



Slow Down

Supporting Children's Agency

Natalie Peters and Caroline Hamilton, Diploma in Early Childhood Care and Education
(Natalie is working towards her Degree in Early Childhood Education). Clarendon
Children's Centre, Victoria



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Overview

- Background
 - Context
 - Methods for reflecting on practice
- Framework
 - Action research and how it was used in our program
 - Supporting infants' and toddlers' sense of agency
- Our study
 - 'Controversial' changes
 - Results (video/photo)
 - Outcomes
- What next?



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Who are we?

Clarendon Children's Centre

- Located in South Melbourne
- It is a parent-managed co-operative
- Licensed to care and educate 40 children each day
- Has three age appropriate educational rooms

Natalie Peters

- Working toward her Degree in Early Childhood Education and Care
- Is the room leader of the 0-2 year old room
- Highly values reflective practice and intentional teaching

Caroline Hamilton

- Is a key educator in the 0-2 year old room
- High values sustainable practice, and individual and community wellbeing



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Where did we begin?



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Action research

Teacher researchers attempt to create new knowledge about teaching and learning to improve their practice.

Teacher research stems from teachers' own questions about and reflections on their everyday classroom practice.

Teachers need to be part detective, searching for children's clues and following their leads, and part researcher, gathering data, analyzing the information, and testing hypotheses.

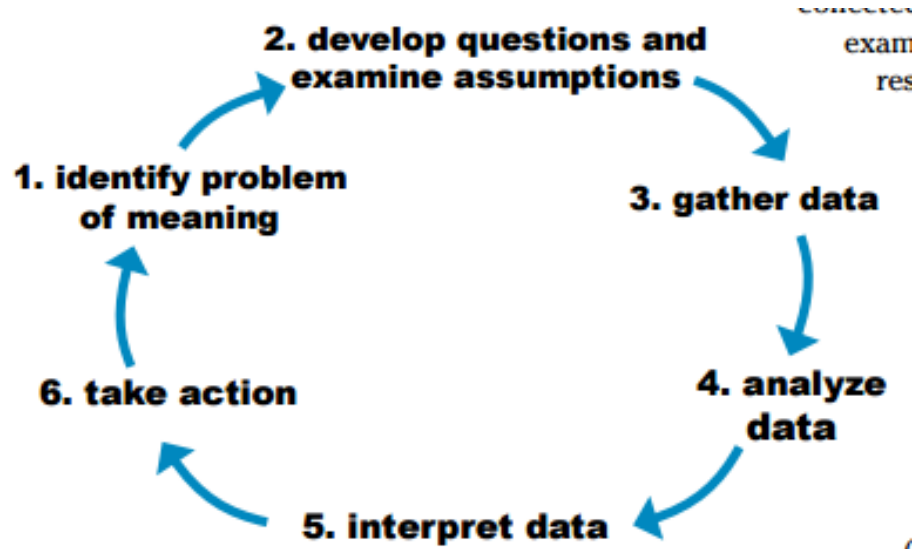
Andrew J. Stremmel, *The Value of Teacher Research: Nurturing Professional and Personal Growth through Inquiry*, Voices of Practitioners 2, no.3



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Action research



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“What makes you go ‘UGH!’?”



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What made us go 'UGH!'

- In-depth curriculum content
- Indoor/outdoor program
- Ratios and lost learning
- Different ways of documenting, moving on from portfolios
- Independence vs dependence in routines
- Sustained shared thinking
- Power within relationships
- ...and many others...

**Rushed
transitions
and routines**



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Reflecting on the lunch to bed routine



Children and educators are rushed as educator needed to get to lunch

Children have little choice

Educators prepare room before lunch for bed time, putting children's beds where they (the adult) think the child's bed should go

Educators were anxious about having enough time to prepare room

Educators make the most choices for children during this transition

Child finishes lunch, educator cleans them, changes their nappy and takes them to bed, patting them to sleep.

Educators feel overwhelmed, and as though the room is on the verge of chaos



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Our action research question

“Could giving children choices in routine support their sense of wellbeing?”

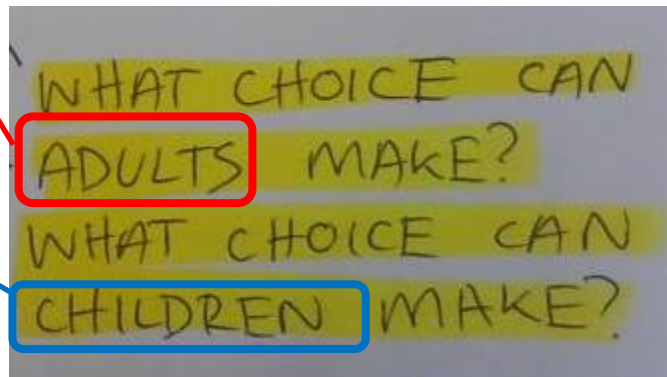


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- Health & safety
- Food on offer
- Sleep
- Resources in the environment
- Play – when/where

- What they will/not eat
- Children they will play with
- Toys they will play with



“Involving Children in Decision Making”¹



Adults need to be prepared to share their power with children.

