

PLAY AND PLAYFULNESS

Professional Support Document



IMAGINATION AND CREATIVITY

- Use Flexible and Fluid Thinking
- Invent Systems of Representation
- Explore New Possibilities



PLAYFUL EXPLORATION AND PROBLEM SOLVING

- Explore Properties of Objects
- Test Limits
- Negotiate Joint Undertakings
- Invent Approaches to Practical Problems



DIZZY PLAY

- Take Pleasure in Being on the Edge
- Take Pleasure in Sharing the Joy of Laughter

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NEW BRUNSWICK
CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK
FOR EARLY LEARNING AND CHILD CARE ~ ENGLISH

PLAY AND PLAYFULNESS

Professional Support Document



By Emily Ashton, Kim Stewart, Anne Hunt, Pam Nason, and Tara-Lynn Scheffel.

Published 2009 for Social Development, Government of New Brunswick by the Early Childhood Centre.

Series Editors: NB Early Learning and Child Care Curriculum Collection: Emily Ashton, Pam Whitty, and Pam Nason.

Copy Editor: Andrew Pulvermacher

Design and Layout: Mandy Wright

Printing and Binding: Taylor Printing Group Inc., Fredericton

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ISBN 978-1-55131-131-9

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

PRIMARY AUTHORS

Emily Ashton Kim Stewart Anne Hunt Pam Nason Tara-Lynn Scheffel

CONTRIBUTING AUTHORS

Tammy Basque	Judith Bass	Jill Bateman	Erin Brewer
Karen Clark	Ann Clayton	Darlene Clinch	Mary Cole
Angie Colford	Leisa Comeau	Jenny Davidson	Sarah Duguid
Loo Elton	Keltie Foster	Maria Gillis	Lynn Hatfield
Alexandra Keenan	Christa Keirstead	Natalie Lauren	Tonia Leavitts
Jenna LeBouthillier	Pauline Love	Tanya MacFarlane	Bernadette McKnight
Linda MacLean	Susan Meredith	Katie Parlee	Kathy Pictou
Cheryl Ritzhaupt	Cassandra St. Louis	Trish Van Goch	Cynthia O'Donnell
Sarah White			

UNIVERSITY OF NEW BRUNSWICK EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTRE RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT TEAM

Pam Whitty, Project Director, University of New Brunswick
Pam Nason, Project Director, University of New Brunswick
Emily Ashton, University of New Brunswick
Jan Ashton, University of New Brunswick
Kembubi Christie, University of New Brunswick
Anne Hunt, University of New Brunswick
Lisa LeBlanc, University of New Brunswick
Lindsay Maxwell, University of New Brunswick
Andrew Pulvermacher, University of New Brunswick
Sherry Rose, University of New Brunswick
Tara-Lynn Scheffel, University of New Brunswick
Kim Stewart, University of New Brunswick
Gillian Yeomans, University of New Brunswick

ON SITE SUPPORT FACILITATORS:

Jennifer Arsenault
Donna Baisley
Wanda Butt
Jennifer Curtis
Linda Gould
Tammie Hachey
Sharon Hachey
Lynda Homer
Shirley-Ann Howe
Kelly Naish
Sue Sears
Avril Wood-Toner

CONTRIBUTING CENTRES

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YM-YWCA DAY CARE AND KIDDIES KOLLEGE
YM-YWCA GONDOLA POINT RECREATION CENTRE
YORK STREET CHILDREN'S CENTRE INC.

THANK YOU TO THE CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES
FOR THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS TO THIS CURRICULUM DOCUMENT.



PLAY AND PLAYFULNESS



Children experience open and flexible environments where playful exploration, problem solving and creativity are encouraged and purposefully planned.



At play, children are empowered to learn on their own terms, in their own ways, and in their own time; this freedom is what distinguishes play from other activities. Play allows children to take the initiative, to test their physical and mental limits, and to explore positions of power and questions about good and evil. In play, children use words and symbols to transform the world around them, creating worlds where they can act “as if” rather than “as is.” Play is a pleasurable and highly motivating context in which children can explore possibilities and solve problems that are beyond their reach in ordinary life.

Early childhood communities that acknowledge the educative and developmental potential of play make provisions for a range of different kinds of play: playful exploration and heuristic play, for children to learn about the physical properties of materials and rules of thumb for problem solving; constructional play, for them to invent new connections as they design and create with mud, sand, twigs, cardboard, and blocks; socio-dramatic play, so that they can take up cultural roles and practices, play out their hopes fears and dreams, test relations of power, and imaginatively explore new possibilities; board games and word games, songs and rhymes that require deep concentration or just invite fooling around with language in order to take possession of it; games of courage and chance; outdoor play that exercises the muscles, lungs, heart, and mind — running, jumping, digging, swinging, rolling, and strolling; and shouting and squeaking and twirling and swirling— dizzy play for the pure pleasure of being on the edge and sharing the joy of laughter and life with others.



USING THIS DOCUMENT

This support document accompanies the *New Brunswick Early Learning and Child Care Curriculum Framework — English*. Building on the values, goals and intended learnings introduced in the Framework, additional ideas and suggestions for planning and practices are offered. This document presents possibilities, provides openings for collaborative explorations, and celebrates the work of New Brunswick early childhood educators who bring the Framework to life in their local centres. You will find examples that illustrate what some children and early childhood educators *have* done using the framework, rather than a model of what *should* be done. There are many other possibilities. We invite you to join us in the ongoing process of creating curriculum with and for our youngest children.

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Image of THE PLAYFUL CHILD

Play is a basic entitlement guaranteed by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Providing time, space and materials for children to play for the sake of playing, to engage deeply in pursuits of their own making, or to just fool around for the sheer pleasure of it is the educator's responsibility. The playful child is one full of the zest for living and learning.

Children at play are curious and competent explorers who use all their senses to find out about the people, places and things they encounter; and ingenious actors who reach beyond ordinary life to create imaginary worlds and transform their identities. They are resourceful inventors who design novel and innovative ways of doing things, courageous acrobats who dare to push the limits of their bodies in space, and clever-minded players who pit their wits against a common threat or push the limits of the rules that govern the game.



Cultural contexts of PLAY

At play, children reflect and reshape what they experience in ordinary life. Popular culture and superheroes often cross social and cultural boundaries in Canada, while more varied play themes, props, games and expectations for children may be culturally specific, reflecting our rich and diverse cultural heritage.

Different professionals, families, communities and cultures value play differently. Some uphold play as a fundamental right of children, others may value it primarily for its educational potential, and yet others more for its recreational benefits. Some families may see daring and physical risk taking as essential to the formation of character and courage, others may view it as unduly hazardous. And the cunning strategists and tricksters some celebrate for their cleverness may be criticised by others for being devious.

Bearing in mind that there are differences both between and within social and cultural groups, and similarities that bind us all together, provisions and practices must be sensitive to cultural dynamics and mindful of the need to build cohesive communities. Always negotiating the role of play within culture, educators provide responsive play environments in which children can re-enact their own cultural experience, explore the cultural experiences of their peers, discover commonalities and reinvent culture.



