

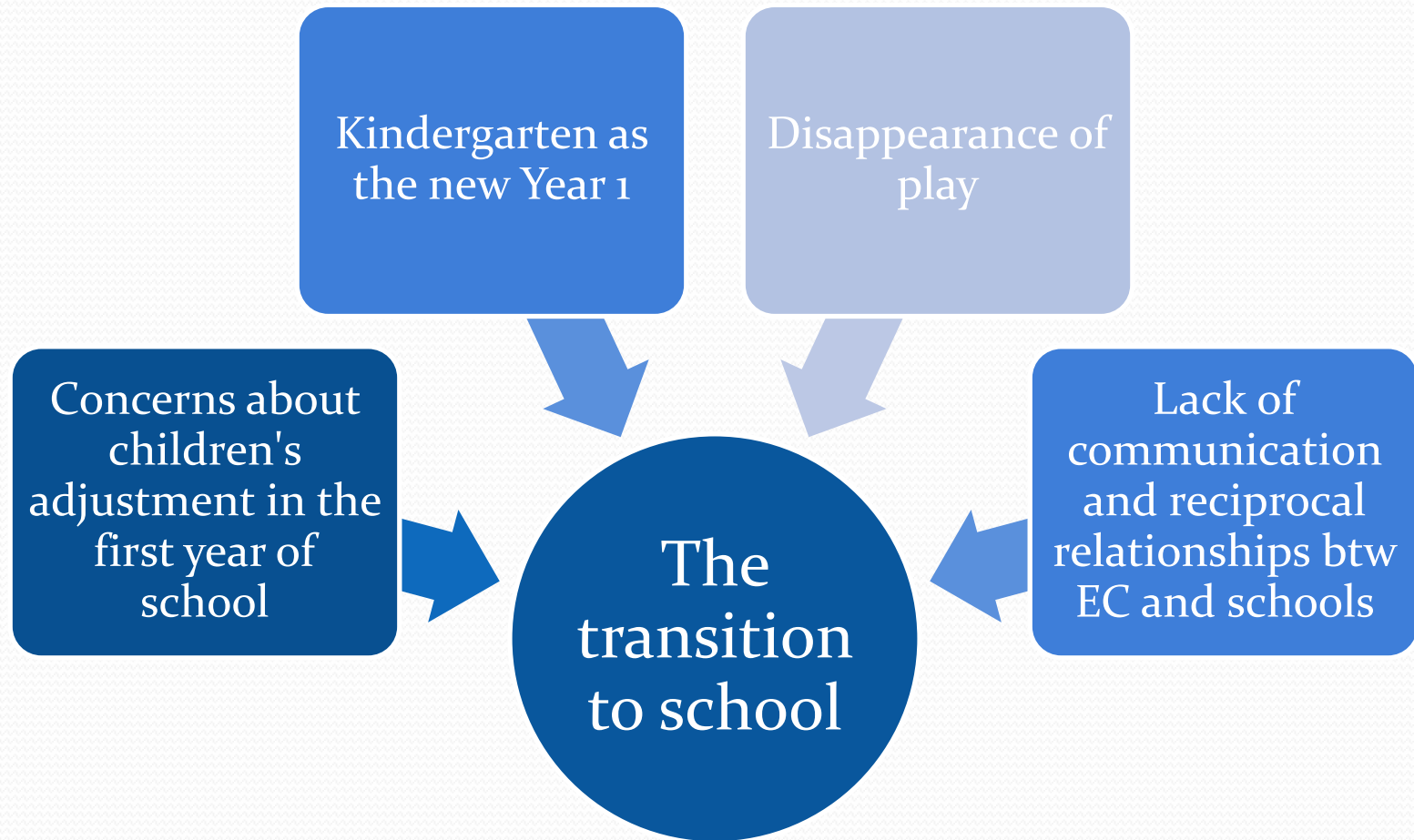
# Play-Lost in Transition?

