

## Scenario

A young boy transferred into a kindergarten. The report from his former school suggested that he was highly disruptive and likely has attention deficit disorder. His new teacher noted that he was caught struggling as his parents were in a bitter divorce. Some mornings his teacher had only to look at his face to see that he wouldn't be able to join in the circle time. The child came to know that he was free to play so long as he did not disrupt the others. After time, when he could cope, he would join the group.

One teacher might have considered it an indulgence to allow this boy to play, and may have believed that it would result in a greater problem with this child. However, the boy's new teacher recognized that a power struggle would only serve to agitate the boy more. The new teacher knows that play is not an indulgence, but a benevolent way for children to cope. It is also an important part of healthy living.



*“Too many schools place a double burden on children. First, they heighten their stress by demanding that they master material beyond their developmental level. Then they deprive children of their chief means of dealing with that stress – creative play.”*

*Miller & Almon, 2009*

## PUMP PRIMING

**T**he term pump priming was used by Sara Smilansky (1969), a foremost authority on children's play and learning, to describe the teacher's role in infusing children's play with new ideas. This might be accomplished by providing direct experiences such as a field trip or attending a live theatrical production. It may also be accomplished by reading to children, viewing a documentary film, or bringing an interesting guest into the classroom. Educators are well aware that what children take from an experience may not be immediately apparent.

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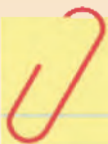
Children in a grade 2 class returned from an excursion to the Royal Winter Fair. During playtime, instead of play around this topic as the teacher intended, the children took up the theme of Ninja Turtles. It was sometime later that the children used what they had experienced at the Fair as a resource for writing picture books.

Pump priming by the teacher is a means of stimulating interest and providing focus for self-directed play. While this may seem a contradiction, it is always important for teachers to expand the students' interests and knowledge beyond what they may get at home. As educators observe children's play they may recognize that another type

Pump Priming	Reflect on the Following
<p><b>Through Direct Experience</b></p>	<p><i>What direct experiences can take place in the school playground? What is in the children's immediate environment? (local park, interesting business such as a bakeshop, construction site )?</i> Excursions into the broader community:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local theatre production.</li> <li>• Museums.</li> <li>• Nature areas, farms, zoos.</li> <li>• Mall.</li> </ul> <p>Bring the community into the classroom, invite: e.g. artists, musicians, community workers, parents to demonstrate a hobby or skill, business owners, etc.</p>
<p><b>Through Vicarious Experience</b></p>	<p>Literature (fiction, nonfiction, poetry). Personal accounts. Film. Television.</p>

of experience will extend or enrich the play. They may also plan experiences that will stimulate play. (Listening to a story about boats motivated some to want to make their own boats to test at the water table. Counting to 50 in different ways prompted one child to build two circles of 25 blocks to make 50. Putting a frame over the wooden sandbox with hooks on the top cross bar led children to experiment with pulleys to lift and empty the sand.) One of the challenges is providing opportunities for children to make connections to personal experiences and to objects, systems, and events in the world in which they live.

The following anecdote shows how pump priming works to extend the children's knowledge and enrich play in the classroom:



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Two grade 3 students were cleaning the hamster cage. While they worked, Emmanuel played with Hamish on the counter along side the cage. As another child passed by, he dropped a heavy book on Hamish' paw. Consternation ensued as the rest of the children gathered

round to examine him. One child suggested that they take the hamster to the veterinarian to have his paw looked at.

After school, the teacher visited a nearby animal hospital to see if this would be possible. The veterinarian was surprised but willing to have the children visit. The next morning, they tucked Hamish into a warm woolen mitten to carry him over to the clinic. As the whole class marched in, the veterinarian was apprehensive, but in spite of the crowd he was able to give them a tour of the facilities, including looking in on an animal that had surgery. He placed the tiny hamster on the examining table and let the children listen through the stethoscope, and watch as he carefully examined the damaged paw. The children asked questions and listened as he explained about care of pets.

On return to the classroom, the children created a large mural showing all of the different activities they saw at the animal hospital. During Independent Inquiry, mindful of the need of the hamster to have a cozy, quiet place to sleep during the day, one group of children built a small enclosure in the cage. They raided the lost and found box for a warm scarf to line the nest. Several other children put

*together a pamphlet on care of pets while one boy made a thank you note, written as if by Hamish himself.*

*The care with which the children played with the hamster after this visit was noticeable. According to several parents, this new respect for their tiny play partner spilled over into care of their pets at home.*

## INFORMED PARTICIPANT

Perhaps the least understood role for the educator in play is that of participant. It requires the artistry of a true facilitator to find the balance between acting uninvolved in the play and taking control of the experience. This may not come easily to some initially, but with experience, participation in children's play can become one of the most enjoyable parts of the school day. Participation sends the message that the play is valued. Through participation, educators can develop their relationships with children, as well as learn more about them as thinkers and language users.

The culture of children's play remains, by and large, a mystery to adults until they actually get inside of it. The role of informed participant is to understand and extend the



play without intrusion or interference. The informed participant knows when to step back and observe and when to redirect.

This is an example of how an informed participant can use observations to extend the play without disrupting it. The goal in this case is to extend the ideas of the play with the addition of new props that connect to their scenario.

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*The grade 1 children have used the large blocks to create a ramp and a winding roadway. They are reworking the same theme, derived from the latest Hollywood blockbuster. Over and over, they do the same limited set of actions and dialogue involving a chase and a car crash.*

*Observing this, the teacher wonders what the best approach is to change the direction of the play. Her first reaction is to simply go over and tell them they can't play that car chase any more, or they must put away the blocks until they play properly. Instead, she comes up with a creative solution that allows the play to continue. She introduces props to set up a hospital, complete with a sign on the wagon, AMBULANCE.*

*The next morning, after several repetitions of the crash, she enters in role and says, "Is anyone injured? Does he need an ambulance?" With that the children immediately redirect their actions and roles toward the hospital emergency room, and a new set of roles and actions begin.*

*In this instance, the teacher did two things; she introduced materials and entered the play in role. The children were interested in extending their play to include the ambulance scenario. However, it could happen that children might not be interested in pursuing this new avenue of play. If this is the case, the teacher must not force her ideas on the play. Children may acquiesce while the teacher is there but will return to their agenda once left on their own.*