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Running Head: Risk Taking In Early Childhood

Appropriate Risk with Two and Three Year Olds

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A School Improvement Project

EDU635: Capstone

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Abstract

The focus of this school improvement plan was to explore existing research and data on the benefits and concerns present when allowing young children to play with toys and natural items in the outdoor environment that expose them to more risk. Based on that information, a plan was made to thoughtfully add some appropriate risky play elements to the outdoor playground at the Iowa State Child Development Laboratory School over the duration of one school year. By adding these elements, opportunities for growth of large motor skills and overall learning and development may occur. To assess growth, two assessment tools - the Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ) and Teaching Strategies Gold (TSG) - are completed once at the beginning of the year and again at the end of the year. The questions posed from adding more risk are as follows: Does the change in learning occur because of adding these opportunities for risky play? Does more risk create more injuries that are cause for concern or is it just part of the learning process?

Key words: Early childhood education, Appropriate risk

Introduction

In the field of early childhood, there are many regulations that dictate what can and cannot happen with children in childcare centers. Rules are important and serve the purpose of keeping children safe overall. However, directives don't always work in every situation. Rules around playground safety are beginning to inhibit young children's natural tendencies to take chances and risks in their play (Gray, 2014; Little & Swaller, 2014).

Children need to be able to take small risks that will help them make better choices as they grow. This is shown as early as infancy (Bransford, 2000, p. 84). For example, when an infant begins to crawl and explore their world, there are a number of risks the infant will naturally encounter. The first time the infant tries to climb up on a low mat for example, there is a risk that the infant may lose their balance and tumble down. But if the mobile infant makes it up one mat, the infant likely will try for the next. At this point the infant might tumble, get scared from the fall, and it might hurt a little. The knowledge children gain from taking risks is important in helping gauge abilities, keeping them from serious injury, and making important choices about risks children may consider taking that are outside of their ability (Hansen-Sandseter & Sando, 2016).

The purpose of this school improvement plan is to explore ways, through investigation and team collaboration, to add more appropriate risk to the two and three year old playground. It will be completed at the Iowa State Child Development Lab School with 12 two and three year olds. Children have a natural curiosity and ability to take a calculated amount of risk. Research will show arguments that support allowing risky play as well as draw attention to the concerns. The goal in the end is to find a

balanced approach to allowing developmentally appropriate risky play within the constraints of the written rules.

Literature Review

The Value of Play

The basis of early childhood education is play. Play is engaging, amusing, or occupying oneself in a variety of activities (Mirriam-Webster, n.d., 2020). Play offers many important benefits and is a medium for learning within all developmental domains (Jung & Jin, 2014).

Outdoor spaces provide diverse learning opportunities for play and incorporate a variety of learning domains. A Scandinavian study found that children who had access to traditional outdoor play spaces played in more versatile ways and showed greater improvement in motor ability nine months later (Brussoni, et al, 2012). Play options outdoors can be; running, jumping, imaginative/dramatic play, building, digging, swinging, and climbing, and give children the opportunity to develop physical and social skills while building reasoning and observation skills (Munroe & Mansell, 2013). The variety of outdoor opportunities allows all modes of children's development to build and keep children physically healthy at the same time (Little & Wyver, 2008). Outdoor environments, whether natural or specifically designed playgrounds are the most instinctive environments for children to move, experiment and explore, be themselves, and develop all areas of growth in the least restricted way (Little & Wyver, 2008).

Children are natural explorers in their world. Children play, investigate, solve problems, and take risks to build their skills. Play has long been acknowledged as an important context for children's learning and development, especially in early childhood

(Little & Wyver, 2008). In all cultures, play is intrinsically motivated and is indeed a dominant activity for children (Brussoni, Olsen, Pike, & Sleet, 2012). As children play and interact in the environment, children are able to understand their body's movement, which leads to gaining body control and mastery (Little & Wyver, 2008).

