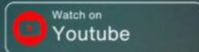


# Moments in Mind

Tune in to hear clinicians share the moments that changed their lives—and the lives of their clients.



## Binh Doan – Episode 3

Pearson Clinical Assessment

00:00

Andy McLean:

Hello and welcome to Moments in Mind, a brand-new podcast from Pearson Clinical Assessment in the Asia Pacific region.

My name is Andy McLean. I'm a podcast producer based in Australia, and in this series, we're sharing extraordinary stories of professionals who make a difference in people's mental wellbeing every single day. In each episode, a special guest reveals moments that have changed their life and changed the lives of the people who they support.

In today's episode, you'll hear my conversation with the wonderful Binh Doan, a speech pathologist who grew up in Vietnam and Australia and who now runs his own speech and language pathology clinic called Speakable.

Binh talks candidly about the highs and lows of his life and career, including the memorable moments that made him realise speech pathology was his calling. Binh also explains why detecting conditions early can be the powerful turning point to change a child's life for the better, and he outlines how he motivates parents and children to persevere even through the toughest of times.

Binh was such a warm and generous guy to speak with. We can't wait to share this discussion with you. So let's jump in and hear the conversation.

Andy:

Welcome to the podcast, Binh, it's great to have you here.

Binh Doan:

Thank you so much, Andy.

Andy:

Before we jump into your professional career – and I can't wait to do so, there's loads I want to cover –

first, I'd like us to press rewind and go right back to your earliest childhood memory. Is there a moment that stands out for you?

01:43

Binh:

The earliest memory that I have is when I was about three years old. I grew up in Ho Chi Minh City, and every single day I was picked up from my kindergarten by my auntie. I would get a special piggyback straight back to my parents' factory. Back then, my parents ran a lacquerware business so: the smell of lacquer, the noise in the factory... They had over 100 workers. So we would chit chat a lot. We just talked to each other. And I was learning a lot from just talking to people. I didn't go home to do my homework. I'd rather go to the factory, and I just loved it. I loved interacting with my parents, with their workers, with the aunties and uncles there. And I guess, that was my first exposure to running businesses.

02:36

Andy:

So after growing up and spending your childhood in Vietnam, you arrived in Australia as a teenager with very little command of English. Can you describe what that was like for you?

02:46

Binh:

It was like being thrown into the deep end with a little bit of English. So when I was about 15, that's when I moved to Australia to study year 11. I wanted to start year 11, but what we had was about six months of English [lessons]. We had to learn six months of English – for all the different subjects like maths, English, geography, everything – it was done within six months before year 11 started. And that was really hard. You just walk into a school environment and go, “Oh, I can speak English” but it was tricky because I would sit in the classroom and I couldn't understand a lot of what was being said.

03:31

Andy:

Yeah, and you didn't travel over there with your whole family as a support group around you. You went and stayed with a host family. Can you tell me a little bit about what life was like there and any moments you can remember.

03:44

Binh:

Absolutely because when you're at home with your parents, obviously they do everything for you, you know, cooking, cleaning and taking you to school. But when I was living with my host family, I had to do a lot of things for myself. And also, when we were sitting at the dinner table, people would have their little conversations in English, and I would just sit back to listen. But at times, the jokes were being said, and I was like, “What is this really about?” I would just laugh anyway; [laugh] along with everyone to show that I really understand this, but I wasn't really processing much of what was being said. I didn't get the jokes.

04:23

Andy:

Yeah. Wow. And then in your work today, of course, you're dealing with people who have challenges around language and speech. So how would you say those early experiences in Australia now inform your work today?

04:38

Binh:

Great question, Andy. I think that because I've been in that situation before, I have the empathy to see what it's like to not understand what is said. So even if these children are sitting in the classroom and if the teachers are teaching them something, and they don't get it, they'll probably laugh and just go along with it. So I understand what it feels like to not do what is expected of you, yeah.

05:10

Andy

And I mean, if I think about the age that you're at, too, that's quite a tender age, when you're in year 11, and you're trying to fit in anyway, in any social environment as a teenager, you're trying to be part of the group and all that kind of thing. It must have been challenging for you to have this sort of pretty major barrier to being able to do that.

05:29

Completely. I didn't have a lot of friends, and back then in Brisbane, I was pretty much the only Vietnamese kid in that school. A lot of them were already friends, so they formed this really strong bond with each other. And I was just like, I felt like an outsider, to be honest, but I found some other friends who started year 11 in the same year, so we just started to get to know each other, and we made really good friends. But yeah, you're right. It was hard.

06:02

Andy:

And particularly for somebody like you, because you're such a social creature, right? I mean, you know, I've got to know you a little bit over the past few weeks, and you're a really chatty, personable person, you know, you love people.

Binh:

That's right.

