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# Doing the Right Thing... in the Early Years Foundation Stage

## Cambridge Curiosity and Imagination and Sightlines Conference



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# Doing the Right Thing Learning with Children



- **Theme: A Unique Child**



Principle :

Every child is a competent learner from birth who can be resilient, capable, confident and self-assured

# Theme: Positive Relationships



## Principle:

Children learn to be strong and independent from a base of loving and secure relationships with parents and/or a key person

- **Theme: Enabling environments**



Principle:

The environment plays a key role in supporting and extending children's development and learning.

- **Theme: Learning and Development**

Principle: Children develop and learn in different ways and at different rates and all areas of learning and development are equally important and inter-connected



**Flexible**

**Complex**



**Connecting**

**Respectful**

# Our Children

“All too rarely do I hear people asking just what it is that we’ve done to make so many children’s hearts so hard, or what collectively we might do to right their moral compass – what values we must live by. Instead I see us doing what we have always done – pretending that these children are somehow not our own.”

Barack Obama: *Dreams From My Father* p 438



**We appreciate early childhood as a valuable stage of life in its own right – not as a waiting room for school .....or KS1,2,3,4 or adulthood.**





**When young children are left to their own devices in a stimulating learning environment most will learn through exploration and play**

## **Yet, this is not enough...**

It is through the active intervention, guidance and support of a skilled adult that children make the most progress in their learning.

This does not mean pushing children too far or too fast, but instead meeting children where they are, showing them the next open door, and helping them to walk through it.



**It means being a partner with children, enjoying with them the power of their curiosity and the thrill of finding out what they can do.**

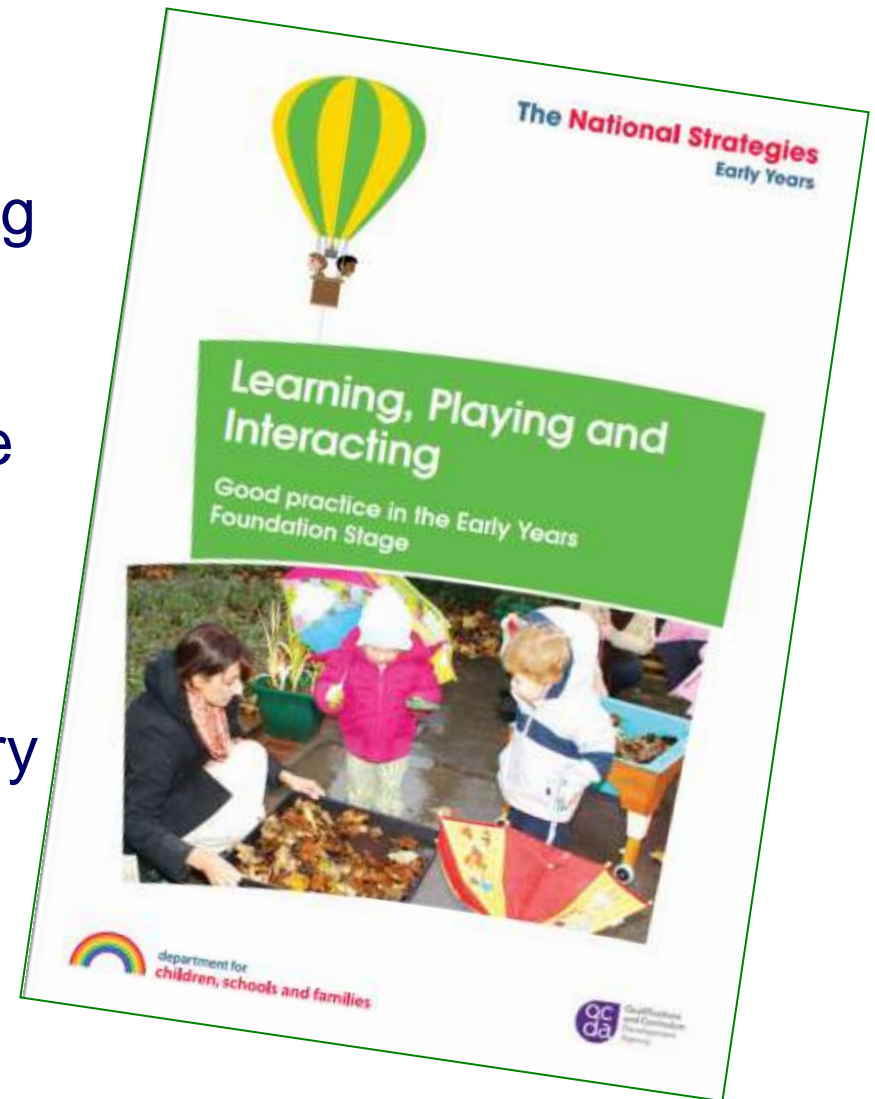
Learning, Playing and Interacting p

**So how do we do it?**  
**What's the 'right' pedagogy?**  
**How do we learn with children?**



# Pedagogy

“Pedagogy is the understanding of how children learn and develop, and the practices through which we can enhance that process. It is rooted in values and beliefs about what we want for children, and supported by knowledge, theory and experience.”