When considering play-based environments for children, the abilities of toddlers, preschool, and school-aged children differ dramatically in all areas. Therefore, it is important that play is tailored to specific abilities regarding the type of materials and layout of equipment (Public Playground Safety Handbook, 2015). The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child signifies play as an essential part of every child's life. Article 31 supports a child's "right to rest and leisure, and to participate in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child" (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 1990).

Risky Play

The word risk typically has a strong negative connotation associated with it (Jost, Yost, Mikus & Ghiasi Ghorveh, 2016). However, risk could simply mean there is the potential for harm (Jost et al, 2016). According to McFarland & Laird (2017) risky play is defined as, "a thrilling and exciting activity that includes some risk of injury. Often, risky play provides children with opportunities to challenge themselves, test limits, explore boundaries and learn to make decisions about injury and risk" (p. 159). During outdoor play, when challenging and risky play opportunities are presented, children are able to test limits of their physical, intellectual, and social development (Little & Wyver, 2008). According to occupational therapist Angela Hanscom, risky play gives children sensory input to prepare for learning and to become sturdy on their feet (Jost et al, 2016).

The outdoor environment is an ideal place for risky play and the need for it is research indicated (Brussoni, Olsen, Pike, & Sleet, 2012). An Australian study showed that 74% of children ages 48 – 64 months old, chose the more challenging playground equipment when given a choice (Brussoni, et al, 2012). Researchers have found that children spend less time with peers when the child is not as competent in gross motor abilities because the child plays less often on large playground equipment (Little & Wyver, 2008). Teachers find that children who were more confident as physical risk-takers in the outdoor environment, were also more likely to be risk takers during indoor activities (Little & Wyver, 2008). Children with confidence in risk taking tend to be more successful problem solvers in multiple areas of development.

Appropriate risk

Appropriate risk allows children to explore freely in adventurous play (Almon, 2013). Children generate curiosity and questions that allow natural problem solving. Children seek out challenges and persist to solve those problems because understanding is motivating in its own right (Bransford, J., & National Research Council (U.S.), 2000). Appropriate risky play allows children to problem solve, assess skill level, and matches them to the demands of the environment (Almon, 2013).

Appropriate risky play also allows children to fail (McFarland & Laird, 2017). When failure occurs, children find alternate ways to solve the problem. Many studies have shown how beneficial physical activity is on brain development and various aspects of cognition like problem solving (Lu & Montague, 2016). Motivation is developed as children learn to master new challenges and accomplish goals (McFarland & Laird,

2017). A sense of achievement and positive self-esteem grows, developing a stronger sense of self for the child (Hansen-Sandseter & Sando, 2016).

Studies conducted in Norwegian countries indicate that early-childhood education and care (ECEC) practitioners view risky play positively. ECEC practitioners allow risk taking in children's play and acknowledge the importance of physically active play for children's overall development (Hansen-Sandseter & Sando, 2016). As children engage in risky play they are learning life lessons about what is safe and what is not. Engaging in risky play gradually allows children to master challenges comfortably (Hansen-Sandseter & Sando, 2016). "On one hand, we want to keep children as safe as possible. On the other they suggest, learning to take risks is a normal part of childhood and child development" (Hansen-Sandseter & Sando, 2016, p. 1). Minimizing risk makes sense but it will always be a part of life (Jost et al, 2016).

Children naturally seek out risky play

Risky play offers children fun, enjoyment, excitement, thrills, and pride. Children have described risky play as fun and that the fear of it was exciting (Hansen-Sandseter & Sando, 2016). Research is abundant on children's testimony showing preschool aged children can accurately recall and narrate past events and are able to relate and express emotions during those events (Di Norcia, Bombi, Cannoni, & Marano, 2018). Children are able to make connections during events when strong emotions are tied to it, thus the ability to recall it later.