Learning Land by valerie

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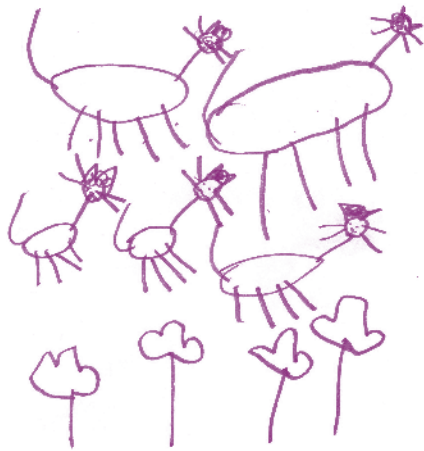
PLAY AND PLAYFULNESS AT A GLANCE

IMAGINATION AND CREATIVITY

Flexible and fluid thinking

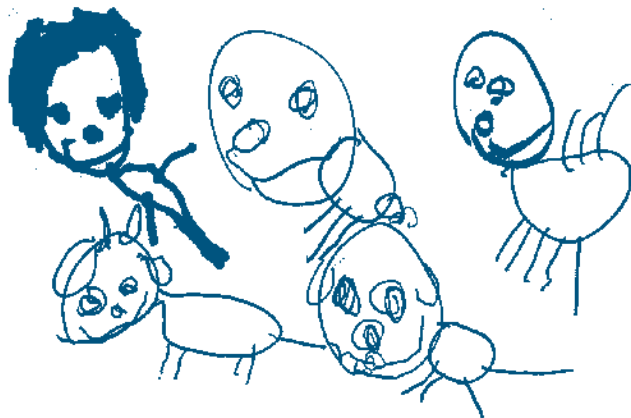
Symbols and systems of representation

Imaginary scenarios to explore new possibilities



Jenna

- Seeing people, places, and things in new ways
- Expressing unique and imaginative ideas
- Making their own words, marks, and movements
- Negotiating the meaning of symbols with others
- Taking up and reshaping cultural experiences
- Developing awareness of the imagined and ordinary worlds as they move between them in play
- Creating social spaces and shared narratives
- Creating alternative systems of power
- Coping with emotional pressure



Kaitlyn



Keona

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PLAYFUL EXPLORATIONS AND PROBLEM SOLVING

Explore properties of objects

Test limits

Negotiate joint undertakings

Creative approaches to practical problems



Keegan

- Playfully exploring and investigating the properties of objects
- Experimenting with action and reaction, cause and effect
- Creating patterns and relationships – sorting and matching, sizing and ordering, sequencing and grouping
- Developing a vocabulary to describe similarities and differences, patterns and relationships
- Testing their powers of observation and sensory discrimination
- Testing strength, speed, agility, and control over movement
- Negotiating rules of time, space, and roles
- Making collective plans and decisions about the directions of their play
- Developing a sense of fair play
- Developing sustained, shared thinking
- Raising questions and making hypotheses about how and why things happen
- Choosing from a range of materials, tools, and languages to investigate, experiment, and make their thinking visible.
- Creating imagined worlds in which they can explore possibilities and test alternative solutions

DIZZY PLAY

Pleasure in being on the edge.

Pleasure in sharing the joy of laughter.



- Engaging in rough and tumble play
- Experiencing exhilarating physical release
- Playing at games of disrupting and restoring order
- Making nonsense
- Clowning and physical humour



Nina

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Flexible and fluid thinking

WHAT'S INVOLVED IN LEARNING

- Seeing people, places, and things in new ways
- Expressing unique and imaginative ideas



Bringing
INDOOR
materials
OUTSIDE
allows
for flexible
and fluid
thinking.

Elicit and support innovative uses of materials and equipment

Open-ended
play materials
encourage
children
to think in
new and
fresh
ways!

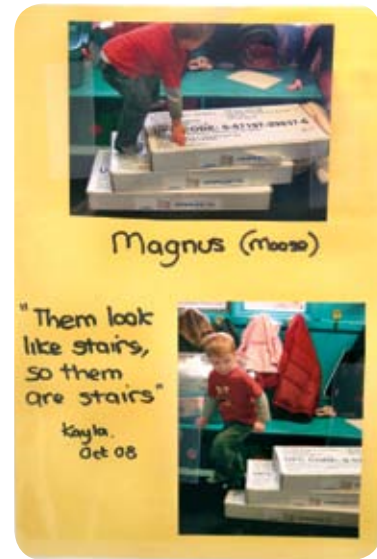
What would you
do with a box?



Invite different ideas and new ways of doing things



The Chatham Day Care Center encourages the use of familiar materials in new settings.
In the outdoor play area chalkboards are mounted on the fence and paper to paint is fastened to the roof.



~ Loo Elton Little Acorns Daycare Centre

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In 2008, "The Stick" was inducted into the National Toy Museum in the United States.



There is no right way to play with mud, sand and water.
The sheer pleasure of raw materials entices the child to dream, explore and invent new ways to use them.



~ Dorothy Hill (1977)



Display art and artifacts that show different ways of using media • Provide open-ended materials that inspire children

What equipment can be added to the playdough centre?
This is hair made with a garlic press!

How flexible are you about where materials are used? For example, can the blocks be taken to house keeping?



Snow muffins anyone? Yum!

COOKING OUTDOORS!



Encourage children to create their own dramatic play props

BOOKS TO READ TOGETHER

- Go Away, Big Green Monster*, by Edward Emberley
- Can't You Sleep, Little Bear?*, by Martin Waddell
- Where The Wild Things Are*, by Maurice Sendak
- Everett Anderson's Goodbye*, by Lucille Clifton
- The Ghost Tree*, by Bill Martin Jr. and John Archambault
- My Grandson Lew*, by Charlotte Zolotow

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Flexible and fluid thinking

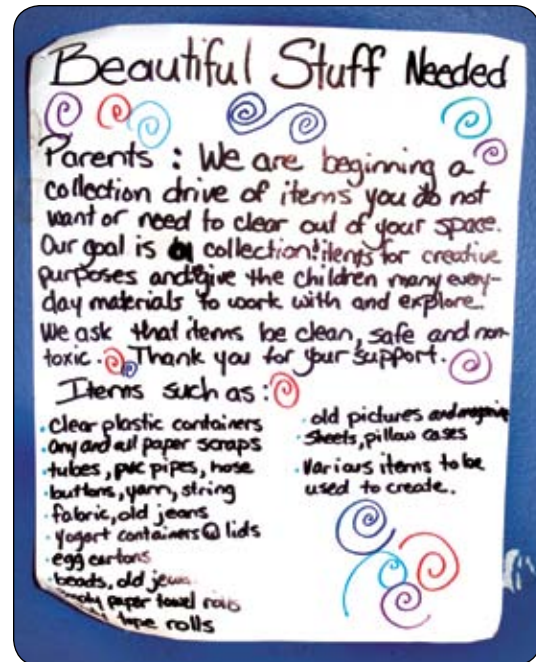
Beautiful Things

We called our collection of found and recycled materials "Beautiful Things". To begin our project, we sent a letter to families along with paper bags asking if children could bring in items from home. When the bags were returned we categorized the items and put them in to baskets on our art shelves. Materials included beads, old jewellery, stickers, different colour paper, zippers, and buttons. The collection drive was a huge success.

The children have the freedom to choose what they would like to use from the art shelf. We label everything and all the materials are within their reach. We cover a long table with paper and children may paint or collage anytime through the day.

We add new materials to our art shelf as often as we can. Lately we have been focussing on finding natural materials, such as moss and pebbles, to add to the collection. I went with my grandson to explore in the woods behind my home to find items for the collection. We found moss and have added it to the shelf. The moss adds an interesting twist to the beautiful collages.

Mary Cole Kids Choice Childcare Ltd.



