Unfreezing Disney's *Frozen* through Playful and Intentional Co-authoring/Co-playing

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Abstract

Often children's opportunities to play are constrained by particular interpretations of play that instrumentalize its value in the service of adult-defined, future-oriented goals for children. As an alternative, we draw upon specific theoretical insights of play and playfulness, to closely examine the power of the present and past in childhood and adulthood, through ongoing play episodes created and re-created by co-playing, co-authoring

adults and children. This particular playing collective takes up common popular cultural scripts embedded in the film *Frozen*, and through intertextual and multimodal adventuring, indoors and out, reveal emergent and playful uncertainties and potentialities that can occur when children and adults are committed to play as "a thing by itself" (Huizinga, 1950, p. 45).

Keywords: play, playfulness, co-playing, *Frozen*, popular culture, outdoor adventuring, multimodal learning

Résumé

Les occasions de jeu offertes aux enfants sont souvent tributaires de certaines interprétations du jeu qui en instrumentalisent la valeur au service de buts définis par des adultes et orientés vers l'avenir. En quête d'une solution de rechange, les auteurs puisent plutôt dans des théories sur le jeu et le ludisme afin d'analyser soigneusement le pouvoir du présent et du passé dans l'enfance et à l'âge adulte à travers des épisodes de jeu récurrents créés et recréés par des adultes et des enfants jouant et inventant ensemble. Ce collectif de jeu particulier reprend des scénarios culturels populaires inscrits dans le film *Frozen* et, à travers des aventures intertextuelles et intermodales se déroulant à l'extérieur et à l'intérieur, révèle de nouvelles incertitudes et potentialités ludiques qui peuvent surgir quand des enfants et des adultes s'engagent dans le jeu « comme une chose en soi » (Huizinga, 1950, p. 45).

Mots-clés : jeu, ludisme, collectif de jeu, *Frozen*, culture populaire, aventure en plein air, apprentissage multimodal

Play, Playfulness, and Early Learning and Childcare Curricula in Canada

Across Canada, within early childhood practice, policy, and research, there has been an intensified focus on the possibilities of play and playful early learning and childcare pedagogies. This is evidenced, in part, with the emergence of provincial/territorial curriculum initiatives in early learning and childcare across Canada, and specifically the creation and implementation of mandated early learning curriculum frameworks for educators of children from birth to four or five years of age.[1] These frameworks highlight/materialize play, and in some cases playfulness, as a pedagogic value and practice. In New Brunswick and Alberta, the curriculum-support document *Play and Playfulness* (Ashton, Stewart, Hunt, Nason, and Scheffel (2009) details one of four broad-based learning goals that inform provincial curricula and practices in both provinces (Early Childhood Research Team University of New Brunswick, 2008; Makovichuk, Hewes, Lirette, & Thomas, 2014).[2] In *Play and Playfulness* the image of the playful child is described as follows:

> At play, children are empowered to learn on their own terms, in their own ways, and in their own times. This freedom is what distinguishes play from other activities. Play allows children to take initiative, test their physical and mental limits, explore positions of power & questions of good & evil, use words & other symbols to transform the world, creating worlds where they can act "as if " rather than "as is." (Ashton et al., 2009, p. 2)

The research and creation of *Play and Playfulness* (Ashton et al., 2009) included an extensive review of literature on play, broad consultations with the sector, and close

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1   According to a recent Early Childhood Education Report (Akbari & McCuaig, 2014)), eight of 13 provincial/territorial jurisdictions in Canada have curriculum frameworks for early learning and childcare, and two jurisdictions have frameworks pending.

2   Provincial–territorial initiatives in the development and ongoing implementation of early learning and childcare curriculum frameworks led to a synergistic "meeting place" (Moss, 2013) between the early childhood educators and faculty from the Early Childhood Centre at the University of New Brunswick and faculty and educators at MacEwan University Child Care Lab School in Alberta. *Play, Participation and Possibilities: An Early Learning and Child Care Curriculum Framework for Alberta* (Makovichuk et al., 2014) was critically informed by and founded upon the extensive pedagogical research used to develop the *New Brunswick Curriculum Framework for Early Learning and Child Care* (2008).

work with childcare educators in the co-authoring of the ideas and stories that constitute the document. Throughout this extensive and intensive process, play was recognized as contested, an area of learning generally erased or marginalized within schools, yet one critical to children's learning, joy, and healthy development. In childcare sector consultations with educators, they made definite their desire that play be included and celebrated within the curriculum framework. Subsequently, the intertwining of theory and practice in the context of multiple types of play has been represented within *Play and Playfulness* (2009). In revisiting the document we notice that the playing and playful child is well articulated, however there are fewer references to the playful adult.

