



Building a Collective Commitment to Outdoor Learning- A Two Year Cycle



Project Aim

Short term - to develop a collective understanding empowering teachers to facilitate an outdoor provision

Long term - providing a continuous provision for outdoor play

Rationale in the wider context



Friedrich Froebel pioneered kindergarten education in the nineteenth century. His contributions go beyond providing an environment for children to play and learn, with the strongest emphasis being that children's learning should be holistic. By giving a strong emphasis on play, Froebel believed children's learning need to be connected. Froebel recognised the importance of incorporating outdoor play so that children have opportunities to be curious, creative and explore nature.

Froebel's rationale for outdoor play was founded on his understanding of children's development. To provide holistic opportunities in learning, Froebel recognised that the indoor environment did not offer the same learning and developmental opportunities that could be seen outdoors. Froebel saw children as: "active, curious, creative learners. He considered that children learn best through self-activity, rich first-hand experience, problem-solving, play and talk". (Tovey 2017, p.2) and that outdoors was the perfect environment for children to explore, experiment, and understand the world around them. Froebel believed that everything is connected and believed that children who spend time in nature will connect with nature. In living and learning within nature, he believed children would develop an appreciation and responsibility towards the natural world they live in. Peter Gray (2013) endorses the importance of such experiences in modern society stating that "it is essential for our children to have playful contact with nature if they are to equip themselves with the capacity to adapt to our ever-changing world and find their sense of self".

Before much of today's research around the benefits of physical play, Froebel had already acknowledged the benefits of playing outdoors for children's physical development. He believed that children needed the opportunities provided outdoors to develop skills such as strength, endurance, balance, coordination, fine/gross motor skills, spatial awareness and assessing risk.

Froebel did not see learning as being compartmentalised and believed that everything should be connected. Therefore, he believed the benefits of outdoor play promoted all aspects of development – social/emotional; physical; language and communication; cognitive; and self-regulation. Froebel believed outdoor opportunities could not be replicated indoors, therefore, access to the outdoors is crucial when facilitating a playful pedagogy. Arguably, no one put it better than Margaret McMillan who said: "The best classroom and the richest cupboard is roofed only by the sky."



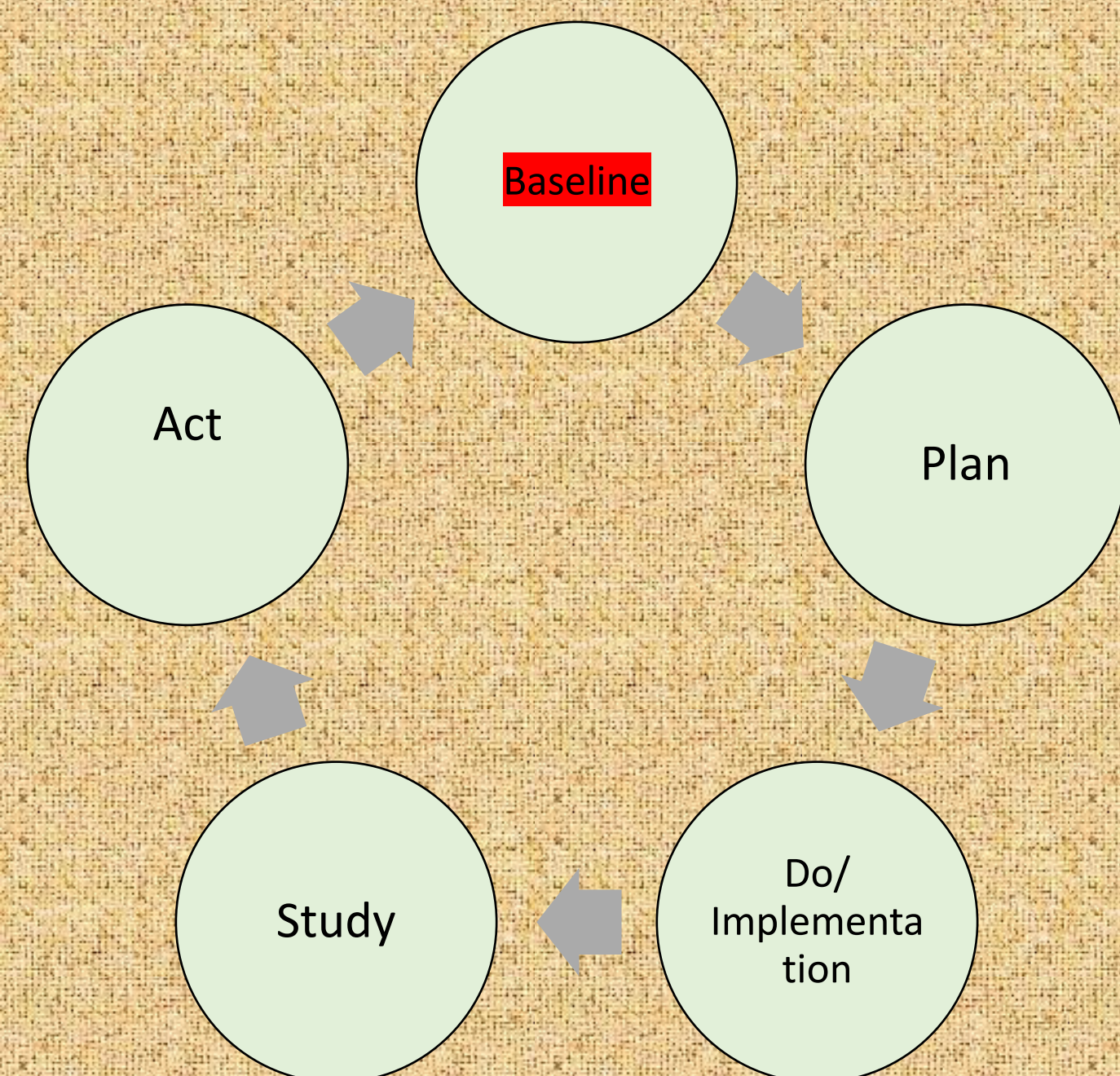
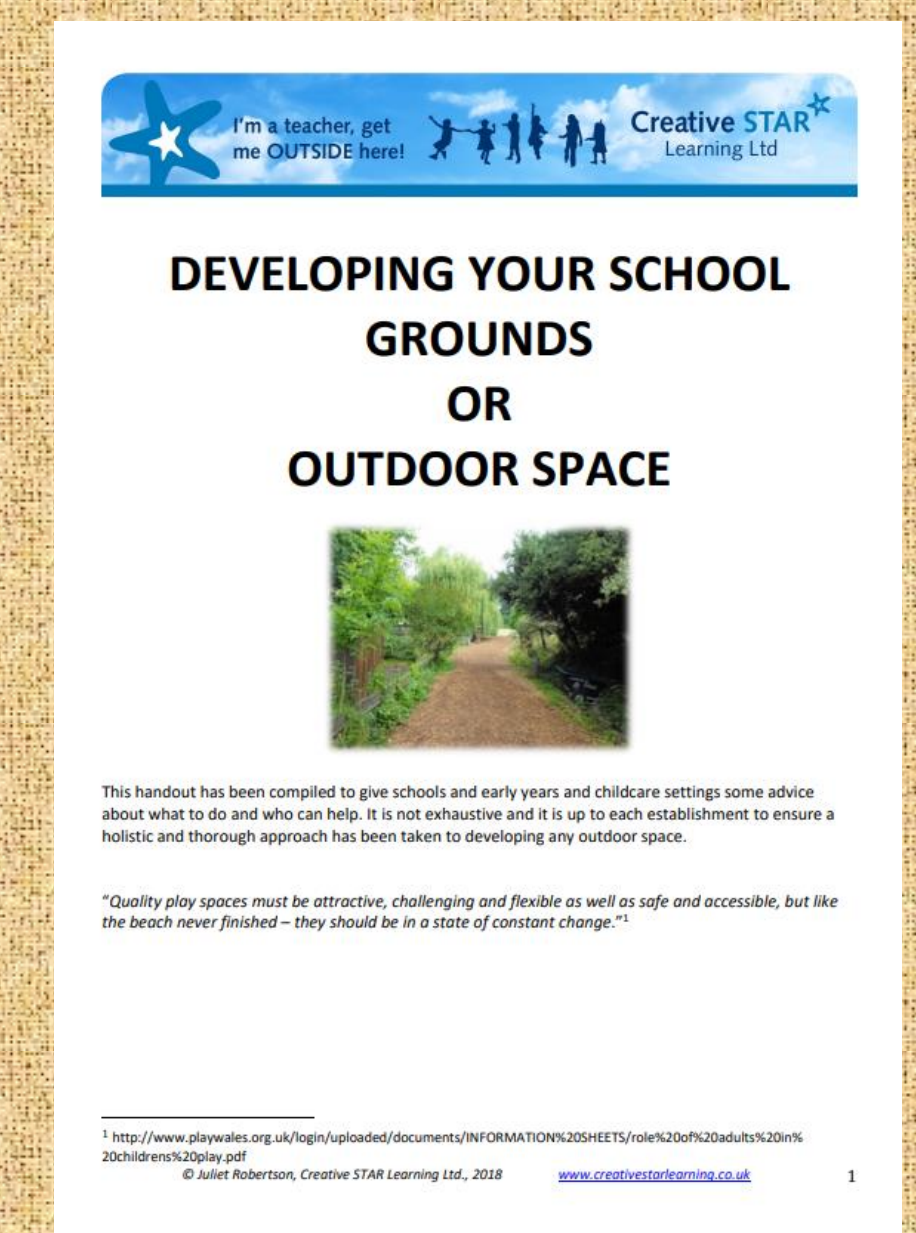
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Background reading

- A Froebelian Approach – outdoor play and exploration by Helen Tovey
 - Space to Grow –Care Inspectorate
 - Loose Parts Play – Scottish Government
 - Out to Play – Scottish Government
- Creative Star – Developing Your School Grounds or Outdoor Space



Our key questions





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VISION

Children saying:

I'm happy
I want to be /go outside
I want to finish this
Come and see/play/help..
I want to tell you about...



Children doing:

- Engaged in learning experiences
- Exploring, experimenting, and investigating how things work
 - Moving, using their bodies
- Making links by having meaningful learning experiences throughout the curriculum
 - Taking risks – risky play
- Working together or independently
 - Developing skills
- Making decisions within their learning
- Acting out scenarios through imaginative play
 - Problem solving
 - Collaborating
 - Symbolic play
 - Sharing their learning
- Showing resilience within their play

Baseline

Act

Plan

Study

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Implementat
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VISION

Adults saying:

I'm confident taking children outside.
I'm confident in taking learning forward.

I know how to use resources outside.
Let's try this outside.

I've developed my own skills as well as my knowledge and understanding of outdoor play.

I wonder.....



Staff doing:

- Observing children
- Providing provocations and resources to support and extend learning
- Taking children out of the school grounds for learning experiences
- Providing experiences with nature
 - Joining in with children's play
- Talking and interacting with children during play
- Using the materials available outside
 - Following children's lead
- Supporting and extending children's play
- Providing experiences not available indoors
 - Allowing children "freedom with guidance"
- Working together and sharing expertise
- Allowing children to take risks, whilst providing a safe environment to do so
 - Nurturing children's curiosity
 - Attending training to gain further understanding and skills

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PUPIL VOICE

What we like about being outside now:

- Seating
- Grass hill
- Planters
- Mud kitchen
- Playing with friends
- The outdoor hut

What we would like to change:

- More things to play with
- Time without the rest of the school to play because it's too busy
- Spaces to sit
- To be less messy
- More colours
- More time to play outside





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OBSERVATIONS OF PLAY BEFORE PROJECT

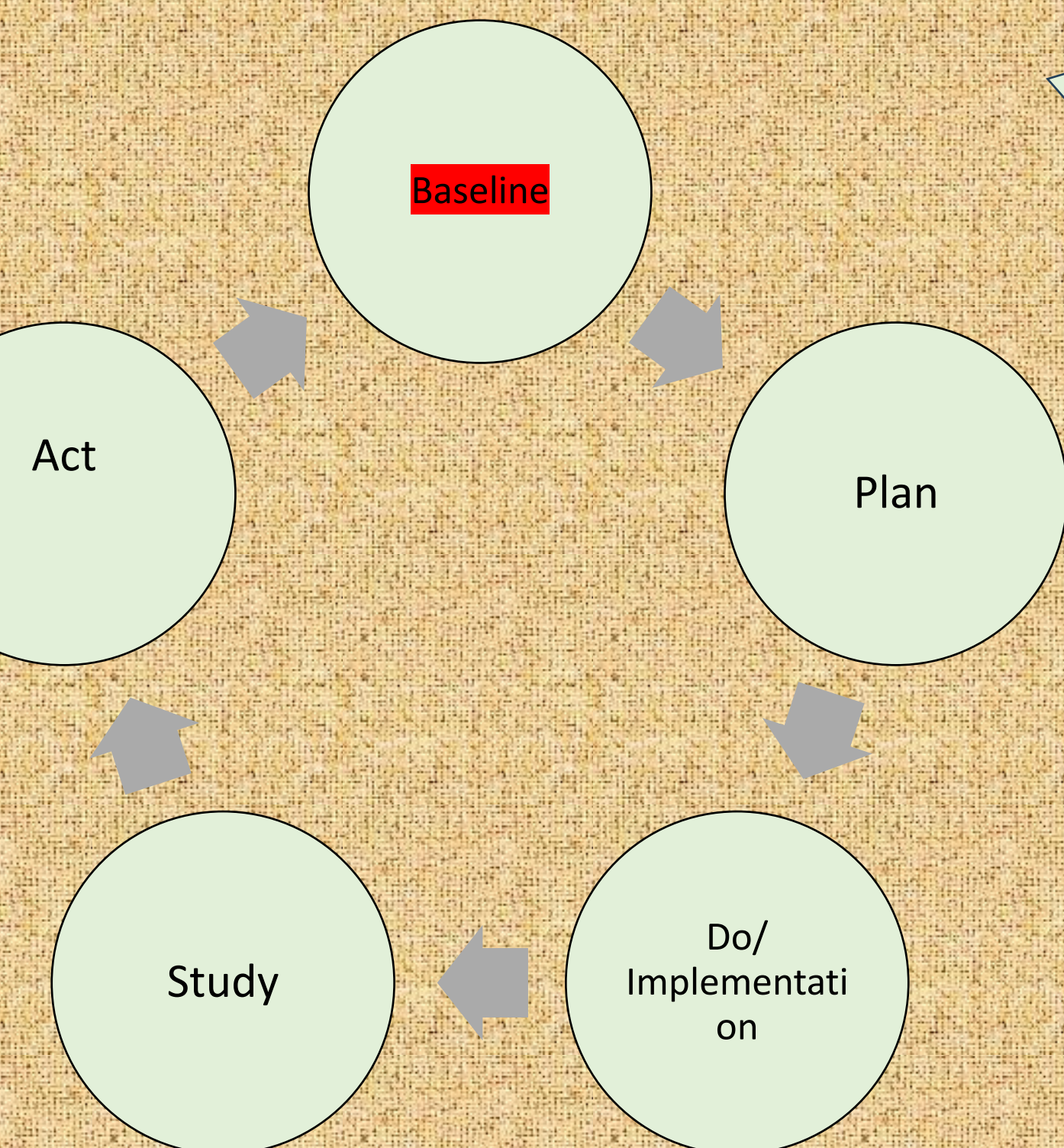
Almost exclusively indoors during class time

Some activities taken outside only in better weather

Noise level high in some areas, especially when children have been inside for break and lunch

Teachers collaborating
so that children were
working between
areas/zones inside
during free flow

