

**Assignment 4: Knowledge Transfer**  
**The Importance of Play, Outdoor Play, and Risky Play and its Impact on**  
**My Educational Beliefs and Practices**

Carla Montie

August 4, 2019

UBC Faculty of Education

ECED 417 93Q

Instructor: Kathleen Eccelstone

## **Part 1: Topic Extension ~ The Importance of Play, Outdoor Play, and Risky Play**

### **Introduction**

While learning about play and play-based learning, I felt inspired to reflect on my own educational beliefs and practices. I realized that I would like to know more about how I can provide more powerful and diverse play experiences, including outdoor play and risky play opportunities in my Kindergarten program. The process of writing this paper has allowed me to explore these topics and deepen my understanding of how to integrate concepts, philosophies, and practices into a comprehensive approach. This reflective exercise has helped me work towards my ongoing professional goal of continuing develop my own pedagogy that will enhance play and learning for my students. The organization of the paper will consist of: (1) the importance of play; (2) the importance of outdoor play; (3) the importance of risky play; and (4) plans and goals for moving forward.

### **The Importance of Play**

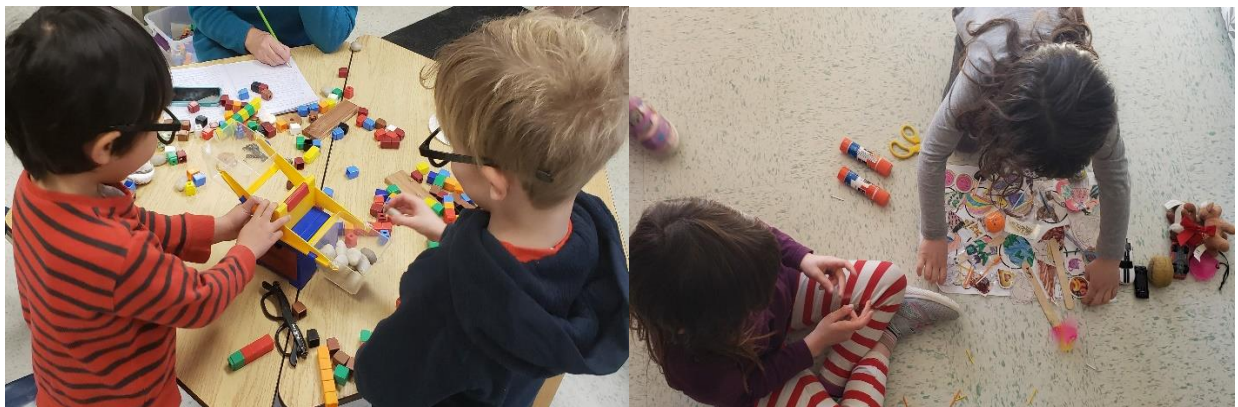
*“When we make Play the foundation of learning, we teach the Whole child”*  
(Vince Gowmon, 2014)

Throughout my teaching career, I have always been passionate about play. Play, play-based learning, and playful activities have always been at the heart of how my students and I connect and create our class culture together. This topic sparked reflection on my educational beliefs and practices, as I enjoy exploring new approaches to play and am always looking for ways to enhance my Kindergarten program. Upon reflection, I decided that I would like to explore some new ways that I can offer a more meaningful and diverse range of play opportunities to my students. After investigating existing research on the topic, I realized that I needed to review my practices to ensure that they were evidence-based.

There is considerable literature on the importance of play in early childhood settings. Studies have shown that play positively affects children’s growth in areas including social and emotional development, cognition, self-regulation, mental and physical health (Pyle, Deluca & Danniels, 2017). As a result, several educational perspectives concerning the role of play have emerged. One approach is

that play can be used to encourage developmental learning. Another approach is that play can be utilized to support academic learning (Pyle et al., 2017). When reviewing my own pedagogy, I decided that I use play in my classroom for both developmental and academic growth and learning. Upon reflection, I realized that I would like to utilize a more diverse range of play experiences encompassing the entire play-based learning continuum (Pyle & Danniels, 2017) from child-directed - to collaborative - to teacher directed. This range includes free play, inquiry play, collaborative play, playful learning, and learning through games. It is essential for early childhood educators to understand the value of play, investigate current research, and use evidence-based practices to inform philosophy, practice, and policy.