Andy:

Now, let's talk a little bit about speech pathology and the profound difference that it can have on people's lives, because you must have witnessed some quite amazing breakthrough moments, I suspect, down the years. Tell me about one that you've witnessed that stands out.

06:32

Binh:

There have been quite a few. One that really stood out for me was this young child who was already in year four and they couldn't read. Some people think speech pathology only has to do with speech and talking. But then, after so many years of working with children, I just realised that you can have a language and a speech disorder, which can also affect your ability to learn how to read and write.

So I sort of discovered that area a little bit more and learned how to treat dyslexia.

So this young child was diagnosed with dyslexia, and we started working together, and after so many years of learning, every day, they would turn up during the holiday for intensive therapy and during the school term as well. Eight years later, now they've graduated from high school and off to university, so I would say that my job is to meet a student where they are at and then work together and bring them up to where they want to be.

07:45

Andy:

Wonderful. And how does it feel when you talk to that person now and they've gone through that journey with you?

07:51

Binh:

Amazing, because you can see that at the start, they felt like they couldn't do something like reading, because all their friends were reading, and they were like, "Oh, how can I not do this? It seems to be so easy for everyone else. Why not me?" I just say to them, like, "If you try really hard, actually, don't even *try* just *do* it. You need to practice every single day, and you'll get there". And they do.

08:19

Andy:

You can do so much work in the clinic, right? But then they need to go away and keep that practice up. So how do you keep people motivated and engaged?

08:27

Binh:

So when you meet someone, you don't want to be in control of them, because you want them to feel like they are themselves, and especially with children. Throughout the day, they'll be at school, and they're being told to do this and that, but when they're here, they know they're having good time, so we just play some games.

We get to know them. I find that after so many years of working with children, the main thing to help the main way to get to know them and to help them is to gain that rapport, right from the starts. Without that rapport and that connection with the family – the kids and the parents – you can't get things done. You have to have the parents in the sessions as well, because that way they can learn what how to perform different activities so that they can carry over at home.

And you make sure that every day they've got a practice not like an hour or so, maybe a couple of minutes, five, six, ten minutes or so makes a difference.

09:33

Andy:

Before we started recording, when I arrived in your clinic this morning, I heard a lot of laughter coming from the other room. There was a lot of “wows”, and there was a lot of laughter and chuckles and stuff. And you were in the middle of some therapy with a young girl, and her mum was there too, and the three of you were clearly having a good time. And when the girl left, she was obviously looking forward to the next session with you in a few days’ time. That was referred to – I heard them say that. And also it means that they’re much more likely to go and apply [what they’ve learned] outside of the clinic too, aren’t they?

10:07

Binh:

That’s absolutely right, Andy, because communication takes place anywhere, everywhere, and not just in the clinic. And I say to the parents, like, you’re with the child, with your child a lot of the time, so I’m transferring this knowledge onto you, because we have such a limited amount of time, I cannot just work on this chart within this time, and nothing’s done at home. So it needs to be carried over. Really important for that to happen.

10:33

Andy:

It’s a joint effort, isn’t it.

Binh:

Absolutely 100%.

Andy:

Now tell me a little bit about how you use standardised assessments to achieve some of the breakthroughs that you’ve managed to achieve?

10:43

Binh:

Standardised assessment. I say to the parents, when they ring us, they say, “I don’t know where my child is at – I need help. I need your support”. So I say, “It’s like going to the gym. You need your personal trainer. So instead of making you do all the work right from the start, we don’t know where to start, so we need to have some standardised assessments to determine your skills in that moment.” And so at university, lecturers used to teach us right from the start, you need to use the right assessments for the children and the clients that you meet at the start. Get to know them, do the right assessments to see where they’re at and go from there.

11:35

Binh:

Yes my own daughter actually went through a process of speech therapy, and I recall vividly a standardised assessment at the start of that process, and then revisiting the same standardised assessment about 12 months later. And we could see specific areas of development and specific areas of continued challenge, which then informed the speech pathologist thereafter.

11:59

Binh:

That's right. So if you do that assessment at the start, you can gauge and see where the client is at, and then that needs to be done again within six months, or actually six months, and then a year later, just to gauge their progress. It needs to be measurable, you know, because we can't just say, "Oh, the child has improved" without any proof or numbers. And that's what standardised assessments can do.

12:29

Andy:

And all the way along, it's impartial, right? So it's not just your opinion that you're giving. It's actually a qualified scientific assessment.

12:36

Binh:

That's absolutely right. And I remember back in my uni days, we spent a long time on learning how to administer these assessments, and we had our supervisors in the sessions all the time, just to make sure that is done correctly, to make sure that, you know, we get the best indication of where the child is at right from the start.

12:59

Andy:

Well, thank you for that so far.

We will be right back after this short break

13:09

Break:

For for more than 100 years, Pearson Clinical Assessment have tested and refined products and services that give educators and clinicians trusted tools to make a profound difference in the lives of adults and children.