Physical risk-taking behavior (PRTB), choosing to do something that could cause injury to oneself when there are less dangerous alternative options, is being studied in depth. (Di Norcia et al, 2018). Learning how to manage risky situations is valuable to

life. Some children are more likely to engage in risk, while others avoid it (Sandseter, 2010). Studies have shown that gender, age, temperament, and dependence on peer pressure play a role in connection to PRTB. (Di Norcia et al, 2018). These individual characteristics within each child impacts decisions made by the child when involved in risky play and understanding how the child can influence the play is important (Morrongiello & Lasenby-Lessard, 2007). According to Berry & Schwebel (2009), single traits do not emerge in isolation. Instead, the contributions of those inborn temperaments and personality characteristics are highly complex and lead to an understanding of why some children are more prone to take risks than others.

The Reversal Theory is a psychological theory of human motivation and emotion that focuses on feeling paratelic (playful) and telic (serious) states (Sandseter, 2010). An individual may feel thrill and excitement when facing risk, or retreat and recognize the danger that could be present. Within these states, the uncertainty of being on the edge between danger and facing the possibility of being hurt or injured is an important part of the mixed emotional experience of risky play (Sandseter, 2010). Sometimes children took specific risks in play primarily for the pleasant emotions aroused by mastering risks the child did not think should attempt be attempted (Hansen Sandseter & Sando, 2016). Children will intentionally add risk to their play in order to create more of a self-stimulating emotional arousal. Adding risky attributes to children's play such as increasing the speed or height at which they are playing, balancing on the edge of fear, or acting rashly during play (Hansen Sandseter & Sando, 2016) adds to the paratelic state of play. In a study released in 2015 by Niehues, Bundy, Broom, and Tranter, parents were interviewed and completed a survey about how much they allow their children to take

risks based on their own experiences with risk growing up. The results showed that parents who allowed their children to engage in developmentally appropriate risk, had children that were better able to move between telic and paratelic states. In addition, the researchers concluded that risk and uncertainty are necessary for healthy development of resilience, happiness, and overall well-being (Niehues et al, 2015).

Adult fears for children's safety

Although some research supports appropriate risky play for children, other research has arguments and concerns against it. In the western world, risk has a very negative view and is something that should be avoided so individuals are not blamed for the consequences of their actions (Niehues et al, 2015). Parents lack confidence when considering allowing their child to engage in risky play, even when the parents are completely aware of the benefits for their child's development (Jelleyman, McPhee, Brussoni, Bundy, & Duncan, 2019). A survey conducted in the United Kingdom found although 91% of the adults questioned recognized the importance of outdoor play, 60% stated concerns about the safety of their children when playing in public places (Little & Wyver, 2008). Allowing children to take risks can create apprehension and tension for some adults.

There is definite reason for caregiver concern. In recent years, emergency room visits for children that were injured or hurt on public playgrounds is estimated at more than 200,000 (Public Playground Safety Handbook, 2015). A report submitted to the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) showed a study of 2,691 playground equipment-related incident reports from 2001-2008 indicated falls as the most common hazard pattern (44% of injuries) (Public Playground Safety Handbook, 2015).

“Unintentional injury accounts for over a third of all deaths of children under the age of 15 years and for a large majority of all nonfatal childhood injuries,” (Berry & Schwebel, 2009, p. 1381). Specifically, children ages two to six years old suffer the largest number of major injuries when considering children ages zero through fourteen years old (Di Norcia et al, 2018). Many studies have recognized multiple individual, interpersonal, and environmental factors that contribute to injury risk and are associated with allowing appropriate risk (Berry & Schwebel, 2009).

Within our growing culture of litigation, educators and caregivers are concerned about being held responsible for injuries to children in their care (McFarland & Laird, 2017). Administrators, directors, and principals worry about the liability for serious injuries of children during outdoor play or recess (Findley, 2017). Early childhood education staff who limit the amount of risky play due to rules and litigation measures to ensure children’s safety continues to increase (Hansen-Sandseter & Sando, 2016). Participation in what used to be considered risky play, is becoming teacher directed, closely supervised, low risk activities (Jelleyman, C., McPhee, J., Brussoni, M., Bundy, A., & Duncan, S., 2019).

