

# Interaction

VOLUME 32, NUMBER 1, SUMMER 2018

## The Power and Importance of Play



The Value in Letting Children Fail

A Need for Strengthening ELCC  
Leadership Practice in Alberta



Early Childhood Education  
**looking back  
moving forward**



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The photo on the cover was taken by Denise Skuce.

# Behind the Scenes

We all know as child care educators about the importance of play in early childhood development, learning, socialization and overall health and well-being. But too often we pull children away from play in an effort to maintain order, structure and behavior. The pressures are numerous for educators to support play “safely and appropriately” inside the classroom or outside. It’s hard to imagine a child not at play — as play is intrinsic to their very nature as young beings. Take for example at the table eating: they mush their food, rub it in their hands, squish, squirt and spill deliberately to learn every aspect of the food and its character. They push their cup repeatedly over the edge of the table, drop their spoon, push over the milk jug. And then in the reading corner, they push all the books off the shelves to hear and see the sounds and collapsing of the books hitting the floor. When they play with children they pour the sand on another child’s head, even tug at another child’s hair or clothing all in experimentation of the scientific world of texture and gravity and seeing people react.

This issue includes articles on play in many contexts. Taking the **Inside Out** (instead of taking the outdoors in as is more commonly done). And read about the conflicts that **early childhood educators in kindergarten classrooms experience when working with teachers** who may say they get the importance of play, but don’t encourage it in reality. And read about the **importance of letting children fail**, and not stepping in the way as they fully learn the lessons of disappointment, determination and new ways of doing things.

Also read about A Need for Strengthening ELCC Leadership Practice in Alberta – explore strategies and initiatives to support the strengthening of leadership in the early learning and care sector in Alberta, and approach leadership understanding as practice, not position.

And finally, we say good bye to a long standing advocate and leader in Manitoba, Pat Wege of MCCA, as she writes her farewell advice for those of us still carrying the torch for Child Care in Canada in From Where I Sit.

And mark your calendars for the National Child Care Conference in Vancouver B.C. in April 10-13, 2019, Early Childhood Education – Looking Back Moving Forward co-hosted by ECEBC and CCCF.

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## INSIDE THE FEDERATION

### Congratulations and Farewell to a Manitoba Child Care Leader – Pat Wege

On May 9, the Manitoba Child Care Association hosted a retirement party for Pat Wege, recognizing her many years of advocacy, leadership and accomplishments.

The CCCF was honored to speak at the retirement and to present Pat with a small token of our collective appreciation for all she has done and her time as Executive Director of the MCCA. Her contributions are invaluable to the child care sector, families and children.



## FROM WHERE I SIT

### After more than 20 years at MCCA and 40 years in child care, Pat Wege is passing the torch Here is her “Advocacy Advice from the Trenches”

by Pat Wege

I have been a child care advocate since the day in 1989 when then Manitoba MLA Judy Wasylycia-Leis asked Karen Ohlson and I to join her at a news conference calling on the provincial government to double the salary enhancement grant. The average ECE salary at the time was about \$16,000.00 a year. An MCCA sponsored study indicated the starting salary should be about \$22,000.00. My first ever



media quote: “People aren’t graduating at a college level fast enough to meet the needs of the existing system.” Karen Ohlson warned, “We’re not going to take this anymore. There’s a real lack of incentive for people coming into the field.” I have lost track of how many media events I have done since then, and how many times I have been quoted on the same topic.

I am retiring from the Manitoba Child Care Association, which has been my home base for child care advocacy since 1997, but I am sure I will find new and different ways to continue to support the cause. Here are some advocacy lessons I have learned:

1. **“Political will is the ghost in the machine of politics, the motive force that generates political action.”** (Craig Charney) After 40 years working in child care, and



many years as a hard core advocate, I know firsthand that child care will fly, float, or sink depending on the political party in power at the time. Everyone needs to help cultivate that political will. You should always ask candidates & elected officials about child care and listen closely to what is being promised. Keep their position in mind when deciding how to cast your ballot on election day. Provincial elections are most important, but the outcome of federal, municipal, and even school board elections also impact on early learning and child care. Political will is an advocates' holy grail. Watch BC as a current example of how far child care moves forward in the right direction when a provincial government embraces it as a policy priority.

2. **Not doing something is also a government policy decision.** We didn't get that increase to the salary enhancement grant in 1989 and a few years later the government made a decision to cancel it entirely. MCCA also didn't have a very good relationship with the government at the time. Keep reading to learn why that matters.
3. **Organizations have the best chance to influence government policy if they develop a positive, open, and respectful relationship with *all* elected officials, regardless of how far apart the opinions are.** Constant criticism and advocacy activities that embarrass the party or the elected official won't get the advocate a seat at the table where decisions are being made. If you aren't at the table, you won't have any influence.
4. **ECEs are more likely to talk to each other about their needs** (funding), problems (wages), challenges (wait lists), beliefs (ELCC matters) than they are to the only people who actually have the ability to make change – their elected official. Governments have many constituents and interest groups competing for a share of public funds and the squeaky wheel does get the grease. So rather than preach to the choir, build a strong relationship with your elected official and communicate often. Don't know what to say? Your story is your superpower.
5. **The compensation problem is a hard nut to crack.** We used to say "we need to educate parents/the public" thinking that was our key to better compensation. "If only the parents/public knew how hard we work/that we are educated/that we are underpaid" Think again - most parents are worried about their own finances and don't want to pay higher child care fees so ECEs can earn more.

Parent fees alone won't support competitive wages and benefits. **Fight for public funding.** See above – political will.

6. **Early learning and child care advocacy would be far more successful if parents who rely on the service also advocated.** We need to get parents to speak up because when it's primarily those of us who work in the system making the noise, we are seen as self-serving.
7. **The vast majority of the child care workforce are not members of their provincial/territorial/national child care organization.** Out of 170,340 ECEs and assistants working in Canadian child care (2009, CCHRSC), only 7,095 were affiliate members of the Canadian Child Care Federation through their provincial/territorial affiliate organizations. (2015-2016). That's not even 5%. We would be so much farther ahead if everyone would support their local child care association and help move their profession forward.
8. **There are so many passionate, smart, creative, resourceful, child care advocates, some of whom have been at it their entire adult life.** I have had the pleasure of knowing and working with many of them. Through thick and thin, ups and downs, they have stuck with the cause never giving up and always looking for more evidence, a new angle, different opportunity, another event, a higher soapbox. They write letters, pen articles, do research, make public appearances, tweet, phone, join, campaign, and lead the charge. Get to know them and ask how you can help.
9. Many of the principles of successful child care advocacy are in the goose story:

**Harness the power of many:** *When geese fly together, each goose provides individual lift and reduces air resistance for the geese flying behind it.*

**Support the vision:** *When a goose drops out of the v-formation it quickly discovers that it requires a great deal more effort and energy to fly.*

**Communicate with kindness:** *Geese honk at each other*

**Utilize everyone's skills:** *Geese rotate leadership*

I've enjoyed flying with everyone I have met on my child care journey, and know I will find new ways to advocate for early learning and child care as a service and as a profession.



# The Education Project of the Child Care Centre *Plein Soleil* in Yellowknife, NWT

**A key process to increase the quality of the early childhood service**

by **Caroline-Lajoie-Jempson**

“It is not because we are located many hundreds of kilometers away from big cities that our needs are different. We, like the rest of the country, understand early childhood is important,” underlines a parent interviewed for the education program’s project of the child care centre *Plein Soleil* in Yellowknife. Yet, the Northwest Territories are one of the last bastions in Canada to have overlooked the development of an official early childhood program for their child care centres, either English or French speaking.

