



# Strength based programming

*Engaging, Transforming, Defining*




Catharine Hydon January 2010

# What is strengths based...

‘Is an approach to people, which is primarily dependent upon positive attitudes about people’s dignity, capacities, rights, uniqueness and commonalities’

Wayne McCashen 2000 as cited by Bernadette Glass and Associates





*‘...children and their families have strengths, resources and the ability to recover from adversities.*

*In sharp contrast to the predominant preoccupation with what is wrong with children, families and society.*

*Lack of particular strengths within a child or family is not seen as a failure or inadequacy, because this lack can often be explained by life circumstances.’*

(Laursen, 2000, Page 70).

## Kylie Eastwood given suspended sentence after feeding alcohol to her five-year-old son

Staff reporters | Herald Sun | February 03, 2010 12:01AM | 364 comments

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**UPDATE 2.04pm: PREMIER John Brumby said he was shocked to learn a mother had fed her young child booze.**

The Moe mother, who drank litres of alcohol a day, got her five-year-old son so drunk he could barely speak or stand up, a court heard.

Mr Brumby defended the role of suspended sentences in such cases saying it was important to protect judicial discretion.

"I'm shocked by many cases that go before the courts. People who go before the courts do the wrong thing and sometimes those things shock you," Mr Brumby said.

"But the judgements as to whether a person should go to jail or whether they should have another form of sentence, in my view these are matters best determined by the judge.

"This is a person who has obviously had a problem with alcohol and who has advised the court she has overcome that problem. The court has judged that she is best to be with her children."



Kylie Eastwood. Picture: Darren Tindale Source: Herald Sun



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# What is a *Strengths-Based* approach in early childhood practice?


A *Strengths-Based* approach to planning programs for children can transform practice and result in a more satisfying experience for everyone – child, family and educator.

Rather than focus on deficits and what does not occur a strengths-based approach relies on the positive resources and abilities that children and families have and uses these enhance the whole experience of early childhood education.

# Words into Action

## Strengths based qualities

- Respect
- Genuineness
- Empathy
- Trustworthy
- Transparency/Honesty
- Quiet enthusiasm
- Persistence
- Consistency/Reliability
- Flexibility
- Personal Integrity



Which ones  
are you??

*A strengths-based* see what Lewis can do and builds on his capabilities



*A deficit approach* sees what Lewis cannot do, and plans accordingly.

# The child

**Strong, powerful, competent**



...our image of the child is rich in potential, strong, powerful, competent and most of all, connected to adults and other children.

(Malaguzzi 1993:10 as Quoted in Dahlberg Moss and Pence 1999)

# The Family

## Children learn in the context of their families



‘When educators work closely with families, fostering their sense of belonging and their confidence, we strengthen parents’ capacity to support their children over a lifetime...These relationships empower both the families and the educators, acknowledging the knowledge and strengths of each and emphasising their common goals ’

Fischer and Murray P141



# No such thing as 'the' parent!

...there is no such things as 'the' parent. There are parents, or rather people who are also parents who should be credited with having an educational [aspiration] towards and concern about the child, albeit sometimes unexpressed or which we may be unable to see. We need to learn to see the parents' explicit and implicit needs and respond to them with new and effective answers.