Free-flow play well-established and high-quality activities included indoors





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Identified positives



Direct access to outdoor space from each learning space and toilet facilities inside

Waterproofs and wellington boots available

Access to plots of garden where children are involved in the process of growing their own produce

Play is valued by staff and integrated into curriculum

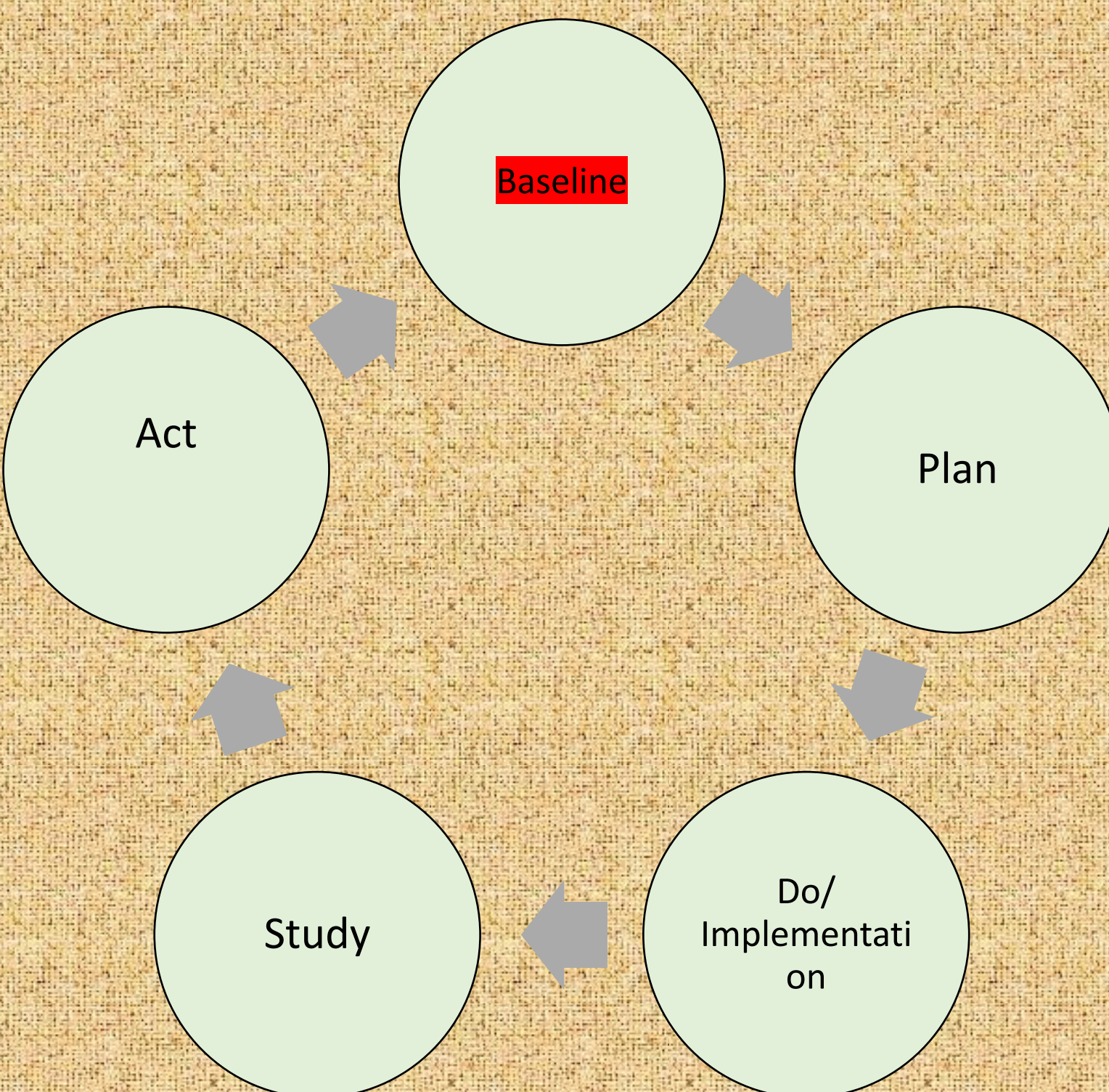
Free-flow inside well-established with children able to choose what, with whom and where to play

Uneven areas within the play area with access to wild garden and green spaces

Sheltered outside area

Identified staff committed to Sustainability and Eco

Children are used to free flow between classrooms.





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Identified challenges

Lack of confidence to use areas outwith the school to provide year-round opportunities for learning

Storage for equipment and resources

Involving stakeholders in outdoor learning experiences

Staffing outside area as there is only one staff member allocated to the classroom. Each class has between 25 and 31 pupils.

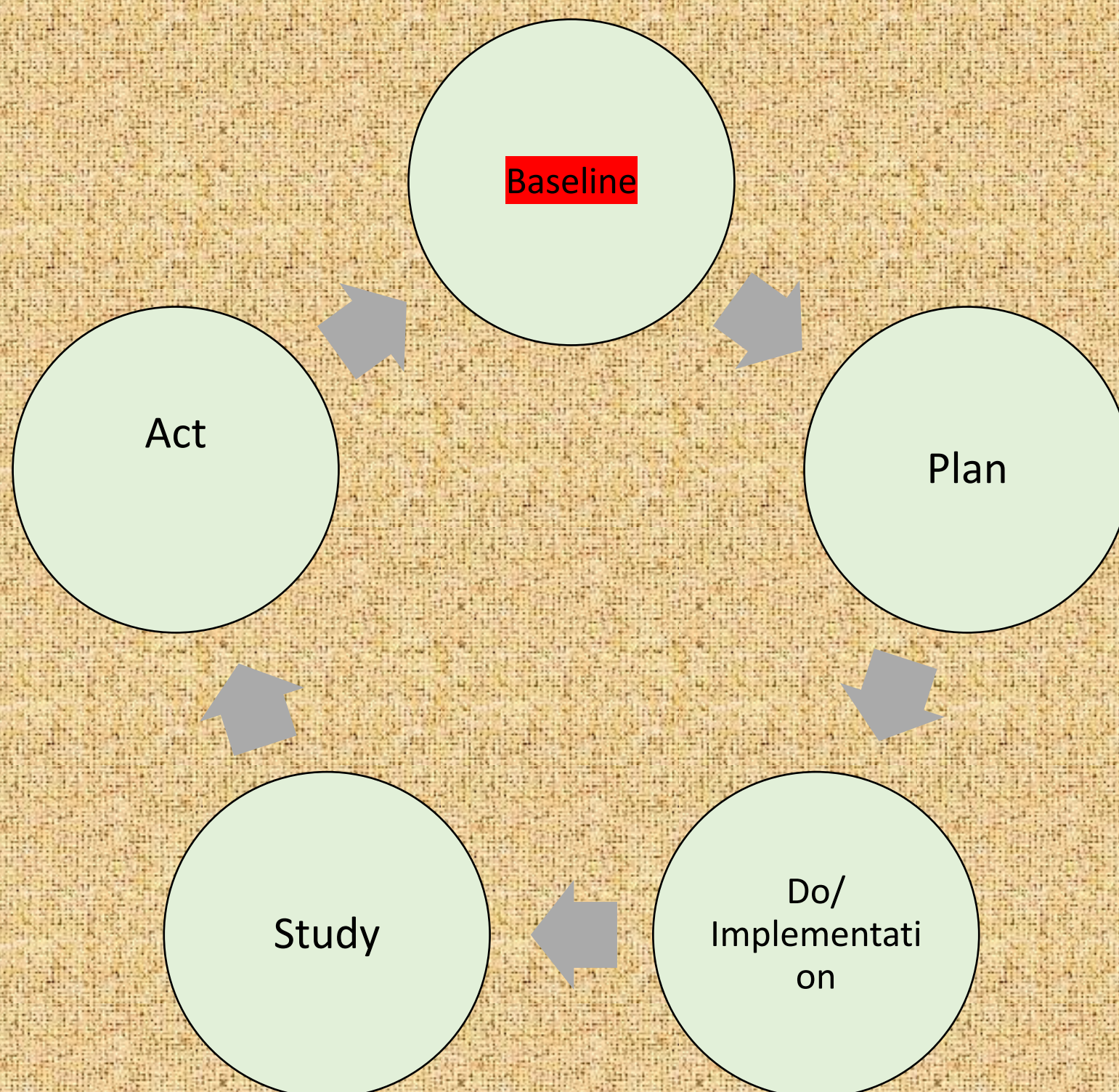
Lack of different outdoor experiences such as den building, fire pits, etc.

Children not involved in creative experiences outdoors outwith playtime/lunchtime

Current extension building work in process. Final date of completion has continued to be prolonged

Lack of natural materials within the immediate learning space outside

Unpredictable weather





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Aim

By February 2024, 100% of pupils in P1 and P2 will have access to outdoor play during free flow time

Drivers

High-quality pedagogical approaches to teaching and learning

Children's health and wellbeing

Child-centred and holistic approaches

Connection to nature

Community engagement

Secondary Drivers

Teachers having a deep understanding of the value of outdoor play

Integration of outdoor learning to deliver the curriculum

Increasing engagement in learning

Providing resources to enable high-quality learning experiences

Empowering teachers with the knowledge and skill to deliver high quality outdoor learning opportunities

Having a shared understanding of Froebelian principles

Change Ideas

- Allocated time set for free-flow play to include opportunities indoors and outdoors
- Support staff to be with the class where possible to allow all learning spaces to be utilised.
- Track staff attitudes and staff confidence levels.
- Collaborative research and discussion of key documents
- Outdoor learning specialists training staff
- Engage in planned staff training – fire and curriculum
- Follow children's interests outdoors as well as indoors
- Monitor student engagement
- Provide provocations for children outside to support curriculum integration outdoors
- Track children who are/ are not accessing outdoors
- Collection and purchasing of resources
- Risk management for outdoor activities – fire training
- Invest/create outdoor learning packs to include equipment to support outdoor inquiry and exploration. – e.g. binoculars, string, tape measure

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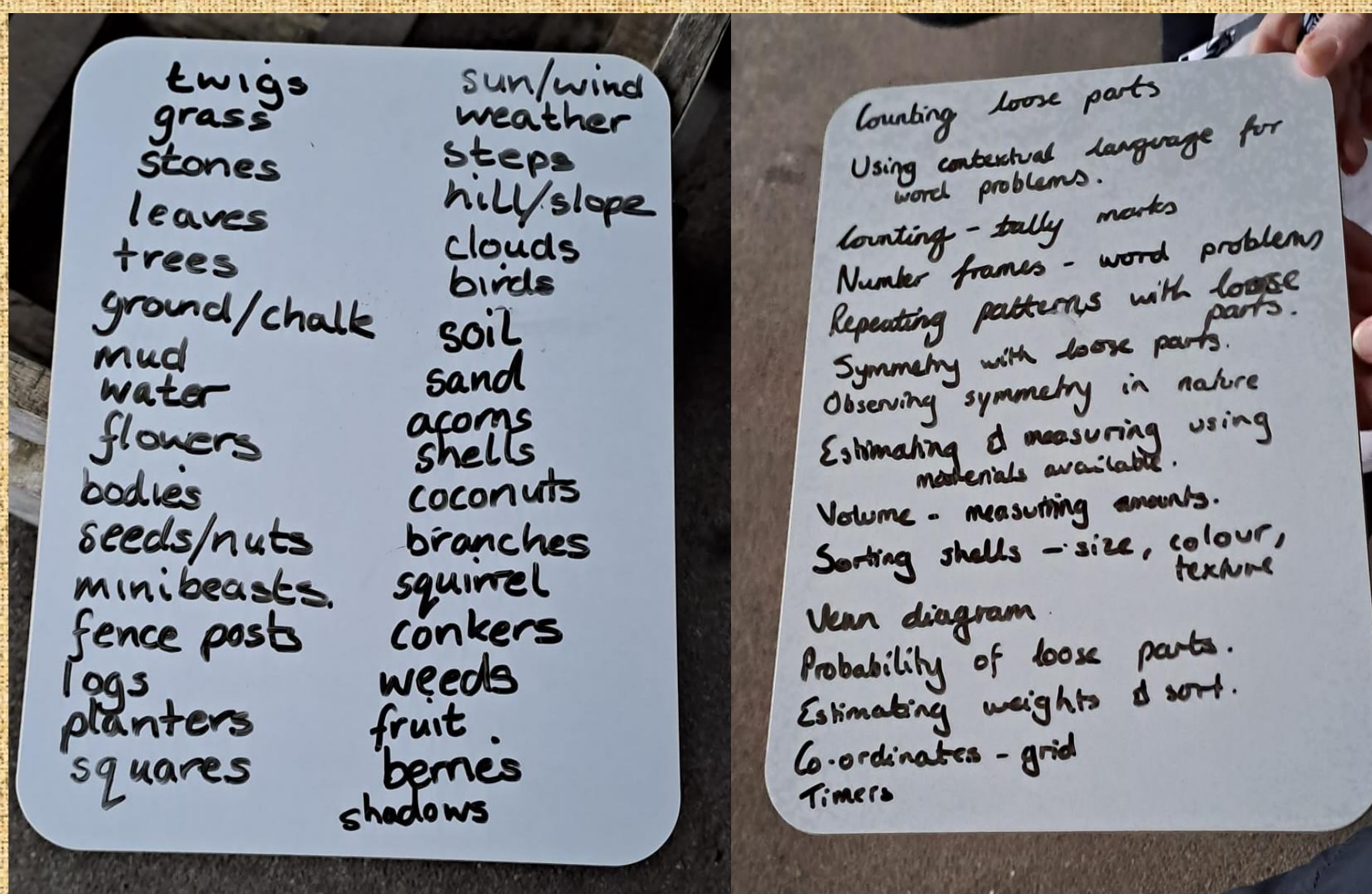
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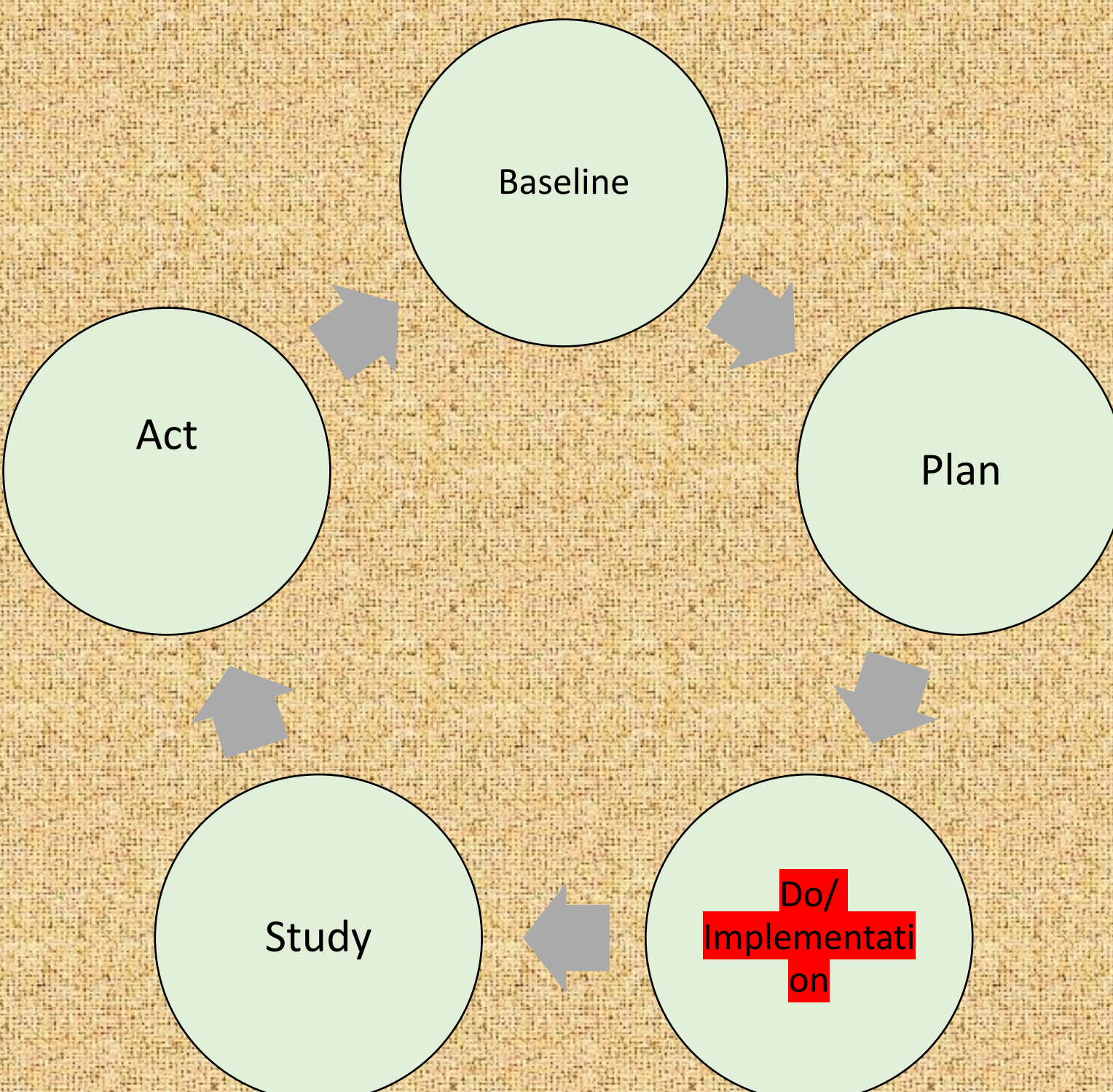
Long term - providing a continuous provision for outdoor play