It is important to understand that in many provinces, in particular in Québec, the child care centres must abide by the provincial education program which serves as a reference tool to ensure the quality of the service is there, no matter where the daycare environment is to be found. In some provinces, the early childhood provincial program serves as an incentive — the childhood centres may implement it if they wish, but they can only draw from it as well.



So in 2016, in order to follow up with her concern to enhance the quality of the service offered in French, the director of the centre *Plein Soleil*, madame Rachelle Francoeur, moved heaven and earth to secure the funds needed to develop an appropriate education program that would take into account not only the early childhood concerns but also the concerns of the northern francophonie or the francophone nordicity.

Therefore, thanks to a two-year subsidy from Canadian Heritage (2017-2019) the project formally began with the hiring of a lead consultant, and together with the director of the centre of research, wrote out the mandate and activities related to the program. Meetings with the community stakeholders and data gathering with the centre staff further moved the plan forward.

To facilitate the integration of the education program, a research-based format was chosen which involved the collaboration of the educators and parents. An environment cannot be transformed from the outside; the environment has to be considered first and foremost with a philosophy of ‘by and for’ the environment. This was at the heart of our action, much like the heart of the director, as her name suggests (Fran-coeur).



### ***Imagine* – a North West Territories Program that holds promise!**

The program's project, called *Imagine* led to the creation of an *Imagine Committee* made up of parents, educators, the director of the School Board, a representative from the provincial government with a background in education, and members of the francophone community. This committee was gathered in November 2017 when a document was presented summarizing the state of the childhood programs in Canada as well as in five countries where early childhood is given particular attention — three Nordic countries (Finland, Denmark, Norway), New Zealand and Australia. Members of the Committee were thus able to participate and to contribute ideas for the draft of the program scheduled to be ready for the end of March 2018.

First of all, we all focused on what is meant by an *education program for early childhood* and what its priorities should be. Apart from the chapters on values, guiding principles, child development objectives and targeted interventions in a Nordic environment where francophones constitute a minority group, the new education program must be a reference for the educators and must make them, and the community, aware of the importance of early childhood in the Northwest Territories.

The centre Plein Soleil's director and her consultant have shared the process involved in creating the education program with the NWT's Ministry of Education which, for its part is starting to develop the territorial early childhood program intended to be ready in 2023. The hope is that the Ministry will recognize the legitimacy of their process for the

Francophonie of the NWT and will work hand in hand with the centre.

Although there are multiple early childhood programs which can serve as a basis for the education of the youngsters, it is important to offer an intervention corresponding to the needs of the region and environment. The context of the extended family, for instance, in remote locations is one that demands particular attention when it comes to early childhood intervention. If we only take into account the Nordic environment and the distinctiveness of the francophonie in the Territories, we already know that the components of the education program for early childhood will be different here than in Québec or Ontario.

Finally, the process of developing the *Imagine program* will continue from March to June. Parents and educators will be kept informed and invited to comment on the draft via a new Web site so that the necessary changes can be made before the training and field testing of the program. The training is expected to take place from September to December 2018 at the centre Plein Soleil. The process may be long and tedious, but it is critical if we want to achieve a quality program with all the essential elements to direct, guide and inspire the early childhood workforce and ensure a quality service to francophone parents in the NWT.

All in all, once the official launch of the program is field tested, reviewed and corrected it should take place in March 2019. There is already enthusiasm from the educators eager to own the program and build from it. Once early childhood is made a priority, its value cannot be ignored and sets a strong precedent for all childhood programs, no matter where people are from!





# A Need for Strengthening ELCC Leadership Practice in Alberta

by Susan Garrow-Oliver

Leadership is a constructed phenomenon that is complex to define and understand; yet leadership in the early learning and care sector has been identified as a key area worth investing in and exploring. Here, I will explore strategies and initiatives to support the strengthening of leadership in the early learning and care sector in Alberta, and approach leadership understanding as practice, not position.

In recent years the Alberta government has shown an increased interest in addressing the need for affordable, accessible and quality child care programs. Financial investments in the province focus on programs and initiatives such as the *Early Learning and Child Care programs*, *Alberta Early Learning Curriculum Framework*, *professional development subsidies for Early childhood educators*, the *AsAP coaching model*, *certification equivalencies*, and *Child Care Program Accreditation*. Investments in these separate initiatives have made it difficult for an already fractured sector, that lacks a comprehensive system, to strengthen the workforce and build leadership capacity.

Current research continues to prove the importance of investing in the early years and that educated early childhood educators are a key indicator in providing quality early learning and care experiences for young children. However, investments continue to focus on addressing affordable and accessible child care but quality and system change is less of a priority. While the importance of access and affordability is also important, quality should not be compromised.

As the provincial government implements its childcare strategies, the early learning and child care sector is also being supported by the efforts of various groups. The Association of Early Childhood Educators of Alberta (AECEA) is working to mobilize the sector and to work towards the development of a sustainable system, focusing on a childcare workforce strategy.

The Muttart Foundation in Alberta is another key supporter of early learning and child care. The Muttart Foundation has been investing resources in the Early Childhood Education and Care sector in efforts to:

“foster, promote and support the organizational vehicles and processes that will enable charitable early childhood and care organizations to play a full role in the development of public policy related to early childhood education and care; and to support the development of increased organizational capacity in early childhood and care charitable organizations with an emphasis on executive and management staff” (Muttart Foundation, 2017).

The Muttart Foundation highlights and values the need for strong leadership in early childhood education and care, so children have optimal early opportunities for school success. At the same time strong leadership will strengthen the workforce and support early childhood leaders to influence and inform public policy. In their report *Advancing the Educational Preparation and Professional Development of Alberta's Early Learning and Care Workforce* (2014) they identify the need for additional qualifications for staff in management or leadership positions in licensed early learning and care programs (p.11). Alberta is fortunate to have these champions to support a workforce strategy.

It is often taken for granted the assumption that leadership is viewed through a lens of managing and supervising; or position. The early learning and child care sector has inherited the business model of leadership, as a top down approach where one leader is viewed as expert and holds the power. Child care directors tend to rely on this understanding of leadership as they consider and engage in their own practice of leadership (Garrow-Oliver, 2017).

## Reconceptualizing leadership understanding

Many educators believe that leadership is a lonely position that requires control and certain skills, training, and characteristics, thus they do not perceive it as a valued role they want to aspire to (Garrow-Oliver, 2017). However, in recent years, there has been efforts to understand leadership differently; from position to practice. The phenomenon of grassroots leadership is emerging where leadership is being reconceptualized.



McDowall Clark and Murray (2012) suggest that reflecting on leadership “as a social construction and experienced phenomenon, leadership can be a broad and changing notion. It has no fixed identity because it is in a constant state of deconstruction, interpretation and reconstruction” (p. 5). Traditional understanding of leadership focus on hierarchical top down approaches to leadership with individuals holding power over, while directing and managing employees and teams. According to McDowall Clark and Murray (2012), when we reduce leadership to a set of standards, traits, or behaviours, it does not consider the social context or the interplay of human relationships. The shift in viewing leadership as practice and process encourages shared leadership amongst the team and allows for a more collaborative approach to leading, learning, decision making and problem solving.

This approach to leadership could begin with early learning and child care students and graduates if we wish to see a shift in the profession. Current leaders need the support and time to critically reflect on their own leadership practice, so they may act as models and pedagogical leaders for early childhood educators.

### Identifying and Nurturing Emerging Leaders

It is important that we pursue leaders apart from positions such as managers or directors. Leaders and emerging leaders can be everyday practitioners, parents, children, students and directors. While many early childhood educators will attest to leadership practice in their everyday work with children, it is important to consider the meso and macro system levels if there is a desire to lead, and influence change and policy.