Rinaldi 2006 p 36

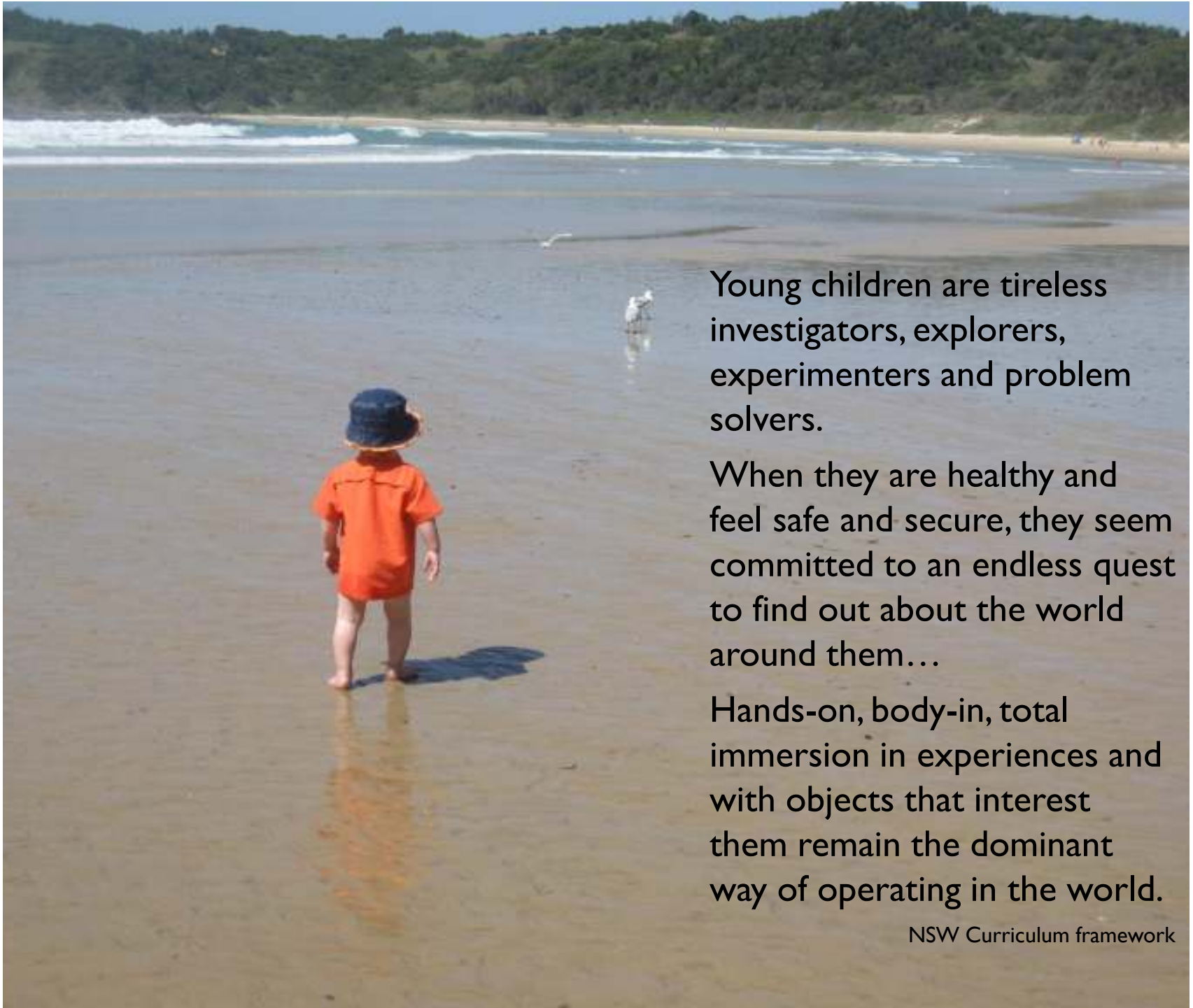
# The Educator

researcher and thinker, a reflective practitioner



...the pedagogue [or educator] is seen as a **researcher** and **thinker**, a **reflective** practitioner who seeks to deepen her **understanding** of what is going on and how children learn, through documentation, **dialogue**, critical reflection, and deconstruction...

(Malaguzzi, 1993b; Rinaldi, 1993).




Young children are tireless investigators, explorers, experimenters and problem solvers.

When they are healthy and feel safe and secure, they seem committed to an endless quest to find out about the world around them...

Hands-on, body-in, total immersion in experiences and with objects that interest them remain the dominant way of operating in the world.

NSW Curriculum framework

A photograph of a child standing on a beach, looking out at the ocean. The child is wearing a bright orange shirt and a blue hat. The beach is wide and sandy, with waves breaking in the distance. The background shows a line of trees and a clear blue sky.

**Think about a child you work with....**

Talk to the person next to you and tell them about this child...  
use a strengths-based approach!!

The listeners job is to ask questions, gently remind and offer prompts when we stray from a strengths-based approach!!

# Belonging



*‘Experiencing belonging – knowing where and with whom you belong – is integral to human existence’.*

EYLF p7

# Being




*Being recognises the significance of the here and now in children's lives. It is about the present and them knowing themselves, building and maintaining relationships with others, engaging with life's joys and complexities, and meeting challenges in everyday life.*

EYLF p7

# Becoming



Children's identities, knowledge, understandings, capacities, skills and relationships change during childhood. *Becoming reflects this process of rapid and significant change that occurs in the early years as young children learn and grow.*



# EYLF

## Principles

1. Secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships
2. Partnerships
3. High expectations and equity
4. Respect for diversity
5. Ongoing learning and reflective practice