Staff training was funded by the Froebel Trust

Staff took part in the following training:

- 16 members of staff attended outdoor training from the 3 literacy CPD sessions and 2 numeracy CPD sessions offered after school
- All P1 to P3 class teachers took part in a series of training with outdoor education officers to deliver practical outdoor sessions during free-flow play sessions
- 8 staff members throughout the school trained in safe fire-starting





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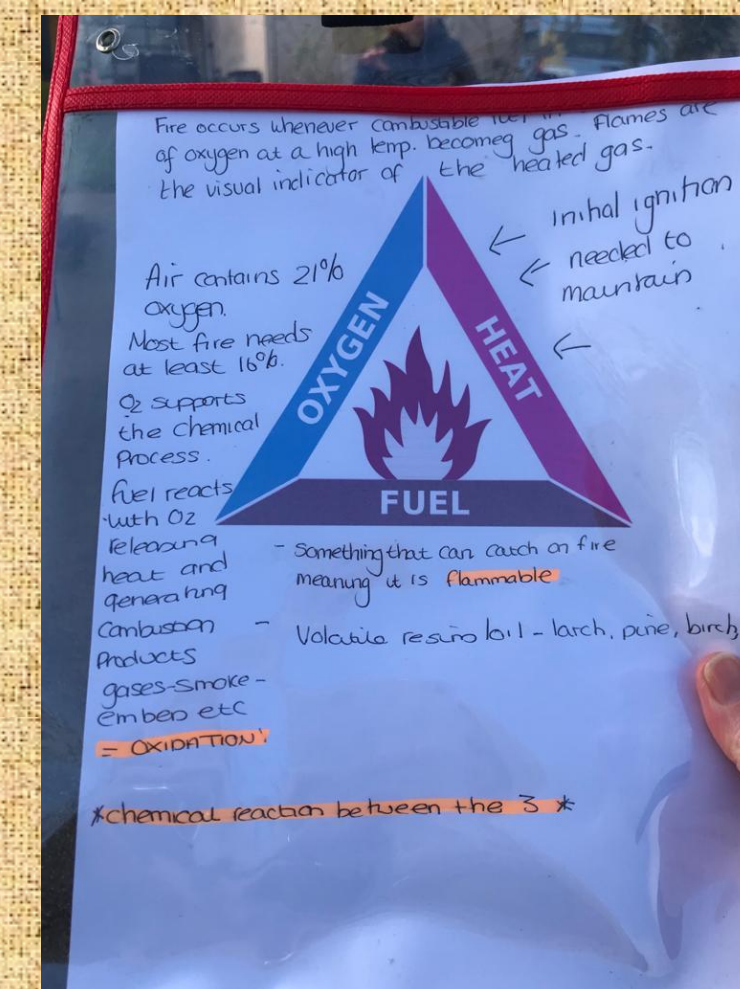
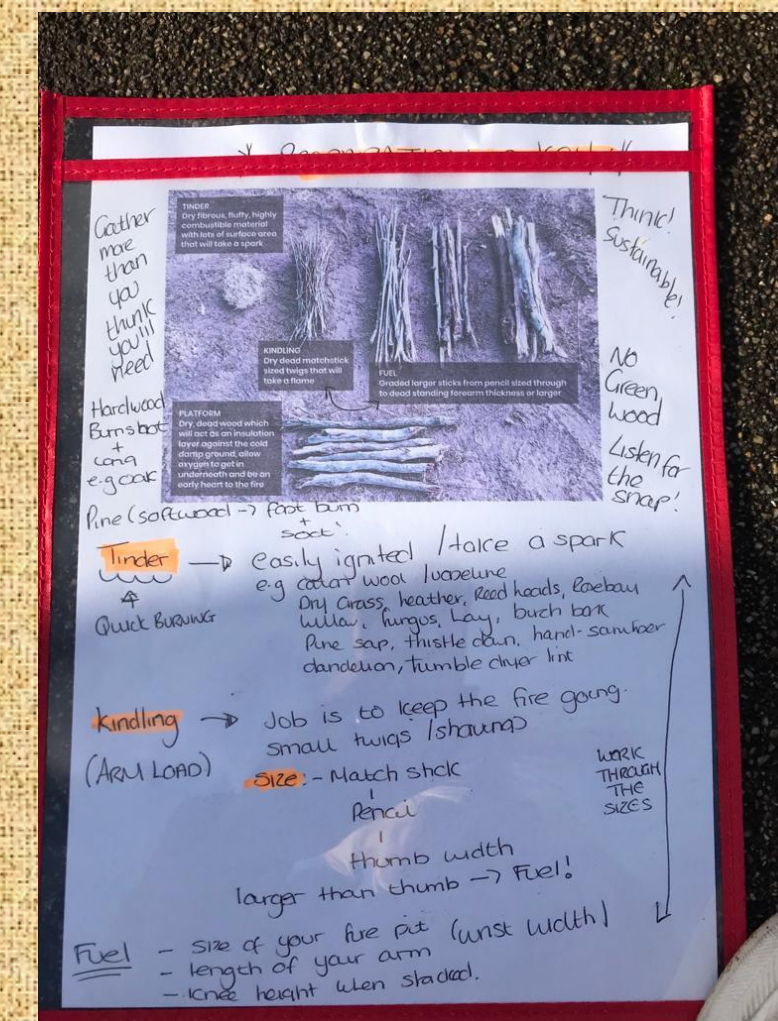


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Funding by the Froebel Trust has enabled training for 8 members of staff within the setting.



Example of task within the portfolio – 14 tasks required.

Under The Trees
Level 1 Fire Training
(For Camp-Fire Cooking)



www.underthetrees.co.uk
Under the Trees, 158 Main Street, Larbert, FK5 3JP
Scottish Charity Number: SC48074



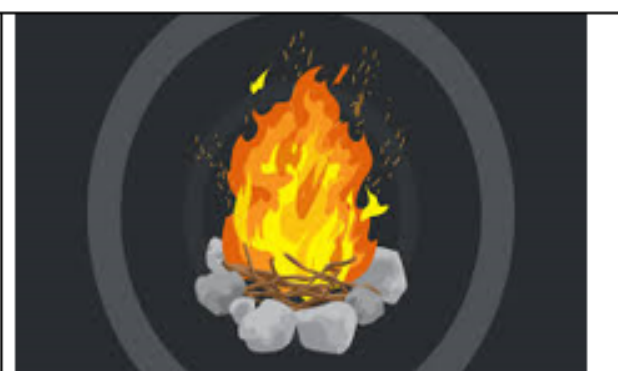
Task 1 Create your own rule around fire and resource to support/demonstrate

Teaching kids about fire pit safety is crucial to prevent accidents and injuries. Using cue cards can be an effective way to educate children on the do's and don'ts around fire pits. Here are some key points that can be included in fire pit safety cue cards for kids:

- 1. Keep a Safe Distance:** Emphasize the importance of staying at a safe distance from the fire pit. Children should understand that they should never lean over or touch the fire pit when it is in use.
- 2. Supervision:** Stress the need for adult supervision whenever the fire pit is being used. Kids should never be left alone near a fire pit, and adults should always be present to monitor the situation.
- 3. Clothing:** Teach children to wear appropriate clothing when near a fire pit. Loose-fitting clothes, especially those made of flammable materials, should be avoided as they can easily catch fire.
- 4. No Running or Horseplay:** Encourage kids to avoid running or engaging in rough play near the fire pit. This can lead to accidents and increase the risk of someone falling into the fire.
- 5. Fire Extinguisher or Water Source:** Teach children about the importance of having a fire extinguisher or a water source nearby in case of emergencies. They should know how to use these tools if needed.
- 6. Don't Throw Objects into the Fire:** Emphasize that children should never throw any objects into the fire pit. This includes sticks, rocks, or any other items that could cause sparks or flames to spread.
- 7. Cool Down Period:** Explain the concept of a cool down period after using the fire pit. Children should understand that even after the fire is out, the pit can remain hot for a while and should be avoided.
- 8. Stop, Drop, and Roll:** Teach kids the stop, drop, and roll technique in case their clothes catch on fire. This basic safety measure can help extinguish flames quickly and prevent serious injuries.

Maddiston Fire Circle Que Cards

Please only move around the outside of the fire circle and don't walk through the middle unless invited in by an adult.



Do not light a fire unless you have water to extinguish it fully as well as water for first aid.



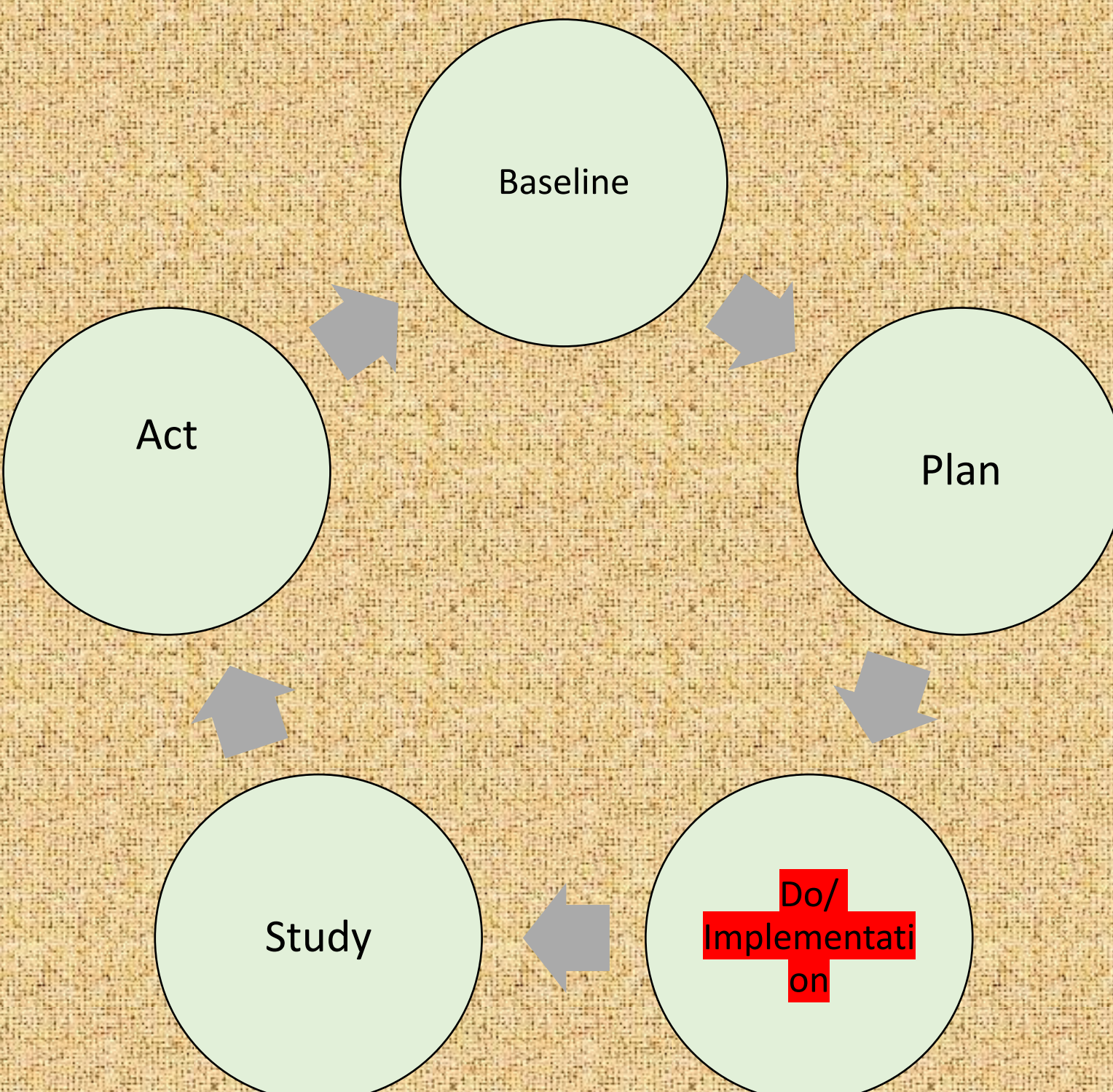
Gather sufficient fuel to sustain your fire before you light the fire.



Tie long hair back and ensure that any loose straps or ties are tucked out of the way. Push up baggy sleeves and remove water proof coats.



One person at a time can move into the fire circle when invited. If you come in please kneel on one knee.