In this article, we focus on the idiosyncratic, conceptual, and practical power of play as it is combined with a disposition of playfulness, and thoughtful acts of co-authoring and co-playing adults. As well, we highlight the pedagogic power of the present, and of place through this critical rethinking of play with playfulness as it transpires in the co-authoring creations of four educators and a group of young children. These co-players collectively re-story multiple versions of the popular film *Frozen*, itself a loose improvisation of Hans Christian Andersen's *The Snow Queen*. Not surprisingly, the dramatic play of young children is informed by this popular culture phenomenon. The co-playing/co-authoring dispositions of the educators and their desire to "unfreeze" the predictability and power dynamics of *Frozen* play avoids the pitfall of banning popular culture play (Rose, 2013). In this way the educators disrupt the false dichotomy between real and pretend play, and demonstrate intertextual inventiveness in the context of multimodal play and playfulness. Through critically revisiting cumulative documentation in the form of learning stories and ensuing conversations, we aim to articulate and better understand the value of play and playfulness in the context of co-playing and co-authoring. Our critical revisiting also revealed the agential nature of the children in their intra-actions with materials, the outdoor environment, each other, and their educators. As Eva Änggård (2016) points out in her posthumanist work with young children, the presence of diffractive encounters between/across theories "makes it possible to focus on the material and embodied aspects of play sequences" (p. 86). In her case, Änggård works across theories of symbolic and sensorimotor play. In this article we work across/between the theories articulated below.

Theoretical Concepts We Are Thinking With

Play as just play. In the seminal work *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture* (1950), Johan Huizinga observes that attempts to define play often describe what play is not rather than what play is, for example, play is not work, not real, not serious, not productive. In a fascinating examination of the *play concept* as it is expressed in diverse languages, both historic and contemporary, Huizinga concludes that "play is a thing by itself" (1950, p. 45), a phenomenon that "lies outside the antithesis of wisdom and folly, and equally outside those of truth and falsehood, good and evil" (p. 6). Play, he theorizes, can only be truly understood when considered *in itself* and from the perspective of its meaning for the player (p. 2). Play belongs to the players; when it is used to serve other purposes, it is no longer play from the perspective of the players. When we consider Huizinga's thinking alongside recent research exploring young children's perspectives on play in early learning settings, it becomes clear that children often have a different understanding than adults about what is play and what is not play (Glenn, Knight, Holt, & Spence, 2013; Howard, Jenvey, & Hill, 2006).

Play as a frame for experience. The notion that play is a context for experience, rather than a particular kind of activity, is central to rethinking play and pedagogy in early learning and childcare. In *A Theory of Play and Fantasy*, Gregory Bateson (1955/1976) argues that playing requires an ongoing meta-communicative framing of experience based on a logical paradox—that play is simultaneously real and not real. Bateson's theory clearly illustrates how it is that players come to understand that when we play we do not mean exactly what we say or do and that fantasy affords a unique experience of reality. Bateson's theorizing, then, provides a formal, logical argument for thinking beyond a fixed boundary between real and pretend. In the play context, the rules are different. To keep the play going, communication between the players is essential to maintaining the action as "just play." According to Bateson, the message "this is play" is an ongoing meta-communication (often nonverbal) that ensures the players understand that the intended meaning of what they say and do continues to be playful. Drawing on Bateson's theory, the question "Do all of the players know they are just playing?" becomes a complex ethical and pedagogic question, particularly when play includes language/action that appears to be aggressive, hurtful, exclusionary, or risky. The players may understand the

meanings of these actions and words differently, presenting ethical as well as pedagogical dilemmas and challenges for early childhood educators.