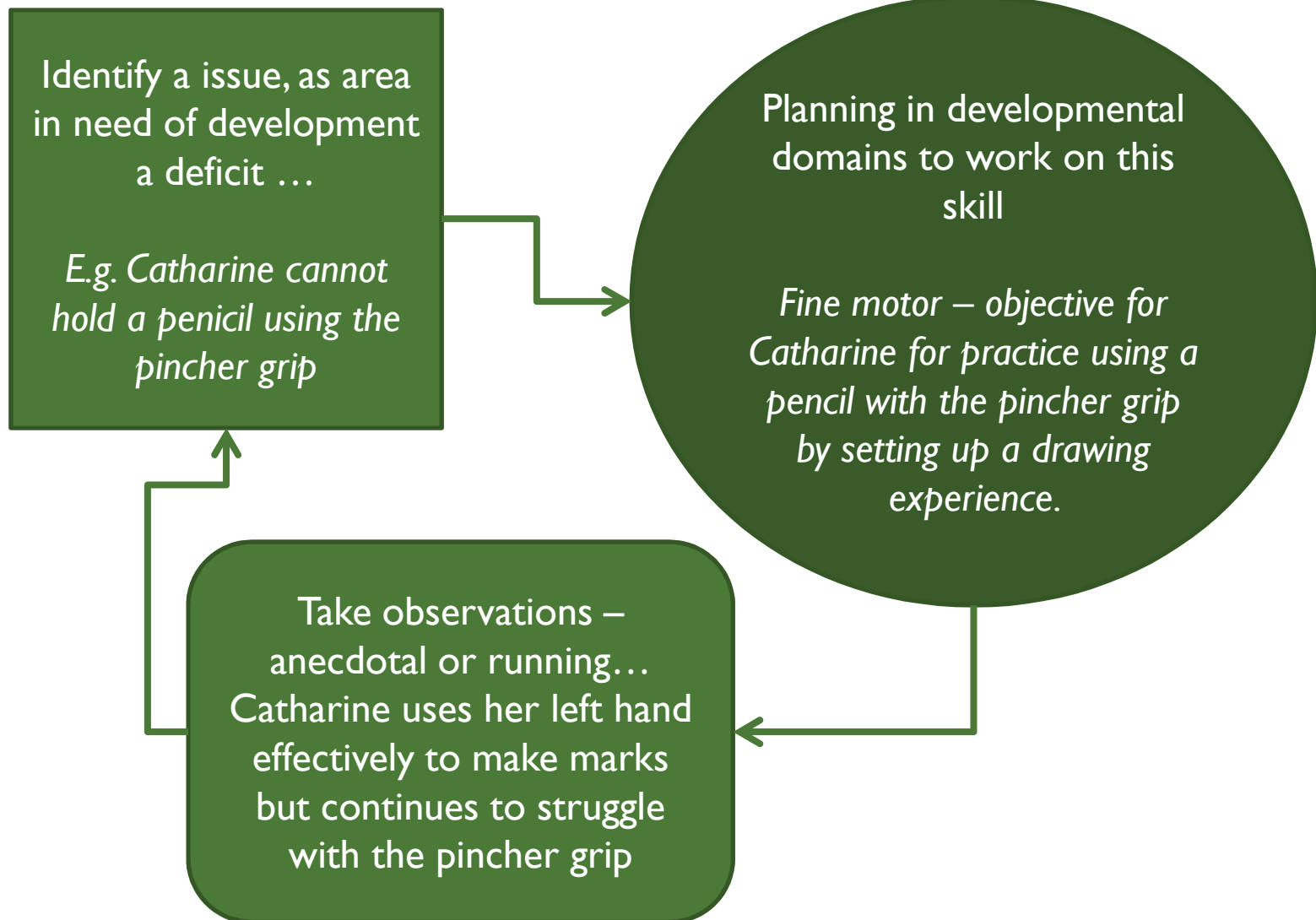
EYLF

# Outcomes

1. Children have a strong sense of **identity**
2. Children are connected with and **contribute to their world**
3. Children have a strong sense of **wellbeing**
4. Children are confident and **involved learners**
5. Children are effective **communicators.**



