

# Play, Policy, & Practice CONNECTIONS

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## A Note from the Editors:

Welcome to a very special two-part edition of *Connections*! Both the Fall 16 and Spring 17 publications will focus on what is working in early childhood play-based classrooms across the country. Lynn and I found ourselves concerned about the lack of play in our schools and decided we should instead be sharing positive examples of how many places were using play and being successful. We set out to use a backward design that instead of focusing on research first, started instead with successful practices.

We are pleased to introduce you to Dr. Jennifer Berke, Child Care Exchange's Masters Leader from 2016 as our guest editor. She did a fantastic job of collecting case studies and then aligning the comments with current researchers in our field. You are in for a real treat. It is so exciting to see the many positive examples.

Thank you, Dr. Berke, for your commitment to play and to our publication of *Connections*! We appreciate your hard work and are extremely delighted to share how play is working!

### Co-Managing Editors:

Lynn Hartle, The Pennsylvania State University at Brandywine  
Karen Lindeman, Edinboro University

### From the Guest Editor, Jennifer Berke, Ph.D.

I am so pleased to be the Guest Editor for the next two publications. In March, 2016 I sent out a request for individuals to submit short 'case' studies on play. Because I had been chosen as a Master Leader by Child Care Exchange, I was able to use the mailing

mailing list to contact practitioners. I urged them to write from the heart and focus on the importance of play. Play experts were then identified and encouraged to connect the case study information to theory, research and/or describe how they discerned theory to practice being accomplished. Using their expertise and unique perspective, they were eminently qualified to affirm some of the values and beliefs about play that were found in these articles.

During my search for play experts one individual inquired as to why PPPIF did not go right to the data and research first. Obviously, data and research are extremely important, especially for audiences that may view qualitative accounts lacking in scientific potency. However, research and data siphon the description of joy out of rich play episodes. Besides, given the current state of affairs of a test-driven, solely academic focus for young children – where sometimes the kindergarten curriculum is described as “DAUNTING” and often professors are frustrated by not being able to find appropriate placements for pre-service teachers (even in 3-year-old classrooms) – I felt we all needed to be reminded that play for children was actually being supported, valued, and respected. In fact, I found many of the case descriptions moving, providing an opportunity for revitalization. I hoped that the joy in these articles would shine through and that the play experts would connect that joy to theory and research.

I am pleased that there are articles submitted from each major region of the country, from individuals in different positions of engagement including, toddler teachers, private preschool teachers,

child care center teachers, a family child care provider, an administrator in a public school, a parent, a grandparent, and a community program [this does not have an expert comment], as well as 4 articles from around the world.

A description of each article was not included because you should enjoy reading them and draw your own conclusions regarding what points about play are essential. Some accountings may inspire you; some stances may challenge your thinking. Furthermore, I have tried to reach out to a broad spectrum of “play experts” in order to propel the conversation to an even deeper intensity. We (myself, and coeditors Karen Lindeman and Lynn Hartle) anticipate that the next two issues of *Connections* (Fall ’16 and Spring ’17) will stimulate advocacy and a dialogue around how to best create an action plan that will lead to a national position paper on play for NAEYC.

Finally, and I am stating with as much emphasis as I can: the deliberate choice of schools and programs to exclude play in early childhood (UP TO AGE EIGHT) is toxic and damaging. Yes, we must be armed with research and data but we already have so much of that information-AND IT IS IGNORED. Kathy Hirsch-Pacek and Roberta Golinkoff assert in their new book, *Becoming Brilliant: What Science Tells Us About Raising Successful Children* (2016), that we have let the Learning Industry overshadow the Learning Science. Why have we allowed that? However, the more important question is, “What are we going to do about it?” We can no longer afford to sit idly by, waiting for others to understand the importance of play. This must be a call to action-not just another exercise in platitudes and patience! Sincerely,

Jennifer E. Berke, Ph.D., Guest Editor

Berke and Berkley (B & B) Early Childhood Consultant Group  
Exceptional Master Leader, Child Care Exchange (2015)

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*Disclaimer: The programs described by the authors seem developmentally appropriate and supportive of play, yet the editors cannot endorse them since we have not visited any of the programs in person.*

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## Outer Space On the Patio

By Bethica Quinn, MA  
Centro Las Olas –Bilingual Childcare Center  
San Francisco, CA

This morning, Santiago and Xavier both started their preschool day on the patio. Before any other children ventured outside, they moved the small wicker chairs and the milk crates into a pattern they negotiated as they went along. “Aquí me voy a sentar yo,” said Xavier as he positioned a chair. *I’m going to sit here.* “Aquí va la comida,” answered Santiago as he stacked one box on top of another. *The food goes here.*

As they had done on several previous mornings, Santiago and Xavier were building a space ship for their planned trip to the moon.