Playfulness as a disposition toward experience. The concept of playfulness, less theorized than play, is present in the literature and theorized as spontaneity, joy, creative thought, and expressiveness. Lieberman (1966) speaks to the quality of the play and the player when defining playfulness as "spontaneity in physical, social and cognitive functioning, manifest joy, and sense of humour" (p. 1278). Callois (1961) takes up the notion of *paidia* as spontaneous play, characterized by unpredictability and playfulness. More recently, Youell (2008) sees playfulness as creative thought, and Howard, Jenvey, and Hill (in Walsh, Sproule, McGuiness, & Trew, 2011) define playfulness as a state of mind in which an individual can flexibly take risks with ideas or interactions and allow an "internalised quality that develops over time as a result of experience and interaction" (pp. 109–110). Thinking about adults and playfulness, Glynn and Webster (1992) theorize adult playfulness as exhibiting spontaneity, expressiveness, fun, creativity, and being silly, a perspective that coincides with Walsh et al. (2011), who write that being playful is about "being outgoing, energetic, and active; preserving a light hearted tone; leaving some room for spontaneity" (p. 112). For Barnett (2007), aspects of playfulness in young adults are exhibited as gregariousness, lack of inhibition, comedic talent, and physical energy (p. 953).

Media and popular culture as resources for play and pedagogy. The complex, evolving, and dynamic nature of the relationship between children's play texts and the characters and storylines of popular media culture frame the interpretation of our story. Willett, Richards, Marsh, Burn, and Bishop (2013) theorize that children use the figures and symbols of media and popular culture as "bricoleurs," creating original and meaningful "mashups" and "remixes" that serve as resources for social meaning making and identity formation. Marsh and Bishop (Marsh, 2014; Marsh & Bishop, 2013) take up the Deleuzian notion of "assemblages" as a way of explaining the "tension, mismatch, and ongoing reconfiguration" of media-related elements characteristic of children's freely occurring play (Marsh, 2014, p. 405). Their extensive ethnographic research on school playgrounds confirms that "new media assemblages permeate the play practices of young children in contemporary societies and shape the ways in which children draw on a range

of media texts in their play" (Marsh, 2014, p. 405) and, in turn, that "play and creativity are central to multimodal, multimedia meaning-making practices" (Marsh, Willett, Bishop, Burn, & Richards, 2010, p. 5). The child is an active agent in this process, constructing cultural practices in/through play. This work challenges prevailing notions that media and digital technologies inhibit and restrict children's creativity in play.

Anne Haas Dyson (1998, 2003) lends further support to valuing children's "intense involvement" with the characters of popular culture as a pedagogical resource in early childhood, both for literacy learning and for what they can tell us about children's "powerful social desires, most especially the desire to belong, to have a part in whatever story is being told" (1998, p. 401). She describes children as active, intelligent users of media, appropriating media figures, texts, and symbols for their own social and cultural purposes.

Looking at the impact of the emergence of multiple literacies in the digital world, Wohlwend (2011) offers further pedagogical insights:

> These changes present an opportunity to rethink play as a new literacy and, at the same time revive it as a staple of early childhood curricula. We can now recognize play as a literacy for creating and coordinating a live-action text among multiple players that invests materials with pretended meanings and slips the constraints of here and now realities. The embodied nature of play makes it a particularly relevant literacy at a time when the textual landscape is increasingly furnished with gestured texts written with Wii wands or fingers swept across screens and filmed texts captured on cell phones and uploaded to mobile screens of all kinds. (p. 2)

Close observation of boys' and girls' play with Disney princesses (Wohlwend, 2009, 2012) confirms that children go well beyond following the prescribed script, frequently challenging, transforming, and transgressing normative discourses of gender identity through these characters. Mills, Comber, and Kelly (2013) call for a greater focus on the sensorial dimension of children's use of digital media in relationship to literacy practices, claiming that "literacy practices are not only acquired through the mind, but are also reliant on embodiment, sensoriality, co-presence, and kinesics of the body in place" (p. 11).

Co-authoring and co-playing as ethical actions. Brian Edmiston (2008) in his book *Forming Ethical Identities in Childhood Play* situates adult and child co-playing/

co-authoring of super hero play within an ethic of encounter, one in which co-players are answerable and accountable to each other rather than to a universal code of ethics, a code dominated by a "discourse of technical practice with its instrumental preoccupation of predetermined outcomes" (p. vii). In this case study, Edmiston begins with a realization that emerged as he played with his son. He writes: "Once I could conceptualize playing as an attitude towards any activity…. I could shift into play mode with Michael by adopting this playful attitude toward his activities" (p. 9). In this work, Edmiston foregrounds "how adults' authoring of responses to children's actions, especially when they are playing, can support and extend children's authoring including co-authoring of their ethical identity" (p. 141). As with Michael and his father in Edmiston's case study, this particular restorying of *Frozen* considers how adult understanding is affected, pedagogically and ethically, by what children do, and by how children and adults co-author ethical identities in the context of their co-playing adventures.