# The traditional planning approach...

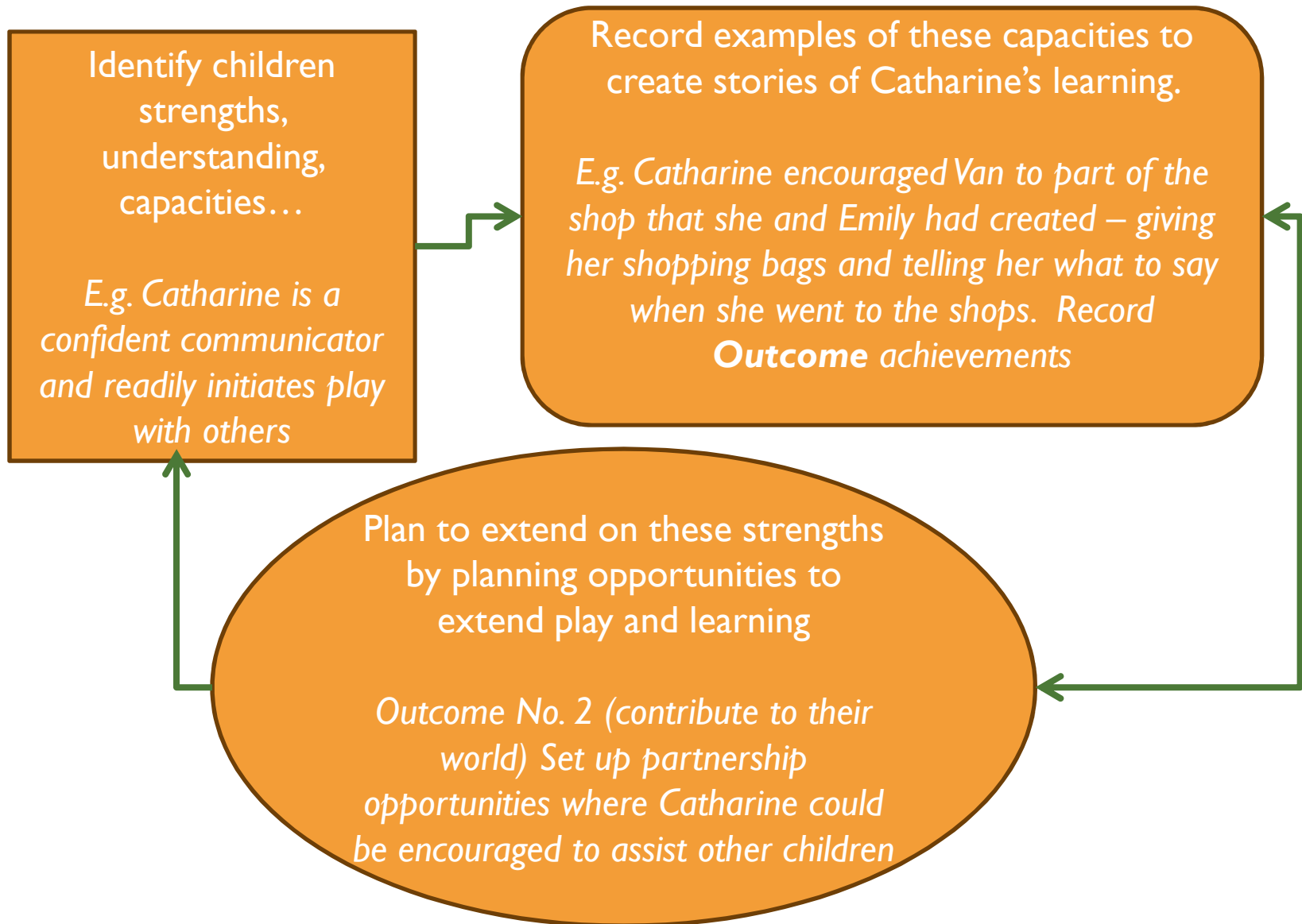




# NRR – a tool for seeing!

- Notice
  - What is happening!
- Recognise
  - What do we understand from what we see – what is going on here?
- Respond
  - How do we respond? What next?

# Strengths-Based planning approach



## Emergent Curriculum

# Alannah makes a busy shop...



**NOTICE**...Tell the story of what was observed, what happened. Don't be afraid of subjectivity the adult is sometimes a critical player in the story. Describe the scene, the dynamics, the materials, the use of those materials...

Use the **RECOGNISE** cue to document what we understand as early childhood educators is happening here. What does it demonstrate. What do we recognise? What outcome area/a can we recognise? Is it belonging, being or becoming?

### **Childs voice**

- Alannah: get a bag and do some shopping
  - CH: Ok ... (I look at the items on sale) I will have that one thank you and this one for Darryl
  - Alannah: No you cant have that one, its for Lily.
  - CH: who is Lily
  - Alannah: she is the next shopper she is not here yet , you can have this one its pretty.
  - CH: how much is it
  - Alannah: Sixty hundred.
- (I hand some money to Alannah and she counts the amount and gives me change and a hand written receipt)

- Use the **Respond** cue to consider what might happen next
- Ask the child and family about what their photo tells us?
- How might your extend on this?
- What might the family or the child suggest happens next... what outcome areas might you be working on.



# Learning Stories

‘Learning stories and *Te Whāriki* are a good example of respect for children's rights ... Children share meaning and power with adults (teachers and family members), have their **voices heard** and acted on, develop **agency** through having the opportunity to take initiative and play responsible roles, and have their strengths and interests respected.

It is also a model which gives all children who participate in early childhood education, not a selected group of children (kindergarten children, for example, as opposed to children in home-based care), the opportunity to be active participants in their communities of learners.

Children's rights and early childhood education Links to theory and advocacy Anne B. Smith *Children's Issues Centre, University of Otago*



*“All children have the best start in life to create a better future for themselves and for the nation.”*

*Investing in the Early Years - a National Early Childhood Development Strategy, Council of Australian Governments*



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