"Recycling has become part of most people's lives. But before some items hit the recycle bin, they can be reused to create toys and art. This kind of 'recycling' inspires the imaginations of children and adults alike. Because there is no right or wrong way to create with junk, it encourages a child's creativity and helps develop problem-solving skills"

~ Canadian Child Care Federation (2001)



Symbols and systems of representation

WHAT'S INVOLVED IN LEARNING

- Making up their own words, marks, and movements
- Negotiating the meaning of symbols with others
- Taking up and reshaping cultural experiences
- Developing awareness of the imagined and ordinary worlds they move between as they play

MAKING MEANING TOGETHER



fishing with a cattail

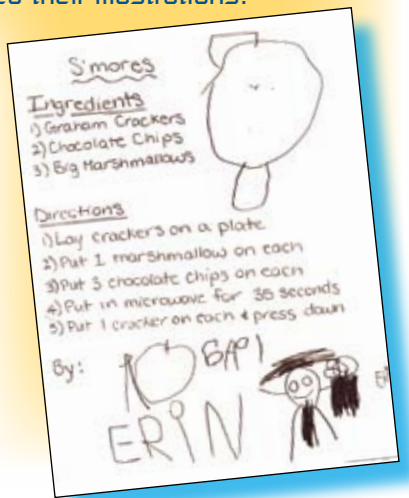
At play, children are empowered to use language on their own terms, in their own ways, and at their own time.

Erin and Rachel prepared and cooked S'mores following the written recipe. After eating the S'mores, they decided that the recipe needed pictures so they added their illustrations.

Pamela Nuttall Nason and Anne Hunt (1999, 1)



Together the children decide how to make a house with their bodies.



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“Oops, the basketball net fell down...
 ...now it's a bus!” – Lauren, Kevin, Moose, Ben



PLAYING WITH WORDS

Making new versions of old favourites



~ UNB Children's Centre



Making Movements



Making Marks

“I’M A CLOCK!”



While playing outside, I watched Spencer draw a large circle with a stick. He then laid down on the ground and, keeping his arms and legs straight, tried to shimmy around. I was confused as to what he was doing until I heard him chant, “Tick Toc...Tick Toc... Look Erin...I’m a clock!”

~ Erin Brewer Sussex Early Learning Centre

BOOKS TO READ TOGETHER

Imagine a Night, by Sarah Thompson

Imagine a Day, by Sarah Thompson

Imagine a Place, by Sarah Thompson

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Symbols and systems of representation

Clothespin Creations

I purchased some clothespins from the local Dollar Store to hang artwork on an indoor clothesline - what we call the art string. At one of the NB Curriculum Framework professional learning meetings, I had noted the idea of introducing clothespins in a basket to encourage fine-motor development. Excited to implement this idea, I showed the children how to clip the clothespins on the side of the container they were stored in; I left it at that, hoping they liked the idea. They seemed very interested in the clothespins and before long began connecting several pins to create various objects such as snakes and boats. I was awe-struck with their creations and snapped a couple pictures.

Within the next couple of days the children attempted much more detailed and complex creations such as dragons, robots, and even Nintendo Wii remotes! I have even seen them attach a clothespin to pieces of decorated cash-register tape and run around with them like kites. At that point, I offered to put on some music and they had a blast dancing around with them - as some have done with scarves or ribbons. How great that I can facilitate the passion that they have shown in the clothespin construction. Another awesome creation was when one child took a plastic toy pear from the dramatic play kitchen and attached a clothespin to the stem to create a nozzle for bug spray.

Not one day has passed in the last 2 months that the children have not picked up the bucket of clothespins and built something. Now, I am seeing the younger children start to imitate the older ones who initiated the clothespin frenzy. The infants (11 months and 15 months) will often head for the pins and either carry them around or try connecting two of them. It is amazing to me how the children have demonstrated the ability to engage in hours of imaginative and meaningful play through the creation of symbols.

With the accumulation of masterpieces, I thought "What better way to share them than an Art Show!" so I invited the parents to a potluck and art gallery premiere. We had a 10 minute slide show of the pictures and each child had a wall space, "Featuring..." It was a success!

Cassandra St Louis Precious Gems Play Center

Why this matters:

Cassandra is creating an environment conducive to learning by:

- Watching the possibilities unfold and making materials available, such as recyclables, popsicle sticks, and clothespins of different colours.
- Drawing on Enid Elliot's suggestion of "being present" in observing children's play
- Celebrating and documenting the children's clothespin creations by featuring them in an art show for families.





*"A robot"
– Erik*

*"A collar for
Mooney"
– Alison*

"A reindeer!" – Erik



"Bambi" – Caleb

*"Wii remotes"
– Alison & Caleb*

"Snake car"

*"Snake set-up" with a firepit for the
snakes to roast marshmallows.*



*"Rocket ships"
– Alison & Caleb*

*"It's bug spray"
– Alison*

*"A big, long boat"
– Caleb*

*Reese playing
with some
clothespins too!*

*Sharing our "jets" with
Caleb's Grampy.*

Other Possibilities:

How else could we extend this play?

- Adding different styles of clothespins such as wooden or metal: comparing and contrasting their styles, what they are used for, how they work, which is stronger, etc.
- Providing mark making materials for representing their creations.
- Adding some glue, paint, and other art materials near the clothespins and seeing what happens!

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Create Imaginary Scenarios

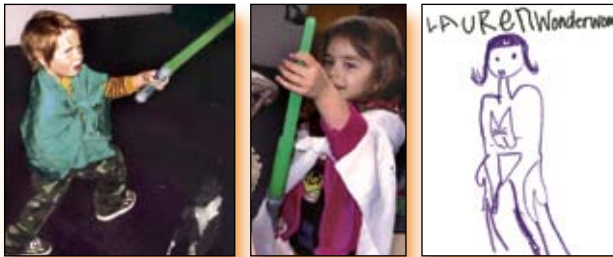
WHAT'S INVOLVED IN LEARNING

- Creating social spaces and shared narratives
- Creating alternative systems of power
- Coping with emotional pressure

In imagination, [children] fully enter worlds that... include their re-told experiences, the stories they have read, and the movies they have watched. When adults play with children they can likewise enter those worlds not to observe but to participate with children... ~Brian Edmiston (2007, 12)



**CREATING
IMAGINARY
WORLDS**



Dead Everything

By Lauren

The princess was walking to the zoo. A pirate came and killed the princess.

The unicorn kissed the pirate. The knight killed the pirate. The fairy killed the pirate. The princess woke up. The pirate killed the fairy. The princess woke up and killed the fairy.

The dragon killed the fairy. Horses and unicorns and dragon killed the fairy. The unicorns and knights and princesses and horses and fairies and pirates are all dead.

The end.

Children's play themes involve big and serious issues which commonly include death, loss, loneliness, abandonment and being cared for or nursed. Weapon play certainly provides opportunities for these themes to be explored and also involves the common dominant theme in children's play – namely power, and being in control or controlled by others. ~ Diane Rich (2005, 4)

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Much to the children's delight, Roberta Miller used a large cardboard box to enclose an area of the room. The children made signs and designs on the new wall and the space was used as an imaginary house, a dungeon, a jail and then a doghouse before the wall started to fall down from so much use!

- Big Bear Preschool

From the earliest 'pretend I'm the mama and you're the baby,' play is the model for the life-long practice of trying out new ideas. Pretending is the most open-ended of all activities...Pretending enables us to ask 'What if?'

-Ujvian Gussin Paley (2004, 92)

BOOKS TO READ TOGETHER

Roxenboxen, by Alice McLerran and Barbara Cooney

Changes, Changes, by Pat Hutchins

How to Catch a Star, by Oliver Jeffers

Puff the Magic Dragon, by Peter Yarrow and Lenny Lipton



Joshua

This stegasaurus is getting ready to leave on a rocketship with all the other dinosaurs.

Building Block Worlds



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Create Imaginary Scenarios

“You need to comb it first!”

