**[Dr Caroline Scott]:** I found through the research, each time my participants were giving me an example of really agentic practice, where children were given a lot of freedom and choice, there was also this parallel idea that children also needed to be very aware of others. So, this idea that we're always cleaning up after ourselves and making sure that the area, there's a lot of mess involved in eight children pursuing things that they value, making sure that the area is cleaned up and resources put back for the next children. There was always this undercurrent of yes, we want you to pursue your valued outcomes. We want you to have some freedom. We want you to make lots of choices and have lots of fun with that. But let's do it with consideration of others. And that was interesting to me because I hadn't asked questions about that as such. My participants just brought that up, that that was an important component of these messy, good fun, child-led activities.

So, I looked into that a little bit more, and the research also supported the fact that agency as we would like to understand it, isn't individualistic. It isn't about people or children or adults just going for what they want to do, hang everybody else. It is about, these are the things that I value, but how can I go about pursuing those with consideration of other people around me, the natural environment as well. That came into it as well. So yeah, this idea of affiliation as well, it's very important for you to understand what it is that motivates you and pursue it. But let's do it without hurting others, without disadvantaging others. So, they run parallel.

Early childhood educators do this so well, because always, in an early childhood setting, there's a group of children. So, it is often a negotiation between children's wants and desires and the educators' boundaries and limitations that they need to put around things. So there is often that negotiation between what children want to pursue, because we know that they will often make decisions that potentially aren't the safest. Our role as the early childhood educator, is to make sure that they stay safe and healthy in our care.

Through the research, it became really evident that the early childhood educators who were giving me all this valuable information about what they did in practice, were very clear to say that children have agency. So they already have the ability to make choices and decisions. It's whether we as educators allow them to do that. So how do we as educators practice in a way that allows children's agency to be enacted? Because naturally, it will be.

There was a very interesting conversation that we had around, 'give agency', because that can be a language that's used. So educators give agency, or parents give agency to children. And we had a great conversation around, well it's not really about giving agency, because then the power is with the adult that's giving it. So how can we phrase it in a way that is ensuring that educators know that it's really important, the way that they practice that allows children to enact agency, but isn't putting all the power with the educator? So, facilitate or facilitation was the thing that came up, as educators can arrange the room, they can organise their environment, they can practice in a way, they can interact in a way with children, that allows that agency to naturally come up and be enacted. And so, some of those ways are to step back and allow some freedom for children to act with initiative and pursue their own valued outcomes.

But another one was stepping in and making sure that there are really intentional interactions happening with allowing children to have input into the program, for example. So, if you're sitting down at the start of the day or the start of a term, really taking seriously the input that the children have, as to what it is that they'd like to see in the room, any excursions or incursions they might like to have which can get quite fanciful and good fun, but you can then have the conversation with children around why we can't all fly to Sydney and see the Sydney Harbour Bridge or whatever it might be. But what is it that we can bring into the classroom or the room, that can tap into some of those things? Was it the plane ride that the child was really interested in? Was it the Sydney Harbour Bridge? Was it the climb of the bridge? What was it, that we could maybe bring some elements of that into the program and fulfil those objectives?

The participants that I had in my research were incredibly intentional about everything they did. So even when they stood back, and it looked like they were doing nothing, there was a choice to do that. There was a very conscious and deliberate reason. Another example was allowing children to work out their own altercations and issues. And so, that was always very deliberate, because knowing the child really well, then informed the educator as to whether they needed to step in to that altercation and help the child negotiate, or whether they could stand back and allow the child to work it out themselves. So there was those two really important steps. One, which was stepping back, very consciously and thoughtfully, and the other was to step in and say, "What can we do here? What would you like to see in the room?".

Another example was the celebrations. These were a really strong theme that came through from my research. What celebrations are we going to celebrate as a room, as a centre, and why? So, rather than saying, Easter, Christmas, some of those traditional ones, that in Anglo Australian culture we tend to celebrate, having a look at the community, asking the children, asking the families, what celebrations which you like to honour and how would you like to do it? That was another really big thing. So rather than we're going to sing traditional Christmas carols, you're going to stand up in front of the parents, what can we do for Christmas celebrations? Some of my participants had brilliant ideas that had come from the children. Let's cook a meal for mums and dads. We can serve them. But then, even within that, if there was a child that said, "I don't want to cook. I want to sit with my mum and dad." Then they were welcome to do that as well.

In early childhood, we have the freedom to do that. We've got a wonderful framework that guides our practice, but it doesn't say, at the end of this year, you must achieve this. When children move into primary school, there's a little bit more of a stricter curriculum, but hopefully, there's still some movement in there, particularly in early childhood, which we know is up to the age of eight, to have a little bit more freedom and flexibility to say what is it that motivates this child? How can we link that with some of the outcomes that we're getting from the set curriculum?.

So really, this is happening after the fact. A very interesting example of going into my research and asking educators, how do you plan for agency? And of course, they said, "We don't. It's just everywhere. It's all the time. It's in our morning conversations with families. It's in every interaction I have with the child. It's in all my planning. It underpins everything." So that was really interesting for me because I wanted to get some documentation, as an example, to analyse. And I couldn't, because they didn't have any, in terms of forward planning.

So, looking back, some documentation panels, some this is where the learning took us, this is what I asked the children, or this is what the children asked me, and this is where we went with it. And so, documenting it in that way, is the most powerful way, because you're not setting pre-determined outcomes. You're not saying, this is what we're going to do and this is how it's going to happen. You're leaving it open, which can be messy and can be challenging. But after the fact, you're looking back, looking at some photos that you've documented and looking at the children's maybe artefacts of work that you've collected and saying, look where this took us.

I know that it is good to have some things on paper, pre these things happening. So being able to say, we're having a conversation about XYZ, I'm going to listen to what the children have to say, and then we're going to progress the experience from there, is quite an acceptable way to go, as long as then at the end of it, you've got this really rich documentation that shows all learning that occurred and the interactions and all the wonderful things that go on.

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