**[Catharine Hydon]:** I guess now it's really helpful for us to ask Pru if she can share some ideas with us about why does this matter? You know, why does it matter that children are connected? You know, why does it matter that children are contributing? Why does it matter that children are orientated or that they take responsibility? And why do we think that's got something to do with considerations of children's development and learning, particularly in relation to what we aspire to under the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework. So, Pru, can you help us figure out why it matters?

**[Pru Mitchell]:** I'll try, Catharine. Can you hear OK?

**[Catharine Hydon]:** We can hear you.

**[Pru Mitchell]:** Great. Lovely. Trusty headsets. Great.

**[Catharine Hydon]:** Yes, we're all getting new devices as we speak.

**[Pru Mitchell]:** I think it's just permanently implanted on my ears.

**[Catharine Hydon]:** Yeah, I know. Yes.

**[Pru Mitchell]:** Well, on the one hand, the 'why' question. I mean, I think Kate's answered in a way that outlined...And the VEYLDF says it as well. But if we look at those key areas - decision-making, negotiation, responsibility, curiosity, participation - they're areas I think we just all see as so important even to our own development.

**[Catharine Hydon]:** Maybe we can have the slide back up again, actually, while you talk about that, because that'll help people to solidify those ideas. Sorry to interrupt. And we'll get the slide back so we can have a look at it.

**[Pru Mitchell]:** Great. And I've got it in front of me. But you know, like, in our own development and in our lives, we're very conscious when people we work with or live with don't seem to have developed those areas of decision-making, negotiation and responsibility. So, you know, how important to make sure we focus on those elements in our children's development. So on the one hand it's like...almost a motherhood statement that of course it's important. But when we looked at the literature over quite some time, and now might be a good time just to acknowledge the third author on this work which was Dr Jen Jackson, and she did the last webinar, So Kate and I get to do this one.

**[Catharine Hydon]:** Yes, big shout-out to Jen.

**[Pru Mitchell]:** Just hearing her voice and some of these things when we looked at the literature, as Kate alluded to, there was quite a bit to sift through and try and make some sense to manage it somewhat. But connection to others, that first side. I think, I mean, we know that it's a crucial part of development. We recognise that particularly at the moment when our regular ways of connecting might not be available to us. And the VEYLDF does focus predominantly on those social connections, belonging. But if you look at people, country, place, community, there's lots of areas that we can unpack in that space, and then moving on to the values, traditions, practices, relationships and shared experience, right into empathy, respect and awareness, there's just so many parts of development that this touches on. So...Plus the natural and constructed environments. That was the other one. And increasingly the digital. So it would be lovely to have almost a whole workshop now on the digital connection. But just to connect also...We did connect with executive function, and while we didn't find a lot of other people had done that connection, we do find things like how well people...children in particular, manage emotions and in decision-making and also responsibility, how much they're able to control the inhibitory control part of executive function came through to some extent. Kate focused on orientation, which really, for me, was the really interesting part of this work. The other one I think that people are starting to realise, and there's a little bit more work happening, is curiosity. And we see it particularly with science and STEM people are starting to realise that development of curiosity in children might be what's contributing...what contributes to them having an interest in their world and therefore asking questions and seeking to learn more about their world. So that's part of that being aware and receptive, and that is something that we can observe in children, whether they're connecting with what's around them. A contribution...Sorry, do you want me to...?

**[Catharine Hydon]:** Keep going.

**[Pru Mitchell]:** I've got one more...

**[Kate Noble]:** Actually, Pru, can I just jump in quickly on curiosity? Something that was really interesting in the literature on curiosity was this kind of tension between these two viewpoints of, "Is curiosity an inherent trait?" Are there naturally curious children, and is it possible to support the development of curiosity? And something that came through in the literature was that definitely there are ways of supporting children's interest and engagement and, you know, I think perhaps...I might be a little bit biased, but early childhood educators possibly know this better than many others. I think that was right to see in the literature.

**[Catharine Hydon]:** Yeah, great. Thank you.

**[Pru Mitchell]:** That's great. Thank you. And really, because what I was gonna say, to finish that question was, actually when we get to contribution, while it's fairly well researched in middle childhood and adolescence around citizenship and leadership, we found there was much less that we could rely on...look at for early years.

