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Engineering 110-01  
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### Risk-less Playgrounds a Detriment to Healthy Child Development

Simon loved the playground; it was a place he could challenge himself, learn, and build a foundation of social skills that would lead him successfully into adulthood. This all ended when Simon rushed up the ladder too fast, fell backwards, and broke his arm. Simon's parents never let him onto a playground again. Although he never broke his arm again, for the rest of his life, Simon suffered the consequences of being deprived of play at such an early age. Simon wasn't the only child affected by this either. Simon's parents lobbied the local government to put stringent playground safety regulations in place, so that risky playgrounds were redesigned or removed altogether, and new playgrounds were to reduce risk at the expense of the benefits of a challenging play environment [1]. ✓ Simon's parents are just one of many who are driving the evolution of playground design into an extensively controlled and safe environment for children. This new play environment is having a well-documented negative effect on the cognitive and physical health of children. In addition to children putting themselves at personal risk by finding more "exciting" places to play when they find playgrounds too boring, cognitive health factors such as the development of life skills relating to risk and responsibility, conflict resolution, creativity, and overall learning are eroding [2][3][4]. ✓ Moreover, physical health factors such as decreases in physical activity are leading to higher obesity rates and other health complications [2][3]. ✓ The healthy cognitive and physical development of children relies on minimizing play deprivation through the reversal of excessive risk reduction trends in playground design and use. ✓

The benefits that children derive from self-directed, challenging, risk-taking play are often overlooked, but extremely important to their general physical and cognitive development, as well as their learning abilities. Through play, children develop an early foundation of social, learning, and risk-

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**Comment [1]:** Nice opening anecdote

management skills that will help them **lead** an independent and confident **future**. A critical factor in the development of this independence is for the child to be engaged in spontaneous, free, and self-directed play. As opposed to adult-directed play, self-directed play yields **more** benefits for the child, where they are “given the opportunity to develop a sense of self, discover their ability to make choices, act independently, and learn to self-regulate”[2]. This independence fosters an environment where the consequences of risk taking are the immediate responsibility of the child. Children then learn to manage and categorize risk quickly and are less prone to more serious accidents in the future. Furthermore, this independent environment quickly forces the child to learn conflict resolution skills, where the child will need to balance his or her desires with the desires of other children. Many more aspects of learning are closely linked to play. For example, play benefits academic performance in both literature and mathematics, and play-based learning has proven to be more effective than conventional methods [2][3]. Play develops key problem solving skills and other character traits such as “grit, curiosity, perseverance, conscientiousness, self-regulation, and optimism” [2], which are important for a child to be a successful learner.✓ In addition to these mental health benefits, the physical benefits of play help children resist obesity, and develop strong and robust bodies, which will in turn reduce the likelihood of injury in the future. A well-designed play environment is key to effective play, and for most children, this environment is the playground.✓

Playgrounds provide one of the only practical and safe places for children to engage in risk-taking play with their peers and develop their skills; therefore, a well-designed playground is essential to the healthy development of children. A well-designed playground will provide a challenging environment that encourages children to take risks, but protects them from hazards they cannot foresee [2][5].✓ This distinction between hazard and risk is important; many parents and teachers perceive risks as hazards and make increased efforts to avoid these risks. While a child foresees a risk and consciously makes a decision about how to approach it, then learns from the consequences, hazards are an immediate and unforeseen consequence of no fault to the child, and therefore are not effective or ethical learning

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**Comment [2]:** Help them lead a future?

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**Comment [3]:** No real comparison made here – no “than” to complete this comparison

experiences. Additionally, children perceive risk as a challenge and an interesting and engaging activity, and when the play environment is no longer interesting, children put themselves in hazardous situations by finding truly dangerous places to play.✓ It can then be concluded that the goals of playground design should not be to minimize risk, but to encourage it in an environment free of hazards. Moreover, by minimizing risk, challenge is minimized in turn, and the child's quality of play is reduced, losing the benefits of a challenging play environment. This could lead to the child being exposed to the many negative cognitive and physical effects of play deprivation.✓