   Children's play as performing culture. Lastly, we draw upon Kalliala's (2006) idea of play culture and Sellers's (2013) notion of children "performing curriculum complexly" in their play(ing). We illustrate and think about ways in which play culture is situated, performed, and transformed within particular intertexual cultural frames, times, and places that emerge in the context of attentive co-playing of children and adults. Our critical revisiting serves as a place to view the difference between what Kalliala describes as culture created by adults for children, and culture that children and educators create in and through their co-playing/co-authoring. These re-storying acts of *Frozen*, provide a sense of the relational complexity of popular culture and children's play, pushing beyond a binary construction of play, such as is often articulated in distinctions made between real and pretend. The continuous re-storying and transforming of *Frozen* illustrates how these particular adults take children's play culture seriously—learning with and from children and each other in the joint constructing of play culture as they draw upon their cultural frames in re-storying *Frozen* play. As these various re-storied assemblages emerge, alter, and are re-mixed, posthumanist thinking (Änggård, 2016) points to how the children, as one part of various and shifting assemblages, are agential in their intra-actions with each other, specific materials, the outdoors, cameras, and overhead projections thoughtfully facilitated by the educators.

Frozen Comes to Town

The common experience of seeing the Disney movie *Frozen* inspired an unexpected and dynamic culture of play and playfulness among a particular group of three-, four-, and five-year-old children and their educators—Kayla, Brittany, Erica, and Jennifer—over the course of a full year in their playroom at MacEwan University Child Care Lab School. Play stories were co-authored and co-played by the children and the educators—stories of adventure, fantasy, magic, and good and evil. These play stories unfolded as part of ongoing action research exploring the use of *Play, Participation and Possibilities: An Early Learning and Child Care Curriculum Framework for Alberta* (Makovichuk et al., 2014). This curriculum research project afforded time for educators to engage regularly in pedagogical conversations with a faculty mentor[3] as they put ideas in the curriculum framework to work in their practice. These stories are closely tied to the goal of play and playfulness in the framework, specifically with how children and educators use "imaginary scenarios to explore new possibilities" and how the playfulness of educators can enliven and enrich the play culture in a group early learning and care setting.

As the year began, there were children who brought their knowledge and interpretation of the film *Frozen* into their play. Captivated by Elsa and Anna, and convinced that there could be only one of each, the children argued regularly over who would play these roles. The educators noticed that a typical day often began with one girl declaring "I'm Elsa" followed by another saying "I'm Anna." The early childhood educators could see that the roles of Elsa and Anna were highly desirable and taken very seriously, however they were concerned about the argumentation and felt that *Frozen* play had taken over the room. They noted that it was particular girls who were using the roles of Anna and Elsa for power, demonstrated by freezing objects and people. As Brittany reflects:

> One day, I noticed Lily in the block corner. Like previous days, she appeared to be setting herself up for *Frozen* play. As she talked with herself about what she was imagining she waved her arms gracefully as if in a royal court. Madeline approached her asking to play. Lily responded, "You can be Elsa, and I will be Anna." They danced and sang *Frozen* songs. Their activity drew Jocelyn's

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3   The authors acknowledge the inspiration of Lee Makovichuk, MacEwan University, in seeing new possibilities and directions in children's freely occurring play.

attention. When Jocelyn approached the play she was told, "We already have one Anna and one Elsa." I noticed Jocelyn pleaded with the girls to allow her to be Elsa. The girls were firm in their decision—there could only be one of each character! I attempted to support Jocelyn to negotiate her way into the play. They stayed strong in their decision. So I helped the girls to explain, "Not right now, maybe later." I began to notice this reoccurring pattern—later never came, no matter who was playing Elsa and Anna.

The educators faced an ethical and pedagogical dilemma. From their perspective, the children were stuck in repetitive enactments of specific relations of power, examples of "ruling passions" (Barton and Hamilton, 1998, cited in Marsh, 2014, p. 405); passions connected to particular media characters, texts and/or artefacts that "inform constructions of identity and social relationships in the early years" (Marsh, 2014, p. 405). "That's not the way it goes," they told Kayla. "There can only be one Elsa and one Anna." The girls left out were upset. "Why is nothing we're doing working?" the educators asked themselves. "Why are we always having the same arguments?" The educators became increasingly frustrated and struggled not to shut down the play. They were stuck.