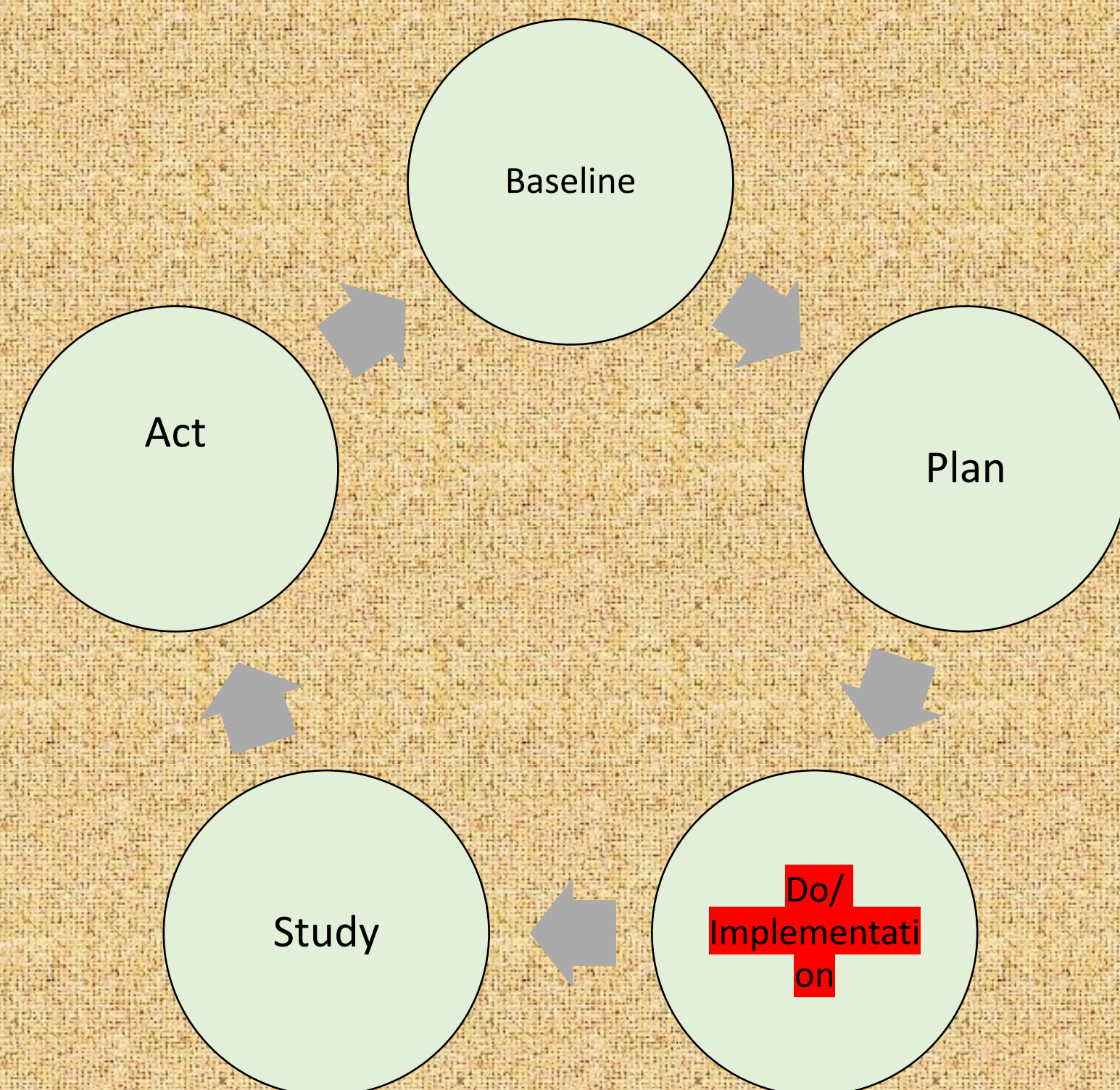


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RESOURCES - STAFFING

Staff accessed training weekly. This involved the trainer working alongside each staff member during each session. Staff would rotate between the different play zones so they had the opportunity to engage in weekly training.



"The teacher's role is not to drill and indoctrinate but to help the child discover and unfold the beautiful thing in the soul. “

the soul. Froebel, F. (1887). *The Education of Man* (W. N. Hailmann, Trans.). A. Lovell & Company.





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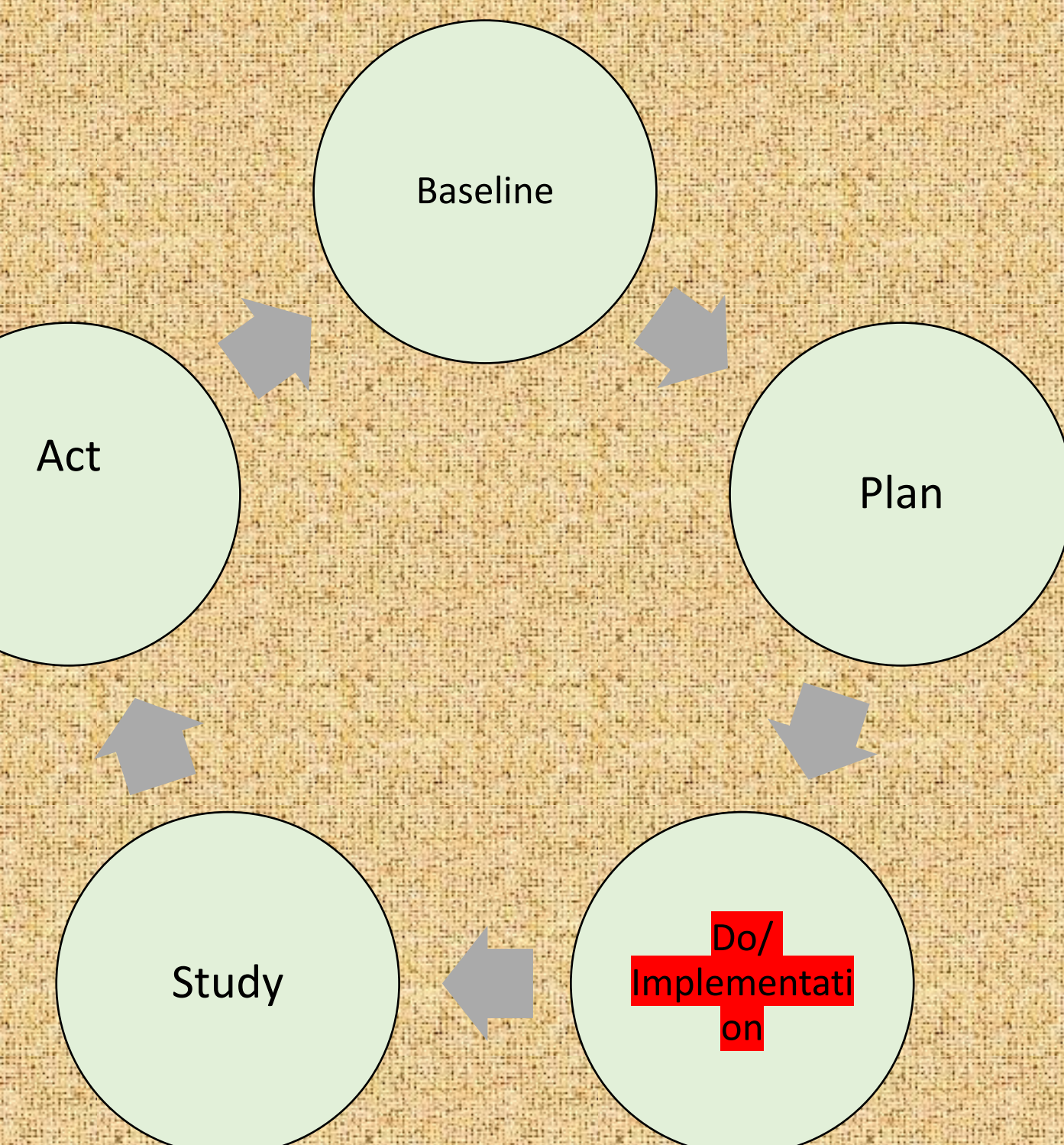
Long term - providing a continuous provision for outdoor play

RESOURCES - PROVOCATIONS

Staff planned provocations and materials to support curriculum integration outdoors. This was supported through on-the-job training. The grant from the Froebel Trust enabled staff to receive high-quality training from experts. The staff reflected on this hands-on experience and applied what they learned directly to our environment. The vision of facilitating an outdoor provision was becoming real and manageable.



Froebel emphasised the importance of play in childhood, advocating that children should have the freedom to explore and express themselves, with adults providing the necessary support and materials to facilitate this process. (Froebel, The Education of Man, 1826)





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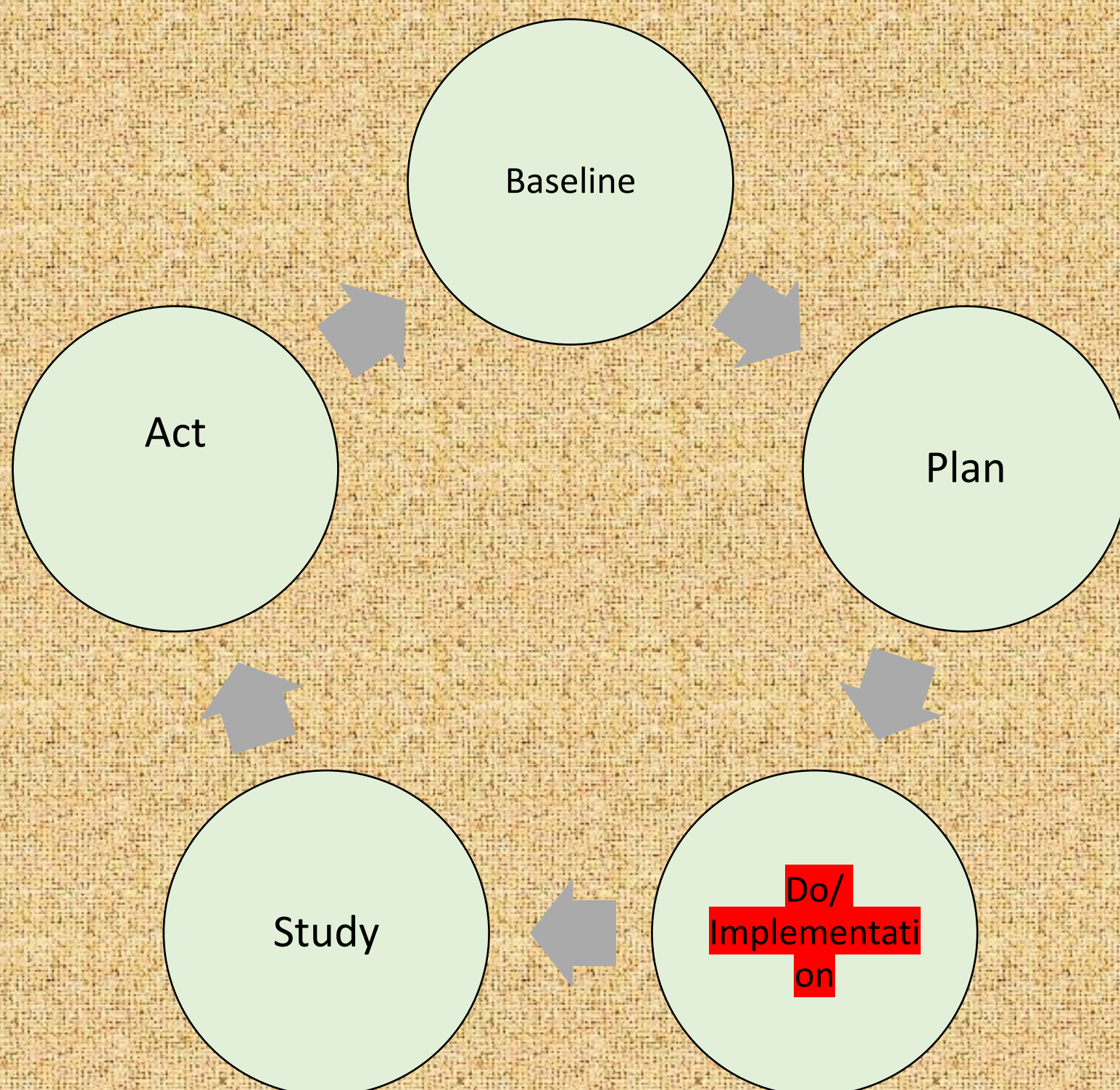
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FOLLOWING THE CHILD'S LEAD

The staff allocated time for free-flow play, including opportunities for children to play indoors or outdoors. Classes started once a week with the “Under the Tree” outdoor education officer working alongside teachers sharing ideas and making adaptations to suit the classes’ needs. This increased as teacher confidence grew to allow free-flow play to occur during all free-flow sessions.



By following their lead, we respect the children's natural curiosity and individuality, fostering an environment where learning is driven by their creativity and desire to explore. This child-centered approach empowers them to construct their own understanding of the world, leading to deeper and more meaningful educational experiences.