Results of decreased opportunities for risky play

Evidence supports the need for risk on playgrounds. However, the consequence of child injuries and litigation is indeed creating a situation of less opportunity to offer risky play (Jelleyman et al, 2019). A steady decline in children's opportunities for play, and particularly outdoor play has been seen in recent decades (Little & Wyver, 2008). A study in China found that before the 1980s, Chinese early childhood education classrooms typically utilized natural resources and created hand-made toys. The Chinese

educators embraced a naturalistic approach basing most of their days play outside of the classroom (Hu, Li, De Marco, & Chen, 2015). However since then, economic reform has changed the nature of children's play, how children play, and what children play with in regards to toys and other play based options (Hu et al, 2015).

The problem with the decrease of outdoor risky play opportunities for children is that their habits of play are changing, which has subsequent effects on mental and physical health (Brussoni, Olson, Pike, & Sleet, 2012). This decrease in risky play includes a subsequent loss of personal control, which is needed to assess self-appropriate risk (Brussoni et al, 2012). Children who are risk-deprived are more likely to experience a variety of negative health concerns such as obesity, perception, and judgment skills (Brussoni et al, 2012).

“From a wider perspective, this change affects the possibilities for children's play, development, and learning” (Hansen-Sandseter & Sando, 2016, p. 194). Experiences such as climbing, sledding and sliding, playing in and near water, and playing in generally less challenging environments take away the thrill and excitement of play (Hansen-Sandseter & Sando, 2016). Restrictions are eliminating the opportunity for children to enhance their own ability to learn how to manage risky situations and constitute a loss of important experiences children seek in play (Hansen-Sandseter & Sando, 2016).

Quality supervision is key

All outdoor play areas pose some level of risk (Munroe & Mansell, 2013) and risky play can lead to injury; there is no debating that. However, statistics show the most serious injuries are rare (Hansen-Sandseter & Sando, 2016). Children are limited in

many cognitive and motor skills until age eight (Di Norcia, et al. 2018). When children ages four to seven were asked to list safety rules, most children could only recall a small number of those rules presented. That fact reveals by guardians telling children what the rules are does not necessarily coincide with compliance (Di Norcia, et al., 2018). Young children are more likely to try riskier behaviors having a higher likelihood to result in injuries (Di Norcia, et al. 2018).

Supervision plays a key role in keeping children safe (Hansen-Sandseter & Sando, 2016). The need for quality and attentive supervision of young children has to be in place. Supervisors and caregivers must have a strong knowledge base about safe play behavior to be a quality caretaker (Public Playground Safety Handbook, 2015). It is the caregiver's job to keep children as safe as possible when they are engaging in risky play.

Finding a balance

A study completed in 1998 by Lois Brink, a licensed landscape architect from the University of Colorado, found that adding boulders to natural playgrounds showed no additional injuries. There was much debate about adding this "risky" element to the playground and today many playgrounds have boulders (Yost et al, 2016). Children seek out appropriate challenge and will create that challenge in a more dangerous manner in low-risk environments (Munroe & Mansell, 2013). Creating sterile and unstimulating outdoor play spaces may cause more injury as children look for opportunities to satisfy the thrill aspect of the activities (Little & Wyver, 2008). Adults who respond with fear limit risky play opportunities for children, denying children the possibility to learn about risk and how to manage it in the real world (Little & Wyver, 2008).

It has been shown injuries will happen (Public Playground Safety Handbook, 2015). But that doesn't mean removing all of the hazards is the answer. Rather, it is supervision that is key. Supervision ensures the safety of children as they approach hazards and plan how to take appropriate risks when considering their own skill set (Little & Wyver, 2008). In addition, adult participation with children is a great way to model good, healthy habits. Research has shown that teachers who show enthusiasm and participate in children's physical activities have a greater impact on the children's healthy perspective of play and risk taking habits overall (Lu & Montague, 2015).

