

The Benefits of Risky Play and Adult Influence in Children's Risky Play

by

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### **Dedication**

Thank you to my family for allowing me to disappear for hours, days, and weeks at a time to focus on my studies. Thank you to all of you who listened to me talk endlessly about my project and mini-project. I would never have been able to complete this project without your patience, love, and support. Thank you to my instructors in this program who took the time to listen to me, get to know me, and who supported me throughout the past two years.

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**Abstract**

This project examines the many benefits of risky play for children's development and also looks at how adults' beliefs and values influence children's opportunity to take risks in their play. This project will answer two questions: "How is risky play beneficial to children's development?" and "How do adults' attitudes affect children's opportunities for risky play?" In our society, risk is generally seen as something that is negative and should be avoided, but in this project a literature review is conducted and a series of professional development workshops is developed to help staff working in early learning centres reframe their beliefs about risk. The review of the literature examines what risky play is, the types of risky play, the benefits of risky play, the drawbacks of not engaging in risky play, what makes some children more likely to take risks in their play, what types of environments provide for risky play, and the characteristics of appropriate outdoor play spaces for children. Several studies discussing how important individual and cultural attitudes and beliefs about risky play are in allowing children to take risks in their play will also be discussed. The influence of values and beliefs on teaching practice, how to go about making changes in teaching practices, and what elements make professional development more effective will also be examined. If child care centre staff see risk as something that contributes to children's development in a positive way, they will be more likely to encourage and support children to take risks and challenges in their play.

## Table of Contents

Dedication .....	ii
Abstract .....	iii
Table of Contents .....	iv
List of Figures .....	vii
Chapter 1: Introduction .....	1
My Motivation .....	1
Practical Problem .....	4
Disconnect Between Theory and Practice .....	5
My Plan .....	7
My Project .....	8
Chapter Summary .....	9
Coming Up .....	10
Chapter 2: Literature Review .....	11
Values and Beliefs .....	11
Perception of Risk as Negative .....	12
Benefits of Taking Risks in Play .....	13
Rough and Tumble Play .....	14
Differences in Risk Taking .....	17
Negatives of Not Taking Risks .....	20
Parental Fears and Risk Deficit Disorder .....	21
Creating Their Own Challenges .....	23
Environments That Support Children's Risk Taking .....	24
Playworkers .....	27
Playground Hazards and the Need for Safety Standards .....	28
Children's Preferences for Outdoor Environments .....	30
Environments and Adults Influences Children's Risky Play Options .....	36
Adults' Influence on Children's Risk Taking .....	37
What Children Consider 'Risky' .....	38
Six Categories of Risky Play and Characteristics that Make Play 'Risky' .....	39
Various Beliefs about Risky Play and Children's Risk Taking Opportunities .....	41
Relevant Regulations in Manitoba .....	43

Individual and Cultural Differences Relating to Children's Risk Taking .....	44
Adult Involvement and Interactions Are Critical .....	48
Educators Need to See the Value of Risk Taking in Children's Play .....	52
Adults' Beliefs and Values and the Impact on Risky Play .....	54
Teacher Change .....	55
Influence of Practicum Training and Mentors .....	58
Chapter Summary .....	60
Coming Up .....	62
Chapter 3: Project Design and Details .....	63
Characteristics of Effective Professional Development .....	63
Risk Reframing .....	64
Slowing Down the Thinking Process .....	66
Bringing Staff Together.....	67
Project Rationale.....	67
Potential Limitations .....	70
Workshop Benefits .....	73
Workshop Specifics .....	74
Session #1 .....	76
Session #2 .....	79
Session #3 .....	84
Session #4 .....	85
Chapter Summary .....	87
Coming Up .....	88
Chapter 4: Final Reflection .....	89
Reflecting on My Learning over the Past Two Years .....	89
Aha Moments along the Way .....	91
Some of My Questions Answered .....	94
Now What?.....	95
Three Recommendations for Other Educators Interested in Engaging with the Topic of <i>Risky Play</i> .....	97
Chapter Summary .....	98
References .....	99

Appendix A – Image of the Child .....	112
Appendix B – PowerPoint Presentation for Workshop Series .....	113

**List of Figures**

Figure 1. Factors associated with children's risk taking. This figure illustrates all of the elements that influence children's risk taking .....	18
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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **Who am I?**

I am a student and a teacher. I have been studying for a very long time. If I added up the years, it would equate to most of my life. Currently, I am teaching Early Childhood Education to College students in a two-year diploma program in the same program I graduated from years ago. In my heart, I am an Early Childhood Educator (ECE), but I am also a certified K-12 teacher and I recently completed my Certificate in Adult Education (CAE). I have worked with children from 1-18 years. Most of my practical experience is with children ages 1-5.

### **My Motivation**

When I first started working at a preschool centre with children ages one to five, I had just graduated from College. I had spent two years discussing theories and learning that my job was to help children be more independent and autonomous. I was excited to try out what I had just learned. Very quickly I started to notice that what I wanted to do and my expectations for the children were different than those of the other staff at the centre. The other staff would frequently tell me that the children were not allowed to do something, they were too young for that, that is too dangerous, or that is not how we do it here. I wanted to give children freedom and let them try different things, but I felt like the other staff thought I did not know what I was doing, or thought that I was young or irresponsible. I will admit I was new to the child care field, but I also truly believed in what I was trying to let the children do. It was instinctual and I thought it was the best thing for the children.

My coworkers did not allow the children to drive the riding toys or tricycles quickly, they did not allow the children to pretend they were superheroes, they did not allow the children to engage in rough-and-tumble play (R & T), they did not allow the children to climb up on the



picnic tables and jump off, and they did not allow the children to run down the hill when we were walking back to the centre. There were a lot of rules. To my coworkers, the idea of risk was negative; something that should be avoided. Unfortunately, they are not alone in their thinking. Our society in general has negative views of risk and risk taking, especially when it comes to children (Unger, 2009; Malone, 2007; Copeland et al., 2012a; Bundy et al., 2009; Karsten, 2005; Finch, 2012; Niehues et al., 2013; Eager & Little, 2011).

I remember one summer after all of the children had gone home I was asked to stay late with another staff to dig out a tree because the children had been trying to climb it. Our director said it was not safe. We spent hours and hours digging it out; it was exhausting. The next day, some of the children looked so sad when they arrived in the morning and the tree was gone, but by the afternoon they had found a replacement for climbing; they had moved on to the fence. My director had years of experience and I trusted her judgment, but it did not feel right to me. When the children quickly found another way to climb, I started to think that maybe climbing was something they needed to do. If I knew then what I know now, I never would have agreed to take out the tree and I would have advocated to have more challenges for the children in our play yard. Deb Curtis is an author and educator who has worked with children and teachers for 35 years and is currently working with toddlers again (Redleaf Press, n.d.). She believes in high quality care and education, creating inspiring environments for young children, and reflective practice and is considered an expert on early childhood education by those in the field of early learning and care (Redleaf Press, n.d.). Curtis (2010) explained “because all of us wanted to keep the children safe, usually the most fearful teachers ended up persuading us that we should enforce the rules” (p. 52). The staff were always talking about keeping the children safe and

avoiding anything where a child could possibly get hurt. It is likely that what Curtis (2010) described is what happened to me at my centre.

The staff at my centre, and by extension I, had so many rules for these young children. I did not believe it was my job to say no to everything the children wanted to do and to constantly have to redirect them to something quieter or less physical, even when we were outside. That is not what I thought early childhood education was about and that was not why I went to school to become an early childhood educator (ECE). I often felt torn because some of what the children wanted to do were things that I used to do when I was a child. It was very confusing why something that was a natural part of my childhood was suddenly inappropriate or extremely dangerous for these children.

One of my reasons for selecting the topic of risky play was so that I would know what to say to these coworkers, or others like them. I wanted to see what the research said and if it backed up what I truly believed was the right thing to do. I wanted to have enough knowledge to be convincing and; hopefully, persuade others to let children take more risks in their play. I believe this project will help me do that. I feel like I let these children down because I was not strong enough to fight for what I thought was right and because I did not know enough to make a convincing argument to my coworkers. I do not want that to happen again. This project will help me obtain the knowledge I need to help others see the benefits of risk taking in children's play and the negatives of discouraging risky play. This project will help me encourage adults to let children take more risks in their play, or at least get them thinking about letting children take more risks in their play.

**Practical Problem**

In the Early Childhood Education (ECE) training program where I work, we teach future early childhood educators about a number of theoretical perspectives and approaches to early learning. One approach that we feel is beneficial for students to learn about is the Reggio Emilia approach. I first heard about Reggio Emilia when I was taking my ECE training over a decade ago. The ideas and beliefs appealed to me immediately. The environments and the materials provided to the children included items that were real, beautiful, and breakable. The prepared environments were aesthetically pleasing and so full of thought and purpose. The information I read about what educators were doing in Italy made sense to me; respecting children made sense to me. Through my research, I happened to come across an article translated from a seminar Loris Malaguzzi, founder of the Reggio Emilia approach, gave in June 1993. It is called *Your Image of the Child: Where Teaching Begins*. Malaguzzi's words spoke to me and reaffirmed my desire to be a better educator and take the time to get to know what children need. Many of my current beliefs about teaching and learning connect to what Malaguzzi said in this seminar. My immediate thought was about how I can share this in a meaningful way with my own students.

The article had many important points, but the two that connect to this current project are how what we believe about children guides our practice (Image of the child), and how teachers have many different roles and one is to let children learn on their own and make their own decisions (take risks). I knew the Reggio approach was based on respect and a view of the child as capable and competent, but this article made me see how those views also extend to allowing children to make their own decisions and to take risks. If you believe certain things to be true about children, you will allow them to do certain things and you will provide them with the space, equipment, materials, time, and trust they need to do them. I believe that children need to

be able to do things for themselves, try new things, and take risks. Malaguzzi said, “Over activity on the part of the adults is a risk factor. The adult does too much because he cares about the child; but this creates a passive role for the child in her own learning” (1994, p. 2). When adults do everything for children, when they continuously tell children they cannot do something, or when they try to eliminate all possible risks in a child’s environment and are too overprotective, they are not helping the child. I will explore this more in the next chapter. Malaguzzi also said, “Children need to enjoy being in school, they need to love their school and the interactions that take place there” (Malaguzzi, 1994, p. 2). How will they learn to love school if they are always being told, ‘No, don’t do that’ and they are not allowed to do what they really want to do? He also said, “We don’t want to protect something that doesn’t need to be protected” (1994, p. 4). I agree with Malaguzzi and this is why I am motivated to complete this project.

### **Disconnect Between Theory and Practice**

My beliefs may align with what Malaguzzi said and we may be teaching these things to our Early Childhood Education students, but there is a disconnect between these beliefs and what is being taught and what is happening out in child care centres. Our students are coming back after their practicum placements and many are saying they were not allowed to do what they wanted to do because their centre had too many rules, or their centre was concerned with the safety of the children. The ideas the students had that were getting shut down ranged from putting out glass objects or real dishware in the environment for children to use, letting children climb trees, letting children use real hammers and nails, letting children build forts inside with blankets where they could sit and not be seen by the adults, or letting children walk down to the local creek.

I have been a practicum student many times and I know the challenges of wanting to try something that a centre or lead teacher is not used to or comfortable doing. I want to equip my students to be able to justify their ideas, but I think that the bigger issue lies in the child care centres. I want to start from the inside. Part of me does not think it is fair to expect students to go out and make big changes, especially when I could not make big changes as a new staff member. When centres are saying no to our students' requests, it leads me to believe that they are uncomfortable with the idea of risk and that they may not realize the benefits of risky play. Therefore, after I explore the research on risky play, I will share my designs for a series of professional development workshops for child care centre staff to allow them to explore their own personal feelings and to show them the benefits of risky play. If the staff at the centre examine their own thinking and learn new information, this will hopefully inspire some changes that will benefit the children. Throughout the duration of the professional development sessions, staff will have an opportunity to try new things and then discuss them with each other. During the sessions, they will talk about the benefits and challenges they have observed of allowing children to take more risks and come together to implementing strategies the team is comfortable with to allow children to take more risks in their play.

During the proposed professional development sessions, the staff will have time to reflect on their practice and make some decisions regarding risk taking and challenges in children's play. This reflection and discussion will result in changes to the centre's rules and more opportunities in the children's play. When this happens and early childhood education students go out for their practicums, centres should be more open to what the students want to try because they have spent the time reflecting on their own practices and are in the process of trying new things. Early learning staff and early childhood education students will share positive values and

knowledge about the benefits of risky play and this will make it more likely that children are encouraged and supported to take risks in their play in early learning environments.

### **My Plan**

Through my research I am exploring the topic of risky play in early childhood settings.

My main research questions are:

1. How is risky play beneficial to children's development?
2. How do adults' attitudes affect children's opportunities for risky play?

I am mostly interested in adult involvement and roles in risk taking and how adults can influence children's risk taking. In Chapter 2, I will review some of the literature relating to risky play. Using the current literature, I will define risky play, I will outline the benefits of risky play for children, and I will address some of the negatives of not being able to engage in risky play. I will also clearly show that adults' beliefs and values have a major influence on whether or not children are allowed or encouraged to take risks in their play and that attitudes towards risky play are culturally specific.

Early childhood educators who spend a considerable amount of time with children on a regular basis have a responsibility to know what they believe about teaching and learning, to know about the benefits of risky play, to know what is best for children and their development, and to provide environments and opportunities that support children's optimal development. As an educator of future early childhood educators, I have a responsibility to know about risky play and the benefits of risky play, but I also have a responsibility to help my students learn and be able to stand up for what they believe in. When I was a new graduate, I did not have the confidence to tell my director not to remove the tree and be able to explain the reasons why I felt that way. My goals for this project are that I will learn more about risky play and have some

researched based evidence to back up my instincts and that I will be able to use that knowledge and evidence to help those people who work with children examine their ideas, look at their teaching practice, and feel empowered to make changes that will be in children's best interests. Allowing children to take risks in their play is about keeping children "as safe as necessary, not as safe as possible" (Brussoni, Olsen, Pike, & Sleet, 2012, p. 3134). The following quote inspired me to engage in this project:

The attempt to eliminate risk is not only a fool's goal and enormously presumptuous, it completely misrepresents the nature of life. Risk is an inherent part of life. Success and happiness hinge not on the elimination of risk but on the reasonable management of risk. (Marano & Skenazy, 2011, p. 426).

### **My Project**

We live in a society driven by fear and many parents and adults are overprotecting children. Not letting children take risks is doing more harm than good and having devastating consequences (Brussoni, et al., 2012; Unger, 2008; Sandseter, 2009b; Eager & Little, 2011; Marano & Skenazy, 2011; Sandseter 2011; Gill, 2007; Stephenson, 2003; KaBOOM!, 2012; Malone, 2007; and ParticipACTION, 2015). Society has an image of the child as weak, someone who needs adult protection, who is fragile, unintelligent, and cannot be trusted (Marano & Skenazy, 2011; Unger, 2008; Rosin, 2014). Of course, children are much more capable and competent than many people believe them to be and the upcoming review of the literature in the following chapter will show how children are capable of taking risks and that risk taking is good for children's development.

Through a thorough review of the literature I will explore the many reported benefits of risky play and pay particular attention to the integral role that adults play in facilitating those

benefits in childcare settings. In my current role as an Early Childhood Education instructor, I believe it is my duty to make sure future and current early childhood educators are aware of up-to-date information about risky play. In a preschool centre in Manitoba, only 2/3 of the staff need formal training; the rest only require one 40-hour course by the end of their first year of employment (Manitoba Child Care Program, 2005). It is reasonable to believe that many of the adults who are currently working with children are unaware of the benefits of risky play and may even be overly fearful for children's safety.

I find that most people I talk to about this issue seem to agree that children need to be able to take some risks in their play. However, believing something and taking action are two different things. After I have completed my literature review, I will propose and design a series of professional development staff meetings for child care centre staff. The staff will consist of trained Early Childhood Educators and untrained Child Care Assistants. I want the people who are working with young children to examine their personal values and beliefs about children and about risky play. I want them to examine the rules at their centre and the reasoning behind them. Ultimately, I want to inspire change, so children will have more freedom in their play and take risks. An added indirect benefit of this change is that future early childhood education students placed in these centres will be able to see how the staff support children who are taking risks in their play.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter has explored who I am, why the topic of risky play is meaningful, and why risky play warrants an in depth study. The following chapters will review the literature and detail my proposed plan to help other educators review their personal beliefs and ultimately revise their practice to allow children to take more risks in their play.



**Coming Up**

In Chapter 2, I will discuss how influential values and beliefs are on teaching practice, including how our beliefs about children guide everything we say and do with children. I will also explain how to go about making changes in teaching practice by getting educators motivated and willing to change. I will review the literature related to risk taking in childhood. Risky play and the categories of risky play will be defined. I will use the literature to emphasize the benefits for children of engaging in risky play and the negatives that occur from not having opportunities to take risks. Environments that provide for risky play and characteristics of appropriate outdoor play spaces for children will be outlined. Several studies discussing how important individual and cultural attitudes and beliefs about risky play are in allowing children to take risks in their play will be discussed.

In Chapter 3, I will discuss the elements that make professional development more effective. I will provide a convincing rationale for my proposed professional development sessions and describe the sessions in detail. In Chapter 4, I will reflect on the past two years. I will discuss what I have learned during this program how it has shaped, and will shape, my professional practice.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **Values and Beliefs**

“Many studies have shown that the individual beliefs and values of teachers play a vital role in shaping the objectives, goals, curriculum, and instructional methods of schools” (Yero, 2010, p. 1). “A value is a deeply held view of what we believe to be important and worthwhile” (Bloom & Ellis, 2009, p. 1) and these “values define our idea about what is good” (Hearron & Hildebrand, 2008, p. 36). A belief “is our personal conviction that certain things are true and that certain statements are facts” (Bloom & Ellis, 2009, p. 1). In our actions and interactions, our values and beliefs show clearly and guide everything we say and do with children (Hearron & Hildebrand, 2008). Values and beliefs are instilled in us as we grow and develop in our families and cultures, but experiences, education, and the society we live in can also influence them (Hearron & Hildebrand, 2008; Bloom & Ellis, 2009). Together, values, beliefs, and knowledge are used to make decisions regarding early childhood education and, in the case of this project, decisions related to risky play (Hearron & Hildebrand, 2008; Bloom & Ellis, 2009; Yero, 2010).

In a child care centre, there are many different adults working with children from many different families. These adults and families all have different values and beliefs. It makes sense that at times there may be conflicting values or different priorities. For example, one educator may believe it is ok for children to climb trees and another may think that climbing trees is too dangerous for young children. When there are conflicting values or beliefs, it is important that staff have an opportunity to discuss them openly and honestly, without judgment. These discussions will “give voice to teachers’ values and to also help them identify the source of their beliefs” (Bloom & Ellis, 2009, p. 2). Bloom and Ellis (2009) believe that staff meetings are a good time for these discussions.

It is not easy to have these discussions, but that is exactly what has to happen. “The idea is not to convince the others that you are right, or to give up your own values, but to try to understand some of the reasons behind the other person’s beliefs and to come to a solution that is acceptable to both of you” (Hearron & Hildebrand, 2008, p. 41). “The goal is that over time the group will not only expand their tolerance and understanding of different values and beliefs, but that they will find common ground on centre-wide, agreed-upon priorities and practices” (Bloom & Ellis, 2009, p. 2). It may not be easy for people to change their values and beliefs, but it is possible to do over time (Hearron & Hildebrand, 2008). My proposed set of workshops on risky play will give educators an opportunity to discuss their values and beliefs and decide how they would like to proceed as a group with the aim of making some changes and allowing children to take more risks in play. It is not enough to simply think about teaching or talk about teaching, but the ultimate objective is “that the teacher re-examines and ponders over prior experience to make sense of it, to learn from it, and presumably to become a better teacher in the future” (Boody, 2008, p. 500), which in this case means allowing for more risk taking in children’s play. In order to make changes in the centre as a whole, first individual staff have to make changes in their own values, beliefs, and practices. “When you act differently, you force others around you to respond in different ways” (Yero, 2010, p. 8).

### **Perception of Risk as Negative**

“Risk in our society is generally associated with something negative, if you mention the term risk most people associate risk only with negative thoughts and consequences” (Eager & Little, 2011, p. 6). “Risk is not necessarily a danger that needs to be avoided, but rather something that needs to be managed” (Sandseter, 2011, p. 261). This is an important distinction. Many people assume all risk is bad, but risk can have positive or negative consequences (Eager

& Little, 2011; Byrnes, Miller, & Schafer, 1999; ParticipACTION, 2015). Our perception of what risk is will make us more or less likely to promote risk taking in early childhood. If we see risk as negative, we will try to avoid it, but if we see it as something positive and beneficial, we will allow it to occur. “For ‘taking risks’ we should say ‘making mistakes’ and being able to make mistakes at a young age is vitally important in terms of learning and development” (Armitage, 2011, p. 1). Children need to have the opportunity to take chances and try new things in their play (Niehues, Bundy, Broom, Tranter, Ragen, & Engelen, 2013; Waters & Begley, 2007; Sandseter, 2007; Brussoni, Gibbons, Gray, Ishikawa, Sandseter, Bienenstock, Chabot, Fuselli, Herrington, Janssen, Pickett, Power, Stanger, Sampson, & Tremblay, 2015; ParticipACTION, 2015).

