

Supporting a Playful Pedagogical Approach in Early Childhood Education

Alana Parsons

School of Education, Thompson Rivers University

Kamloops, BC

Author Note

A capstone project submitted to Thompson Rivers University in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Education.

Presented July 24, 2022

Abstract

This paper explores the significance and application of playful learning experiences with the intention of making a positive influence towards changing the trajectory of society's inherently traditional educational delivery model. Early-childhood programs have been recognized as an integral and essential component of a child's education. Through my experiences as an educational leader in early childhood education, I have witnessed the positive impact of facilitating developmentally appropriate learning experiences that are both child-centered and playful. Educators have the ability to experience joy and the resulting rewards of facilitating playful experiences with students. Play-based education is a powerful method of curriculum delivery as the children are receiving an enriched and more meaningful experience; it is impactful and integral to encompass throughout a child's entire educational experience as it allows for a child to be actively engaged in their learning. Experiencing joy, for both the educator and the student, can significantly reduce feelings of stress. Playful learning experiences foster accessible entry points to learning that address the varied needs of all learners. Teachers should appreciate and understand how to create authentic playful learning experiences for their students for the purpose of enhancing student learning. Fostering playful learning experiences can apply to all educational levels, however, this paper will specifically focus on the application of playful learning within early childhood educational contexts. Learning through a playful pedagogical approach can better equip children with a holistic range of skills to support success both inside and outside the classroom.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter One: Introduction	6
Educational Journey	6
The Importance of Playful Learning	7
Argument for Playful Learning	8
Paper Overview	9
Chapter Two: Literature Review	10
Definition of Terms	10
Playful Learning	11
Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP).....	11
21 st Century Skills	12
Best Practice in Early Childhood Education (ECE)	12
Curricular Frameworks.....	13
Evidence-Based Practice (EBP)	13
Implementation of Play and Playful Learning Experiences	14
Teacher-Led Activities	14
Teacher-Guided Activities.....	15
Student-Led and Child-Initiated Activities	16
Benefits of Playful Learning	16
Development of 21 st Century Skills	17
Supporting Inclusive Education	17
The Natural Engagement in Play.....	19
Perceptions of Playful Learning	19

Teacher Perspectives	20
Child Perspectives	21
Parental Perspectives	21
Summary.....	22
Chapter Three: Application	23
Applying a Playful Pedagogical Approach in ECE.....	23
Understanding the Approach	23
Promoting Reflective and Reflexive Practice.....	24
Adopting the Frameworks	25
Putting Theory into Authentic Practice: My Pedagogical Transformation	27
Recognizing a Need For Change	28
Leading Organizational Change	29
Supporting a Playful Pedagogical Approach: Teachers and Parents.....	30
Supporting Teachers.....	30
Supporting Parents.....	32
The Prosperities of Walking the Playful Walk.....	32
Development of 21 st Century Skills	33
Supporting Inclusive Education	33
Shifting Teachers' Perspectives	34
Summary.....	34
Chapter Four: Conclusion.....	36
Summary.....	36
Implications	38

References40

Chapter One: Introduction

In this chapter, I begin by reviewing how my interest in the topic of playful learning has developed through my experiences as a student at Thompson Rivers University and as a teacher in Early Childhood Education (ECE). I proceed by identifying the significance of playful learning in the context of both teaching and learning, more particularly at the ECE level. My argument is then presented, followed by an outline of how the paper will be structured.

Educational Journey

Two years ago marked the beginning of my journey in the Master of Education program at Thompson Rivers University. My desire for advancing my professional career as an educational leader in the field of Early Childhood Education (ECE) was deep-seated. Reflecting on my practice at that time, I was well aware of the skills, understandings, and awareness that would develop through taking an M.Ed. degree. As such, I knew the positive growth within myself as an educator would be of absolute benefit and rewarding to the young children and fellow ECE teachers I work with; and so, I began.

Engaging in both reflective and reflexive thinking was always part of my work as an educational leader in ECE. Not only did I engage in reflective and reflexive practice regarding my own work, but also the work of the educators on my team. My first course on educational leadership solidified the importance of reflective and reflexive practice. In turn, it helped me refine my teaching and apply newfound knowledge in a professional context to assess the effectiveness of our program delivery model and preschool curriculum. Our program delivery model was inherently traditional and teacher-led, which is what we desired to shift away from. At this time, we had just begun the process of institutional change and I learned just how

difficult managing change can be. An impactful culminating moment was recognizing how my role as an educational leader within my field could significantly affect the results of the curricular and program changes that we were looking to implement.

Both courses of educational philosophy and curriculum provided a solid theoretical foundation for my own teaching and my ECE leadership role. As our organization was designing a more holistic and child-centered curriculum, I felt myself inherently drawn to the philosophies of John Dewey, Maria Montessori, and Friedrich Fröbel. My curricular re-design project for the Curriculum and Learning course beautifully illustrated how ECE programs can deliver child-centered and playful learning experiences through meaningful topics. This project, *From Farm to Table*, showed how to expand the traditional topic of *The Farm* to be open-ended, holistic, and playful (Parsons, 2021). Looking back on the progression of my work, I saw my educational philosophy strongly infused throughout. Teachers, from my perspective, are not the sole holders of knowledge and can therefore learn from their students (Parsons, 2021). Just as Fröbel valued play as a way to connect children to culture and their society (Gutek, 2015), I became passionate about children learning authentically through playful experiences.

The Importance of Playful Learning

My work in ECE continues to reveal the ever-evolving and diversified needs of both the children and their greater communities. I see the need to nourish stronger and more adaptable learners. As illustrated within my educational philosophy, “a primary goal of education, beyond the curriculum, should be for children to develop a strong ability to resource their own learning and implement effective problem-solving skills” (Parsons, 2021, p. 2). ECE programs should be designed to achieve set curricular outcomes in such a way that

is motivating for both the educator and the child. For children, playful learning should be the chosen method of ECE delivery. Current ECE frameworks recognize how important and relevant play is for young children. *Flight* is an Alberta ECE framework noting that “play is a pleasurable and highly motivating context in which children can explore possibilities and solve problems that are beyond their reach in ordinary life” (Makovichuk et al., 2014, p. 97). Simply allotting time for play separates it from an experience that can be used as part of a child’s way of learning. It further discounts the role an educator has within all experiences to facilitate rich learning environments. Educators can transform the disconnected relationship between play and learning by delivering playful learning experiences and embodying a playful approach.