Data Collection

The focus of this school improvement plan is to selectively and responsibly add additional appropriate risky play opportunities for two and three year olds in the outdoor environment. As those elements are added, research will be conducted to track two things specifically; the number of incident reports that occur when adding certain elements and the increase in learning over the course of the school year. Quantitative data has been documented regarding the current gross motor opportunities within the outdoor play area and the number of incident reports for the current year related to outdoor play.

Lab school current risky large motor options are:

- running anywhere on the playground,
- jumping off limestone retraining walls and low stairs,
- yellow slide on grassy area to slide down or climb up because it is simply laying on the ground that is slanted to give it some angle,
- dome shaped mats and other tumbling mats (no higher than 18") for low climbing

- and rolling over, they are allowed to stand on them as long as they are on the grass,
- climbing cube – not able to get on top of it because of lack of appropriate cushioning but they can pull up on it and stand on the circular holes on the sides,
 - climbing on railings by bridges and stairs where there is dirt or grass underneath,
 - riding tricycles and scooters and allowing feet off the peddles while going down short hills to gain more speed,
 - stacking a variety of textured blocks as high as they can reach, caution children when knocking towers over,
 - sliding on stairs in the winter – reminding children to hang on to railing as needed if unsure when going up, and
 - toddler teeter totter.

The Lab School's perspective is to start with a safe space and then add appropriate risk as developmentally appropriate for each group of children and supervise with precision. Documentation in the form of a Playground Inspection Form is completed monthly to ensure that basic level of a safe space and is based on guidance from the Public Playground Safety Handbook (2015) (See Appendix A). The timeline of how new risk is added will likely change slightly from year to year as the groups of children change each August.

Accident report findings that were filed from August 2019 – March 2020 in a classroom of 11 – two and three year olds are the following:

- one child was pushing a dump truck on the ground and the bucket flipped up scratching the child's face,

- one child was climbing up the steps of the pergola when snow was on it and tripped up bumping forehead on the step,
- one child was walking along the limestone wall like a balance beam and fell forward causing a bump and bruise on forehead,
- one child pinched an index finger in the playhouse door,
- one child jumped off the retaining wall and lost balance backwards hitting the back of the head, and
- three children were reported to be running and tripped just from a loss of balance. Of those reports, two ended up with scraped knees and the third bit lip. All caused some bleeding that was controlled with a paper towel and ice pack or band-aid.

What the rules say

According to the Public Playground Safety Handbook (2015), the following are examples of age appropriate equipment for ages two to five: Certain climbers (reference 5.3.2 in the handbook for clarification), ramps, rung ladders, single file step ladders, slides (Reference 5.3.2 in the handbook for clarification), spring rockers, stairways, swings – belt, full bucket seats (two to four years), and rotating tires.

Further rules within the Public Playground Safety Handbook give guidelines for appropriate fall zones and surfacing (six feet parameter under any climbing equipment that is higher than 18”), monitoring for potential playground hazards such as entrapment, impalement, tripping, sharp points or edges, and crushing or shearing points, as well as overall general upkeep of the playground. Most of the items listed in the bullets above

would require a large enough space for the appropriate fall zone and surfacing which will limit some additions of appropriate risk at the Lab School.

In collaboration with Lab School Administration and Labs One and Two Teaching Staff, the following were shared as ideas of ways to add more appropriate risk to challenge children socially, physically, and cognitively:

- running with push toys such as shopping carts,
- climbing low trees,
- allowing children to begin going on the manufactured climber in small groups for supervision as teachers feel they are developmentally ready,
- adding dress clothes on the pergola,
- allowing lightweight toys and toys with no wheels to go up and down stairs of the pergola,
- scrounge box of materials (planks of wood, tires, a variety of seed pods, collectibles from children),
- big tree trunk stumps to push and pull around,
big tree trunk that could be cut and laid on the ground as a way to climb,
- hammocks – child sized so there’s no fall zone needed (less than 18”),
- rope climbing walls (would need a fall zone or padded mat to comply with regulations), and
- add spring rockers that are low enough to the ground to avoid needing a fall zone but high enough to still provide appropriate risk.