### **Benefits of Taking Risks in Play**

“Children have a natural propensity toward risky play” (Brussoni, et al., 2012, p. 3134) and they seek out and take risks on a daily basis (Sandseter, 2009b; Christensen & Mikkelsen, 2008). Children enjoy and value playing outside, away from adults “because they perceive it to be enjoyable, to prevent boredom, to have physical and mental health benefits and to provide freedom from adult control, rules and structure” (Brockman, Jago, & Fox, 2011, p. 1). Children attempt challenges in their play because they like how it makes them feel, but there are additional benefits from engaging in risky play. Brussoni et al.’s (2015) systematic review of the literature found that there are multiple health benefits connected with children’s risky play outdoors including improved physical health, increased physical activity, and healthy body weight.

“The right amount of risk and responsibility gives children the risk-taker’s advantage” (Unger, 2008, p. 7). “The less protected child learns: to trust his own judgment, to respect his

talents, to know his limits, to understand the consequences of his actions, how to reach out for help, to assert his independence, how to keep himself healthy, physically and mentally” (Unger, 2008, p. 7). Encounters with risk help children learn how to manage risks (Gill, 2007). Other benefits include the children’s ability to “improve their perception of risk and their mastery of risky situations,” which may aid survival when, later in life, watchful adults are no longer present” (Apter, 2007, as cited in Sandseter, 2009, p. 94). If young children experience risk and problem solving with adult support, it is likely they will be able to make good choices later on when they are alone.

Through risky play, children are able to test their own limits and abilities and get to know themselves and what they can do. It takes time for children to master risks and succeed at new challenges. In order to do this, they must stick with the task and keep trying. This takes focus and persistence and builds resilience, confidence, coping skills, and self-regulation (Marano & Skenazy, 2011; Play Wales, 2015). When children are successful at taking risks, there is “the possibility of discovering that one is adventurous, daring, brave, strong, confident, and successful” (Stephenson, 2003, p. 42), which improves a child’s self-concept and self-esteem. It is also necessary to mention “one of the most important aspects of risky play may be the anti-phobic effect of exposure to typical fear eliciting stimuli and contexts, in the combination of positive emotion and relative safety and with autonomous coping behaviour” (Sandseter, 2011, p. 274). If children are able to face their fears in play, they will not be afraid in those situations outside of play.

### **Rough and Tumble Play**

There are many benefits to risk taking in general, but there are also many benefits to rough-and-tumble play (RTP), one of the six types of risky play as identified by Sandseter

(2007). Pellis and Pellis (2007) researched play fighting in rats. They studied the differences between rats that were allowed to play fight and rats that were prevented from play fighting and social interactions. They found “adult rats that have been prevented from playing with peers as juveniles have many emotional and cognitive deficits” (Pellis & Pellis, 2007, p. 95). “Play-deprived rats are overly stressed by novel social encounters and are poor at adopting strategies that can alleviate that stress” (Pellis & Pellis, 2007, p. 96). They also found that there were differences in the brains of rats who engaged in rough-and-tumble play and those that did not engage in rough-and-tumble play. There was a clear connection between the rats that were allowed to play fight and their level of social competence. For ethical reasons, they studied rats and not children, but from their research, Pellis and Pellis (2007) concluded that “play fighting may promote the development of social competency” in children. (p. 97).

In another study looking at how rough-and-tumble play can prevent later aggression, Pellis and Pellis (2012) found “children that engaged in more RTP tend to be better liked by peers, over consecutive years exhibit better social skills, and, overall, perform more effectively in the school setting with regard to academic performance” (p. 2). On the contrary, when children have not been given opportunities to engage in rough and tumble play, these positives will not occur and “poor adjustment to the school setting, failure to make friends and poor academic performance may lead to frustration-induced aggression” (Pellis & Pellis, 2012, p. 3).

Rough-and-tumble play also contributes to children’s need for touch because when they are engaged in rough-and-tumble play “children have lots of opportunities in it to learn about their bodies and their touch preferences” (Carlson, 2009, p. 72). In her book, *Essential touch: Meeting the needs of young children*, Carlson (2006) explored touch and why it is so important for children. She also talked about how humans have a need to touch and be touched because

“touch is both a physiological and psychological need” (Carlson, 2006, p. 17). “Research at Baylor College of Medicine concludes “children who don’t play much or are rarely touched develop brains 20 percent to 30 percent smaller than normal for their age” (Nash, 1997, p. 51, as cited in Frost, 2006, p. 7). Some of the benefits of touch include, learning body awareness and body ownership, developing self-regulation, learning social skills, and developing emotional regulation and attachment (Carlson, 2006). Rough-and-tumble play can meet children’s needs for touch because “when properly supervised, touch in the form of “rough-and-tumble” play can provide young children with wonderful opportunities for positive physical contact” (Carlson, 2006, p. 15).

Carlson (2011) also wrote about big body play, some of which could be classified as rough-and-tumble play. In her book, she defined big body play and its benefits, gave ideas for how to implement and make it safe, and answered some common questions. The information she provided was based on a review of the research and literature and she cited over 130 sources. Big body play is active and rowdy and allows children opportunities to exercise and helps them stay fit and healthy (Carlson, 2011). “Research demonstrates convincingly that there is physical, social, emotional, and cognitive value in children’s big body play” (Carlson, 2011, p. 73). “Children engage in big body play in many different ways: alone, with others, with objects, in rough-and-tumble fashion, and in organized games with rules” (Carlson, 2011, p. 6). She also wrote about how “in early childhood settings, too many adults who work with young children doubt the validity and appropriateness – much less the developmental *necessity* – of this boisterous and very physical play style. ... But as rich and varied as the benefits of such play are, almost all adults admit to stopping or banning at least its rough-and-tumble forms” (Carlson, 2011, p. 11-12). However, in high-quality programs, the staff are able to see all of “the potential

physical, social-emotional, and cognitive benefits of the activities” and these benefits outnumber the potential drawbacks and encourage staff to support this type of play (Carlson, 2011, p. 46).

“Children are more likely to engage in appropriate rough-and-tumble play when supervised by teachers who have had formal education or training in the importance of play generally and in big body play specifically” (Dowda et al., 2004, as cited in Carlson, 2011, p. 52). “This means that a key step in making sure teachers and the curriculum support big body play is to ensure that all teaching staff are taught the importance of vigorous, unstructured physical activity and are trained specifically in how to recognize and facilitate big body play” (Carlson, 2011, p. 52).

### **Differences in Risk Taking**

Based on the literature, risk taking is something that children want and need. Risky play has its advantages, but it is important for adults to know that all children do not take risks equally. There are a number of factors that make certain children more willing to take risks and other children less willing to take risks. Morrongiello and Lasenby-Lessard (2007) conducted an extensive literature review to determine what factors influence children’s risk taking behaviours. Though the authors acknowledged “that some degree of risk taking is necessary for development, adaptive functioning and/or survival” (Morrongiello & Lasenby-Lessard, 2007, p. 20), their purpose was to provide information that could be used to create interventions to reduce dangerous risk taking behaviours in order to prevent injuries and deaths. This study could be seen as example of how the term risk can be perceived as something negative rather than something positive. This chapter and project focus on allowing risks and risk taking behaviour, so it is important to know what contributes to children’s willingness to take risks to have a more thorough picture of risk.



Morrongiello and Lasenby-Lessard (2007) concluded that children's risk taking behaviours were shaped by individual characteristics, family/parent factors, and social-situational factors. Included below is a figure showing how "children's risk taking is a multi-determined outcome" and the factors associated with risk taking (Morrongiello & Lasenby-Lessard, 2007, p. 20).

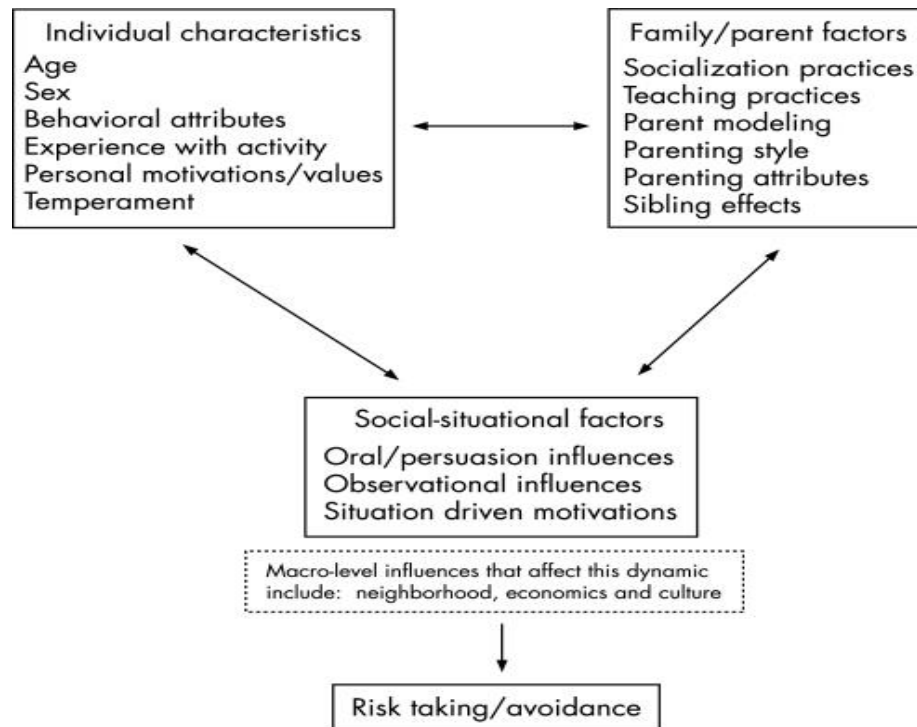


Figure 1. Factors associated with children's risk taking. This figure illustrates all of the elements that influence children's risk taking.

They found that most children perform risk appraisals before engaging in risk and "perceived danger was associated with risk avoidance for both boys and girls" (Morrongiello & Dawber, 2004, p. 255). When children have done something before or have more experience with an activity, they tend to be willing to take greater risks (Morrongiello & Dawber, 2004). When children think injuries are due to bad luck, when they think injuries are less likely to

happen to them, and when they think the risk of injury is low, they tend to take more risks (Morrongiello & Rennie, 1998).

Morrongiello and Matheis (2004) found that cognitive and emotion-based factors, as well as social-situational contexts, did play a role in children's risk taking decisions. They also found that sensation seeking personalities tended to take more risks, convenience was a reason the children used to justify increased risk taking, and "children in the oldest group generally identified more hazards than younger children, and at all ages, children interpreted hazards as implying danger and injury potential" (Morrongiello and Matheis, 2004, p. 318). Another study by Morrongiello and Dawber (2004) found best friends influenced children's risk-taking decision making and children could be persuaded to take more risks when their friends talked them into it.

There are also gender differences in risk taking, with males taking more risks than females (Slovic, 1966; Byrnes, Miller, & Schafer, 1999; Morrongiello & Rennie, 1998; Morrongiello & Dawber, 2004; Morrongiello and Lasenby-Lessard, 2007).

The best predictor of girls' intentions to take risk was their perceived vulnerability for injury (i.e., beliefs about the likelihood of getting hurt), whereas for boys it was perceived severity of injury (i. e., beliefs about how hurt they might get). (Morrongiello & Rennie, 1998, p. 41).

Boys' risk-taking decisions also significantly related to their beliefs about the potential for fun and pleasure in risk-taking. Boys endorsed greater risk-taking for activities they judged to be greater fun. Hence, boys' risk-taking decisions related both to fun and dangers, whereas girls' decisions related only to perceived danger. (Morrongiello & Dawber, 2004 p. 255).

“When deciding where their personal limits are regarding risk-taking activities, girls focus more on danger or their vulnerability for injury than boys, and boys focus more on fun than girls”

(Morrongiello & Dawber, 2004, p. 255). This information can help adults be aware of some of the factors that do promote risk taking in children. This information can also help adults reflect on their own willingness to take risks and allow children to take risks. These are generalized factors that can contribute to a child’s increased risk taking, but it is essential to get to know each individual child to provide adequate support and encouragement and to help prevent unnecessary injuries.

### **Negatives of Not Taking Risks**

“Injury prevention plays a key role in keeping children safe, but emerging research suggests that imposing too many restrictions on children’s outdoor risky play hinders their development” (Brussoni, et al., 2012, p. 3134). “Our reluctance to let our children take risks and assume responsibilities may do them more harm than good” (Unger, 2008, p. 7). Adults cannot protect children from every danger, but helping them learn how to manage risk is valuable for their development (Sandseter, 2009b). When children are not allowed to take risks in play, this negatively affects their development (Eager & Little, 2011). If children are not allowed to play in physical ways, they could become obese or develop physical health problems (Marano & Skenazy, 2011; Brussoni et al., 2015). A big risk of not allowing children to engage in risky play is anxiety or fears later on in life, or not being able to manage future risk taking situations (Sandseter 2009b; Sandseter 2011; Gill, 2007). “Judging risk requires the application, first, of common sense and then some calculation of risk versus benefit” (Marano & Skenazy, 2011, p. 426). Stephenson (2003) stated that if children’s risk taking is restricted, “children may grow up lacking confidence in their own physical ability through lack of opportunities to extend their

skills and to meet appropriate physical challenges” (p. 40) and they will also “have less experience in making decisions on their own, less opportunity to assess their own personal frontiers, and less opportunity to gain confidence and self-esteem through coping independently” (Stephenson, 2003, p. 42).

According to Gill (2012), “we actually do children a disservice by trying to eliminate risk from their lives as they grow up” for “it is a good thing for children to be exposed to the possibility that things could go wrong because that’s how they learn to cope with challenges” (KaBOOM!). “Denying children this opportunity could result in a society of risk-averse citizens, unable to cope with everyday situations; or in children simply finding more dangerous locations to carry out their risk-taking behaviour” (Eager & Little, 2011, p. 21). When adults treat children like they are weak and try to eliminate all risks from their lives, we are not showing trust in children’s ability to learn and we are being too restrictive and breeding “fearfulness in the child.” (Marano & Skenazy, 2011, p. 427). When we treat children in this way, they will become dependent on adults and not able to make their own decisions related to risk taking. They will also “become risk adverse and excessively cautious and this spills over into a deficit of what’s called divergent thinking, or the ability to solve problems” (Marano & Skenazy, 2011, p. 435). By over-protecting children and not allowing them to take risks, children will not develop the skills they need to be successful and they may actually have a more difficult time later in life (Malone, 2007). “We need to value long-term health and fun as much as we value safety” (ParticipACTION, 2015, p. 4) and allow children to make their own risk taking decisions.

### **Parental Fears and Risk Deficit Disorder**

“Watching our children take chances and handle risk demands more from us than from the children. It takes courage” (Wilson, 2010, p. 19). “Parents are important gatekeepers of

children's physical activity and it may be that opportunities for children's active free-play are restricted due to parental concerns" (Veitch et al., 2006, p. 384). There are a few reasons why parents might not allow children to engage in physical outdoor play where there are multiple opportunities to make decisions and take risks; many of them are connected to safety. Some of the main reasons for not allowing children independent mobility and free access to playgrounds include concerns about traffic, concerns about strangers, concerns about teenagers or gangs, and the location of suitable playgrounds (Veitch, et al., 2006; Carver, Timperio, & Crawford, 2008; Malone, 2007; Rosin, 2014; Valentine & McKendrick, 1997; Dixey, 1999; Wyver, Bundy, Naughton, Tranter, Sandseter, & Ragen, 2010b). However, parents' fears and anxieties over the perceived dangers may not be justified to the actual dangers and can have unintended negative consequences (Wyver, 2010b; Dixey, 1999; & Valentine & McKendrick, 1997). One study found that "the most frequently reported location for children's active free-play was the yard at home (74%)" (Veitch, Bagley, Ball, Salmon, 2006, p. 385). While this is better than no active free-play, these children are still missing out on other opportunities for risky, physical, outdoor play. ParticipACTION (2015) has released its annual report card on physical activity for children and youth in Canada and Canadian children have scored a 'D-' for Sedentary behaviours and a 'D-' for Overall Physical Activity. Canadian children are not moving enough. Knowing how parents are feeling and what they are allowing their children to do in the time they are not at school or in child care, helps put things into context. If early childhood educators know that children are not accessing the outdoor environment and playgrounds in their neighbourhoods on a regular basis either on their own or with their parents, they can make sure to give children opportunities to be more active and take more risks during the day.

Eager and Little (2011) have come up with a term to describe this phenomenon of children not being allowed to take risks; Risk Deficit Disorder. “Risk Deficit Disorder (RDD) describes the growing and unhealthy trend of attempting to remove all risk from within our community and the problems that this risk removal indirectly creates” (Eager & Little, 2011, p. 3). Overprotection of children and the idea of “surplus safety” can have unintended, negative consequences for children’s development and these effects can continue throughout adulthood (Wyver, Tranter, Naughton, Little, Sandseter, & Bundy, 2010a, p, 264).

### **Creating Their Own Challenges**

Adults’ attempts at preventing children from taking risks and “our close attention to safety has not in fact made a tremendous difference in the number of accidents that children have” (Rosin, 2014, p. 14). In fact, “wearing a helmet actually makes kids feel like they can do more dangerous stunts” (Unger, 2008, p. 7). Ball (2004) also believes that adults and children change “their behaviour in response to greater perceived safety in playgrounds (p. 664). “The best theory for that is “risk compensation” – kids don’t worry as much about falling on rubber, so they’re not as careful, and end up hurting themselves more often” (Rosin, 2014, p. 15).

Another risk of not supporting children to take risks in their play is that children will attempt risky behaviours without adequate supervision, or they will attempt to use playground equipment in unsafe ways to create a challenge (Sandseter, 2011; Play Wales, 2008; Jambor, 1995; Copeland, Sherman, Kendeigh, Kalkwarf, & Saelens, 2012b; Frost & Henniger, 1979; Bundy et al., 2011). “Children have an appetite for risk taking that, if not fed somehow, will lead them to seek out situations in which they may be exposed to greater risks” (Gill, 2007, p. 16). “Environments that are too safe deny children opportunities to experience incremental amounts of risk required for good psychosocial development” (Unger, 2008, p. 7). The real

danger in “making a centre hazard free, inadvertently it will also be made challenge free. In a centre environment that is too ‘safe’ and restrictive children are likely to become bored; and this in turn may lead them to use equipment in unanticipated and truly dangerous ways, in an effort to create challenges for themselves” (Walsh, 1993, as cited in Stephenson, 2003, p. 40). “When children perceive that play settings are not demanding enough, they may compensate by engaging in activities that yield challenges – in the context of undesirable behaviour” (Bundy et al., 2011, p. 2). “Unfortunately, inventing new play possibilities on boring equipment can lead to risk-taking feats that increase the probability of injury” (Jambor, 1995, p. 4). It is scary to think about children trying this on their own without adult support, but that is exactly what they will do if adults are continuously stopping risk taking in their play, or the play spaces that children have access to are not engaging and do not promote developmentally appropriate risk taking and challenge. “Ultra safe playgrounds may provide peace of mind for adults, but children are likely to reject it and seek challenge and risk somewhere else; often in undesirable places that expose them to potential serious consequences” (Jambor, 1995, p. 7). That is dangerous and something we need to recognize.

### **Environments That Support Children’s Risk Taking**

With the consensus being that children will start to use play equipment in unsafe ways if it is not challenging and exciting (Jambor, 1995; Bundy et al., 2011; Stephenson, 2003; Gill, 2007; Sandseter, 2011; Play Wales, 2008; Copeland, et al., 2012b; Frost & Henniger, 1979), adults need to carefully consider what to provide in playspaces for children. “It is no longer easy to find a playground that has an element of surprise, no matter how far you travel. Kids can find the same slides at the same heights and angles as the ones in their own neighborhood, with many of the same accessories” (Rosin, 2014, p. 11). “Generally speaking, the more diverse the

playground challenges to meet play and developmental needs the more likely children will retain interest, thus presenting good justification for cost and installation efforts” (Jambor, 1995, p. 2).

“The playground is a unique place where children can take risks in a challenging environment without depriving them of opportunities to gain even higher levels of independence in thought and action” (Frost, 2006, p. 8). Brussoni et al.’s (2015) findings “that risky play supportive environments had numerous positive impacts on health, behaviour and development make it clear that built environment solutions are also necessary” (p. 6447). “Play environments where children could take risks promoted increased play time, social interactions, creativity, and resilience” (The University of British Columbia, 2015, para 3).

Other studies (Sandseter, 2009b, Fjortoft, 2001) have also noted the importance of the environment in affording opportunities for children to take risks in their play. It makes sense that different types of environments would allow for different types of challenges and risk taking, or affordances (Gibson, 1979; Fjortof, 2001; Kyttä, 2002; Kyttä, 2004). For example, Fjortoft (2001) found that children who had access to a natural, forest play environment had a multitude of play opportunities and more positive impacts on their motor development, especially balance and coordination, than children who only had access to a conventional playground. The natural play environment afforded more opportunities for play and development than the traditional play environment. Similarly, different types of playground equipment will allow children to practice different physical skills and take different risks.