Argument for Playful Learning

In this paper, I claim that the authentic and holistic delivery of a playful pedagogical approach in early childhood education is best practice for the reason that it supports inclusivity by addressing individual learning needs which positively supports the growth of a child’s social-emotional skills. I further claim that learning through a playful approach is beneficial to both the trained educator and student as learning outcomes can be targeted through a more meaningful and engaging approach. This, in turn, can infuse joy into teaching and learning. Learning through a playful approach provides children with the necessary skills to be better equipped for their future learning endeavours and encourages the development of essential learning behaviours. Based upon the following evidence, play is essential for the development of a child’s self-regulation, communication, and coping skills (Berk, Mann, & Ogan, 2006, as cited in Felekidou et al., 2018). Teachers play an important role to ensure that playful learning experiences are therefore effective as a means for inclusion (Felekidou et al., 2018). This

supports the need for appropriate educator training to allow for more inclusive, meaningful, and engaging student experiences. Further research indicates that play-based approaches are as effective at targeting learning outcomes as teacher-led lessons and programs (Vogt et al., 2018) as play-based learning supports early literacy and language skills (Rand & Morrow, 2021). Based upon this evidence, this paper will argue for the authentic implementation of play-based learning in early-childhood programs as it offers as a substantial benefit for the teachers, students, and the educational system.

Paper Overview

This paper began by discussing my journey as both an ECE leader and a student at Thompson Rivers University. Both roles of a student and teacher simultaneously inspired me to recognize and prioritize the importance of child-centered playful learning experiences. An in-depth literature review is conducted in the second chapter. The second chapter explores the specifics that the literature outlines regarding best practice, holistic and child-centered approaches, and playful learning in ECE. In chapter three, theory and literature are put into practice by illustrating how educators can walk the playful walk and implement authentic playful experiences for their students. The paper concludes in chapter four by providing a summary and the implications of playful learning in ECE and beyond.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

This chapter provides an in-depth review of the literature surrounding the pedagogy of play, implementation of play within early-childhood education, and perceptions that exist regarding playful learning. The purpose of the literature review is to establish the relevant knowledge and research as a strong foundation for my argument in providing authentic playful learning experiences in ECE. This chapter begins by defining the key terminology that is relayed throughout the literature, that relates to the field of ECE and playful learning. Then, the themes in the literature as it relates to the essential argument are presented. Lastly, the chapter concludes by aligning the themes in the literature to the importance of following a playful pedagogical approach in early childhood education.

Definition of Terms

Play, playful learning, developmentally appropriate practice (DAP), and 21st century skills are terms that frequently arise within the literature. These terms are important to the essential argument of this paper and must be understood so that the literature can be analyzed. The concepts of play, playful learning, DAP, and 21st century skills are defined to support the literature review.

Play

Play is an important concept to define, as it is central to the life of a child and further encompasses many of their experiences in early childhood education. Eberle (2014) argues that “play is a roomy subject, broad in human experience, rich and various over time and place, and accommodating [diverse] pursuits” (p. 214). He extracts his definition of play by identifying its key attributes. Play has rules, is fun, exists for the benefit of others and in various settings, and people engage in play because they want to (Eberle, 2014). Makovichuk

et al., (2014) reference play as a multimodal literacy that involves the active participation of children with others and their world. One essential characteristic of play outlined by Makovichuk et al., (2014) is that play exhibits freedom for a child to participate in their own prerogative. This characteristic differs from Eberle (2014) as he characterizes play as having parameters, or rules. Although the specific characteristics of play might differ within the literature, one central theme connects many definitions. That is, play is often characterized and defined as an activity that is enjoyable and fun (Eberle, 2014; Makovichuk et al., 2014; Hansen et al. 1999, as cited in Passmore & Hughes, 2021).

Playful Learning

Play is defined as an activity without reference to learning. The definition of playful learning integrates the activity of play with the acquisition of knowledge and skills. Playful learning views play as a medium for learning to occur (Passmore & Hughes, 2021, p. 1155). Playful learning is noted to occur when it meets the following characteristics: the activity is joyful, actively engaging, meaningful, iterative, and socially interactive (The LEGO Foundation, 2017).

Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP)

Many early childhood educational philosophies, curricula, and theories refer to teaching using developmentally appropriate practice (DAP). DAP is founded on two core considerations. What this means is that early childhood educators should ensure their teaching practice is considerate of the typical ages and stages of a child's development along with their unique developmental needs (Stanković-Ramirez & Thompson, 2021). The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC, 2020) released a similar, yet more comprehensive, definition of DAP that informs the work of early childhood educators.

According to the NAEYC (2020), DAP constitutes “...as methods that promote each child’s optimal development and learning through a strengths-based, play-based approach to joyful, engaged learning...” (p. 5).

21st Century Skills

21st century skills are important in determining a child’s future success. They refer to the knowledge, career and life skills, habits, and traits that impact student achievement and success (Buckle, n.d.). Buckle provides a comprehensive list including many integral 21st century skills, such as: Critical thinking, communication, creativity, problem solving, perseverance, collaboration, information and media literacy, digital and technological literacy, global awareness, self-direction, social and literacy skills, civic literacy, social responsibility, and innovativeness (para. 6). A similar definition of 21st century skills outlines them as existing under four competencies, the 4C’s, representing Critical thinking, Creativity, Communication and Collaboration (P21 association, 2017, as cited in Buitrago-Flórez et al., 2021).

Best Practice in Early Childhood Education (ECE)

The literature provided a comprehensive framework as to what is and is not considered best practice in early childhood education. Best practice in ECE constitutes DAP, which requires an educator’s comprehensive understanding of each individual student. This means that educators should understand that each child’s development is unique to their individual, social, cultural, and linguistic environments (Stanković-Ramirez & Thompson, 2021). It is also evident, through reviewing the definition of DAP as illustrated by the NAEYC (2020), that play is considered DAP.

Curricular Frameworks

Emerging ECE curricular frameworks help promote the implementation of best practice, which emphasizes play. For example, the province of Alberta released an ECE curricular framework called *Flight* (Makovichuk et al., 2014). Although this curricular framework was not mandated, it “...can help educators see, think about, and reflect on... [their] potential to shape and extend children’s play experiences and their sense of belonging” (Makovichuk et al., p. 6). Other curricular frameworks similarly valued children's experiences within play. Ontario’s early childhood framework stressed the incorporation of play in early childhood settings while infusing learning opportunities within play (Best Start Expert Panel on Early Learning, 2007). Similarly, the province of British Columbia’s *Early Learning Framework* (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2019) emphasized play within their framework as “[it is] vital to children’s learning, growing, and making meaning” (p. 24). Play was recognized and supported by curricular frameworks and through understanding how to incorporate play most beneficially, ECE educators can deliver a quality educational experience that better supports the needs of the children.

Evidence-Based Practice (EBP)

Implementing evidence-based practice (EBP) through play and using ECE curricular frameworks influences the quality of early childhood programs. It is agreed upon amongst early childhood scholars that program quality is directly linked to the implementation of EBPs (Brock et al., 2018). In terms of implementing EBPs, the literature refers to the importance of professional development (PD). Mitchell (2009) advocated for “better and more accessible professional development, so that every teacher can advance their practice” (p. 8). Providing early-childhood educators with PD is one way to increase the implementation of EBPs. One

study reported that the professional development experienced by early-childhood educators has a direct association with their educational practices and beliefs (Chazan-Cohen et al., 2020). Carr (2008, as cited in Makovichuk et al., 2014) further reiterated the importance of professional development within ECE as a way to improve teaching practice. It is evident within the literature that providing coaching EBPs through PD has a positive influence on ECE programming quality. Policymakers and educational leaders should provide appropriate support for the teachers who are at the forefront of program delivery to ensure that early childhood educators implement evidence-based practice, which translates to effective implementation of play and a playful learning approach.

