**[Dr Caroline]:** I spoke before about the tokenistic or small seemingly tokenistic choices that children make in their days. And so they'll be pursuing their valued outcomes in the little decisions that they make every day as to who they play with what they do. And so to strengthen agency in the early childhood period and through primary and secondary school will allow children to be more aware of their own motivations and their own desires and interests and what makes them tick. And so that helps them make those better decisions. Hopefully my research was not around this, so I can't say this unequivocally. But research hints at the fact that if children have strong agency.

If they have opportunities to strengthen their agency throughout childhood, then the chances are that they'll make decisions that are right for them more frequently and with more conviction when they're older. Which of course, if you think about coming through secondary school and into the adult world, which we know is changing rapidly. And research has shown that soft skills are what we need. And so children strengthening their own sense of agency hopefully will come out the other side of the schooling journey, able to make decisions and choices that are right for them and meaningful and valuable for them. Which research would say leads to a happier, more fulfilled life, to talk about the really big picture. It's my firm belief that would be the case.

So, it comes back to really listening to children. Again, transitions tend to be I'm reminded of Sir Ken Robinson's image of children going through schooling like on a conveyor belt in batches, from a factory. So we often do move children through rooms according to their age. And so I would challenge people to think about... I know there are ratios that we have to think about and other perhaps limitations around things. But how is that child feeling ready? Do you get the sense, whether they're verbal or not, pre-verbal, that they're comfortable with the transition that's coming up? And if not, what is it that we can do as educators to support that transition based on what it is that child's telling us. So the less rigid your program is the less likely that children's agency is to be cut off at some point or several points during the day. So if children arrive between 8:30 and 9:00 in the morning, and at 9:30, you have a set group time when children perhaps have just settled in to being really engaged and involved in a play experience.

I would challenge you to question whether having a really strict time for a group time or a snack time is really responding to children's agency and their sense of wellbeing. So, if those transitions during the day are a little bit more fluid, we need children to understand that there are times when particular things need to happen and they need to be perhaps all in the one area. But does that need to be every day at 9:30 or 2:00? Weighing up the benefits because we know that group times have a lot of benefits for many reasons, but weighing that up with having it at a particular time and cutting short, perhaps children's desires and what they're doing.

We're seeing some secondary schools now giving children and adolescents much more choice earlier on in the subjects that they pursue, which I think is a great move. Children are moving through primary school. Of course, children don't always go to early childhood services, but when we strengthen or facilitate children's agency and allow them to strengthen and practice using their agency. We're setting them up to be more confident in their own abilities, in their own wants and needs. Which I would hypothesise is going to set them in good stead for not doing things that aren't good for them.

So, making wiser decisions as they grow up, as they go through the teenage years, we know that generally there'll be some mistakes made and perhaps some bad decisions made. But if we're helping children to understand what it is that makes them tick. To make decisions that are meaningful and valuable for them, then hopefully as they grow, they're more able to make good decisions. And also decisions going back to that affiliation point also decisions that are good for the people around them that take into consideration others' needs, and wants, and others' agency as well. From gathering evidence from the research and pairing together this idea of agency and affiliation.

The idea is that we do create a better society, big picture thinking. But pursuing the outcomes that are valuable to you surely are going to end up with you being a happier and more fulfilled person. But also doing it with respect to well, the natural environment for one, which we know is in a little bit of trouble. And other people, so your relationships are going to be better. The people around you are hopefully going to be happier and more fulfilled as well. So yeah, that would be the big outcome of this. But sustaining that through the primary and secondary years might be more of the challenge with a more strict set curriculum. So, I'm really interested in helping particularly early primary teachers understand how that transition to primary school can help sustain the ideas and the strong agency that's been promoted in early childhood.

There is definitely different understandings out there. Agency is not a well understood concept, generally. And so empowerment's actually a good way of talking about it. They're not exactly the same, but they're very similar, is a good way of talking about it with families. If you're just starting to introduce the fact that you are perhaps practising in a way that listens more closely to children and allows children to make more decisions. Now that can be quite challenging for some families. We know that all families have their own understandings and their own practices and their own knowledges and ways of doing things. And we need to be respectful of that.

But at the same time, we also need to be very confident in what we are doing and why we are doing it. So it can be a chance for educators to be an advocate for children. So, if you are really fully understanding why it is that you are practising in a way that facilitates agency, you can use some of those reasons that you're doing it, to explain to parents what the benefits are and why it might stand their child in good stead going through their schooling and into adulthood.

So again, another thing that educators already do really, really well is partnering with families. I feel that in early childhood, we have the space and the time and the knowledge to do that a little bit more than in primary school where the interaction between families and teachers tends to be a little bit more constrained. So capitalise on that relationship that you've got with the families. Really know what's going on for them and what's appropriate for them and their understandings and their beliefs. And also, as I mentioned before, this understanding of what's going on for the family. Because that will impact on what it is that children are interested in, able to do have their feeling.

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