In an interview, Mariana Brussoni explained, “playgrounds that offer natural elements such as trees and plants, changes in height, and freedom for children to engage in activities of their own choosing, have positive impacts on health, behaviour and social development... These spaces give children a chance to learn about risk and learn about their own limits” (The



University of British Columbia, 2015, para 5). Other elements to include in children's outdoor play spaces are loose parts and portable materials to allow children to have creativity, flexibility, and control over their environments (Brussoni et al., 2015; Frost, 2006; Waters & Maynard, 2010; Niehues, Bundy, Broom, Tranter, Ragen, & Engelen, 2013). It is also important to have lots of space, so children can move around freely and engage in more physical play.

“Playground space that is less structured and has fewer permanently installed large pieces of equipment (like climbers) supports children's body play” (Carlson, 2011, p. 60).

Frost (2006) discussed the history of playgrounds in America from 1821 to the present and there have been many changes, most due to safety concerns and the changing values of the times. Unfortunately, he found “nearly all playgrounds for school-age children fall short on integrating garden and nature areas, constructive play materials and symbolic play props into outdoor play and learning environments” (Frost, 2006, p. 3). In a previous article, Frost and Henniger (1979) discussed ‘creative’ and ‘adventure’ playgrounds. Despite the fact this article is over thirty years old, these are the types of playgrounds that would allow children the opportunity to take more risks in their play. The creative playground is “constructed creatively from existing commercial equipment, a few purchased materials, and a wide variety of donated “junk: materials such as old tires, utility poles, railroad ties, and cable spools” (Frost & Henniger, 1979, p. 23). The “adventure playground is a highly informal play environment where tools, a wide range of scrap building materials, and modifiable climbing structures are provided for children to use in freely expressing themselves” (Frost & Henniger, 1979, p. 23). “Adventure playgrounds are a specific type of outdoor play environments that have the potential to offer an abundance of developmental opportunities for children to grow emotionally, socially, and physically” (Staempfi, 2009, p. 268). Rosin (2014) and Staempfi (2009) both advocate for the

introduction, or reintroduction, of adventure playgrounds due to the multitude of physical, social, emotional, and cognitive benefits these types of playgrounds and materials afford.

### **Playworkers**

A feature of adventure playgrounds that is unique and we do not have in Canada is that they have trained playworkers and volunteers who are there with the children. Playworkers are people who help facilitate children's play and have specific training. If they do not have formal training when they start, they will be supervised by a senior playworker and encouraged to get their qualifications (The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, 2015). The first level of training focuses on playwork values and principles, the importance of play, the role of the playworker, and first aid training (Council for Awards in Care, Health and Education, 2011). The principles do not tell playworkers exactly what to do, but they "make the assumption that playworkers are sensible, responsible people who have common sense and will apply it to their job" (Play Wales, 2008, p. 3). Playworkers are trained to value and support risk taking in children's play; they provide "opportunities for all children to encounter or create uncertainty, unpredictability, and potential hazards as part of their play" (Play Wales, 2008, p. 2). They introduce potential risk slowly, so they can see how individual children respond (Play Wales, 2008). Playworkers "create playful environments, support children's own play, assess risk, and help out when needed, without directing or controlling. They strive to be as invisible as possible" (Wilson, 2010, p. 3). The playworker's main goal is not to play directly with the children all the time, but to be unobtrusive; "The ideal playworker leaves the children free to play for themselves but intervenes in carefully measured ways to support the play process" (Wilson, 2010, p. 9). Knowing there are playworkers at the playground, helps to alleviate some of the fears parents have about letting their children go out and play on their own. Both of these types of

playgrounds, adventure playgrounds and creative playgrounds, have many of the elements that others have indicated would provide challenges and opportunities for risk taking in children's play (Brussoni et al., 2015; Frost, 2006; Waters & Maynard, 2010; Niehues, Bundy, Broom, Tranter, Ragen, & Engelen, 2013).

### **Playground Hazards and the Need for Safety Standards**

Frost and Henniger's (1979) article was written before safety standards, such as the CSA standards in Canada, were written and used. At that time in the US and Canada, children were getting hurt and dying from real hazards on the playgrounds; including unsafe surfacing under and around children's play equipment; exposed bolts, sharp or rough edges, and protruding corners; unsafe openings and angles; improper installation and infrequent maintenance of equipment; and equipment that is inappropriate for a wide range of developmental levels (Frost & Henniger, 1979, p. 24). The CSA standards have worked to address these concerns, except, perhaps, for the last one (Herrington and Nicholls, 2007).

Herrington and Nicholls (2007) discussed the CSA safety standards in relation to child care centre play spaces and they found that the "standards focus on technical information concerning structural integrity, performance requirements, and maintenance of materials and play structures, leaving behind the needs and desires of children" (p. 131). The committee creating the standards is not composed of child development experts or early childhood educators who could explain what children need in their play and how they would like to use the play spaces. Herrington and Nicholls (2007) found that educators want "outdoor play spaces that allow for constant change, flexibility, and manipulation by children and staff" (p. 134). The CSA standards do not focus on anything except for safety and so the play opportunities for children tend to be limited. The regulation also provides for children ages 18 months to twelve

years and does not seem to recognize that there is a wide range of developmental abilities in that age span. However, in a child care centre play space, the age of the children using the equipment is usually more specific and the general safety recommendations may not provide equipment that meets their specific developmental needs.

Herrington and Nicholls (2007) also point out that young children like to play on the ground and with the ground. They believe the surfacing of the playgrounds may interfere with children's abilities to be creative and playful. For example, the rubber matting, an impact absorbing surfacing (IAS), that many playgrounds now have for safety reasons cannot be manipulated by children and it starts to deteriorate when in contact with sand (Herrington and Nicholls, 2007). Ball (2004) found that "the wholesale application of IAS as a playground safety measure" is not necessary because the "risk of serious injury in UK playgrounds is actually small and the cost-benefit calculations "do not support the imposition on play providers of the significant cost implications of IAS" (p. 668). This is one example of how the public desire for safety overrides what is developmentally good for children. "When policy that could potentially advocate for the play and development of children is substituted with technical safety standards that are produced to promoted trade and industry, the needs of children are lost" (Herrington & Nicholl, 2007, p. 135).

"The Canadian Standards Association's (CSA) standards for "Children's Playspaces and Equipment" CAN/CSA-Z614 [33], originally published in 1990, are voluntary in Canada, but various local and provincial agencies mandate their adherence [34]" (Brussoni et al., 2015, p. 6426.). In Manitoba, the *Best Practices Licensing Manual* (2005) requires that "new playspaces, equipment, additions and replacement parts of existing playspaces and equipment meet Canadian Standards Association (CSA) International standards" (Manitoba Child Care Program, p. 78).

“Most people who care about child development know nothing about design, and most people who design know nothing about child development” (Shell, 1994, p. 80, as cited in Frost, 2006, p. 1). This is a fitting quote that highlights the need for those involved in children’s playgrounds (children, families, early childhood professionals, child care coordinators, designers, inspectors, etc.) to work together. Just because the standards are not perfect does not mean that they should be eliminated entirely. When there were no standards, playgrounds were full of hazards and multiple children were getting injured and killed (Frost & Henniger, 1979). The need for safety standards in regards to children’s playgrounds is present; “playground standards ensure that hazards are engineered out” (Little & Eager, 2010, p. 501).

We do not want children getting hurt on playgrounds because of hazards we could have prevented. However, these standards should not eliminate play opportunities or challenges. The CSA standards need some revision to truly reflect a playspace that is ideal for children’s development and risky play. We know “challenging tasks that require some degree of risk-taking are an important ingredient of children’s play” (Frost & Henniger, 1979, p. 27). Our job is to “eliminate the unnecessary hazards on playgrounds and help prepare children to deal sensibly and safely with the challenges the outdoor environment provides” (Frost & Henniger, 1979, p. 27).

### **Children’s Preferences for Outdoor Environments**

In an ethnographic study of one childcare centre in New Zealand, Stephenson (2002) observed the children inside and outside for five months. The centre had a “free flow between the indoor and outdoor environments for most of the day” (Stephenson, 2002, p. 30). Stephenson (2002) wanted to know “What is it about playing outdoors that attracts so many children?” (Stephenson, 2002, p. 29-30). Through this study, Stephenson (2002) was able to

identify four key elements of indoor and outdoor environments that made the outdoor environment different and satisfying for children. Her study is relevant because it is supervised environments like the one she studied that young children in a child care setting will be in, because the regulations state that “children attending the child care centre are supervised at all times” (Manitoba Child Care Program, 2005, p. 47). Stephenson (2002) said, “Each area encompassed a variety of experiences and behaviours, and some overlapped” (Stephenson, 2002, p. 30), which made it difficult at first to identify the differences. However, she came to the conclusion that there were distinct differences in the indoor and outdoor environments, in how the children used the environments, and in how the staff interacted with the children inside and outside (Stephenson, 2002). She found the following to be true:

Outside was the “look at me” environment, whereas indoors was the “look at what I’ve made” environment. The outdoors was the environment of change, while indoors was the stable environment; the outdoors was a freer and less controlled environment; and finally, there were subtle but distinct differences in the way teachers and children interacted inside and out. (p. 30)

Overall, outside “there were fewer restrictions and controls, and activities tended to be more open-ended” (Stephenson, 2002, p. 37). The teachers in the study valued the outdoor time as a time for more physical play. The younger and older children were able to practice their physical skills and challenge themselves in different and appropriate ways. It was impossible to control all of the outdoor elements and the fixed equipment did not change, but the staff regularly tried to change what they could to make the environment new and exciting for the children. One staff said that it was “easier to help children when they’re taking risks outside than inside – because they’re obvious, obvious risks, and you can see that they need help” (Stephenson, 2002, p. 36).

In Stephenson's (2002) study, she observed the environment and tried to determine what was different inside and outside of the centre in order to figure out what was appealing to the children. Stephenson (2002) consulted with the teachers, but she did not consult directly with the children. When considering what types of outdoor play spaces to provide for children, it is important not only to think of who will be using these spaces, but also to talk with children and see what they would like in their play spaces. Norodahl and Einarsdottir (2015) acknowledged that including children in research studies comes with its own challenges. However, Moore's (2014) study on children's secret places highlighted the importance of truly listening to children and recognized that in order to fully include children in the research process, the researcher has to have a certain image of the child. Waller (2006) also described the challenges of including children in participatory research and found that children preferred natural environments, but Norodahl and Einarsdottir's (2015) study provided some interesting information about children's preferences.

Norodahl and Einarsdottir (2015) studied 100 four and five year old children from two preschools and 189 six year old children from a compulsory school in Iceland. Their aim was to find out what these children wanted from their outdoor play environments. A special component of this study is how it is "influenced by the view of children as capable, competent, and active thinkers who have something special to offer and from whole grown-ups can learn" (Norodahl & Einarsdottir, 2015, p. 153).

The findings of the study showed that the children wanted to challenge themselves as well as to be secure, explore things, be in contact with others, find or create nests, and enjoy beautiful things outdoors. The children highly valued the natural environment and liked diversity in playground equipment. (Norodahl & Einarsdottir, 2015, p. 152).

The children in the study expressed a desire for grown-ups to “secure their safety in risky circumstances,” which “indicates the importance of finding a balance between allowing and encouraging children to try out new things and take risks, and at the same time ensuring their safety” (Norodahl & Einarsdottir, 2015, p. 15). What the children wanted is compatible with Sandseter’s (2007) categories of risky play and the children’s need to take risks is also consistent with previous research (Norodahl & Einarsdottir, 2015; Little & Eager, 2010; Sandseter, 2009; Stephenson, 2003). Something important to note about this study and the results is

during the project the teachers had changed their attitudes about what children should be allowed to do outdoors. They had started to reconsider which rules were necessary and which were not. Teachers saw that allowing children to challenge themselves was valuable enough to outweigh the possible risk of minor accidents” (Norodahl & Einarsdottir, 2015, p. 162).

This study showed that when adults truly listened to children and paid attention to what children wanted and needed developmentally, they started to change their own personal beliefs and values and see first-hand the importance of allowing children risk taking opportunities in their play.

Another study that included children was Little and Eager’s (2010) study that “examined the outdoor play choices and risk-taking behaviour of 38 children (25 boys, 13 girls), aged between 48 and 64 months from Sydney, Australia” (p. 497). They used semi-structured interviews, including pictures with naturalistic observations of the children at local parks to analyze out children’s preferences and behaviours. The playgrounds where they observed had mostly fixed equipment and “offered limited opportunities for unstructured play with loose materials such as sand, water or natural elements within the environment” (p. 504). “The



playgrounds in this study were typical of the “off-the-shelf” fixed play equipment commonly found in public playgrounds” (Little & Eager, 2010, p. 510).

When asked, 79% of the children said outdoor play was their preferred play activity and the majority of the children, 47.5%, selected the most challenging playground structure as the one they wanted to use (Little & Eager, 2010). However, the children’s actual play behaviours did not match their stated preferred play behaviours. “The children mainly engaged in lower level risk behaviours with all children engaging in no or very low risk behaviours” (Little & Eager, 2010, p. 506). Little and Eager believed this was because “the playground equipment in this study provided limited opportunities for children to challenge themselves, try new skills or push the limits of their capabilities” (2010, p. 509). They also found “the equipment appeared to hold little appeal and did not sustain play as the children showed signs of disinterest towards the end of the observation period” (p. 509). They felt that “for older children who are more likely to use the equipment unsupervised, the potential for inappropriate risk-taking increased as the features of the equipment would hold little appeal for these children and there are often no alternatives available” (p. 510). The playgrounds that they used met the safety standards, but they did not meet the children’s standards. This is not an uncommon finding.

Child development and play quality is enhanced when the environment allows children to safely explore their surroundings, equipment, try new things, accept challenges, and take risks. Ideally, the playspace should contain a diversity of physical, social, and intellectual play elements as well as opportunities to engage with the natural environment” (Little & Eager, 2010, p. 498).

From the research, it is clear that children want playgrounds that are challenging where they can take risks and test their limits. Outdoor environments with natural elements, open spaces,

flexibility, loose parts, and a variety of equipment will offer many play possibilities and opportunities for children of a variety of developmental levels to challenge themselves (Brussoni et al., 2015; Frost, 2006; Waters & Maynard, 2010; Niehues, Bundy, Broom, Tranter, Ragen, & Engelen, 2013; Staempfi, 2009; Rosin, 2014; Carlson, 2011). When playgrounds do not offer these possibilities, children will attempt to create them in ways that may truly be dangerous (Sandseter, 2011; Play Wales, 2008; Jambor, 1995; Copeland, Sherman, Kendeigh, Kalkwarf, & Saelens, 2012b; Frost & Henniger, 1979; Bundy et al., 2011).

Adults have a responsibility to make choices that will enhance children's development and risky play, but their choices are not always beneficial for children. Frost (2006) found adults responsible for designing, selecting and purchasing playground equipment make choices that are wasteful and expensive, that provide redundant challenges, that ignore many important forms of children's play and games, and that fail to take into account the range of interests and abilities of children across developmental levels. (p. 12).

Playgrounds do not have to be boring and challenge free to be free from hazards and meet the safety standards. "While it is our responsibility as adults to protect our children from hazards that would inflict injury, it is also our responsibility to provide them with environments that enhance their total development" (Jambor, 1995, p. 2). Taking all of the risk, challenge, and fun out of playgrounds is not in children's best interests, especially when we are thinking about the long term picture. "We must not deny the children of today the natural risk-taking and consequential learning opportunities that have been common to the childhoods of past generations" (Jambor, 1995, p. 3). We may not be able to control where our early learning centres or playgrounds are located, but we can control the outdoor spaces we create for children and the materials we provide for them.

### **Environments and Adults Influences Children's Risky Play Options**

Typically, there are more opportunities for children to take risks when they are outside. The environments children have access to and the adults around them both influence what risks and challenges they can and cannot take outside. Blanchet-Cohen and Elliot's (2011) participatory case study looked at the actions and responses of educators and children in four different childcare programs to find out more about "children's and educators' perspectives on engagement and learning possibilities outdoors" (p. 757). "This study emerged from an interest expressed by educators in four centres who valued the time children spent in the outside space and were curious about creating more natural environments and exploring alternatives to the usual playground structures" (Blanchet-Cohen & Elliot, 2011, p. 762).

Blanchet-Cohen and Elliot (2011) discussed how children used their outdoor play environments. "Children, as shown in this study, seek the opportunity to challenge their skills and engage their imaginations; they want challenges that slightly exceed their abilities, and if such challenges are not readily apparent, they find them" (Blanchet-Cohen & Elliot, 2011, p. 774). "Although manufactured equipment may meet rigorous safety standards, children spend little time on playground equipment and more time around and about the equipment" (Herrington & Lesmeister, 2006, as cited in Blanchet-Cohen & Elliot, 2011, p. 759). This is similar to Little and Eager (2010) who noted from their observations that children seemed to get bored with the standard play equipment.

Blanchet-Cohen & Elliot (2011) "found that educators play an active role in nurturing young children's relationships with nature" (p. 768). "The educators in the study drew on and adapted to the natural features of their immediate landscape and surroundings" (p. 768). The educators also adapted and used creative problem solving to keep children safe and allow them

to do what they wanted to do, where they wanted to do it. “Educators tended to trust children’s abilities to manage their own risk taking. Children usually have a clear sense of what they are capable of and what is a safe risk” (p. 771). “Educators saw the importance of allowing children to deal with risk as part of preparing them for life” (p. 771). In the study, the educators made risk taking a priority and worked together to allow children opportunities to take risks.

The programs in the study had to “convince parents of the value of the outdoors to their child’s development” (p. 771) and had policies in their handbooks to let parents know that they valued outdoor play and would be spending a lot of time outside. In order for educators to be able to persuade parents that risk taking and outdoor play is beneficial for children, educators need to have the necessary knowledge. The educators in this study felt so strongly about providing children with these opportunities and listening to what the children wanted that they “kept “secrets” from licensing” (Blanchet-Cohen & Elliot, 2011, p. 770).

It was clear from this study that when educators value outdoor play and risk taking that they will do whatever they can to make it happen for the children. This is encouraging and is a good example of how much influence an educator’s values and beliefs can have on what children are permitted and not permitted to do. Of course, keeping “secrets” from licensing coordinators is not ideal. It highlights the need to have parents, educators, children, and policy makers come together when creating policies and standards.

### **Adults’ Influence on Children’s Risk Taking**

Sandseter (2014) said, “Adults help to ensure children are safe when playing, but at the same time, these adults represent the most important constraints on children’s opportunities to experience risks and challenges” (p. 436). “Children’s risk-taking decisions are also influenced by supervising adults’ evaluations of the situation, their assessment of the risk involved, and their decision to allow the children to engage in the risky activity” (Sandseter, 2014, p. 436). Adult

beliefs influence whether or not children will be able to take risks and their environments also influence risk taking opportunities; depending on where children play, they will have more or less opportunities to take risks depending on the environment (Little, Wyver, & Gibson, 2011; Sandseter, 2009b). If children are to become successful at managing risks, they need to have opportunities to make their own decisions and experience the consequences of those decisions. This is why it is essential that ECEs know about, and understand, the benefits of risky play for children's development.

### **What Children Consider 'Risky'**

Stephenson's (2003) article was based on data collected from two studies; an older study she did using an ethnographic approach where she studied one centre with twenty-five children from zero to five years over four months and a more recent study. Her focus was on what experiences the four year old children considered scary and what "physically challenged them" (Stephenson, 2003, p. 36). Stephenson found some elements that make the experience scary included "attempting something never done before; feeling on the borderline of 'out of control' often because of height or speed, and overcoming fear" (2003, p. 36). These included activities like sliding, swinging, climbing, and bike riding.

From her observations, Stephenson (2003) wanted to know how adults can provide children with the physically challenging experiences they crave, while meeting the necessary safety requirements. She recognized that safety regulations can make it difficult for educators to provide experiences that would satisfy children's need for risk, but she thought playgrounds needed to have some elements of challenge for children, so that they will not be too safe and boring (Stephenson, 2003), which is consistent with Gill (2007); Blanchet-Cohen and Elliot (2011), Little and Eager (2010), Frost (2006) and Jambor (1995). She also wondered what the

long term effects would be if children were not able to try out and master these physical challenges. Another interesting point she made was how taking physical risks outside can transfer into taking risks inside with learning. New, Mardell, & Robinson (2005) also looked at how a “risk-rich early childhood curriculum” includes more than physical risks and how children’s risk taking in all areas of learning has a multitude of benefits for everyone involved (p. 11). Stephenson’s (2003) work is frequently cited by other researchers in other countries, including Canada.

### **Six Categories of Risky Play and Characteristics that Make Play ‘Risky’**

Sandseter (2007) built upon Stephenson’s (2003) work to come up with six categories of risky play. Sandseter (2007) used a qualitative study based on observations and semi-structured interviews with some of the children and staff. She worked with thirty-eight children, ages three to five, at two preschool centres in Norway to create six categories of risky play based on “perceived and actual risk” (Sandseter, 2007, p. 250). “The categories also take into consideration both the staffs’ and the children’s evaluation of what is risky, despite not always being the same” (Sandseter, 2007, p. 250). She found that “risky play is related to the chance of getting hurt and the feeling of fear” (Sandseter, 2007, p. 239). Another interesting finding is that some categories were perceived to be risky by both children and staff, some only by staff, and some only by the children (Sandseter, 2009b). To make sure her categories made sense, she had an experienced preschool teacher read thorough her data to verify. It is common to see Sandseter’s work cited in other articles about children’s risky play.