**[Catharine Hydon]:** Well, that's an invitation if ever I heard one. (LAUGHS) For some more work. And I guess one of the things too, Pru, we're doing here is we're trying to explore this outcome area. So we are trying to figure out, when have children learned and grown in this area? How do we track that? How do we track the distance travelled and how do we understand it? And I think it's a really important thing for our participants today to remember about these pieces that contribute to the suite of material that's available through the VCAA that it's helping to explore that outcome area. So, how do we know what's going on in this space? And I think this is a really important question. How you track this is a really interesting idea. And you're gonna share a little bit about a Hart's ladder with us in a minute, which I find absolutely intriguing and I'm sure there's lots of people here who maybe know a little bit about that. But before I do that, I just want to remind all of our participants today, particularly our early childhood educators who are working with the national quality standards space, that lots of what we're talking about here has deep resonances with the national quality standard exceeding themes, in particular the exceeding themes around the ways in which families and community shape the practice of an early childhood education or outside school hours service. So it's one of those areas that's really...it's an outcome that really helps explore that space. And one of the things that I find in some of my conversations with educators, and it's great that we've got practitioners from various places, librarians and people from the VET sector and people from special schools as well, which is fantastic to see you in this space, is when we're exploring that quality element, it's sometimes tricky to figure out how the information is flowing, or how the ideas are flowing. And in that exceeding themes space, it's about how we hear the contribution from others coming TO us rather than the contribution coming FROM us to the community. And so all of these ideas around what contribution means and what connection means helps us to also explore some of those quality areas and figure out where that contribution is going. I love that the arrows are going both ways in that model because it's an invitation for us also to be shaped by the contribution of children, shaped by the contribution of families and community, and likewise for us to also shape. So I love that sort of reciprocity, that idea, and I think Hart's ladder, which you're gonna share with us just now, Pru, I think helps us get there a bit in terms of understanding what that sort of continuum of contribution looks like. So take it away. Tell us what this Hart's ladder is about.

**[Pru Mitchell]:** OK, well, as I said...So, Stephanie, do you want to try and load that slide, thanks, so people know what we're looking at?

**[Catharine Hydon]:** Always good to get another picture. Very good.

**[Pru Mitchell]:** And as I said, this ladder wasn't developed for early years, so it would be good for you all to have a think about whether this resonates with your experience because, you know, expert...expert experience is extremely valid when we're looking at...at development and things that we can't measure or research completely. So you'll notice first on the right-hand side, if you wouldn't mind, those two little bits there. So the bottom three rungs of this ladder - and it’s a participation ladder, as you can see - the first three are basically designated as non-participation. And as we move up we're increasing the degrees of participation. And so just to give you a few things -if we look at things like manipulation, it's a fairly negative word in this context and so we see...I think you can understand what that one is all about. And probably decoration and tokenism, where we're trying to...we alluded to earlier where we might be making it look like our children have got...are participating but if you really dig down into it, it's really adult-driven and we, to some extent, are putting children in there as a decoration or making a token effort. But as we go further up...and climbing any ladder, it gets harder and more challenging as we go up, so we're not saying any of this is easy, but I think it's worth just reviewing what we're doing with this kind of lens. And in some cases, yes, it's enough that we inform children but that there is a reason why we're giving them a particular role. But where possible, trying to move up to where we've actually got...certainly consultation and children are informed within their developmental level, right to child initiated... child-initiated and directed. So the big difference between the top two is who's actually calling the shots. We're not saying that young children...it's not appropriate that they're required to do things on their own. That's not the way things work. But finding opportunities for them to experience so that they can develop the decision-making, the negotiating, and particularly...around their day-to-day life and in centres where they might be having to do this outside a very small family unit, this is where the circle starts to become an issue. We can let them do it in the family and then we can develop outwards from there. Does that... Is that helpful?

**[Catharine Hydon]:** Yeah.

**[Pru Mitchell]:** It would be great if people put examples. I'm sure you've all seen this in practice and perhaps, you know, if you've got ideas on what idea could move you further into the next rung.

**[Catharine Hydon]:** Well, and also some of the things that people see out there in the community sometimes grate on us and maybe that's because it's children as decoration. We think, gosh, they're just there for a token, you know? And as we see children actively participating...One particular idea that strikes me as a really good example of this is the children who participated with the community more broadly in the design of the playground next to the Royal Children's Hospital. So, some of you might know about that. There was a big collaborative effort run in conjunction with the City of Melbourne, so lots of collaborative conversation. Children, young children participated in some of those things, which is why you've got a giant hill. So if you haven't been to that beautiful park, when this COVID thing is over, you can go and have a look and see that giant hill. But a great example of some of those things, and I'm sure people have got them in their own communities. I absolutely agree, Pru, there's probably lots of examples of how people have moved those experiences up through that ladder.

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