like different thingsdepending on what kind of tool you're looking at.

Another criterion was that we wanted tools that were compatible with warm, responsive relationships with children, OK? Now, an assessment tool that in any way undermines play-based learning programs or that centrality of warm, responsive relationships we felt was not likely to meet that criterion of being useful to you because it's not going to resonate with what you value in your practice.

Another thing we were interested in was tools that include children's self-assessment. So, the VELDYF actually points to children's self-assessment as a really powerful motivator for their learning, so we were hoping to find some tools that spoke to that. That gave children an opportunity to understand how they were making progress.

Lastly, we wanted to find assessment tools that would help connect early childhood educators and anyone using the VELDYF with others in their professional community. And that includes tools that would help, um, professionals talk to parents. Tools that would help different types of professionals talk to one another.

We already know that assessment is often used in sort of that diagnostic space where you end up with two professionals talking to one another there. But what about children who aren't in that space? How can assessment be used to stimulate really good professional collaboration around all children and their learning?

So, that was our wish list, really, wasn't it, in going out to the literature and saying, "Well, we're hoping to find some tools that meet these criteria." Whether or not we did, I'll leave to Dan to explain in the next section.