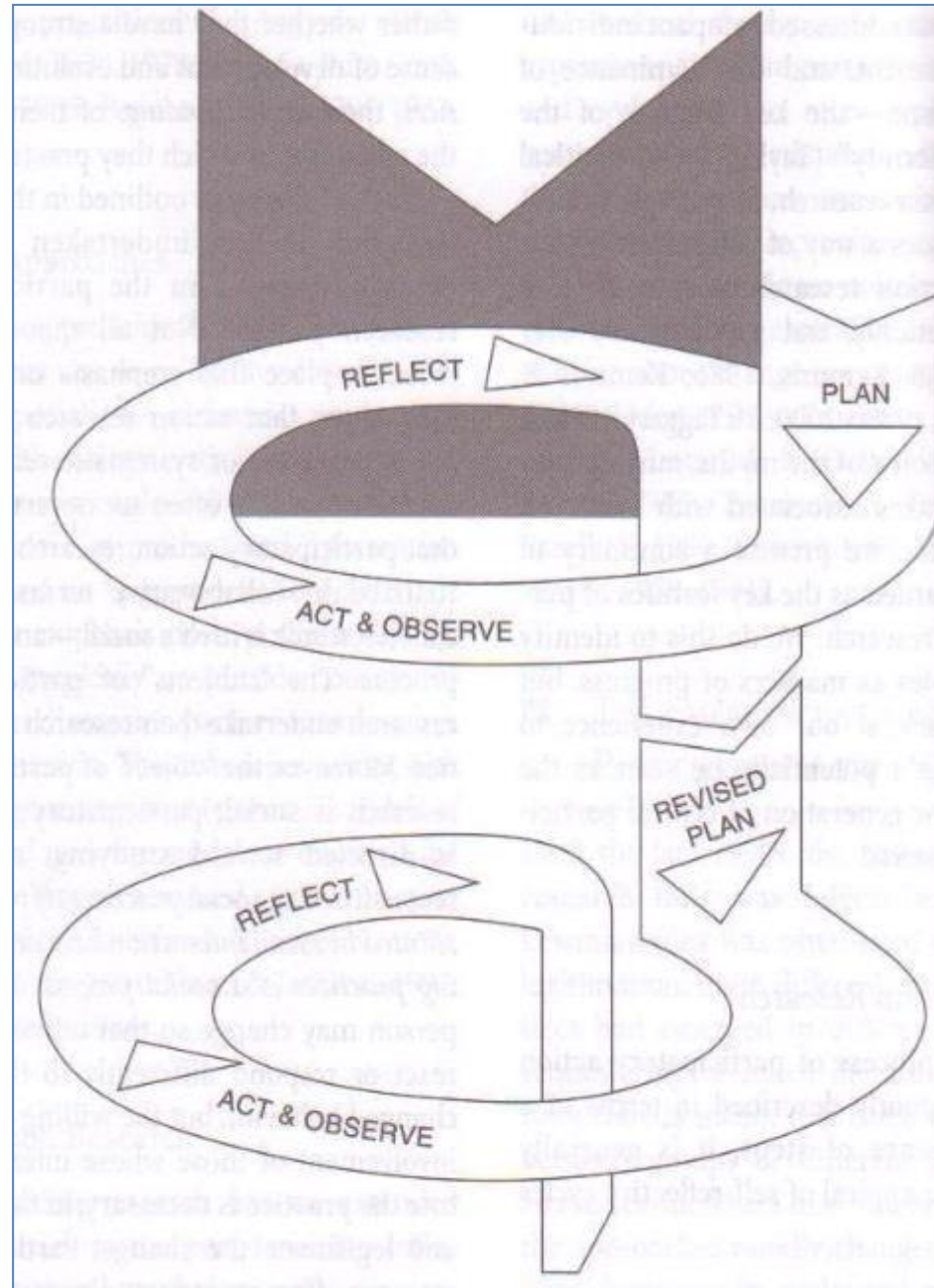
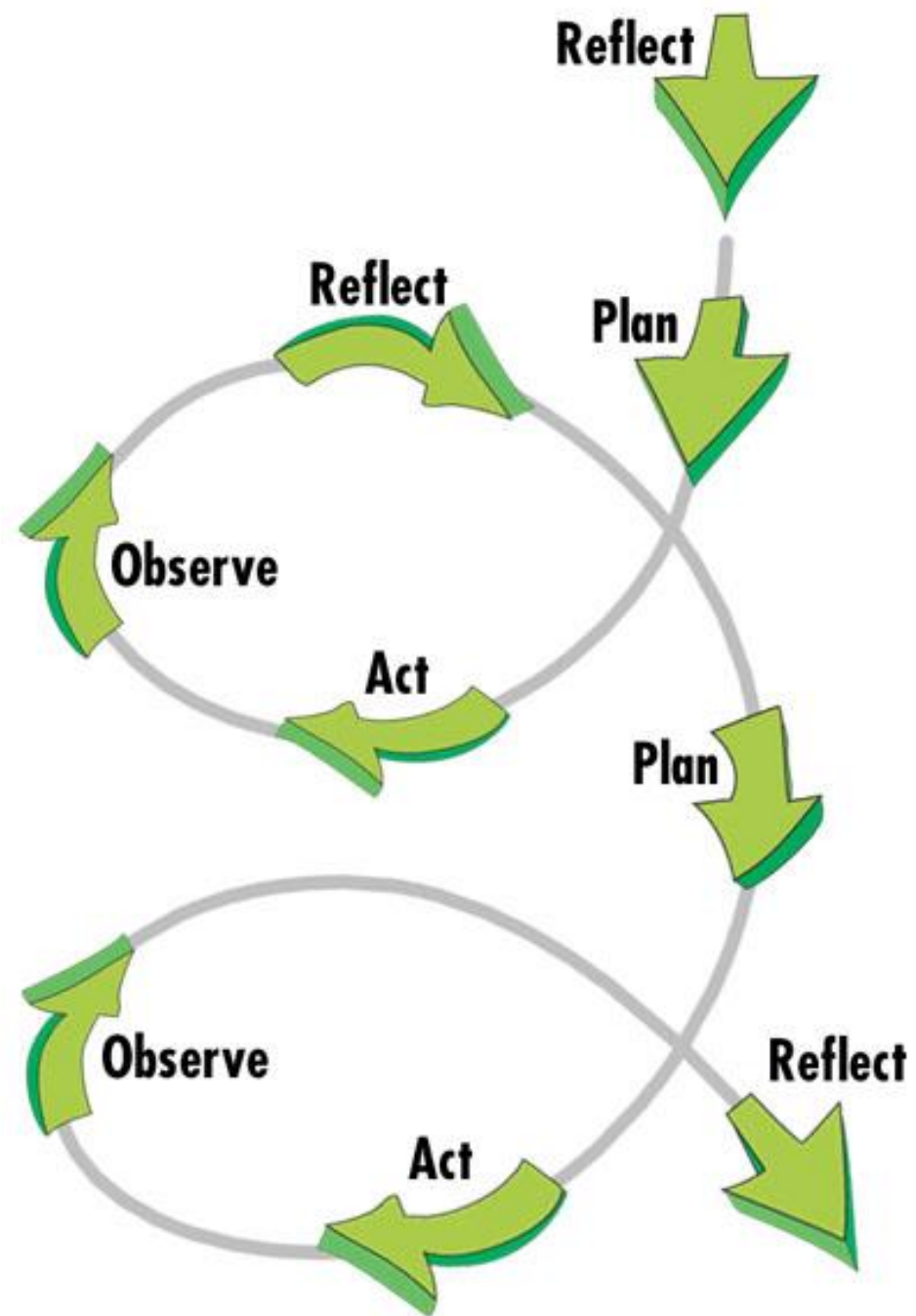


What is Action Research?