Exploring teachers' beliefs to promote pedagogic continuity

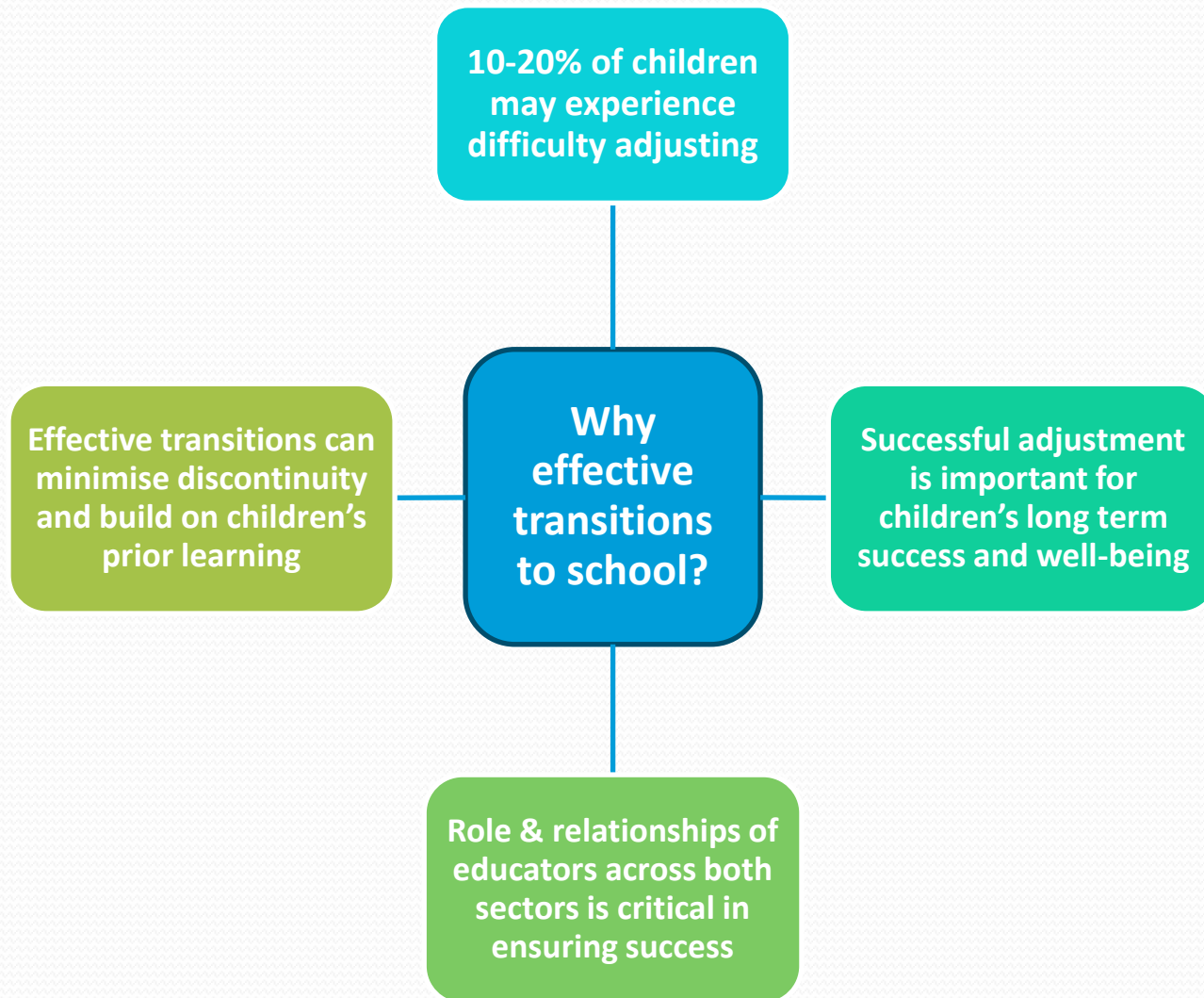
Linda Bellen



# Why? The impetus...



# What does research tell us?



# Transition to formal schooling



- Transitions are complex – the critical point in the pedagogical divide between early years services and schools
- Teachers – are critical players and contributors, and implement the transition process
- Teachers' pedagogical thinking – essential to explore to get a sense of their beliefs about play-based pedagogy & pedagogic continuity