Implementation of Play and Playful Learning Experiences

The literature discussed the methods by which early childhood educators implement play and playful learning experiences for children. Pramling-Samuelsson and Carlsson (2008) state the traditionalist perspective of play as being an activity initiated by children. Although preschool programs can include a multitude of activities delivered through teacher-guided, teacher-led, and child-led activities, play is more often illustrated within the literature to take the form of a child-led activity.

Teacher-Led Activities

Within the literature, teacher-led activities did not often incorporate play or facilitate a playful learning experience. A study conducted by Hännikäinen et al., (2014) analyzed structured teacher-led activities and their influence on a child's social life. The findings revealed that teacher-led activities can be designed to be more interactive (Hännikäinen et al., 2014), but did not indicate that they can be designed to be more playful. Other commonly incorporated teacher-led activities are presented in methods that are less interactive and lack mention of play.

Calendar time is a popular teacher-led activity that was demonstrated to be utilized in early-childhood classrooms. It was criticized as having barriers to a child's meaningful participation, and the incorporation of teacher-led games is offered as a suggested EBP alternative (Beneke et al., 2008). However, it is important to note that although this alternative is offered, there was no specific reference to play as a facet of learning through a teacher-led activity.

Teacher-Guided Activities

Teacher-guided play activities were referenced more within the literature. Franco et al., (2019) presented the notion that teachers, in many ways, can guide play and classroom activities. Guided activities were illustrated within the literature to “[constrain] the environment just enough to help ensure that the child engages with relevant materials and encounters relevant experiences” (Toub et al., 2016, p. 122). Many subject areas can incorporate teacher-guided activities. For instance, literature-related activities within early-childhood classrooms can be both teacher-guided and playful. Fler (2021) discussed the teacher-guided aspect of incorporating Playworlds literature in ECE. Within this, the role of the adult is to support the children in the imagination of the scenario as the narration continues to develop throughout play (Fler, 2021).

Many global curricular frameworks echoed similar emphasis on the integral role of incorporating teacher-guided play activities throughout the subject areas. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2021) recognized various ECE curriculums that exist globally, and some are revealed to value teacher-guided activities. For example, Switzerland's ECE curricular framework provided direction on implementing guided play and activities (OECD, 2021). The *Flight* (Makovichuk et al., 2014) ECE framework of Alberta offered a similar guideline to that of Switzerland. This framework viewed the teacher as a co-learner with children and one who guides children towards opportunities (Makovichuk et al.,

2014). However, the complete removal of teacher guidance allows children to participate in play that provides the child with full agency.

Student-Led and Child-Initiated Activities

Play is an activity that can be led or initiated by the learner. It was noted that play can provide a child with the freedom to learn in their own ways, terms, and time (Makovichuk et al., 2014). Play was often illustrated as a student-led or child-initiated activity within the literature. Similarly, student-led and child-initiated activities were typically presented as play. Bullock (1990) provided considerations for educators when planning or encompassing student-led activities in their classrooms. Two of Bullock's (1990) important considerations were to plan developmentally appropriate activities and for teachers to encourage a child's agency within their play. Through Bullock's (1990) considerations, she illustrated student-led activities as being able to constitute play. The literature further presents how learning can be embedded within student-led or child-initiated play. Pramling-Samuelsson and Carlsson (2008) validated that children, through play, can develop their understanding of any learning object. Other literature emphasized the importance of student-led and child-initiated play activities (Bayley, 2013; Lindon, 2010; Woods, 2013) as an approach to learning in preschool.

Benefits of Playful Learning

The benefits of learning through play was widely discussed within the literature and further demonstrated within the research. Implementing a playful pedagogical approach was similarly supported and encouraged by many scholars. Increasing evidence continues to represent that children continue to connect, engage, and learn with their surroundings through play (The LEGO Foundation, 2017). Play, as an activity, is also said to positively influence child development. For example, play is recognized to support the development of children's social-

emotional skills (Andrade, 2019). This section will discuss the benefits of play as illustrated within the literature and research.

Development of 21st Century Skills

Playful learning can positively impact the development of a child's 21st century skills. The development of these skills can occur by intentionally targeting these skills, or can develop by simply partaking in learning through play. One report conveyed their findings that 21st century skills were the most commonly targeted by playful learning initiatives (Winthrop et al., 2019). Other research notes the positive development of communication and social skills through playful preschool lessons. Another study revealed that through playful activities in a Finnish preschool, teachers targeted communicative and social behaviour goals (Hännikäinen et al., 2014). Other 21st century skills are also developed throughout engaging in play. During guided play, children can be challenged to engage in critical thinking and problem solving when teachers pose certain questions or suggestions (Toub et al., 2016). Just as the literature illustrates how these skills can be targeted intentionally, the development of 21st century skills, such as communication, may also occur naturally. Pramling-Samuelsson and Carlsson (2008) explain how children spontaneously utilize communication and meta-communication throughout play. Colliver and Fleeer (2016) revealed how preschool participants analyzed their play scenarios, which demonstrates the innate development of 21st century skills within play.

Supporting Inclusive Education

Inclusion and inclusive education are the foundation of many ECE programs. Research showed a positive relationship between play and supporting inclusive educational practices. The results of a study conducted by Passmore and Hughes (2021) revealed that the addition of open-ended play materials encourages more social communication between peers. This can support the

development of social communication skills in diagnosed children and amongst all children, which supports inclusive education.

When teachers are involved in the process or planning of play, they can direct the play to meet the diverse needs of their students. This idea of scaffolding learning is a practice that can be used by teachers to support the diverse needs of their students, and therefore can also be beneficially applied within playful learning. Rand and Morrow (2021) discussed adult scaffolding within playful learning and made specific references to many studies that review its effects on children. One particular study concluded that children exhibit a higher rate of participation in an activity where the adult is an active participant (Neuman & Roskos, 1993, as cited in Rand & Morrow, 2021). Teachers who are active participants in the play, whether through participation or scaffolding, can impact the efficacy of playful learning.

Playful learning has the ability to positively support inclusion if educators understand how to implement it. Rand and Morrow (2021) recognized that not all teachers fully understand their role within play, and thus requires extensive professional development. Playful learning curriculums that align with inclusive education, such as *Flight* (Makovichuk et al., 2014), require understanding from the teacher on how to appropriately implement it within their practice. A study conducted on ECE practitioners revealed the lack of professional development as they “rated their theoretical understanding of play and their play training as moderate to low” (Howard, 2010, as cited in Bubikova-Moan et al., 2019, p. 789). For play to authentically support inclusive classrooms, appropriate and applicable training and professional development are needed.

