

## Magical Playscape – The Airport

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**“Play is the answer to how anything new comes about.”**

- Jean Piaget

Offering promises of fun and self-expression, the desire to play comes naturally from within each child. Play allows children to test their boundaries and their bodies, to experiment and express, to manage and muse-over, to fantasize and be free. Play serves many functions in a child’s development and it is through play that children learn to make sense of their world. “The more complex the play, the greater the opportunity for children to develop and express their growing understanding of the world” (Gainsley, 2008).

Placed in a preschool room (ages 3-5 respectively) of an Edmonton daycare, I was challenged to facilitate play through the creation of a *Magical Playscape*. Authors Frost and Talbot explain that, “such playscapes extend possibilities; expand awareness; transcend the common; and enhance opportunities for children to wonder, create and experiment, and thus to grow” (1989, p. 15).

During my placement there was a wave of absentees as many children vacationed with their families. As each child returned with unique stories of their travels and their destinations, excitement in the room grew. Coinciding this, elements of vacations were emerging in their free-play: wooden unit blocks transformed into passenger trains, cardboard tubes launched into the sky, and in the sand box pigs sizzled and roasted on hot Luau spits. Following their lead, I felt that an airport would be an interesting extension for the interests they had been exhibiting. My goal in creating this airport was to build a space where each child was welcome, felt supported, and free to play within the given space or to recreate it; I wanted them to feel unencumbered by adult rules or boundaries and to find within this area their own “magical state of being” (p. 14).

‘Real-ness’ was found throughout: in the travel magazines, various time-zone clocks, global maps, and the luggage: ranging from a child’s Disney suitcase to the gargantuan green case which most of the children struggled to carry. A large cardboard box, opened with streams of flagging at both ends, served well for a security scanner and was thoroughly utilized as children ran luggage through it. It was suggested, after one child tried to scan himself through the contraption, that I might create an MRI machine as well. The true highlight of the play space was the two driving consoles. Completely ‘child-scaled’, they further incorporated the elements of ‘real-ness’ and ‘novelty’: from the light switches and LCD screen to the thermostat and the padlock – all familiar items that are usually unavailable for curious young minds.

A wonderful sense of “place-ness” was achieved through the atmosphere and how the children responded within it. This airport was my first experience of truly seeing children fully and completely engaged in their play – it continually transformed, becoming a travel agency, a bus, a train, a space ship, a destination, and it created more potential for dramatic play throughout the classroom. With minimal facilitation, children discovered many positions they could hold within the airport, though I especially enjoyed observing the continuous stream of conversation between the pilot and the control tower as the plane constantly crashed into mountains causing ‘fix-er planes’ and ‘helper planes’ to be sent out. Luckily no one was ever hurt.

E (pilot): “The orange light is flashing, that means *emmm-ergencee*. Oh no! The plane is broken.”

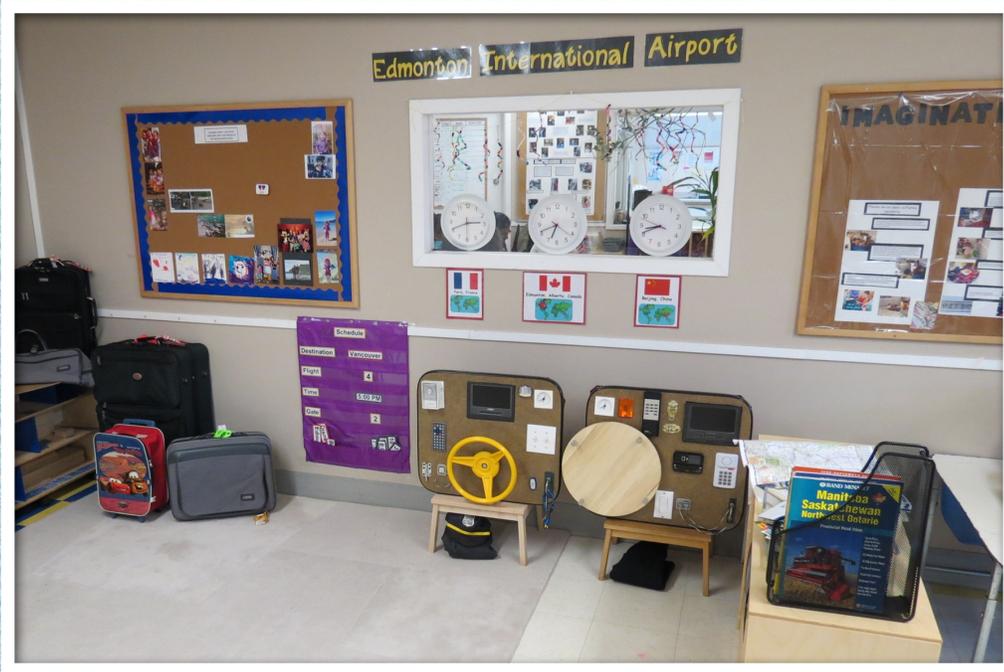
Z (control tower): “That means we must be in a *gie-normous* crash!

Play flowed freely from the airport through to the dramatic centre as families packed their bags and set off on vacations to “warm Calgary”, the “Arctic waters” (for fishing excursions), and other destinations. This playscape also opened up the door for communication with families who shared some of the narrations that had been coming home. Frost and Talbot note that “when an object or environment is open to many interpretations and uses, the child holds the power to tell it what it is to be or do, rather than it giving the child some preconceived “correct” way to perceive or act” (1989, p. 6).

As a student in the ELCC program, looking towards a career working with young children, this space denotes what I hope is evident in my attitude: “as part of a rich and abundant universe, I support you fully” (Frost & Talbot, 1989, p. 11)

#### References

- Frost, J., & Talbot, J. (1989). Magical playscapes. *Childhood Education* , 66 (1), 11-19.
- Gainsley, S. (2008). Learning environments that support complex play. *Extensions* , 22 (3).



Week  
Three



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