Sandseter’s (2007) six categories include:

- 1) play with great heights
- 2) play with high speed
- 3) play with harmful tools

- 4) play near dangerous elements
- 5) rough-and-tumble play
- 6) play where the children can 'disappear'/get lost

Armitage (2011) and Greenfield (2004) have used characteristics and elements similar to those of Stephenson (2003) and Sandseter (2007) to describe risky play. Armitage (2011) described “four ‘risky’ things that we could all provide access to” including height and depth, movement and speed, den building and using tools, and fire (p. 1). In Greenfield’s (2004) work, she had four year old children identify the elements of where they preferred to play from various photographs. She found “common features of risk, speed, excitement, thrills, uncertainty, and challenge” in her study of how four year olds like to play in their environments (Greenfield, 2004, p. 3).

Sandseter (2009b) wanted to further explore the categories and characteristics of risky play in a qualitative research study. It involved twenty-nine children, ages four to five years old, in two preschools in Norway. Sandseter (2009b) observed children playing during a five month period and then analyzed the characteristics in the children’s play. She concluded that there are “two categories of risk characteristics that make risky play risky,” environmental and individual (Sandseter, 2009b, p. 17). Environmental characteristics include features of the play environment, including staff as part of the environment, and individual characteristics include how the play was carried out by the child (Sandseter, 2009b). Sandseter (2009b) found that it is “a combination of the environment in which the children play, and how they carry out play in this environment is interpreted to both constitute the objective risk in children’s risky play” (Sandseter, 2009b, p. 17). She then took her six previously defined categories of risky play and discussed those in relation to the environmental and individual characteristics. An important implication of her work is that “supervising adults’ own risk perception in the situation will

influence how they react to the risk-taking child, and thus their actions of interfering, constraining, or encouraging risky play will constitute factors that contribute to the potential risk in the situation” (Sandseter, 2009b, p. 5). The role of the adult is important here. Even though the work she did was in Norway, her characterizations and definitions of risky play can transfer to settings in Canada.

### **Various Beliefs about Risky Play and Children’s Risk Taking Opportunities**

In a qualitative study of early childhood practitioners with two or more years of experience in Ireland, Kennedy and McGrath (2014) attempted to find out what these practitioners knew about risky play, particularly outdoor risky play; how they incorporated it into their programs; and what they saw as benefits and challenges. Kennedy and McGrath found “outdoor risky play is a new concept for Irish practitioners” (2014, p. 4); the practitioners could not clearly define it and only a few had actually “incorporated risky play in service” (2014, p. 4). That being said, “most practitioners were eager to embrace risky play outdoors” and had “positive attitudes on outdoor risky play” (p. 5). Similar to Sandseter (2014); Little, Wyver, and Gibson (2011); Sandseter (2009b); and Nicol (2013), Kennedy and McGrath (2014) also found that risky, outdoor play was “dependent on individual staff attitudes and preferences” and “dependent on staff personal interest and drive” (p. 5).

They concluded that more awareness of risky play and training for practitioners to support implementing and managing risky play were essential (Kennedy & McGrath, 2014). They plan on doing more studies, but their findings do show that the actual implementation of risky play is connected to the individuals who are working with the children. If the practitioners see the value and benefits, children will be able to take risks in their play.



Little (2010b) conducted a qualitative study of 17 early childhood practitioners to find out their “beliefs about risk-taking and their provision of ‘risky’ play opportunities in the outdoor environment” (p. 3) with special attention paid to how “the regulatory environment places constraints on their ability to provide sufficiently challenging experiences” (p. 3). She found that “in addition to teachers’ own beliefs and attitudes towards risk-taking, the regulatory environment in which practitioners operate is a significant factor that impacts on the decisions they make in response to risky play” (p. 7).

The practitioners in the study valued risky play and saw the developmental benefits. They were able to adjust support based on individual children in their care. However, the study found that there were conflicting government documents. One document that valued risky play and the regulations that made allowing children to take risks in their play difficult. They found that “in order to comply with the legislated guidelines (i.e. the Regulations) the balance is firmly tipped in favour ensuring safety at the expense of supporting positive healthy risk-taking.” (Little, 2010b, p. 18).

Little’s (2010b) study has two relevant connections to my project; one, that adult beliefs and values will influence children’s opportunities for risky play and two, that government regulations may prevent educators from doing what they really want to do with children/allowing children to do what they think is best for them. This study was not the only one that found that early childhood practitioners felt confined by the regulations. Sandseter et al. (2012); Stephenson (2003); Kennedy and McGrath (2014); Blanchet-Cohen & Elliot (2011) all found that the practitioners in their studies also felt that the regulations influenced their work with children, sometimes so much that following the regulations went against what the educators felt was best for the children and their development.

**Relevant Regulations in Manitoba**

There are a few sections in the Manitoba *Best Practices Licensing Manual for Early Learning and Child Care Centres* (2005) that relate to risky play and allowing for children to play in more physical ways. In this document, there are regulations that must be adhered to and there are recommendations for best practice that centres should aspire towards, but are not a requirement. The rule related to supervision is “Every licensee shall ensure that children attending the child care centre are supervised at all times” (Manitoba Child Care Program, 2005, p. 47). The ‘Best Practice’ related to risky play is “Staff anticipates and takes action to ensure safety, while balancing children’s need to explore and take risks appropriate to their development” and “Staff is aware of the environment and individual children and adjusts supervision accordingly” (Manitoba Child Care Program, 2005, p. 47). We cannot leave the children alone for extended periods of time in a child care centre, but we can give them more space and not be as directly involved in telling them what they can and cannot do as long as what they are doing matches their abilities. This regulation does not seem to prevent ECEs in Manitoba from allowing children to take risks, provided the staff are there with them.

In relation to outdoor play, it is mandatory that “Every licensee who operates a full time child care centre or nursery school which provides child care for more than 4 continuous hours per day or a school age child care centre, shall provide outdoor play for children attending the child care centre on a daily basis,” except where extreme weather like cold or storms would jeopardize children’s safety (Manitoba Child Care Program, 2005, p. 70). The ‘Best Practice’ says,

Staff respects the need for children to experience the outdoors and the real world. They provide children with opportunities to interact with the environment. Staff helps children:

learn about safe exploring; recall and connect prior experiences with new ones; explore environments using their cognitive skills, including comparing, classifying and predicting. Staff works with children both on the playground and away from it. They know children's activities and whereabouts, as well as recognizing learning opportunities in the environment (Manitoba Child Care Program, 2005, p. 70).

Except for strict adherence to the CSA standards for play equipment previously discussed in this chapter, many of the guidelines and best practices are written in a general way that leaves them open to interpretation. This is likely a good thing and allows more room for experienced early childhood educators to make decisions for children based on what is best for children and not feel pressured by the regulations. Thankfully, it seems like in Manitoba, early childhood educators would not be as restricted or conflicted by the licensing and safety regulations as some practitioners in other locations seem to be.

### **Individual and Cultural Differences Relating to Children's Risk Taking**

After reading the literature, it becomes clear that there are individual and cultural differences in how societies view risk in children's play and how much they value outdoor play. New (1999) discussed how there is no single early childhood curriculum for individual countries, but that in each country there are elements and certain values that will be present in each individual centres' curriculum which will reflect the country's cultural values. New (1999) explained how what educators teach is determined by society's values and beliefs, and educators' own values and beliefs. This means it is essential that adults understand the value of risk in play and the developmental benefits it has, so they will allow and encourage children to take risks. This is important because Sandseter (2009) described how the supervising adult can impact whether or not a child will be able to take a risk.

New, Mardell, and Robinson (2005) built upon New's (1999) ideas. They suggest that there are cultural differences around the world. They explored how different cultures have different goals, beliefs, and expectations, and how that those differences affect the risks educators allow children to take. They believe that "the topic of risk is more complex and culturally situated than is typically understood" (New et al., 2005, p. 11).

Sandseter, Little, and Wyver (2012) looked at the pedagogy and beliefs of educators in two countries, Australia and Norway. Then they looked at the risks children are allowed to take in play and compared both countries' practices. They really wanted to know "whether teachers' pedagogy may be a further contributing factor" (p. 168) to allowing outdoor and risky play (because risky play happens most outside – Stephenson, 2003, Sandseter 2007, ParticipACTION, 2015). A range of research methods and two different individual studies were used in this investigation to generate findings. Practitioners in Australia (17) and Norway (14) were interviewed; the sample size of practitioners was quite small.

"The pedagogical guidelines for all preschools in Norway are characterized by emphasizing children's play and learning through play in various contexts rather than focusing on schooling activities" (Sandseter, 2009a, p. 8). This aligns well with the educators' practice of allowing children to engage in risky play outdoors. In contrast, "a tension exists for the Australian practitioners between their pedagogical beliefs and what they believe they can actually provide for the children within what they see as a restrictive regulatory environment" (Sandseter et al., 2012, p. 178). Sandseter et al. (2012) made it clear that outdoor play was a priority and part of Norwegian culture and heritage and there was a strong belief that children need to learn valuable skills from their outdoor environments. A major difference between the two countries was in how the outdoor play spaces were regulated. In Australia, they were highly

regulated and in Norway they were not regulated. Sandseter et al. (2012) found that Australian and Norwegian ECEs had similar beliefs about the value of risky play, but their overall culture was different, and so “there were clear differences in how these beliefs translated into practice” (p. 178). This study made it clear that we can expect differences in beliefs, values, and early childhood practices regarding risk-taking in children’s play depending on where the risky play takes place.

Sandseter (2012) qualitatively studied and observed outdoor free play in two different Norwegian preschool centres and then interviewed seven practitioners to determine their views about risky play and to see how their views affected children’s risk-taking in play. Her study showed it is clear that the ECEC practitioners in Norway who were involved in this study both valued risky play and allowed children to engage in risky play. The small number of participants along with the established cultural bias towards outdoor risky play in Norway make it hard to generalize these results.

Nonetheless, Norodahl and Johannesson (2014) found similar results studying Icelandic teachers’ views of outdoor environments and children’s risky play opportunities. These teachers did not see the potential of children taking risks and possibly having accidents as a “hindrance” to allowing them to engage in physical outdoor play. “However these findings are in contrast with the fear for children’s safety that seems to hinder teachers in many other countries from taking children outside” (Norodahl & Johannesson, 2014, p. 12). “Viewing children’s outdoor play and learning so positively may be something special to the Nordic countries” (Norodahl & Johannesson, 2014, p. 12). Sandseter (2012) recognized this and said, “The cultural differences in children’s opportunities to engage in risky play are an important issue if risky play is to be discussed as a universal phenomenon across the world” (p. 97). What is true for one country

may not be true for other countries (Sandseter, 2012; Little, Sandseter, & Wyver, 2012; Armitage, 2011). What seems to be true is that when teachers value the outdoors and the benefits it provides children, they will make it a priority to take children outside and let them engage with the environment in the ways they want.

In addition to cultural values, individual teacher values and their education will also play a role in children's allowances to engage in risky play. Little (2006) reviewed the literature at that time to determine if there were certain characteristics in children that made them more or less likely to take risks in their play and; therefore, more or less likely to incur injuries in their play. Her critical review found that some children seek out risks more than others; optimism bias plays a role in risk taking with children who believe they are more likely to have a positive outcome from the risk; parental expectations for boys and girls are different with parents seeming to encourage more independence in boys; and boys engage in more risky play than girls do (Little, 2006). It was clear that some children will engage in risk-taking more than others and that those working with children need to be aware of this. The implications of her findings were that early childhood staff need to use "their knowledge of children's individual differences to provide an environment that is safe, yet challenging" (Little, 2006, p. 152). A risk that is suitable for one child, may not be suitable for another and educators need to be mindful of this when supervising.

After studying the risk perceptions of thirty-eight, four and five year old, children using a variety of methods, Little and Wyver (2010) found that

at the age of four-five years, children's independent engagement in many activities is limited; hence many possible injuries are avoided through the intervention of adults. In order for young children to accurately appraise risks, parents and other significant adults

perhaps need to adopt teaching strategies that provide explicit feedback on the likely outcomes of injury risk behaviours to facilitate children's understanding. (p. 308).

Little and Wyver (2010) suggest, "Adults require an understanding of individual characteristics that might predispose some children to higher levels of risk-taking and injury risk behaviours in order to provide appropriate support and guidance for children during play" (p. 311). In Sandseter et al. (2012) it was reported that "practitioners usually made an individual evaluation of risky play in each play situation, considering each child individually according to the child's competence and risk mastery" (p. 176), which is similar to what playworkers are trained to do (Play Wales, 2008). Again, the implications are that early childhood practitioners need to know the children they are working with and be able to make decisions based on individual situations.

### **Adult Involvement and Interactions Are Critical**

There are clear differences in how children will respond to risk-taking, but there are also differences in how educators will respond to children's risk-taking. The "personality of the practitioner" (Sandseter, 2014, p. 437) plays a role in how adults respond to children taking risks in play. Sandseter (2014) used a "quantitative approach to ECED practitioners' perceptions of children's risky play with an aim to reveal how risk perception is related to the practitioner's age, gender and personality" (p. 434). She found that male practitioners "have a more liberal attitude towards children's risky play, and allow children to engage in greater risky play than women" (Sandseter, 2014, p. 434). Sandseter (2014) also found "most Norwegian ECED practitioners (both men and women) had few worries when children engaged in risky play" (Sandseter, 2014, p. 446). These results are interesting because Little (2006) and Little and Wyver (2010) found differences in children's risk taking behaviours, so it seems to make sense that there would also be a difference in adult behaviours towards risk taking. Little, Wyver, and Gibson (2011)

believed educators who valued risk-taking in their own lives, would be more willing to allow children to take risks, which is consistent with Sandseter's (2014) findings. Sandseter (2014) found a difference between male and female practitioners, but both men and women were allowing a lot of risky play. Would this be similar somewhere where risky play was not so abundant and accepted? If children are going to be allowed and encouraged to take risks in their play, they need a certain type of caregiver.

Caregivers work in many different types of child care programs and these different types of programs for children have different philosophies. While each individual adult may have a different mindset about what is an acceptable risk for a child to take, certain programs as a whole also have a certain mindset. One example is Nature Kindergartens. "*A Nature Kindergarten* provides young children with large amounts of time in natural outdoor settings where they can play, explore and experience natural systems and materials found there" (Sooke School District, 2015). Clair Warden is an educational consultant, lecturer, and author who has visited and written about many natural environments and nature kindergartens. When discussing nature kindergarten, Warden (2011) explained, "Our philosophy is to be risk aware and not risk adverse and to employ a sense of perspective when assessing risks as risk." Warden (2011) explained how in "Nature Kindergartens we remove hazards that children do not see..., but we do not remove challenges or risks that children do see and then choose to undertake" (para 3). Warden (2011)'s ideas that practitioners need to assess risks to children on an individual basis and consider "children's capacities, their resilience, and their ability to make judgments" when figuring out what is and is not an acceptable risk for a child agree with what Little and Wyver (2010), Play Wales (2008), and Sandseter (2012) have written about (para 10). Again, what is good or appropriate for one child, may not be good or appropriate for another.



Another program that has a positive philosophy towards risk taking is Forest School. Forest school is similar to nature kindergarten in that children spend the majority, or all, of their time outside in natural environments. The main principles of forest school include “*regular and repeated access to a natural space*, as well as *child-directed, emergent and inquiry-based learning*” (Forest School Canada, 2015). Waters and Begley (2007) conducted an exploratory study of two four year olds, one boy and one girl, in two different preschool settings in South Wales, one primary school and one Forest school. The boy was chosen because he was a child most likely to take physical risks and the girl was chosen because she was the least likely to take physical risks. The children’s play behaviours in both settings were observed and documented. Waters and Begley (2007) found that both children’s risk taking behaviours increased when they were in the Forest School setting. They determined that this was because “the Forest School had a positive and consistent approach towards physical risk-taking” (p. 373) and the Forest School environment afforded more varied and interesting forms of risk-taking behaviour than the equipment provided in the school play-space (p. 372). Also, “Forest School practitioners not only allow risk-taking, but provide for it and support children when they engage in it” (Waters & Begley, 2007, p. 369). This study is another example of how adult values can affect children’s risk taking and also how the environment can afford risk-taking opportunities, which is what Sandseter (2007) described as environmental characteristics.

Sandseter’s (2007, 2009a) research shows that Norwegian children are able to take a number of risks in their outdoor play on a regular basis and that society and early childhood staff there support risk-taking. This is not the case everywhere. Some of the reasons early childhood practitioners give for not letting children engage in risky play include fear of litigation, fear of children getting hurt, fear of parents’ reactions, and strict regulations. (Wyver, et al., 2010;

Greatorex, 2008; Bundy, Lockett, Tranter, Naughton, Wyver, Ragen, & Spies, 2009; Little, 2010a). Greatorex (2008) states the top three priorities for most providers to help them provide more challenging play opportunities for children are publicity campaigns to educate society about the many benefits of risk in children's play, better design of play spaces, and training for play workers (p. 17).

Adult involvement is critical in children developing skills related to risk taking in play. Sandseter (2009b) took video observations of twenty-nine children in two preschool centres in Norway. She looked at "how preschool children seek out risk-taking in play and how children and preschool staff manage these risks" (Sandseter, 2009b, p. 1). "Children often deliberately sought out risky play and performed several strategies of heightening the risk to get rewarding experiences, while still moderating their actions to avoid loss or injury" (Sandseter, 2009b, p. 4). "Supervision from adults present influenced children's risk-taking in play, and that the preschool staff made risk-taking decisions on behalf of the children" (Sandseter, 2009b, p. 8). "The results show that the staff usually took one of four different strategies when dealing with children's risky play: restricting/constraining, keeping a close eye, not present/distance, and contributing/initiative" (Sandseter, 2009b, p. 8). Once more, the importance of adult involvement in children's risk taking is highlighted in this work. Adults can encourage or discourage risk taking and ideally they would encourage it, so children could benefit. If adults are going to encourage risk-taking in children's play, they need to believe in its value. Education can help by giving practitioners the benefits of risky play and also letting them know it is acceptable to let children take risks in their play.

**Educators Need to See the Value of Risk Taking in Children's Play**

Cevher-Kalburan (2014) studied the effectiveness of an intervention on pre-service teachers in Turkey. Twenty six pre-service teachers in Turkey filled out a questionnaire before and after a six week intervention aimed to help them view risky play more positively. Many of the respondents initially had negative views about risks in play and thought adults should limit children's risk taking. The intervention was effective and increased the educators' understanding about risky play. After the intervention, they saw risky play more positively and even believed adults should permit and encourage it among children. Cevher-Kalburan (2014) found that teacher education is essential and effective in changing educators' view towards risk in play. The findings of this study are encouraging and support my belief that a series of workshops could inform early childhood practitioners about the benefits of risky play and in turn increase children's access to challenging environments.

Logue and Harvey (2009) conducted a study to determine educators' "attitudes and practices about rough-and-tumble play" (p. 32). This was a US study that "surveyed 98 teachers of 4-year-olds about dramatic play in their classrooms," which included rough-and-tumble play (Logue & Harvey, 2009, p. 32). Even though the literature review showed that rough-and-tumble play is a natural and common form of play for children, "results from the survey indicated that 46% of the respondents have a "no-tolerance" policy toward rough-and-tumble play and 54% do not" (p. 43). Based on this data, a follow up questionnaire was sent out to see which aspects of rough-and-tumble play teachers were prohibiting. The responses led the researchers to determine that "play fighting is viewed differently than other parts of rough-and-tumble play" (Logue & Harvey, 2009, p. 44) and there are differences in how teachers view the components of rough-and-tumble play, with some being valued and encouraged more than

others. The overall responses from the questionnaire showed that “many teachers expressed ambivalence about the function that rough-and-tumble play serves for children, as well as about their role in allowing or disallowing it. “65% indicated an interest in more training” (Logue & Harvey, 2009, p. 44). Based on this study, there is a need for professional development.

In her study, Tannock (2008) attempted to determine educators and children’s perceptions towards rough-and-tumble play. She wanted to find out how valuable educators believed this play was and also how rough-and-tumble play was being implemented in early childhood settings. Tannock (2008) interviewed 11 educators and 17, 5 year old, children. While the study’s findings are based on a sample size that is too small, the results are relevant to my proposed project. The data Tannock (2008) collected showed that the children engaged in rough-and-tumble play and that educators did allow some rough-and-tumble play. The educators did indicate that they saw the value in rough and tumble play; however, the rough-and-tumble play that happened was not planned for and educators were “unsure of guidelines for managing rough and tumble play” (p. 360). She found that there was a “need for educators to discuss the role of R&T within their settings and develop policies to guide their practice” (p. 360).” This is what my project sets out to do. The need for the staff to sit down together and discuss what they want to do is evident. First, the workshops will explore educators’ feelings about risky play and then they will provide the early childhood staff with an opportunity to discuss what they are comfortable with and to set up some parameters for how they want to proceed. This should help staff at early learning centres be more knowledgeable, more confident, and more comfortable allowing for risky play.