While Santiago and Xavier worked on the patio, Maya, Lucía Inez and Orla were in the reading corner. They had clipboards in hand and were taking copious notes. “Somos doctoras,” commented Lucía Inez. *We are doctors.* “Doctoras malas,” added Maya. *Evil doctors.* Maya pulled over a chair from the writing table and climbed up to stand on it. She reached one hand to the sky and slowly, with great power and intent, curled her fingers into a fist. Orla echoed the gesture. “Estos son nuestros poderes malos,” said Orla with relish. *These are our evil powers.*

Now, more children were arriving and several chose to go outside to the patio. Adela and Lenna were looking around to see what they would do next when Ari arrived and went straight to the sand kitchen. “Esto es mi pasteleria,” he announced. *This is my bakery.* “¿A cómo los pasteles?” asked the teacher. *How much are the cakes?* “Hoy es un día especial,” replied Ari. “Puedes tener un pastel y no me tienes que dar nada de dinero.” *This is a special day. You can have a cake and you don’t have to give me any money at all.* On hearing this, Adela and Lenna clapped their hands and jumped up and down. They looked at each other with big smiles and began a discussion of their favorite flavors of cake.

After baking for the girls, Ari went to the other side of the patio to see if the astronauts needed any cake for their journey. Mateo had arrived to join the space voyage, and Lucía Inez had transformed from an evil doctor to an astronaut as well and had found a

seat on top of the food storage in the spaceship. They were not interested in cake, so Ari decided to become an astronaut too. The spaceship was getting a little crowded, though.

Ari climbed into the nearby hammock and asked Orla, who had just come outside, to swing him to the moon.

“¡Columpiame a la luna!”



The teacher asked Mateo, who was sitting closest to the hammock, how the astronauts in the original spaceship were going to communicate with Ari. “No sé,” said Mateo. “Podemos mandar un mensaje.” *I don’t know... we can send a message.* On an earlier day of spaceship building, Mateo had used a long stretchy ribbon to connect two parts of the ship. The teacher reminded him of this and asked if he thought they could use the ribbon again. He nodded. When she went to get the ribbon, she also found two pulleys with coupling links attached. Xavier attached one link to a milk crate on the spaceship and Lenna climbed up to clip the other one to the end of the hammock.

After Lucía Inez helped to string the ribbon through the pulleys, Mateo began to pull on one end. The ribbon became snarled in the pulley and broke. “Necesitamos algo mas fuerte,” Orla said. *We need something stronger.* The teacher went to look for some hemp cord and the children once again pulled it through the pulleys. Unfortunately, the cord also became snarled and broke when they pulled harder. Lucía Inez and Xavier left to go back inside, disappointed. The others were determined, however. “¿Qué hacemos?” asked the teacher. *What should we do?* “Debemos buscar una soga muy fuerte,”





answered Mateo. *We need a really strong rope.* The teacher sent him inside to ask the inside teacher for a length of rope. She also asked for volunteers to bring paper, markers and clothespins from the art area. Four children ran off with great purpose and soon returned with the needed materials. This time the pulley system worked and the children began to send messages back and forth between the spaceship and the hammock. Lenna wrote her name, her brother's name, "mami" and "papi." Lucia Marisol drew a picture of herself with her best friend. Ari drew a heart to send to Maya.

Inside, Xavier and Lucía Inez had found another game. Celeste had covered her head with a green cloth. "Soy la Virgen de Guadalupe," she said. *I am the virgin of Guadalupe.* Lucía Inez grabbed a red cloth and put it on her head. "Soy la Virgen Maria y eres José," she said to Xavier. *I am Mary and you are Joseph.* Xavier and Lucía Inez chose a baby doll and placed it in a basket, tenderly wrapped in a blanket. Then they brought the basket back out to the patio and the holy family climbed on board the space ship.

Meanwhile, the exchange of messages continued. Much negotiation was needed to stop the pulleys and wait while messages were attached. Ari and Orla exchanged clothespin strategies – it's really hard to get the pin to grab the rope and the paper at the same time! Then more negotiation was needed to decide who would pull the rope in which direction to move the messages where they needed to go. Mateo called out the name of the recipient as each message reached him. Lenna sat on the milk crate where the other pulley was attached and directed Ari to pull. Adela climbed up next to Mateo and collected the overflow of messages, then brought them to Maya, who asked Xavier/José to turn over one of the crates to make a box for delivered mail. Santiago wrote all the letters he knew on a message, then asked the teacher to sound it out. "Sinmisat Bro?" she tried – sending him into gales of laughter.