Play deprivation is defined as "a spectrum from extreme to moderate reduction in opportunities to play, which negatively affects children's social, cognitive, and physical development"[2]. For a child, play deprivation not only has immediate negative consequences in their development, but has lasting negative implications throughout their life. Perhaps the most powerful example of the immediate effects of play deprivation are illustrated in an example from the article "Empty Playgrounds and Anxious Children," where the authors reference a study of play-deprived children in Romania, for the first time experiencing engaging opportunities for play with their peers:

"[The children's] social interaction[s] became more complex; physical activity showed a distinct move from gross to fine motor skills; the children's understanding of the world around them was improved; and they began to play in highly creative ways. They no longer sat rocking, staring vacantly into space. Instead they had become fully engaged active human beings"[2].

Such negative immediate consequences of play deprivation have long-term implications. Research has shown that children who are engaged in play-based learning in preschool tend to "have better quality of life outcomes" than children who are more deprived of play in their learning[1]. Children who are deprived of play are less likely to develop these essential social interaction and conflict resolution skills until later in life; thus, they could experience social and academic difficulties, which would in turn affect

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**Comment [4]:** Great job distinguishing between "risk" and "hazard"

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**Comment [5]:** Font shift – when you cut and paste, be sure to adjust the font so it conforms to your style sheet.

Suzan Last 2014-12-12 11:44 AM  
**Comment [6]:** You don't need quotation marks around an indented block quotation.

their careers. This illustrates the critical importance of the minimization of play deprivation in children through increasing opportunities for challenging child-directed play. ✓

In the past thirty years, children have seen a reduction in both opportunities for play, and the quality of play in general [3]. Factors responsible for this decrease in opportunities in play include park boards and teachers fearing liability for child injury, and overprotective parents. Naturally, schools and their policies have one of the greatest direct influences on quality and quantity of play for children. Children in school develop complex relationships with their peers, and engage in play with them on as frequent a basis as school policy, or their parents will allow. These school policies are becoming more stringent in regard to limiting risk in play, where “teachers’ fear of the legal consequences of injury can elicit over-zealous risk reduction.”[source?]. Parents are also playing a role in this trend of increased play deprivation. Parents are increasingly perceiving their children as vulnerable and in need of their protection, at increasingly earlier ages [3]. An abundance of research has been shown to support this fact as the article “The Risk That There is No Risk” illustrates:

“The age at which children are allowed out to play without supervision has been increasing (Hillman, Adams, and Whitelegg 1990; Tranter and Pawson 2001); children are more likely to be driven or accompanied to their play activities (Fotel and Thomsen 2004; O’Brien (2003); and play activities are more likely to be adult-organised or -supervised and indoors (Isenberg 2002; Tranter 2006)” [3].

Furthermore, with parents becoming more responsible for child’s play, it is just another activity to be squeezed into an already busy parental schedule. The overall result of these factors is:✗

- a decrease of child-directed play and more strictly supervised adult-directed play,
- a decrease of overall opportunity for free and challenging play with peers,
- and an overall increase in risk minimization trends in playground design.✓|

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**Comment [7]:** Silken Laumann has written on this idea in her book *Child's Play*, and has implemented programs to try to combat the problem of overly adult-directed play.

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**Comment [8]:** Nice bullet list; just omit the colon after “is”

Therefore, targeting schools and parents to decrease play deprivation through better designed playgrounds, and increased opportunities for challenging, self-directed play would be an effective means to effect change. ✓

If the effects of risk minimization trends in playground design and use are not recognized and targeted quickly, generations of children may be affected by the severe negative implications of play deprivation. Newer playgrounds are not challenging enough for children to build new skills, and parents and teachers are compounding the issue by decreasing the quantity and quality of play through fears of injury and liability. Parents and teachers must be educated that the long term benefits of play, and the long term detriments of play deprivation, greatly outweigh short term consequences of cuts and bruises. Furthermore, parents and teachers must understand the critical role of playgrounds in the development of a child. They can then shift the goals of playground design from an environment free of risk, to an environment where taking risks is encouraged, hazards are managed safely, and children can develop life-long skills effectively in a challenging and engaging play environment.