As the aging early learning and childcare workforce considers slowing down and eventually retiring it is essential to engage emerging leaders in ongoing advocacy work. A career in childcare is still undervalued, while at the same time families lack access to affordable, accessible and quality child care options. In Canada there is still a push from researchers, families and early childhood educators for investment in a universal child care program, but this request and demand remains to fall on deaf ears as the Federal government and provinces continue to invest minimal resources and band-aid approaches to the child care crisis.

In a recent survey informally conducted in winter 2018, with current early learning and childcare students and Bachelor of Child Studies Degree students in Calgary, only 30% of those who responded said they plan to work in child care upon graduation. In conversations with the potential graduates, many cite frustrations with the lack of respect by government and society regarding early childhood education. The certification

equivalencies in Alberta are a contentious issue as early learning and child care graduates are expected to work alongside peers who have less foundational knowledge in early childhood. With the recent introduction of the *Alberta Curriculum Framework* and pilot programs, early childhood educators and directors have argued an even higher priority and need for an educated workforce with includes knowledge that is specific to early childhood.

Throughout student course work and practicum experiences students are introduced to Early Learning and Child Care as a profession. Post secondary programs have shared the challenges of finding quality child care programs to provide optimal learning for students. With a workforce that is already overworked and undervalued those model programs can accommodate only so many student placements. Early childhood graduates are often unprepared for the realities of the workforce. Their dreams of making a difference is frequently overshadowed by the bureaucracies of regulations, low wages, having to mentor and teach less educated peers, poor working conditions and lack of recognition in the important work they do.

However, there are emerging leaders that recognize these challenges and see themselves as a part of a solution. It is up to experienced leaders currently in the field to harness the passion, energy and determination of these individuals. Directors and managers must find opportunities to engage with emerging leaders in their programs. Perhaps through shared leadership where professional learning is extended, administrative tasks are offered, facilitation of professional learning communities, and pedagogical partner or leadership models are created. As pedagogical leaders it is important to identify and acknowledge the individual strengths and gifts early childhood educators bring to the team.

McDowall Clark and Murray (2012) propose a paradigm of leadership that is non-hierarchical and includes catalytic agency, reflective integrity, and relational interdependence. “This leadership model shares the practice of co-learning and co-construction of knowledge through dialogue and intentional and reflective practice, similar to the practice of early childhood educators with children and families” (Garrow-Oliver, 2017, p.47). The idea of catalytic leaders, those with a ‘spark’, where they are responsive to the complexities in the early learning and child care sector, disrupting, questioning and holding policy makers accountable. Catalytic leaders are needed to take responsibility for change through influence of respect. As these emerging leaders are nurtured they are encouraged to participate, engage and share their ideas where they are acknowledged and valued.

In *Child Care Directors Understanding of Leadership* research study (Garrow-Oliver, 2017), experienced child care directors



shared their lack of confidence and knowledge to engage in leadership practice beyond their role of director or manager. The directors also cited a lack of time and resources as much of their day was spent overseeing the day to day operations of their program. While directors acknowledged their desire to be more involved, along with mentoring and coaching new graduates, at the end of the day there wasn't enough time.

### Voice

Participant stories in Garrow-Oliver (2017) study highlighted some key areas that contributed to their lack of participation in leadership practice away from the traditional model or role of leadership. When reflecting on their advocacy efforts as leaders they identified their feelings of isolation, with pressure to take on sole responsibility and decision making in their programs; a lack of confidence to lead, and fear of speaking out.

When the early learning and child care profession and the role and work of early childhood educators is not valued, respected, or recognized as important (Bornfreund & Goffin, 2016), early childhood educators are hesitant to speak out and demand more. But often we hear early childhood educators say they are only one voice and therefore feel they cannot make a difference or influence change. On the rare occasion their opinion is asked, they feel no one is listening or values their ideas. It is important that early childhood educators are given the opportunity to have their voice heard and genuinely listened to.

### Advocacy Leadership

Early childhood educators often demonstrate advocacy in their everyday practice with children and families in their programs. Macdonald, Richardson, and Langford (2015) noted early childhood educators and directors prioritized "putting their energies into stabilizing their immediate work environment". By providing and demanding quality learning and care environments for children they are informally advocating for the rights of children. But issues such as regulations, workforce disparity, affordable and accessible quality child care, and other social equity issues need to be made aware of and addressed. Political advocacy and increasing society's awareness are key elements of leadership practice, that is, advocating for children and families, and, equally importantly, advocating for themselves and the profession (Ebbeck and Waniganayake, 2003).

## **When the early learning and child care profession and the role and work of early childhood educators is not valued, respected, or recognized as important, early childhood educators are hesitant to speak out and demand more.**

A potential contributing factor to the lack of advocacy and leadership efforts of early learning and child care directors is a direct result of their limited skills to engage in personal and political advocacy because of their limited exposure to advocacy strategies and knowledge in their postsecondary programs (Bruno, Gonzalez-Mena, Hernandez & Sullivan, 2013). The same was discovered in Garrow-Oliver (2017) where directors in that study shared their lack of knowledge and skills to be more involved in advocacy efforts outside of their programs.

### Preparing Students

Early learning and child care post secondary curricula include some courses in development, play theory, planning, guidance and management. In efforts to provide ample course content to meet diploma, degree and certification requirements, there is minimal content in social justice advocacy in some two and four-year programs. Brunson (2002) surveyed over 700 early childhood educators and discovered that participants felt that more training and education on public policy advocacy is needed in their program of study. Early childhood educators in the Macdonald, Richardson, and Langford (2015) study were found that they "lacked the skills needed to advocate publicly or speak on bigger picture issues" (p. 7). Winick (2013) suggests that "advocacy as a part of a leadership plan needs to be a core component of pre-service and in-service programs" (p. 143). Hollingsworth, Knight-McKenna and Bryan (2016) noted this absence of curricular content specific to professional advocacy in degree programs.

### Concluding thoughts

In my research, and from my own personal experiences working with the early learning and child care sector, I have seen child care directors and managers lose their passion and eventually burn out, leaving the profession altogether, from the unrealistic role expectations that all too often they were not prepared to undertake. Many early childhood educators enter the field because of their desire to make a positive impact on the lives of children and families; only to be undervalued, overworked and silenced in their efforts to advocate for themselves and others. And, many early learning and child care graduates avoid working in child care altogether.

Constant changes and shifts in the political landscape influences child care policy and priorities which leads to the unknown



regarding financial investments in child care from year to year. Bureaucrats, decision makers and influencers at the policy level are rarely invested or genuinely interested in recognizing quality child care as a right. Minimal pockets of public investment are distributed towards band-aid approaches. There appears to be fear in making bold decisions around a publicly funded system such as education, which seems to be more valued. We are left to wonder why it is that when children enter kindergarten that this is deemed the optimal time to invest in them.

Early childhood educators are made to feel undervalued as they see those without foundational knowledge in the early years given the same recognition. There is little incentive to pursue post secondary education specifically in early childhood education when this limits their career opportunities. Whereas in the province of Alberta a social work diploma, child and youth care degree or degree in kinesiology provides the same certification level to work in early learning and child care, and many other career opportunities. It is difficult to stay motivated, passionate and committed to early learning and child care as a profession with this lack of respect and perspective. Another example is the Alberta Learning Information Service, 2011 website that provides a description of the early childhood educator role in efforts to recruit employees to the field. On the website an 'easy read profile' is provided for those with low levels of literacy, in efforts to fill the gap needed to provide child care in the province. This is what those who genuinely wish to make working with young children in care their career choice face every day from society.