**Adults' Beliefs and Values and the Impact on Risky Play**

In a study by Copeland, Kendeigh, Saelens, Kalkwarf, and Sherman (2012b), child care providers and teachers were questioned about what they felt were the benefits and barriers to children's physical activity. "Participants recounted that for many teachers the barriers outweighed the benefits, and because the decision of whether or not to take the children outside ultimately resided with the teacher, teachers perceived that they were the primary gatekeepers to the playground" (Copeland et al., 2012b, p. 97). The participants explained that they were the ones who decided if they were going to go outside, where they would go, what materials and equipment the children would use, and how they would interact or not interact with the children when they were outside (2012b). This study showed that when the educators valued outdoor play, the children would have more access to outdoor play and "that children could have very different gross motor experiences even within the same facility (with presumably the same environment and policies), based on the beliefs, attitudes, creativity and level of engagement of their teacher" (p. 97). Sadly, if the children had a teacher who was not a 'cold weather,' 'hot weather,' or 'outdoor person,' their chances to go outside would be limited. This study is another of many examples that it is the adults' values and beliefs that determine the types of outdoor and risky experiences children have access to (Blanchet-Cohen & Elliot, 2011; Copeland et al., 2012b; Curtis, 2010; Niehues et al., 2013; Sandseter, 2014, 2012, 2009b; Veitch et al, 2006; Little, Wyver, and Gibson, 2011; Nicol, 2013; Waters & Begley, 2007; Sandseter, Little, and Wyver, 2012; and Kennedy and McGrath, 2014).

Curtis (2010) discussed how educators' values influence their practice with children and she told a story of how her own beliefs were shaped by a new director at her centre. She had staff meetings where staff discussed "life experiences and how they impact our reactions to these

challenging situations with children, talked about the children's and families' points of view and what they deserve from us, and reviewed the most current information from licensing and best practices for risk and safety in child care programs" (p. 52). She said that those meetings really helped the staff "respect each other's ideas" (p. 52). Curtis' (2010) also said, "It is important for early childhood professionals to examine our views of these situations and make distinctions between our personal feelings and experiences, our coworkers' points of view, and children's strong desire for autonomy and independence" (p. 53). I whole-heartedly agree with Curtis' ideas and this is something that I would like to explore more. Curtis' (2010) article would support my idea to design a series of workshops for staff in child care centres. These workshops would examine staff values, their current ideas about risk taking and children's play, and what rules they currently enforce in their centres to restrict or encourage children's risky play. Hopefully, the information I present and the discussions they have as a group would allow them to make some changes in their programs to embrace the idea of children taking more risks and physical challenges in their play. Knowledge itself is not enough to get teachers to change their practices, they need to value and believe in the changes and the benefits of the changes (Sparks, 1988; Richardson, 1990; Kin et al., 2014). The discussions and self-examination supported by the proposed workshops will be the catalyst for the change in teaching practices and rules in the child care centres.

### **Teacher Change**

"As the front-line implements in the change process, teachers are the real source of, and the vehicle for, school change" (Kin, Kareen, Nordin, & Bing, 2014, p. 1). Kin et al. (2014) were talking about change in general, but the specific studies in this chapter show how important adults are in allowing children to take risks in their play (Blanchet-Cohen & Elliot, 2011;

Copeland et al., 2012b; Curtis, 2010; Niehues et al., 2013; Sandseter, 2014, 2012, 2009b; Veitch et al, 2006; Little, Wyver, and Gibson, 2011; Nicol, 2013; Waters & Begley, 2007; Sandseter, Little, and Wyver, 2012; and Kennedy and McGrath, 2014). “Since changes must ultimately be implemented by school teachers, it is essential to understand how teachers make judgements and evaluations towards change – teacher change beliefs (TCB) underlie teacher motives to support or resist change efforts” (Kin, et al., 2014, p. 2).

Knowledge, like the information about risky play presented in this chapter, is important, but by itself it is not enough to get educators to change their teaching practices (Gulamhussein, 2013; Whitworth & Chiu, 2015; Sparks, 1988; Richardson, 1990; Kin, Kareen, Nordin, & Bing, 2014). Professional development plays a role in influencing teachers’ decisions about whether or not to adopt any changes in their teaching, but it is these other elements that will determine whether or not teachers adopt the changes outlined in the professional development. Whitworth and Chiu (2015) define “teacher change as change in teacher beliefs, understandings, and/or practices” (p. 123). Teacher change is a complex matter and there are many factors that are related to whether or not a teacher will start to make changes in his or her teaching. It is important to know what makes a teacher more willing to change because any “change will be ‘doomed’ if there is no buy-in from the change recipients” (Kin et al., 2014, p. 2). Embracing and implementing changes is not easy and it does not always happen, but it is encouraging to know that change is possible. When teachers see the value and believe in the changes and the benefits the change will bring, the teachers will be more likely to make changes (Sparks, 1988; Richardson, 1990; Kin et al., 2014). Involving the educators in recognizing a problem and then allowing them to participate in finding solutions will make them more willing to accept and

adopt the changes (Yero, 2010). According to Fullan (2001), there are three components when implementing change. These include:

(1) the possible use of new or revised materials (instructional resources such as curriculum materials or technologies), (2) the possible use of new teaching approaches (i.e., new teaching strategies or activities), and (3) the possible alteration of beliefs (e.g., pedagogical assumptions and theories underlying particular new policies or programs). (p. 25).

In order to attempt to achieve the end goal of the change, all three components need to change “The change has to occur in practice along the three dimensions in order for it to have a chance of affecting the outcome (Fullan, 2001, p. 25). My series of workshops will be designed to address all three components. “There is really only one thing people have the power to *directly* change- their own behavior. We bring about change in others (or in larger systems) only by changing ourselves. When you act differently, you force others around you to respond in different ways.” (Yero, 2010, p. 8). Ultimately, I want the entire group to make changes, but to do that individuals need to make changes first.

Some key elements related to teacher change include:

- Staff group training, small group discussions, and collaboration are elements that make professional development and teacher change more effective (Whitworth & Chiu, 2015; Sparks, 1988; Richardson, 1990; Fullan, 2006)
- The amount of teacher experience - the newer teacher is more likely to adopt change (Whitworth & Chin, 2015)



- High internal or intrinsic motivation to learn or high external motivation to learn - when present, the teacher is more likely to adopt change, but the intrinsic motivation will make the change more long lasting (Whitworth & Chin, 2015; Fullan, 2011).
- Cost - when the change is relatively easy to implement and the payout is seen as worthwhile, teachers will be more willing to adopt the change (Sparks, 1988; Kin et al., 2014)
- Congruence – when teachers believe the new practice will easily fit into what they are currently doing, they are more likely to adopt the change (Sparks, 1988)
- Self-efficacy - when teachers feel like they are capable and competent, they are more willing to take risks and adopt change (Whitworth & Chin, 2015; Sparks, 1988; Kin et al., 2014)
- Leadership - if leaders and management are involved and know what is expected, they can see the value of the change and provide the necessary resources and support (Whitworth & Chin, 2015; Kin et al., 2014; Fullan, 2002)
- Peer coaching or mentoring (Sparks, 1988; Chitpin, 2011)

### **Influence of Practicum Training and Mentors**

It is clear from the information presented in this chapter that values and beliefs have an impact on teaching practices, but it is also important to consider the effects of practicum experiences on new educators' beliefs, values, and teaching practices. Being in the right training environment is essential when learning how to be an effective educator; this includes the placement setting as well as the mentor teacher (LaBoskey & Richert, 2002; Dusto, 2014; Boz & Boz, 2006). "Mentor teachers are an integral part of learning to be a teacher" (Dusto, 2014, p. 62). Effective mentors are flexible, supportive, "allow teacher candidates to take risks, try new

approaches, and use their practicum as an opportunity to explore their personal teaching styles” (Dusto, 2014, p. 62-63). Mentor teachers are the ones who will allow practicum students to try out new ideas or to provide the children with new materials.

LaBoskey and Richert’s (2002), education professors at Mills College in California, conducted a case study to look more closely at their student teacher’s placement experiences and to see if their College’s values and principles were being demonstrated in the placement sites. They concluded that it is important to have a “compatible” placement setting, especially early on in the training, where student teachers felt safe and supported, where the values of the educational institution were in action, and where the educators engaged in reflection about their teaching practice. They discussed how this is not an easy task because there are many student teachers and only so many classrooms, but I think this is where my professional development workshops will be helpful. I propose to go to different child care centres and schools to provide professional development and work with the staff. Once I have worked with different centres and schools, I will have an easier time finding placement centres that are compatible and who do value risk taking in children’s play. When students are placed in centres that are open to change and are willing to allow children to take risks in their play, the student will be able to put into practice the theory they have been learning and see the results directly.

“It is impossible to teach people how to teach powerfully by asking them to imagine what they have never seen or to suggest the “do the opposite” of what they have observed in the classroom” (Darling-Hammond, 2006, p. 308). It is important that students are placed in centres where they will be able to try out what they have learned in their studies, but “developing sites where state-of-the-art practice is the norm is a critical element of strong teacher education, and it has been one of most difficult” (Darling-Hammond, 2006, p. 309). It is important to develop

relationships with schools, child care centres, and mentors to create environments where beginning teachers will benefit and be able to practice (Darling-Hammond, 2006). In relation to this project, this is a place where early childhood education students will be able to allow and encourage children to take risks in their play and provide appropriate challenges and materials for them to take risks and test out their limits. If centres allow me to come in to facilitate my professional development sessions on risky play, then those centres will likely be places where future early childhood education students will be able to allow children to take risks and to practice their teaching in a supportive environment.

Teacher training is important, but “teachers are always in the process of ‘becoming,’ they need to continually rediscover who they are and what they stand for through their dialogue and collaboration with peers, through ongoing and consistent study, and through deep reflection about their craft” (Nieto, 2003, p. 125). This series of professional development workshops aims to make child care centre staff aware of the benefits of risky play and more open to allowing children to take more risks in play through discussion and the exchange of ideas between child care centre staff. These professional development workshops will not only benefit the children at these centres because they will be able to take more risks and have more freedom in their play, but they will also benefit early childhood education students who are placed at these centres for practicum.

## **Chapter Summary**

This chapter examined how values and beliefs are linked to actual teaching practice, including how our beliefs about children guide everything we say and do with children. This chapter reviewed relevant literature relating to risk taking in children’s play. It was clear from the literature review that risky play is beneficial for children’s development and that adults have

an important role to play in whether or not children are allowed to take risks. The current societal view of risk, parental fears, and the idea of reframing risk to be viewed in a more positive light were discussed. What makes play risky for children and the six types of risky play were thoroughly discussed along with the benefits to children of engaging in risky play and the negatives of not engaging in risky play. Factors that make children more likely to take risks were described. The types of playgrounds that would be highly beneficial to children's development and offer multiple opportunities for risk taking were explored. When these play environments are not challenging for children, children will try to make them more challenging in ways that could be dangerous. From the literature, it was shown that hazards need to be removed from play equipment and some safety standards are necessary, but this should not override making the equipment challenging and exciting for children of various ages. Some of the regulations specific to Manitoba child care centres were examined and it was found that there is room for interpretation of the regulations and therefore room to allow children to engage in risky play without going against the mandated regulations. Numerous studies were reviewed and it was clear that adults' values, beliefs, and education have a major influence on whether or not children will be encouraged and allowed to take risks in their play. When adults see the benefits of risky play, they are more likely to promote it. Some of the studies showed that educators could change their perspective and start to value and allow for more risky play opportunities. This highlights the need to ensure those working with young children know the benefits of risky play and recognize how valuable it is for children's holistic development. The factors related to making changes in teaching practice were also discussed.

**Coming Up**

In the following chapter, I will discuss the general elements of effective professional development. Using those elements, I will provide a rationale for my proposed workshop sessions as well as the specifics of my proposed project and professional development sessions. I will outline the direction for each session and also include the PowerPoint slides that I would use to conduct each session. “Stretching our own comfort zones and skills takes time, just as it does for children. Thinking about different ways children might engage in this play, and discussing it with your colleagues, is a good place to start.” (Carlson, 2011, p. 76). That is precisely what my workshops will aim to do.

### **Chapter 3: Project Design and Details**

Chapter 2 presented a great deal of information related to risky play and why it is beneficial for children's learning and development. It also looked at how influential adults' values and beliefs are in guiding their teaching practices, specifically in allowing children opportunities to take risks in their play. When adults valued risky play, they made it a priority and children were encouraged and supported to take risks in their play. The educators used a combination of knowledge and values to make their pedagogical decisions.

This chapter will continue to explore the role of values and beliefs in relation to teaching practice and the elements of professional development that make it effective. In the previous chapter, the effectiveness of intervention studies specifically related to risky play was discussed and used as a basis for the development of a series of professional development workshops for child care centre staff. This chapter will provide a convincing rationale for my proposed series of professional development workshops related to risky play and detail each of the four sessions.

#### **Characteristics of Effective Professional Development**

There are many forms of professional development for educators, but not all are effective at changing teaching practices and beliefs. The purpose of my project is to design a series of workshops that will help educators reflect on their own childhoods, see the value of risky play, and start to make some changes in their centres to allow children to take more risks in their play. If I want my workshops to be successful, it is necessary to know what characteristics make professional development effective at producing change. It is also important to recognize that "teachers come to professional development opportunities with different backgrounds, confidence, and motivation" (Whitworth & Chiu, 2015, p. 126). Some of the characteristics of effective professional development include:

- Active learning (Whitworth & Chiu, 2015; Gulamhussein, 2013)
- Coherent and relevant content (Whitworth & Chiu, 2015; Hunzicker, 2010; Dunne, 2002; Gulamhussein, 2013)
- Of significant duration (Whitworth & Chiu, 2015; Hunzicker, 2010; Dunne, 2002; Gulamhussein, 2013)
- Collective participation and training as a team (Whitworth & Chiu, 201; Hunzicker, 2010; Dunne, 2002; Gulamhussein, 2013; Blanchard, 2011)
- Identify and come up with solutions for potential barriers (Whitworth & Chiu, 2015)
- Help plan for, and support, implementation (Whitworth & Chiu, 2015; Gulamhussein, 2013)
- Include “learning communities” that meet regularly for ongoing discussion (Hunzicker, 2010; Dunne, 2002; Nieto, 2003)

### **Risk Reframing**

In a recent webinar on why risky play is so important for children, Dr. Mariana Brussoni began the presentation by having the participants think about what they wanted for a child as he or she grows up. She also had the participants think back and remember their own previous play experiences, decide what they learned from those experiences, and then compare their own experiences to the experiences children have today. She wanted to get everyone on the same page and remind us that the things we used to do are very different from what children are able to do now. She discussed “anxiety-based caregiving, decision making based on what makes us anxious and not what is best for the child” and how we should not let our fears control us and the decisions we make regarding children’s play.

She also spoke about “risk reframing” and the importance of getting “everybody on the same page” (Brussoni, 2015). In order to do this, staff need to talk about what is happening, what they want, what needs to be done, and then do it as a team. Risk reframing is what my project aims to do. My goal for my proposed workshops is to start with the educators and present the relevant information about risky play and the benefits of risky play. Once the educators have the information, I will help them discover, through self-reflection and discussions, what they value and then work together as a team to create an environment based on their values and beliefs about risky play that will support children’s development. I will then work with staff to help them come up with ways to inform and educate the parents of the children in their child care centres about the benefits of risks and challenges in children’s play.

I truly believe that if people started to view risk in a more positive way and if they recognized how many benefits there are from taking risks in play, then they would be much more willing to give children more freedom to take risks in their play and “anxiety-based caregiving” would decrease.

Niehues, Bundy, Broom, Tranter, Ragen, & Engelen (2013) conducted a risk-reframing intervention to attempt to increase parents’ and educators’ positive perceptions about risk in hopes of prolonging the Sydney Preschool Project (purposeful introduction of loose parts to encourage children to be more active and creative) and other similar playground interventions. This was a qualitative study in Australia completed with almost 150 people, mostly parents, but some educators and volunteers in small and large group sessions also participated. The “results suggest that educators and parents benefit from opportunities to share risk perceptions and discuss the costs and benefits for offering outdoor free play to children to achieve their common goals for children: health, happiness, and resilience” (Niehues et al., 2013, p. 223). The



“participants recognized that sometimes with the best intentions, they became barriers to children’s age-appropriate, healthy risk-taking opportunities” (Niehues et al., 2013, p. 230), which is what Sandseter (2014) also explained. Niehues et al. (2013) also found that “slow thinking about risk-taking and children may be just what parents and teachers need in order to neutralize their own fears and negativity” (p. 225).

### **Slowing Down the Thinking Process**

“Slow thinking” is really about slowing down, thinking about the pros and cons of possible outcomes, and taking time before making a decision (Niehues et al., 2013, p. 225). Adults “benefit from slowing down their thinking and taking time to explore new information through discussion with people they trust” (Niehues et al., 2013, p. 225). I like the idea of “slow thinking” and getting a group of people together to share their thoughts, fears, and ideas related to risky play. That is why I think my proposed workshops will be beneficial for child care staff.

Working with young children and maintaining strict adult to child ratios makes it difficult for staff to discuss values and beliefs during the work day; most discussions are about what is happening at that very moment and decisions are made quickly. Getting the staff together when the children are not present and providing them a safe space to discuss the topic of risky play would allow them to share their perspectives and concerns. It would also allow them to brainstorm possible solutions to allow for more risky play. Setting aside time in the workshops for discussion would allow the staff to think about the possible outcomes and benefits of their decisions and let them decide what they wanted to do in advance. That way, when situations happen on the playground, staff will be better prepared on how to handle them and not make quick decisions on the spot that may not benefit the children. This slow thinking can help reduce some “automatic protective responses to uncertainty” (Niehues et al., 2013, p. 232) driven by the

adult's fear. The proposed workshops will give staff an opportunity to think about potential risky play situations and discuss how they could handle them. This will reduce some of the emotional, fear-based decisions that can happen on the spot if educators have not had the chance to think about their values, priorities, and the benefits of risky play situations for children's development.

### **Bringing Staff Together**

Finch (2012) advocates for "teacher training sessions" that "question assumptions of undue risk, and offer counter-arguments about the value of children facing and overcoming physical challenges while simultaneously building their connections to nature" (p. 4). He says to "encourage your colleagues to recall their own childhoods, which almost certainly included mastery of many of these same challenges" (Finch, 2012, p. 4). I definitely want to explore the practitioners' childhood play, like Finch (2012) and Brussoni et al. (2015) suggested, so these adults can get a sense of how different things are for children today. Another idea to explore in these workshops comes from Cevher-Kalburan's (2014) intervention with pre-service teachers in Turkey. In her intervention, she used an imaginary scenario of a risky play situation and then had the pre-service teachers review "the scenario in the context of perceptual benefits and hazards the situation might have" (Cevher-Kalburan, 2014, p. 6). This would allow the practitioners to weigh the pros and cons of different risky situations and figure out what they are comfortable allowing children to do in their care.

### **Project Rationale**

For this project, I was mostly interested in adult involvement and roles in risk taking and how adults can influence children's risk taking. I included a brief description of risky play, some benefits, and some negatives of not engaging in play, but the focus was on how attitudes towards

risky play are culturally specific and how adults significantly influence whether or not children are able to take risks in play.

According to Sandseter (2014), “Adults help to ensure children are safe when playing, but at the same time, these adults represent the most important constraints on children’s opportunities to experience risks and challenges” (p. 436). “Children’s risk-taking decisions are also influenced by supervising adults’ evaluations of the situation, their assessment of the risk involved, and their decision to allow the children to engage in the risky activity” (Sandseter, 2014, p. 436). Adult beliefs influence whether or not children will be able to take risks and their environments also influence risk taking opportunities; depending on where children play, they will have more or less opportunities to take risks depending on the environment (Little, Wyver, Gibson, 2011; Sandseter, 2009b). If children are to become successful at managing risks, they need to have opportunities to make their own decisions and experience the consequences of those decisions. This is why it is essential that ECEs know about, and understand, the benefits of risky play for children’s development.

It is clear that risky play is beneficial for children and it is also clear that adults have an important role to play in whether or not children are allowed to take risks. In my current role as an Early Childhood Education instructor, I believe it is my duty to make sure future and current early childhood educators are aware of up-to-date information about risky play. In a preschool centre in Manitoba, only 2/3 of the staff need formal training; the rest only require one 40-hour course after their first year of employment (Manitoba Child Care Program, 2005). It is reasonable to believe that many of the adults who are currently working with young children are unaware of the benefits of risky play and may even be overly fearful for children’s safety.

I will base my workshop sessions on the work of Cevher-Kalburan (2014) and Niehues et al. (2013) with the overall goal being to get early childhood educators to allow more risk taking in children's play. In some ways, my workshops are different than what Cevher-Kalburan (2014) and Niehues et al.'s (2013) did. Cevher-Kalburan (2014) worked with pre-service teachers and Niehues et al. (2013) worked mostly with parents. My proposed workshops will take place with current child care staff.

Cevher-Kalburan (2014) had the participants use a combination of readings, discussions, observations of children, and interviews of teachers and parents to learn more about risky play and the practitioners' own beliefs and values about risky play. "Participating in the intervention course changed preservice teachers' beliefs and enhanced their understanding of children's risky play. This change was observed significantly in terms of moving from avoiding risk to supporting risk in children's play" (Cevher-Kalburan, 2014, p. 16). Niehues et al. (2013) used mostly personal surveys and small and large group discussions to help the adults identify values and beliefs relating to children and risky play. Through these carefully crafted discussions, participants realized "that they have the power to do things differently" (Niehues et al., 2013, p. 231) and "they began weighing up their responsibilities to keep children safe with their desires for children to make good choices and manage risks for themselves" (Niehues et al., 2013, p. 231). In the end, the risk reframing had positive results.