Adults need to recognise that ALL children are capable of making choices, including infants and toddlers.

The activities, routine and environment need to provide children with real opportunities to make choices.

Provide choice that can be accepted.

¹ Owens, A 2009, *Involving Children in Decision Making*, National Childcare Accreditation Council (NCAC), AUS.



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What were the changes....



Children could come to lunch when they were ready.

Another educator would clean the room, and setup activities

The room was left setup for the children to play

When they finished lunch they could play or go to bed

The third educator would change the children and get them ready for bed

One educator would engage children in play, or ask if they were ready for bed



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Why was this controversial for some educators?



If children are given lots of choices during routine times, will they want more choices over other parts of the daily routine?

Could giving children choices about food impact their health?

Does giving children choice mean they can move freely from the lunch table, bed and outside? Is this safe?

What if one child's choice to play whilst others are sleeping disrupts them?

But we've been doing it like this for years!

Not all educators give children the same choices. How will this impact the educator and child?

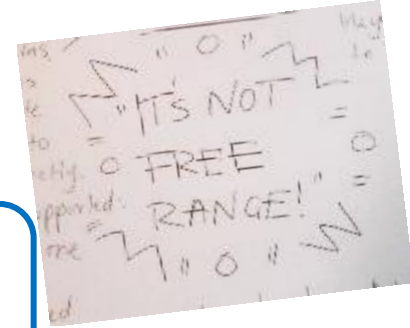
What do parents want? Should they have a say?

If children are given more choices, do educators get less?

What are their choices?

Do infants and toddlers understand what choices they are being given?

What if the routine takes too long and children need to wait long periods for educator support, or educators don't make it to lunch in time?



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Data collection



Lola - 11:45 (1.5 restricted) Put self to sleep
Luca C - 12:15 (1.5-2hrs) Patting for 20 minutes, challenging at times
Edward - 11:50 (1.5-2hrs) Put self to sleep, needs toy. Takes time.
Lachie - 11:45 (1.5 restricted) Put self, easy going.
Audrey - 12:00-12:20 (2 hrs restricted). Put self to sleep.
Zayn - 11:40ish (1-1.5hr) Sometimes pat, challenging at times.
Stella - 11:50 (1-1.5hr) wonders, easy to pat.
Ziggy - 12:15-12:30 (30mins to 1hr). persistence. 15 min patting.
Dante - 11:40 - (upat 1:00 always), easily patted off. ^{wakes and sets off others.}
Alex - 11:30 (1 hr). very easy to get to sleep.
Benji - 11:40 (1 hr). quiet easy to get to sleep.
Luca J. - 11:15-11:30 (1.5hr restricted). puts sleep to sleep often.
Luis - 11:30-11:40 (1.5-1hr) patting technique. ^{can become over tired.}
Henry - varies (40-1.5 hr) bottle, easy.
Jack - 11:40 (2 hrs) put self to sleep or minimal patting.
Isaiah -
Timo - 11:30-11:45 (1-1.5) put self to sleep or minimal patting.
Frances - 11:30 bottle to sleep by 11:50. easy.

- Children went to bed between 11:30am and 12:00pm
- On average children had 60 to 90 minutes sleep
- On average the children were awake by 1:00pm
- 50% of the children required educator support to go to sleep
- 50% were able to self settle, or required little educators support