- ▶ A fluid, unfolding process of research
- ▶ Involves recursive cycles of questioning, gathering data, critical reflection and deciding on a course of action







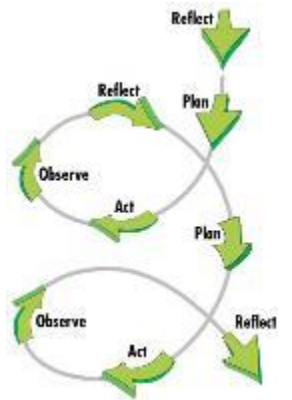
Key Characteristics of Action Research

- ▶ Collaborative in nature
- ▶ Fosters leadership regardless of an educator's role and tenure
- ▶ Builds on educators' interests – it allows them to research their own practice in their own setting
- ▶ Educators learn from their experiences as the project progresses and can apply new learning to practice
- ▶ Educators revise directions and priorities for practice as the cycles of research continue



In an Action Research Cycle...

- ▶ Develop a research question about something of key interest and concern
- ▶ Develop starting points for action or a plan based on your research question
- ▶ Follow the plan to make things happen
- ▶ Reflect on and analyse the data collected
- ▶ Begin the process again
 - ▶ Questioning, gathering data, critical reflection, deciding on a course of action



Developing a Research Question

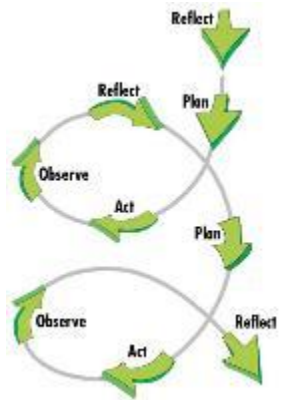
- ▶ Collaboratively identify an issue relevant to your setting
- ▶ Develop a research question that is:
 - ▶ Important to the staff group and makes sense to everyone
 - ▶ Is specific to the topic you are investigating but also has scope
 - ▶ Is change-oriented and knowledge-generating, but also manageable (not too broad, narrow or vague) (MacNaughton & Hughes, 2009)
 - ▶ Leads to logical starting points for action

Note: You may have an overarching theme for the action research project, with several individual yet interrelated investigations occurring at one time



Example Research Question

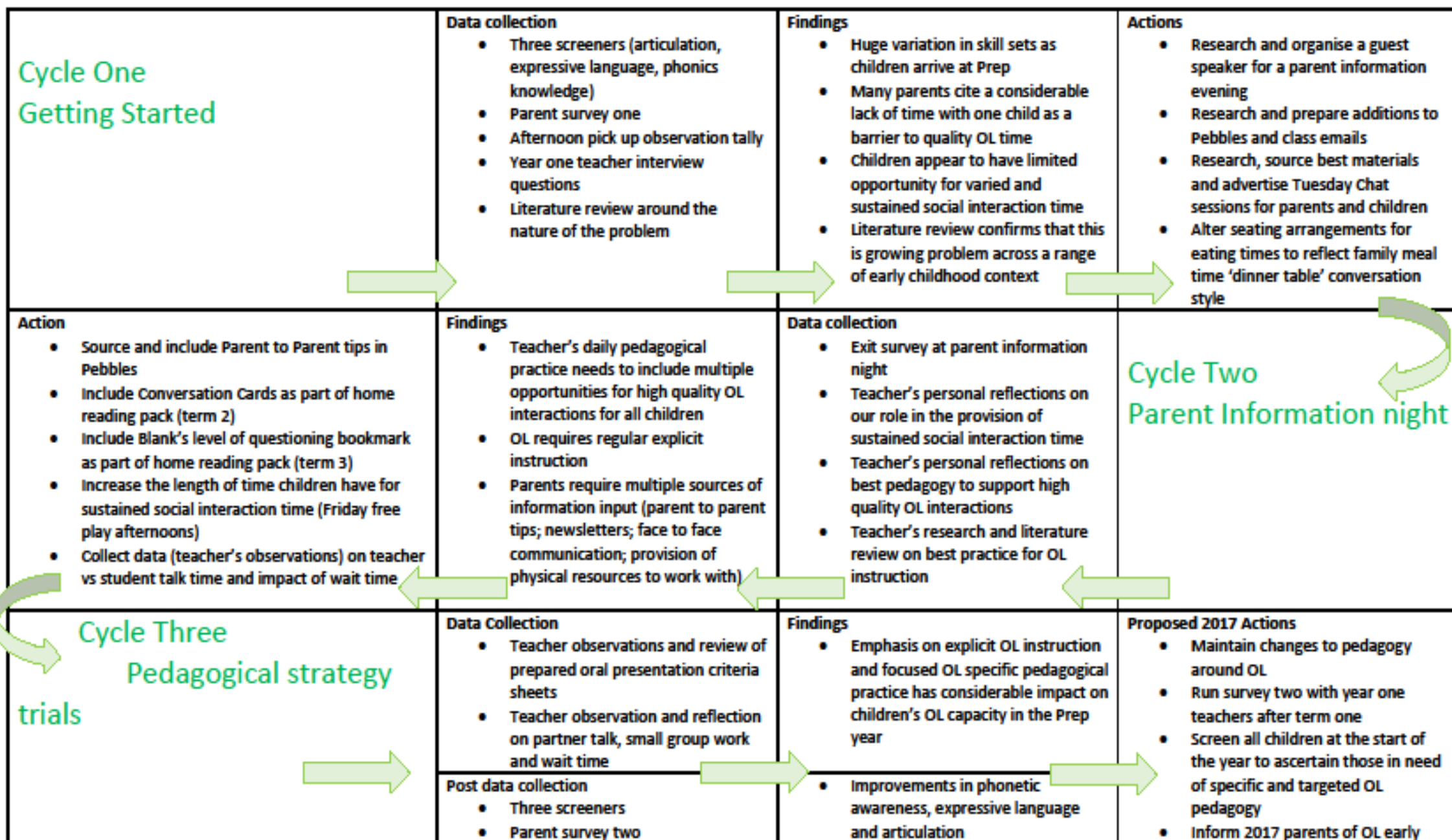
What is the value of pretend gunplay in children's experiences at our centre?