The Natural Engagement in Play

Playful learning and play can both be effective tools to utilize in teaching as children are naturally drawn to participate in it. In fact, most of the activities that children are involved in are considered play (Pramling-Samuelsson & Fler, 2009). Just as play is part of a child's world, it is deeply rooted within the existence of mammals. Eberle (2014) explained the physiological instinct within all mammals to participate in play as it has enriched our survival. It is evident that play is both a preferred activity and part of our physiological make-up. Curricular frameworks and other proponents of playful learning incorporated these principles to strengthen their argument for play-based learning approaches. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC, 2020) argued for the incorporation of actively engaging playful experiences in ECE to support the development of the whole child. Various Canadian early learning curricular frameworks hold similar arguments. One of the fundamental principles of the *British Columbia Early Learning Framework* (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2019) is that play is essential to the well-being of each child. Similarly, the *Flight* (Makovichuk et al., 2014) framework regarded play and playfulness as a child's natural disposition to learn. Understanding the strong natural connection to play is important for early childhood educators and can help support the appropriate implementation of play within education. This can strengthen the effectiveness of implementing playful learning.

Perceptions of Playful Learning

The literature strongly supported playful learning and revealed the benefit that play has on a child's overall development. ECE curricular frameworks similarly prioritized the implementation of play and playful learning approaches and echoed the perspectives from research and literature. Teachers, students, and their corresponding families are therefore

impacted based on their experiences at the school level. As such, they hold unique perspectives based on these experiences. This section will explore the perspectives on play and playful learning in ECE held by teachers, children, and families.

Teacher Perspectives

Teachers in ECE are expected to implement a given program and, if mandated, follow the provided framework. The literature exposed that teachers often separate learning and play and this is evident in how they structure their classes. Teacher-led activities, such as circle time, are seen as teaching practices where learning occurs and play is ignored until designated leisure time (Pramling-Samuelsson & Carlsson, 2008). Results from a study conducted by Fessha and Pyle (2016) illustrated the common separation between play and learning among kindergarten teachers in Ontario. Results indicated that although 91% of all participants incorporated play within their classrooms, only 19% of participants identified play-based learning to be part of their ECE program (Fessha & Pyle, 2016). Other research revealed barriers to teachers implementing a playful learning approach, indicating the disconnect between the supporting literature, research, and educator interpretation. Bubikova-Moan et al., (2019) discovered through their research that a barrier to implementing playful learning is the external pressure of school preparedness. Delaney's (2018) qualitative research further indicated ECE teacher support for more structured and less playful classroom activities, such as calendar time. One participant in Delaney's (2018) study noted that "calendar time was a place where they felt successful because the children could be directly taught and practice the basic skills deemed necessary for future success in Kindergarten" (p. 161). The literature continues to confirm the benefits of a playful approach to learning. However, the disconnect within teacher perspectives

indicates that there is further investment required in order to shift teachers' educational delivery methodologies.

Child Perspectives

Child perspectives on playful learning in the research and literature are drawn from both direct conversations with students and inherent conclusions made based on observations and data. The research showed that overall, all children are highly engaged in play. Passmore and Hughes' (2021) research on play in preschool found that children were engaged in a version of sustained play for an average of eighteen minutes. Further research by Colliver and Fleeer (2016) revealed that children are able to understand that they are learning something, and what they are specifically learning, through a playful activity. Throughout recorded observations and interactions with children in various play scenarios, the children articulated various purposes or rules of their play (Colliver and Fleeer, 2016). This illustrates how children view play and learning as a cohesive activity and therefore find it highly engaging. A case study conducted by Franco et al. (2019) illustrated how children extend literacy and numeracy concepts within their play, and in turn, indicated the children's high level of enjoyment and engagement. Children not only exhibit positive perspectives on play but further confirm that play and learning can exist simultaneously.

Parental Perspectives

Parental perspectives differ from the perspectives of children, and even more so from the perspectives of teachers and educational professionals. Research by Demircan and Erden (2015) revealed parental perspectives on playful learning. Their research indicated that while incorporating play within the preschool day is considered important for ECE educators, parents do not value this as an important issue (Demircan & Erden, 2015). Furthermore, Demican and

Erden (2015) reported that many parents favour teacher-directed and teacher-centered learning. This can stem from the fact that many parents believe play and learning are mutually exclusive from one another (Kane, 2016, as cited in Ward & Wilcox-Herzog, 2019). Other understandings of best forms of educational practice are not always appropriately held by parents. What constitutes DAP is not fully understood nor do parents necessarily hold appropriate beliefs (Ward & Wilcox-Herzog, 2019). These differing beliefs are also noted in other literature regarding parents' understandings of kindergarten readiness. Another study revealed kindergarten teachers' perception that parents held academic skills at a higher value (Sverdlov & Aram, 2016). This relays a case for increased parental awareness. It is important to recognize these differences to better understand how to address the gaps between parental beliefs and the research and literature.

Summary

The importance of play and learning through a playful approach is both extensively examined and supported within the research and literature. The benefits of learning through a playful approach continue to exist as a strong foundation of the argument towards a pedagogy of play. Examining the perspectives of educational stakeholders reveals the necessary increase in effective parental training to better support learning through play. The literature review provided evidence that supports the implementation of a playful pedagogical approach, and the following chapter will provide an accessible approach to implementing this pedagogy within early childhood classrooms.

Chapter Three: Application

In this chapter, I first illustrate how a playful pedagogical approach to learning can be practically applied within an early childhood classroom setting. Next, I share my experiences of supporting a program-wide playful pedagogical approach to teaching and how these experiences strengthen my argument. Through this, I demonstrate how my experiences in supporting and implementing playful learning experiences promotes child engagement, 21st century skill development, and an inclusive learning environment. I connect my practical application and personal experiences to both the literature and the argument for playful learning. This chapter concludes by presenting the significance of my learning on the future of ECE programming and my work as an early-childhood educational leader.

Applying a Playful Pedagogical Approach in ECE

The literature supports an authentically playful ECE program as it provides significant benefits to a child's skill development. Applying a playful pedagogical approach can be cost-effective, as it can be done by utilizing and repurposing what exists while reframing instructional delivery methods. This section reviews how ECE teachers and programs can deliver authentic playful learning experiences to their students. In doing so, this section reiterates crucial considerations when implementing playful learning experiences for students at the classroom and program level, as related to the literature. Embracing a playful pedagogical approach will ensure that through high-quality program delivery, students are best set up for success.

Understanding the Approach

Delivering playful learning experiences requires understanding from both ECE leaders, teachers, and support staff. ECE leaders and teachers need to hold shared beliefs on the definitions of play, DAP, EBP, and characteristics of a playful learning experience (see The

LEGO Foundation, 2017). However, as illustrated within the literature, a discrepancy exists between teachers allotting time for playtime and authentically adopting a playful pedagogical approach throughout their teaching practice (Fessha & Pyle, 2016). Additionally, not all educators fully comprehend their role within play (Rand & Morrow, 2021). To apply a playful pedagogical approach, this must be addressed through professional development (PD) while providing ongoing support and mentorship to all ECE staff.