# Thinking and Learning



**Understanding child development: understanding ourselves**

In order for professionals to work effectively with babies, young children and their parents, their first duty is to recognise themselves for who they are, what they believe and why. The emotions we see in infants and young children do not only belong to them, they belong to us. We have all been helpless infants, we all carry with us our history including that of being parented and therefore, consciously or unconsciously, we know what children are going through.'

Robinson (2003)

- Warm, trusting relationships with knowledgeable adults support children's learning more effectively than any amount of resources.
- EYFS, Supporting Learning Card 2.3



# Action research - finding answers to learning questions.



- Practitioners seeing themselves as co-researchers
- Working alongside the children to gain deeper insights into the learning process,
- Modelling many key skills, including enquiry, creativity, information processing, problem solving and communication.

# Space and time for exploring trees

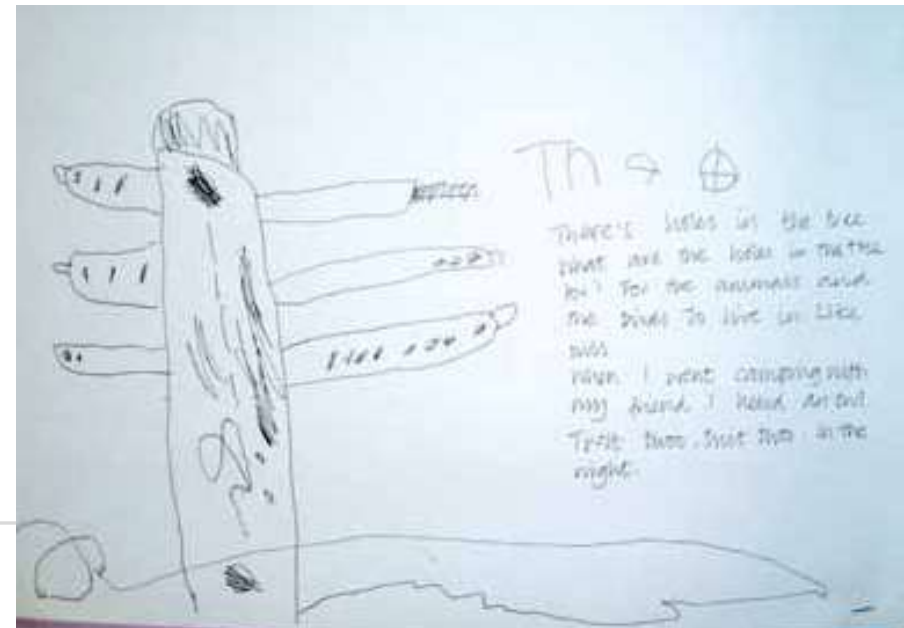
## We know:

- 'When the little seed grows it soon turns up into some woods and then it grows. And then it grows lots of branches. And then loads and loads of leaves turn up'.
- 'Squirrels live in trees and hide nuts.'
- 'Trees are really, really, really big.'
- 'I've got a tree house in my garden. My daddy made it'.

## We want to find out:

- Why do the leaves fall off?
- Why have trees got holes?
- Why is the spider under there?
- Why is the bark red?