Strong leadership practice is necessary if we want to transform the child care workforce into a respected and valued career. Strong leadership practice is needed if we want to see more women in the workforce knowing they have access to

affordable and quality child care. Strong leadership practice is needed for children to have learning environments where they are nurtured, cared for, and encouraged to explore and co-learn with peers and adults in a democratic setting.

**Susan Garrow-Oliver** is an Associate Professor in the Department of Child Studies & Social Work at Mount Royal University in Calgary. Susan's teaching and research is in early childhood education and child studies with interests in leadership, ECE profession, advocacy and public policy.

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FOCUS

# The Power of Play

## THE POWER OF PLAY

# The Importance of Indoor Play in Kindergarten

by Karen McLaughlin

***“Early childhood educators will have to find the courage to speak up with more conviction about play’s importance, and they will have to come together to protect the integrity of the body of knowledge our profession has developed”***

I had always taken the benefits of play for granted throughout my career as an early childhood educator. The bulk of my experience had been in preschool and kindergarten age programs. I never once questioned the copious amounts of literature I had read over the years as an ECE student and later as part of professional learning, — that play is very important for young children. But I never truly appreciated and understood its value until I became an ECE in the Ontario Ministry’s full day Kindergarten program in 2010. It was only when I saw the lack of play in the kindergarten program that I understood play’s profound significance in fostering the healthy development of children at this age.

### **Quality of play impacts the quality of learning**

I also came to appreciate and understand how the quality of play that exists in a play-based program impacts the quality of the learning. The quality of play is not always high for various reasons. The most common reason quality of play can be lacking, it seems to me, is when play is not valued.

Many teachers in the Ontario Ministry of Education have worked a long time using traditional, if not static methods in learning,

so it is difficult for them to accept play as the most prominent form of learning when it goes against everything they have understood in their profession.

To many play is just something that keeps the children occupied while a small group is pulled aside to do “the real learning” such as reading and writing or math. For these teachers it is believed that when children are playing nicely they can be ignored, and other “more important things” can be accomplished.

To them play is a necessary evil to be tolerated because it is a means to an end for learning rather than the end itself. Structured group work is considered the best way to teach the children to “settle down” so they will be “ready for grade 1”.

It’s true that children’s indoor play *can* be unproductive. When no adult is thoughtfully observing what they are doing, what materials they are using, how they are using them and how they are interacting with each other (except when there is conflict) play can become stagnant. When no adult is ever joining in on the play as a role model or exploring along with the children and giving suggestions or listening to theirs, play can lose its effectiveness as a vehicle for learning and development. When no adult is changing the environment or the materials in a way which evolves as the children’s interests, abilities and learning evolve, play can lose its joyfulness and ability to teach. When the amazing accomplishments that children make in their learning during play are not recognized or highlighted to children, teachers and families, play is not being valued.

### **Play – an inconvenient necessity**

When coming into the kindergarten program years back, I noticed that the same materials were put out day in and day out. Every day there were the same old play dough tools, the same old water toys, the same old pails and shovels in the sandbox, the same wooden blocks, and Lego and the same old boring rocks and pinecones. When there were other toys like dinosaurs or wild animals, teachers would often throw them out because they promoted boisterousness. After all, dinosaurs roar and bears growl and fight each other. When children struggled to tidy up toys at the end of play time (usually because the play time allotted was not enough) many teachers would feel justified in throwing out more toys and materials. They would say it was because it was too much of an effort to get the children to keep things tidy; it was “getting chaotic”. When children fought over a toy many teachers pounced on that menacing item and threw it out, with much exuberance. I don’t know how many times I have heard “less is more”. Too many toys can be overwhelming for sure, but too few is equally or more of a problem. “Why throw them out or give them away?”, I would ask myself. “How about storing them and rotating



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them?” I never thought I would ever be asking myself those questions. I had always thought the answers were a given. I now know not to use the word “toy”. Toy is an evil word. I was once told that we only use “materials” and “construction tools” in kindergarten.

### **Play and academic work “are not distinct categories for young children”**

The Full Day Learning Kindergarten document of 2016 prioritizes play in very significant ways. It calls play a “vehicle for learning that lies at the core of innovation and creativity”. When children are truly engaged in play “they are at their most receptive”. They are naturally motivated to solve problems and to seek challenges that are manageable. They are “naturally being scaffolded” at their zone of proximal development as they construct knowledge through exploration and interactions.

The child knows what he needs to know and “each child takes what he needs to learn” from each play scenario so that the learning is highly personal and differentiated. Play is “responsive to the unique learning styles and interests of each child, and in an appropriate environment play meets multiple individual developmental needs simultaneously”. Play and academic work “are not distinct categories for young children”. The deepest most complex learning comes from play because “the learning and growth in all developmental domains is integrated”. Learning is “broad and acquired in an overall way” instead of in specific systematic trajectories. It’s hard to imagine how all this individualized scaffolding and integrated and differentiated learning through play could be replicated using group lessons, worksheets and instruction plans. It would be akin to providing an 18-month-old toddler with systemized grammar and vocabulary lessons to teach her to talk, when what would really work best is social interaction involving playful exchanges with an adult.



## **Nurturing teachers to value and practice play**

So, it is clear the full day learning document delineates in every way the importance of play as a vehicle for learning. But for many teachers being told to change their whole system of values and perspective and just allow the children to play can be very difficult. The pedagogical rationale and framework for play has to be understood first. But to understand it means to have practiced it, lived and breathed it. Therefore, change comes slowly, and sometimes not at all. The children may reluctantly be given more time for play but that doesn't necessarily mean that it is the most constructive or effective play. It doesn't mean the teacher will observe the play and value it and make the learning within play visible to the children and families. If a teacher has never worked in an emergent or play-based learning environment, all the abstract documents about play in the world cannot suddenly and magically be transformed into practice without the practical learning component that comes from experience in quality play based early childhood environments. A teacher still needs lots and lots of practical experience and role modelling from people that have that background in order to implement changes in practice. When such a teacher doesn't trust the judgement educators with a quality play-based background have, or if the teacher lacks faith in the educator's knowledge and skill base, or if the teacher doesn't understand what the educator is trying to do, or if a teacher refuses to allow such an educator to contribute meaningfully to the program then change comes much too slowly. The quality of the program can be severely compromised. And of course, in these cases, the children are the ones who suffer, along with their families, and let's not forget the taxpayers, the economy and society.

The full day kindergarten document specifies in great detail what the role of the educators in the room should be in order to provide a rich environment where effective quality play will flourish. "Both educators will observe, interpret, analyze and make visible the children's learning through play and inquiry so that new materials, provocations and prompts can reflect and extend the wonder and the thinking and theories of the children". The "critical role of the educators in the kindergarten program is to understand how the child learns through play", to facilitate the learning and to "make the learning visible to the child, parents and teachers". Environments should "allow for multiple entry points for learning and for demonstrating the learning" in representations of all kinds. Materials should be "open ended and provide multi-dimensional aspects".

## **Interacting with children at play and wondering out loud**

The document also recognizes another key role of the educators beyond observation, analysis and next steps. It is to interact with

the children in meaningful ways to promote social and emotional growth. Where that occurs, so will cognitive, communication, problem-solving, oral language, and literacy and math skills. The educator "must keep in mind during interactions that the expectations are overall and not specific". Asking open-ended questions, wondering out loud, role modelling appropriate social interaction and collaboration, sharing documentation, eliciting children's ideas and theories, helping them make goals and plans, challenging them to problem-solve and supporting their interests by following their lead are all necessary interactions. So clearly, play is not something to ignore.