School Improvement Plan

Given data, research on the importance of appropriate risk for development, and collaboration with administration and teachers at the Child Development Lab School, a timeline was developed and will be implemented to increase the amount of appropriate risk options for two and three year olds at the Lab School. Appropriate risk options allow for further challenges and learning and can be directly linked to Teaching Strategies Gold (TSG) and the Ages and Stages Questionnaires (ASQ, 30 month) that will be used to measure learning outcomes while monitoring safety aspects at the same time. Both TSG and ASQ's are forms of child assessment tools used in the early childhood field.

Table 1

Timeline for Increasing Appropriate Risk Options for Two and Three Year Olds

Date of implementation	Addition of items or adjustments being made to the outdoor environment	TSG and ASQ connections	Description and details
September 15, 2020 – December 15, 2020	Add a scrounge box of materials with wooden planks, small tires, a variety of seed pods, and nature collectibles from children	TSG: 7, 11, 12, 13, 14, 24, 27 ASQ: N/A	Scrounge materials will be added to the playground environment for children to explore freely when they choose. Children can build, create dramatic play, add other toys already available to these play options, investigate, etc. Scrounge materials are open-ended which allows for creative problem solving and new ways to create child initiated risk.
September 15, 2020 – December 15, 2020	Allow lightweight toys and toys with no wheels to go up and down stairs of the pergola	TSG: 4, 5, 11, 12, 13, 14, 32 ASQ: Gross Motor 2, 3, 5	At the lab school is a pergola with two sets of stairs going up to the landing. Allowing toys on the pergola increases the chance of tripping because children can be transporting toys up or down the stairs. A hand railing is available on both sides of the stairs for children to

Date of implementation	Addition of items or adjustments being made to the outdoor environment	TSG and ASQ connections	Description and details
		Personal-Social 3	use, especially for children who show signs of still being unstable on the stairs. While this is a safety concern, real learning that can happen if the regular playground toys are allowed up and down and supervision is maintained. The reason for allowing these toys up and down is so children can extend their play in a variety of ways. If children take books up to read to baby dolls in a “pretend bed”, then they are extending their dramatic play and relating to home and how they live for example. If children take a ball up the stairs then watch it roll/bounce down, the children are learning about gravity and cause and effect.
January 15, 2021 – April 15, 2021	Add big tree trunk stumps for pushing and pulling	TSG: 6,11, 27 ASQ: Personal-Social 3	Because of the fall zone requirement, children will not be allowed to stand on these trunks unless they are moved to a place with the appropriate fall zone or mats are placed around them. The purpose of adding the tree trunks is for large motor movement of pushing and pulling. Children may adapt their play in other ways as they utilize the tree stumps.
January 15, 2021 – April 15, 2021	Add dress clothes on the pergola	TSG: 4, 5, 11, 14, 30, 36 ASQ: Communication 3 Gross Motor 2, 5 Personal-Social 4,5	Dress clothes are typically kept off of the pergola because of the possibility of tripping over longer pants or dresses. But that limits their ability to extend their dramatic play to other areas of the playground. So, by adding the dress clothes there is an element of risk that creates an opportunity for problem solving of how to manage going up and down with the longer dress clothes on. It also allows for extending dramatic play opportunities.