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Results



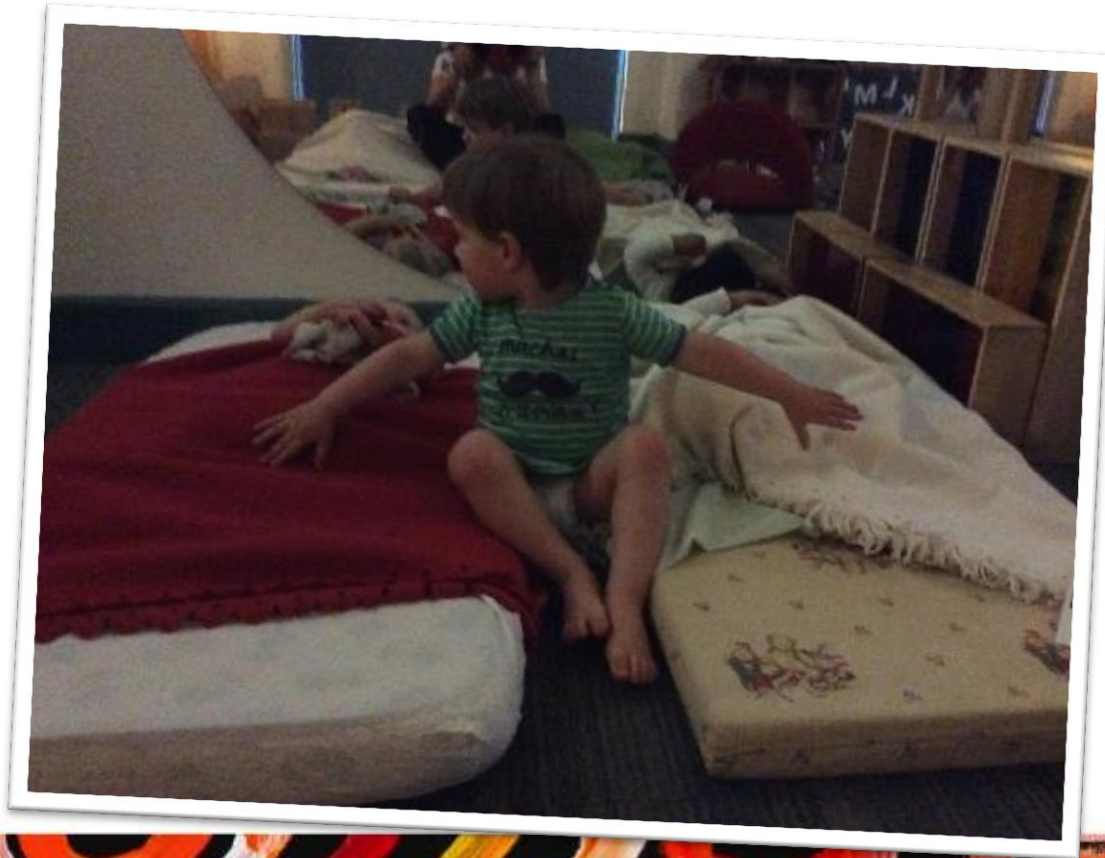
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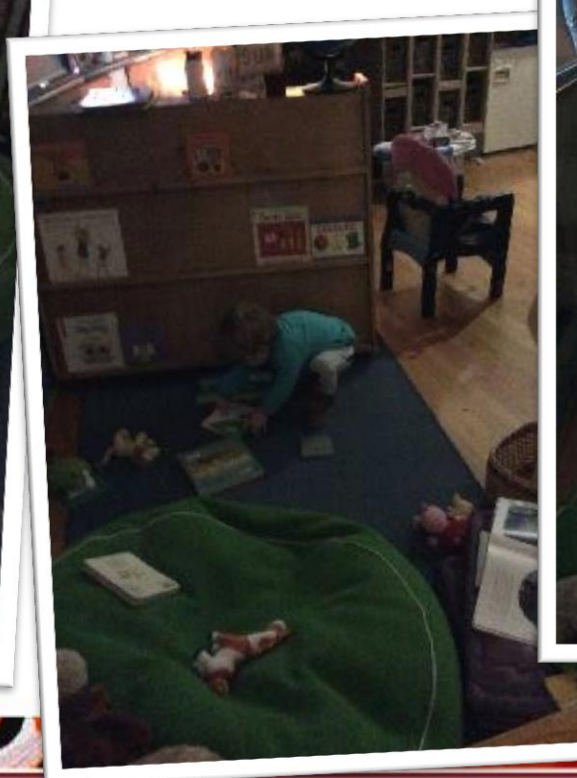
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Data analysis: reflections



Is it successful?

"Flows better"
Caro

There's no need
to wait & stress
for everyone to
be ready.

Sammy's calmer
at sleep time,
I feel more calm.
At times worried
about role at
times. Outside
play needs to
be encouraged.
It can be seen
that the children
enjoy the choice.
children take less
toys outside.
children are more
focused during
play.

"It's become organic"
Caro.



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Data analysis: “number crunching”



- The majority of children self settle
- Children go to bed between 11:50am and 12:30pm
- The children continued to sleep on average for 60 to 90 minutes
- The children wake between 1:00pm and 2:00pm
- Children on restricted sleep are not disrupted
- Children who go to sleep earlier are not disrupted by those going to sleep earlier
- Similarly children going to sleep later weren't woken by those waking earlier



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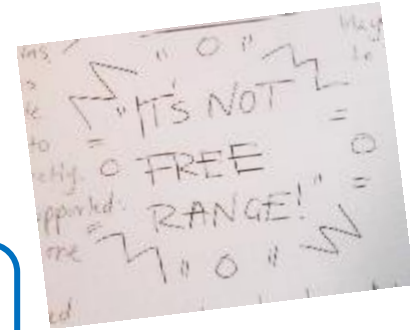
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Outcomes: challenges

- Educators individual interpretation of the changes
- Educator expectations of children
- The dynamics of the children on any given day
- Documenting and recording the changes
- Working as a team



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Unexpected outcomes



- Peer relationships
- Their sense of identity and belonging to the environment
- Children language



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What next?

Continuing to use action research as a professional tool

- Looking at empowering children
- Viewing infants and toddlers as capable
- Going outside of the box
- Thinking again about 'what makes us go "UGH!"?'
- Our new question?

How can we enhance communication to support infants and toddlers wellbeing?



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- Anne Kenndey



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