Learning, Playing and Interacting p42-47



# Challenging the taken for granted

A children's centre  
in Wolverhampton



# Every Child a Talker child progress monitoring

% at risk of delay	Listening and attention	Understanding of language	Speech sounds and talk	Social skills
Afternoon group	88%	92%	71%	88%

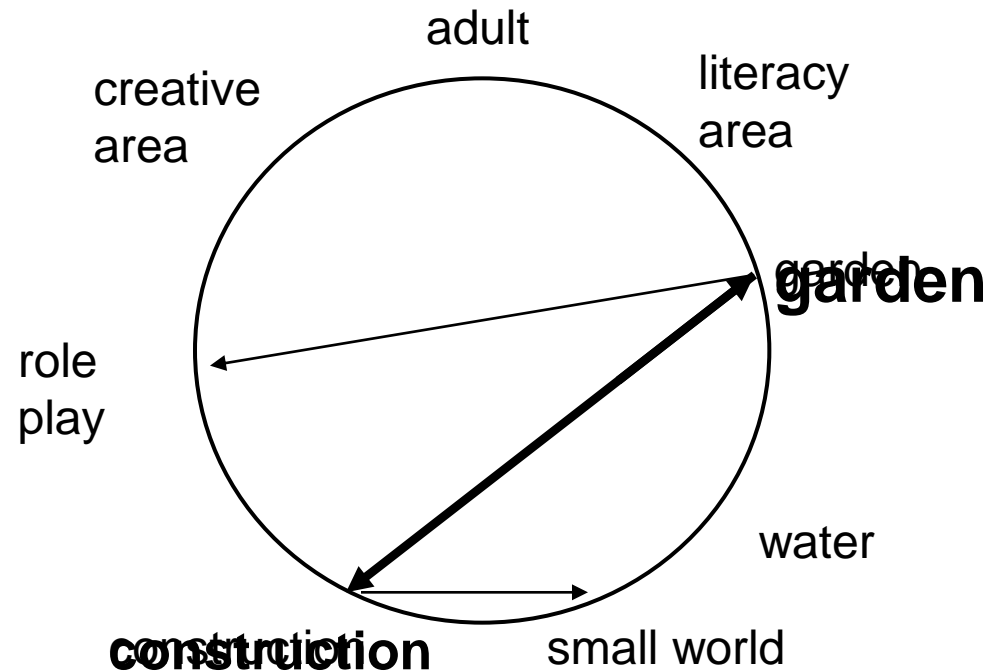
# Every Child a Talker child progress monitoring

% at risk of delay	Listening and attention	Understanding of language	Speech sounds and talk	Social skills
Afternoon group	88%	92%	71%	88%
Girls	75%	83%	42%	75%
Boys	100%	100%	100%	100%

# Investigate

## Tracking – spider

- Pathways between garden and construction
- Little access of literacy and creative areas
- Boys opt out of adult-supported activities
- Average less than one interaction with an adult per session – usually seek out own group leader



‘This has really made us think. I’m quite shocked. We should have done more for these children. We think we’re doing it, but we’re not.’      Headteacher

- **Organisation**

Small group focus activities, to ensure all children participate;  
Move focus activities around areas, to encourage access

- **Physical Environment**

Quiet spaces – den building in play themes, planned with children;  
Outdoors to offer all opportunities as indoors, in all weathers