Providing staff-wide PD is an effective means to foster shared beliefs and motivate educators to support a playful pedagogical approach. PD should address the needs of the staff and build on their understanding of playful learning experiences and be designed to build upon their existing level of understanding. DAP should be clearly defined to ECE educators through PD to address developmentally inappropriate activities, such as calendar time (see Benke et al., 2008). As schools should follow the principles of Inclusive Education (see Alberta Education, 2022), PD can effectively address educator needs as learners by following the same principles. Clement and Vandenberghe (2000, as cited in Cherrington & Thornton, 2013) stress the importance of balancing collaborative learning PD with individualized PD opportunities, which is a method of responding to individual learner needs as educators (Alberta Education, 2022).

Promoting Reflective and Reflexive Practice

By promoting a culture of reflective and reflexive practice, educators can increase morale, commitment, open-mindedness, creativity, and clearer boundaries defining their practice (Fook, 2002, as cited in Bolton & Delderfield, 2018) when working through a playful pedagogical approach. As such, it is important to promote reflective and reflexive practice at both the teacher level and leadership level. Educational leaders can encourage teachers to reflect upon their incorporation of teacher-led, student-led, and child-led activities. Reflecting on

teaching practices such as circle time could reveal ineffective learning methods, such as ignoring play until designated learning time (Pramling-Samuelsson & Carlsson, 2008). This illuminates where a more playful approach can be implemented.

Reflective and reflexive practice can also provide teachers and ECE programs with insight into the perspectives of the parents within the school community. As Ward and Wilcox-Herzog (2019) state, parents may not fully understand DAP or hold appropriate beliefs about it. Teachers and programs can better support parents by targeting their discrepancies through discerning parental perspectives. This can address the gaps between parental and program perspectives to allow for stronger and more universal support of a playful pedagogical approach.

Adopting the Frameworks

As reviewed in the literature, many Canadian provinces hold curricular frameworks that support a playful pedagogical approach. *Flight* (Makovichuk et al., 2014) is the Alberta early learning and care framework and although it is not provincially mandated, “it is a guide for early childhood educators to use in their everyday work” (p. 4). This framework provides holistic play-based goals (see Makovichuk et al., 2014, p. 81) that can support a program's implementation of DAP, EBP, and authentic playful learning experiences within ECE programs.

Scott Eberle (2014) promotes a philosophy of play by providing a comprehensive definition of and review of the elements of play. Eberle (2014) discusses how each element of anticipation, surprise, pleasure, understanding, strength, and poise unfold throughout the process of play and therefore distinguishes play in its entirety. The elements of play are evident in Figure 1. Understanding and further reflecting on past play activities and the elements exhibited during those playful experiences can guide teachers towards adopting an authentic playful pedagogy.

Figure 1

The Elements of Play

<div>Anticipation</div> <div>Surprise</div> <div>Pleasure</div> <div>Understanding</div> <div>Strength</div> <div>Poise</div>					
interest	appreciation	satisfaction	tolerance	stamina	dignity
openness	awakening	buoyancy	empathy	vitality	grace
readiness	stimulation	gratification	knowledge	devotion	composure
expectation	excitement	joy	skill	ingenuity	ease
curiosity	discovery	happiness	insight	wit	contentment
desire	arousal	delight	mutuality	drive	fulfillment
exuberance	thrill	glee	sensitivity	passion	spontaneity
wonderment	astonishment	fun	mastery	creativity	balance
<i>To infinity, and beyond!!</i> <small>Buzz Lightyear Spaceman</small>	<i>Playfully challenging the limitations of a science, an art, or a technology just to see what happens is one of the most common ways in which novel ideas are born.</i> <small>Robert and Michele Root-Bernstein Contemporary American physiologist; historian</small>	<i>Men do not quit playing because they grow old; they grow old because they quit playing.</i> <small>Oliver Wendell Holmes American physician 1809–1894</small>	<i>Learning through play means trying things this way and that, staying loose, changing your perspective, and trying the intuitive instead of the logical.</i> <small>Stuart Brown, M.D. Contemporary American psychiatrist</small>	<i>A child loves his play, not because it's easy, but because it's hard.</i> <small>Benjamin Spock American pediatrician 1903–1998</small>	<i>Play grows from our sense of freedom, it produces strength and skill for the players, stimulates the imagination, and encourages agility and self-confidence.</i> <small>Joseph W. Hecker Contemporary American human ecologist</small>

© The Strong

Elements of Play by The Strong is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.

Play Elements

From *Play Elements*, by The Strong, 2014 (<https://www.museumofplay.org/education/education-and-play-resources/elements-play>).

The LEGO Foundation (2017) advocates for the authentic delivery of playful learning experiences through their framework and published literature. This framework offers a practical and relevant perspective that can be adopted by ECE programs as a supplement to their governing framework. *The LEGO Foundation* (2017) outlines five characteristics of a playful learning experience. A learning activity must meet the criteria of being joyful, actively engaging, socially interactive, meaningful, and iterative to be considered an authentic playful learning experience (The LEGO Foundation, 2017). These criteria can be used by educators as a guideline during their planning process. Educators can also benefit from considering the characteristics of a playful learning experience in their reflective practice. This can be done as a means of assessing areas of strength and areas for growth while critiquing their effectiveness and authentic delivery of playful learning experiences.

The LEGO Foundation (2017) and the *Flight* (Makovichuk et al., 2014) framework illustrate a common holistic approach and, as such, can be used as a benchmark for creating authentically playful programs. A holistic ECE program should hold equal emphasis on the development of a child's emotional, cognitive, physical, social, and creative skills (The LEGO Foundation, 2017). These skills can be achieved through targeting the holistic play-based goals outlined in *Flight* (Makovichuk et al., 2014) which are well-being, play and playfulness, communication and literacies, and diversity and social responsibility. In the next section, I discuss my experiences in applying the characteristics of a playful learning experience while guiding parents and educators to transform the delivery of an ECE program.

Putting Theory into Authentic Practice: My Pedagogical Transformation

In this section, I will explore my transformation toward embracing a playful pedagogical approach to learning. My practical experiences in the role as an educational leader and

supporting the implementation of a playful curricular framework confirms the claims made within the literature. First, I discuss how my experiences in leading organizational change towards adopting an authentic playful pedagogical approach presented increasing benefits to a child's development and educational experience. Through this, I address how my experiences mirror the educator, child, and parental perspectives shared within the literature. To conclude this section, I share my experience in working with educators and childrens' families that supports their receptiveness and acceptance of a playful pedagogical approach to learning.

Recognizing a Need For Change

After working for two years as a program leader at a 'play-based' ECE organization, I became part of the curriculum and program re-design team in 2020. The term 'play-based' is used loosely in this context as the program, at that time, did not consistently follow best practices or offer authentic playful learning experiences. Educators did not infuse playful learning within teacher-led activities. Instead, play was separated from their understanding of what was considered to be teaching moments, such as circle time. This echoes the perspectives held by many teachers that are shared by Pramling-Samuelsson and Carlsson (2008), where play is ignored during teacher-led activities until designated leisure time.