Date of implementation	Addition of items or adjustments being made to the outdoor environment	TSG and ASQ connections	Description and details
January 15, 2021 – April 15, 2021	Allow running with push toys such as shopping carts and other push toys on the sidewalk	TSG: 4, 12 ASQ: Gross Motor 1 Personal-Social 3	Some children find much thrill and excitement from running while pushing shopping carts and other push toys. There is a level of risk involved due to speed when running and making something with wheels go fast. Always monitor areas on playgrounds that may have small bumps in the sidewalk that may catch the push toy causing it to flip and the child getting hurt.
May 1, 2021 – August 1, 2021	Allow climbing of low trees	TSG: 5, 11, 26 ASQ: Problem Solving 2	This must be done with close supervision and mats underneath to provide a fall zone. Some children are more capable of scaling their body up a tree trunk while others are not. Staff must know their children's capabilities well in order to complete this, which is why it is being added at the end of the school year at the Lab School.
May 1, 2021 – August 1, 2021	Begin allowing children to go on the manufactured climber in small groups as teachers feel children are developmentally ready and with close supervision	TSG: 2, 3, 5, 11 ASQ: Problem Solving 2	The manufactured climber at the Lab School is made for two year olds and above. By the end of the school year, the majority of the children in the Lab Two classroom are almost all three. The climber allows for further exploration and development of gross motor skills, problem solving, and social skills.
May 1, 2021 – August 1, 2021	Add hammocks	TSG: 1, 5 ASQ: N/A	Hammocks will be added to allow children to experience balancing their whole bodies while swinging gently or more vigorously depending on preference. Hammocks will be purchased to be close enough to the ground and will not need a fall zone other than making sure the hammock is on a grassy area.

Other items will be implemented as they become available, money is available, or both. These include; spring rockers that are low enough to the ground to avoid needing a fall zone but high enough to still provide appropriate risk, a big tree trunk that could be cut and laid on the ground as a way to climb, and a rope climbing wall. A step-by-step process to ensure proper supervision of new areas of risk will be provided. The step-by-step process allows time to review incidents before adding more options for appropriate risky play. Adjustments may need to be made as the reviews happen by teachers and administration.

Incident reports will be tracked every 3 months to determine adequate risk or too much risk as incident reports show. The data will show if there is a correlation between injuries and the new risks, and if any child or children are particularly prone to injuries from certain additions. The following spreadsheet will be used to document incident reports with the “Added risk” column changing as scheduled above:

Table 2

Data Collection for Incident Reports Resulting from Newly Added Risks

Added risk	Incident report?	Date & Which Child?	Brief details of what happened
Scrounge Materials	Y/N		
Toys on pergola stairs	Y/N		

Measures

The benefit of adding appropriate risk for young children has been supported by research showing that it can improve children’s overall development (Hansen-Sandseter

& Sando, 2016). Specific areas thought to be impacted positively are physical, intellectual, and social skills (Little & Wyver, 2008). To monitor and to show growth in these three specific areas, the Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ) and Teaching Strategies Gold (TSG) online checkpoints will be completed. Parents will complete the ASQ and teaching staff will complete the TSG checkpoints. The assessment tools will be completed by September 15th and again the following July by the 31st before the children move to their preschool rooms. The scores reflecting children's growth in gross motor, cognitive, and social areas over a ten and a half month period will be correlated with the added appropriate risk play experiences.

Conclusion

Play is a critical component of young children's daily lives. Within that play, certain levels of risky play are needed for children to further their overall development. Children have an innate tendency to test their abilities by taking risks naturally. Many playgrounds today are minimizing risky opportunities due to minor injuries and fear of litigation. A goal is to find a balanced approach to allowing risky play within the constraints of the written rules. Children need to remain challenged appropriately but not so much that serious injuries occur.

At the Lab School, appropriate materials and certain risky behaviors will be allowed to increase risky play. With adequate supervision and assessments to measure growth and development, the goal of this school improvement plan is to monitor and see with quantitative data from TSG and ASQ's, that appropriate risky play is beneficial and necessary for young children. This school improvement plan can show that risk taking can happen with young children and that it does have a positive

outcome on learning and development.