This trip to the moon, which had begun when school opened at 9 am, continued until it was time to clean up at noon. Along the way there were many side journeys and a lot of discovery. At Centro Las Olas, rich play like this is the heart of our program. As a

Spanish immersion program serving dual language learners in San Francisco's Mission neighborhood, we believe that experiences like these are essential to prepare the children we serve for school and for life. Through these types of play encounters, children build foundational capacities that will support their learning throughout their school years. We identify these capacities as language, reasoning, representation and relationships. When they engage in complex social play, children are strengthening their language capacity as they talk to teachers and to each other about what they are doing. They are reasoning to solve problems encountered in play, from the powers needed by evil doctors to the best way of sending messages between space ships. They are representing their ideas symbolically, both in dramatic play and in artistic media. And they are strengthening their relationship skills through all the negotiation and mutual care required to make the play a success.

Because play is a priority for our program, we do several things to make sure that deep, rich play can happen at our school. First of all, we have created the environment with play in mind. The space is divided into defined areas for play, like the reading area, house corner, and patio the children used in the play described here. Each area has open-ended materials the children can utilize for a variety of purposes. For example, there are swatches of fabric of different colors in the house area instead of pre-made 'costumes.' If they were limited to the firefighter or doctor costumes, Celeste, Lucía Inez and Xavier probably wouldn't have been inspired to represent a story they have heard many times in their families. The milk crates on the patio are another open-ended material that the children can turn to any purpose they have in mind. Additional materials, like the rope, clothespins and pulleys used on this day, are stored in classroom cabinets so access is easy if a need is indicated.

We have thought carefully about our daily schedule in order to create the time children need to engage deeply with the materials and with each other. We decided to dedicate the whole morning, from 9 am to noon, to child-directed play. During this time, children have free access to the different spaces inside

and outside the classroom and to the materials in each. They can move between spaces at will. Although teachers may offer invitations to more focused project work during this time, children have a choice about whether or not to participate. If there is really great play going on that needs extra adult support, as there was on this day, we may decide to save the invitation we had prepared for another day.

Adult-child interactions are intentionally planned to support play. Both the teachers and the parent volunteers in this co-op program work to facilitate rather than direct children's play. We practice a menu of strategies, including adding needed materials, narrating on-going scenarios, and asking open-ended questions in order to help children deepen their play. We also document the children's play and reflect on that documentation in staff and family meetings. This ensures that adults in the program maintain a consistent stance supporting play and recognize the opportunities for scaffolding children's development.

We try to keep rules and directions to a minimum and to question our urge to command and correct. For example, on seeing Maya climb on a chair to reach her hand to the sky for her evil powers, the first impulse of many adults would be to tell her to get down. But through our process of reflection, the adults at Las Olas practice holding on to that impulse and ask ourselves first: Does she have a purpose for what she is doing? Is she doing it with focus and intention? Does what is going on around her allow us to let her follow her plan? We have found that when we let children know that they are responsible for their own safety in small ways like climbing on chairs (while we stay in charge of the big ways like making sure the chairs in the program are stable and in good repair), they tend to act with more care and hurt themselves less. Similarly, we allow children to move materials between areas of the classroom when they have a plan and a purpose in doing so, and then ask the children to help put the space back in order when play comes to an end.

Because we believe that children have a right to rich and complex social play, and because we

believe that such play is the best vehicle to prepare them for school and later success, we have designed the program at Las Olas with play in mind. Decisions about space, schedule and interactions are made intentionally to support play. Documentation and reflection are also used to see how we can scaffold language, reasoning, representation and relationships through the play experience. It is our hope that these mornings spent going to space on the patio will propel these dual language learners on all the journeys their future holds.

## **Response to Outer Space on the Patio**

By Dr. Ann Barbour

*Professor Emerita at California State University, Los Angeles. <http://web.calstatela.edu/faculty/abarbow/>*

Quinn's account of children's play within an uninterrupted three-hour period at Centro Las Olas provides compelling examples of the extent to which play and learning are intertwined. It highlights many ways children build and integrate concepts and skills across a range of developmental areas within the context of self-directed play. It also illustrates how beliefs that each child is curious, competent, capable of learning, and deserving of respect are translated into program practices.