The previous evening Olivia had a haircut and I invited her to draw a picture of the experience. I displayed her work on the wall in a dramatic play area.

One of our roles as educators is to “play along, and provide ideas, materials and information for children to enrich their imaginary play.” I provided a prop box and invited Olivia to the hair salon.

When Brooklyn arrived we invited her to join. The girls decided together who would be the first person to have a haircut.

One of our roles as educators is to “play along, and provide ideas, materials and information for children to enrich their imaginary play.”

Brooklyn asked, “Olivia, are you ready?” Olivia sat in the chair and Brooklyn placed the black hairdresser’s cape over her shoulders. Olivia looked at me and stated: “Brooklyn is getting my hair done.” Brooklyn asked Olivia, “Did the hairdresser do this?” Olivia nodded her head in agreement.

Brooklyn then asked, “Olivia, did that hurt?” She responded “No” and then asked, “After you’re done, can I do yours?” Brooklyn replied, “O.K.,” as she applied shampoo from the bottle to Olivia’s hair. Olivia instructed, “You need to comb it first.” Brooklyn agreed and said, “I like this one,” and chose a black brush to brush out Olivia’s hair.



Fred had watched with interest the interactions between Brooklyn and Olivia in the hair salon. When Olivia left the salon, Brooklyn said, “Fred, sit down,” and she placed the client’s cape around his shoulders. Fred sat patiently as Brooklyn brushed his hair before cutting and drying it.

Brooklyn, I wonder who will be your next client? If I need a hairdresser, I should make an appointment with you because you pay such close attention to your work.

Maria Gillis Unicorn Children's Centre Inc.



Why this matters:

Through this dramatic play, Olivia revisited her experience of the previous evening as a client having her hair trimmed. Also, Brooklyn did not need or desire for me to intervene or to direct her activities with Olivia and Fred. She used her imagination and her experiences to participate in her own way. As educators, we encourage

children to “represent their experiences in their own way.” I often wish that the children’s parents could observe their children firsthand here, seeing the variety of expressions on their faces, hearing the language development, and appreciating the roles the children have chosen to play.

María Gillis Unicorn Children’s Centre Inc.

Other Possibilities:

Local industries and parents’ work varies from community to community, but it is always a rich source of experience that children make sense of through play. In New Brunswick, local occupations such as fishing, farming, and logging industries offer fruitful possibilities for play scenarios; in addition, there are perennial favourites such as playing hospital, school, house, library, store, post-office, and hair salon.



YMCA Preschool and Afterschool Adventures



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For Reflection

Do you take time to play with open-ended materials as a way of exploring your own creativity? Think about how the children may view and represent their world.

Think about cultural notions of play. What do you consider play? What do families in your centre think about play? How do children view play?

When children share their symbol making systems (mark making/storytelling/symbolic representation) how do you honour their systems? How would you encourage children to share their systems with other children and families? How do you document their process?

Are materials and props in your room easily accessible to children? Do children select their own materials? Think about the variety/range of materials available. Can children transport materials from one area to another? Consider how often you change and rotate materials throughout your room.

How do you inspire children and enhance their imaginative potential? Think about materials that inspire. What experiences and role models have been sources of inspiration recently for the children's play and art work in your centre?

How do you intervene when fantasy play (e.g. superhero play) is disruptive? For example — do you enter as a character? Do you change the tone of play by dropping your voice to a whisper as you enter the play? Do you redirect or refocus the play by inviting children to draw, paint, or scribe superhero stories?

How do you create spaces and time to connect with families? How do the lives of families enter imaginary play? As the educator, how do you share play scenarios with families to gain insight into children working through complex life situations?





Francis



Morgan

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Properties of Objects

WHAT'S INVOLVED IN LEARNING

- Playfully exploring and investigating the properties of objects
- Experimenting with action and reactions, cause and effect
- Creating patterns and relationships—sorting and matching, sizing and ordering, sequencing and grouping
- Developing a vocabulary to describe similarities and differences, patterns and relationships

In providing play material for [infants and toddlers] it is essential to ensure that there is a great variety and richness of experience offered, giving the infants the opportunity to explore with mouths and hands, a wide range of textures and shapes.

~ Elinor Goldschmied and Sonia Jackson (2004, 92)



Is it...?

- wet
- sticky
- smooth
- rough
- soft
- heavy
- cold
- hot
- squishy
- prickly
- bumpy
- slimy
- dry

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Creating patterns by ordering and sequencing



PLAYFUL EXPLORERS...

- ...make mud pies
- ...lay on the grass
- ...build snow sculptures
- ...catch the wind
- ...watch the clouds
- ...jump in leaves
- ...dig a hole
- ...catch rain drops
- ...splash in puddles
- ...stop and listen



"LOOK, I MADE A TRIANGLE!"

Just before snack time Erin had been working on a shape puzzle and talking to me about circles, squares, and triangles. After Erin helped tidy up and went to wash her hands she was waiting for the rest of her friends to join her. I watched her fold and unfold her napkin a few times. Suddenly she called out, "Look Bernadette,

I made a triangle."



~ Bernadette McKnight Sussex Early Learning Centre

BOOKS TO READ TOGETHER

Mama Do You Love Me?, by Barbara Joosee

Koala Lou, by Mem Fox

Meet Max and Roxy, by Karen Huszar

Knuffle Bunny, by Mo Willems



I notice Spencer sitting on the carpet playing with our plastic bug collection. I ask him what he is doing and he tells me he is sorting the bugs. "Some are really big and some are really small. Here is where I'm putting all the dragonflies. There are two summer bugs, two flies, and lots of other ones. Look at this HUGE one, Jenna!" Spencer asked, "What is this one"? I explain that it is a tree bug and he can learn more about them in our bug book.

Why this matters:

Spencer loves bugs. He sorts and classifies them by colour, size, and species. He counts all the bugs and knows most of their names. Spencer is eager to learn more about bugs from books and the Internet.

~ Jenna LeBouthillier Sussex Early Learning Centre



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Properties of Objects

Sound Baskets

I read about sound boxes for preschool-aged children and thought the idea could be modified into a treasure basket for infants.

I knew my centre had empty baby fruit containers that were just the right size for babies to handle and the containers were clear so the children could see inside. I filled the containers with objects that provided a range of colours, shapes, sounds and textures such as beans, rice, pasta and buttons. I used packing tape to seal the containers and put them in a basket with low sides so the infants could reach inside.

When one child starts playing with a shaker it is an invitation for others to join. The children interact with each other as they shake and dance to the sounds of their noise makers.

~ Ann Clayton Kids Choice Toddler Centre



To learn more about heuristic play and treasure baskets:

Elinor Goldschmied & Sonia Jackson. 2004. People under Three: Young Children in Day Care. 2nd ed. Routledge: London.

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Why this matters:

Ann's carefully selected items for the containers provide a range of sounds for children to explore and manipulate on their own. As the infants and toddlers play, educators are close by to observe and record their interactions with the materials and each other. Over time, children's engagement with materials, often called heuristic play, deepens.

Other Possibilities:

What other items could be used for the sound boxes? Would smaller or larger containers create different sounds? What about creating a touch and/or smell basket? How about a basket containing all natural items? What other "treasures" could you include in a basket for children to explore?

Sound baskets encourage Heuristic Play with Objects

Heuristic play actively encourages exploration by using and developing children's senses. Children instinctively investigate objects that interest them, making discoveries through taste, touch, smell, sound and how they look. During the activity children explore different materials and objects without adult interference. The role of the adult is to support the children, collect objects, set out the activity and to observe.