## **Experience in play required**

But unless teachers have had at least a few years of experience working in an environment that promotes the role of the educator as described above, would they be able to suddenly become co-constructors of knowledge and leave behind teacher directed lessons? Would they know what open ended materials or multi-dimensional centres look like? Would they value them? Would they be willing to follow the lead and interests of children and would they even understand how to do that? When someone has become a master of rote learning over an extended period of time and has worked hard to refine it as an artform, to the point where it is somewhat effective would they really be onboard to a radical paradigm shift in their practice? Would they bring in toys, play along with children in centres, wonder along with them about all kinds of things? Would they tolerate boisterous play at the block centres while they are working with other children who are practicing their printing? Would they value and share at circle a Lego structure as much as they value the sample of writing a child accomplished at the writing centre? Would they welcome a new educator to come in and make significant changes? Some might. But many others would find it difficult – even threatening. They might refuse to allow it. Still others wouldn't like it but they wouldn't say anything (at least, not to the other educator). A large number might be very concerned that such behavior does not help the children learn to "settle down" or be "ready" for more advanced grade 1 academics.

There is no denying that many kindergarten children like to sit down and count 3 red bears and 4 yellow bears and are happy to write the number 7, representing the total number. Most like to show the teacher what they can do. A small amount of this is great for most children at this age. But this activity has one and only one outcome each and every time, no matter how much you vary the number of red bears versus yellow bears. This makes the activity simplistic and one-dimensional and after a few rounds children rightfully get bored. They need to go back to the real business of playing with its complex multidimensional opportunities for learning. Most kindergarten children enjoy practicing to read simplistic pattern books that help them





recognize key words and to understand the principals of phonics. But after a short while they will want you to read them a beautifully illustrated picture book with imaginative plots about dragons and fantasy worlds that will provide the inspiration for them to then go and collaborate their own rich stories with their friends at the drama or big block centre.

### **Living and breathing play-based learning environments**

Many teachers need to live and breathe play based learning environments. They need to absorb the room with thoughtfully laid out centres throughout, that have the right materials, prompts, scaffolding and support co-created with children based on observations and documentation, in order to understand its benefits. The sand table where children resort to whipping sand in each other's faces because they are bored and frustrated with the lack of inspiring materials can become a land of dinosaurs. It could have lots of different sized and shaped rocks, a home made volcanic mountain, plastic green shrubs for prehistoric vegetation, some pieces of bark and sticks, a shallow blue bowl with water for a pond, toy dinosaurs and pictures of categories of dinosaurs on the wall beside the sand box. Every few days things could be added or taken out, modified and so forth. Bones made from clay, rocks with "fossils" home made by educators could be buried after reading them a child-centred book about paleontologists. This would presumably be after overhearing children pretend to be digging for dinosaur fossils or after having a conversation with them about the dinosaur skeletons they saw at the museum. If we truly value play then stories and conversations at circle time should be directly related to the materials at the centres. When wonder and excitement start to dissipate then it is time to completely transform the sandbox into say, a construction site like the one the children were fascinated with after they saw a real one on a community walk. There will be no need to reprimand children for throwing sand at each other because they will be engaged and inspired with all of their senses and imagination. If they do start to throw sand at each other, then its not time to close up the sand box because "its causing too much chaos". Its time to transform it again.

### **What happens when teachers don't "get" play**

But what if an educator in the room with years of quality play-based experience would like to work with the teacher to help transform the sandbox, the water table, the circles and sharing times, the routines, the culture of learning and the assessment but can't? That is a reality for a large number of early childhood educators working in the full day kindergarten program across Ontario. It is a pervasive problem with various issues. Could a highly skilled, experienced and educated ECE be seen as a threat to a teacher and the future of her or his job or reputation

in kindergarten? Or could it be that the teacher has no concept, whatsoever, of how play can be an effective learning and teaching tool, and doesn't trust the ECE's knowledge and skills and refuses to allow his/her input, ideas or contributions? What if teachers, who have been told to make play the centre of the curriculum insist they will figure it out on their own without help from the ECE? They might introduce play, but not the culture of play as a highly valued tool for learning that requires skill and thought and planning *and interactions*. Then the quality of play will be lacking as will the quality of the program. And when the teacher then sees chaos ensuing and little learning happening, think how difficult it can be to convince a teacher to expand play instead of hindering it.

### **Play helps develop and promote self-regulation**

A final component concerning play in the full day learning document is how it promotes and develops self-regulation through the theories from Stuart Shanker and Charles Pascale as well as Vygotsky. During play children naturally engage in self-talk which promotes self-regulation. They have an internal dialogue where they are able to assimilate adult prompts, descriptions, and explanations and incorporate them into their own internal speech. This allows children to internalize socially acceptable behaviour and responses so that compliance comes from within and is not externally imposed out of fear of consequences. That is one way play promotes self regulation. Self regulation is the ability to recover from an over worked nervous system or an under functioning one, caused by stressors in the environment (both sensory and emotional). When children experience stressors such as not having an engaging environment or having to do simplistic repetitive tasks for long periods of time or being reprimanded for not complying or having the fear of consequences imposed on them, they build up negative emotions. To rebalance themselves (or regulate) requires a great deal of energy on their part. Negativity depletes energy reserves needed to self-regulate. When they are playing at self-initiated and self-directed activities in a supportive and interesting environment they are acquiring positive emotions. Positive emotions build up energy reserves they can use to self-regulate when needed. The development of self-regulation is connected to healthy neural pathway building and pruning. Stagnant and joyless environments compromise children's neural pathway building. The development of self-regulation is a primary indicator of positive outcomes for young children down the road. The true benefits of play have long term implications but only if it is play that is valued and is of high quality.

### **Implementing the Full Day Kindergarten Learning Program**

The Full Day Kindergarten Learning Program for 2016 document is a strong and well thought out document. Every childhood



educator could benefit by taking a look at it, especially the section on play. The problem in implementing such a gigantic paradigm shift into all those large school boards across Ontario lies with the fact that early childhood educators coming into the public school system have largely not been listened to, or allowed adequate opportunities to make significant contributions. I have worked with teachers who have tried hard to accommodate these new concepts but find it difficult. They often complain about the amount of work involved in having to adopt these changes. But they often refuse to allow the ECE to have a significant role in helping to implement these changes for a variety of reasons. Some don't trust that the ECE has the skills and experience needed to help them and some ECEs won't be up to the challenge, though a majority will. Many teachers simply don't want to share the spotlight because they never have had to work in a team environment. Some might convince principals to overlook the lack of changes in their pedagogy. Many principals themselves don't understand play. Some teachers believe they can read the literature, go to workshops and then learn by trial and error. When they make big mistakes and say "I know not to do that again, back to the drawing board" they didn't want ideas from the ECE before they tried it, and they don't want input from the ECE afterwards either.

"Early childhood educators will have to find the courage to speak up with more conviction and they will have to come together to protect the integrity of the body of knowledge our profession has developed. We need to own it and be confident in our knowledge and skills".

But without proper implementation of the Kindergarten document the full day program is not going to be able to deliver on its promise to provide better outcomes for children throughout their academic life and beyond. It won't be able to reap economic savings in the social services sector down the road. It won't pay for itself without fundamental changes within the culture, it will just cost us all more money. The marginalization of *quality* play within the school system is historical, pervasive and deep, and is an integral part of the culture of public schools within Ontario and I would venture to say across the country. Early childhood educators will have to find the courage to speak up with more conviction and they will have to come together to protect the integrity of the body of knowledge our profession has developed. We need to own it and be confident in our knowledge and skills. Our children and our society need us to do this more than ever.