Within the research found about appropriate risk and playground safety, minimal research was found on risk taking specifically with children ages birth through five. Most of the research is geared toward preschool and school aged children. Further studies need to be completed on risk taking with the youngest children so teachers and staff in early childhood classrooms have informed data when considering adding more risky play to their playgrounds.

Resources

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APPENDIX A: PLAYGROUND INSPECTION FORM

<u>Surfacing</u>	OK	IF NOT OK, COMMENTS OR ACTIONS TO BE TAKEN
1. Safety surface depth sufficient (12")?	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
2. Inadequate safety surface material (other than ASTM surfacing material)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
3. Does safety surface comply with ADA?	<input type="checkbox"/>	___ Yes ___ No ___ Don't Know
4. Poor drainage area (standing water) or potential problems?	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
5. Areas of compaction, kick-out, or wear have been leveled or repaired?	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
6. Sidewalks, paved surfaces, steps, and platforms have been swept or cleaned of loose surface materials and debris?	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
 <u>General Hazards</u>		
1. There are no sharp points, corners, or edges?	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
2. There are no protrusions or projections?	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
3. There are no pinch points, crush points, or exposed moving parts?	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
4. Potential clothing entanglement hazards have been eliminated?	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
5. There are no missing or damaged protective caps or plugs?	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
6. Hanging tree branches have been trimmed (6' clearance)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
7. Fall zones not per CPSC (6' perimeter all directions)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
8. Openings < 3 1/2" or > 9" to prevent head entrapment?	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
9. Footings exposed, cracked or loose in ground?	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
10. Trip hazards, broken glass, trash, ropes, tree roots or foreign objects in play area have been removed?	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
 <u>Play Structures</u>		
1. Broken supports or anchors?	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
2. Pipe ends missing plugs or caps?	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
3. Broken or missing rails/rungs/steps?	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
4. Protruding bolt heads or threads?	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
5. Loose, missing, worn or rusted bolts/nuts/or other fasteners?	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
6. Broken clamps?	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
7. Peeling or chipped paint?	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
8. Entrapment/pinch or crush points?	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
9. Vinyl coated decks/platforms/steps have visible cracks or peeling?	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____

10. Excessive wear of any component/slide part? _____

11. Wooden equipment is free of splinters, checking, large cracks, warping, and rot? _____

12. General condition/appearance? _____ Good _____ Fair _____ Poor

Swings

1. Broken, twisted, worn, rusted chain? _____

2. Inadequate (non-commercial) chain? _____

3. Worn, rusted or broken swing hangers? _____

4. Open, worn or rusted "S" hooks (dime will not pass through)? _____

5. Grommets show wear or rust? _____

6. Missing, worn or cracked swing seats? _____

7. Inadequate fall zone around swings? _____

8. Swing frame damaged? _____

9. Swing chain wrapped around top rail? _____

10. Safety surface worn or scattered? _____

11. Loose, missing or protruding bolts? _____

12. General condition/appearance? _____ Good _____ Fair _____ Poor

Slides

1. Slide bedways have imperfections? _____

2. Handrails loose or missing? _____

3. Steps broken or missing, or flaws/cracks? _____

4. Sit down transition platform present? _____

5. Safety rails or sit-down canopy at bedway entry present? _____

6. Slide exit parallel to ground? _____

7. Safety surface at slide exit has been leveled or repaired? _____

8. Fall zone adequate on all sides? _____

9. General condition/appearance? _____ Good _____ Fair _____ Poor

Freestanding Climbers/Monkey Bars

1. Not free-fall design? _____

2. Loose or broken rails or rungs? _____

3. Need painting? _____

4. Tire worn, cut or broken? _____

5. Plastic structures are free of holes and cracks? _____

6. General condition/appearance? _____ Good _____ Fair _____ Poor

Inspected By: _____ Time: _____ Date: _____