Objects used in Heuristic play are simple everyday and natural items that provide opportunities for:

- filling and emptying
- slotting together
- building and balancing
- selecting and discarding
- recognizing differences and similarities

The objects are often set out in Treasure Baskets — large, interesting, lidded boxes that hold different items to explore.

Excerpted from: South Fallsworth Primary School. 2008. *Heuristic Play*. Manchester, UK. <http://www.southfallsworth.oldham.sch.uk/page14/page25/page57/page57.html>





It will be helpful to explore more of your own relationship to risk taking. Dispositions toward risk are different for each of us. Our own tolerance and safety thresholds need to be acknowledged.

~ Deb Curtis and Margie Carter (2000, 74)



As children design structures they make decisions that require judgements regarding **balance**, **shape**, **weight**, **size...**



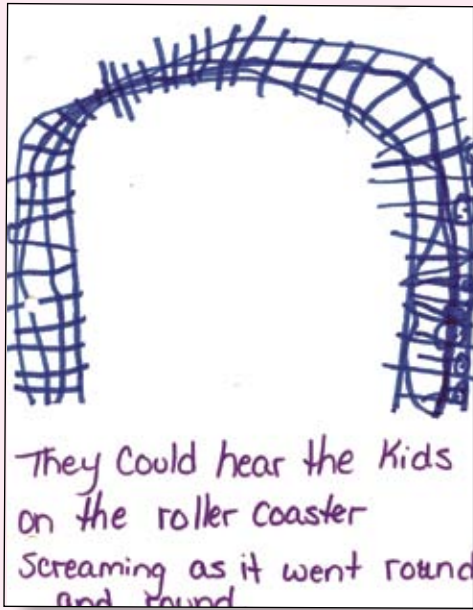
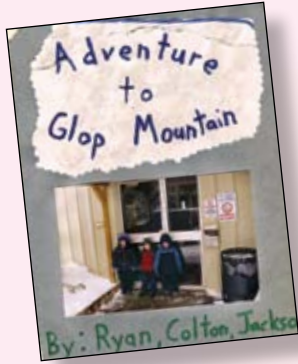
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Other Possibilities:

There are many opportunities for children to take risks when playing outdoors: How high to swing? How far to stray? How fast to roll? An attentive adult by a child's side helps build confidence and assures children that they are not risking too much. As well, taking risks

vicariously - by identifying with or admiring others - enables children to experience the pleasure and exhilaration of risk taking. Books, drawings, and paintings serve such a purpose.



by the Southend Day Care Kids
The Adventures of the Crazy Rollercoaster

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Negotiate the Complexities of Joint Undertakings

WHAT'S INVOLVED IN LEARNING

- Negotiating rules of time, space, and roles
- Making collective plans and decisions about the directions of play
- Developing a sense of fair play



We often respond to children's conflict from our own sense of justice and fairness, which is often quite different from what children want in a given situation.

We often underestimate children's ability to work things out, even when they are infants. We forget to look for the underlying motivations of the behaviours in question.

~ Margie Carter and Deb Curtis (2000, 97)

After working very hard on a block vehicle, Creston brings it over to show me. He explains its many functions and decides he would like to keep it until tomorrow. I offer to put it up high on the cubbies. Creston tells me, "We need a sign too in case there are tall friends." I ask him what it should say and after some deliberation he decides on "Don't Touch, Don't Sneak". Creston asks, "Erin can you do one part and I'll do the other?" "Sure" I reply and we finish the sign together.

- Erin Brewer Sussex Early Learning Centre



Group games... provide many opportunities for making rules, seeing their effects, modifying them and comparing what happens.

~ Constance Kamii and Rheta DeVries, (1980, 28)

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Observing Puzzle Making:

- How are children sorting and selecting pieces?
- Are children rotating pieces to try different orientations?
- Do children use the picture on the box as a guide?
- How do you decide when is a child ready for a new puzzle challenge?

“Who wants a turn on the computer? Better write your name down!”

~ Jenny Davidson
Sussex Early Learning Centre

COOPERATION OR COMPETITION?

Almost any game can be made into a cooperative game. For example, in the game of Concentration or Memory, anyone who remembers a card can help out the person whose turn it is.

Some board games, such as Harvest Time are designed as cooperative games where all players work together to overcome Old Man Winter.

How can games such as Musical Chairs and Simon Says be modified to encourage ongoing participation by all players?

BOOKS TO READ TOGETHER

- Growing Vegetable Soup*, by Lois Ehlert
- Stone Soup*, by Marcia Brown
- Pancakes, Pancakes!*, by Eric Carle
- Mean Soup*, by Betsy Everitt

You Can't Say "You Can't Play"

Equal participation is, of course, the cornerstone of most classrooms. This notion usually involves everything except free play, which is generally considered a private matter. Yet, in truth, free acceptance in play, partnerships, and teams is what matters most to any child.

~ Vivian Gussin Paley (1992, 20)



Jeremy-Jesse spends lots of time playing Tic-Tac-Toe and teaching other children how to play the game. One morning as Jeremy-Jesse drew a picture he told me: "This is a Tic-Tac-Toe game but you use your pencil to put the X's and O's in, not those plastic thingies." His drawing inspired other children to create their own versions of Tic-Tac-Toe.

~ Katie Parlee Sussex Early Learning Centre

Celebrating a game well played!



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Negotiate the Complexities of Joint Undertakings

Sam and Francis Want to Play Pirates

Sam and Francis were having a bad day. I observed them several times in different parts of the room with their hands on their chins looking glum. These two friends don't usually have any trouble finding some interesting adventure to act out so I asked them what was going on and they explained that nobody wanted to play with them.

Upon further questioning it came out that nobody wanted to play the same game they had planned for that day. I continued to watch to see how they would solve this dilemma. As Lola's ballerina school danced past and Jacob and Laura went on a picnic nearby, Sam and Francis sat and pondered because nobody wanted to play pirates.

Soon I saw them talking to Russell and Matthew about building and suddenly there was a great flurry of activity as they all started hauling the large blocks up to their favourite spot up on the steps.

The unfortunate part was that they only had a few moments to build before the cleanup music started. I could tell that this was frustrating for them so I talked about how helpful it is to get started playing right away and about how other children often join in when a great game is underway.

The next day I noticed that the pirate ship was built first thing and I praised them for their decision to get right to it.

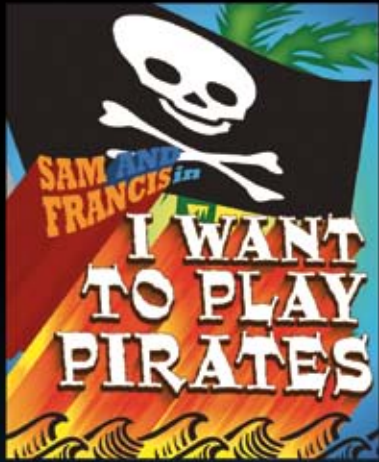
~ Jill Bateman UNB Children's Centre

Why this matters:

Negotiations in this busy social atmosphere are often difficult. Sam and Francis are very imaginative children who usually have a crowd of children clamouring to join in with their great ideas. They experienced a set back in their play on this particular day and had to figure out a different way to meet their goals.

Jill supported Sam and Francis by offering strategies to support them in solving their own problems. Jill made the most of this learning opportunity and followed through with positive encouragement when Sam and Francis used their new strategies the next day. When educators recognize critical moments, provide strategies, and reinforce successes, children's abilities to negotiate with others are strengthened.





SAM AND FRANCIS WANT TO PLAY PIRATES
— BUT NO BITES FROM THE OTHER CHILDREN!



EVERYONE
IS ALREADY
DANCING OR
HAVING A
PICNIC!



MAYBE IF WE
JUST START....