In addition to representation in literature, views concerning the benefits and purposes of play are also being reflected in current policies and mandates. In educational systems all over the world, the value of play is being acknowledged, explored and endorsed. In Canada, educational policies and curricula have been changing to promote the importance of play as developmentally appropriate pedagogy (Pyle & Danniels, 2017). In British Columbia some examples include The Play Today B.C. Handbook (2019), the B.C. Early Learning Framework (2019), and the B.C. Curriculum and Core Competencies (2019). The B.C. Early Learning Framework explains: “This framework values play as vital to children’s learning, growing, and making meaning” (2019, p. 27). Despite pressures to push for academics at the expense of play, educators have a responsibility to create holistic, balanced, developmentally (and contextually) appropriate programs that respect, honour, and support each child.



## **The Importance of Outdoor Play**

*“One transcendent experience in nature is worth a thousand nature facts”*

*(Sobel, 2008)*

In my own personal life, I am extremely passionate about spending time in nature and outdoors. Five years ago, my husband and I moved from a small apartment in Vancouver to a ten-acre hobby farm in the mountains, in a forest, in Pemberton. This move has been life changing both personally and professionally, as I now have access to nature right at my doorstep at home and at school. Nature is now the heart and soul of how I relate to myself, to others, and to my world around me. This topic sparked reflection on my educational beliefs and practices, as I greatly enjoy exploring new ideas about how to use the environment for outdoor play and as a ‘third teacher.’

Beyond the classroom, there is an exciting world that affords children with unlimited natural opportunities to explore, play, learn, and connect. Although, the concept of children in nature has been part of a long-standing tradition in Western thought, there are some practical reasons why this movement is increasingly important in today’s modern world. For example, feeling connected to the place we live and to nature: caring about and advocating for the community and the environment; feeling connected to others: social skills, social competence, and sense of belonging; feeling connected to ourselves: physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health. Now, more than ever, it is vital that educators provide children with outdoor play opportunities to support their overall health and well-being.

Recently there have been movements towards spending more time outdoors at school, incorporating First Peoples Principles of Learning (FPPL) (FNESC, 2014), and other outdoor initiatives and programs including Nature Schools, Outdoor Schools, and Forest Schools. “Learning about the place in which they live offers Nature Kindergarten students opportunities for learning that cannot be found inside a classroom. This learning can be complex and layered and deepen children’s

connections to their place” (Elliot & Krusekopf, 2017, p. 375). This educational movement towards more time for outdoor play “...presents us with an opportunity to think differently about education and to articulate a pedagogy of place that embraces complexity and uncertainty” (Elliot & Krusekopf, 2017, p. 387). I believe that a high quality education program must utilize the great potential for powerful play and learning that can happen outdoors.

Some questions that I continue to think about are: How can I make more time for outdoor play? How can I make sure I am providing students with quality outdoor play experiences to support learning, growth, and development? How can I integrate First Peoples principles of learning into outdoor play? How can I involve families, Aboriginal Elders, and community members in outdoor plan and learning activities? How do I provide opportunities to encourage student connections to the community and to our local environment? Currently, I use outdoor play in my Kindergarten program on a regular basis in several ways including, extra play time at recess (30 minutes rather than 20) and at lunch (45 minutes rather than 30); eating snacks or lunches outside (picnic style); outside play centers during free choice time (water station, sand station, outdoor toys, etc.); Wilderness Wednesday (nature time all morning once a week); action breaks outside; and taking learning outside. This is a good start to integrating the outdoors into my program; however, it is necessary to constantly reevaluate how to use the outdoor environment as a teacher and as a tool for student learning.