Adventuring revealed. The educators might have responded to this play as exclusionary and either shut it down entirely, or intervened, insisting, for example, that children include everyone in the play, or that they take turns playing the powerful roles. Rather, the educators took a step back and asked themselves a question: "What are these children doing in this play? What meaning are they making through this playing?" Brittany recalls:

> I would go home at night and try to figure out what the heck was going on…why were there so many arguments? What was so amazing about Elsa and Anna? I started to break down the movie…songs, magic, adventure…a captivating song, but, not much character development…

In their ongoing conversations, the educators learned that each of them had seen *Frozen* and liked it! As well, all four identified themselves as "Disney kids." For example, Brittany recalled playing Little Mermaid over and over again. As a consequence, they "could see where the children were coming from. Elsa was powerful, special, sparkly, and beautiful. We worked to identify a foundational theme children were drawn to within that story

telling. We observed the play more closely." With closer observation of *Frozen* play, the adults in the room began to notice connections to other play scripts unfolding in the room. Erica writes:

> As I was doing some reflection about what I saw children doing in the room, I remember noticing children moving around from place to place during their play, travelling to mountains, houses and of course places from *Frozen*. There was lots of *Frozen* play, but there was also lots of car play and map-making happening. I wondered if children were revisiting places they had already been through their play.

When the educators observed play in the house corner, they saw play with moms, dads, babies, and kitties. They noticed that this play was often combined with building elaborate block structures representing some kind of vehicle—a car, a truck, or a spaceship—and that the play frequently revolved around going somewhere. There was a story and a sequence of events, and they also noticed that typically one main character was telling the other characters what they could and couldn't do. While observing one of these play episodes in the block corner one day, Kayla casually commented to Brittany "they're off on another adventure." "That's what they're doing!" responded Brittany. For the educators, the idea of "saying yes to adventures" took flight in this moment and became a sustaining frame for playing and learning throughout the whole year, one that proved to be rich with possibilities for both the children and their educators.

Fabrics as co-authoring inspirations. In pedagogical conversations following from these realizations, the educators discussed ways to bring materials to the environment that might respond to children's desire for adventure, beauty, power, and magic. Together they conceived the possibility that adding beautiful fabric—richly coloured, deeply textured, sparkly velvets—might open up multiple ways to take up the aesthetic of beauty and power embodied in Elsa. They made a conscious decision to leave blue fabric out of the trunk, thinking a range of other colours might provide possibilities beyond the sparkly blue of Elsa's gown. Enacting their desire to present the material in a magical way, they draped the fabric on a woven trunk.

Figure 1. Adding a trunk of beautiful fabric "changed everything"

Brittany, Kayla, and Erica could each reiterate how adding the trunk of fabric "changed everything." This was a moment that created possibilities of movement and experimentation (Olsson, 2009), opening up new places for playing and storying. Brittany writes: "The play always started with *Frozen*, but went elsewhere. The girls so captivated by Elsa's beauty and power now had many more possibilities to be beautiful." Building on Brittany's reflection about the two-dimensional nature of the characters in *Frozen*, discussions took place about complexifying characters and storylines, to bring more ideas into play, potentially creating new possibilities for the co-authoring of play adventures. They looked for books about magic and adventure, and for stories with similar plot lines. They began with short chapter books, reading them aloud to the children, and leaving lots of time in between the chapters for children to play.

These children were drawn to character and fantasy narrative, and to re-storying these genres in their play. Brittany began to use story mapping as a visual representation to show the unfolding plots in chapter books that had no illustrations. Erica picked up on this and created story maps with the children that symbolized their ongoing adventure play. These mappings made visible how frequently the children combined characters and events from multiple stories. Working with the concept of visual story-mapping, the educators then created story maps for each of the chapter books they read aloud, using icons

and symbols to represent characters, places, and events. The mappings served as a collective visual representation for the children and educators, and as a support for informing play, while linking everyone back into the cumulative storying each time they began a new chapter.

Brittany and Erica followed the children into play as co-players and co-authors, taking on new roles and characters from the stories, and offering playful ideas to unfreeze *Frozen*. One of the first stories read aloud was *Cara and the Wizard*, also a story about two sisters, one who must take on a wizard in order to rescue the other. Brittany writes: "I dressed up as a wizard instead of a witch, a wizard who was more powerful than Elsa and couldn't be frozen. They took this idea and ran with it." When a child said to Erica, "You can be the princess," she replied, "I don't want to be a princess, I want to be a knight." The possibilities that play offered these early childhood educators to co-author identities with young children became visible (Edmiston, 2008).