My workshops will be similar to Cevher-Kalburan (2014) and Niehues et al.'s (2013) in that they will contain self-reflection and discussion to get the participants to uncover what they believe about children and risky play and to share those beliefs with each other. There will also be an opportunity for the staff to come up with a plan for change and to implement that change during the course of the workshops. Throughout the professional development series, the staff

will have multiple opportunities to reflect and make changes they think will be beneficial for the children in their care. Despite the some of the differences between my proposed workshops and the two discussed, the purpose is still the same; to find out adults' current views towards children's risky play and then improve those attitudes to help those same adults feel more positively towards risk; therefore allowing children to take more risks. Their results were encouraging and so I have confidence my workshops will elicit positive change as well.

I perceive these workshops as a temporary fix; a piece of a larger puzzle. They represent a shift in the right direction. The bigger picture would be to look at early childhood training programs to see what pre-service ECEs are being taught about risky play. If it was found that there was a gap in their training, then I could advocate to include more risky play education right in the training programs and perhaps help to redesign the curriculum. This would reduce the need for my workshops, but increase the amount of risky play in child care centres. However, I may find that it is not a gap in the early childhood education training, but the fact that in Manitoba preschools, only 2/3 of the staff need formal training (Manitoba Child Care Program, 2005). This is another issue that needs further investigation.

### **Potential Limitations**

I have decided to space my workshops out over a period of two months and come to the centre a total of four times for two or three hours each time. The first two times will be providing information and getting the educators to come to a realization about what they believe and value, so essentially setting up the change. The last two times there will be more of an opportunity to discuss what has been happening, how the children are responding, and how the staff are feeling about the change, so supporting the implementation of the change. One potential limitation is that four sessions, even though they are spread out, may not be enough

time to implement the kind of changes I am hoping for. It might not give staff enough time to see positive results between the sessions. If staff are not seeing the results they want or expect, they might not be willing to keep trying the new changes. Another possible limitation is that in the time I have allotted, I may not have enough time to build a relationship and create trust with the centre staff. If this is the case, there might be some staff who are not open to what I have to say and the “change will be ‘doomed’ if there is no buy-in from the change recipients” (Kin et al., 2014, p. 2). In order for my proposed workshops to be effective, there needs to be a give and take in the sharing of information. There is some information that I know and have learned from my research that I can share with the participants, but I also need to listen to what the participants have to share with me about their children, their families, their centre, and their values. Hopefully, the staff will feel comfortable having me there, will trust that I am there with good intentions, and will share and be open with me. I cannot make the changes for them or tell them exactly what to do. I am there to help them discover their values and beliefs about risk in children’s play, help them determine if change related to risky play is necessary in their centres, and then help them formulate a plan to allow for the change they want to implement.

Despite these potential limitations, I am feeling confident that my proposed workshops will be a good place to start. If, over time, I find that four sessions is not enough, I will consider adding more sessions to ensure I am providing enough support to the centre staff. Sparks (1988) and Gulamhussein (2013) both discussed how important it is to support educators through the implementations and not just provide information at the beginning because “this is the critical stage where teachers begin to commit to an instructional approach” (Gulamhussein, 2013, p. 11). I think that by stretching out the four sessions and being available for phone conversations or email throughout the duration of the professional development process that I will be able to

adequately support the staff during their time of change. Also, I can encourage the staff to continue to meet together without me present and discuss the progress throughout the process. My series of workshops is designed based on the information I found as I was reading about values, teacher change, and effective professional development. Each group will be different, so I am prepared to modify and make changes along the way.

Since I will not be at the centre full-time during the professional development process, it will be important that I let the director and management staff know what to expect during the change process. Even if the staff agree that risky play is important and want to change, there will likely still be challenges along the way. Whitworth and Chin (2015) and Kin et al. (2014) discussed the importance of leadership during a change process. Fullan (2002) explained some characteristics of successful leaders during a change process. He said that leaders need to show “palpable energy, enthusiasm, and hope” as well as have “moral purpose, an understanding of the change process, the ability to improve relationships, knowledge creation and sharing, and coherence making” (Fullan, 2002, p. 17). Fullan stated, “Being a change agent involves getting commitment from others who might not like one's ideas” and this is also important to me as a presenter and facilitator (2002, p. 17). I will need to be a leader, but I will also need to get the management team to lead the process when I am not at the centre.

My workshops centre on risk-reframing, which is similar to the reculturing that Fullan (2002) discussed. According to Fullan (2002), “Much change is structural and superficial. Transforming culture—changing what people in the organization value and how they work together to accomplish it—leads to deep, lasting change” (p. 18). Changing values and implementing them into practice takes time and it is important for directors to not expect instant results. “Since few change situations come with shared consensus, leaders must build consensus

by taking action, developing relationships, and problem solving” (Fullan, 2011, p. 7). The group discussions about what is working and what is not working will be beneficial, even if there are people who are resisting the change, and there will be some give and take (Fullan, 2002). It is not enough to talk, but the group needs to come up with solutions and then implement them (Fullan, 2006).

### **Workshop Benefits**

These workshops are designed based on research about risky play and about effective professional development, so I am optimistic that they will share important information about the benefits and value of risky play with those working with young children, the trained and untrained staff, and help them to feel more comfortable allowing the children to take risks in their play. If there is someone out there who was like me and believed in risk taking, but felt pressure from coworkers to disallow it, maybe these workshops would allow that person to voice their opinions. Even better, maybe these workshops could help centres feel comfortable to try something new and see for themselves the benefits in children’s development. Hopefully, the centres will find similar results to Sandseter (2012) who found the Norwegian practitioners reported few injuries even though the children were often engaged in risky play outdoors and the children would experience the other benefits listed previously in the second chapter.

If my workshops were effective, children in child care centres would have more freedom and less rules and staff would be willing to let children try more physical challenges than they did in the past. In turn, this would improve children’s development in all domains. One of my objectives would be to share the results of the workshops sessions and any associated change which came from them with more child care centres or parents. This could help to really spread the word about the benefits of risky play and how it can be done right here in Winnipeg. Child



care centre staff may be more willing to allow for more risky play when they hear that other centres have done it and have had positive results.

### **Workshop Specifics**

I have designed a series of workshops for trained and untrained staff at child care centres based on current research about effective professional development, teacher change, and risky play. These workshops will provide current information and research about risky play, including the benefits and the negatives of not allowing risk-taking in children's play; give the staff an opportunity to examine their values and beliefs as well as their comfort level related to risk; give staff an opportunity to brainstorm solutions to allow more freedom and risk-taking for the children in their centres; and support the staff during the implementation by checking in to see how things are going, if they are experiencing any challenges, how their attitudes have improved towards risk in play, and to see what benefits they have observed from allowing children to take more risks in their play. As the workshop facilitator, I am not there to tell them what to do. I am there to share some information, provide a safe space for discussion, help them figure out what they want to do, and help them solve any problems along the way. What is "right" will be different for each adult, child, and centre.

I have decided to take this approach to my sessions because, based on the information about effective professional development presented earlier in this chapter, there should be more of a focus on the participants and getting them actively involved and engaged and less of a focus on me as the expert presenting a lot of information. Also, because an essential element of achieving change in teaching practice is doing something that the teacher values and believes is important, I need to have less of a focus on the information and more of a focus on what the group thinks is important for the children and families that they work with. Through the small

and large group discussions, the staff will have an opportunity to come together and make some decisions as a team. Guiding the group through the process and not telling them what to do should result in more commitment and contribution from the participants. It should also result in long lasting change that will continue when the sessions are over and I am no longer coming to the centre regularly.

The workshops will take place over a period of two months and I will spend about 10 hours with the staff during the process. I have allotted three hours for Session #1, three hours for Session #2 (one week after Session #1), two hours for Session #3 (two weeks after Session #2), and two hours for Session #4 (one month after Session #3). The staff will also be able to contact me by phone or email during the two months if they have any questions or concerns.

I have decided to space these sessions out over a period of two months because this will give the group time to think, time to try new things, and time to start to see some positive results while being supported with these sessions. It would be unrealistic to expect to go into the centre one time, tell them about the benefits of risky play, and encourage them to make some significant changes because real change takes time and it takes buy-in from the participants. Spacing out the sessions will allow me to get to know the group better and it will give them group lots of time for discussion. This way, everyone will have a chance to share their ideas, concerns, and questions. Then, once they start to implement some changes, there will be sessions where they can discuss how things are going and then decide what to do next. If there are struggles, or if they experience an “implementation dip,” there will be time to work this out as a group in future sessions, so they continue to try the changes and do not get discouraged (Fullan, 2001). Spacing the workshops out will allow more time for trial and error, so the staff can find solutions that work for them. The longer the staff continue to try out the changes, the more likely they will be

to see some positive results in the children's behaviour and development. Likewise, the longer the staff implement changes, the more likely these changes will become a habit and part of the daily program.

### **Session #1**

Session #1 is going to set the stage for the whole series and it is important to have a positive start. It is essential that this time is used to build a relationship and connect with the participants, so they will be open-minded and willing to hear what I have to say about risky play and making changes. In this first session, I am going to have the participants examine their own personal values and beliefs about children, similar to how Niehues et al. (2013) started their risk reframing intervention in the Sydney Preschool Project. Before the participants attend this first session, I will have asked them to fill out the Image of the Child worksheet (Appendix A). "It is important for educators to reflect on their image of children because that perspective affects the decisions teachers make every day in their classrooms" (Martalock, 2012, p. 4). This is similar to what Haddon and Hildebrand (2008) believe about the influence of values and beliefs. Before I can start discussing any type of change with the staff, I need to know what matters the most to them and where they currently stand regarding children and risky play. Malaguzzi (1994) said, "We have to find each other in the forest and begin to discuss what the education of the child actually means" (p. 2). Discussing the staff's values, beliefs, and different images of the child will help us do that and will help display individual and collective values, beliefs, and priorities. After everyone has had an opportunity to share and hear about each other's values, I will get the staff to start thinking of the rules that they currently have at the child care centre. In the next session, I will get them to determine if the rules they have truly match their image of the child and the values that they have about children.

In slide #5, I will start with introductions. I want to get to know the staff and I want them to get to know me. It is likely that everyone in the room knows each other a little bit, but they may or may not know each other well, especially if they work in different rooms or with different groups of children. Going around the room and having everyone introduce themselves and talk about their comfort level regarding risky play will get everyone on the same page and the staff might learn something new about each other. Additionally, if I want to see how effective these workshops sessions are at reframing risk for the group, I need to know where they are starting.

In Chapter 2, I presented a lot of information about values and beliefs and how they guide teaching practice and decision making. In the discussion about teacher change, values and beliefs have an important role to play because in order for change to happen, the teacher needs to see the value in it. In slides #6 and 7, I want to remind the staff how important values and beliefs are and I want to get them thinking about what they think is important for children. I have chosen to have the staff come up with their top behaviours and characteristics in small groups and then share their results with the larger group because I want them to recognize that everyone has different beliefs and priorities. At this point, I want them to start seeing things from their coworkers' perspectives and I want them to try to come up with some characteristics that the whole group can agree on. This exercise was inspired by the work of Bloom and Ellis (2009) and Hearn and Hildebrand (2008) that was discussed at the beginning of Chapter 2. This will help the group have more understanding of where the other staff are coming from and it will also give them direction for the potential changes regarding risky play and centre rules that will start to happen in Session #2.

In slide #8, I will have the participants work in smaller groups to answer the questions, “What do children do? What do children need?” This will get them thinking about the different needs for the different age groups and it will help get them ready to think about the centre rules and if they really work with children’s needs. Through this discussion, the participants will be able to highlight some of the characteristics of the different age groups and then start to think about how to provide for those needs and characteristics.

Once the group has had an opportunity to think about what children do and what they need, slide #9 will build on that discussion and get each individual staff member to identify what they believe about children. In Chapter 1, I discussed the Reggio concept of Image of the Child and how, like values and beliefs, an individual’s Image of the Child also guides everything that they say and do with children. If these staff members are going to make some changes in their teaching practice, then they have to know what they believe to be true about children and they have to know what their priorities are. Having them complete the Image of the Child worksheet and share their ideas with each other will bring their beliefs to the surface and will help me get to know the group better. Depending on the training and experience levels of the participants, they may not have had an opportunity to explore their own personal beliefs about children. I think exploring personal beliefs is absolutely necessary if the group is going to make changes to allow for more risky play.

In slides #10 and 11, I want to discuss rules and why they are needed in child care centres. The focus here will be more on what rules the centre currently has and not about general information about rules and their purpose. I want the staff to identify some of the rules they have and then talk about whether or not they agree with having those particular rules for children. I have included this exercise in the first session because, ultimately, if the staff are going to allow

children to take more risks in their play they will likely need to alter or eliminate some of their existing rules. Identifying the rules in this session will save us time in the second session when I will get the group to look more closely at each rule and decide if it is necessary once the staff have thought more about the benefits of risky play. Again, like many of the other exercises in this first session, this one will be used to generate a starting point for future discussions.

Session #1 will require a lot of participation from the group. This session is going to set up the rest of the workshop series. My goal is to create a solid foundation on which to draw from in later sessions. In this session, the participants will have to think deeply about what they know and what they believe. Having the staff members reflect on their own values, beliefs, and Image of the Child will help them in the future sessions when they start to combine their current beliefs with the information about risky play and its benefits for children. Having each person share their ideas and not judging the value of their ideas will let each of the participants know that what they have to contribute is valuable. This will help to create a team atmosphere. When this session is over, I will know more about the group and they will know more about themselves and each other. In order for the workshop series to go smoothly, we need to get off to a good start and create a safe, supportive, and trusting environment. I have designed the first session to create a positive learning climate through reflection, sharing, and discussion.

## **Session #2**

Now that the staff have had an opportunity to reflect on their own personal values and beliefs, I want them to think about the things they used to do when they were children. Slide 14 is similar to what Dr. Brussoni (2015) did to start her risky play webinar and it will help the staff realize that there is quite a difference between how they used to play and how children play today. Finch (2012) thought that starting training sessions by having participants recall their

childhoods would help put things into perspective. Carter (2010) had success with her interventions when she had staff examine their own life experiences and how those related to their work with children. If the staff are able to remember what they used to do as a child, if they are able to remember the positive feelings associated with their play; hopefully, they will start to think about risky play in a different, more positive, way. This will be the start of the risk reframing because it will give the participants a positive connection to risky play.

In slides 15, 16, and 17, we will discuss how today's society is risk adverse and how risk is typically seen in a negative light. Sharing this information will put the topic of risky play into context. It will help the participants sort out their ideas about risk and it might even help some staff see how their current beliefs about risk are closely connected to society's beliefs. Risk reframing aims to change this negative viewpoint about risk into something more positive.

In slides 18 and 19, I want the group to come up with a definition of risky play. This will make it easier for us to discuss risky play because we will all have similar ideas. I want to hear their ideas first and then I will share some information that I have gathered from my readings. Once the definition is established, I will present Sandseter's (2007) six categories of risky play in slide 20. To have them start to apply this information, I will ask them to categorize the play they talked about in the beginning of this session into one or more of Sandseter's (2007) categories. This will show them that risky play does not have to be dangerous or extreme and it is likely something that they did when they were younger.

I will share some of the information I have gathered about risky play and the benefits of risky play for children's development, but I will balance the amount of information that I tell them and the amount of information that I ask them to tell me. I believe the staff need to have current and accurate information in order to make decisions. For some of the participants, this

might help put risky play into perspective because they might not have considered what they used to do risky. When establishing the definition of risk and risky play, it is also important to distinguish a risk from a hazard and this will happen in slide 21. Again, sharing this information with the group is necessary to ensure we are all thinking about risk in the same way.

Next, I want the participants to start thinking about all of the benefits children will get from taking risks in their play. Through my research, I was able to find a number of benefits, but I think that simply presenting all of this information to the group in the slides could be a bit tedious and may not be the most effective way to share the information. I have decided to get the participants to think about Sandseter's (2007) six categories and then to come up with potential benefits for each developmental domain. This will keep the group engaged and help them critically think about the benefits. I think this will be more useful than if I just listed off the benefits one by one. If there is something that the group does not mention, I will bring it up and share it with them. Slides 23 and 24 have a number of benefits on them, but I will hide those slides and verbally share anything the group does not discuss. When it comes to the consequences of not taking risks in play, I will use a similar process. I will have the participants come up with potential negatives and then orally share anything they do not mention. Slides 26, 27, and 28 will be hidden from the group and shared through discussion. I will mention Eager and Little's (2011) definition of Risk Deficit Disorder (RDD) on slide 29 because it is possible the group will not come up with that term on their own.

Slides 30 and 31 introduce how significant adult beliefs and values are on children's risky play. Slide 30 lists some of the reasons adults do not let children engage in risky play. I want to share this information with the participants to show them how powerful their decisions are on children's opportunities to take risks. In slide 31, I share the statement "When adults see the



value in risky play, they will make it a priority and encourage children to take risks in their play” and ask them what it means to them as people who work with children. In presenting this information, I want the participants to realize their responsibility and be able to make decisions that will be in the best interests of children. This responsibility is one of the reasons that it was essential for the participants to start exploring their personal beliefs and values in Session #1.

Once the staff have the relevant information about risky play, we will watch a short video of young children engaging in risky play. The group will have an opportunity to discuss their reactions to the video. Then, I will break them into smaller groups and have them create some potential risky play scenarios and discuss how each of their group members would handle the situation. The purpose of including the video and the scenario discussions is to give the staff more opportunities to apply what they have been discussing in the first part of this session, the information about risky play and its benefits. The goal of these tasks is for the staff to recognize the benefits children get from engaging in different types of risky play and the value of risky play and also to recognize their own comfort level relating to risky play. If some staff see the benefits of children taking risks in their play, but they realize that they are uncomfortable with risky play, then the group can come up with ways to help them get more comfortable.

The group will also watch a short video about play from children’s perspectives. I have chosen to include this video because it will get the staff thinking about what children want and need. A positive result of this video would be for the staff to talk to the children in their care and ask them what they would like to do. This might be helpful for the staff when they are trying to decide what is and is not appropriate for the children in the centre.

In Session #1, the staff identified some of the centre rules. Now, I will have the whole group think about the rules they identified in the previous session to see if these are rules that

they need to have. It is likely that the staff will decide that all of their current rules are not needed and they will decide to make some changes to the rules and what they allow the children to do. As a group, we will discuss some potential challenges or barriers to making these changes, come up with some possible solutions, and then come up with a plan for the staff to start implementing. This discussion could take some time because it is likely that some of the staff will have safety concerns.

Previously, I discussed Niehues et al. (2013) idea of “slow thinking” (p. 225). All four of the proposed workshop sessions will give the staff the opportunity to talk and reflect, but Session #2 is the one that will really show the staff how their actions influence the opportunities the children have to take risks in their play. This will hopefully inspire them to want to make changes and to come up with a plan.

There is only so much time that we have together in the designated sessions. At the end of this session I will issue a personal challenge to the participants for them to try over the next two weeks on their own. The challenge that I will issue to the group is for them to try something exciting they would not normally do, or something they have not done since they were a child. I am asking them to do this because I want each one of them to remember how it feels to do something new and different. I want them to feel that excitement, that exhilaration, that apprehension, that “scaryfunny” sensation that Sandseter (2010) described and believes drives children to take risks in their play and rewards them when they do. I think that sometimes as we get older, we stop doing these things and we forget how it feels. Trying something new and exciting will remind the participants how the children might feel and hopefully help them be more open to allowing children to take risks and challenges in their play.

**Session #3**

I will start this session by asking the participants how many of them tried the personal challenge of trying something new or exciting that I suggested at the end of the last session. I want to find out how many people tried something and I want them to describe how they felt before, during, and after the experience. For those that did not try something new, I will get them to explain what stopped them from trying. We will discuss the differences in what everyone chose to do and how some people engaged in the task and others did not. This will lead to a discussion about how everyone is different and how children are individuals and have different preferences for risk taking, different abilities, and different comfort levels for risk. I will continue to encourage the participants to keep trying new and exciting things in the upcoming month.

Now that the staff have started to make some changes and adjust some of their rules regarding the children's play, it is important that I check in with them to see how things are going. I want to give each staff member an opportunity to share their thoughts, feelings, and concerns. Making changes is not an easy process and things do not always go perfectly at the beginning of a change process. Fullan (2001) referred to this as the "implementation dip" – "things get worse before they get better" (p. 61). I do not want the staff to give up if things are not going as well as they thought they would. Whitworth and Chiu (2015) and Gulamhussein (2013) both mentioned the importance of providing support throughout the professional development and process of change. Once everyone has had a chance to share, I will have them pair up and go outside to the play yard.

When the pairs are outside, their task will be to go through the play yard and identify all of the potential risks and challenges available to children in their play. I will encourage them to

try out some of these challenges as they go. In addition, I will ask them to look around the yard and in the storage shed to come up with ideas for challenges they could create for the children.