### **The Importance of Risky Play**

*“Children must be kept as safe as needed not as safe as possible. We can’t eliminate risk and challenge essential for learning!” (Retrieved from: [www.storiesandchildren.com](http://www.storiesandchildren.com))*

While exploring approaches to play and outdoor play, the element of risky play was another concept that called out to me. This topic sparked reflection on my educational beliefs and practices because it is something that I have always been excited to explore more deeply, but often felt like there were obstacles. Some challenges include social and cultural perceptions about risk, access to appropriate outdoor spaces, lack of parent or public understanding and support, and my own lack of knowledge about the topic to inform pedagogy. Now that I have explored some research about the benefits to outdoor risky play, I am confident to use evidence to defend my philosophy and to guide my practice.

Risky play is a type of physical play that is considered to be active, exciting, and has elements of risk (Harper, 2017). Some types of risky play include speed, height, elements, rough-and-tumble, using tools, and independent exploration. Harper (2017) points out: “Risk is the potential for loss or harm, yet risk can also present opportunities for gain” (p.1) or growth and is actually necessary for healthy child development. By engaging in outdoor risky play, children learn risk management skills; identifying and assessing risk, adapting to change, and overcoming challenges; therefore reducing phobias, limitations, or accidents later in life (Harper, 2017, p. 6). “Risky play can also be associated with increased time spent playing with peers, increased interpersonal cognitive problem solving, increased motor skills, social behaviours, and conflict resolution” (Yates & Brussoni, 2016, p. 4). Positive health impacts includes combating obesity, musculoskeletal health, cardiovascular health, and bone density (Yates & Brussoni, 2016). Furthermore, physical activity shows positive effects on mental health (including self-concept, anxiety, depression), in addition to improvements in concentration, memory and school performance (Yates & Brussoni, 2016). This compelling research makes me feel excited about the potential of outdoor risky play. I now feel strongly that it is a valuable

part of a high quality Kindergarten program, and feel confident in justifying beliefs and practices based on evidence from research.



## **Plans and Goals Moving Forward**

Moving forward, there are several things to consider in order to integrate everything I learned about play into a comprehensive approach. The article by Pacini-Ketchabaw, Kocher, Berger, Issac and Mort (2007) was influential, as it made me review my own teaching philosophies and practices, and reflect on the quality of my own Kindergarten program. “The effect of child care on children’s social, emotional, linguistic and cognitive development depends in part on children’s daily experiences in their child care program” (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2007, p. 5). This article made me reflect on my responsibility as an educator to provide a dynamic Kindergarten program. It is such a great honour that parents trust me each day with their precious ‘treasures.’

Pacini-Ketchabaw et al. (2007) offered some Reggio Emilia principles that I will consider and use to guide my pedagogy in the future. These principles include: language de-construction and re-construction; the image of the child; the image of the early childhood educator; assessment, evaluation, and meaning making (pedagogical documentation); meaningful community participation; structures that embrace stability and multiple perspectives; valuing communities and Aboriginal community’s ways of knowing. In addition, Elliot and Krusekopf (2017) described a set of pedagogical principles that I can use to guide outdoor play, including “connecting deeply with nature: environmental stewardship, the environment as another teacher, learning collaboratively as part of a community, physical and mental health, and integrating aboriginal ways of knowing” (p. 383-384). Furthermore, Harper (2017) called for a reconceptualization of risk in child development and advocates that policy and practice should be reformed to allow children “full exploration of their capacity and curiosity through outdoor risky play” (p.1). This would include making a distinction between risks and hazards, and also shifting from an approach of ‘keeping children as safe as possible’ to ‘keeping children as safe as necessary’ (Yates & Brussoni, 2016). In the future, my goal would be to incorporate outdoor risky play in a way that balances safety and risk. Within this approach, I think that it is important to

openly and explicitly discuss the difference between hazards (potentially harmful) and risks (potentially beneficial) with children and their families (Harper, 2017).