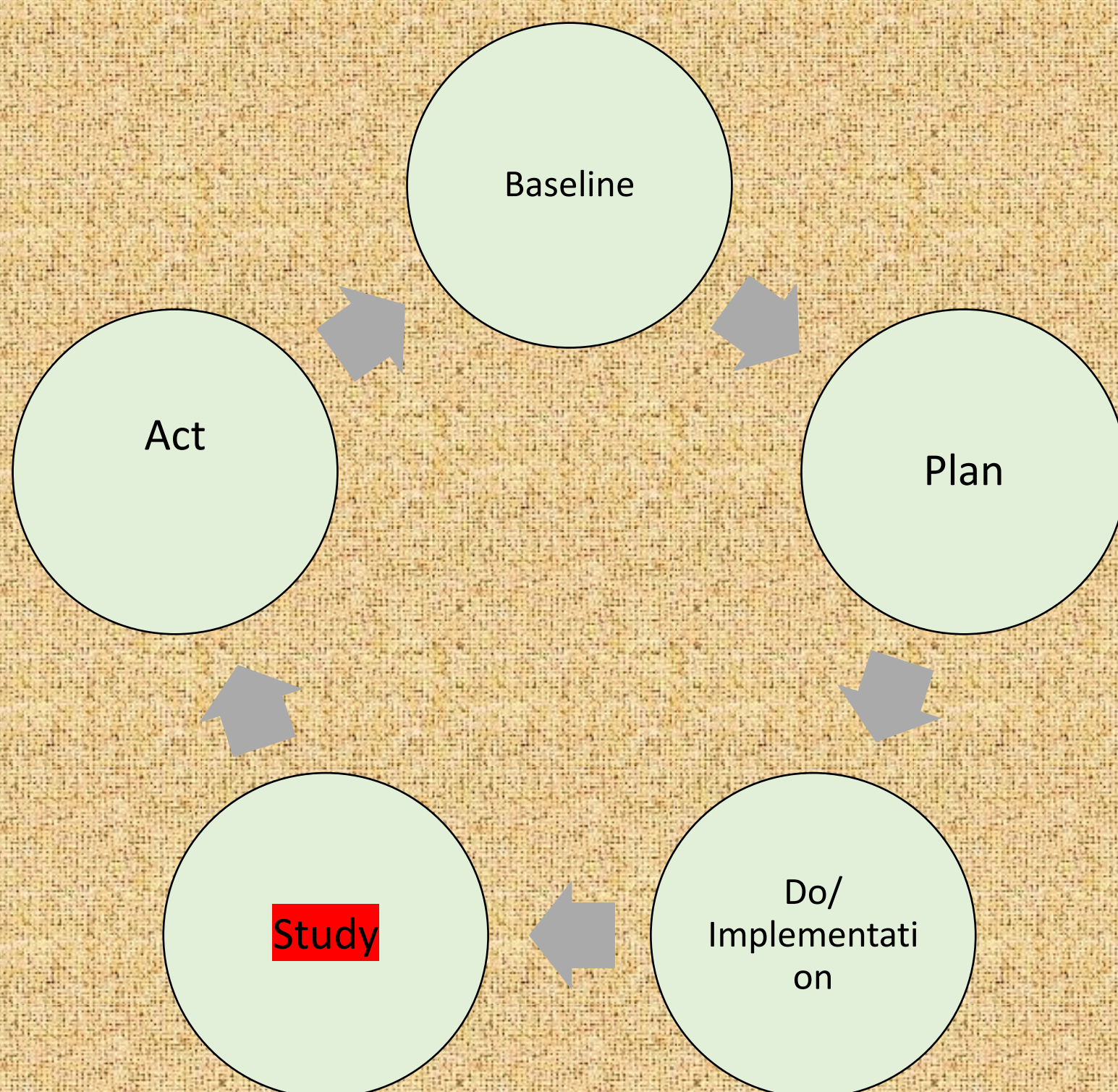
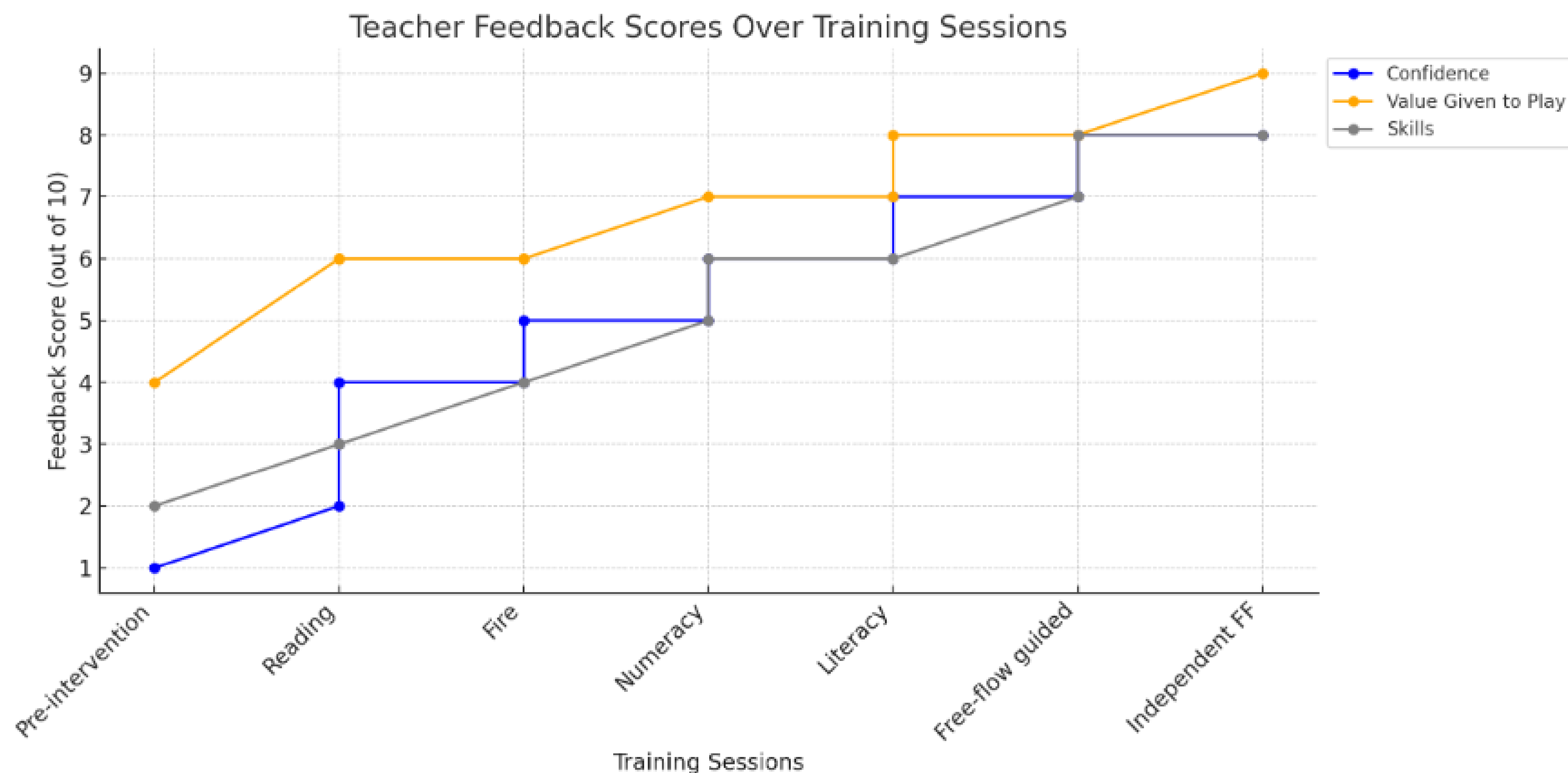


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Froebel, F. (1900). *Pedagogics of the Kindergarten*

Teacher confidence levels grew after each training session. Along with confidence, motivation to take children outdoors was also higher. Teachers reported they felt equipped with the skills to deliver high-quality lessons outdoors. They increasingly saw the value of providing the children with daily outdoor opportunities and upholding Froebelian principles.





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To be part of the training was a fantastic experience for all. It allowed opportunities for purposeful play, cooperation and teamwork. What I see is a group of children who find formal learning very tricky and who have blossomed in the outdoors. They were fully engaged in each outdoor session and it has been lovely to observe their skills develop and show what they are capable of when the environment is conducive to their needs.

During play sessions outside, I've really learned the importance of stepping back and allowing the children to explore. Before, I was intervening too quickly.



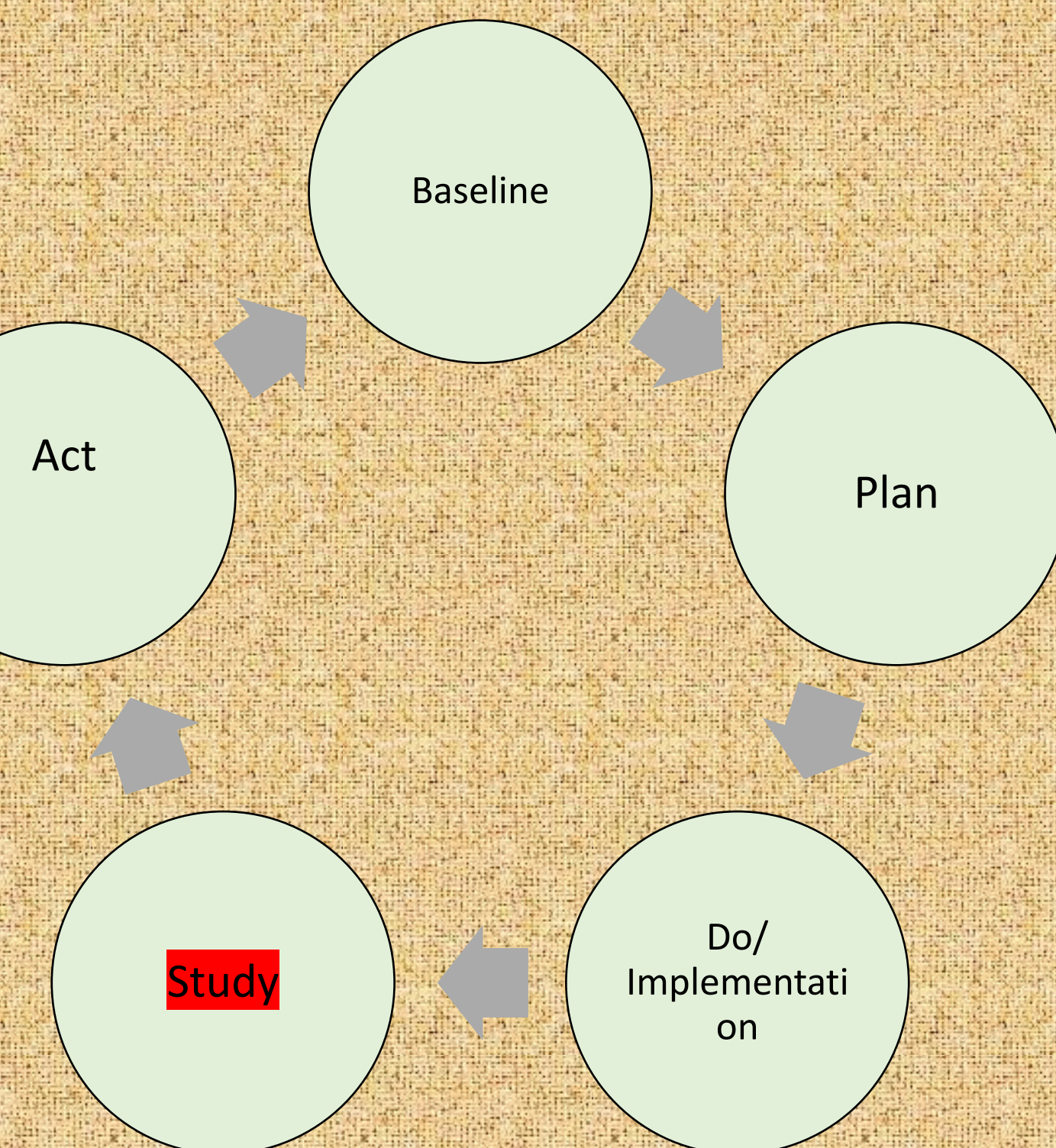
Staff Feedback

The training has made me think differently about what we offer children in school. Initially, I thought the preparation was going to be too difficult to sustain, however, focusing more on the loose parts has allowed us to use what we already have available and what we can easily obtain.

It's great to see children being children. Inside, the children are constantly seeking digital technology. Outside, they are trying and connecting with new experiences and people.

It is surprising to see the children that are thriving outdoors. It's like seeing them in a different light.

It's really made such a difference having dedicated time slots supported by someone with expert knowledge.





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The ideas within the training have been simple. Sometimes less is more and with not having our expectations enforced on the children, we have seen them be more creative.

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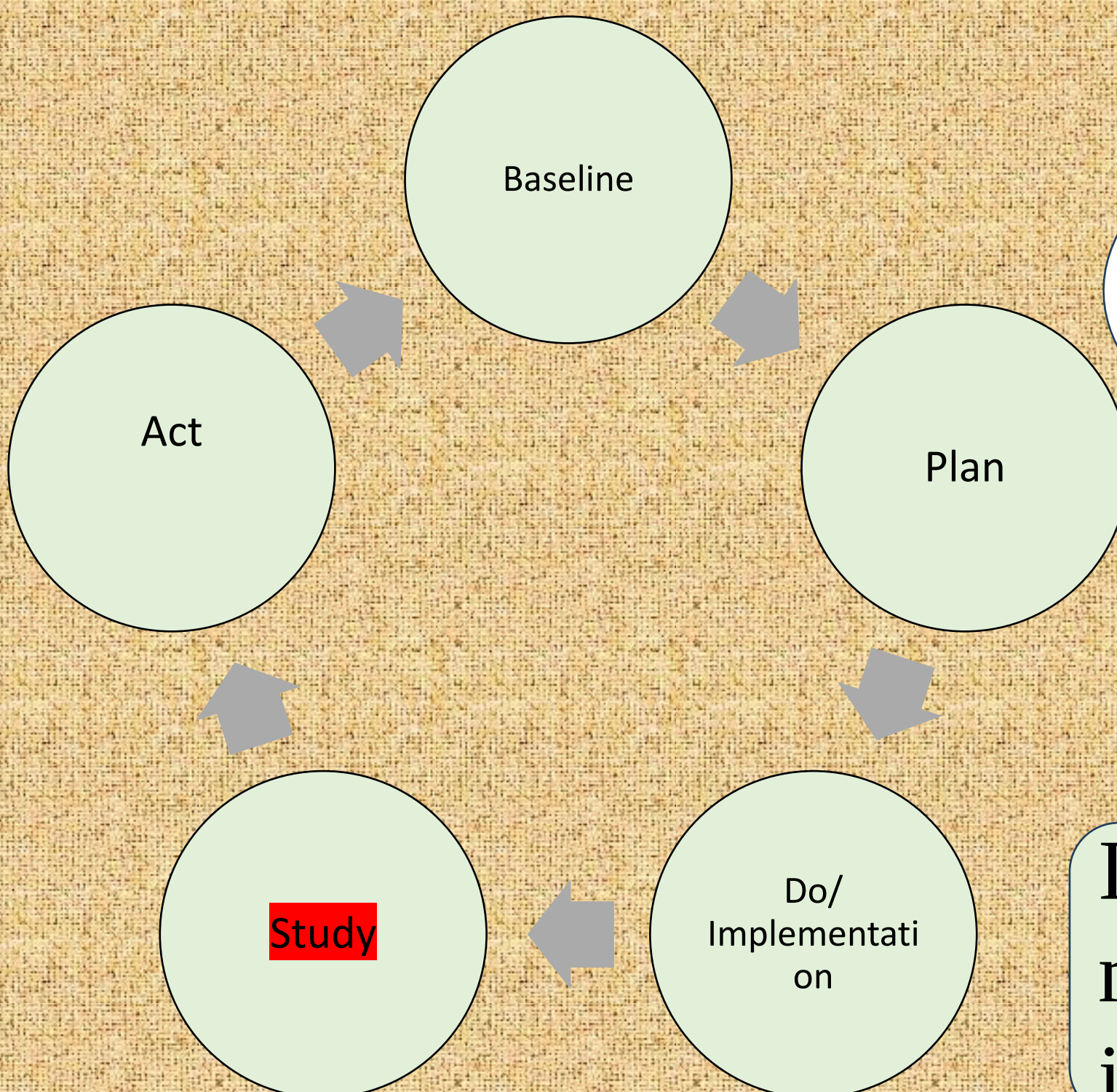
We have all developed our knowledge through research. However, what has been most impactful is how we can put this into practice and the training we've had has given us the time, the skills and built our confidence to do this.

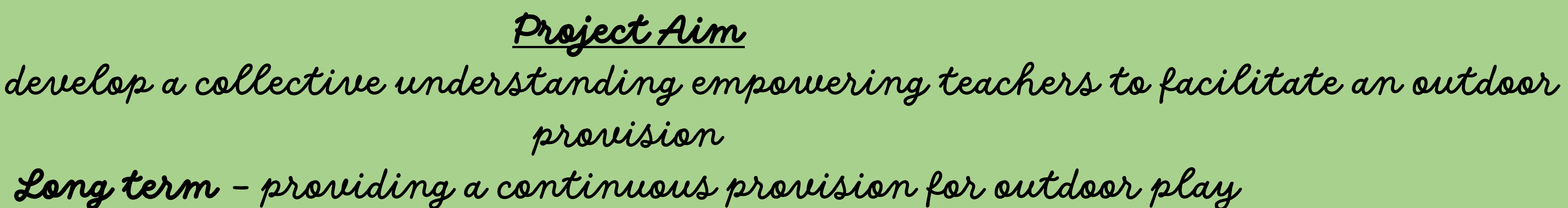
Within my observations, I see children attempting skills they can't do inside. They are less inhibited outside and willing to give new things a go.

The fire training has been a lot of hard work, but it has prepared us for taking this forward with groups. I have big ideas on how we will use our training in and out of school with the children and their families.

The most noticeable observation is the increase in children's engagement.

In addition, the headteacher reported that (during their Employee Review and Development meetings) teachers identified the training funded by Froebel Trust as having the most value and impact on their practice.