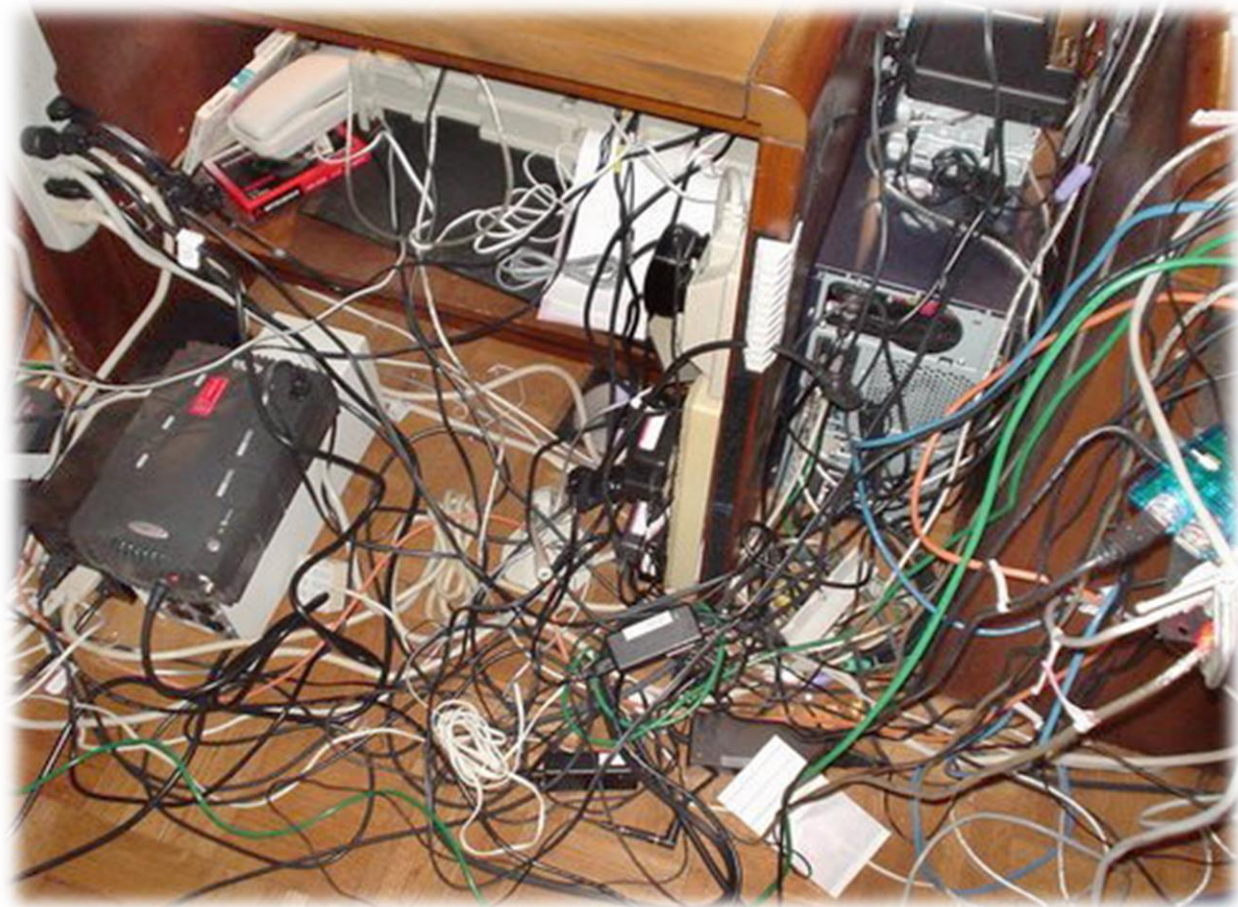
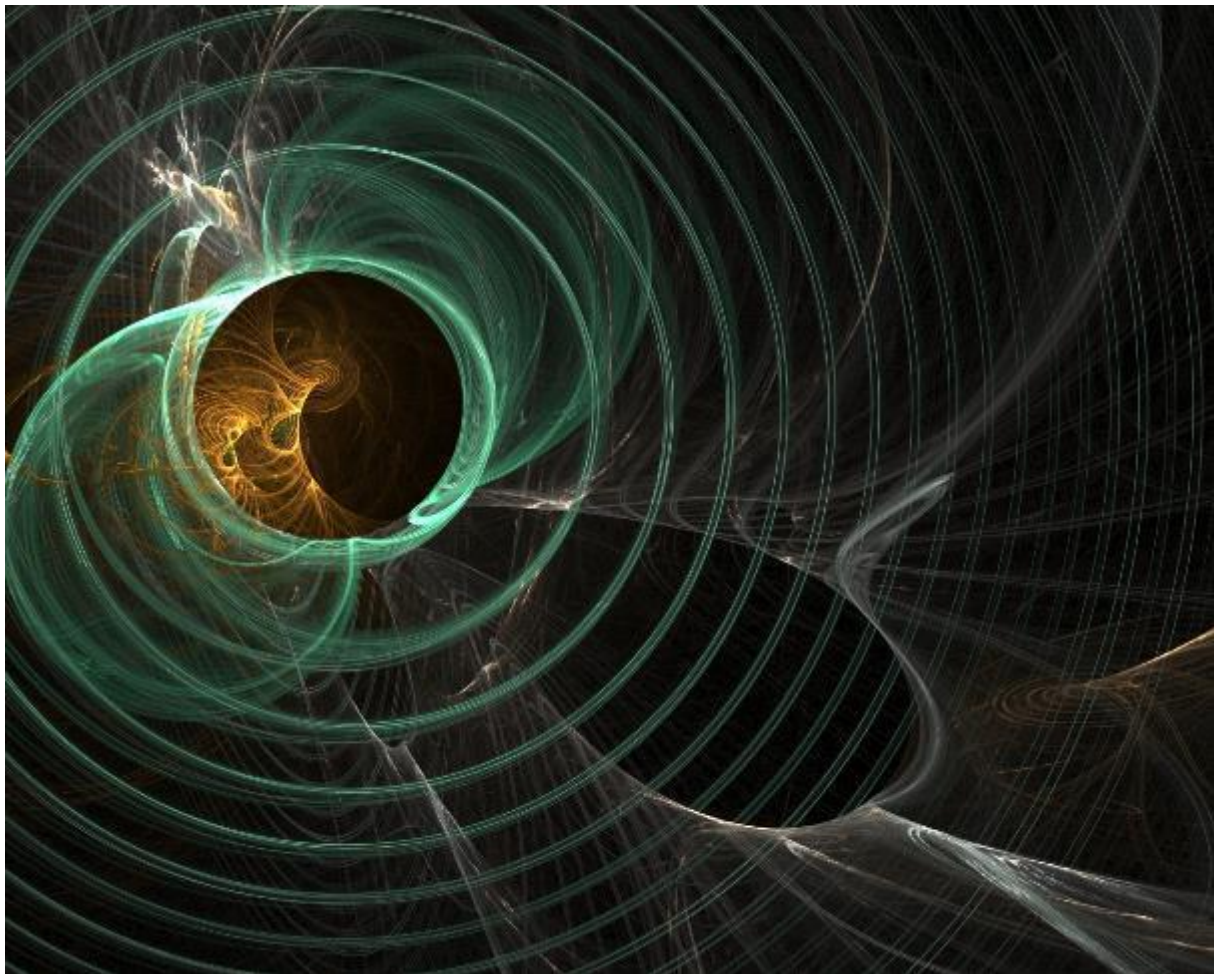