To find out more about the resources that Binh and his colleagues at Speakable use – covering everything from speech disorders to language fundamentals and from auditory processing disorders to cogmed memory training and more – just Google "Pearson Clinical Assessment" and check out the Pearson website.

13:52

Andy:

Welcome back to the podcast.

So tell me about any clients who have really impacted you personally.

13:58

Binh:

Apart from working with children, we also work with professionals from overseas who have English as their second language. So they would ring us up and say, "Hey, I have got a qualified degree from overseas. I've just arrived in Australia".

And most of these clients are quite young, so in their 20s, 30s, and that really reminds me of myself, even though I came when I was 15, but it's still, you know, I had my English as my second language. So I say, "All right, let's just come and see what we can do to help you"

Because they would say, "I've got a degree, I'm fully qualified, but I still can't find a job, because English is my second language, and it's been hard for me to communicate - and can you help try and pinpoint some things that can help me improve?"

So yeah, they come. We use standardised assessments. We pinpoint all the areas they need to work on, create an individualised program for them. They turn up every week, work on their accent. So it's called accent reduction. And then it can take time. It doesn't happen overnight. But just like anything, if they put in the work and they improve after working with us,

15:18

Andy:

Yeah, that must be tremendously frustrating to be so qualified in another country and then come to Australia, where English is the first language, and simply because of a language barrier, it prevents you from actually using your full intellect and reaching your full potential. So it must be really rewarding for you when you help people to reach their potential?

15:39

Binh:

Completely, because some of them are afraid to speak on the phone, and that can affect their confidence, and therefore they feel like they're not qualified when they truly are qualified to do what they do. So yeah, the language barriers, you know, it's higher there, but they come get their support, and you know, they improve, get promoted to the next position.

16:06

Binh:

Now, I hope you don't mind me referring to you like this, but I kind of think of you as a bit of a polymath. You seem to have your fingers in so many different pies. You're a published author, you're a qualified actor, you're a qualified yoga teacher, and you recorded a podcast series called A Peaceful Mind, which went out on Spotify. It's full of short, simple, mindful exercises. And I can't help thinking that sometimes when people come to your clinic for the first time, they might be feeling stressed or worried. And I just wondered, are there any mindful exercises that you've perhaps used with children that help them to pause and focus on the moment?

16:52

Binh:

So children sometimes they don't know how to work on their emotions. Yeah, which is completely fine. We just meet them where they're at.

But we can just let them know if they're angry or feeling a bit upset, [that] they can monitor their own emotions through breathing to help them stay calm.

And I've heard this quote somewhere, it says: "If you stay calm, you win". So I teach them how to breathe. I teach some of my accent reduction clients to breathe as well, because some of them breath

with their chest. Chest breathing can cause a lot of stress, so we check in with our breathing every time.

17:35

Andy:

Now, before we round out the podcast, let's imagine we're years into the future, maybe decades into the future, and you're looking back over your career in speech pathology. What do you think will be the moment that will stand out for you. [The one] that you'll remember most?

17:54

Binh:

It would be me turning up to my first interview in Campbelltown in Sydney. I still remember turning up being all presentable, with my shirt all tucked in long trousers, with my CV and everything the interview took about an hour to complete. I still remember my first supervisor or my manager.

I was nervous because I'd never had an interview face-to-face in person before. And I did well, but I went home and thought, "Ah, not sure if I got the job or not".

But the next day, I was at McDonald's with one of my best friends. Back then, I didn't have a lot of money at all, so I spent all my money on flying from Brisbane to Sydney to go to that job interview. And I got a random phone call while I was chomping down on my Big Mac, and I was like, "What is this? Who's calling me? I hope it's the job".

And I picked it up, and they said, "You got the job".

So that would be the moment I would remember for the rest of my life.

19:15

Andy:

Wow, and if you could go back and speak to Binh, back in McDonald's back on that day now, would you tell him to stick with it and to say "yes" to that job?

19:30

Binh:

One hundred per cent! 20 years later, you know! But I was so thankful for the opportunity. Obviously, someone has to say "yes" to what you want to do, and then that door completely opened to the person that I am now.

19:45

Andy:

Well, it's been such a pleasure talking to the person that you are now today! Thank you so very much for your time.

19:52

Binh:

Thank you so much. Andy, it's a great pleasure to be here.

20:03



Andy:

Thanks for listening to this episode of Moments In Mind, a podcast by Pearson Clinical Assessment in the Asia Pacific region.

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And to find out more about Speakable and Binh’s book *The Speakable Child*, visit [speakable.com.au](http://speakable.com.au)

And finally, to listen to more episodes in the Moments In Mind series, just subscribe. You'll find us on Spotify, Apple Podcasts, YouTube... pretty much, wherever you get your podcasts. And while you're there, do feel free to leave us a rating or review.

In the meantime, thanks so much again for listening, and goodbye for now.

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