

Advocating for Play

Carrie Melsom

Early Childhood Educators are in a unique position to become advocates for play. We get to see the joy, engagement and laughter of young children at play on a daily basis; we also have the education to understand how the play we are seeing fuels early learning and development. Even so, it can be challenging to communicate what we know. It can also be challenging to resist the pressure to introduce more direct instruction and teacher appropriation of play in the interests of meeting “learning outcomes”. At times it seems as if in our quest to be seen as professional, or in a misguided effort to look like stereotypical ‘teachers’, even we have forgotten to value the process of freely chosen, intrinsically motivated play. In spite of Vygotsky, in spite of Piaget, we forget to trust in play as the *leading developmental activity* of the early years.

Early Childhood Educators often say things like “children learn through play”, “children are active learners”, or “play is children’s work” but what exactly do we mean by these catch phrases? And if we

do know, and we do believe this, how are these beliefs reflected in our

CHILDREN are the foundation of the world’s future.

CHILDREN have played at all times throughout history and in all cultures.

PLAY, along with the basic needs of nutrition, health, shelter and education, is vital to develop the potential of all children.

PLAY is communication and expression, combining thought and action; it gives satisfaction and a feeling of achievement.

PLAY is instinctive, voluntary, and spontaneous.

PLAY is a means of learning to live, not a mere passing of time.

(International Play Association Declaration of the Child’s Right to Play, www.ipaworld.org)

daily practice? What is the balance of child initiated play and teacher initiated

activity in your program? When is the last time you really dug into the concept and theory of play and explored it together at your centre?

Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child states that children have the right to leisure, play and participation in cultural and artistic activities.

Through the Convention the global community affirms that play is an essential right of children. (www.ohchr.org)

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A Message from the Director

Dear Colleagues,

Changes and additions to course offerings are informed by current research, occupational guidelines and feedback from students, faculty and the early childhood sector.

In the past, Practicum I has been scheduled to begin in September. Before the students have been introduced to developmental principles, observation techniques, behavior guidance strategies or activity planning we have sent them out into the community expecting a skill set for which they have not been prepared.

We have altered the 1st practicum experience to better meet the needs of these brand new learners. 1st year students will

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Inside this issue:

A publication informing the early childhood education community of events, services and professional development opportunities offered by the Nova Scotia College of Early Childhood Education.

- Practicum News (Director’s Message)
- Being a Play Advocate
- “Play” In the Resource Centre
- Inspirations for Play Advocates

Please circulate and post this newsletter!

E-mail: info@nscece.ca
to be added to our e-mail list or
visit our website at
www.nscece.ca

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The United States is one of two countries in the world that has not signed the Convention. It is important for Canadians to keep this in mind in the face of the current American push to formalize academic teaching in the early years. We need to be strong advocates to resist this push-down and to resist the marketing that goes with it.

To be strong advocates we must be knowledgeable and able to recognize and share the essential nature of play in early learning and development; within our programs, with families and with the community at large. The place to start is in our own programs.

The child's innate drive to play means that children will play in even the harshest of circumstances, but they need the opportunity. Play becomes possible when children have access to uninterrupted time, a space and some kind of material or person to act on or imagine with. It is during the process of acting-on and imagining-with that brain development and learning occur.

A key feature of play is that it is satisfying in and of itself. Play is meaningful, fulfilling and absorbing for the young child. In play there is no predetermined learning outcome and the child is fully engaged in the process of playing. The child or children are in control of the play process. Children can take risks and challenge themselves in play. There is no failure when playing, mistakes only fuel problem solving and the learning process. It is in the negotiation and adherence to play generated rules, roles and mental constructs that some of the most beneficial developmental outcomes occur.

While there can be playful or "fun" approaches to teaching there is no teaching through play; we must not be confused about this. Playing 'to-learn-something' is not playing. Children play to play. Once an adult sets an agenda for the child the child is not playing. This is where the Reggio idea of the environment as the third teacher becomes so important for early childhood educators. The planned environment (time, space, materials) becomes the



envelope in which play is supported and made possible. Thoughtful, well designed early learning environments have play potential.

