Inclusiveness and Equity          Compassion and Caring
• Living Democratically
• Individuality                     And Independence
• Social Responsibility
• Communication
• Imagination, Creativity & Play
• Spirituality
• Zest for Living
• Playfulness

Play and Playfulness

Professional Support Document

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
- Imagination and Creativity
- Playful Exploration and Problem Solving
- Dizzy Play
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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Picture Books Support Literacies In Every Goal


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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.
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.
**Play and Playfulness at a Glance**

**Imagination and Creativity**

*Flexible and fluid thinking*

*Symbols and systems of representation*

*Imaginary scenarios to explore new possibilities*

- 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
Playful Explorations and Problem Solving

Explore properties of objects
Test limits

Negotiate joint undertakings
Creative approaches to practical problems

- 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
Flexible and fluid thinking

What's involved in learning

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

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

Elicit and support innovative uses of materials and equipment. 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.

What would you do with a box?

~ Loo Elton Little Acorns Daycare Centre
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)

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

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?

Cooking outdoors!

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?

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
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 focusing 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)
Other Possibilities:

- Welcome to the robot museum.

Materials to Collect:

- wire
- shells
- feathers
- sponges
- small seed pods
- costume jewellery
- wood scraps
- containers
- broken jewellery
- tape
- string
- ribbon and yarn
- old keys
- small machines that don’t work (i.e., watches and clocks)
- corks
- bottle caps
- leather remnants
- holders and other extruded objects
- plastic sock holders
- baskets
- cardboard pieces
- paper of differing weights, textures, and colors
- nails
- screws and bolts
- small mirrors
- bottle caps
- leather remnants
- holders and other extruded objects
- plastic sock holders
- baskets
- cardboard pieces
- paper of differing weights, textures, and colors
- nails
- screws and bolts
- small mirrors
- corks

Why this matters:

Found materials, such as the "beautiful things" brought in by the children and educators on these pages, present many opportunities for flexible and fluid thinking. Children can explore ideas for sorting or categorizing and experiment with the aesthetic of what is beautiful to them, both in the items they select and how they see these items within the finished product. Children will also make decisions about which items will be most useful for building different creations. All around, they are seeing new possibilities in these every day items.
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

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.

Together the children decide how to make a house with their bodies.
“Oops, the basketball net fell down...  
...now it’s a bus!” – Lauren, Kevin, Moose, Ban

**PLACING WORDS**

Making new versions of old favourites

**BOOKS TO READ TOGETHER**

*Imagine a Night*, by Sarah Thompson  
*Imagine a Day*, by Sarah Thompson  
*Imagine a Place*, by Sarah Thompson

**“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
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 N8 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 Ninetendo 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 the 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.
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!

“Robot” – Erik
“A collar for Mooey” – Alison
“A reindeer!” – Erik

“A Bambi” – Caleb
“Wii remotes” – Alison & Caleb
“Snake car” – Caleb

“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.

“Wii remotes” – Alison & Caleb
“Snake set-up” with a firepit for the snakes to roast marshmallows.
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)

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**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)
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

**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

**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?”

- Vivian Gussin Paley (2004, 92)

**Building Block Worlds**

*Joshua*

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

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.

Maria 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

Why this matters:

YMCA Preschool and Afterschool Adventures

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

Ava

NEW BRUNSWICK CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK For Early Learning and Child Care ~ English
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?
NEW BRUNSWICK CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK For Early Learning and Child Care ~ English
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

Is it…?

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

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)
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

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

“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

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

Creating patterns by ordering and sequencing

NEW BRUNSWICK CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK For Early Learning and Child Care ~ English
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:

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
- building and balancing
- recognizing differences and similarities
- slotting together
- 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.

**Test Limits**

**WHAT’S INVOLVED IN LEARNING**

- Testing their powers of observation and sensory discrimination
- Testing strength, speed, agility, and control over movement

Remember to let children take risks — they learn through play.
~ Tanya MacFarlane  
Nackawic Child Care Inc.

Listening carefully to different pitches

Games that test powers of observation and tactile discrimination:

- I Spy
- Concentration
- Guess Who?
- Dominoes
- Pick-Up Sticks
- Barrels of Monkeys

When we ask children not to move we should have excellent reasons for doing so.

It is stillness we have to justify, not movement.
~ Susan Issacs (1932)

Listening carefully to different pitches

Books to read together

Scaredy Squirrel, by Melanie Watt
Meanwhile, by Jules Feiffer
Courage, by Bernard Waber
Pig Pig Rides, by David McPhail
As children design structures they make decisions that require judgements regarding balance, shape, weight, size...