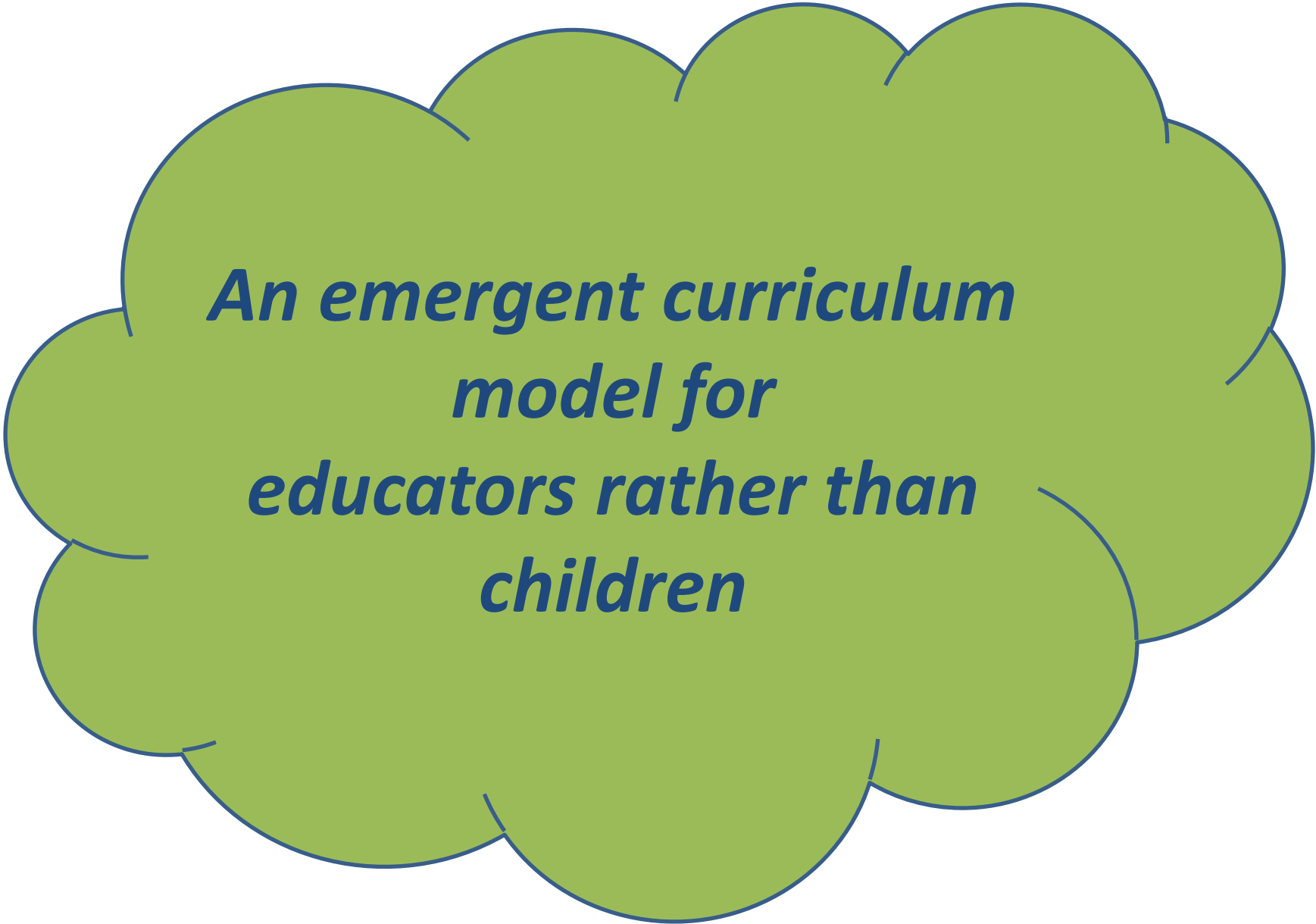
Starting Points for Action: Making a Plan

- Watch the gunplay and document children's experiences and language
- Gather the perspectives of children, parents, educators and critical friends
- Read literature about pretend play, and gunplay specifically
- Access theories that allow different ways of viewing children's play scenarios
- Use a reflective journal to document educator's thinking and responses to gunplay









***An emergent curriculum
model for
educators rather than
children***

Action Research as Professional Development

Content Model → Research Model

- ▶ Shifts professional development from a traditional content-model to a research-model for professional learning
- ▶ Educators can make use of a research-model to 'sell' their professionalism to parents and community
- ▶ Sustained, contextualised professional learning as a right for educators in the before-school sector



In Centres, Action Research Supports...

- Cross-classroom collaborations
- Cross-qualification collaborations
- Leadership skills
- Ownership over the direction of one's professional learning
- Combination of in-service and specially catered external PD



Institutional Considerations

- ▶ Building a shared language around research of centres (e.g., relating existing, everyday practices to research processes)
- ▶ Developing key skill sets: critical reflection and applying literature and theories
- ▶ Release of staff (e.g., using PD budget for relief staff)
- ▶ Constructing professional development in new ways
- ▶ Establishing key roles (e.g., mentors/facilitators)



The Roles of a Facilitator or Mentor



**Active
listening**



Resourcing



Mentoring



Interposing



Facilitators/Mentors: Helping to Maintaining Progress

- ▶ Helping to build educator ownership over the action research project and cycles
- ▶ Building trust and being present in different ways (face-to-face discussions and meetings, journal entries, online forums etc.)
- ▶ Locating and creating links between projects and/or multiple centres
- ▶ Connecting educators with opportunities external to the service





***How do we
document the
process?***

Documenting the Action Research Process

- ▶ Documentation should be a robust representation of the action research process
- ▶ It is not possible to capture all of the intricacies of action research cycles, but the documentation should illustrate how technical features of action research were attended to, and how educators created changes in thinking and practice

Technical features = cycles of questioning, gathering data, critical reflection, and deciding on a course of action