Another common practice that was often implemented was the use of calendar time during teacher-led activities. Not only is calendar time disputed within the literature and seen as developmentally inappropriate (Benke et al., 2008; Friedman, 2000), it rarely offered the children a playful learning experience. Through my reflections during this time, I realized that students exhibited general disinterest in teacher-led activities. This was apparent through childrens' direct opposition to participate in a teacher-led activity, disengagement during the activity, or the demonstration of a child's lack of understanding. Delaney's (2018) research noted

that teachers supported calendar time because ECE teachers felt they were successfully teaching and practicing kindergarten skills through a direct approach. Yet, these approaches do not address the child's disengagement and lack of understanding.

Leading Organizational Change

We began the process of encouraging the educators to substitute calendar time activities within classrooms. The teachers were provided with programming alternatives that encouraged more social interaction and active engagement to support their transition. One immediate positive transformation recognized was the significant increase in overall student engagement. Children seemed less reluctant to participate in a teacher-led activity when they became active participants in it. As these activities appeared more joyful, therefore enjoyable for both the teacher and student, it became more evident that the children could demonstrate understanding of the activity's purpose. This similarly represents Colliver and Fleeer's (2016) research, which revealed that children can understand what they are learning, and what knowledge and skills they are specifically acquiring, through playful experiences. Realizing the benefits of this change promoted the re-design of our ECE curriculum to support a more holistic and play-based pedagogical approach.

Being a contributing member of the curriculum re-design team required systematic reflection on our observations of our most recent programming transformation. As a team, we further critiqued our current curriculum and analyzed it against the holistic play-based goals of *Flight* (Makovichuk et al., 2014), the essential holistic skills and playful learning experience characteristics from *The LEGO Foundation* (2017), and various other early-learning frameworks from places such as Ontario and British Columbia (see Best Start Expert Panel on Early Learning, 2007; British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2019). Our team developed a draft

curriculum that we believed to be holistic and encouraged teachers to adopt an authentic play-based approach within their classrooms. My pedagogical transformation advanced quicker upon recognizing the existing discrepancy between allotting time for play and authentically adopting a playful pedagogical approach (Fessha & Pyle, 2016). Although this realization was something I had developed, supporting educators and families in understanding the importance of a playful pedagogical approach was necessary.

Supporting a Playful Pedagogical Approach: Teachers and Parents

As explored in the literature review, children's natural engagement in play further confirms the merit of providing an authentically playful educational experience. Pramling-Samuelsson and Fler (2009) note that play classifies most of a child's experiences. This translates to the inherent support that children bear towards engaging in playful experiences, which I can similarly confirm by my encounters. Within my experiences, teachers and parents, however, exhibited the opposite. They were either unacquainted with a playful approach to learning, reluctant to adopt it, or skeptical of the benefits.

Supporting Teachers. Teachers required additional targeted support in facilitating authentically playful activities and classrooms. Within this educational setting, the teachers viewed play and learning as two separate entities. This was also revealed in the research by Pramling-Samuelsson and Carlsson (2008). Through professional development and in-class support, it was the goal to have educators recognize that teacher-led activities did not have to be delivered through a more traditional and disciplined approach. Teacher-led activities should adhere to the characteristics of a playful learning experience, and in turn, be more engaging for both the teacher and the student. In other words, teacher-led activities should be playful. Figure 2 is the teacher planning sheet that was designed to support ECE teacher planning.

Figure 2*Playful Learning Experience Teacher Planning Sheet*

Playful Learning Experience Title			
Unit of Exploration	<i>What Monthly Unit of Exploration is this Playful Learning Experience for?</i>	Level	<input type="checkbox"/> Pre-Kindergarten <input type="checkbox"/> Junior Kindergarten
Lesson Objective	<i>What will students understand by the end of this Playful Learning Experience?</i>	Curriculum Objectives	<i>What specific learning outcomes from the curriculum are being targeted?</i>
Lesson Description and Timeline		Required Resources	Universal, Targeted, and Individualized Strategies
<i>Describe the sequence of the playful learning experience.</i>		<i>List any resources required and how they support the playful learning experience.</i>	<i>List the universal, targeted, and/or individualized strategies implemented.</i>
Links to the 5 Characteristics of a Playful Learning Experience <i>Explain how your lesson targets each characteristic.</i>			
Iterative			
Socially Interactive			
Meaningful			
Joyful			
Actively Engaging			
Documentation			
<i>Discuss how you will document student learning and how this will be shared with their family. How will each child's documentation be representative of their individual learning journey?</i>			

Note. This figure was produced by Parsons in 2022, a planning sheet for ECE teachers. Adapted from *What we mean by: Learning through play*, by The LEGO Foundation, 2017.

Supporting Parents. Parents required additional education to understand the objectives and resulting benefits of this change. The general consensus toward play that existed between many preschoolers' families directly connects to Demican and Erden's (2015) research. Through my experiences facilitating school tours, individualized program plan (IPP) meetings, and other parent-teacher meetings, many parents based support on teacher-directed and teacher-learning activities (Demican & Erden, 2015). For example, parents would question how targeted specific cognitive-based skills, such as shape and letter recognition, were targeted. The implementation of family play sessions was done as a way to demonstrate to parents that language or fine motor skills can be targeted through a playful approach. Activities within the session included each characteristic of a playful learning experience. This showcased the benefits of learning through a playful approach, which supported the organization's adoption of this philosophy. Ward and Wilcox-Herzog (2019) mention that parents may not hold appropriate DAP beliefs, and these misconceptions can be appropriately addressed through parent play groups. Through including the parents on the journey of understanding and appreciating the playful approach to learning, this can allow for stronger and more collaborative approaches to supporting the growth and well-being of children.

The Prosperities of Walking the Playful Walk

By implementing a playful learning experience for students, this pedagogical approach addresses the essential argument of an overall benefit to teachers and students. This section connects my observed applications of engaging playful learning experiences and how they connect to the development of a child's 21st century skills and promote an inclusive learning environment.

Development of 21st Century Skills

An example of a playful learning experience provided to the children was during the unit on *Structures*. In a junior-kindergarten lesson presented by a teacher, children worked together in groups to build their ideal town using various plastic cups, paper ramps, and other recyclable materials. Children were required to interact with one another due to the nature of this lesson, which made the lesson socially interactive. This targeted communicative and social behaviour goals (Hännikäinen et al., 2014) and challenged children to engage in critical thinking and problem solving (Toub et al., 2016). Through the process of problem-solving, a playful experience can support an iterative process. Children were actively engaged throughout the entire building process, and created a product that was meaningful to them. Targeted numeracy concepts were extended within this playful lesson (Franco et al., 2019) as the children used language such as “tall”, “short”, “big”, and “small”. As such, it was found to be joyful as established by various child requested to repeat the activity once it was concluded.