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## THE POWER OF PLAY

# The Value in Letting Children Fail

## The core of true play

by Marie Poss

***“Failure is instructive. The person who really thinks, learns quite as much from his failures as from his successes.”***

– John Dewey

Walt Disney. Oprah Winfrey. Vera Wang. Thomas Edison. JK Rowling. Albert Einstein. What do all of these successful individuals have in common? They all persevered in the face of failure to rise above the obstacles in their lives to reach new progressive milestones. New research has highlighted the importance of teaching children the value in failure, and to see it not as a detriment, but as a natural part of the learning process.

### **When was the last time you failed at something?**

It could have been a large failure, or a small failure, but we have all failed at different times in our lives. Perhaps it was making a terrible pot of coffee, or burning dinner, or forgetting to pick something up from the grocery store? Regardless of what the failure entailed, chances are you were resilient enough to not let it affect you too much.

Failure is a component of life, and a tangible way to learn from natural consequences and grow from those same small defeats. However, as educators we often do not let children fail, and only provide opportunities for success. Yet the question remains, are



**Failure is a component of life, and a tangible way to learn from natural consequences and grow from those same small defeats.**

success driven environments really helping our students, or is there value in letting children fail?

### **By removing opportunities for failure we are also removing opportunities for learning**

Sue Riley (2005) describes how we remove obstacles for children instead of allowing them to learn from these tribulations when she states, “Adults, having learned so much from long experience, often find it difficult to give children defined areas of choice and then stand back and allow them to use their freedom. “Oops, he’s making a mistake” comes so easily that it is hard for Daddy not to insist that he knows best,



for of course he usually does. Yet the parents' knowledge cannot be spoon-fed to the children. One of the major responsibilities of adults is to give children freedom to learn from their own experiences and to shoulder the consequences of their choices. Too often we are inclined to isolate the virtue of responsibility and assume it can be taught in a vacuum." (p.14). This explanation clearly demonstrates the way in which adults often minimize or eradicate obstacles or barriers to success, instead of allowing children to meet these barriers head on, learn from them, and overcome them.

### Learning through Failure

Individuals who fail, learn from the choices they have made that have led them to their failure, and in turn grow both personally and professionally. This is ultimately the goal of Vygotsky's zone of proximal development — encouraging children to remain between the fine lines of mastery and challenge, a zone where children will be required to work hard and be challenged, but not simply master without effort. When children are learning in their individual zones of proximal development, they are challenged to think of solutions, problem solve, and regulate their emotions until they finally master the task at hand, something that takes time and commitment. When mastery finally presents itself after trial and error, the feeling of self-satisfaction is intrinsic and satisfying.

Learning is intrinsic in failure, and promotes problem solving and critical thinking skills. When failure occurs, we must

regulate our emotions, learn from our mistakes, and reanalyze both the problem at bay and the path we took to get there. I believe there is value in letting children fail and learn from their mistakes. By allowing children to stand on their own, exercise their own ideas, and learn from the natural consequences that unfold, educators teach children that failure is a natural learning consequence and one that should be learned from and not self-deprecating. According to the Women in Business (2016)



magazine, we know that, "As humans we are imperfect and prone to erroneous decisions, and as such we're predestined to crash and burn from time to time. The trick is to keep those crashes from crushing our spirits, to accept that everyone fails and to remain undeterred from taking additional risks" (p. 19). When we teach children that they must use failure as a stepping stool and an opportunity for problem solving, we are teaching them entrepreneurial skills and how to use their critical thinking skills in a contextual way.

In our current society we have maintained a fear of error, and this is evident in our children today. Many students are risk-averse and fear making mistakes. We need to allow our students opportunities to challenge themselves through trial and error

and see failure not as a fault, but as a ladder for deep critical thinking. When we reframe the very thought of error from a negative to a positive concept, we change the self-deprecating mistake to be understood as the step it is to eventual success. Our current Ontario Ministry of Education document, The Kindergarten Program (2016), describes problem solving and innovating as one of the four frames of learning and highlights the importance of developing these skills when stated, "...it is



important for educators to consider the importance of problem solving in all contexts – not only in the context of mathematics – so that children will develop the habit of applying creative, analytical, and critical thinking skills in all aspects of their lives” (p. 15). Encouraging problem solving and innovation skills are foundational to learning in young children, and yet we often take away the opportunity to develop these skills by only providing opportunities for success, and not natural failure. In failure, we explore and analyze critical thinking, problem solving, and innovation opportunities in an attempt to learn from the mistakes.

### Self-regulation in Failure

In failure we teach children to think independently and therefore to make choices and learn from each choice they make. Sue Riley (2005) describes the importance of giving children opportunities to make choices when she states, “When we stand back and give children time to explore, to discover their own answers, to search for the answers even if they do not find them —there is learning in the search — we are providing fine stretches of open road for growth and decision making” (p. 25). When children are given opportunities to make choices and learn from their choices, they are also learning how to self-regulate their emotions, develop resilience, and persevere when confronted with obstacles. By recognizing children’s autonomy and giving them the opportunity to have both successes and failures, we also create opportunities for children to obtain “one of the most highly endorsed socialization goals in Western samples [which] is children’s self maximization, [and] reflects the ideas of autonomy and viewing children as individual agents who are responsible

## Strategies to Encourage Failure as a Learning Opportunity:

### Describe failure in yourself.

We know no one is perfect, so why do we expect perfection among children? Why do we praise perfection as a society amongst our children, when the real value of success lies in resiliency and adversity? Goetz et al discusses the importance of allowing children to see failure as opportunity for problem solving when stated, “...acknowledging your mistake and apologizing to students shows them that one’s negative emotions can be identified and regulated” (Goetz et al). By recognizing mistakes we make ourselves we can help children understand that perfection is not an attainable quality, but self improvement and reflection skills are. When we start to externally portray the value of problem solving we also start to place importance on developing these essential skills.

### Comment on the process not the product.

So often when children are creating, drawing, building, or writing, we focus on the product and comment on the end result- ie: “That looks just like a house!”, “You finished all of your letters”, or we use generalization statements about the product, “Good job!”.

However, when we change our comments to process orientated they put an emphasis on the process and not the finished product. They value the steps children took before they got to their end result, and therefore place value on the thinking and the ideas, rather than the final outcome. ie: “Look at the colours you used”, “Can you tell me about how you came up with this?”

### Read Books Encouraging Failure and Resiliency:

Children’s author Andrea Beaty (2013) has a fabulous children’s book titled, *Rosie Revere, Engineer* that describes the failures and criticisms a little girl endures as she builds a creation, yet at the end she learns the powerful message about perseverance when she is encouraged to try many “flops” but to never quit. Books like these demonstrate to young children the importance of self-reflection in failure and learning from mistakes as opportunities for growth instead of a halt. When children are given opportunities to learn, try ideas, and fail in the process they are also given opportunities to think critically about their failure and learn from the experience.

### Let children fail

This may be the single hardest component to master, and yet the most critical component of later success. Success does not come to those that are afraid to fail, it comes to those that are not afraid to take risks.

Successful entrepreneurs worldwide attest to risk taking as the single most important aspect of success. Mark Zuckerberg is quoted as saying, “The biggest risk is not taking any risk...In a world that is changing really quickly, the only strategy that is guaranteed to fail is not taking risks.”

