Early Years Twilight Seminar Video

The context for assessing children's learning

Let's start with the big picture, as Suzy said.

So, in Victoria, we have got the implementation of the two years of preschool.

Nationally, we're heading into an election and early childhood is a big issue again and everyone's talking about the importance of investing in early childhood.

Now, I don't need to tell you guys how important that is.

But we need to be showing that what's happening in early childhood services in Victoria and elsewhere is actually delivering these outcomes for children that everybody's talking about.

So, that's sort of contextualising it in terms of what is happening outside of the early childhood sector and what's happening across the country.

In terms of why we're talking, that's much closer to home, we're talking about assessing children as confident, involved learners because you need to do that in your practice and you need to do that in order to be able to talk to families about what their children are learning in early childhood services, so they appreciate the work that you do and they can support their children's learning and development at home.

You need to be able to talk to one another about what's going on with their children using the kinds of language that will help you to support one another to develop your programs for children.

You also have a policy obligation, of course, to assess children's learning.

It's one of the practice principles in the VEYLDF and it's also there in the National Quality Standard.

The National Quality Standard talks about the cycle of planning and doing and assessing, and within that cycle there's this thing called ‘analysing learning’.

Now, when I was at the Education Department, one thing I did was work as a lead assessor for Children's Services against the National Quality Standard and I found the really top-notch services, it wasn't about the documentation - a lot of people think it is - it's about the thinking and the analysing learning.

Knowing what learning is. Knowing when it happens, knowing how to recognise it.

When we talk about assessment, anxiety levels can go up, OK?

I know it. We know that there are models of assessment that we don't want to see in the early childhood sector.

But we still know that assessment is important and I'm hoping that is why you are here tonight, because you think assessment is important and you'd like to find ways to think about doing it better.

And that's why the VCAA has supported us to do this literature review.

Another reason, on a personal level, that I'm excited to be here tonight is, as you might have guessed, Dan and I have quite different backgrounds.

So, Dan's the science guy. He knows the learning sciences back to front. I am more the policy and practice kind of girl.

So we've had some constructive disagreements over the years about how to approach this issue of ‘How do you assess?’

And this literature review, what we're going to talk you through tonight, brings together what we hope is the best of those different ways of looking at the world.

And I want to tell you, just as you're having conversations in your services with other professionals and getting better and better and bouncing ideas, the same thing is happening in the research community, OK?

So we're all on this journey of getting better at this thing called assessment, whatever it looks like.

And tonight, we're going to give you a bit more food for thought to help you on that journey.