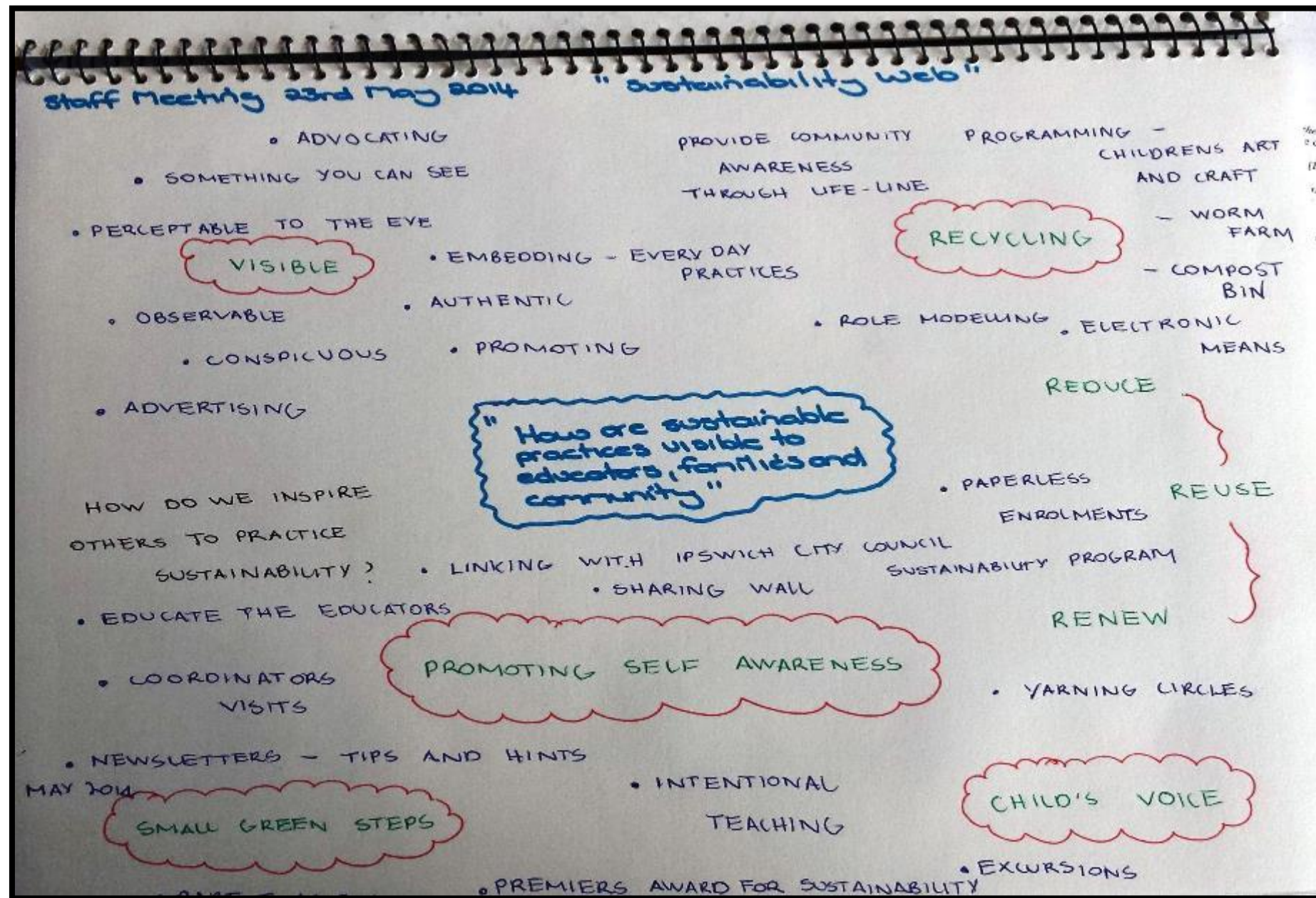


Documentation

Ways to collect data and document

- ▶ Observations (e.g., learning story, anecdotal record)
- ▶ Photographs
- ▶ Note-taking (e.g., staff meetings, record-keeping)
- ▶ Parent and/or staff survey
- ▶ Concept maps/webbing
- ▶ Facebook posts
- ▶ Interviews
- ▶ Informal conversations
- ▶ Ongoing reflections
- ▶ Drawings





Capturing input from educators at a staff meeting using **Webbing** (note the research question is recorded at the centre)

Meeting Notes from 8th April. Staff Meeting

Focus: Action Research Information

Submissions from staff about building on a question, this led to a short discussion with the question being posed "What does sustainability mean to you". Staff were very vocal and contributed lots of meaningful ideas.

Verbal Inputs:

- turning lights out, aircon off when not required.
- handwashing instead of appliances
- recycling water
- walking, carpooling
- riding pushbikes
- chickens → using eggs → manure, feathers.
- Buying only what you need.
- reusing, reducing
- community involvement.

Reasoning:

- convenience
- attitude
- thinking outside
- reflecting on history
- global warming
- animal extinction
- culture of me, me, me
- hard to get the children outside
- lack of outdoor experiences → health
- bringing community together
- what does community mean
- community days / open days
- indigenous groups
- networking
- council → enquiry about a community garden (local)
- how does this replace program
- How can Nursery participate fully
- what is relevant to babies
- making ordinary extraordinary
- program/curriculum
- meditation

Notes from a Staff Meeting:
Gathering the input of educators
– this led to new questions about sustainability practices with young children

From this discussion a further question was posed to educators.
Question: What are the benefits of playing in nature for children in early learning at Connet.
Answers included:
making ordinary extraordinary
program/curriculum
meditation

What is it about Sustainability that really resonates with you? It means saving the environment, re-using, recycling

Being a good Role Model

→ Keeping a healthy mind and body
being in the great outdoors. Not inside with technology

sustaining the children.

Awareness.

Feeding the animals - role modeling for the children to appreciate/love animals. O

Not washing food

spring safe ds not d the

Sharon
planting veggie to survive and recycling the soil reusing stuff all over not wasting anything

• Bringing health & wellness to the centre in a natural way through 3 practices: Social
Protecting animals and ensuring their survival by preserving their natural environment.

Principles - Practice - Theory

- Democratic Participatory Approach
- child initiated experiences
- Act + Share
- Own Ideas
- Children making decisions
- Key outcomes
- Empowered
- Effective Practice
- Agents of change
- Contribute to actions
- Local Environments
- Develop a positive disposition

Feature Articles



Sustainability initiatives in early years settings

Melinda Miller

Melinda Miller is a lecturer in the School of Early Childhood at QUT. Her research, teaching and publication interests include culture studies, indigenous studies, sustainability education and professional development for early childhood educators.

Children bring much knowledge about sustainability issues into the early childhood classroom.

In recent times, I have overheard children as young as three years of age discuss events such as the BP Oil Spill in American waters and extreme weather patterns. While aspects of these events can be overwhelming, responding to children's existing knowledge about any educational approach to sustainability issues, and a focus on the multitude of ways individuals and communities are working to create positive change.

Principles of effective practice

Given the global focus on key environmental issues over the past few decades, it is not surprising that the majority of work around sustainability in child care services and schools centres on environmental initiatives. Such initiatives include garden projects, water conservation practices and recycling. Many educators can articulate the value of these initiatives for children and service delivery, but may not be aware of underlying principles of effective practice related to sustainability work. To make links between practice and theory, it is useful to consider principles of effective practice outlined by Davis and MacLellan (2008). These include:

- **Values learning**
Values are the overarching ideals that underpin sustainability work. While children may learn knowledge and skills via curriculum experiences, 'values learning' relates to overarching lessons to do with citizenship, stewardship, empathy, and concern for the world and its peoples.
- **Whole-of-setting models**
Sustainability initiatives have the most longevity and influence when a whole-of-service approach is employed (see Henderson & Tilbury, 2006). Whole-of-service approaches to sustainability invite the participation and support of a range of stakeholders within and outside a service. All stakeholders work toward an agreed goal that will benefit children, families and community.
- **Inquiry learning**
Inquiry learning promotes a problem-solving approach, in that there can be more than one answer or solution to a problem. Hypothesising, testing and finding multiple solutions are key elements of an inquiry approach. Inquiry approaches contrast to transmissive educational approaches that focus on teacher-directed rather than child-directed learning.
- **Real-life learning**
Real-life explorations are relevant to, and extend from, children's daily experiences at home and in the child care service or school. Learning is authentic because it builds from children's existing experiences and knowledge.

An holistic understanding of sustainability considers environmental factors, but also takes in related social, political and economic areas of concern.

Feature Articles

Child participation in the early years of education

Dr Kylie Smith

The Centre for Equity & Innovation in Early Childhood,
Melbourne Graduate School of Education,
The University of Melbourne



Dr Kylie Smith is a Research Fellow at the University of Melbourne's Centre for Equity & Innovation in Early Childhood. Kylie's research examines how theory and practice can challenge the operation of equity in the early childhood classroom and she has worked with children, parents and teachers to build safe and respectful communities. In her work with the CEIEC, Kylie has been actively involved in leading consultations with young children in curriculum and policy making in the early years. She has presented papers from that work to international early childhood conferences and has co-authored articles about the work that have appeared in peer-reviewed early childhood education journals. Kylie also works as director and kindergarten teacher at the University of Melbourne's Swanson Street Children's Centre two days a week.

Background

There has been a growing interest in child participation in the early years of education in recent years in Australia and internationally. Two of the influences on this growing interest are firstly the **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)** and secondly the **conceptualisation of democratic principles in education**.