### **Conclusion**

In my reflection on play, outdoor play, and risky play, I feel more passionate as ever that play is a vital part to a high quality Kindergarten program. As Vince Gowmon explains: “Play is not a break from learning. It is endless, delightful, deep, engaging, practical learning. It’s the doorway into the child’s heart” (2014, p. 12). I now feel more confident in my ability to move forward using research to devise evidence-based practices that enhance play experiences for all of my students.

I still have some more work to do in terms of reviewing obstacles, challenges, and questions that exist or may arise along the way. However, I think that this is an essential part of an ongoing process of reflection to ensure a high quality education program. As Pacini-Ketchabaw et al. (2007) state, “[t]his rethinking of policies and practices can never be final and fixed” (p. 11); rather this must include a continuous process of reevaluation and reinvention for pedagogy to remain relevant and meaningful. Kindergarten is such a magical time in a child’s life. It is a special and sensitive time, as it is a critical developmental period; it is the beginning of a child’s school life, and sets the foundation for their educational experience. As a result, Kindergarten should inspire a love of school; a love of play, and a love of learning for all children.

References:

- Elliot, E. & Krusekopf, F. (2017). Thinking outside the Four Walls of the Classroom: A Canadian Nature Kindergarten. *International Journal of Early Childhood*, 49(3), 375-389.
- Government of British Columbia. (2019). British Columbia early learning framework. Retrieved from: [https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/early-learning/teach/earlylearning/early\\_learningframework.pdf](https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/early-learning/teach/earlylearning/early_learningframework.pdf)
- Government of British Columbia. (2019). The Play Today B.C. Handbook. Retrieved from: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/early-learning/teach/earlylearning/play-today-handbook.pdf>
- Gowmon, V. Retrieved on March 1, 2021 from <https://www.vincegowmon.com/the-therapeutic-power-of-play-to-heal-shame-in-children/>
- Harper, N. J. (2017). Outdoor risky play and healthy child development in the shadow of the "risk society": A forest and nature school perspective. *Child & Youth Services*, 38(4), 318-334.
- Pacini-Ketchabaw, V., Kocher, L., Berger, I., Isaac, K., & Mort, J. (2007). Thinking Differently about 'Quality' in British Columbia: Dialogue with the Reggio Emilia Early Childhood Project. *Canadian Children*, 32(1), 4-11.
- Pyle, A., & Danniels, E. (2017). A continuum of play-based learning: The role of the teacher in play-based pedagogy and the fear of hijacking play. *Early Education and Development*, 28(3), 274-289.
- Pyle, A., DeLuca, C., & Danniels, E. (2017). A scoping review of research on play-based

pedagogies in education. *Review of Education*, 5(3), 311-351.

Yates, M., & Brussoni, M. (2016). The importance of children's risky play. *Green Teacher*, (109), 3.

## Bibliography

Gillis, K. & Jupp, O. (2016). In Praise of Risky Play. *Physical & Health Education Journal*; Gloucester. Vol. 81, Iss. 3, 1-8.

Lester, S., & Russell, W. (2008). *Play for a change: Play, policy, and practice: A review of contemporary perspectives*. London: Play England.

Mraz, K., Porcelli, A., & Tyler, C. (2016). *Purposeful play. A teacher's guide to igniting deep and joyful learning across the day*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Pyle, A., & Alaca, B. (2018). Kindergarten children's perspectives on play and learning. *Early Child Development and Care*, 188(8), 1063-1075.

Pyle, A., & DeLuca, C. (2017). Assessment in play-based kindergarten classrooms: An empirical study of teacher perspectives and practices. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 110(5), 457-466.

Pyle, A., Prioletta, J., & Poliszczuk, D. (2018). The play-literacy interface in full-day kindergarten classrooms. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 46(1), 117-127.

Youmans, A. S., Kirby, J. R., & Freeman, J. G. (2017). How effectively does the full-day, play-based kindergarten programme in Ontario promote self-regulation, literacy, and

numeracy? *Early Child Development and Care*, 188(12), 1786-13.