When children bring an idea to you (that you know will likely fail), instead of stopping them before they attempt it, let them *try*, and let them *fail*. Use the failure as a learning opportunity to research similar ideas and strategies that have worked, and let them try, try, again.



for the outcomes of their actions...” (Vanbergen, 2016, p.535). When children feel they are autonomous and valued, they are more confident to make choices, learn from those mistakes and reach higher plateaus.

By allowing children opportunities in failure to self-regulate their emotions and their actions we create independent learners who are active agents in their own learning. Instead of creating children that can not cope with defeat, we need to provide them with opportunities to learn how to rise above obstacles and persevere. It is through our experiences as children and the small failures we endure that these skills become taught. Instead of halting a student’s attempt at a “big” idea such as building a boat, why don’t we *let* them? Try out materials in a sink until you find one that is buoyant, challenge the student to stay within Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development by allowing them to try, learn, and reanalyze, until after many failures, they finally get a cardboard boat that floats. Process is the learning platform and failure in learning is a valuable tool for developing intrinsically motivated students who persevere.

Part of failure is learning- learning how to self regulate the emotion of defeat. Stuart Shanker’s work describes the importance of developing self-regulation in young children when stated, “The early years are a time of extraordinary growth and development. Children’s capacity for self-regulation-how they manage energy expenditure in response to stressors and then recover from the effort—is wired during these critical years. Trajectories are set early and once set can be difficult to change later in life” (Shanker, 2017, p. 1). Self-regulation is a critical skill children need to develop in order to learn how to deal with adversity as an adult, and by allowing children opportunities to fail and self regulate in failure we provide critical foundations for developing these skills. Goetz (2013) describes how these autonomous self regulatory skills are some of the most sought after adult skill set, and further describes how, “...enabling people to become independent learners is of particular importance in modern and fast-changing, knowledge-based societies. It is through self-regulatory competencies that people are better able to handle new challenges and achieve greater success and life satisfaction in both the short and long term. Consequently, the teaching of self-regulated learning skills has become a critical directive of schools, universities, and training institutions” (p. 130). Self regulation and failure are intrinsically connected, as they effectively teach children

the emotional resiliency and problem-solving capabilities for developing later success.

## The Challenge

I challenge you the next time you see a child attempting a big idea, to stop yourself from telling them all of the reasons why it won’t work or leading them to an alternative, and instead let them try their idea, and most importantly, let them fail. Use this natural failure as a platform for discussing the obstacle, improvements to make, and recognizing why the failure occurred. When failure is used as the powerful learning platform it is, it can be the most contextual learning experience for children, and an opportunity for them to learn natural problem solving and critical thinking skills.

## Conclusion

Many successful individuals have failed at some point in their lives, yet it was their ability to overcome these barriers that created their success. Could you imagine a world without these successful individuals? What if JK Rowling had listened to her first rejection letter and never wrote again? True success comes from understanding how to fail, learning from this failure, and trying again. Allowing children to have opportunities to fail in order to learn from this failure is truly an essential life skill for later success.

**Marie Poss** is a professor at Fanshawe College Simcoe/Norfolk campus in the accelerated ECE/DSW program. Her central focus is on curriculum and documentation and she has a strong interest in cultivating creativity and critical thinking skills both within children and her adult students. ECE/BA/B.Ed/M.Ed

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## THE POWER OF PLAY

# The Value of Play

## Everything we do inside we can do outside! Only Better!

by Denise Skuce

After attending two International conferences on early childhood learning this year, I know without a doubt that all children play. No matter where they are, their circumstances, or where they live. All children play.

Children all have similar interest, they all learn through play. They all use play to discover, to understand and navigate their world. As Early Childhood Educators we know the types of play that children are interested in, we know how to set up the environment when we are inside. Here in Canada we are blessed to have this wonderful diverse landscape that allows us the joy and wonder of being able to play outdoors.

Inside we have a dramatic play area, housekeeping, reading areas, an area to act out what they see and hear. We have a block area for them to construct and destruct. We have an art area where they are encouraged to be creative. We have sand and water areas, get messy areas. We use natural items and loose parts. But what about our outside environment? What does it look like? A climbing structure? A Space to run?

### We have all heard the phrase take the outside in, but what about taking the inside out?

We create beautiful spaces inside for children to learn and explore, what about the outside play space?

Creating space for music and movement, drama and story telling are not often spaces that you find in the outdoors. These spaces help those children who are more artistic, quiet, those children that like to be on their own. Having them help make the space for them shows that we value them, their ideas, and their interests.

Early Childhood Educators focus on the inside environment, but there is a huge outdoor environment that should be utilized more. The space is larger, more children can participate in the area, and they are not excluded because there is no more room. They can have large body movements and make more noise. They can express themselves more creatively. Children are freer to move around and go from activity to activity with out being intrusive on each other's play space. Children have more opportunities to use their whole body in their activities. They can get in, get messy, touch, feel, smell, taste. They can use all their senses in the outdoor play.





In Outdoor play spaces we also have an amazing opportunity for children to explore and interact with all types of weather in all the seasons. Children can interact with the environment in different ways than what we can do inside. Children can use the environment and manipulate it to learn more about it. The chance to explore what it feels like to jump in the snow, or a pile of leaves, the chance to be buried inside a pile of sand. Or enjoy the opportunity to go dancing in the rain. These are not activities that we can do inside.

**Setting up the outdoor environment should be much like setting up the indoor play environment.**

It is important to ensure that you are including all the elements that create the space. Being sure that there are many different types of materials, loose parts and a variety of activities. Also, being sure that the area is organized and inviting. Providing a variety of items to make the space beautiful, including different types of plants, flowers and trees. Having the children grow the plants themselves helps them to create their own space and have that sense

of belonging. It makes them feel pride in their learning environment and encourages them to take better care of it.

Keeping environment zones that we have indoors, it's good to include play zones and path ways. Organize types of play, being sure that large muscle activities and cooperative games do not interfere with quiet or cozy spaces. Spaces should allow for messy areas and noisy areas so that children can respect the areas that need to remain cleaner, for meals, or for those children that need time away from large group activities.

Other considerations are to provide areas with plenty of shade, or shelter to protect from wind chills or bright sunlight. Keep in mind that there is no inappropriate weather — only inappropriate clothing for the weather.

Everything that you do inside, we should do outside. Taking snack outside, having lunch. Creating a peaceful place to have story time.

Providing naptime. The sky is the limit. By allowing children to interact and play outdoors teaches them to be more aware of our natural environment and learn to take care of it. To become great stewards in protecting the earth. **My advice for Early Childhood Educators is go OUTSIDE!**

**Everything we do inside we can do outside! Only Better!**







## ACROSS CANADA

### ALBERTA

The provincial and federal governments are working together to improve the quality, accessibility and affordability of early learning and child care across Alberta.

Officials from both governments announced a collaboration on a three-year agreement to help parents with the costs of raising children and address the unique early learning and child care needs of families in Alberta.

Within the agreement, Alberta will receive just over \$136 million over three years to be put towards the expansion of Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) Centres across the province; a childcare project launched in 2017 that charges parents a maximum of \$25 per day. There are currently 22 centres across Alberta with up to an additional 78 more to be added this year.

### BRITISH COLUMBIA

The B.C. government will spend an extra \$1 million in each of the next three years to raise the amount of money people can receive to make child-care payments if they are young parents.

The Ministry of Children and Family Development announced an extra \$3 million over the next three years to a program that gives funding to young parents – under the age of 24 – who had a child before they turned 20. The new funding means parents can receive up to \$1,500 if they qualify for the program, covering monthly costs for the vast majority of child-care spaces.

The announcement is one of many the province has made in recent months, as they put more hundreds of millions more of annual funding into child care subsidies. The government has repeatedly said this is an interim step toward their campaign promise of \$10 a day child care.

