Enhancing Physical Literacy through Emergent Curriculum

Emergent curriculum is an important early childhood education concept which encourages educators to adapt activities to meet the interests and abilities of the children. This February (2019), the children were excited about Groundhog Day approaching so many of the activities we did were geared towards this interest. As part of the Physical Literacy study, I wanted to use the activity “Squirrel Tails” ([APPLE Seeds program](https://www.earlyyearsphysicalliteracy.com/apple-seeds-program), Activity #1), but I adapted the skills in the activity (walking, hopping, jumping, and balancing) and developed a "Groundhog Maze".

I introduced the activity by reading a story book, *Ten Grouchy Groundhogs* by Kathryn Heling. We talked about the legend of Groundhog Day and looked at pictures of real groundhogs. The children learned about some groundhog behaviour such as living in a burrow and hibernating in the winter.

Then I created a maze with masking tape on the carpet. A square starting area was the "burrow" (small enough that children had to huddle together and practice balancing). From the burrow I taped "tunnels" with some turns leading to an open area where the “groundhogs” looked for their shadows and then scampered back to the burrow. I made the tunnels about 6 inches wide so the younger children could use them successfully. Older children could walk on a single line of tape along the edge for more of a balancing challenge. We also added in various movements such as hopping, skipping, walking backwards or sideways, and so on. Children enjoyed using their hands to make groundhog ears on their heads as they played, which also made balancing more challenging. The toddlers watched the older children play and then tried imitating by walking and crawling after the older children.

After enjoying the activity together, we left the groundhog maze on the carpet for free play. Sometimes children repeated the groundhog activity and sometimes they used the maze for different play such as driving vehicles or walking stuffed animals.

When my consultant, Heidi, came to visit, she asked the children questions about what they were playing. She started by modelling the movements she pretended they may have tried. First, she asked if they stepped on the tape of the maze like a balance beam. They all laughed. Next, she stood on one foot and hopped through the tape. They laughed again and said no. Then, the children showed her how to play in the maze and taught her about groundhogs. All of this while giggling, playing, and having a wonderful time.

Contributed by Lucinda Parker (Dayhome Provider) and Heidi Greenhalgh (Dayhome Consultant)

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participants in the Physical Literacy Proof of Concept Study in Child Care. Heidi shared this story during one of our mentor meetings in March, 2019.