Several articles in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) call for us to recognize that children have a right to participate and have a say in matters affecting them and a right to receive information about their world and how it can or may affect their lives. For example children have:

- the right to express their views on all matters affecting them and for their views to be taken seriously (Article 12)
- the right to freedom of expression, including freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds through any media they choose (Article 13)

The Convention has been with us for 19 years and has influenced youth participation activities such as committees and youth forums, and young children's voices and perspectives in early

childhood research (e.g. Candy & Butterworth, 1998; Mantel, 1999; Come & Latta, 1999; Marchington, 2001; Campbell et al, 2001). In 2005 the focus shifted onto young children's participatory rights with the release of the United Nations General Committee's General Comment No. 7 implementing the United Nations Rights of the Child in early childhood. Comment No. 7 states that young child's right to express their views and feelings should be taken into account in the development of policies and services, including through research and consultations (OHCHR, 2005, p. 7) and it stresses that these are the rights of all children, irrespective of their age. Prior to Comment No. 7 it was argued that young children under the age of eight were too young to understand, articulate and make decisions about their lives. The release of General Comment No. 7 raised questions for how child participation might look for young children in the classroom.

Education as a democratic practice was originally explored and written about by John Dewey (1916). In more recent times, people's work such as Peter Moss and Alison Clark from the United Kingdom (e.g. Clark, 2005; Clark & Moss, 2001; Moss, 2007) and Gunilla Dahlberg from Sweden (e.g. Dahlberg & Moss, 2005) have called for democratic practice to be intrinsically woven into

Children's Voices - Development of Policies
Democratic Practice - Emergent curriculum approach
Adults + children - An emerging image of the child is the child as a "CITIZEN".

United Nations
Convention
on the Rights
of the Child
(1989)

• children have a right to participate + a say in matters affecting them.

• The right to express their views on all matters affecting them and for their views to be taken seriously (Article 12)

• The right to freedom of expression, including freedom to seek, receive and impart information + ideas of all kinds through any media they choose (Article 13)

Plan from time with Nick
8/09/08

Short Term ← IDEAS → Long Term

- Lights
- Toilet Drying
- Recycling ^{paper} _{cartridges}
 is there more
- Chemical use
- Worm Farm
- Worm Wee Shop
- Possum Box
- Talking about Nature
- Degradable Plastic
garbage bags.
- Recycled Paper
for Art.

Grants

↓
Tanks

Solar Power

Solar Hot water

Water Aerator.

Grounds Development.

↓

More Natives

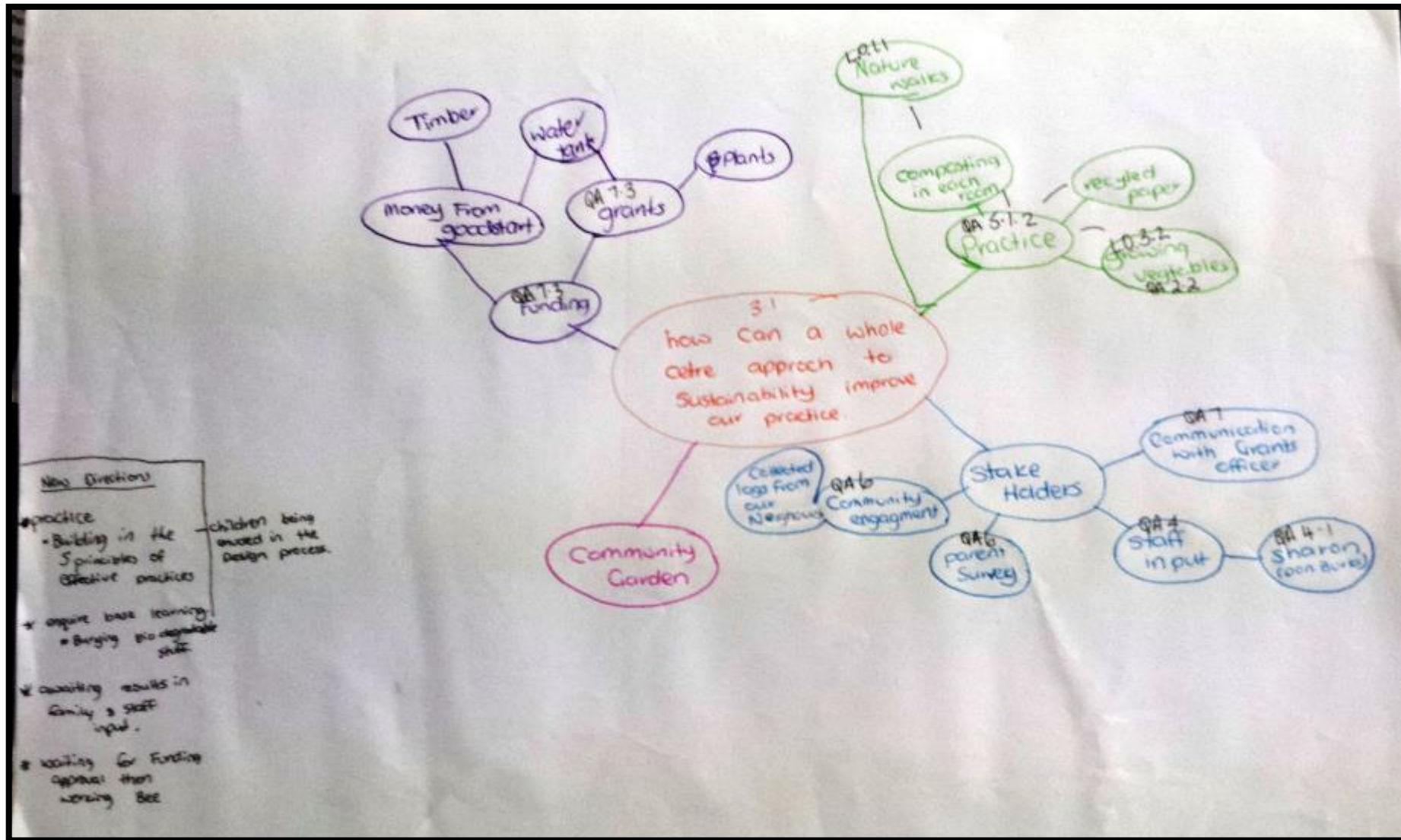
Front + Back
garden.

✓ Wind power.

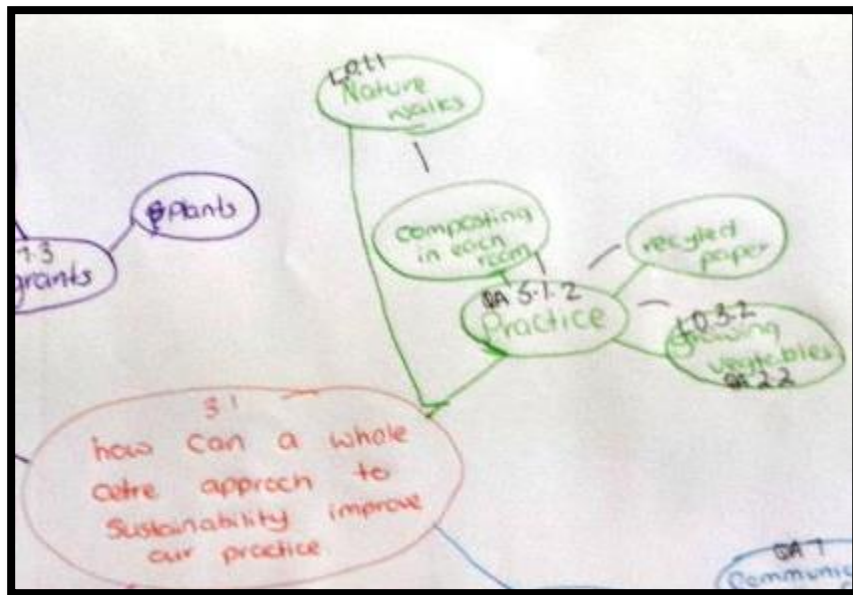
Planning for short-term and long-term goals around Sustainability.