### MANITOBA

The provincial of Manitoba announced in spring that they will create 780 new child care spots. \$22.8 million will be invested in child care through the Canada-Manitoba Early Learning and Child Care Agreement. In February, the federal and provincial governments announced an investment of \$47 million over three years in new funding for child care in the federal governments bilateral agreements with the provinces. Families Minister Scott Fielding

said the new spaces will be created through new construction as well as funding for 621 existing spaces at 63 child care centres. Of the 20 projects being announced, 10 are being developed within schools, which will produce about 424 new spaces. 10 projects developed in the community locations will result in 356 new spaces. \$1.24 million will be spent on province-wide access to online training, core professional development, membership programs and incentives to grow home-based providers.

The province is providing free online access to learning resources for students and professionals in prenatal and child development, it was announced Friday.

The Science of Early Child Development (SECD) includes regularly updated living textbooks and modules that offer current research and links to practice through a convenient online platform, accessible via computer, tablet and smartphone.

### NEW BRUNSWICK

The provincial government announced in December 2017, an investment of \$28 million over four years to support wage increases for early childhood educators beginning in 2019-20.

In early January this year, the New Brunswick government then announced millions of dollars to subsidize daycare costs for middle-income New Brunswick families. The government said the goal is to have no family pay more than 20 per cent of its income for childcare. Among the spending allocations in the funding announcements from the Liberal government in its bilateral agreements with the province, are changing child care to early learning centres. The upgrades include working with the province to provide more spaces for infants and toddlers. The centres would have to implement inclusive practices to serve children with disabilities and diverse needs, and they would also have to have annual quality improvement plans.

### NOVA SCOTIA

Private and non-profit child care operators in Nova Scotia say it remains to be seen how their sector will ultimately be affected by the ongoing rollout of universal pre-primary for four-year-olds across the province. However, representatives told the legislature's human resources committee the big issue remains access to enough trained early childhood educators.

Nova Scotia has 2,700 registered early childhood educators (ECEs) with about 1,700

employed in regulated child care. Despite the reported numbers of ECEs available to practice in the province, the regulated early learning and care sector has experienced and continues to experience significant challenges in recruiting and retaining staff, impacting quality across programs.

### NUNAVUT

The government of Nunavut is exploring rolling out full-day kindergarten across the territory to help ease a daycare shortage causing parents to quit their jobs or drop out of school to stay home with their children. There's at least a two-year wait list for a licensed daycare in Iqaluit.

It's keeping people from being able to work, from being independent, from being able to support their families. The Department of Education did its own informal study with daycare and calculated that roughly 700 people are on wait lists for daycare in Iqaluit. That number includes all daycare facilities across the city and may contain duplicate families.

The new government has mandated daycare as a priority and has given the education department the power to see if full-day kindergarten in Nunavut is possible.

So far, the department has completed a feasibility study, an in-depth needs analysis, and will now spend the next year engaging with stakeholders.

### ONTARIO

Premier of Ontario Kathleen Wynne unveiled in March, free child care for preschoolers in a \$2.2 billion budget boost that is the cornerstone of the Liberals' spring re-election platform.

Wynne announced the move – which covers licensed spots for children from age 2-1/2 until they start kindergarten – just prior to her government's budget being tabled at Queen's Park. Under the Liberal plan, the average Ontario family with one preschooler would save about \$17,000, while families in Toronto – where child-care fees are among the highest in the country – would save even more. Hailed as a national first and a game-changer by the child care sector, the move could be short-lived as Progressive Conservative Leader Doug Ford indicated he would scrap it if elected June 7. For the first time ever, child care is a central policy plank in the programs of all three major parties in the Ontario election on June 7.

**PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND**

According to a new report, when it comes early childhood education P.E.I. is doing the best job in the country. The report was put together by the Atkinson Centre in Ontario. Researchers there gave P.E.I. the top rating for early learning and child care. Kerry McCuaig, a fellow in early childhood policy at the University of Toronto and co-researcher on the study, said a good governance structure, as well as professional recognition for early childhood educators, are areas where P.E.I. is doing well. She added that P.E.I. is one of the few provinces that provides equity of access for children with special needs in early years centres. The report itself also indicates some challenges. One of those is that Island parents often take children to one place for kindergarten, and another for after-school care, which makes it tough on non-school days. There is also a critical shortage of Francophone child care staff for the French child cares in the province.

**QUEBEC**

Daycare workers in Laval and Montreal were once again on strike in May and they have decided they are willing to go on a long-term strike if necessary. The striking workers are employees at 56 CPEs in Montreal and Laval which provide care for about 3,000 children. More than 1,200

CPE workers held a one-day general assembly to discuss their demands, then voted 91 percent in favour of a general strike. The CPEs that are part of the Provincial Employers Association of Daycares (APNCPE) did not ratify an agreement made last year between union workers and the Ministry of Families. The main disagreement in their contract dispute is scheduling and when their employer can decide they are not needed to work for the day. Employers want to be able to call employees in the morning and tell them not to come into work that day — and consequently not pay those employees — if several children are absent.

**SASKATCHEWAN**

As part of the federal government's budget allocation to the provinces for child care, Canada and Saskatchewan have signed a three-year Early Learning and Child Care Bilateral Agreement which will provide the Saskatchewan government with over \$41 million for investments towards accessibility, inclusivity and quality. In April, the Saskatchewan government announced that nearly 600 of the 1,015 licensed child care spaces committed through the Canada-Saskatchewan Early Learning Child Care Agreement have now been allocated. This agreement will help to improve early learning and child care spaces over the next three years.

**RESOURCES****Affordable For All: Making Licensed Child Care Affordable in Ontario**

By Dr. Gordon Cleveland, University of Toronto Scarborough, February 2018

This study seeks to answer the question “What is the best way to improve the affordability of licensed child care for infants, toddlers and preschoolers in Ontario?” It seeks to provide a comprehensive analysis of alternative funding and policy options and to recommend steps forward that can dramatically improve child care affordability for families. After much consideration of evidence and ideas, its main recommendation is that the Government of Ontario should implement free child care for preschool-aged children (30 months to kindergarten age) as an immediate priority. As physical and staffing capacity are ramped up over the next few years, increased affordability for other ages should be phased in.

<http://edu.gov.on.ca/childcare/affordable-for-all-en.pdf>

**RESEARCH UPDATE****Early Childhood Education and Care in Canada 2016**

Martha Friendly, Elise Larsen, Laura Feltham, Bethany Grady, Barry Forer, Michelle Jones



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AVAILABLE FOR DOWNLOAD IN PDF FORMAT

**ECEC in Canada 2016 full publication.**

The Childcare Resource and Research Unit's (CRRU) new report *Early childhood education and care in Canada 2016* is its 11th compilation of Canada-wide data on child care and related early childhood and family programs. It considers child care space provision, budget allocations, and service delivery information in the 2014-2016 period, comparing these to previous years. The report provides detailed provincial/territorial descriptive information on kindergarten and child care programs (such as teacher/educator training, ratios, group/class size, pedagogy and governance) as well as pertinent demographic data such as the number of children and mothers' employment rates. It also offers a Canada-wide overview of how ECEC services are organized, the federal role, Indigenous ECEC services, information on maternity and parental leave and new developments through 2017. The report is primarily based on administrative data provided by provincial/territorial ECEC officials but also includes data from Statistics Canada and other current data and research.

CRRU's *ECEC in Canada* reports have been published about every two years since 1992. The series of reports allows both cross-Canada and longitudinal tracking of ECEC programs and policy using a consistent approach that ensures data are as comparable as possible.