



Balancing is Gymnastics



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Josie invites Manuela, her early learning and child care educator, to watch her gymnastic moves. She begins with a narrow wooden ramp on the floor, runs three steps onto the ramp and jumps off, landing with two feet on the ground and two arms in the air. She repeats this action several times while Manuela watches attentively.

Josie then adds several blocks, making a long narrow shape. She steps across the length of the blocks and jumps. Again, she lands two feet together on the floor and two arms spread wide above her head.



Elena joins the gymnastic performance. In no time the pair attract the attention of several more children in the room. Manuela watches as the group speeds up their activity. She recognizes the need to do something as two children have fallen from their fast stepping. Wanting to extend the experience she offers, “Can I give you a challenge? Can you balance a book or a beanbag on your head when you walk across the balance beam?”

Eagerly, the group takes up the challenge and all efforts are accepted and celebrated. The children become focused on balancing a beanbag, rather than running across the blocks. They are enjoying testing their physical limits.



After falling on a block, Manuela encourages Amelia to try again. Initially hesitant, she holds Manuela’s hand. The first crossing is a success and Amelia wants to try again.



She is a little unsure about going alone, yet she doesn't want to hold Manuela's hand. Manuela offers another challenge. "Can you hold a beanbag in each hand, stretched out, while walking the balance beam?"



Amelia accepts the challenge. This challenge offers Amelia the opportunity to experience increased success and gain confidence in her physical abilities. Her attention to her steps slows her down and decreases the potential for falling. She is pleased with her achievement and continues to challenge herself.



Amelia is ready to balance the beanbag on her head. Again, her focus on the challenge to balance slows her steps and maintains a safe level of activity for all involved.

Curriculum Meaning Making

The following is a question—answer recap of a professional dialogue between educators about this story.

What do you understand about Amelia that guides you to first ensure that she is okay and then to support her in the ongoing play? What do you think Amelia experienced through this?

Manuela shares her thoughts about her understanding of Amelia and how she looks up to her peers. She explains, "Amelia wants to be able to meet them in their play experiences. Knowing this, I helped her to stay in the play by helping her to feel successful. I knew that I made the right choice as Amelia was able to continue with the play on her own."

What do you think the challenge did for the builders and those who joined the balancing experience?

Manuela reflects on the introduction of the "challenges" that shifted the experience from one that was becoming questionably unsafe as the children began to rush, to one of focus with an appropriate level of challenge. She reflects, "The children felt confident and in control of their play. I did not need to shut down the experience, rather the challenge to balance objects seemed to extend the children's idea."



How do you think children see themselves in environments that support them to create play spaces for self and others?

Manuela describes how the balancing continued outside on the beams in the play yard and while some children were unsure of crossing the balance beam, others, like Amelia, offered to hold their hand as they cautiously made their way across. “The children are proud that their ideas are taken up by others. They appreciate being leaders in their play. Amelia was able to be a leader as the balancing play continued outside.”

Curriculum Connections

Making links to holistic goals.

Well-Being

Emotional Health and Positive Self-Identities

Children develop a positive sense of self through

- co-constructing their positive self-identities
- experiencing a growing sense of self-confidence, self-respect and ability to take initiative
- growing in their capacity to express feelings, concerns and needs
- pursuing interests, passions and strengths
- persevering and persisting

Belonging

Children develop a sense of place through

- generating a shared repertoire of narratives and memories

Children build respectful and responsive relationships through

- developing cherished as well as casual friendships

- growing in their awareness that their actions contribute to the welfare of others
- participating in group initiatives

Physical Health

Children explore body and movement through

- participating in a variety of physical activities, indoors and out
- increasing bodily awareness, control, agility and large motor coordination
- knowing and stretching their physical limits

Play and Playfulness

Imagination and Creativity

Children develop dispositions for flexible and fluid thinking through

- expressing unique and imaginative ideas

Children invent symbols and develop systems of representation through

- developing awareness of the imagined and ordinary worlds they move between as they play

Children create imaginary scenarios in which they explore new possibilities and take possession of their worlds through

- creating social spaces and shared narratives

Playful Exploration and Problem Solving

Children learn about the properties of objects through

- playfully exploring and investigating the properties of objects

Children test their limits through

- testing their strength, speed, agility and control over movement



Children learn to employ creative approaches to identifying and working out practical problems through

- developing sustained and shared thinking

Curriculum Reflections

Considering implications for further learning and practice.

How does your conception of childhood and what it means to be a child influence your responses to the different identities children take on? (**Think about** verbal and non-verbal expressions that open up or limit children's exploration and risk-taking behaviours.) **Think about** how children respond to people, places, and materials.

How do people and policies at your child care setting honour children's initiatives through thoughtful planning, documentation, and/or responses? **Think about** how your centre builds upon children's interests.

Reflect on your own learning and what fuels your energy as a learner. **Think about** the pleasure you take in persistence and perseverance and accomplishment, and how risk-taking is rewarded, or not, in your life.

How does the environment encourage children to take initiative? What role do you take in children's self-directed play? Does your role extend possibilities or limit children's pursuits? **Think about** how Manuela provided the appropriate challenges that extended the children's exploration of balance and offered children opportunities to engage at their individual levels of ability.



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