

A Teacher's Guide to Rough and Tumble Play

Brandi Brocker

Katie Hartzog

What is Rough and Tumble Play?

- Rough and tumble play: any playful contact or agonistic behavior that is performed in a playful mode and that is social in nature and characterized by positive emotion.

tickling,
wrestling,
grappling,
restraining,
boxing,
spinning,

swinging,
play fighting,
kicking,
hit and run,
chasing, and
tumbling

Our Research Project

- *Observed Preschool 1 and 2 classrooms*
 - *16 observations*
 - *8 of Preschool 1 and 2 together*
 - *4 of Preschool 1*
 - *4 of Preschool 2*
 - *36 children*
- *Interviewed two teachers at the Child Development Lab.*
- *Reviewed research studies about rough and tumble play.*

Reasons, in general, Rough and Tumble Play is Often Discouraged

- *Misconstrued by adults as dangerous or violent*
(Flanders, J., Leo, V., Paquette, D., Pihl, R., & Séguin, J., 2009)
- *Ambivalence toward children's high levels of physical activity.*
(Pellegrini & Smith, 1998)
- *Leads to aggression; as a result they often discourage it.*
(Pellegrini, A., & Perlmutter, J., 1988)
- *Fear that child may be seen as the aggressor or bully.*
- *Policies are too vague*
- *Teachers do not have enough information to incorporate in their classroom.*
- *Fear of injury*

Benefits of Rough and Tumble Play

- *Self-regulatory skills*
- *Social competence*
- *Positive peer relationships*
- *Positive improvements in peer interactions*
- *Encoding and decoding of social signals*
- *Physical development*
- *Social organization and social skills*

More Benefits

- *Safe practice for fighting/confronting*
- *Establishing and maintaining dominance relationships*
- *Self handicapping*
- *Prevent antisocial behavior*
- *Learn rules to games*
- *Develop physical and cooperative skills*
- *Teaches negotiation*

Useful Skills

- *What children learn from RTP:*
 - *Get a hold of emotions*
 - *Listening to their friends*
 - *Control of their body and interactions*
 - *No fear of contact with others*
 - *Self protection*

The Teacher Benefits of Observing Children's R&T Play

- Observations of children at play can provide valid insight into a children's level of functioning on contemporaneous measures;
- For example,
 - sociometric status
 - reading readiness
- In addition, play seems to predict future levels of functioning.
 - For example: aggression during free play predicts subsequent juvenile delinquency

Examples

- Able to watch certain children more closely after they are aware of their personality and nature of play
- Able to keep an eye on the students who tend to become more aggressive during play and teach those children how to regulate their emotions

What We Saw the Most

- They played rough and tumble 67 times:

Brief rough and tumble: 46

Chasing: 22

Pushing: 11

Restraining: 9

Wrestling: 8

Hitting/ boxing: 10

Kicking: 5

Shout/ hollering: 7

Run past: 5

Gender

- More boys than girls participated in rough and tumble play
 - 15 boys out of 18 total boys and 11 girls out of 18 total girls
- Boys played R&T more with other boys
- Girls played R&T more with other girls
- Boys were more physical and louder during R&T play
 - Brief rough and tumble, wrestling, chasing, kicks, shout
- Girls were less physical and not as loud. Girls' R&T usually involved chasing, running past, reciprocal chasing, spinning, rolling, and falling on each

Age

- Older children participated in R&T more often than the younger children
 - Preschool 1: 6 of 9 boys and 5 of 9 girls played R&T
 - Preschool 2: 9 of 9 boys and 6 of 9 girls played
- The children played with kids in their own class vs. the other class.
- When the children played R&T with children from the other class it was mainly the same few older children playing with many different younger children.
- The older children's R&T was more physical than the younger children. When the older children played with the younger children it was also less physical.

Location and Length of play

- R&T mainly took place in the grass outside, playground area, slides, in the sandbox and on the hill.
- Rarely happened inside the classroom, when it did it happened during transition times, near the sinks and bathrooms.
- R&T play usually lasted between 2 minutes and 10-15 minutes.
- Girls play did not last as long as the boys play.

When it Happened the Most

- *Transition times: before and after snack, before and after outside time, and while children were washing hands getting ready for other activities.*
- *Outside: free play and games. Happened more when both classrooms were outside, rather than just one classroom.*
- *Inside: washing hands, restrooms, before and after sitting on their letter, story time and dancing.*
- *Rarely occurred inside the classroom.*

Types of R&T play

- Boys R&T were more vigorous styles of play: wrestling, jumping, chasing, pushing, pretend fighting, karate,
- Girls R&T were less vigorous than the boys: chasing, light pushing, holding hands and falling, spinning and jumping.
- When the children played games with each other such as freeze tag, wheelbarrow races, football, building with the large waffle blocks, it often involved R&T play.

Pretend Play in R&T

- Boys: Good guy vs. bad guy, karate, ninja, Batman, Superman, police officers and monsters, shouting and loud noises.
- Girls: playing house, family or babies and talent shows.
- Boys usually played good guy vs. bad guy and made the girls be the bad guys.
- Boys mimicked adults, classmates and media
- Girls mimicked boys with the pretend play but not the R&T part.

R&T vs. Aggression

- 6 of the 67 times the children played R&T started as R&T and turned into aggression.
- Same behaviors as R&T, but a few distinctions: closed fist slaps, mean faces, loud and mean noises, not following the rules to R&T play, behaviors are a part of retaliation.
- Not listening to their friends.
- Teachers always intervened.

Teacher's Role

- *Teacher is the most important role.*
- *Teacher is responsible for presenting it at the beginning of the class year.*
- *Teacher explains:*
 - *Ground rules*
 - *Intervention*
 - *Suggestions*
 - *Discipline*

Ground rules

- Open palms—not fist
- Nothing above the shoulders
- Listen to others' needs
- Only outside in the grass
- Happy faces
- Not aggressive

Interventions

- Go over rules before outside play
- Monitor the children during play
- Check in with play group to be sure everyone is still enjoying play—no one is feeling threatened
- Reinforce rules when needed
- Address the aggression as a whole
- Direct the individual to self regulate emotions

Suggestions

- *Establish rules in the beginning*
- *Designate an area where RTP is allowed and safe*
- *Be consistent with rules*
- *Intervene when necessary—do several check-ins*
- *Distraction techniques during transition times*

Discipline

- *Maintain a standard of discipline*
- *Allow children to express their emotions to teacher and other children involved*
- *Make suggestions for future incidences*
- *Allow child to return to the group when he/she is ready*

What We Saw that Worked:

- Group conversation about the play after it happens
- Giving the children the opportunity to express their emotions and feelings
 - Ex: Child feeling unsure about the play before the teacher checked-in and then felt happy and joined in after.
 - Ex: Teacher telling the child to verbally express to the other child that she did not want to play that way.
 - Ex: Time to sit alone and think about feelings after child became aggressive.

Reactions From Rough and Tumble Play

- Reactions from children and teachers:
 - Happier after R&T play and continued to play that way
 - When teacher intervened and did check-ins the children seemed more willing to play and enjoy the play
 - Happier after given the opportunity to talk about it and seemed happier after they were able to express their feelings about the play
 - When the teachers intervened after a child got injured, the teacher told children ways they could prevent that from happening in the future. The children continued to play, but did so in the way the teacher suggested (moving to a softer area, make sure no one is right next to you that you may run into)