One of our challenges is that play, in addition to being fun and engaging for children, can also be boisterous, filled with conflict, big, disruptive, joyful, loud, destructive, silly and offensive to adult sensibilities. It's random nature and frequent lack of obvious purpose mean that teachers can react negatively. Understanding, appreciating

and valuing different types of play and the developmental nature of play is an essential competency for early childhood education. Our decisions about how and when to support children in their play; how to guide their behaviour; how to plan for their developing capacities; and how to respond to and take direction from the

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A Message From the Director

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participate in 18 hours (6 modules) of in-class preparation and will not begin the placement until Tuesday October 14. Students will also prepare for and participate in a pre-visit to their practicum site the week before starting.

Topics to be covered are:

- *Introduction to Practicum*
- *Starting to Notice Children*
- *Noticing Other Things (Teachers/ Environments)*
- *Frequently Asked Questions*
- *Activity Planning*
- *Role Playing for Success*

All of this content from the practicum modules will be introduced concurrently with their regular course work.

Students will have a reduced number of placement hours (105). The focus of the



Kinds of Play:

Birth to Eight Years

- ☺ **Exploratory play/object play/sensory play** - *Touching, mouthing, tossing, banging, squeezing, etc.*
- ☺ **Dramatic Play** - *solitary pretense or imaginative play with toys or props using invented scripts and roles*
- ☺ **Construction Play** - *constructing with loose parts, toys or modelling media; may be solitary or group and may include pretense or socio-dramatic play*
- ☺ **Physical Play** - *sensorimotor; rough and tumble; vigorous play with elements of strength testing and risk taking*
- ☺ **Socio-Dramatic Play** - *pretend play with peers with a focus on social roles and increasingly complex scripts and play generated roles and rules*
- ☺ **Games with Rules** - *formal games in groups with predetermined rules*
- ☺ **Games with Invented Rules** - *invented games with modified rules in self-organized playgroups*

Adapted from Jane Hewes (2006), *Let the Children Play: Nature's Answer to Early Learning*

new and improved Practicum I will be on the development of skills and confidence before starting as well as the building of meaningful relationships with children and staff while in the field.

There is also a switch of attention from planning and implementing "many" activities to observing and assisting the early childhood educator as they plan and implement activities. We have come to recognize that the student needs to see the work being done, then assist in doing the work before they can actually make sense of doing the work independently.

For those of you who are hosting 1st semester students there will be lots of detail about these changes included in the practicum packages.

We are very excited about this new format for Practicum and have every confidence that these changes will be beneficial for both students and the ECE community.

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Play...In the Resource Centre

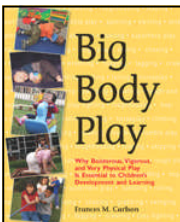
The Resource Centre has many learning materials and books available to support you in your work. You can look for membership information and check out our online toy inventory at www.nscece.ca. For a virtual tour visit our YouTube video.



From My Side: Being a Child (371.3 CH)

This is a photo book of learning in action. Photos are from around the globe and show young children

playing in all kinds of settings, with all kinds of materials. The photos invite the question; what is going on here for this child?

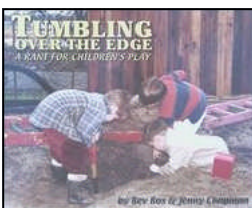


Big Body Play (375.3 CAR)

This book outlines the case for the benefits of big body play for children's social-emotional, cognitive, and physical development. It offers guidelines for educators

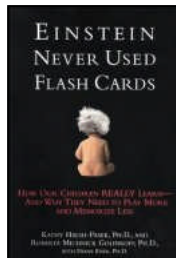
who want to learn how to organize their learning and care environments to allow for this rowdy, rough and tumble play.

Tumbling Over the Edge: A Rant for Children's Play (CD 048)



Bev Bos and Jenny Chapman use photographs and clear language to make the case for play. They focus on creating learning environments

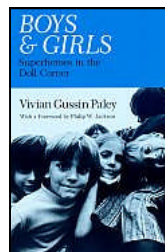
that recognize that "in the midst of play with its apparent disorder, chaos and mess, is a very deep-seated drive to establish order which makes sense to the young child." The conversation between the authors challenges, enlightens and inspires. The pictures of children playing at the Roseville Preschool are thought-provoking for those more comfortable with traditional preschool environments.



Einstein Never Used Flash Cards (155.5)

Children are wired to learn; time to learn and mature is after all the purpose of childhood. This popular psychology book explores what current research tells us

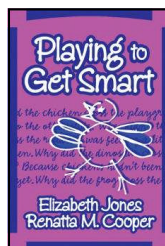
about brain development and learning. The authors explain the role of play in learning about number and literacy and language and by highlighting the special developmental characteristics of children's learning demonstrate that teaching does not equal learning.