Note the comment from the Centre Director at the bottom of the page. A communal action research journal allows all staff to check-in with the project when they are able.

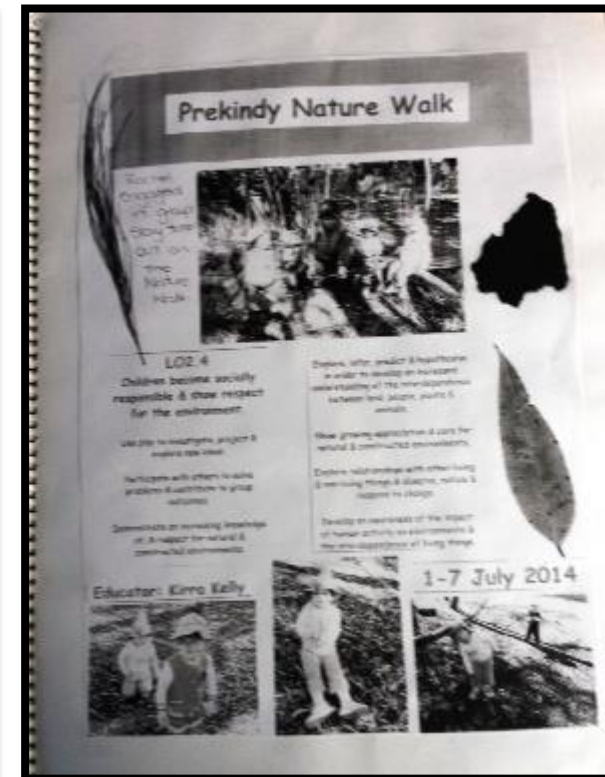
What a great list!! One thing that is a tricky one to
do is disposable nappies. Could we add this to the long
list as something to think about.
Deb

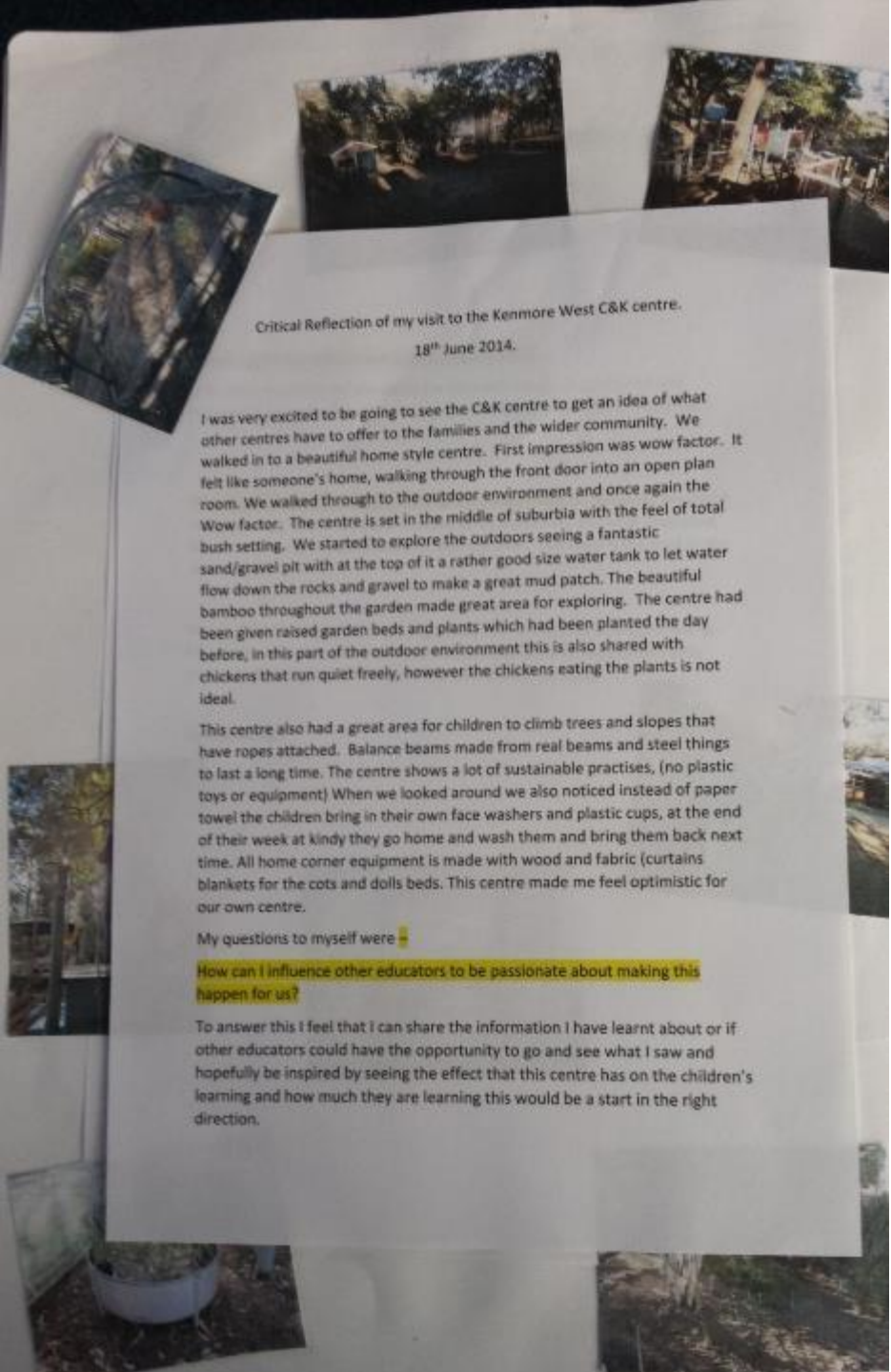


Using a **Concept Map** to capture an overview of the project at Week 6. This helps to identify what has been achieved and **new directions** for action research cycles.



Links between the Concept Map and educators' documentation showing changes to curriculum practices with young children





Critical Reflection of my visit to the Kenmore West C&K centre.

18th June 2014.

I was very excited to be going to see the C&K centre to get an idea of what other centres have to offer to the families and the wider community. We walked in to a beautiful home style centre. First impression was wow factor. It felt like someone's home, walking through the front door into an open plan room. We walked through to the outdoor environment and once again the Wow factor. The centre is set in the middle of suburbia with the feel of total bush setting. We started to explore the outdoors seeing a fantastic sand/gravel pit with at the top of it a rather good size water tank to let water flow down the rocks and gravel to make a great mud patch. The beautiful bamboo throughout the garden made great area for exploring. The centre had been given raised garden beds and plants which had been planted the day before, in this part of the outdoor environment this is also shared with chickens that run quiet freely, however the chickens eating the plants is not ideal.