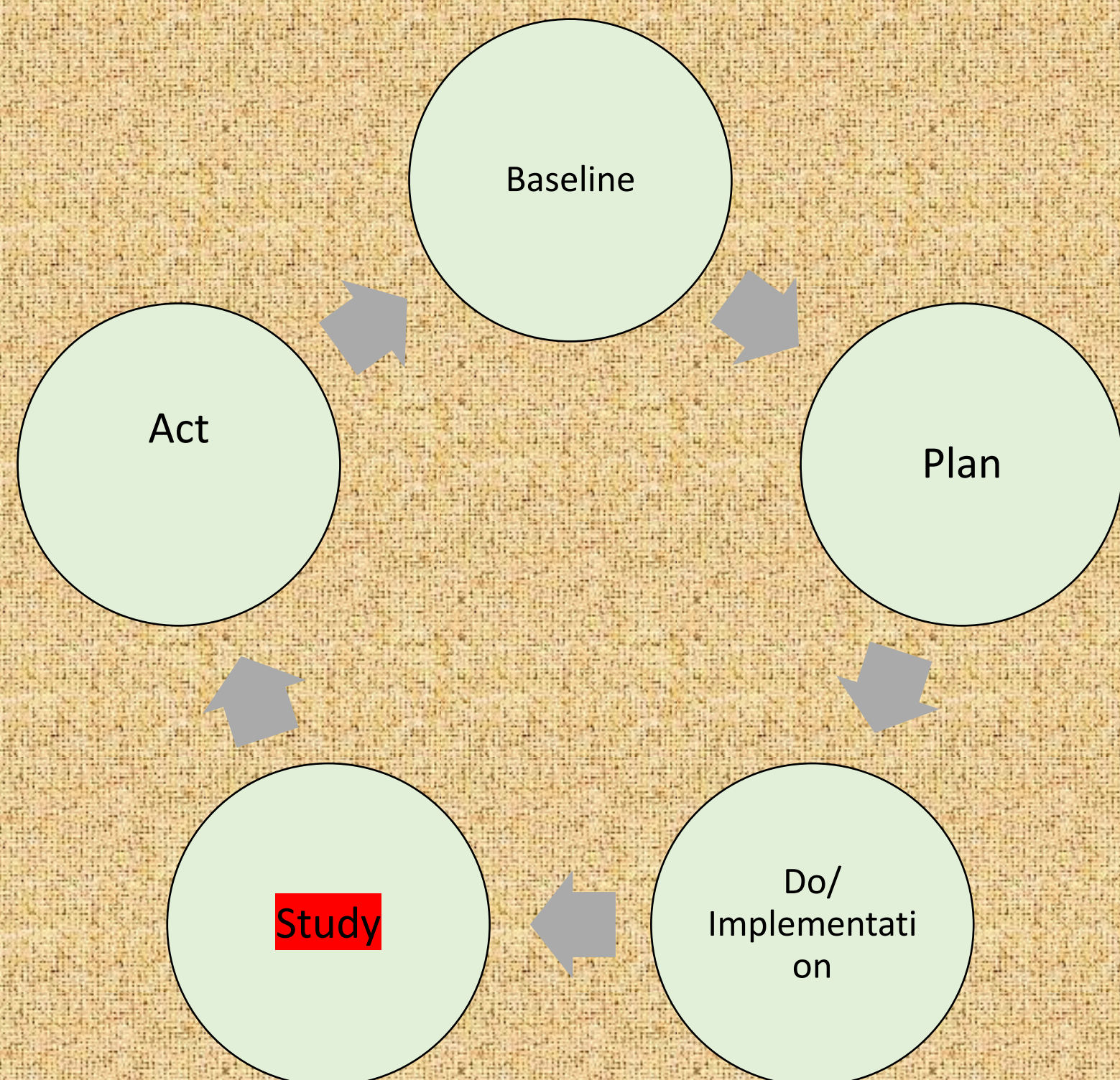


I've seen children develop their problem solving skills and also their own risk-management when engaging in risky play. Staff at Maddiston Primary School have commented how valuable it is for them to have opportunities to do things that might not normally be allowed and how they have witnessed changes in behaviour e.g. much more engagement from children who may usually present challenging behaviour in class.

It's also been fascinating to see the children using their imaginations and developing their creativity.

Staff have been enthusiastic about activities and are often asking about where I've sourced resources from or how they can set up similar activities."

Judith Melville, Under the Trees outdoor officer



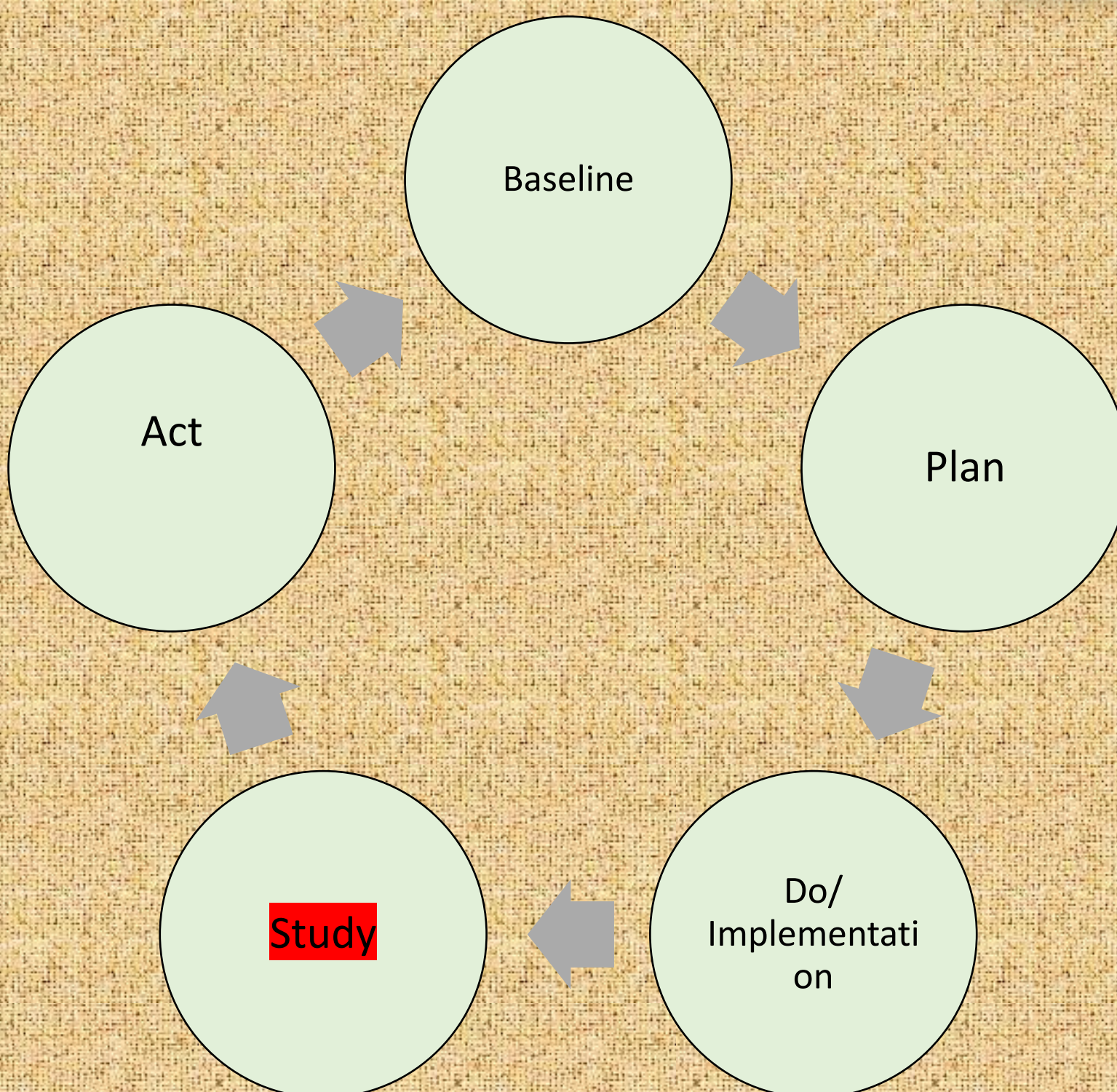


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Wellbeing



Using the 5 point scale to support discussion, children check in daily and can change their visual throughout the day to reflect their feelings. More children checked in with positive feelings on days when outdoor learning environment was accessible to them. Moreover, teachers and support staff noted the children's delight and enjoyment when outside. Many children reflected at the end of the day that their favourite part of the day was their time outdoors and were more animated in their discussions about what they achieved outdoors compared to their achievements inside.





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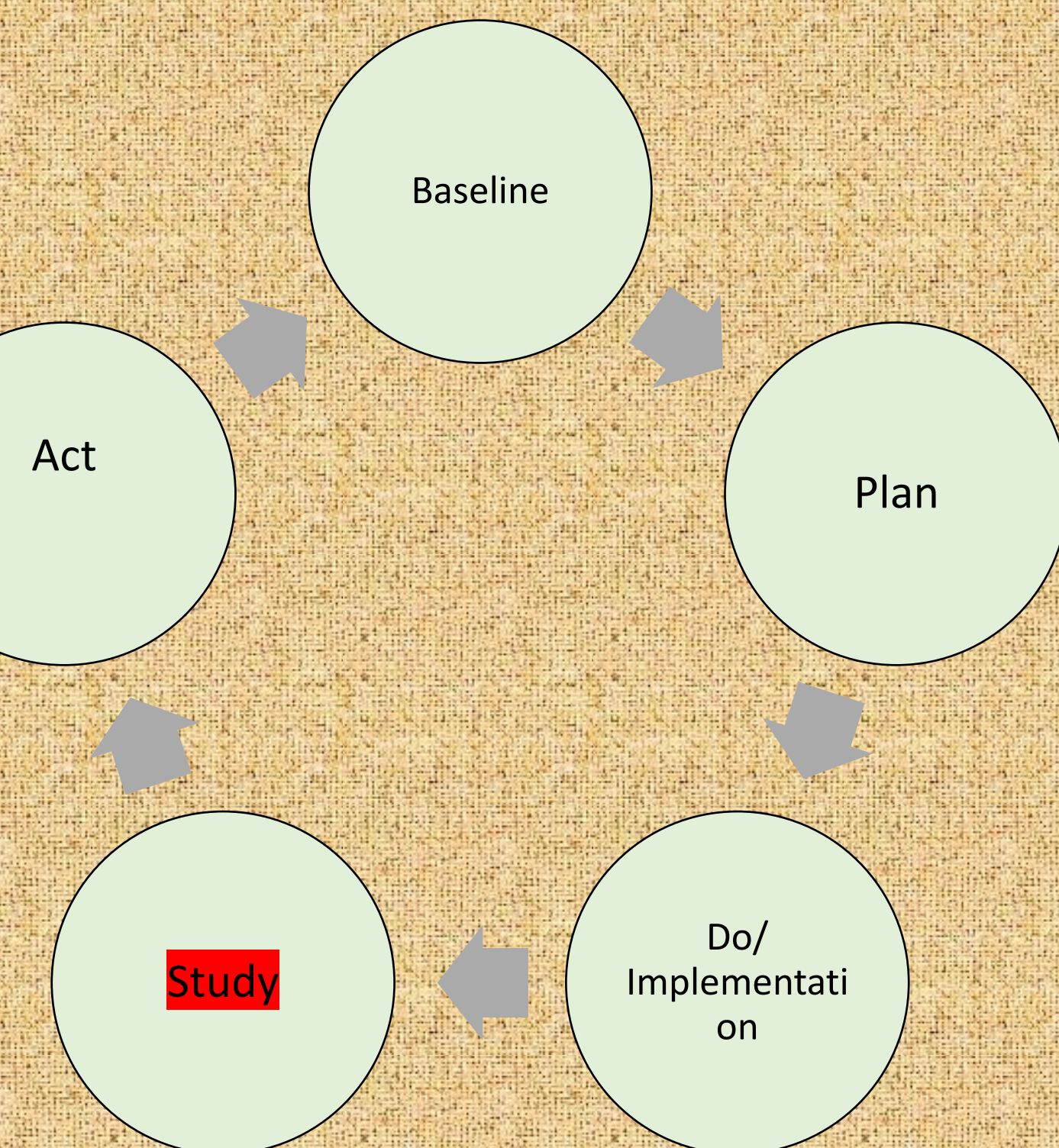
Tracking Children Outside



Teachers tracked children going outside by children signing “a register” (writing their name) as they went out and circling when they came back in. This allowed teachers to tick off names and see trends in who was accessing the outside area. It was observed that some children were out every session from the moment the doors were open to the call at the end of the session (time between 1 hour and 1 hour 20 mins).

Other children went out for part of the time. The tracking showed that all children accessed the outdoor area, however, some made the choice to play more regularly outdoors and some preferred to play indoors.

If teachers noted that some children had not been outside, they asked them if there were any activities they would like to see outside. For some children, it was helpful that a visual plan was shared which included information about what was on offer.





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Learning walks capturing children's feedback

How does being outside make you feel?

- Happy
- Fun
- Excited
- Calm
- Relaxed

What do you like doing outside?

- Making dens
- Rolling down the hill
- Climbing and making towers
- Making things
- Playing with my friends
- Pretend play (various answers given – e.g. shops, castles, schools, pirates, etc)
 - Using ropes
- Looking after animals
- Running around
- Using materials to build
- Looking for right angles/shapes
 - Just being outside
- Finding out new things
 - Building
 - Jumping about
- Making an obstacle course
- Making homes for animals
- Looking after the plants
 - Growing things

What are you learning outside?

- Working together
 - Listening
- How to put things together to make new things
- How to look after plants and things that grow



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Implications

The current building work had a completion date of July 2022. An extension to the project was accepted, however, we are still awaiting the completion of this extension.

Solution – After the initial delay and postponing the start of the project, we decided to proceed. Although we would have ideally been developing the new outdoor environment throughout the project, the short-term goal focused on developing teacher confidence, teaching skills and having a shared vision and focus.

Staffing has had implications, especially long-term absence. We have had to build sessions of free-flow up as we have never had a full complement of staff since the start of the project.

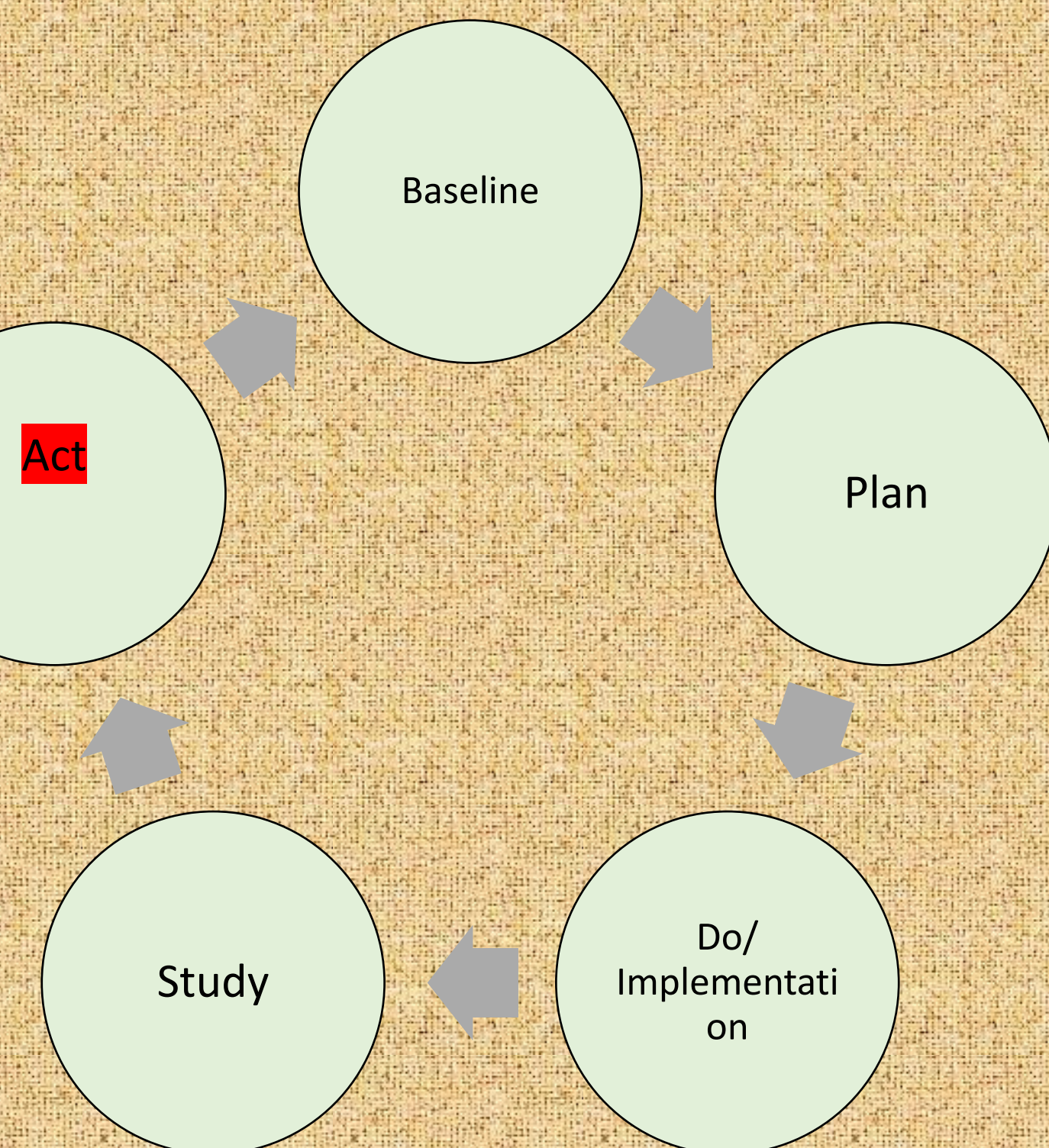
Solution – we had to close and limit areas inside to allow staff to supervise outside.