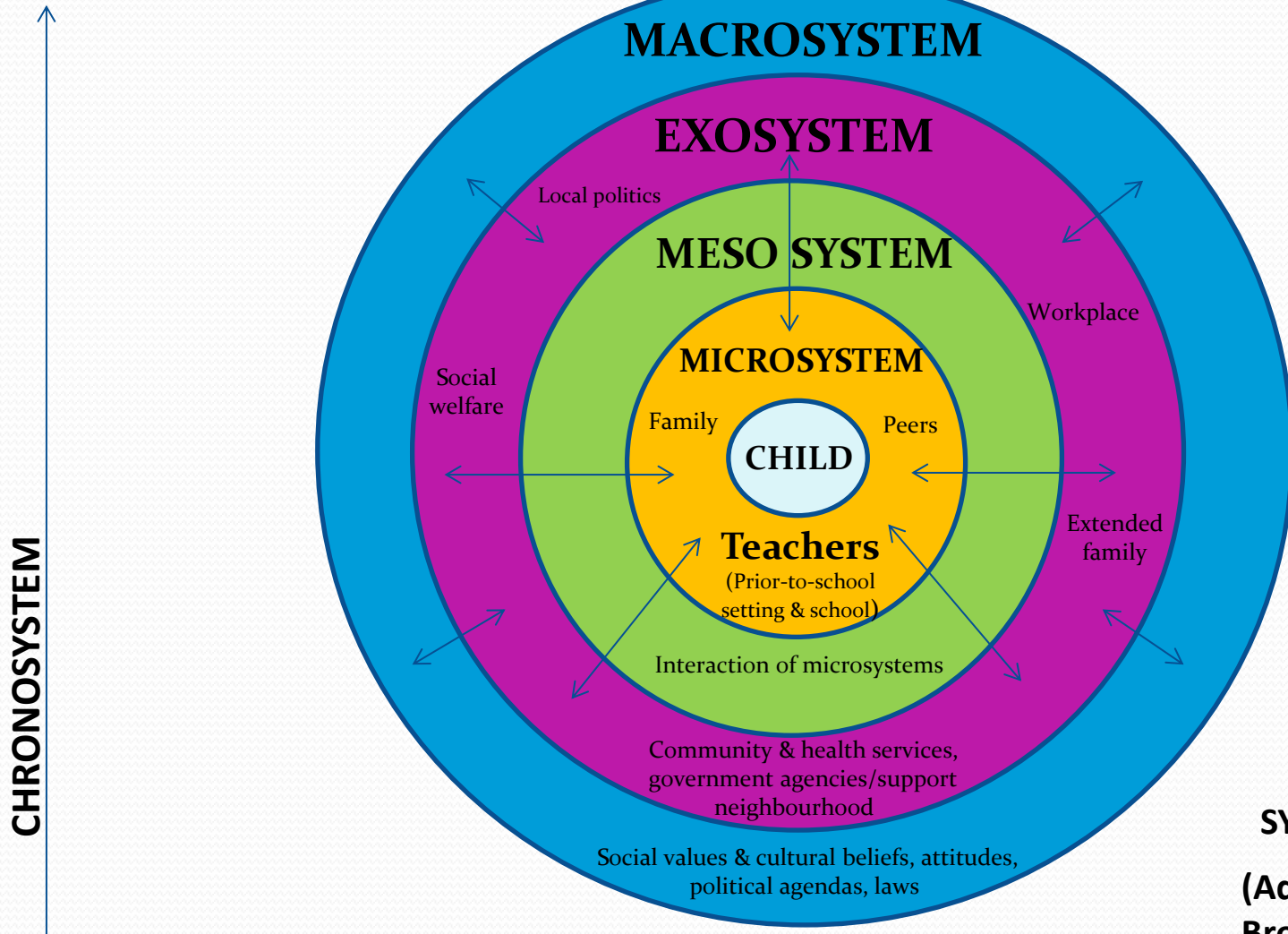
# Definition of transition

How do you define  
the transition to school?

# Definitions in the research

- “Transition to school is taken to be a dynamic process of continuity and change as children move into the first year of school” (Dockett & Perry, 2014, p. 2).
- Fabian and Dunlop (2002) suggest that the period of transition commences at the preschool level (the year immediately before Kindergarten), followed by an initial settling-in stage, and continues until the child feels settled and established in the new school environment.
- Broström (2002) refers to this as supporting children to “feel *suitable* in school” (p. 52) such that children have a feeling of well-being and belonging.
- Definitions should move beyond short orientation periods and induction events, characteristic of many transition programs, to transition being a lengthy process (DEECD, 2009; Educational Transitions and Change Research Group, 2011; Johansson, 2007; Petriwskyj, 2010).

# Theoretical Framework-Bronfenbrenner



**ECOLOGICAL  
SYSTEMS THEORY**

(Adapted from  
Bronfenbrenner, 1979)

# Overarching research question

**"How do teachers' beliefs about play-based pedagogy contribute to their constructs of pedagogic continuity across the transition to school?"**



# Key research questions

- 1. How do prior-to-school and Kindergarten teachers view play-based pedagogy and how do they describe their role in play-based learning and teaching?**
- 2. What do prior-to-school and Kindergarten teachers believe about pedagogic continuity in the transition process?**
- 3. What factors influence prior-to-school and Kindergarten teachers' decisions related to using play-based pedagogy in the transition process?**