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Question, compare, estimate, predict, hypothesise, plan, test, represent, evaluate...

Problems encountered in play often have many possible solutions, and provide the opportunity to “wander over the mathematical landscape”.
~ Judith Van Hoorn et al. (2007, 188)



BOOKS TO READ TOGETHER

- Jack and the Missing Piece*, by Pat Schories
- Mrs Armitage on Wheels*, by Quentin Blake
- The Shopping Basket*, by John Burningham
- Sadie and the Snowman*, by Allen Morgan

The large spaces found outdoors allow children to use the whole body to explore, plan and carry out their plans without restrictions on noise or activity.
~ Jane Perry (2003, 26)

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Creative Approaches to Working Out Practical Problems

How Can We Make the Ball Go Up?

During the morning activities Nigel, Iain and Ryland decided to see how they could make the ball go up using the wooden blocks and ramp sections.

They had to find just the right way to set it up like a teeter-totter and the right placement of the ball. As well, they had to figure out how hard to step on the board to make the ball go up and not just roll away. They all worked together, sharing ideas and helping each other set up the boards and the balls.

It was a lot of fun for the boys who learned how to get the results they were looking for and learned to share and help friends at the same time.

*~ Trish Van Goch and Cynthia O'Donnell
Crafty Corner Childcare Centre*



Why this matters:

By making time, materials and space available, Trish and Cynthia created opportunities for the boys to initiate the activity themselves, defining their own problem and devising ways to solve it. As is often the case with practical problem solving, the boys knew what results they were aiming for and devised a strategy to get there, testing and refining their predictions about weight, balance, levers and force along the way. A collaborative effort, solving this problem required sustained and shared thinking that involved exchanging ideas, sharing materials and helping each other.

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For Reflection

How do you support children in language development through their play? Think about restating and extending children's responses using precise language to name things; consciously expand children's vocabularies.

Walk about your room with children's eye level in mind. How do you support children's access to spaces, objects, and materials? What is available to children to manipulate and investigate?

How does your environment encourage healthy risk taking? Where do children run, climb, and jump? Think about the distinction between challenging and hazardous environments.

In what ways do children challenge each other to test their limits? How do children support each other through these challenges? During this process, consider your role and your influence in balancing safety with courage. Help children to make decisions about participation.

Examine your own beliefs about competition and cooperation. Where do these fit in the play environment? Consider cultural notions underlying these concepts.



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Consider your interactions with children who are negotiating conflict during play. How do body language, facial expressions, and physical responses help children? How do you encourage them to reflect on their behaviour? How do you model rules of fair play to solve their problems?

How do you help children to seek multiple solutions to the problems they encounter? Think about *how* questions and *why* questions that promote children's theory building in order to extend and deepen their understanding.

How do you promote and extend children's thinking at play? Think about how to follow their lead, ground your language in what they are doing/saying, and provide materials, books, and experiences that enable them to extend their thinking and play.

How does your centre provide for constructive play activities? Think about blocks, for both in and out of doors, and other building materials such as wood and nails, cardboard boxes and glue.



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The Best Part of My Day...

Usually there's music involved and sometimes dancing other times with props like ribbons, magic wands and dress up clothes. The children have such great facial expressions that make me laugh. It's good for all ages.

~ Alexandra Keenan

Peri Winkle Blue Day Care/Preschool



One day in the baby/toddler room we placed all sorts of materials out for the children to glue onto paper. One of the items we had set out was confetti. The children started throwing the confetti around and they had no interest in gluing anything. Sarah and I joined in. We could take big handfuls and let it fall from the sky onto the children. Sarah would blow the confetti and the children would burst out loud laughing. We had lots of fun.

~ Tammy Basque and Sarah White
Crafty Corner Childcare Centre



~ Lynn Hatfield and Linda MacLean J.O.Y. Preschool

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Being on the Edge

“Whoa! My Castle”

Today I watched as Lily and Ethan played with the wooden blocks. They worked together to build and tear down many structures. They also tried stacking the blocks in many different ways. It seemed as if they were trying to see how high they could make a structure. Lily even decided to climb onto the table so that she could build it taller.

Susan came over to watch what they were doing. Ethan looked at her and said, “I’m making a castle!”

Laughing Lily said, “Whoa! My castle,” as she and Ethan knocked the castle down together.

Next they took the blocks and laid them out flat – close together to cover the surface of the table. “Angie! Look,” said Ethan, “A park!”

They proceeded to take the park apart and started stacking the blocks again until the castle fell down. Lily laughed, “Look! It fall down.”

They quickly built it back up. Ethan then moved the structure from the table to the shelf, being very careful not to drop any blocks.

“What is that?” I asked. “Mommy,” he responded and then left his castle alone as he went to play with something else.

I asked him if his structure was to show his mother and he nodded his head yes.

By building structures and tearing them down, Ethan and Lily are taking pleasure in disrupting and restoring order. They are also developing their communication skills by using language to express thoughts, feelings, and ideas.

~ Angie Colford Just Kids Day Care Center Inc.



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Why this matters:

Building and demolition cast children in powerful roles - fully in control of the universes they create. The deep concentration during construction lies in contrast to the pleasure and hilarity of the crash. Learning about how blocks and sand respond to forces that children apply is a happy bi-product of both creation and demolition with these media.

Other Possibilities:

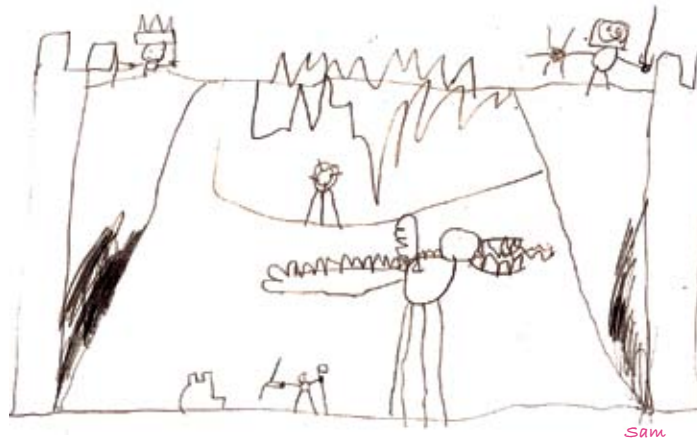


Today was a beautiful summer day so we packed up the wagon and set off to explore our neighborhood beach. As soon as we arrived at the beach, Ivory and Lauren started filling buckets to make sand castles. It wasn't long before Owen and Ty joined in.



After throwing rocks in the water and making mud pies, we gathered back at the sandcastles. I could feel the excitement so I said, "Go ahead. Stomp the sand castles!" The smiles and laughter said it all.

~ Karen Clark Clark's Early Learning Program



Sam

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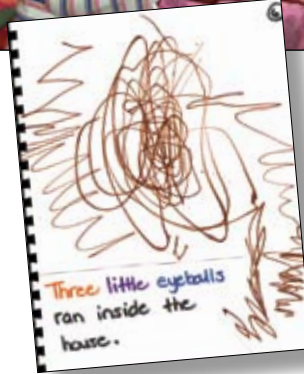


Take pleasure in the exaggeration of sounds and rhymes of language.

Sing Silly Songs



- Apples and Bananas
- John Jacob Jingleheimer Schmidt
- Down By the Bay
- Alice the Camel
- Raindrops and Lemon Drops
- Little Rabbit Foo-Foo
- Baby Bumblebee



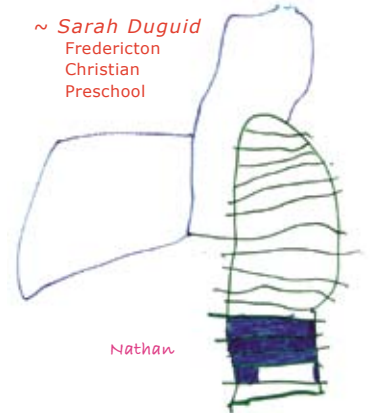
~ UNB Children's Centre

Nathan:
"It is a ladder"

Mrs. Sarah:
"Where does the ladder go?"

