**[Dr Caroline Scott]:** There are more constraints. There are school bells that need to be adhered to in primary school that perhaps aren't there in the kindergarten, early childhood settings. But within that classroom setting, there still can be relationships established that tap into children's motivations and interests. I think it's really important to remember that the VEYLDF, the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework, goes up until eight years old, and technically children are in early childhood still up until eight. The preferred way, the best way that they learn, is through play.

So being able to allow some freedom within the constraints of primary school would be the key to allowing children to strengthen their agency. So where is it in the school day, where you can allow children to make some decisions and choices around what happens? Where is it in your day where you can allow children to lead the learning? So, there will be particular outcomes that you will need to achieve with your students, but where is it that you can bring in their interests to help them achieve those outcomes? So, they would be my top tips of trying to find some wiggle room within the curriculum and within the day and the bells that happen during the day. Where's the freedom to just push a little bit and allow children to act with initiative and pursue what it is they find valuable?

That word, opportunities, is really important, because it might be something that happens quite quickly that you grab onto. A child has voiced... Or maybe, I know that for children in early primary, they can get a little bit wriggly because we know they need to move. So, tapping into... Oh, okay. So, there are certain amount of children in the room that are starting to get ants in their pants. I'm going to listen to that. I know what's motivating that, as a professional, the teacher will know what's motivating that, and it's usually the child needs to get up and move. This is an opportunity for teachers to be an advocate for children. So, understanding that in those early primary years, children are still in the early childhood phase. So, learning through play, not sitting for long periods of time. We know that about child development. So, can you be an advocate for children?

If you look at the recess and lunch times, children are actually given a lot more freedom in primary school than they are in early childhood settings. So that would be somewhere where you'd need to be really aware of when it is that you could perhaps need to step in to help children or where you can let them go and solve their own problems. But part of the intentionality of that would be to have some conversations afterwards. I've heard of some great practice where there's a circle time after recess and after lunch, so you can have a chat. What happened out in the yard? Were there any issues? How did you resolve them? And so, the support might not be immediate out there, but it can be implemented afterwards and help children understand what it is that they did that was beneficial, perhaps what it is that they might need to improve on in terms of their behaviour.

Thinking about focusing on those soft skills that we know now is just so important, how much learning and development happens in the recess and the lunchtime out in the yard, when there might be one teacher to X amount of students? And so, the teachers can't always step in and support children to make good decisions and to resolve their conflicts. But to have that time afterwards, you can harness that learning that has happened. Because as I said, there is a lot of learning that happens out there in the yard. You can harness that and help children to develop those soft skills, the agency, the affiliation, the problem solving, the communication, all those sorts of things.

This idea of establishing relationships is so important. And sometimes in the school year, you can be thrown into the learning part really quickly. So, taking any opportunity that you can have, that you can find, to have conversations with children and with their families, trying to open up those lines of communication. I know that teaching is really busy, and so trying to find opportunities where you can tap into what it is that makes that child tick. Is there a particular interest that I can harness to help the child in, whether it be numeracy or literacy, to make sure that the learning that's happening is really meaningful for them? So, yes, establishing relationships, having really intentional interactions with children, and ensuring that you try, like I said, and push the boundaries a little bit and make some room in the curriculum, make some room for allowing children to act with initiative and pursue things that they find valuable.

The really traditional idea of teacher and child is quite hierarchical, where the teacher holds the knowledge and the child is the subordinate. And I'm not saying in any sense that that happens in classrooms everywhere now, but that is the traditional understanding of teacher and student. I think that to break down that hierarchical structure to understand a really good point, I think, is that all the information that a child or a person could ever want to know is available on the internet now. So already we've said, well, the teacher is not the holder of all the knowledge or the adults in a child's life are not the holders of all the knowledge anymore. Children can access that information at any time. So what is my role as a teacher? It's about reflecting on what the role of the teacher is.

And if we think about those soft skills, one of the best ways to ensure that children are confident, involved learners, happy and confident communicators, are able to problem solve, all those sorts of things, is to have a more equal relationship with children so that there's copious amounts of trust and respect there and that children feel as though you do trust and respect to them. It's not just one way for the teacher. So trying to equalise. So you're having some power with children. They have a say. Their opinions matter. Their feelings matter. Their ideas are taken seriously.

That's a way that you can equalise that relationship and make sure that you are not having power over by telling children what to do all the time and telling them how they should feel and what they should do. Rather, listening to them and allowing them to have really authentic input into what it is that happens in the classroom. Facilitating children's agency isn't about letting them do whatever they want when they want. Even educators in early childhood, where we have quite a lot of freedom as to what we do each day, they will start very slowly with this.

They'll make sure that they know their children really, really well to know what their capabilities and interests are. And over the course of, let's take the example of the kindergarten year, the teacher will step back quite slowly. And by the end of the year, the children are having really significant input into the program and how the room's set up and making their own snacks and things like that. So this isn't something that just happens straight away when you get a group of children in. I would highly recommend that teachers pay really close attention to the learning and transition statements that come from early childhood, because they have a lot of very valuable information in them as to what it is that might be able to help you understand that child, even before they come into your classroom.

So stepping back a little bit slowly, there might be times when you... well, implementing some play-based learning. So thinking about what it is that you need to achieve and how can you weave that into a more open-ended, more child-led... A couple of hours in the morning might be a way of starting. But probably the most simple thing was to get those opportunities to talk with children can be quite, not distracting, but knowing that there are particular things that you need to achieve that are set from above, in this week and the next week and the term and the year, can really take away from having time just with those children that are with you for many hours a day, but often you don't get enough time to chat to.

So, take those opportunities to really get to know them as well as you can, because then you can facilitate agency in a way that suits them and their family, and hopefully achieve better outcomes for them, not just in their sense of self and identity and agency, but also in their learning.

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