- **Interactions**

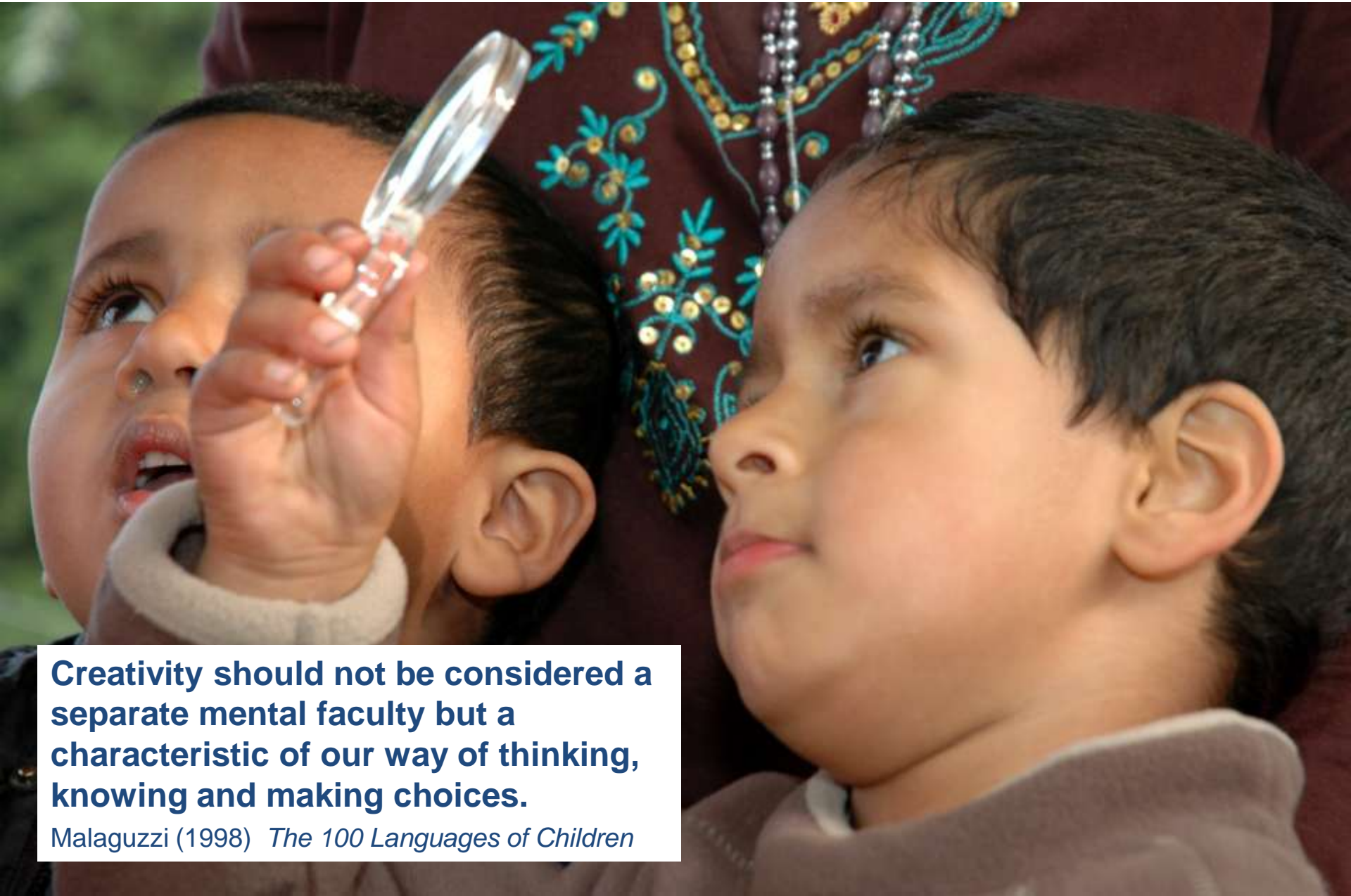
Key person – build on relationships; develop all staff in language support skills and to lead focus activities

- **Experiences**

Paired activities; story-making project involving families; listening and attention activities; value talk – talking tins, stories from home

# A creative approach

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**Creativity should not be considered a separate mental faculty but a characteristic of our way of thinking, knowing and making choices.**

Malaguzzi (1998) *The 100 Languages of Children*

# What is creativity?

- Making, doing, thinking, connecting
- Requires autonomy and independence
- Needs personal space/idiosyncratic
- Can be found in groups
- Is about feeling emotionally safe enough to create
- Is about finding new ideas and ways of doing things
- Risk taking
- Making connections
- Being thoughtful
- Seeing failure as an opportunity