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The weather did impact some of the sessions. In particular, many staff sessions were cancelled due to severe weather warnings. This was often rearranged when staff had other commitments.

Solution – CPD training sessions were optional. All P1-3 staff received training alongside the outdoor education officer. P3 staff were included in this process as the “Under the Tree” company offered additional sessions. The commitment and enthusiasm of staff have been beyond expectations.



The fire safety officer inspected the playground and instructed all resources should be securely put away. Tyres were deemed fire hazards and we were instructed to remove all these.

Solution – appropriate storage identified. A storage cabinet has been provided for the school and will be built in the new grounds when the building is handed over to the school.





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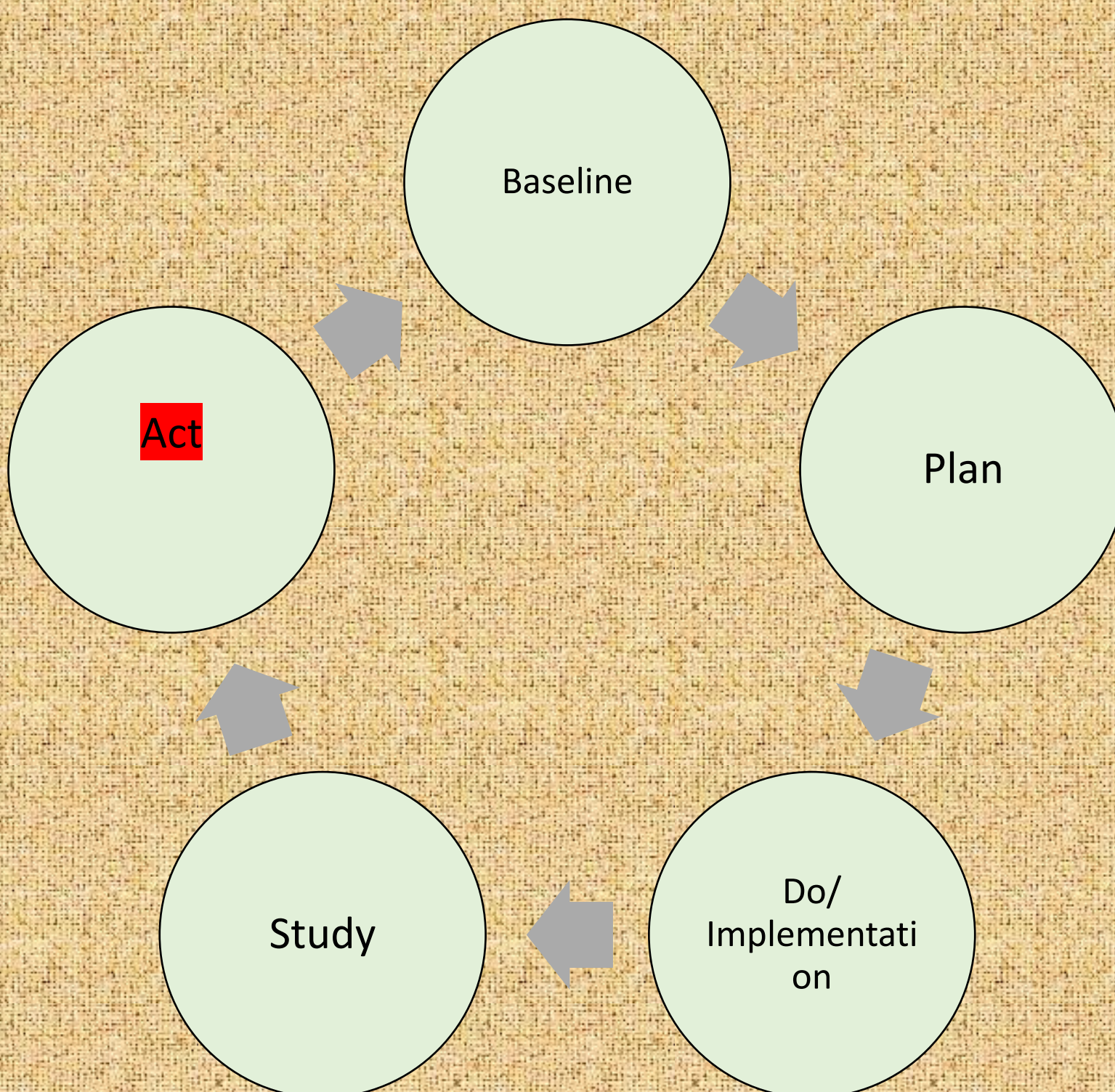
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Future Plans

We feel we are still at the start of our journey in many ways. The Froebel grant has given staff the confidence and skills to feel empowered to provide a continuous outdoor provision. We recognise the value and importance of giving pupils autonomy to choose how and where they learn. Continuous provision will continue in Maddiston Primary School and be developed by:

- Continuing to increase time in P1, P2 and P3 to allow complete free flow access to the outdoor environment to allow daily opportunities (except during severe weather warnings)
 - Equipping outdoor learning to be a continual provision within the new environment when extension work is completed. All stakeholders will be involved in deciding how this should look
 - Taking learning experiences outwith school, including fire pit experiences.
 - Building up resourcing. Eco-group will create a bank of resources
 - Prioritising play in curriculum design
 - Sharing outdoor learning and getting parental feedback at learning café
 - Planning IDL outdoor learning programmes for P1-3
 - Developing an outdoor playful pedagogy in P4-7
- Continuing to share practice. We have shared this with our cluster partners and schools within the council, who have come out to see play-in-action at Maddiston Primary School.
 - Creating a video of outdoor experiences and our journey so far





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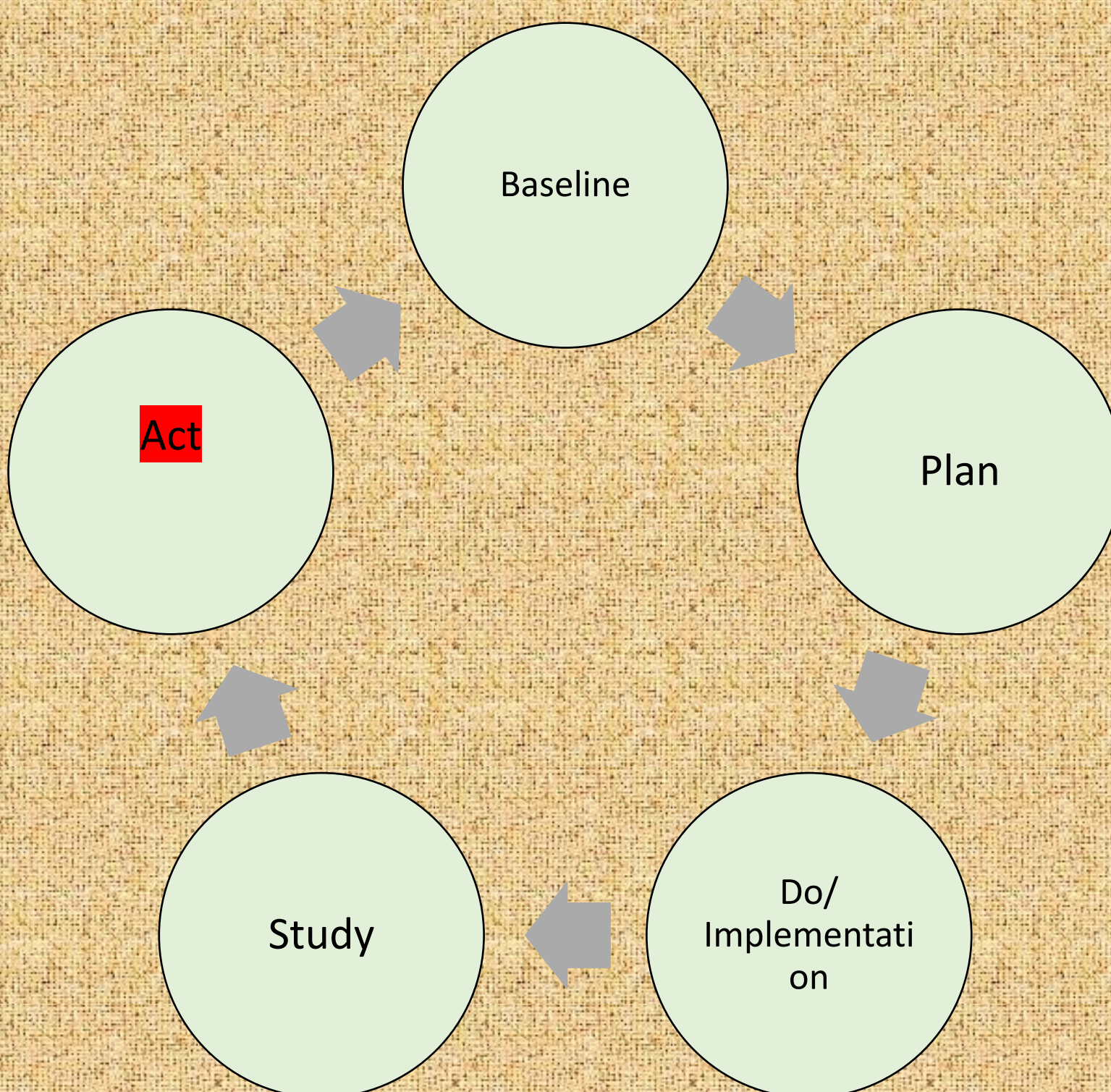
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Impact of funding:

- Shared understanding of the value of outdoor play and how high-quality outdoor play can be provided both indoors and outdoors
- Teachers increased their observations and time spent playing alongside children outside
- Children showed increased independence through decision making, activities, problem solving and dressing appropriately for weather conditions.
- Increased freedom of choice to allow children to make decisions about their learning
 - Children highly motivated in their learning with observations showing concentration and deep learning
 - Increased physical activity
 - Increased opportunities to have time outside
- Staff see potential for learning outdoors and have practical guidance on how to develop rich, challenging spaces
 - Increased staff confidence in taking learning outside
 - Increased staff confidence taking learning out into the community
- Children who stick to the same play opportunities inside are opting to play with different activities outside
 - Parents noting children are talking more about outdoor experiences
- Children have the choice to be outside or not so learning styles are respected and children's interests are followed
 - Children reflecting positively on outdoor experiences
 - Staff able to provide camp fire experiences with children and families
 - Supporting resourcing of outdoor materials
 - Raised profile of outdoor learning throughout the school





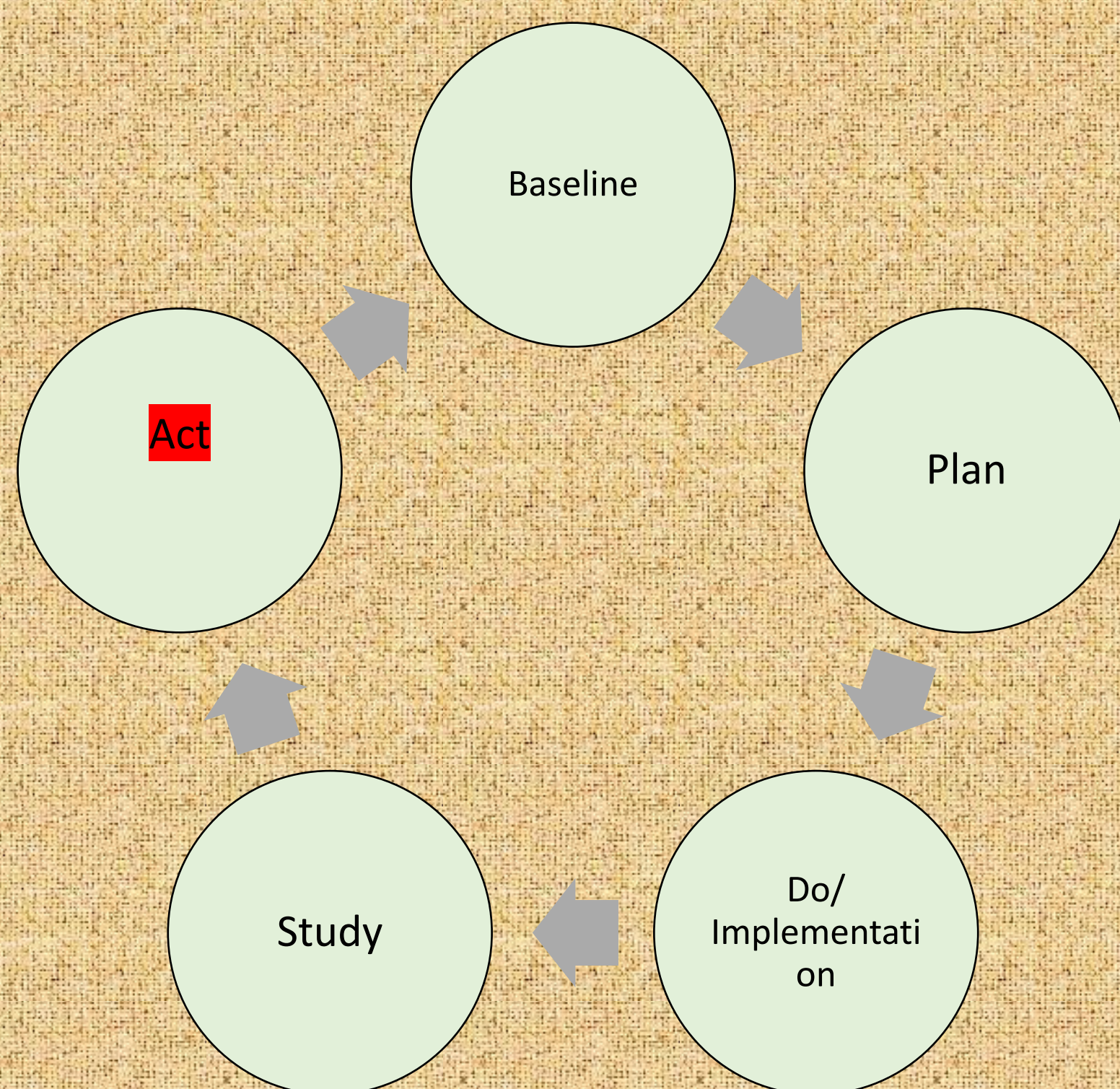
Short term - to develop a collective understanding empowering teachers to facilitate an outdoor provision

Long term - providing a continuous provision for outdoor play

Froebelian Principles



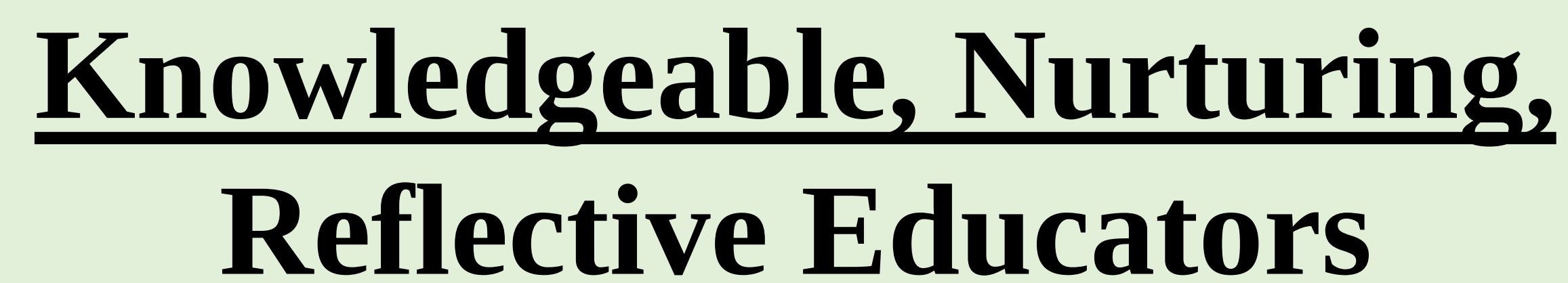
Play is the fundamental way children explore, express themselves and understand the world around them through rich, first hand experiences. We believe it time to play is essential for cognitive, social, and emotional development so children spend one-third of their school day in free-flow play, with no teacher agenda imposed upon them. This project aimed to develop opportunities to extend this play outdoors. Although teachers provided some provocations for activities, children had ample open-ended resources to allow for children to use their creativity and imagination.