# The documents: EYLF & transition to school



## Principles

- ***Partnerships*** (DEEWR, 2009, p. 12)
- ***Ongoing learning and reflective practice*** (DEEWR, 2009, p. 13)

## Practice

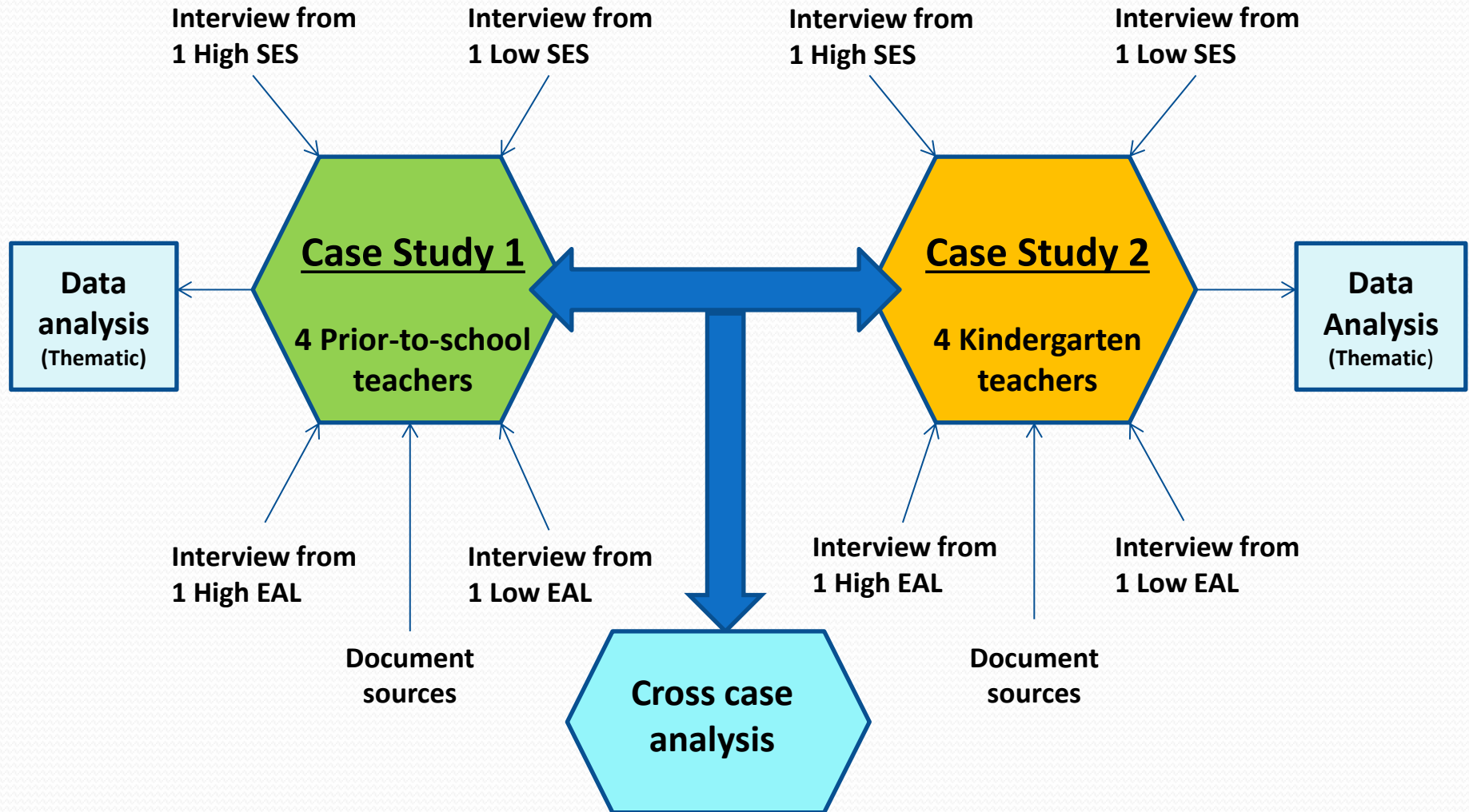
- ***Learning through play*** (DEEWR, 2009, p. 15)
- ***Intentional teaching*** (DEEWR, 2009, p. 15)
- ***Continuity of learning & transitions*** (DEEWR, 2009, p. 16)

# Australian Curriculum (AC) & the transition to school



- AC – focus on content, standards based approach to assessment, not much attention to pedagogy
- Sets out what needs to be taught but not HOW – suggests teachers make the decision about how to teach the content
- Minimal focus on the transition to school

# Sources of data



# Why pedagogic continuity?



***“Children do not ‘magically’ become different kinds of learners as they move from prior-to-school settings into the first years of school”***

(Connor, 2012, p. 28)

# Let's talk...

- What is your understanding of play-based pedagogy?  
(What do you believe are key aspects to consider?)
- How would you describe the educator's role in play-based pedagogy?