There are three main reasons that I have chosen to have the participants complete this task. One, I want them to consider all of the risks and challenges that their play space affords the children. I want them to be prepared for what children might try. Two, I want them to try out some of the potential challenges to see how it feels. Three, I want them to think about how they could enhance the children's play and risk taking and set up more challenges in the environment. Once the participants have had a chance to complete their exploration, we will discuss the experience and their ideas. This task will help the participants take the information they have been discussing and actually apply it to their play space. It will make the learning more experiential and it will get them thinking critically about their space and their children. Seeing the space and the materials they have available to them will make it easier when they try to think about changes they could implement and create a plan for change.

After discussing the staff's ideas for creating challenges in the play space, we will look at the plan they created in the previous session. We will talk about what is going well, what needs to change, and what they still want to happen. If necessary, we will make revisions to the plan. Then, I will encourage the staff to continue documenting the changes that they are seeing, so we can share the documentation at our final session in one month's time.

#### **Session #4**

This is the final session in this series of proposed professional development workshops about risky play and risk reframing. Similar to Session #3, we will start this session by sharing the participants' experiences from the personal challenge issued previously. Then, the staff will all be given the chance to talk about the process of allowing children to take more risks and how

their own views and beliefs have changed along the way. This is important to include because we started the workshop series reflecting on personal values and beliefs and this discussion will show how far the staff have come and how they have changed through the process. It will demonstrate how effective the workshop series was at eliciting change in teaching practices.

The documentation the group has collected will be shared. This is an important part for a few reasons. One, it will validate everything the staff has done over the past two months. It will visually show the changes that have happened and it will be a concrete reminder of how far this group has come since they started this process. Depending on what the staff chose to document, there could also be evidence of growth and progress for individual children. This documentation could be used to generate more discussions for the group, it could be shared with parents and children, or it could be shared with staff at other child care centres to show what risky play can look like.

After each staff member has had a chance to share and we have looked at the documentation, I will encourage the staff to continue to meet on their own to discuss the process and to continue on their journey in their own learning community. Just because the formal workshop sessions are over, does not mean that they cannot continue on their own.

Fullan (2001) said to “assume that changing the culture of institutions is the real agenda, not implementing single innovations” (p. 73). My goal throughout this professional development process was to get the staff reflecting on their beliefs and values about children and about risky play and then to have them work as a team to create an environment that would allow children to take more risks in their play. Like I mentioned before, there is no one set way to do this, no single innovation. Each team of staff and each child care centre is different. Nonetheless, if after my workshop series they have started to feel more positively towards risk in children’s play

and if they have started moving in the direction of allowing children more freedom in their play, then the workshops would be deemed successful.

It is important to remember that each staff member started this process of change at a very different stage with very different values and beliefs about children and about risky play. Some will have started the workshops with a favourable view of risk, others will have started the workshops with a negative view of risk, and some will have a view somewhere in between those extremes. For someone who started with a negative view of risk and a belief that children need a lot of rules, to give up one of those rules might be a big step in the right direction and something that should be celebrated.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter explored the elements of effective professional development. Those elements were used to help design a series of professional development workshops that aim to help child care centre staff reframe their perception of risk in children's play. From a review of the literature, it is clear that risky play is beneficial for children's development. It is also clear that adults' values and beliefs regarding risk in children's play determine whether or not children will have opportunities to take risk in their play. When adults believe in the positive benefits of risky play, they are more inclined to encourage and support risk taking in children's play. This chapter described a series of proposed professional development workshops designed to get early childhood education staff to think about their own values and beliefs and to create programs that trust in children's judgment and allow for challenges and risk taking on a daily basis. Each of the proposed sessions was described in detail and the design choices and expected outcomes were explained.

**Coming Up**

In the following and final chapter, I will reflect on the past two years and what I have learned from this project and from this program. I will also explain how my learning has been, and will be, transferred into my professional practice as an educator.

## **Chapter 4: Final Reflection**

This is the final chapter in my capstone project about risky play. In this chapter I will reflect on the past two years and what I have learned. I will take this opportunity to look back at the process which got me to where I am now. I have learned a lot over the past two years and I have been, and will be, able to apply my course work and the work I have done on this project into my professional practice. I will conclude with three recommendations for other educators interested in engaging with the topic of risky play.

### **Reflecting on My Learning over the Past Two Years**

I applied to this program because I wanted to continue my education, but I was also looking to challenge myself personally and professionally. Living in Winnipeg and travelling on my own to Victoria in the summer was definitely a personal challenge that taught me I can be strong, independent, and accomplish anything I put my mind to. Working full-time and studying taught me that I can find a balance, manage my time efficiently, and compromise when needed. It also taught me that everyone has different life situations and that I need to be compassionate and considerate to what my own students are going through and the sacrifices they have made to continue their studies. Everyone's education journey, including motivations and goals, is unique.

As I reflect back on the past two years, there have been a lot of ups and downs; the path has not been straight and smooth. It is amazing to think that I am just about finished this program and my capstone project because in some ways it feels like I have just begun. When I started this program, I was told that I would be a different person when the two years were over and I was not sure how this was going to happen. Now that the time has passed and my courses are completed, I believe I am a different person and I do think differently than I did when I started this program. I am more confident. I am more open and more willing to accept that there



can be multiple viewpoints, I am starting to see that right and wrong are not absolutes, I look for connections, and I continually think about what I am doing and why I am doing it because I want to be the best educator I can be. I have become more flexible and able to go with the flow, even if the flow has a circular or interwoven path, which is definitely something that is new for me. I have even started to accept that there may not be answers for all of my questions and that looking for answers usually comes with more questions. I have come a long way in the past two years.

I have learned a lot over the past two years, but all of this has really made me see that there is so much more that I could learn. I will be relieved and excited when I submit the last version of my project, but I know that my learning journey will not end there. I am not sure what the next steps will be, but I am excited to share what I have learned over the past two years and especially over the past few months with my students, colleagues, and child care centre staff. I may not have been confident enough in my first job as an early childhood educator to stand up for what I thought was right, but with everything I have learned in this program I now have that confidence and I am finding my voice. I also believe that I will be able to inspire other educators to stand up for what they believe is best for the children they work with.

Education is “the process of receiving or giving systematic instruction, especially at a school or university” and “the theory and practice of teaching” (Oxford Dictionaries, 2015). During the past two years, I have been studying, teaching, and learning about teaching. I have been immersed in education. Even when this program is finished and I am not enrolled in classes, I will still be involved in education. I will still be interacting with students and helping them learn. I will still continue to reflect on what I believe, what I value, and what I do in the classroom. I believe that the classroom environment I create and the relationships I have with students are more important than the content that I am teaching. If I do not create a safe,

welcoming, and supportive environment and if I do not connect with my students and build trust with them, it will not matter what the content is because they will be disengaged. I am thankful to all of my instructors in this program who took the time to listen to me and get to know me and who supported me throughout the past two years.

### **Aha Moments along the Way**

When I started this program I was not sure what to expect. I was a late addition to the cohort and did not have much time to prepare myself for what was about to happen. The first summer, I was introduced to systems thinking and systems theory. In order to be successful in my courses, I needed to make a shift in my own thinking. I had to try to connect these “new” ideas with my “old” ideas. This was not an easy thing to do and it did not happen automatically. I had to start to give up some of the things that I had believed for a very long time and this was uncomfortable. I did not like the feeling of not knowing and constant changes because it made me feel very uneasy. This course challenged my thinking, taught me to start questioning more, and brought me to a place where there wasn’t always an answer and there was uncertainty. I left this course wanting to know more because I had a lot of unanswered questions.

The first summer went by very quickly, but it confirmed that this particular program, with a focus on early childhood education, was the right choice. My first courses reaffirmed the value of play in the early years and when I resumed teaching I was able to use some of the ideas and information I learned right away.

My first online course, *EDCI-591: Developing Ecoliteracy in Early Childhood*, inspired my whole project on risky play because most risky play happens outdoors and the outdoor environment comes with its own built-in risks and challenges. I went into this course with the idea that everything is connected somehow, but I did not know much about ecoliteracy and was

excited to learn more about how to get children connected to nature. When I was younger, I spent a lot of my free time outside and in nature. Now that I am an adult, I spend very little time outside and I am starting to work on reconnecting with nature. I would have loved to have had this course on campus because it always felt strange learning about getting children outdoors, while spending most of my time indoors reading and staring at the computer. I believe it is impossible to learn about nature and connect to nature inside, so my goal is to spend more time outside and to encourage my students to take children outside more often. If children are not outside, they are not going to care about the natural world. I think I was able to help get the message across of how important being outside is for children in my classes because I had a number of practicum students who made it a priority to get the children outside every day. I am going to continue to get my students thinking about how beneficial playing outside is for children. The next time I work with young children, I am looking forward to spending more time outside and watching children take more risks in their play.

Another revelation in this program was the idea that as a teacher I am also a researcher, whether or not I do formal studies and publish my findings in journal articles. As a teacher, I need to ask questions, I need to be a careful observer, I need to think about what I am seeing, and I need to try to make sense of it. The idea of creating emergent curriculum for children using research principles is incredibly exciting for me. This is important information that I can share with my early childhood education students when they are learning about observing, documenting, and planning for children. Thinking about the teacher as a researcher is an appealing way to describe what we do and how we plan for children. It gives a certain importance to what educators do in their interactions with children.

Throughout this program as I continued to read more and more research studies, I thought that it would be very exciting to conduct my own research; to come up with questions, obtain data, and then try to make sense of it. I was able to do a bit of data collection and analysis in one course when I surveyed my early childhood education students to get a sense of their values, beliefs, and habits related to ecoliteracy. I would really like to learn more about qualitative and quantitative research methods and hopefully do some actual research in the future.

Through my courses, I was able to learn relevant information and teaching strategies. In the research for my project, one element of effective professional development was actually demonstrating what the presenter wanted the attendees to learn. This was done consistently throughout my courses by the instructors as well as by the students in group facilitations. Through the required readings, I was reminded of how important the early years are at preparing a foundation for literacy and learning in school. The importance of high quality early learning environments was stressed in numerous research articles. Even though formal teaching of reading and writing is not recommended in the early years, the interactions, experiences, and materials early childhood educators are providing to children are building their emergent literacy skills. This made me feel like the work I do is important and should be valued by teachers who do teach reading and writing in schools. Our work relating to literacy is different, but I think early childhood educators and teachers both have an important role to play in helping children develop literacy skills. It was nice to see the importance of what happens in the early years presented in multiple research studies because often I think many people underestimate what happens in early learning centres.

As I continued through the program, I was forced to think about what I believe and what I know in response to new information. I learned that it was very hard to give up beliefs that I had

held for a long time. Through the research for this project, I learned that it is possible to change values and beliefs, but after going through this experience firsthand I know that it is a difficult process and it takes time.

Completing this final piece of my studies has been challenging and rewarding at the same time. There were times along that way where I really had no idea what I was going to do and what this final project was going to look like. Thankfully, I was able to focus on a topic that I consider relevant and vital to early childhood education. It was interesting to learn more about risky play and the benefits of risky play. In the beginning, I had a feeling risky play was good, but feelings are not enough to persuade others to allow children to take more risks in their play. After spending hours and hours reading about risky play, I feel confident I can convey the benefits of taking risks and the drawbacks not allowing children to take risks to others in a professional and effective way. Completing this project has also given me confidence that even when things are difficult that I can get them done. It has shown me that I am resourceful and dedicated and these are qualities that will help me be a better educator.

### **Some of My Questions Answered**

When I started this project I had two questions: "How is risky play beneficial to children's development?" and "How do adults' attitudes affect children's opportunities for risky play?" I was able to thoroughly answer the first question in Chapter 2. As for the second question, I was also able to answer it because the research showed that adults have a tremendous influence over whether or not children will be able to take risks in their play. In some ways, this is a bit scary because if adults do not value risky play or do not feel comfortable with it, they will not allow children to engage in risky play. This can have negative consequences. Knowing this, it becomes even more essential to ensure that the people who care for children do have the latest

information about the benefits of risky play. My series of workshops will definitely help provide relevant information as well as help staff discuss their values, beliefs, concerns, and questions and then come up with a plan that will help them allow for more risky play in their child care centre.

Through this project, I enjoyed learning more about values and beliefs and their role in shaping teaching practices. From the start of this program, I believed in the importance of reflection in becoming a better educator. This entire program showed me that I need to make time to think about myself, my beliefs, and my teaching practices on a regular basis by continuously creating situations and assignments that required me to reflect. One thing that I will take away is that thinking is not enough, once I have thought about things, I need to make a plan to improve myself if I want to continue to evolve as an educator. This is something that I hope I continue to do throughout my teaching career.

### **Now What?**

First, I am going to celebrate all of my hard work and be proud of all that I have accomplished over the past two years. Working full-time and studying is not easy and I am delighted that I was able to do both successfully. I will definitely be more understanding to different students' personal situations in the future. As a result of my studies, I am a more confident and self-assured person. I know what is important to me personally and professionally and I know how to manage my time to do what I need to do. All of these qualities will help me be a more effective educator. When I return to work in the fall, I will return with renewed energy, excitement, and enthusiasm. I am looking forward to sharing what I have learned about risky play with my new and returning students and my colleagues. As I have been learning more through all of my courses, I have been trying to incorporate that information into the classes that

I teach. For example, *Developing Ecoliteracy in Early Childhood* was extremely helpful when I was helping to design the curriculum and readings for the Nature Play piece in *Play, Environments, and Curriculum 4, ECED-3010*. I have learned a lot of information about early childhood education over the past two years, but what I think is more important is how I have learned more about myself as a person and as a teacher. I have also learned to find information about relevant topics of interest. This is a skill I will continue to use throughout my teaching career.

I am hopeful that some child care centres will bring me in and I will be able to put my project into action and implement my workshop sessions. I am going to think about ways that I can advertise these sessions and make connections with local child care centres. I would love to help centres think about their rules and make some changes to allow for more risky play. Now that I am not taking classes, I will have more time to implement my workshops, or connect with child care centres in other ways.

Having a master's degree will open up more career possibilities for me in the future. Right now, I am happy teaching post-secondary early childhood education students, but I do miss working directly with young children. I am currently in a term position, but I am optimistic that having a master's degree will make me a more desirable candidate for a permanent teaching position. I am not sure what the future holds for my education plans, but I would definitely be open to continuing my studies and doing primary research at some point.

### **Three Recommendations for Other Educators Interested in Engaging with the Topic of *Risky Play***

1. *Don't be afraid – go for it – take a risk!*

You will not learn anything new if you do not take a chance. For me, the hardest part was selecting a topic and getting started. Once I found something that was interesting, everything else started to fall into place. If you are interested in risky play, I think you will enjoy learning more about it. If you are not interested in risky play or you do not think children should be able to take risks in their play, I would encourage you to read more about it because you just might change your mind.

2. *It is a huge topic, so try to narrow it down.*

There are so many different aspects of risky play and so many different ways that I could have completed this project. My focus was on the benefits of risky play for children's development and I was mostly interested in adult involvement and roles in risk taking and how adults can influence children's risk taking. My goal of completing this project and learning more about risky play was that I would be able to articulate the benefits and inspire other educators to allow children to take more risks and challenges in their play.

3. *Many people are not comfortable with the idea of risk, so change needs to happen slowly.*

My project talks about risk-reframing and getting people to change their beliefs that all risk is negative and should be avoided. Everyone will have a different comfort level with risk and children's play, so it is unrealistic to think that someone who thinks all risk is bad or who is very anxious that children will get hurt will instantly stop feeling that way, get rid of all rules for children, and allow children to engage in risky play. The change will happen gradually as the person gets more comfortable and starts to see positive



results. Making small changes and documenting the positive results will help others see the benefits of taking risks. Change in the children's behaviours will also happen gradually. If children have been prevented from taking any risks or challenges in their play, it would not be safe to encourage them to do something extremely challenging that they have not done before. They may not have the proper skills to be able to complete the challenge successfully and could get seriously injured. Children need to be able to test their own limits and skills. Gradually they will try out more complex challenges and take more risks. One last thing to remember is that what is risky to one child, may not be risky to another, so it is important to know each individual child and make decisions on an individual basis.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter highlighted my learning over the past two years. In this chapter, I was able to reflect back on the courses I took, the research I engaged in for this project, and how I will be able to use this entire experience in my professional practice to make me a more effective educator. My main focus of this project was on risky play, but I truly believe that completing this program and this project was a risk that I took that has benefitted me professionally and personally.

Overall, I am extremely pleased that I selected this particular program and the topic of risky play for my final project. Two years ago, I was skeptical that I would change in significant ways, but that is exactly what happened. I am thankful to have had this experience and I look forward to sharing what I have learned with others in the future.

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**Appendix A:****Image of the Child**

"There are hundreds of different images of the child. Each one of you has inside yourself an image of the child that directs you as you begin to relate to a child. This theory within you pushes you to behave in certain ways; it orients you as you talk to the child, listen to the child, observe the child. It is very difficult for you to act contrary to this internal image. For example, if your image is that boys and girls are very different from one another, you will behave differently in your interactions with each of them" (Malaguzzi, 1994, p. 1).

Think about what you believe about children.

Complete the following statement:

**I believe a child is** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

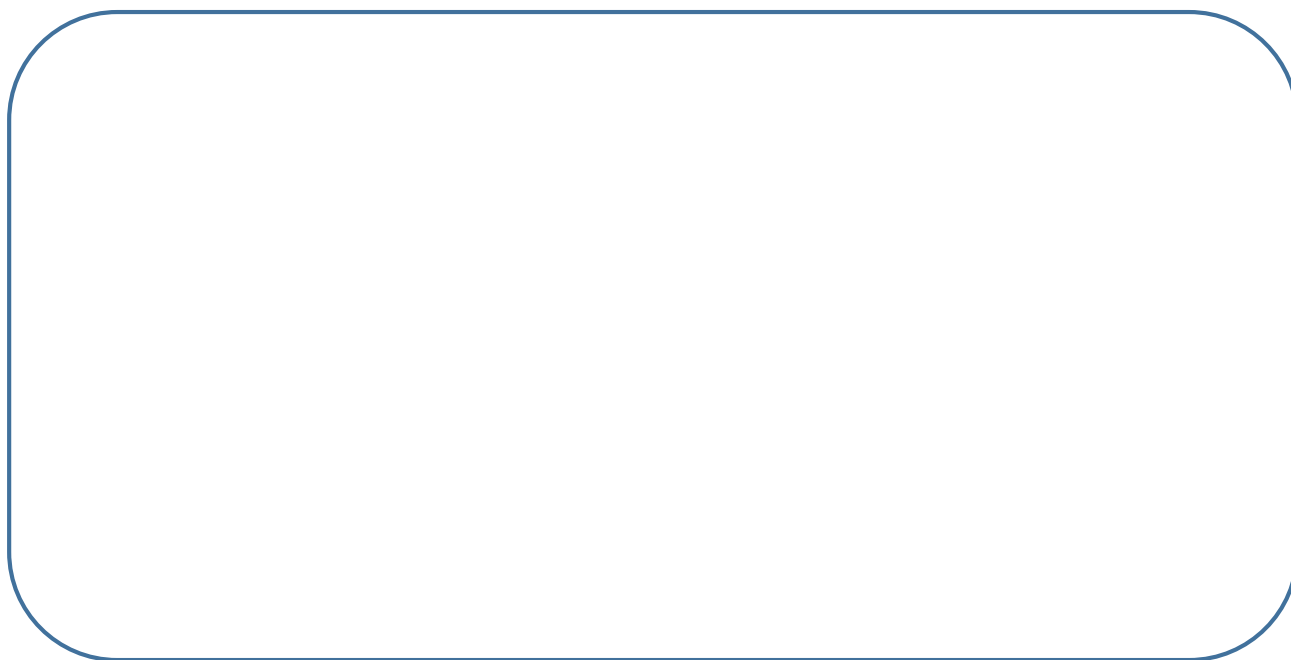
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Feel free to draw your Image of the Child in the space below.