Boys and Girls: Superheroes in the Doll Corner (375.3 Pa)

Vivian Gussin Paley is a teacher and an early childhood ethnographer. In this book she tells stories about gendered differences in imaginative socio-dramatic play and how the play is

received in preschool classrooms. She examines her own responses and shares her curiosity about the meaning of this play in children's lives. This is a small and powerful book that will get you reflecting on the nature of boy play and girl play in your own classroom.



Playing to Get Smart (155.5 JON)

This book takes a playful look at play and its role in learning; not just learning stuff but learning to be human and learning to be smart in a changing world.

It is a book about making choices, about engaging with children and naming and knowing the world together.

Also look for:

- **The Great Outdoors (362.7 RI)**
- **Master Players (372.2 REY)**
- **Child's Play (375.3 LAU)**
- **When Play Isn't Easy (375.3 HE)**

Learning Communities

ALL TOGETHER NOW! INCLUSION SUPPORT GROUP

A facilitated learning community for those interested in supporting the inclusion process within their centres and in the larger community. We meet the last Monday of each month from 9:00 to 11:00 AM at NSCECE.

A CYCLE OF INQUIRY: COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

A community of practice for early childhood educators interested in investigating their work together. The group uses various protocols, research questions, examination of documentation, and critical friends processes to develop skills and understanding about teaching, and learning in the early years. This group will interest those using shared inquiry or an emergent approach to curriculum development. One group meets on occasional Saturdays from 1:30 to 3:30 PM. With enough interest a monthly weekday group will also be established.

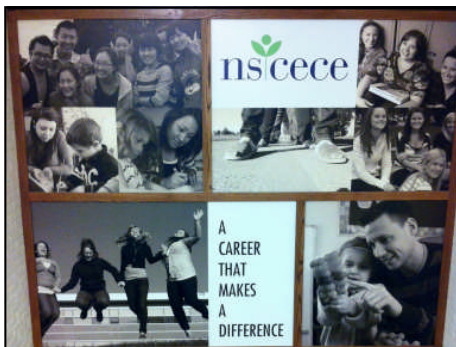
**FOR INFORMATION
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Resource Centre services are offered with support from the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, Early Childhood Education Training Initiative.



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This summer the front of our building got a facelift. You will hardly recognize us the next time you drop by. Inspired by the changes outside we have a new photo wall in our stairwell.

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opportunities, interests and needs that become apparent in play are the heart of our practice.

There is a subtle dance between play, learning, teaching, and development in early years settings. This dance is not visible unless educators find ways to highlight and share it. As play advocates we need to educate ourselves by researching play in our own classrooms and through academic research. We need to be able to recognize and share what we know about the connections between play and learning through play stories and visual documentation. Play advocates reduce barriers to play in their own settings and communities and facilitate play in their own classrooms. As we network together we can inspire each other into action. Children need us to stand up for their right to play in their early learning and care environments. We can't be effective advocates unless we truly appreciate and understand that play is essential to development and that the playing child is a learning child.

At the Nova Scotia College of Early Childhood Education, we provide an opportunity for students to study and gain experience in Early Childhood Education through a diverse range of courses and practical settings.

We are proud to lay a foundation for the personal and professional growth and development of our students. It is our hope and goal that NSCECE graduates continue to learn, practice and reflect throughout their years in early childhood education.



Join the crowd—become a member today!

Take advantage of the many services provided with a NSCECE Resource Centre membership

Resources for the early childhood community



To download an Information Brochure or Membership Form visit www.nscece.ca

E-mail: resourcecentre@nscece.ca

Tel: (902) 423-7114 ext. 227



Inspirations for Play Advocates

Social media and blogs are wonderful sources of inspiration for play advocates. A good place to start your play journey is the International Play Association website. Check out their play video (<http://article31.ipaworld.org>). A fact sheet written by Jane Hewes (2006) for the Early Learning Knowledge Centre is available in PDF form at (www.ccl-cca.ca/pdfs). This is a comprehensive review of the current context of play in Canada which is easy to read and fact filled. It would be a great study tool for centres interested in current research and simple guidelines for supporting play in their own environments. The **2014 NSCECE Fall Workshop Series** is all about play. Check out our offerings at www.nscece.ca.