The fabric, along with new characters and storylines, opened up the possibilities for play, drawing more children in—including boys—and leading to new adventures. Brittany continued to look for ways to introduce greater depth to the characters and storylines being played by the children. She found that often characters in the abbreviated chapter books they selected were flat and two-dimensional characters. Drawing on her theatre background, she writes, "I have always had a fascination with complex characters. When I noticed the children talking in detail about their imagined characters, I saw a place for character development, for characters who have a complex story." The children already understood and enacted complexity.

Intertextual inventiveness: Co-authoring shifts in play. In January, Brittany and Kayla decided to experiment with a picture book version of *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, the second of seven books in the classic children's series *The Chronicles of Narnia* (Lewis, 1950). Similar to *Frozen* in several ways, it tells the tale of a group of four adventuring children who set out to rescue the talking animals of Narnia from the white witch, who reigns over perpetual winter in the magical land. The children asked all kinds of questions about the picture book. Where did the white witch come from? Why is it winter all the time? Struck by their questions and their curiosity, the educators realized that the children wanted more information and wondered if they could understand the

words without the images. They decided to experiment with reading the full text version of *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* to the children.

Brittany explains the team's decision:

> Narnia is a world frozen in time…similar to Arendel in *Frozen*. Narnia was a shared story that Kayla and I loved. We wanted to share it with this group. The writing is colourful, with the descriptions of environments…the uncle's home, the wardrobe, the snow. This group has a vivid imagination. We had a feeling they would really picture the words in their minds.

Children's play revealed their understanding of the complexity of character and storyline, and this complexity became increasingly apparent to the educators. "As educators we found the more detailed novels we chose, the more complex children's play adventures and storytelling became." The educators facilitated the addition of specific props as the ideas occurred to children—first a wardrobe, then a lamppost. New characters came alive on the playground, joining in with those already present and creating "play texts composed of elements of different types that converge momentarily and create specific meanings in context" (Marsh & Bishop, 2013, p. 155). The more the educators watched and participated, the more they began to recognize the complex intertextual resources that were woven into children's freely occurring play. Characters from different stories combined with media-referenced characters and storylines resulting in a variety of mashups indoors and outside on the playground. Children introduced characters from their media experiences and combined them with characters from the stories that the group was reading, which in turn led to new ideas for reading. Mr. Tod, the fox from Beatrix Potter's *Tales of Peter Rabbit* had taken up residence on the playground early in the year, invited by Lily who had seen the story on a TV show. Brittany recalls:

> Peter Rabbit popped up in the fall, but we were unaware he was from Peter Rabbit. There was a lot of chatter about Mr. Tod. Kayla, Erica and I did not know who this "Mr. Tod" was. However it was important the children ran away from him. One morning when we were reading *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, we stumbled upon the woodland animals eating dinner and the White Witch came by. One of the squirrels "lost his head" which was an expression we had learnt from *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*—a child quickly made this connection. After

> this section of the book the children (particularly one child leading the group) began to bring Mr. Tod back into the play. The second time around we learnt he was a character from Peter Rabbit. This was around the same time Jennifer was coming into the room...and she took it from there!

This led Jennifer to share an old and treasured family collection of Beatrix Potter tales, which she began to read to the children. Soon, the colourful animal characters in these stories joined the talking animals of Narnia on the playground forming relationships and sharing spontaneous and playful experiences with each other and with Elsa and Anna, and the white witch and more. The fleeting moments of spontaneous playfulness and fluid converging of seemingly disparate elements speak to the notions of remixing and mash-ups (Willett et al., 2013) as well as to Sellers's (2013) notion of multiple intersecting play stories as lines of flight in children's play. In this place, children perform and transform a shared live-action play culture.

The reading continued through the long cold weeks of winter in January. Brittany reflects: "The white witch has captured our attention with her eternal winter and turning the creatures of Narnia to stone. We reached a part in the book when the spell was breaking at the exact time in our year when our winter spell begins to break and spring is so welcomed."

Adventuring out of doors—transforming play through place.