This centre also had a great area for children to climb trees and slopes that have ropes attached. Balance beams made from real beams and steel things to last a long time. The centre shows a lot of sustainable practises, (no plastic toys or equipment) When we looked around we also noticed instead of paper towel the children bring in their own face washers and plastic cups, at the end of their week at kindy they go home and wash them and bring them back next time. All home corner equipment is made with wood and fabric (curtains blankets for the cots and dolls beds. This centre made me feel optimistic for our own centre.

My questions to myself were -

How can I influence other educators to be passionate about making this happen for us?

To answer this I feel that I can share the information I have learnt about or if other educators could have the opportunity to go and see what I saw and hopefully be inspired by seeing the effect that this centre has on the children's learning and how much they are learning this would be a start in the right direction.

Reflecting and posing new questions

Newsletters: Making the action research project accessible for families.

Sharing information about the project openly with key stakeholders **allows educators to show evidence of the intellectual nature of their work** with young children and how the centre is embedding a research culture.



Bo's Place



Choices Family
Day Care
Facebook
Sharing Page

Question - What
Sustainable practices
do you use?

Deena Hall

Bev Gamble

see Choices Fdc and Lucy Jenga Muzungu like this. Seen by 2

Deena Hall I paint tyres and use them in the playground 🙄

Yesterday at 4:25pm via mobile · Like · 🗳 1

Deena Hall At Easter time I relieved woolies of the plastic trays the eggs come in and I use these as paint mixing trays.

Yesterday at 4:27pm via mobile · Like · 🗳 1

Deena Hall We recycle as much as we can for collage and other craft.

Yesterday at 4:30pm via mobile · Like · 🗳 1

Beverly Gamble Fdc Fernvale We always use a container to catch the water we wash our hands with to use in the garden.

22 hours ago via mobile · Like

Beverly Gamble Fdc Fernvale Using yogurt pots for paint and glue. Zip lock bags which children have bought in lunchbox are good enough to reuse again for collage/craft items

22 hours ago via mobile · Like

Beverly Gamble Fdc Fernvale I also use tyres and pallets and plastic barrels for various alternatives in the play area/veggie patch

22 hours ago via mobile · Like

Wendy At Choices Fdc What great ideas ladies and thank you for sharing. I am putting together a PowerPoint for our services QIP. Would you be able to send me some photos of these please when you are able. If anyone else has some ideas or photos, please email them to me. Thanks ladies!

a few seconds ago · Like

Write a comment...

Posing questions using familiar technology:
Collecting and documenting educators' input via
Facebook posts

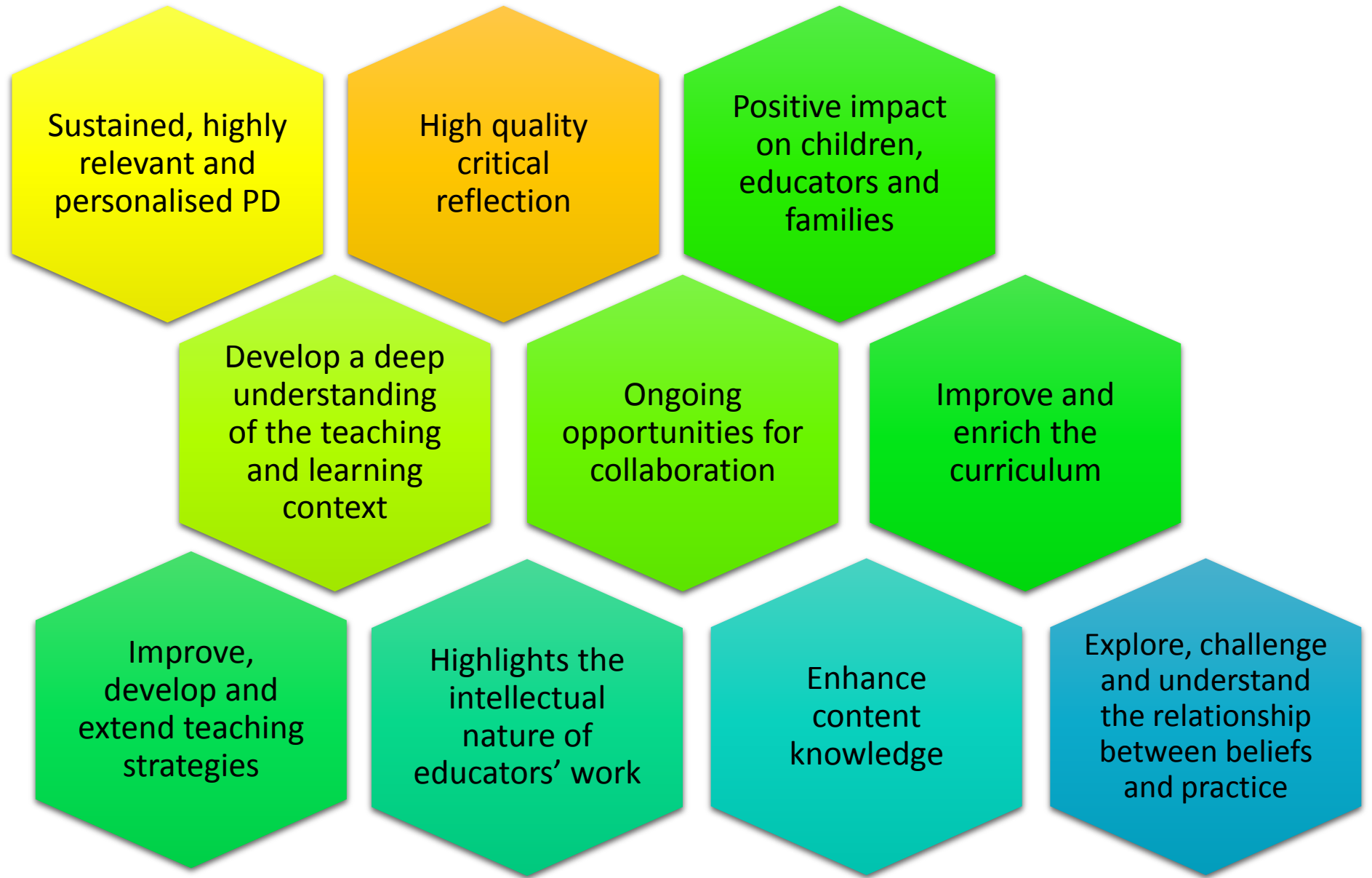
Multiple Purposes

Action Research is your work, not more work

- ▶ Consider the value of your action research documentation for assessment and rating purposes
- ▶ You will capture data (information) about individual children and groups of children, learning experiences, critical reflection, parent/family perspectives, connections with the local community, staff feedback and so forth.



Value of action research for early childhood educators



Educators' Experiences of Action Research

It's good to do group work and something that's useful for the centre. You can use it straight away, so it's practical – something the centre can use daily rather than sticking your PD notes in the cupboard and not using them. (Karen, Educational Leader)

Everyone has their own perspective on what they're interested in and how to make it more meaningful for them I think, which is really important ... they did a lot of research ... they reflected a lot and thought about what they needed to learn and how they needed to go about learning it in the best way. As professional development, it was personal. (Marisa, Centre Director)

The project has created such motivation and enthusiasm for me. It made me want to get up in the morning and go, "Wow, I can explore these different things, implement different things, follow my passion, and then see the opportunities for the children". (Misty, Group Leader)