Like Centro Las Olas, other high-quality early childhood programs are based on constructivist philosophies that are informed by the theories of Dewey, Piaget and Vygotsky. Many of these programs also share the goals of encouraging the foundational capacities of language (whether mono- or multi-lingual), reasoning, representation and relationships. However, few among them devote an entire morning to nurturing these capacities during open-ended play or to facilitating the kinds of in-depth collaboration, problem solving and representation described in Quinn's article. Time *is* definitely of the essence at Centro Las Olas. But rather than transitioning on cue through a number of different activities or hurrying to finish what they've started, children are able to become fully absorbed in substantive and worthwhile endeavors of their own design (Levin, 2016).

In this play encounter children engaged throughout the morning in symbolic play (also called dramatic, pretend or fantasy play), the primary form of play for two- to seven-

year-olds (Garvey, 1977). The children also demonstrated their growing cognitive abilities to symbolically transform objects, actions and themselves into *doctoras malas*/evil doctors, bakers, the holy family, and astronauts on a trip to the moon. They collaborated and communicated to create both the physical and narrative frameworks for their play. In the process, they were learning from each other as they built rich language and literacy foundations and STEM concepts. They also were developing other abilities less easily measured by standardized instruments. These include self-regulation (Bodrova & Leong, 2006) and other executive functions (Diamond, Barnett, Thomas & Munro, 2007), critical thinking and creative problem-solving (Saracho, 2010), persistence in the face of challenge (Dweck, 2006), and the “intellectual dispositions” to make sense of their own experiences through reasoning, hypothesizing and predicting (Katz, 2010). The children were building self-confidence and self-reliance as well as practicing behaviors that underlie all successful social interactions, including awareness of other peoples’ intentions and perspectives. These life skills (Galinsky, 2010) are essential ingredients for success in school and beyond.

Quinn also describes how the physical environment with its open-ended materials and adult-child relationships set the stage for in-depth play. During the morning’s play encounter, adult facilitation was supportive yet unobtrusive. The teacher understood children’s intentions, prompted their thinking (e.g., by asking how an astronaut could communicate with the spaceship), helped them make connections to prior experience (e.g., by reminding one boy what he had previously done), and conveyed confidence in their problem-solving abilities (¿*Qué hacemos?*/What should we do?). The teacher recognized children’s abilities to innovate and cooperate in engineering a system to deliver messages to their spaceship. She did not underestimate their capacity to become purposefully immersed in challenging activities they found meaningful. In other words, she scaffolded their learning (Dombro, Jablon & Stetson, 2011) without taking away ownership of their play.

Centro Las Olas’ program enables children to fully benefit from open-ended play. In applying both theory and empirical research about how children best develop and learn, it is successfully countering the alarming trend to teach discrete academic skills in response to school reform mandates. Just as importantly, this program is protecting children’s right to joyful, creative, self-directed play (Elkind, 2007; Ginsburg, 2007).

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## Two Reflections About Play

By Pepper Robinson

The Five Towns Early Learning Childcare Center Inwood,  
NY

### Reflection #1: PLAY nurtures critical learning dispositions



This is a time of unprecedented attention and support for early childhood education. Everyone is talking about Pre-k and the value of quality early learning experiences. But what should quality early learning look like and what does it look like at the Center? Duncan and Lawrence (2010) state, “dispositions are not learned through formal instruction, but can be encouraged and taught through children’s environments. Creating environments that foster the acquisition of these dispositions is critical to a child’s future learning potential” (p.51). At Five Towns Early Learning Center we truly understand that children (of all ages) learn best through play. During play our children are developing the following critical learning dispositions or- habits of mind:



1. *Joy of Learning Developed through Play* –Play for all humans is the ideal way to learn. Self-chosen, self-directed, pleasurable investigation is our definition of play. Having choices and making decisions gives children a feeling of power. Attention and focus are developed by following individual interests and passions. As our favorite neighbor Fred Rogers said “Play is often talked about as if it were a relief from serious learning. But, for children play is serious learning. Play is really the work of childhood.”

2. *Wonder/Curiosity –Everyday, at Play-* Our children have multiple opportunities for wonder. By suspending adult time and honoring the child’s time, we can pause at small wonders, those events we are often too busy to notice. After a rainstorm, I observed

four children, knees bent, rapt focused attention, watching worms. The worms were doing nothing; they were just there – instilling wonder in the children.

3. *Discovery Through Exploration* – During morning ‘work’ time teachers ask questions, rather than give answers and children are given opportunities to make discoveries. Teachers plan daily play activities that support discovery through exploration and experimentation. A neighborhood walk on a beautiful spring day with toddlers (natural scientists) becomes a potent lesson and practice in making observations and noticing changes.

4. *Creativity/Problem-Solving* – By providing open-ended play materials and activities, teachers give children opportunities to construct their own schemes. By emphasizing process over product, by not rescuing or intruding, children can flex their problem-solving muscles. We believe in children’s abilities - children are viewed as competent. At play children feel free to try things and make mistakes, discovering what works and what does not. When children are not afraid to fail, they can take risks and anything is possible.