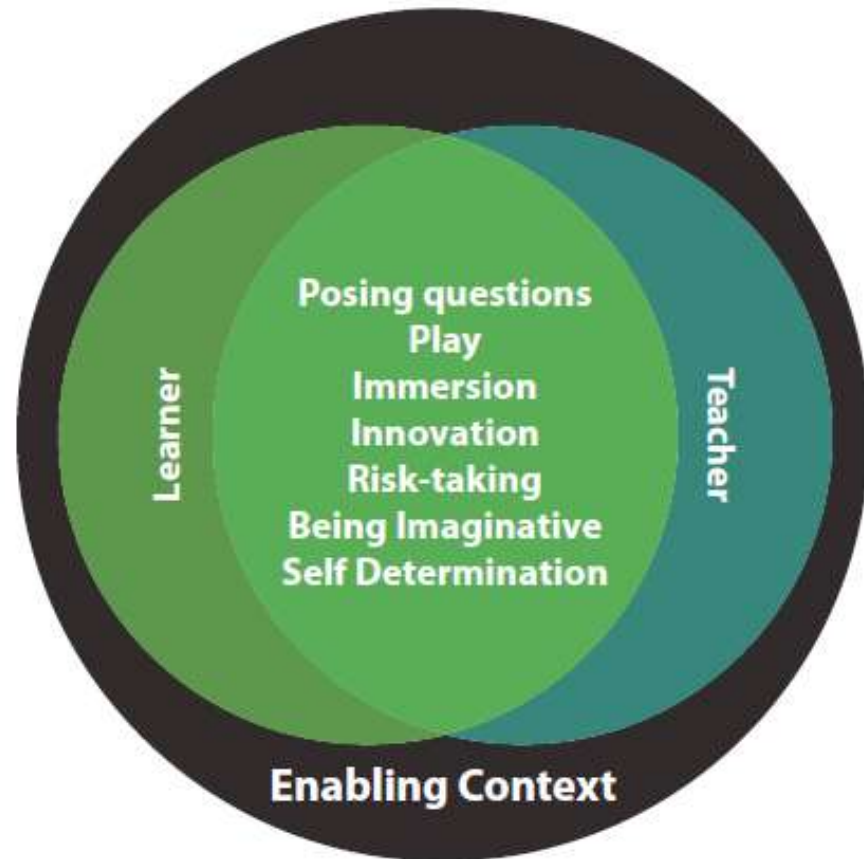
## Creative adults, creative children



If we want children to deepen the quality of their lives intellectually, using their minds and feeling comfortable in their bodies and with themselves, emotionally and physically, *then we need to cultivate creativity in ourselves too*. Otherwise we will offer children rigid, narrow experiences and pedestrian uninteresting lives.

Bruce (2004)

# Possibility thinking



(Craft 2006)





**“The most strenuous period of imaginative activity is that time in childhood when we play with the boundaries of our view of the world: sense and nonsense, the real and the fictive, the actual and the possible, all within the cultural domain we inhabit.”**

(Meek, 1985, p53)

**“It is in the development of their themes and characters and plots that children explain their thinking and enable us to wonder who we might become as their teachers.” Paley(2004)**



# Narrative

- Storytelling provides a myriad of opportunities for promoting possibility thinking
- ‘Superheroes and princesses take their personas to the math table. “Pretend this is gold and we bury it under the castle so the robbers can’t find it,” whisper the great pretenders, hiding the Cuisenaire rods under a pile of dress-ups.’ (Vivian Gussin Paley 2004)

# Can 8 be shared equally between two?



# What limits creativity ?

Dweck (2006) suggests that as soon as we are able to make judgements about ourselves as learners, we develop 'mindsets' that either enhance or inhibit our capacity for learning.

- A 'growth mindset' - we are active agents in the learning process with the ability to affect change.
- A 'fixed mindset' - capacity for learning is perceived as static and unalterable, regardless of effort.



# Children deserve adults who are open to the possibility of growth

Learners of any age with a growth mindset

- actively seek out new challenges
- welcome opportunities for intellectual development
- embrace problems and develop creative solutions
- welcome opportunities for collaborative learning.



## Where do our beliefs about ourselves as learners come from?

- the messages we receive from the significant people in our lives.



## If we receive positive messages....

- we develop confidence
- we become keen to learn
- challenges are welcomed
- failures are seen as opportunities for further problem solving and exploration
- we become creative.



# Children are involved in behavioural, emotional and social learning every minute of every day



## A responsible relationship

I've come to the frightening conclusion that I am the decisive element in the classroom

- It's my personal approach that creates the climate.
- It's my daily mood that makes the weather.
- As a teacher, I possess the tremendous power to make a child's life miserable or joyous.
- I can be a tool of torture, or an instrument of inspiration.
- I can humiliate or humour, hurt or heal.
- In all situations, it is my response that decides whether a crisis will be escalated, and a child humanised or dehumanised

Haim Guinot in C. M. Charles, Building Classroom Discipline,

## Do adults and children reflect on actions and feelings ?

Some examples

- Engaging children in talking about why a particular group activity or interaction went well
- Using story books to explore how characters may be feeling and different ways they could express those feelings
- When do we feel happy, sad, angry?
- When do we feel a bit sad and a bit happy?
- Staff meetings that discuss challenges openly and honestly
- Leadership support for enquiry



# Creativity and critical thinking



- Making connections
- Transforming understanding
- Sustained shared thinking

# Transforming understanding

- New connections help to transform our understanding but this can often be a long process.
- Effective practitioners record the processes that children go through. This will help everyone to see how the children's thinking is developing. Both children and adults can then talk about the learning that has taken place.







**‘I can’t believe how much I did ..... Do you know – it’s amazing how I think!’**

# Conditions for thinking



- The best conditions for thinking, if you really stop and notice, are not tense.
- They are gentle.
- They are quiet. They are unrushed.
- They are stimulating but not competitive.
- They are encouraging.
- They are paradoxically, both rigorous and nimble.

Nancy Kline, 1999

# Inspiring Thinking - Learning without limits



**The possibilities  
are endless**