Supporting Inclusive Education

Children who are diagnosed with a receptive, expressive, or total language delay can participate in and benefit from experiencing playful learning experiences with their peers. For example, one student diagnosed with a severe total language delay was able to participate in the same cup and recyclables building activity delivered in the *Structures* unit. Although this child was unable to verbalize words such as “tall” and “short”, they pointed to the relevant concepts on their aided language board throughout their play. This student was observed to be highly engaged in the activity and was able to be an active participant in the learning process. As discussed within the literature review, open-ended play materials encourages increased social communication (Passmore & Hughes, 2021). This benefits children with diagnosed delays as

similarly demonstrated in this specific case, and allows all children to be active participants in the learning activity.

Shifting Teachers' Perspectives

Just as children hold the inherent perception that play and learning are cohesive activities (Colliver & Fler, 2016; Franco et al., 2019), teachers shifted their perspective towards a similar understanding. This understanding, and the realization that most of a child's activities are considered play (Pramling-Samuelsson & Fler, 2009), supported both my pedagogical shift and the pedagogical shift of other ECE educators. Through understanding how to plan playful learning experiences and target learning objectives, it was easier to remove less actively engaging and joyful activities such as calendar time. As noted within the literature review, calendar time was criticized as having barriers to a child's meaningful participation (Beneke et al., 2008). Whereas, a critical characteristic of a playful learning experience is that the experience itself must be meaningful (The LEGO Foundation, 2017). The shift in teachers' perspectives reveals the appreciation of the playful learning argument.

Summary

My proposal for the successful implementation of a playful approach is supported by the literature. It offers as EBP for ECE organizations, reiterates the importance of relevant and high-quality PD, and is grounded in the importance of deeply understanding the related frameworks. My relevant experiences in putting theory into practice confirms the benefits of a playful pedagogical approach to learning as outlined within the argument of this paper. An authentic playful approach can be more effectively delivered, thus met with less resistance, through educating both parents and teachers. Learning through play and playful learning is, in turn, best practice in ECE. This strengthens my aspirations to continue supporting programs and teachers

in applying a playful learning approach. Through engaging in ongoing professional learning and development, I can increase my understanding and apply what I have learned to support my work in ECE. The final chapter will summarize the presented argument, literature review, and application and provide future implications of playful learning.

Through reviewing the benefits of, implementations of, and perspectives on playful learning within the literature, I have provided a suggested approach for implementing a playful pedagogical approach supported by the literature. My experiences revealed within the application demonstrated the distinguished benefits of adopting a playful approach when organizations work to build capacity of parents and educators. My experiences of this are supported by the literature, and provides as an encouraging confirmation that all children should be provided with high-quality playful learning experiences in ECE.

Chapter Four: Conclusion

In this paper, I argue that implementing a playful pedagogical approach is ideal within the field of ECE. I claim that playful learning is best practice because it promotes the development of 21st century skills and an inclusive classroom environment through actively engaging children's experiences that are more meaningful to them. First, this concluding chapter connects the claims, themes, and ideas presented within the previous chapters. Next, I review how the paper successfully achieves and further progresses the argument for playful learning in ECE. Last, I discuss the theoretical and practical implications of a playful pedagogical approach to learning.

Summary

In chapter one, I discussed what influenced my decision to enter the M.Ed program. My reason for enriching my professional practice connected to my practical redesign of a playful curriculum to similarly enrich ECE program delivery. I reflected on how the key learning moments within the M.Ed program was a positive influence in being an educational leader and implementing curricular change. I referenced the educational philosophers that helped seed the roots of my argument for authentic playful learning in ECE. My significant learning moments within the M.Ed program and practical experience in developing a playful curriculum provided a strong foundation to my argument for providing authentic playful learning in ECE.

In chapter two, I reviewed the literature surrounding playful learning in ECE and revealed the connection to my essential argument. Several themes emerged from the literature review. The first theme is how best practice is defined and presented within ECE. Curricular frameworks, such as *Flight* (Makovichuk et al., 2014), provide a guideline for ECE practitioners to support their implementation of best practice in their classrooms. EBP is used within

curricular frameworks and has a direct impact on teacher practice when presented through PD (Chazan-Cohen et al., 2020). The literature presented evidence that the inclusion of play and playful learning is most commonly done through child-guided methods (Pramling-Samuelsson & Carlsson, 2008), which establishes a strong case for the equal inclusion of playful learning within teacher-led teacher-guided learning methods. The literature review demonstrated the strong appreciation of the benefits to playful learning recognized by the literature, which supports the argument for a playful pedagogical approach. Learning through play is an optimal approach to developing 21st century skills and promoting inclusivity as play exists as an extensive, meaningful, and natural experience within a child's life (Pramling-Samuelsson & Fler, 2009; Eberle, 2014). The literature review concluded by illustrating the strong support towards play held by children (Passmore & Hughes, 2021; Colliver & Fler, 2016) which presented as a strong justification for its inclusion. The perspectives held by both parents and teachers presented within the literature is offered as the pretext to the training provided to ECE educators and parents in chapter three.

The third chapter brought together my educational journey, as the inauguration of my argument, and the existing literature to present my application of a playful pedagogical approach. The application was presented twofold. The first suggested an approach towards adopting authentically playful practice in early childhood. This was strengthened by the findings within the literature and relates to my experiences in doing so. The second component of the application illustrated my experiences in facilitating curricular change and supporting the implementation of a playful learning philosophy as an educational leader. I recognized how my own experiences reveal that adopting a playful learning approach proved to be beneficial. For example, my experiences showed increased active engagement for all students which demonstrates its

promotion of inclusive education. Then, I revealed the necessary parental and educator training required so that all stakeholders can positively influence the outcomes of a playful pedagogical approach.

Implications

Theoretical and practical implications emerge from the presented argument and application within this paper. These implications should be considered by teachers, educational leaders and administrators, curriculum designers, and ECE organizations as a whole. From a theoretical standpoint, ECE practitioners continue to ensure high-quality program delivery and advance their understanding of DAP. Accepted understandings of DAP in ECE continues to change over time as a result of the ongoing research on how children learn best. This influences the related teaching practices implemented by teachers, programs, and the suggested curricular frameworks. Research similarly reveals how teachers can target learning outcomes through a meaningful, actively engaging, joyful, socially interactive, and iterative learning experience (see the Lego Foundation, 2017). This transforms the pre-established view on a child's act of learning and skill development. Learning and play can exist cohesively, and this understanding has the ability to make a difference in learning both inside and outside the field of ECE. Further research on the subject of playful learning in ECE, and beyond, will support curriculum designers, ECE programs, and teachers to better understand how to embody this pedagogical approach. This can provide a positive impact on educational programs to continue to foster inclusivity and promote a learning environment that is the most joyful and effective for both teachers and students.

From a practical standpoint, it is my hope that this paper's argument encourages ECE program leaders to consider the format in which they are teaching their students. Similarly, another goal is for ECE teachers to reflect on the delivery of their curricular outcomes. I am

encouraged that educators and program leaders will seek ways in which curricular outcomes can be addressed through delivering playful learning experiences, rather than through traditional teacher-led methods. Recognizing the need for change and, in turn, changing one's practices can be overwhelming. Through seeing the benefits that playful learning has on students, I hope educators commit to beginning the process of change. Even if the change is small, such as removing the teacher-driven circle time practices within classrooms, it has the ability to make a large and positive impact on fostering a more inclusive and engaging classroom.