Nathan [laughing]:
"Ladders don't walk!"

~ Sarah Duguid
Fredericton
Christian
Preschool



Nathan



Laughter erupted during a puppet performance of Little Red Riding Hood. The children then made a storybook of their new twist on the classic tale.

~ Bridge Street Children's Academy Inc.



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Sharing the Joy of Laughter

Rainy Day Fun

One warm rainy day during our gathering time, Jo-Anne noticed that many of our friends had their rubber boots. The children all agreed that playing in the puddles would be an excellent idea. We got our coats and boots on and ventured off on our puddle adventure.

Jaykob didn't want to get his pants wet so he stopped to tuck them into his boots, while Katelyn found a nice deep puddle that made a big splash.

We tried out several puddles in the parking lot and then we ventured over to a nice muddy area. Allie really liked these puddles; she jumped really hard.

Conner laughed out loud as he ran quickly through the puddles with his sneakers. Who says you need rubber boots on to have fun? When our adventure was finished we stopped to empty the water from our boots.

~ Leisa Comeau Chatham Day Care Center Inc.



Why this matters:

Experiences such as these - taken up spontaneously and for the sheer pleasure of splashing - release energy, build community, and give educators and children alike an opportunity to express pure joy. When adults play at getting messy, wet and dirty, they also accept the responsibility for helping children get clean.



Other Possibilities:

Children and educators – Jared Robinson, Krista Gale, and Catherine Crilley – from Lincoln Day Care Centre share the pleasure of a rainy day.



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For Reflection

How do you value and respond to rowdy, physical dizzy play? What is your comfort level and how does this affect allowances you make for children? Are there differing beliefs about this kind of play in your centre? Have you, or adults you know, played in these ways with children? Think about chasing, tossing, singing nonsense songs.

Have the educators at your centre discussed dizzy play? What do you value about dizzy play? Are some spaces, equipment, and materials more appropriate than others for dizzy play? Consider families' perspectives of dizzy play and how this connects with the centre's practices.

How do you use nonsense language in books, songs, and poems to evoke laughter? Do children chime in, learn the rhythms of the language, and add spontaneous words and laughter? Does the nonsense language continue during play and create more moments for laughter?

Laughing with, rather than laughing at, others is an important concept for children to learn. How do you encourage laughing together in your centre?



Keona

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CO-CONSTRUCTING LEARNING THROUGH PLAY; *What educators do*



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PURPOSEFUL ENVIRONMENTAL DESIGN

Managing time, space, and materials for play

TIME Large blocks of uninterrupted time allow children to sample activities, experiment with materials, develop play scenarios, roles, and props, and engage in problem finding and solving.

Children determine how long to stay with any one activity. Deciding where to go next can take some time. With a five-minute warning to clean-up time, children can prepare to end play gracefully, or make plans for resuming it later.

SPACE The illusion of seclusion: movable, low cupboards demarcate cozy, private play spaces.

Natural light illuminates art activities located close to windows.

Clearly marked pathways reduce collisions and inadvertent intrusions into play.

Proximal positioning of play/learning centres encourages the movement of equipment and materials between them.

Patios and balconies: transitional spaces between indoors and out.

Hard surfaces allow for efficient clean up of messy materials.

Natural and wild spaces open up new possibilities for play.



PLANNING

Planning for play is a complex, challenging, and ongoing process. It requires dedicated time to reflect on what has happened, and takes diverse strengths, interests, and passions into account. We must keep children's ownership of play firmly in mind, while celebrating what is happening in the moment and thinking about how we might extend or deepen children's learning. We affirm that ownership when we respect children's ideas and elicit their participation in maintaining, modifying, and renewing their play environments.

ENGAGING

Taking on the role of purposeful designers/planners requires that we are playful ourselves: ready to try out new materials, explore new possibilities for the spaces we occupy, take a flexible approach to time. In so doing, we are better able to appreciate how children might approach new materials and equipment, and determine the type of organization, modeling, and support we need to provide.

REFLECTING

We need to think about what is working and what is not, find ways to effectively communicate the value of particular play episodes to families and communities, and invite their contributions - their ideas, materials, and time. We need to help children reflect on their play.

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MATERIALS

“I have come to regard materials as the textbooks of early childhood classrooms... Materials become tools with which children give form to and express their understanding of the world and the meanings they have constructed” Harriet K. Cuffaro (1991, 64)

Access and responsibility

In a rich play environment materials are visible and accessible to all. They stimulate the senses, provoke curiosity, and invite hands-on exploration. Clearly labeled baskets and storage bins on low shelves assure easy access and make cleaning up easier for children.

Introducing new materials

Take time to introduce new materials and allow children to explore their properties and become comfortable with them. Some materials take more supervision than others. This means that you need to understand the properties of materials yourself so that you can include a range of activities, some of which children can manage on their own, freeing you to support others. Keeping some materials in reserve, you can then introduce novelty and complexity into the environment as interests wane and new ones emerge.

Open ended and structured materials

Include open ended materials such as unit blocks and other construction materials, paint and brushes, crayons and other mark making tools, “beautiful stuff” for creating collages and 3 dimensional structures, clay, sand, water, as well as rhythm instruments such as small drums, triangles, wood blocks, tambourines, bells, and rhythm sticks. These are materials that encourage imagination and creativity. Structured materials such as puzzles, pegboards, parquetry blocks, and games with rules encourage problem solving.

Natural and recycled materials

Natural and recycled materials offer an environmentally friendly alternative to plastics, as well as a greater range of sensory experience. Sand and water are versatile and free. Cardboard boxes and tubes, Styrofoam, and other packing materials encourage exploration, creativity, and problem solving.

Playful exploration

Materials that encourage playful exploration or heuristic play include items such as magnets, scales, magnifiers, scoops, sieves, tubing, graduated containers, and timers. As you select these kinds of materials, think about what discoveries might be possible.

Dramatic play

Materials for dramatic play include dress-up clothing, pots, pans, dishes, telephones, mirrors, backpacks, purses, and cultural items that reflect the life and work of the community. Dramatic play also includes small world play with miniature animals, human figures, small blocks, and vehicles.

Outdoor play

The outdoors provides its own materials. Sun, shadow, wind, snow, sand, water, and leaves all encourage play. Some added materials might include gardening tools, balls, hoops, wind toys, sleds, snow shovels, and sand toys.

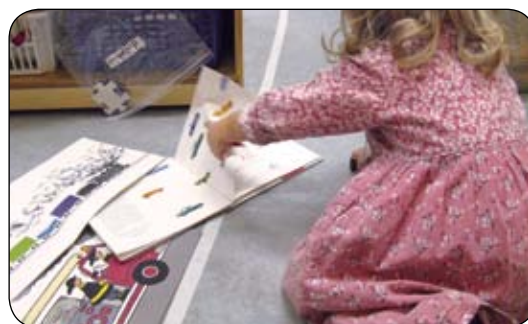
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PLAY INITIATED BY
CHILDREN'S INTERESTS AND EXPERIENCES: *Hannah-Jo's Ferry Boat*

Maria Gillis and Christa Kierstead Unicorn Children's Centre

Educators **plan** for environments that are rich in possibilities. Maria and Christa's room provides the materials, time, and space for children to "give form to and express their understanding of the world and the meanings they have constructed." Maria says she "brings the world into the classroom." She also calls this "real life". She regularly communicates with the parents to find out what is going on in the lives of the children and uses photos and documentation from home. It was through this sharing that Nicholas, a child in the group, shared his adventures traveling on the Wood Island Ferry with his family.



