Being on the Edge

What’s involved in learning

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

Dizzy play

is of short duration
and is all about
swiveling, falling, yielding
to the hands of another person
when they throw you and
send you flying.

~ Marjatta Kalliala
(2006, 98)

Upside Down

The idea of turning something upside down
is part of dizzy play.
It often appears in short-lived flashes.

~ Marjatta Kalliala (2006, 101)

Rough and Tumble Play

How do you distinguish rough and tumble play from serious fighting?

- there is much laughter and smiling
- many children are involved at one time
- children do not usually use their strength to the maximum

~ Fergus Hughes (1995, 133)
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

Laughing children
stomping feet
pinching fingers,
hear those BUBBLES
POP POP POP!!

~ Lynn Hatfield and Linda MacLean
J.O.Y. Preschool
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.
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
Sharing the Joy of Laughter

WHAT’S INVOLVED IN LEARNING

- Making nonsense
- Clowning and physical humour

CLOWNING

A child ... has put his cap on the wrong way. He could correct it quickly and hope that none of his playmates noticed his blunder. He would not be playing then. Instead, he chooses another road: he repeats his mishap deliberately and in an exaggerated form, putting it, so to say, between quotation marks. Now he draws everybody’s attention to his mistake, and he does not feel bad about it any more – just the opposite. After all, it is plain that he chooses to act this way. ~ Lili E Peller (1971, 116)

Books to read together

- Giraffes Can’t Dance, by Giles Andreas
- Silly Sally, by Audrey Woods
- Click Clack Moo Cow, by Doreen Cronin and Betsy Lewin

Bowling

We set up plastic bowling pins in the hallway. After Abbigal had thrown three balls her and Nicholas were laughing, jumping around, and clapping their hands. On his turn, Nicholas hit several pins down and shouted to his friend: “Abbi girl, Abbi girl, look, look!!”

~ Pauline Love  Love’s Community Day Care Home
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

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.

Nathan:
“It is a ladder”

Mrs. Sarah:
“Where does the ladder go?”

Nathan [laughing]:
“Ladders don’t walk!”

~ Sarah Duguid
Fredericton Christian Preschool
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.
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?
Co-constructing Learning Through Play: What educators do

**Preparation of the Environment**
- Re-viewing provisions in relation to reflections
- Re-organizing space, equipment, and materials both indoors and out
- Inviting children to participate as environmental planners

**Connecting with the Community**
- Inviting guests with special expertise or interests
- Organizing excursions to expand on experiences children bring to ongoing play

**Initiating Community Reflection**
- Making documentation ready for public display
- Discussing documentation with parents, children, and community members

**Documenting**
- Documenting the process as projects unfold
- Compiling learning stories — in pictures and print — that celebrate children’s strengths and accomplishments
- Annotating children’s work

**Noticing and Recording**
- Scribing children’s words
- Taking photographs
- Making notes
- Collecting and children’s work

**Reviewing**
- Discussing what happened in play with children and colleagues: What worked? What didn’t work? What do we need for this play tomorrow?

**Expanding**
- Locating new resources, books, materials, and equipment
- Elaborating children’s ongoing play themes
- Brainstorming and webbing possibilities
- Connecting to curriculum goals and values

**Supporting**
- Enriching play by taking on a role
- Helping to negotiate inclusion and turn taking
- Helping to solve technical problems
- Helping to order, locate, and clean up materials and equipment

**Extending**
- Playing with materials to understand their possibilities
- Introducing new ideas and language
- Modeling and encouraging exploration of new materials

**Planning**
- Engaging
- Reflecting

What do I need to do to let the children lead?

~ Christa Keirstead
Unicorn Children’s Centre
**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: transitionary 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.
“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.
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’.”
Co-constructing Learning Through Play

Play Inspired by Cultural Roles and Practices: Under The Rainbow Market
Susan Meredith and Cheryl Ritzhaupt

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 Sobey’s store.
“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.

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.

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.
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."
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.

“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.”

Co-constructing Learning Through Play

“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.”
WORKS CITED


Works Cited


Professional Resources

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.

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**PLAY AND PLAYFULNESS**

*Professional Support Document*

- **Inclusiveness and Equity**
- **Compassion and Caring**
- **Living Democratically**
- **Individuality and Independence**
- **Social Responsibility**
- **Communication**
- **Imagination, Creativity & Play**
- **Spirituality**
- **Zest for Living and Learning**

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**IMAGINATION AND CREATIVITY**

- Use Flexible and Fluid Thinking
- Invent Systems of Representation
- Explore New Possibilities
- Explore Properties of Objects
- Test Limits
- Negotiate Joint Undertakings
- Invent Approaches to Practical Problems

**PLAYFUL EXPLORATION AND PROBLEM SOLVING**

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

**DIZZY PLAY**

- Playful Exploration and Problem Solving
- Dizzy Play