> Unless you have looked at a world of snow as long as Edmund had been looking at it, you will hardly be able to imagine what a relief those green patches were after the endless white. (Lewis, 1950, p. 199)

As the educators had hoped, this story opened up new adventuring. Brittany writes, "This was the quote that helped me see an entry point to an adventure we could share and what lead me to think about organizing the trips to the river valley." The team of educators decided to take the idea of adventuring outdoors; to travel with small groups of children (4–5 at a time) on trips into the city's river valley parks. They hoped that being in the river valley might offer possibilities for children to make new connections between their play storying and everyday life, connections that could lead to more ideas for shared play adventures, for both children and educators.

Figure 2. MacKinnon Ravine Park. "In the past I had been working with an idea of how children's spaces shape their play and how play can shape spaces… We often bring in natural materials for the children to explore, but by bringing ourselves to Nature I noticed a different relationship building." —Brittany

The river valley in Edmonton is one of the longest stretches of parkland in North America. The educators discovered that MacKinnon Ravine Park and Louise McKinney Riverfront Park were both only one short bus ride from MacEwan University.The trips to the woods were as inspiring for the educators as they were for the children. Brittany writes:

> There is something to be said about being in the woods. The natural space has endless possibilities of exploring distance, hiding places and visibility. The space invited movement—a different movement than what we get to explore on the playground or in the playroom.

Being outdoors offered the educators an opportunity to see children in new ways and both the children and the educators' playfulness increased as they became more confident. Brittany reflects:

> One child showed us her adventurous side. Another child, usually quite confident and bold with her ideas, was a little unsure and hesitant at first in this natural environment. Another child who tended to be more reserved indoors, became quite confident in the ravine, sharing with us his experience of being in nature.

Jennifer, who had just joined the team, wrote: "As a new staff in the room I was afforded the opportunity to connect with children through exploring their ideas in play and also

through experiences in the broader community." She experienced the newness of this environment alongside the children. Both Brittany and Jennifer recognize that their own joy and comfort in being outdoors in nature was important in this experience. Brittany reflects:

> In my observations I recognize I value the experiences that nature provides us. Through my observations I heard/saw how the children were interacting with nature, and how these interactions connected back to the story. We HAVE been looking at a white world of snow for weeks and it will be a relief to see green again. Just like children move between the imaginary and real world in their play, I too was moving from the imaginary world of Narnia to the everyday world.

Aslan appears: Fantasy play and reality merge. To the delight of both the children and the educators, the characters from Narnia came alive in the woods. To everyone's surprise, one of the first encounters on the field trip to Louise McKinney Riverfront Park was with a stone sculpture of a lion, which the children immediately assumed to be the powerful lion Aslan from the book. Their belief in the presence of Aslan made the white witch seem very real. Children also wondered about the footprints around the statue.

Figure 3. Louise McKinney Riverfront Park

"Maybe the witch was here and turned them into stone," Daniel said.
"Yeah, and look there are tracks that lead to the statues," Shae added.
"Maybe that's where the lion was walking before the witch turned it into stone," Daniel explained.

In "Vibrancy of Childhood Things: Power, Philosophy, and Political Ecology of Matter," Tesar and Arndt (2016) theorize current materialist perspectives in early childhood through the agential power of "thing-matter-energy-child assemblages" (p. 196). In this instance, the non-human statue has become Aslan and, by so naming this inanimate thing, the children ascribe power and agency to the Aslan-statue and reimagine the story

occurring in their time and place. The inanimate stone lion has come to life through the children's storied connections. The lion and the story act upon the children, and the children act upon the storied Lion, an example, as Tesar and Arndt posit of the "vibrant materiality of thing-hoods" (p. 199).

Bringing the adventures back indoors through revisiting children's documentation. The educators decided to give the children small digital cameras to document their experiences on the field trips to the woods. Jennifer recalls:

> The centre had come into several old, but new to us, cameras for children's use. I remember some children being really interested in Brittany, Erica, and myself taking photos for documentation. Lucas in particular would often ask if he could use my camera to take photos too. I thought about that connection plus these new cameras plus this adventure. What would the children like to document from these experiences? How would they like to share these photos with their peers? With their families? The cameras needed to be prepped...charging, labelled, and cleared. I remember many children coming over to see what I was doing and many of them stayed to help me prep the cameras.

Figure 4. MacKinnon Ravine. Children's perspectives revealed through photographs

The decision to put cameras in the hands of the children sparked several new ideas. Jennifer writes:

> We made a decision for children and us to revisit these photos following each visit to the river valley. In the afternoon of each visit the images were shared with the children on a laptop along with children's reflections. As they were revisiting images from their experiences in the river valley, the children commented on what they remembered seeing.