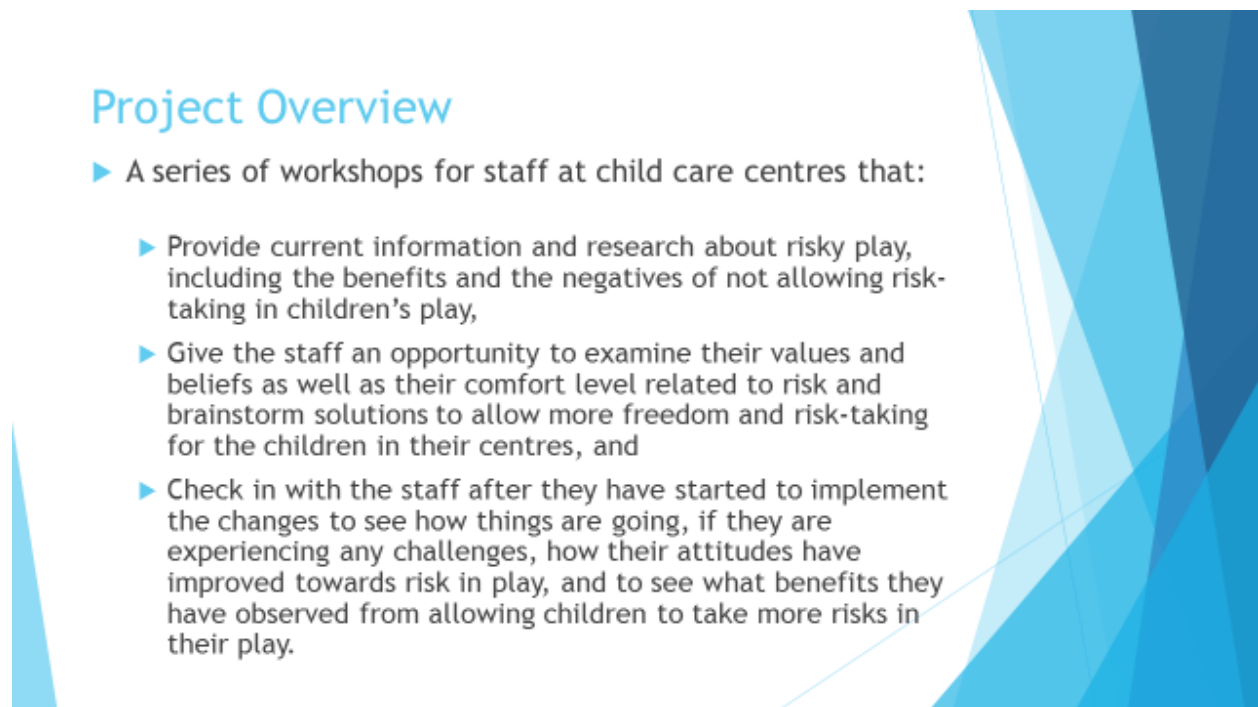
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**Appendix B:****PowerPoint Presentation for Workshop Series**

Slide #1



Slide #2





Slide #3

## Basic Overview of the Four Professional Development Sessions

### Session #1

- Values
- Beliefs
- Image of the Child
- Children - what do they do and what do they need?
- Centre rules

### Session #3

- Check in - how are things going, how do the staff feel, what have they noticed...
- Discuss any questions, comments, or concerns.
- Explore the play yard and the challenges it provides.
- Revise the plan, if needed.

### Session #2

- What did you play as a child?
- What is risky play?
- Benefits of risk
- Proposed changes for centre
- How to overcome potential challenges

### Session #4

- Final check in
- Wrap up
- Share documentation

Slide #4

## Today's Session #1

- ▶ Get to know each other
- ▶ Values
- ▶ Beliefs
- ▶ Image of the Child
- ▶ Children - what do they do and what do they need?
- ▶ Centre Rules

Slide #5

## Getting to Know Each Other

### Who am I?

- Education
- Experience

### Who are you?

- Please share:
  - Your name
  - Your experience with children.
  - One interesting fact.
  - How you currently feel about risky play.

Slide #6

## Guidance and Values

Your values and beliefs will shape the guidance you provide for young children and will influence everything you say and do (Hearron & Hildebrand, 2008).

- ❑ “A **value** is a deeply held view of what we believe to be important and worthwhile” (Bloom & Ellis, 2009, p. 1).
- ❑ “**Values** define our idea about what is good” (Hearron & Hildebrand, 2008, p. 36).
- ❑ A **belief** “is our personal conviction that certain things are true and that certain statements are facts” (Bloom & Ellis, 2009, p. 1).

Slide #7

## Ideal Behaviours and Characteristics

Discuss:

- **What kinds of behaviours or characteristics do you want to see in children?**
  - ▶ With your group, write down 5 and try to number them in order of importance.
  - ▶ Join another group and compare your priorities.
- What can we do to help children reach their fullest potential?
- How can we appreciate these positive behaviours?
- How can we encourage these behaviours?

Slide #8

## What do children do? What do they need?

- What do infants do? What do they need?
- What do toddlers do? What do they need?
- What do preschoolers do? What do they need?
- What do schoolagers do? What do they need?

## Slide #9

## Image of Child

How we see children influences how we interact with children, how we guide children, and how we set up the environment to provide for play and risk taking.

▶ Complete the following statement:

▶ A child is ...



## Slide #10

## Children Want and Need Rules

▶ Reasonable limits

▶ Safety



## Slide #11

## What are some rules at your centre?

List some rules you have at your child care centre.

- ▶ Do you agree with each rule?
  - ▶ Why or why not?

11

## Slide #12

## For Next Session...

Think about what you used to play when you were a child.

- ▶ Bring in a photograph of where you used to play.

## Slide #13

## Today's Session #2

- ▶ What did you do as a child?
  - ▶ Share photographs.
- ▶ Benefits of risk.
- ▶ Questions or concerns.
- ▶ Risky play video discussion and scenarios.
- ▶ Discuss rules identified last session.
  - ▶ Are they necessary?
- ▶ Proposed changes for centre - Create a plan.
- ▶ How to overcome potential obstacles.

## Slide #14

## What did you used to play when you were a child?

- ▶ Share photographs and stories.

Slide #15

## Risk Adverse Society

- ▶ Society has a negative perception of risk.
  - ▶ “If you mention the term risk most people associate risk only with negative thoughts and consequences” (Eager & Little, 2011).
  - ▶ However, “risk is not necessarily a danger that needs to be avoided, but rather something that needs to be managed” (Sandseter, 2011, p. 261).

Slide #16

## Risk Adverse Society

- ▶ “When we tell children that everything is dangerous, they will fear everything”  
(Marc Battle, March 12, 2015, personal communication).
- ▶ How do you feel about this statement?
- ▶ How will children explore if they are terrified?

Slide #17

## Alternatives to 'Risk'?

Perhaps if we take out the word risk, 'risky' play will be received differently.

- ▶ Niehues, Bundy, Broom, Tranter, Ragen, & Engelen (2013) suggest to replace the word risk with “**uncertainty**,” “**opportunity**,” or “**challenge**.”
- ▶ Armitage (2011) replaces ‘taking risks’ with ‘**making mistakes**.’
- ▶ Marc Battle (2015) calls it “**Taking a Chance Play**.”

Slide #18

## What is risky play?

- ▶ How would you define risky play?
- ▶ What are some examples of risky play?



## Slide #19

## What is risky play?

- ▶ “Attempting something never done before; feeling on the borderline of ‘out of control’ often because of height or speed, and overcoming fear” (Stephenson, 2003, p. 36)
- ▶ “Common features of risk, speed, excitement, thrills, uncertainty, and challenge” (Greenfield, 2004, p. 3)
- ▶ “Risky play is related to the chance of getting hurt and the feeling of fear” (Sandseter, 2007, p. 239)
- ▶ Includes things like sliding, swinging, climbing, and bike riding.

## Slide #20

## Sandseter’s (2007) Six Categories of Risky Play:

- 1) play with great heights
- 2) play with high speed
- 3) play with harmful tools
- 4) play near dangerous elements
- 5) rough-and-tumble play
- 6) play where the children can ‘disappear’/get lost

## Slide #21

## Risk versus Hazard - (Curtis, 2010, p. 55)

**Risk:**

- ▶ “Something that is possible to negotiate and may be appropriate for particular situations and children.”

**Hazard:**

- ▶ “Something that is inherently dangerous and needs to be remedied.”

## Slide #22

## Benefits of Risky Play

Think about children engaging in the six types of risky play.

- ▶ What benefits will they gain from taking risks?
  - ▶ Physical, social, emotional, and cognitive.

Pair up and share your ideas with a partner.

## Slide #23

## Benefits of Risky Play

- ▶ Encounters with risk help children learn how to manage risks (Gill, 2007).
- ▶ “Improve their perception of risk and their mastery of risky situations,” which may aid survival when, later in life, watchful adults are no longer present” (Apter, 2007, as cited in Sandseter, 2009, p. 94).
- ▶ Through risky play, children are able to test their own limits and abilities and get to know themselves and what they can do. (Ungar 2007/2008; Stephenson, 2003)
- ▶ When children are successful at taking risks, there is “the possibility of discovering that one is adventurous, daring, brave, strong, confident, and successful” (Stephenson, 2003, p. 42), which improves a child’s self-concept and self-esteem.

## Slide #24

## More Benefits of Risky Play

- ▶ Develop problem solving skills and social competence (Greenfield, 2004; Pellis & Pellis, 2007)
- ▶ Builds resilience, confidence, coping skills, and self-regulation (Marano & Skenazy, 2011; Play Wales, 2015)
- ▶ Experience and face their fears (Sandseter, 2011)
- ▶ Multiple health benefits, including improved physical health, increased physical activity, and healthy body weight (Brussoni et al., 2015)

## Slide #25

## Discussion

- ▶ What are the consequences of children not being able to take risks in their play?

## Slide #26

## Negatives of No Risky Play

- ▶ When children are not allowed to take risks in play, this negatively affects their development. (Eager & Little, 2011).
- ▶ If children are not allowed to play in physical ways, they could become obese or develop physical or mental health problems (Marano & Skenazy, 2011; Brussoni et al., 2015; Brussoni, Olsen, Pike, & Sleet, 2012; Wyver, Tranter, Naughton, Little, Sandseter, & Bundy, 2010).
- ▶ A big risk of not allowing children to engage in risky play is anxiety or fears later on in life, or not being able to manage future risk taking situations (Sandseter 2009b; Sandseter 2011; Gill, 2007).
- ▶ Stephenson (2003) stated that if children's risk taking is restricted, "children may grow up lacking confidence in their own physical ability through lack of opportunities to extend their skills and to meet appropriate physical challenges" (p. 40) and they will also "have less experience in making decisions on their own, less opportunity to assess their own personal frontiers, and less opportunity to gain confidence and self-esteem through coping independently" (Stephenson, 2003, p. 42).

## Slide #27

## More Negatives of No Risky Play

- ▶ Gill (2012) said, “It is a good thing for children to be exposed to the possibility that things could go wrong because that’s how they learn to cope with challenges” (KaBOOM!).
- ▶ “Denying children this opportunity could result in a society of risk-averse citizens, unable to cope with everyday situations; or in children simply finding more dangerous locations to carry out their risk-taking behaviour” (Eager & Little, 2011).
- ▶ Another risk is that children will attempt risky behaviours, seek out risky situations, or try to use “boring” equipment in creative and dangerous ways without adequate supervision if adults are not supportive of these behaviours (Sandseter, 2011; Gill, 2007; Walsh, 1993, as cited in Stephenson, 2003; Bundy et al., 2011).

## Slide #28

## When risk taking is limited in a child’s play...

(Dietze & Kashin, 2012, p. 143)

- ▶ The child’s level of physical play is reduced, impacting their motor skill development.
- ▶ Children change the quality of their play experiences which increases unsafe risk taking.
- ▶ Children will create ways to bring challenge into their play.
- ▶ Children’s natural curiosity, creativity, and challenge is being impacted.
- ▶ Children do not gain healthy kinesthetic and physical skills that build physical confidence, judgment, competence, and self-esteem.

Slide #29

## Risk Deficit Disorder (RDD)

Describes the growing and unhealthy trend of attempting to remove all risk from within our community and the problems that this risk removal indirectly creates”

(Eager & Little, 2011).

Slide #30

## Adult Beliefs and Values Influence Risky Play

- ▶ Sandseter (2014) said, “Adults help to ensure children are safe when playing, but at the same time, these adults represent the most important constraints on children’s opportunities to experience risks and challenges” (p. 436).
- ▶ Some of the reasons early childhood practitioners give for not letting children engage in risky play include:
  - ▶ **fear** of litigation,
  - ▶ **fear** of children getting hurt,
  - ▶ **fear** of parents’ reactions,
  - ▶ and strict regulations.

(Wyver, Tranter, Naughton, Little, Sandseter, & Bundy, 2010; Greatorex, 2008; Bundy, Luckett, Tranter, Naughton, Wyver, Ragen, & Spies, 2009; Little, 2010).

## Slide #31

## Adults Need to See the Value in Risky Play

When adults see the value in risky play, they will make it a priority and encourage children to take risks in their play.

(Norodahl & Johannesson, 2014; Sandseter, Little, & Wyver, 2012; Little, Wyver, & Gibson, 2011; Sandseter, 2014; Blanchet-Cohen & Elliot, 2011; Nicol, 2013; Kennedy & McGrath, 2014)

- ▶ What does this statement mean to you as someone who works with children?

## Slide #32

## Video Discussion

- ▶ What is your first reaction to what the children were doing in the video?
- ▶ How did it make you feel?
- ▶ What are the children learning through their actions?
- ▶ How comfortable would you be allowing children to do what they were doing in the video?

Slide #33

## Risky Play Scenario Discussions

- ▶ As a group, come up with a situation that you believe involves risk.
- ▶ Do you think the child(ren) should be able to engage in the risk?
  - ▶ Why or why not?
  - ▶ What are the benefits of allowing the child to take the risk?
- ▶ How would you handle that situation?
- ▶ Would everyone in your group handle it the same way?

Slide #34

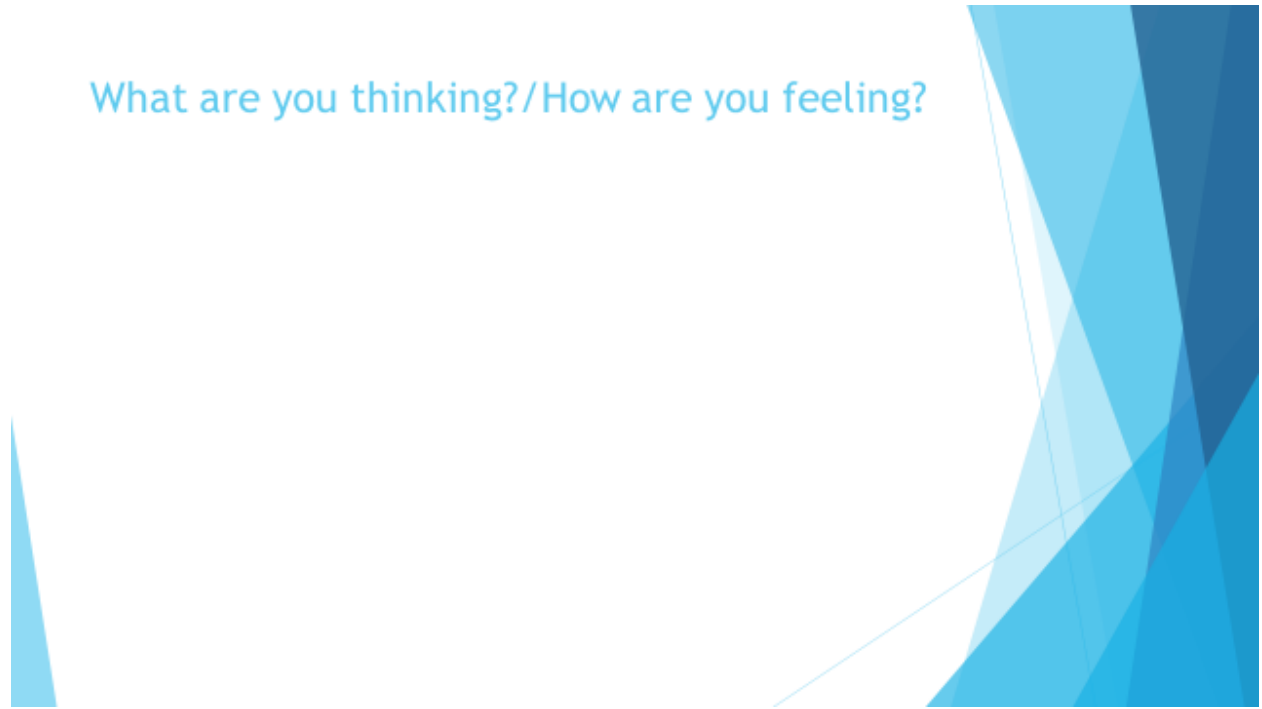
## Video Discussion

- ▶ Were the children's comments surprising?
- ▶ What do you think the children you work with would say if you asked them about risky play and what they would like to be able to do?



Slide #35

What are you thinking?/How are you feeling?

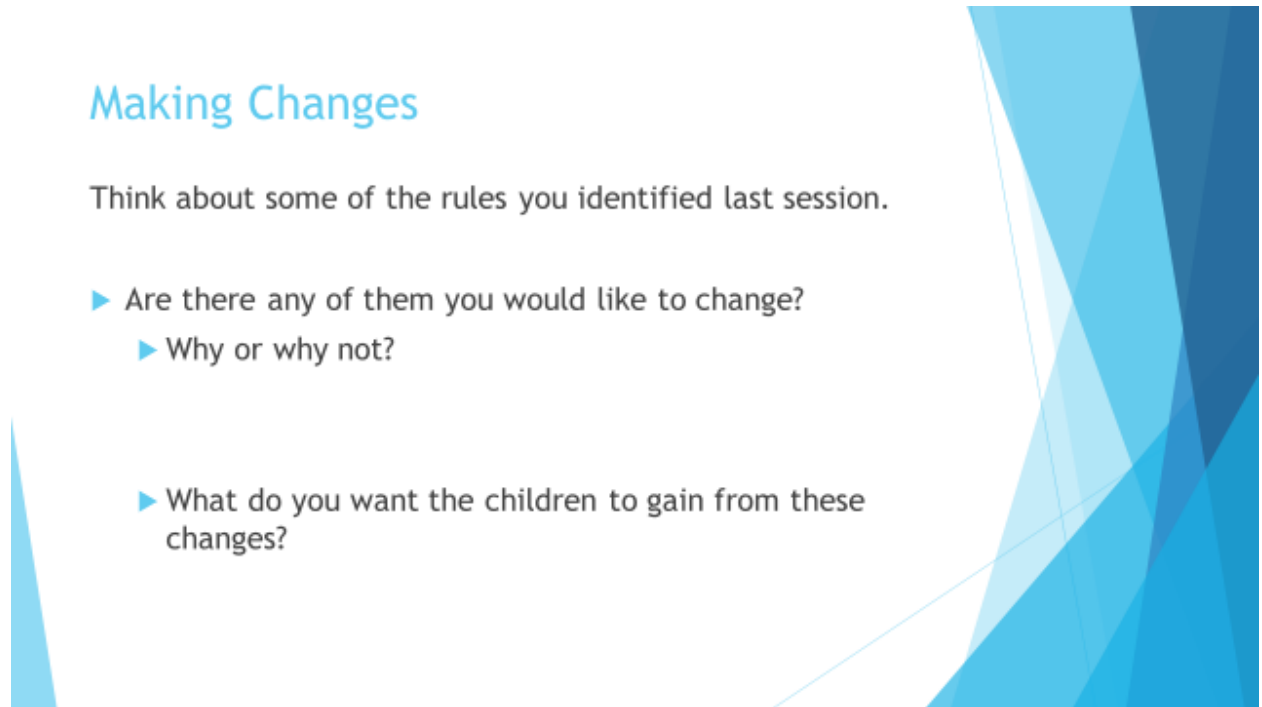


Slide #36

## Making Changes

Think about some of the rules you identified last session.

- ▶ Are there any of them you would like to change?
  - ▶ Why or why not?
  
- ▶ What do you want the children to gain from these changes?



Slide #37

## Plan

- ▶ What is your team's plan?
- ▶ How will you implement it?

Please call or email if you need anything before our next session.

Slide #38

## For Next Session...

- ▶ We will be discussing how things are going.
- ▶ Bring appropriate outdoor clothing (dress for the weather).
- ▶ Bring your questions and any documentation (photos, videos, notes) you have collected.

**Personal Challenge:** During the next two weeks, try something exciting you would not normally do, or something you have not done since you were a child.

Slide #39

## Today's Session #3

- ▶ Share what you tried.
- ▶ Check in to see how things are going.
- ▶ Review any collected documentation.
- ▶ Explore the play yard and/or playground.
- ▶ Revise the plan, if necessary.



Slide #40

## Personal Challenge

- ▶ To try something new or exciting.
- ▶ Why do you think I asked you to do this?
- ▶ Share experiences.



Slide #41

## Discussion

- ▶ How is it going?
- ▶ What has changed?
- ▶ Have you noticed any changes in the children's behaviour?
- ▶ Have you been getting any feedback from parents?

Slide #42

## Round Table Discussion

- ▶ How do you feel?
- ▶ Do you have any questions, comments, or concerns?

Slide #43

## Exploring the Space Available

1. With a partner, go through the play yard and identify all of the potential risks and challenges available to children in their play.
2. Try out some of these challenges as you go.
3. Look around the yard and in the storage shed.
  - What challenges could you create for children?
  - What materials would you need?

Slide #44

## Exploration Debrief

- ▶ How many risks and challenges did you and your partner find?
  - ▶ Were you surprised by the number?
  - ▶ Were there more or less potential challenges than you thought?
- ▶ Did you try the risks and challenges?
  - ▶ If you did, how did that make you feel?
  - ▶ If you didn't, what stopped you from trying?
- ▶ What ideas did you and your partner come up with for providing more challenges for the children?

Slide #45

## Plan

- ▶ Does the plan need to be revised at this time?
- ▶ Are you going to set up some of the challenges you came up with today?
- ▶ What materials do you need?
- ▶ Who will do what?

Slide #46

## For Next Session...

- ▶ We will discuss the changes that you have seen.
- ▶ Bring all of the documentation you have collected over the past two months.

**Personal Challenge:** During the next month, try something else exciting you would not normally do, or something you have not done since you were a child.

Slide #47

## Today's Session #4

- ▶ Our final session.
- ▶ Wrap up and share documentation.



Slide #48

## Personal Challenge

- ▶ To try something new or exciting.
- ▶ Share experiences.



Slide #49

## Sharing of Documentation



Slide #50

How did things go? How do you feel?  
Has your opinion of risky play changed  
over the past two months?





Slide #51

## Plans for the Future?

Slide #52

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