Maria noticed Hannah-Jo deeply **engaged** in a construction project. She approached her and asked about what she was building. Inspired by Nicholas, who, after his ferry ride, frequently built ferry boats, Hannah-Jo was trying to build one for herself.



Educators offer support and means for extending play. Here, Maria has found a book for Hannah-Jo to use as a reference after observing that Hannah-Jo was sorting vehicles by type.



Educators identify important episodes/moments/events through observation and **reflection**. Maria and Christa were aware of Hannah-Jo's deep engagement in this construction and made space for her to leave her work until her mom could see it at the end of the day. Maria was also aware of the possibility of Hannah-Jo's work, in turn inspiring another child. "After all her hard work, what would it have done to her sense of how her work was valued if I had said, 'Take that down now. Playtime is over'."



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PLAY INSPIRED BY
CULTURAL ROLES AND PRACTICES: *Under The Rainbow Market*

Susan Meredith and Cheryl Ritzhaupt Miracles at First

While Cheryl and Susan’s centre collected items for donation to the food bank, they decided to take advantage of the packaged foods to set up a market. Once everything was collected, they took it to the food bank.

Planning at this stage involved brainstorming possibilities. The next step was creating a web. Often this includes the children and families.

Cheryl and Susan **engaged** the children in establishing a shopping routine. Children were responsible for re-shelving items at the end of playtime so that the store was ready to be open to customers the next morning.

“Playing with” established the roles and language of shopping — customer, cashier, packer, and daily specials.

Cheryl and Susan **reflected** on what was happening and documented in photos and words the learning that was taking place.

Note that these children travel by bus or taxi to the store, reflecting their experiences as city dwellers.

After the market had been open for awhile, the educators **planned** a visit to the local Sobeys’ store.



The children are really enjoying their time in our Market!

As shoppers they like to dress up before starting their shopping adventure. They enjoy filling their carts with groceries, especially those similar to the items at their homes. After they've paid for their purchases, they often wait for a "cab" or "bus" to take them to their next destination - home or work, usually 😊.

As cashiers they like counting the money, ringing in the purchases, putting the groceries into shopping bags, giving change to their customers, stocking shelves & even suggesting products for the shoppers!

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PLAY INITIATED TO ACKNOWLEDGE COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS: *Hauling in the Traps*

Judith Bass, Tonia Leavitts, Darlene Clinch Grand Manan Children's Centre



"Since lobster fishing is such an important part of our community, we thought it would be fun to set up a dramatic play area depicting lobster fishing. Our **planning** included bringing in lobster traps, fish crates, ropes and bouys. We also put boats in the water table.

As the children **engaged** in play we observed and learned. The children filled bait-pockets with lego and other small toys that would fit.

They checked their traps...



The children had so much fun we thought we would take it one step further and **planned** a visit to the local lobster plant. The children were fascinated with all the different sizes of lobster. We learned that the blood sugar of the lobster is taken using a needle to see if the lobsters are fat enough to crate... and that lobster blood is clear, like water.

Made fast the bouys...



Back at the centre, we used photos of the adventure to make a book together so we could read about and remember everything that happened."

The children were able to **reflect** on their experience and articulate it in words. This shared narrative will be read and re-read many times, stimulating new enactments of this particular community's work.



...And hauled in the catch!



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PLAY INITIATED BY
 EDUCATORS MAKING CURRICULAR CONNECTIONS: *Silly Sticks*

Keltie Foster West Side Co-op Preschool

"With the goal of creating a class book, I gathered a few children around for the reading of a story about sticks. Afterwards I said, 'We can write a better book. This book only uses popsicle sticks.' We brainstormed a title. A number of suggestions were made, but we all agreed on Jenna's suggestion of Silly Sticks."

Keltie **planned** ahead to make materials available for the children. "I used anything I could find that had the word 'stick' attached – popsicle sticks, chopsticks, matchsticks, sticks from trees, stir sticks. In hopes of encouraging three-dimensional designs, I gave each child a large piece of Styrofoam on which to build with the sticks."

Keltie **engaged** the children in deeper thinking. "I worked to expand their ideas. When I asked Jenna, 'Where do you have a bonfire?' she replied, 'In my backyard.' I extended the conversations by asking, 'What do you do around the bonfire?' Jenna quickly answered, 'Cook marshmallows,' and started to look around the class for a stick and pretend marshmallows. It's about having conversations with them, and through these conversations their play is extended."

As Keltie **reflected** on the experience she noted some interesting things. "I was surprised by the children who got involved, the ones that don't usually. They found a usefulness for their structures. It was immediate. They wanted to play with them. The children were playing with their structures two or three days later. And the conversations, they were listening to each other. They were not asking 'What do we do now?' Instead they were doing."

"I asked how each child would like their structure labeled and documented their words. The children knew where in the classroom they wanted their picture taken with their structures for the book. Their structures went everywhere."



Silly Sticks can...



...make a bonfire.



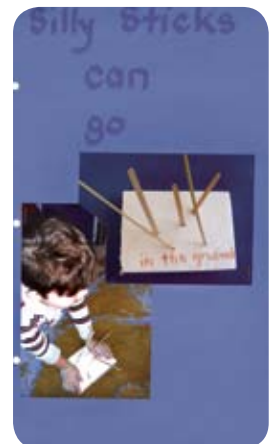
...make a forest.



...make a dog house.



...make a pirate ship.



...go in the ground.

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PLAY INSPIRED BY FAMILY AND COMMUNITY: *Hunting Season*

Natalie Lauren Sussex Early Learning Centre

"A hunting unit was sparked when a dad showed up in camouflage. It was hunting season."

Educators **planned** in response to community interests by providing and coordinating materials, supporting the play they observed, and seeking further resources such as a visit from a taxidermist.



"She's a doe."

Educators **engaged** with the children: "I wore neon orange for days. I worked at keeping open. I could have smothered it" (because of her own attitudes about hunting).

Educators **reflected** on their beliefs as they listened to children and families and responded, "We would never have done a hunting unit because of the whole gun issue. I'm so glad we listened to the children because this was a learning experience in so many ways. We focused on eating meat for supper, the art of camouflage, partridge and ducks. Not one child was focused on guns or killing."



"We turned the dramatic play area into a forest, made a 3D deer and even made a hunters' hut."

Making our 3D deer.

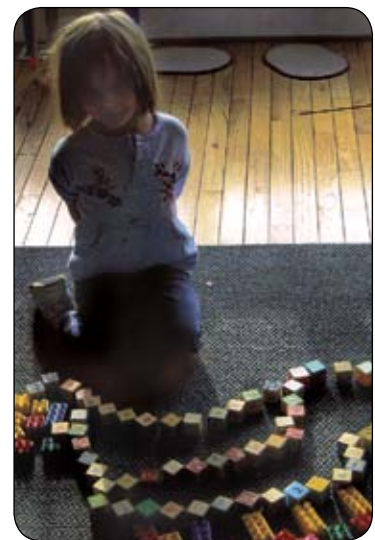
As educators responded to this seasonal community activity, families and community members began to contribute..."lots of parental and community involvement. Parents brought in antlers, clothing, hunting magazines, and deer and duck calls. One father taught us all how to make our own moose calls. A taxidermist came. It was great."



Antlers, antlers!



"No, it's a moose."



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