# ***What did the teachers say?***

## **Views of play-based pedagogy**

```
graph TD; A[Views of play-based pedagogy] --> B[Play as active exploration]; A --> C[Play as purposeful, child-centred pedagogy]; A --> D[Limited place for play]; A --> E[Various roles of the educator];
```

**Play as active  
exploration**

**Play as  
purposeful, child-  
centred pedagogy**

**Limited place for  
play**

**Various roles of  
the educator**

# Play-based pedagogy in the literature

Pedagogy: what “practitioners actually DO and THINK” (Moyles et al., 2005, p.5)

Play-based pedagogy:

- Synodi (2010) – a mixture of child-initiated or child-directed play, teacher-directed play and mutually directed play of both teachers and children.
- Ashiabi (2007) & Howard and McInnes (2010) – discuss the need for a balance of child-initiated and teacher-guided experiences.
- Wood (2010) – suggests teachers should utilise an integrated approach of both child-initiated and teacher-directed activities where teachers plan for play with the children, based on their interactions and observations

EYLF:

Definitions of pedagogy, play-based learning, involvement and intentional teaching are all separate



# Let's talk some more...



- What does the term **pedagogic continuity** mean to you? Do you consider this important to consider in the transition to school? Why/why not?

Please discuss with some partners close by and also consider the following question...

- How do your transition practices support and promote pedagogic continuity so that each child feels “suitable”?

# *What did the teachers say?*



- *“I think it's very hard for them to go from this to sitting at a desk, very formal teaching” (EC<sub>1</sub>)*
- *“Yeah, yeah definitely. It is a different environment. That's what we have to be aware of. It's a totally different environment for them...” (EC<sub>4</sub>)*
- *“Unfortunately that is, it just seems to be there is a huge cut off... and it's just like, that was preschool [clap] this is school. There is no crossover. That's just part of it. That's just the way it is unfortunately” (PT<sub>1</sub>)*
- *“To go from here to there I think there's just a big step... I don't think there is a continuity I would say. I think there could be a better continuity and a more successful continuity...” (PT<sub>4</sub>)*

# Some key themes

## Constructs of pedagogic continuity

### Differing expectations

Minimal crossover  
The shock of formal learning  
The play/learn divide

### Academic push-down

Notions of school readiness  
The 'schoolification' of preschool  
Crowded curriculum and less play

### Aspects of enhancing continuity

Play as a transition bridge  
Recognition of prior experiences  
Collaborative exchange

# Recommendation 1:

- Towards a new definition for play-based pedagogy... let's try together!
- What do you believe should be included to help define the role of the educator within this definition? Discuss.

# My new definition...

*Responsive, reflective educators provide a balance of child-directed and adult-guided purposeful and meaningful play possibilities to support and extend children's thinking and learning based on their inquiries and interests. Educators co-construct knowledge with children, in both planned and spontaneous opportunities, achieved through the use of intentional teaching strategies that are deliberate, purposeful and thoughtful to promote sustained shared thinking and high quality verbal interactions.*

*Any feedback?*

## Recommendation 2:

- Reconceptualising 'ready schools' and a new early years continuum

A question to ponder...

- What do you would you consider is important in your concept of 'ready schools'?

## Recommendation 3:

- Change at the policy level
- Change the macrosystem level perceptions (societal views & cultural beliefs) so that there can be a shift in how play-based pedagogy is viewed in early years education

# What can we do?



- View transition as a process not an event – programming and planning for it throughout the year
- Establish transition policies in services/schools
- Create early years transition networks in your community
- Establish collaborative partnerships with the schools in your area – to find a ‘pedagogical meeting place’



# What can we do? (cont'd)



- Advocate for play-based pedagogy – feel confident to articulate the value of learning and teaching through play and to articulate your pedagogical expertise
- Consider joint professional learning opportunities and reciprocal visits
- Foster a greater understanding of EYLF in school sector – Professional development to help teachers in schools understand how children's play continues to develop and mature

# And some final words from one of the research participants...

*“I would also say that it's the way our education system is set up on a whole... it's not about what we believe at the moment, until the system actually changes we're in a system where we want to see improvements and until that actually changes and our whole system is changed we're with the system that we're in now and we need to produce the results that people expect to see” (PT4)*