



## 3.1.2

# Play and Playfulness

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

- Imagination and Creativity
- Playful Exploration and Problem Solving
- Dizzy Play





## 3.1.2 Play and Playfulness

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.

This goal has three facets:

- **Imagination and Creativity**
- **Playful Exploration and Problem Solving**
- **Dizzy Play**



## Imagination and Creativity

Through play, children invent symbols to explore relations of power, truth, and beauty as they move between the world as it is and the worlds they create. In these possible worlds, children have the liberty to push the boundaries and explore who they are as members of communities engaged with age-old issues such as good and evil. Learning to be imaginative and creative requires open and flexible environments, rich in materials and role models that reflect the cultural life of their communities—the songs, crafts, languages and artifacts—and opportunities for children to invent their own cultural forms and symbols; to explore unique and innovative approaches to understanding their worlds.

*Children develop dispositions for flexible and fluid thinking*

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

*Children invent symbols and develop systems of representation*

- 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

*Children create imaginary scenarios in which they explore new possibilities and take possession of their worlds*

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

## For Reflection

What open-ended materials are available in the spaces where children play? Think about materials that can be used in a number of ways: construction materials such as blocks, sand, cardboard, and wood; art materials such as crayons, paints, glue and “beautiful stuff;” and props for dramatic play.

How does your site’s scheduling promote or interfere with time to play and create? Think about flexible scheduling. Think about time allotted to play, routines, and adult-directed activities.

How do you support and value the worlds and fantasies that children create? Think about ways in which fantasy and imagination can be extended for children and documented to illustrate their value.

How do you make use of and reflect the community around you to engage, model, and develop children’s creativity, imagination, and play interests? Think about musicians, local artists and artisans, families’ expertise, and cultural contributions.



## Playful Exploration and Problem Solving

Using all their senses, children explore the physical and social worlds around them. In the process they refine their senses, test their personal capacities, and construct knowledge about people, places, and things. At play, children learn to make their thinking visible, build theories about how the world works, and practise skills and dispositions for inquiry, negotiation, and problem solving. This learning requires support for involvement in various types of play—exploratory, heuristic, imaginative, language and literate, constructive, and physical; access to a wide variety of materials and equipment; and adventuresome, playful, and persistent role models who actively engage children in processes of playful exploration, investigation, and problem solving.

*Children learn about the properties of objects*

- 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

*Children test their limits*

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

*Children learn to negotiate the complexities of joint undertakings*

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

*Children learn to employ creative approaches to identifying and working out practical problems*

- 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

### For Reflection

How do you provide ways for children to explore on their own, with peers, or with adults? Think about materials to act upon for cause and effect, open-ended materials for in-depth investigations, and children's own interests or questions.

Do children have access to a variety of games, both competitive and cooperative, that challenge thinking and encourage social relations? Think about peek-a-boo games, aiming games, chasing, hiding, and guessing games.

How do adults model problem solving behaviours? Think about talking through situations such as dividing materials fairly, fixing a broken toy, working out turn-taking for special activities or favourite playthings.



## Dizzy Play

Children's play sometimes erupts suddenly in loud, boisterous, physical bursts. This kind of play is exhilarating and infectious, creating communities through shared laughter.

Children love to twirl until they are too dizzy to stand up, laugh with others over nothing in particular, babble nonsense words in a riotous conversation, put their pants on their head or their jacket on their legs, and perform for their friends. They revel in their power to turn the world upside down, playfully confident that they can restore it. Educators recognize and accept this kind of play, valuing it for what it provides for the children: a release of physical energy, a sense of power, and often an expression of pure joy. It also requires tolerance, as this can be a noisy and seemingly senseless activity. Educators, aware of the resilience of children, must also assure that they are safe as they push their physical limits.

*Children take pleasure in being on the edge*

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

*Children take pleasure in sharing the joy of laughter*

- Making nonsense
- Clowning and physical humour

## For Reflection

How do you value and respond to rowdy, physical dizzy play? What is your comfort level and how does this affect the allowances you make for this type of play? Think about times when children's joy has been infectious, for example, sliding down hills, dancing barefoot, or singing at the top of their lungs.