The experience of seeing the photos again together with small groups of children sparked another idea:

> After looking through the children's photos, I started to think about how this adventure could be shared and revisited further. I decided to bring in a projector to display these images on the wall. We relocated the elements of Narnia (the lamp post and the wardrobe) to a space near where the images would be projected. We believed that redesigning this space would support their connections between the visits to the river valley and *The Lion, Witch and the Wardrobe*. We wondered how these connections would influence their play.

Figure 5. Children revisit their experiences indoors

Jennifer describes how rich the conversations were between children who had travelled separately to the river valley in small groups, as they realized they had different memories of the same places:

> Projecting their scenic images onto the wall gave new life to their ideas; they began to revisit their ideas about Narnia but also played with their shadows, and reflected on their personal experiences in the river valley. The connections and interconnections that the children have been able to make through this process has gone further than what was anticipated. They are sharing back and forth their reflections and then expanding their ideas from those reflections as a community.

Figure 6. Stairway to outerspace

As these images cycled through onto the wall children were pretending to walk up those stairs as if they were really in the room! I wonder if they were thinking back to the experience they had with the stairs, as Daniel and Shae spoke of the "LOTS and LOTS of stairs" that they climbed. It wasn't going as I had planned, but when Lucas saw that screensaver of the galaxy and said "Look I'm in outerspace!" it made me pause and reflect on the importance of what we were doing. It led me to a bigger question: How can new technology support us in extending and expanding children's play processes?

And another story takes flight…

In closing: Co-authoring Ethically Responsible Identities and Communities. . .

In speaking with Brittany, Erica, Kayla, and Jennifer about their own play adventures this year, the joyfulness of this experience was palpable. It was evident that they each had experienced adventure play in the woods and classroom, and that their intentional material and textual contributions to play acted as ethical responses "answerable" to the actions of the children and each other (Edmiston, 2008). As the end of the year approached, many of the children in this group were becoming excited about moving on to kindergarten. Yet there were still a few chapters left to read in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. Brittany reflected on how she was going to approach the part of the story where Aslan dies. She noticed, with amazement, that the children were playing with dying and death—as if they already knew what was going to happen and were preparing for it through their play. Meanwhile the adventure play and play with adventure continues, with children deeply engaged in co-creating the play and learning environment. Children's growing affinity with the spaces and places in the ravine led the educators to think differently about children's role in co-constructing the space for indoor play. Brittany writes:

The room is built around what children are playing. Play is at the forefront of our work—the driving force in my work. Our observations of children in the natural world are helping us to construct a playroom that represents the shared

experiences of our learning community. The room began to change—influenced by what we had been doing in nature. We noticed that children gravitated to the spaces that spoke to them outdoors. This provoked me to think about how to make those possible indoors? The children are taking an active role in constructing the space—they want to decorate the trees, create an indoor river, and a storm feeding an indoor waterfall, they asked to begin planting. I am enjoying constructing the space with them.

What new possibilities emerge as a result of this work? As co-authors, reviewing and reflecting upon these play adventures, we are amazed that by listening closely for the meaning of children's intense involvement with Elsa and Anna, we were led outdoors to the rich beauty and inherently magical nature of the changing seasons in our local ravine. In this space, Brittany, Kayla, Erica, and Jennifer recalled and acted upon treasured experiences that took them back to their childhoods. We are reminded that when taken seriously, and as revealed in these complex mash-ups and intra-actions, children's and educators' literacies emerging with/from popular culture open up co-playing and co-authoring. The re-mixing and shifting of assemblages points to the intra-actions possible, yet unknown, that de-centre the agential nature of the human-centric, and provide openings to the more than human. Brittany was reminded of this as she recalled a child's comment: "Nature doesn't belong to us, we belong to nature."

We are drawn now to the rich possibilities that the stories about local places might hold for children, and ourselves, as resources to deepen and enrich play. We wonder how the stories of First Nations peoples about the land and the changing seasons might resonate with young children. The Cree stories of Wasekechak, told only during the winter, and the Wabanaki story of how Kluscap found the summer come to mind. Each of these stories speaks to the depth of winter, the power of traditions and storytelling, and the ways in which the cold and white depths are encountered.These first stories call upon us to continuously and critically reimagine our pedagogies, to ensure a respectful place for Indigenous histories and worldviews in our early childhood spaces.

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