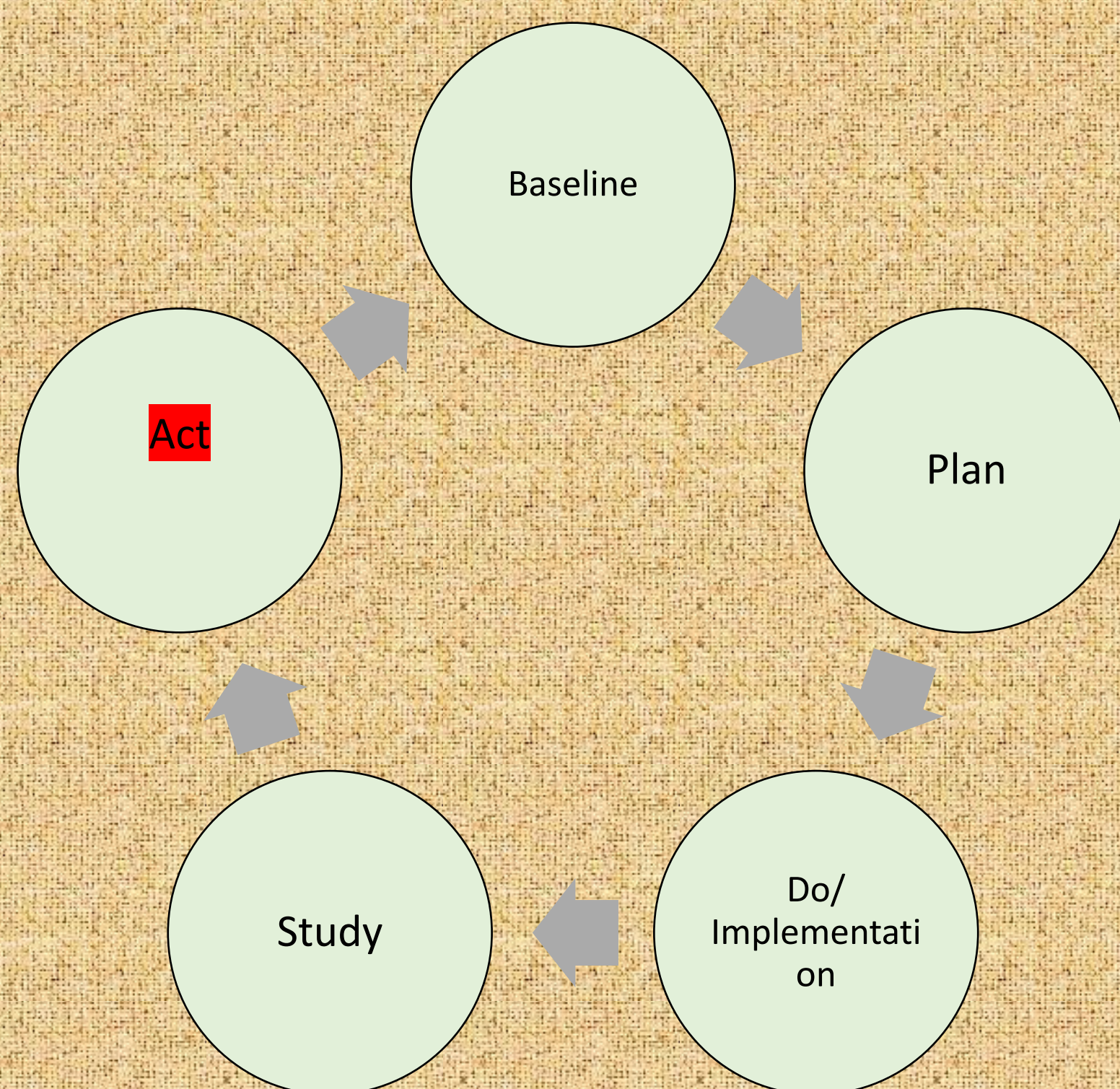
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Free-flow play differs from playful learning in that it is not teacher-directed. Teachers observed and facilitated learning, providing materials and experiences that matched the child's developmental stage and interests. We found this was more evident outdoors than indoors as teachers were observing and interacting more with the children. Parents also gave their knowledge and expertise of gardening.





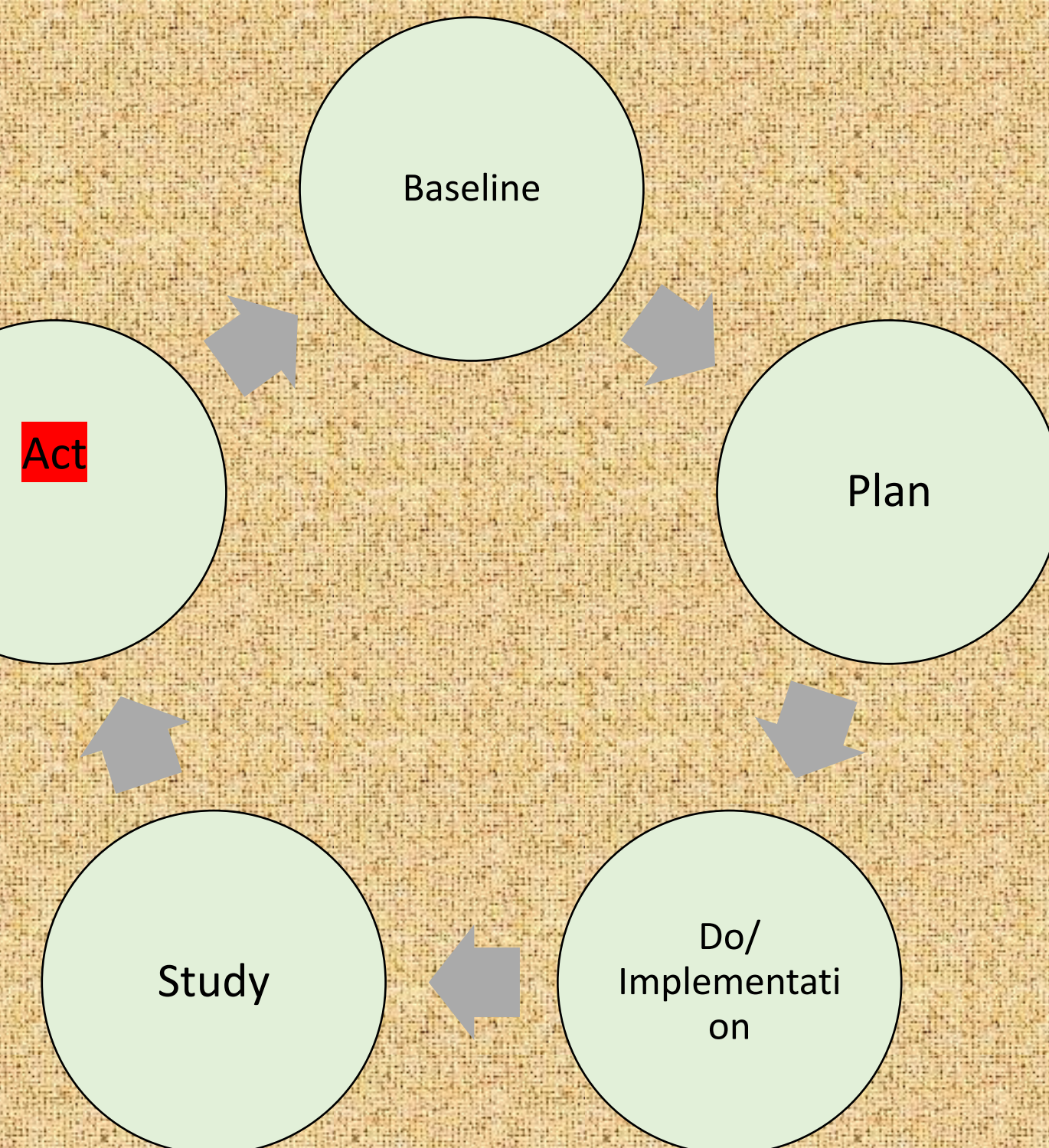
Short term - to develop a collective understanding empowering teachers to facilitate an outdoor provision

Froebelian Principles

Learning and spending time outdoors allowed for spaces where children could experience a connection to others, nature and themselves, fostering community, collaboration and learning in a shared, meaningful environment. They could see connections relating to their discoveries and their experiences outside, linking their knowledge by developing links between

Campfires were a great way to bring groups or classes together for sessions. They benefited from:

- Social interaction and collaboration through shared activities like storytelling, singing and eating
- The interconnectedness of the elements of fire with nature and the sensory engagement reinforcing the experiences with the environment
- Inclusion - the circular nature symbolises the “circle of life” and that everyone is included
- Rituals and rhythms of storytelling and music enhancing their sense of belonging





Building a Collective Commitment to Outdoor Learning- A Two Year Cycle



Project Aim

Short term - to develop a collective understanding empowering teachers to facilitate an outdoor provision

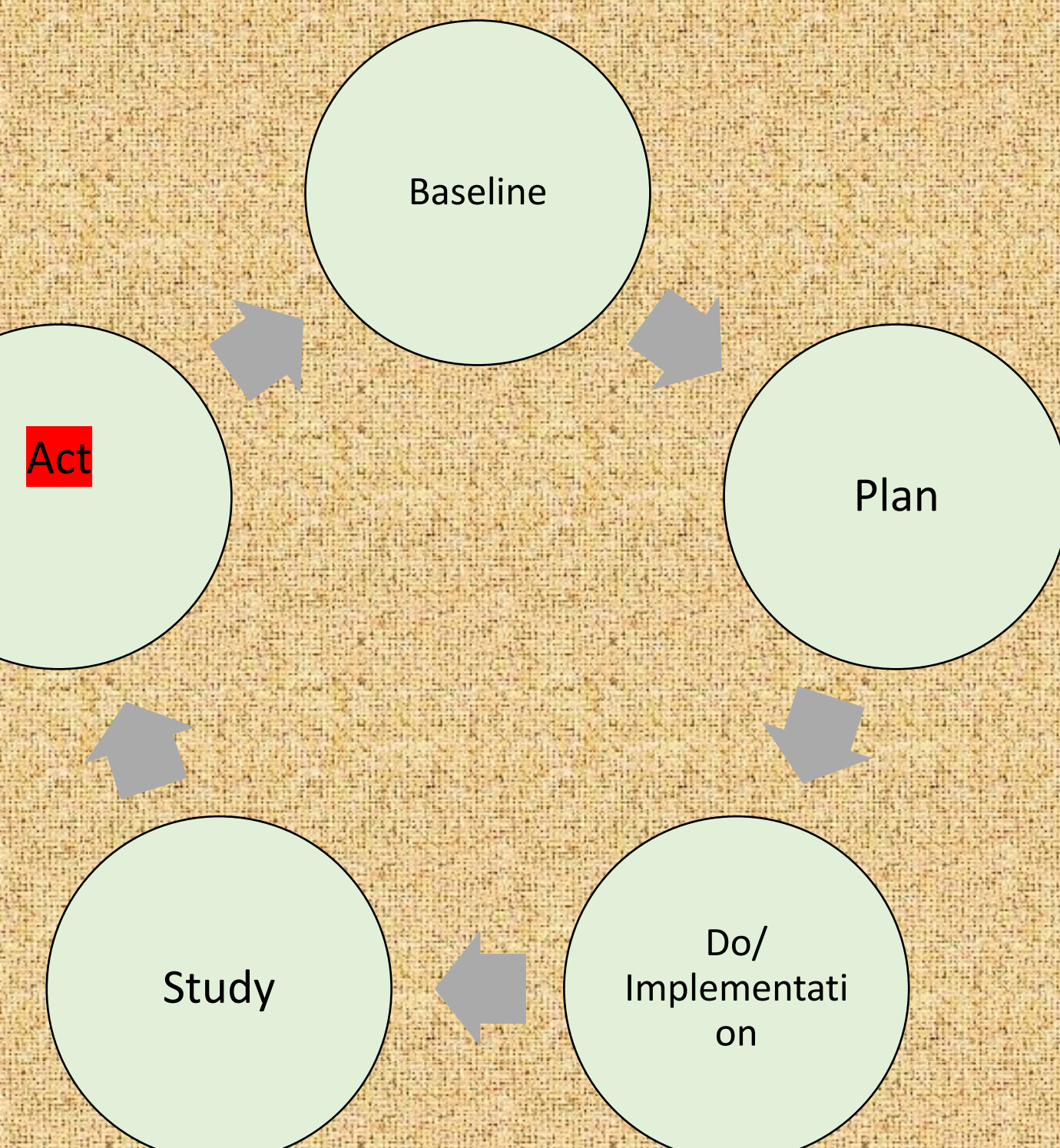
Long term - providing a continuous provision for outdoor play

Froebelian Principles



Freedom with Guidance

By recognising children's interests, talents and individual needs, the children were given freedom to choose through free-flow. They had the autonomy to play inside or outside, choose who they wanted to play with and what they wanted to play. There was no pressure on children to complete any tasks or pre-determined outcomes – children were free to express themselves and the adults nurtured and guided learning when and where appropriate.





Building a Collective Commitment to Outdoor Learning- A Two Year Cycle



Project Aim

Short term - to develop a collective understanding empowering teachers to facilitate an outdoor provision

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Froebelian Principles



Engagement of Nature and the Environment

The children were encouraged to connect with nature by planting and growing whilst outside. A gardening club was established with a focus on growing items that could be used for cooking. It was noted the children were much more responsible and respectful of the garden area when they were involved in the process of growing and cultivating.