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)
Test Limits

“I knew I could do it myself”

While playing outside in the yard Maddison stares at the tires and then begins to stack them. When the stack gets taller than she is, Maddison carefully drags over a chair and places the last tire on top. She then leans over and one foot at a time beings to crawl in. I resist the urge to tell her this is too dangerous and instead walk over and stand close by to lend a hand if needed. She gets in all by herself and beams! “See Erin... I knew I could do it myself. I didn’t fall.” She pops up and down in the tire tunnel for a few minutes and then accepts some help removing the top few tires before crawling out.

~ Erin Brewer  Sussex Early Learning Centre

Why this matters:

Maddison is testing her agility and control over movement in a safe environment. She is learning to take healthy risks... and I am learning it is healthy and important to allow children to take risks and test their limits.

~ Erin Brewer  Sussex Early Learning Centre

“Silly bum” by Avery
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.

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

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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)

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?

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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!

THE SHIP SAILED EARLY THE NEXT DAY!

MAYBE IF WE JUST START....
Creative Approaches to Working Out Practical Problems

What’s involved in learning

- 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

Encourage children in their unconventional and innovative uses of materials and equipment.

Respect children’s initiative and focus by:

Noticing: When you made the ramp steeper, your cars went much faster. You’re managing to control those drips with the very tip of your brush.

Encouraging: Looks like you’re getting there… You’re really persevering with that. If you need a hand, I’m right here. Good idea! Let’s try that next.

Asking: What seems to be the problem? What have you tried so far? What’s happening now? How could we help?

Wondering: What might happen if…? How could we find out? Would another tool work? What about trying…?

Creating opportunities for reflection and evaluation: What did you try? How did that work? What did you learn? Would you like to show and tell how you solved that problem? take a photograph? draw a picture? make a book?

How do you:

- Model enthusiasm, curiosity, and interest in solving problems?
- Cultivate sustained and shared thinking?
- Uphold an ‘image of the child’ as competent, inventive and full of ideas?
- Encourage children to ‘think out loud’ as they work through practical problems?
- Hold the door open for every child to join the community of problem solvers?

Small World Play — Children explore new possibilities in miniature worlds they create.

Making a Ramp — Sustained, shared thinking about balance, pitch, scale and velocity.

Making a Ladder — Large equipment prompts collaborative problem solving.
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)

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)
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.
Puzzling It Out: Cass and Kathy Co-Construct a Solution...

“I want to pick up the puzzle that I just made,” Cass told me. She showed me the cover of the puzzle box, which featured Big Bird and a girl holding up the puzzle. But when Cass tried to pick up her puzzle, it fell apart. So I asked her: “What do you think you could do to keep the puzzle together so you can pick it up?” Together we decided to try tape. Initially, it wasn’t working so well, and we figured out that the tape would need to be on each piece.

As Cass put the puzzle together she asked me to place the tape on the pieces. “We can get it done faster if we work together,” she exclaimed. She was right! When we were done, I helped her pick up the puzzle and we measured it against her – just like the picture on the Big Bird puzzle box that had inspired her. Wow! It was almost as tall as her.

~ Kathy Pictou  Eel River Bar First Nation Day Care

Other Possibilities:

Providing different materials, equipment and tools offers different opportunities for children to build on their conceptual knowledge and develop languages as they solve practical problems. For example:

- Water play – flow, capacity, buoyancy, surface tension, pressure...
- Clay/modelling materials – malleability, mass, forces, texture...
- Small world play - classification, ordering, spatial relations – shape, size, scale, and positionality...
- Board games and card games – counting, comparing, sorting, 1:1 correspondence, addition, subtraction, number and word recognition, probability...
- Painting and drawing...
- Domestic play...
- Blocks, lego...
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.
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.
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

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.
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
**DIZZY PLAY**

**Sharing the Joy of Laughter**

**WHAT’S INVOLVED IN LEARNING**

- Making nonsense
- Clowning and physical humour

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**BOOKS TO READ TOGETHER**

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

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**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)

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**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

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*“I’m a Rock Star!”*  
by Daniel

---

*“THIS BLOCK LOOKS JUST LIKE UNDERWEAR.”*— KATE
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?
What do I need to do to let the children lead?

~ Christa Keirstead
Unicorn Children’s Centre

PREPARING 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

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

ENGAGING
• Planning
• Engaging
• Reflecting

PLANNING

Co-constructing Learning Through Play: What educators do
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 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 Sobey’s store.
Play Initiated to Acknowledge Community Connections: Hauling in the Traps
Judith Bass, Tonia Leavitts, Darlene Clinch  Grand Manan Children’s Centre

“So 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.
"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.”

Keltie Foster, West Side Co-op Preschool
**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.”

Educators co-constructed 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.”

“No, it’s a moose.”

“She’s a doe.”

Antlers, antlers!
Works Cited


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Professional Resources


New Brunswick Curriculum Framework
For Early Learning and Child Care – English

Play and Playfulness

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