#### Cited References ✓

- [1] A. Picard, "Danger in the Playground," *The Globe and Mail*, pp. A.19, Apr 28, 2000.
- [2] E. Belknap and R. Hazler, "Empty playgrounds and anxious children," *Journal of Creativity in Mental Health*, vol. 9 (2), pp. 210-231, 2014. DOI: 10.1080/15401383.2013.864962.
- [3] A. C. Bundy *et al*, "The risk is that there is 'no risk': A simple, innovative intervention to increase children's activity levels," *International Journal of Early Years Education*, vol. 17 (1), pp. 33-45, 2009. DOI: 10.1080/09669760802699878.
- [4] H. Little and D. Eager, "Risk, challenge and safety: implications for play quality and playground design," in *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, vol. 18 (4), pp. 497-513, 2010. DOI: 10.1080/1350293X.2010.525949.
- [5] R. Mitchell *et al*, "Not all risk is bad, playgrounds as a learning environment for children," in *International Journal of Injury Control and Safety Promotion*, vol. 13 (2), pp. 122-124, 2006. DOI: 10.1080/17457300500310269.

✓

GRADING CRITERIA SHEET for RESEARCH ESSAY	
<b>Format</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Properly formatted according to specifications</li> <li>Effective document design elements</li> </ul>	Excellent
<b>Introduction</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Appropriately academic topic, suitably narrowed</li> <li>Context of the issue is clearly explained</li> <li>Controversy is clearly described</li> <li>Thesis takes a clear position on the issue; provides perspective and path</li> </ul>	Excellent intro!  Strong thesis
<b>Development</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unified and coherent paragraph development (TEEC)</li> <li>Clear logic and reasoning to develop and support thesis</li> <li>Effective use of sources</li> <li>Effective use of empirical evidence</li> <li>Demonstrates interest and engagement with the topic</li> <li>Argument is organized and structured in a logical order, using effective rhetorical strategies</li> </ul>	Well-organized and well-developed paragraphs.  Excellent evidence-based argument.  Subtle appeals to emotion are effective.
<b>Sources</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Appropriate number (at least 5) of credible, academic and reliable sources have been used</li> <li>Quotations, paraphrases and summaries of sources are effectively introduced, contextualized, and explained</li> <li>ALL Sources are cited properly in IEEE style</li> <li>Sources material is integrated smoothly into the essay</li> <li>Sources listed in a properly formatted <b>References</b> section (IEEE style)</li> </ul>	5 excellent sources, well integrated, and properly cited in IEEE.  For further reading, you might be interested in Silken Laumann's book, <i>Child's Play</i>  <a href="http://www.mcnallyrobinson.com/9780679314073/silken-laumann/childs-play#.VltGzydWLSA">http://www.mcnallyrobinson.com/9780679314073/silken-laumann/childs-play#.VltGzydWLSA</a>
<b>Conclusion</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Effectively recaps, summarizes the argument without sounding repetitive</li> <li>"concludes" the essay—does not just .... stop...</li> <li>Reinforces the importance of the topic; answers the "so what?" question; spells out broader implications</li> <li>Does not introduce any NEW arguments</li> </ul>	Great conclusion!
<b>Style</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Adheres to a formal academic prose style (avoids contractions, 2<sup>nd</sup> person pronouns, slang, colloquial expressions, clichés, etc.)</li> <li>Uses proper terminology and vocabulary for the topic</li> <li>Uses a variety of sentence structures effectively</li> </ul>	Excellent formality level and vocab  A few word choice errors  Effective sentence structure
<b>Expression</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clear expression of ideas; avoids awkwardness and vagueness</li> <li>Concise; avoids wordiness</li> <li>Coherent; uses logical transitions to link ideas</li> <li>Concrete; uses specific examples and precise vocabulary</li> <li>Correct; adheres to standard rules of grammar, punctuation, usage and sentence structure</li> </ul>	Occasional awkward or wordy phrasing could use revision, but generally the writing here is very clear and sophisticated, with a strong vocabulary.  A couple minor punctuation errors Watch out for that "singular their"
<b>Comments</b> (see <b>First Year Grading Standards</b> link on Moodle for detailed rubric on how letter grades correspond to particular writing skills).	Excellent work! A+ You have a strong and well-focused argument that is very well supported by academic research and well organized.  <div>23/25</div>