Continued research is needed to explore playful learning beyond the ECE classroom to address the gap between the ECE and grade school environment. This will support and encourage that more playful and meaningful learning experiences are offered beyond the child's early years, and for educators to continue to develop their practice in delivering playful learning experiences. Children should receive learning experiences that develop profound skills to support their forward thinking. If this pedagogical approach continues to develop, we will support today's children to develop the necessary skills required to innovate solutions to the increasingly complex problems they will encounter within their adulthood.

References

- Alberta Education. (2022). *Inclusive education*. <https://www.alberta.ca/inclusive-education.aspx>
- Andrade, C. (2019). Benefits of Play for the Social and Emotional Development of Children in Kindergarten. *Capstone Projects and Master's Theses*. 498.
- Bayley, R., (2013). *Supporting child-initiated learning* (S. Featherstone, Ed.). Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Best Start Expert Panel on Early Learning. (2007). *Early learning for every child today: A framework for Ontario early childhood settings*. Ministry of Children and Youth Services.
- Beneke, S. J., Katz, L. G., Ostrosky, M. M. (2008). Calendar time for young children: Good intentions gone awry. *Young Children*, 12-16.
- British Columbia Ministry of Education. (2019). *British Columbia early learning framework*. Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Children and Family Development, & Early Advisory Group.
- Brock, M. E., Farley, K. S., Winterbottom, C. (2018). Evidence-based practices: Providing guidance for early childhood practitioners. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, 32(1), 1-13.
- Buckle, J. (n.d.). *A comprehensive guide to 21st century skills*. Panorama Education. <https://www.panoramaed.com/blog/comprehensive-guide-21st-century-skills>
- Bullock, J. (1990). Child-initiated activity: Its importance in early childhood education. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 18(2), 14-16.
- Buitrago-Flórez, F., Danies, G., Restrepo, S., Hernández, C. (2021). Fostering 21st century competences through computational thinking and active learning: a mixed method study.

International Journal of Instruction, 14(3), 737-754.

Chazan-Cohen, R., Gardner-Neblett, N., Henk, J. K., Rucker, L., Vallotton, C. D. (2021). The what, how, and who, of early childhood professional development (PD): Differential associations of PD and self-reported beliefs and practices. *Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Education*, 42(1), 53-75.

Delaney, K. K. (2018). Negotiating calendar time: 'Best practices' and teacher sense-making in a public pre-Kindergarten classroom. *Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Education*, 39(2), 150-168.

Demircan, Ö., & Erden, F. (2015). Parental involvement and developmentally appropriate practices: a comparison of parent and teacher beliefs. *Early Child Development and Care*, 185(2), 209-225.

Fesseha, E., Pyle, A. (2016). Conceptualising play-based learning from kindergarten teachers' perspectives. *International Journal of Early Years Education*, (24)3, 361-377.

Fleer, M. (2021). Conceptual Playworlds: the role of imagination in play and learning. *Early Years*, 41(4), 353-364.

Franco, J., Orellana, M. F., Franke, M. (2019). 'Castillo blueprint': How young children in multilingual contexts demonstrate and extend literacy and numeracy practices in play. *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy*, 21(3), 361-387.

Friedman, W. J. (2000). The development of children's knowledge of the times of future events. *Child Development*, 71(4), 913-932.

Guttek, G. L. (2015). Friedrich Froebel: Founder of the kindergarten. In G. L. Guttek, *Philosophy and history of education* (pp. 151-170). Pearson Education.

Hännikäinen, M., Poikonen, P., Rasku-Puttonen, H., Salminen, J (2014). Teachers' contribution

to the social life in Finnish preschool classrooms during structured learning sessions.

Early Child Development and Care, 184(3), 416-433.

The LEGO Foundation. (2017, June). *What we mean by: Learning through play*.

https://www.legofoundation.com/media/1062/learningthroughplay_leaflet_june2017.pdf

Lindon, J. (2010). *Child-initiated learning: Positive relationships in the early years*. MA Education Ltd.

Makovichuk, L., Hewes, J., Lirette, P., & Thomas, N. (2014). *Flight: Alberta's early learning and care framework*. <https://www.flightframework.ca>

Mitchell, A. W. (2009, May-June). 4 good reasons why ECE is not just important, but essential. *Exchange: The Early Childhood Leaders' Magazine Since 1978*, 8-11.

National Association for the Education of Young Children. (2020). *Developmentally appropriate practice*. National Association for the Education of Young Children.

OECD, (2021). *Starting strong VI: Supporting meaningful interactions in early childhood education and care*. OECD Publishing.

Parsons, A. (2021). *Final project: From farm to table – an experiential environmental educational approach* [Unpublished assignment submitted for EDUC 5031]. Thompson Rivers University.

Parsons, A. (2021). *Final project: My philosophy of education* [Unpublished assignment submitted for EDUC 5021]. Thompson Rivers University.

Passmore, A. H., Hughes, M. T. (2021). Exploration of play behaviors in an inclusive preschool setting. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 49, 1155-1164.

Pramling-Samuelsson, I., Fler, M. (Eds.) (2009). *Play and learning in early childhood settings: International perspectives*. Springer.

- Pramling-Samuelsson, I. P., Carlsson, M. A., (2008). The playing learning child: Towards a pedagogy of early childhood. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 52(6), 623-641.
- Rand, M. K., & Morrow, L. M. (2021). The contribution of play experiences in early literacy: Expanding the science of reading. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 56(1), 239-248.
- Stanković-Ramirez, Z., & Thompson, J. (2021). What early childhood educators know about developmentally appropriate practice. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 103(2), 20-23.
- Sverdlov, A., & Aram, D. (2016). What are the goals of kindergarten? Teachers' beliefs and their perceptions of the beliefs of parents and of agents of the education system. *Early Education and Development*, 27(3), 352-371.
- The Strong. (2014). *Play Elements*. [Online Image]. The Strong: National Museum of Play. <https://www.museumofplay.org/education/education-and-play-resources/elements-play>
- Toub, T. S., Rajan, V., Golinkoff, R. M., Hirsh-Pasek, K. (2016). Guided play: A solution to the play versus discovery learning dichotomy. In T. S. Toub, V. Rajan, R. M. Golinkoff, K. Hirsh-Pasek, *Evolutionary Perspectives on Child Development and Education* (pp. 117-141). Springer.
- Vogt, F., Hauser, B., Stebler, R., Rechsteiner, K., & Urech, C. (2018). Learning through play – pedagogy and learning outcomes in early childhood mathematics. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 26(4), 589-603.
- Ward, S., Wilcox-Herzog. (2019). Early childhood education curriculum choice: Assessing the interplay between prior beliefs and evidence-based information. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 47, 409-415.
- Woods, A. (2013). *Child-initiated play and learning: Planning for possibilities in the early*

years. Taylor & Francis.