5. *Cooperation, Kindness, Caring and Collaboration* – At play children practice cooperation, caring and collaboration, critical dispositions for a meaningful life.

Observe the dramatic play area on any day any you will see children working hard on cooperation and collaboration skills. Our

rickshaw rider was purchased with these positive social skills in mind. The riding toy must be used by three children, fostering countless negotiations. Words of kindness and caring are modeled and taught throughout the day.



We believe that these critical learning disposition - habits of mind -best develop during play and will contribute to the creation of lifelong learners.

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### Reflection #2: Each day, outside the window, I see children playing... What joy!

I begin my day by walking into my Center, greeting teachers and children. I then go make a cup of coffee in our all-purpose room. While my coffee is brewing, I lean on the window sill and gaze out the window into the backyard, intently watching the children play in our outdoor classroom. At that moment, I experience a host of feelings and thoughts. I wonder if teachers are able to really see the rich experiences that they are offering children. I wonder if teachers understand the depth of the learning that is taking place in the small moments that I can see. I wonder if families know how lucky they are to have enrolled their children at the Center. These ordinary, spontaneous, joyful moments of play put a smile on my face and center my day as I go into my office.

- The two year olds are outside this morning. Amy is sitting on a stump and Alisa is standing behind her combing her hair with a tree branch. Other friends soon joined the game, waiting for a turn to get their hair fixed at their 'beauty parlor.' I smile as I watch the two-year olds working together, creating a game with found material.
- One morning I laughed as I watched a group of our four year olds having a race. They had organized the game. Antonio was the leader and he was determined to be the winner. Every time that he was behind in the race he would say, "Wait a minute, wait a minute, I need to tie my shoe." Several times he restarted the race. Each time he was behind he had another ruse to restart the race. He created a game with

his friends and I marveled at his commitment to his personal goal.

- It is a rainy morning and the three year olds are outside in their green raincoats and boots, joyfully jumping in puddles. I was thrilled that my teachers really believed that there is no inappropriate weather, only inappropriate clothing and that their children were outside doing something that all children dream of doing, jumping in a big puddle with their friends.
- I see two year olds gathering stones, dropping them down the storm drain, listening as they hit the water and then laughing--small motor skills development as well as a study of cause and effect.) The children create games popping in and out of the playhouse windows--working on taking turns and building friendships. Or sometimes children just chill in the center of an old rubber tire--discovering how their bodies fit in space.



So this is how I begin my day looking out the window, watching the children play. According to Carlo Frederick Beuchner, an American writer and theologian, "Purpose is the place where your deep gladness meets the world's needs." I think of his words

From Pepper Robinson:

I am a passionate advocate for play, so I am sad when I lose my 3 and 4-year-old children to UPK in the district public school because of the absence of play in those programs. I support play in my daily work with young children. I preach play to my CDA students and I share my passion with anyone who is willing to listen. I am grateful that I am able to provide play every day for the 54 children that attend the Five Towns Early Learning Center and find it heartbreaking that it is denied to so many children in the pursuit of only academic learning.



and smile. I am filled with joy, grateful that I have found a place where my passions and purpose can help meet the great needs of these children as they strive to derive meaning from the world.

## Response to Two Reflections

By Kristine Martz and Alison Porcelli

Co-authors, along with Cheryl Tyler, of *Purposeful Play* (Heinemann, 2016). Kristine Martz teaches Kindergarten in the New York City Public schools

<http://www.heinemann.com/authors/5334.aspx>.

Alison Porcelli is Vice Principal at PS 59 in Manhattan. <http://www.heinemann.com/authors/5001.aspx>.

The author of this article knows that play is how children learn best. In her reflections some very clear themes emerge, supporting this view. She believes that play is a child's work, that all play has a purpose and that in play children feel safe to take risks in their learning, and that essential dispositions that serve children a lifetime can develop during play.

### Play is a Child's Work

In Pepper's first reflection, she describes her sad feelings about losing her students to Universal Pre-K programs, because these programs often emphasize academic learning over play. What Pepper understands, that perhaps these programs do not, is that it does not have to be an either/or situation—the work inherent in a child's play is what supports and enhances children's academic learning. Academic learning means giving our students the skills necessary in order to be successful in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century workplace. According to Tony Wagner (2008), an essential skill needed in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century is imagination. What better place to develop a child's imagination than in play? When children engage in imaginative play they develop skills, such as creativity and flexibility, as well as core social skills, such as negotiation, collaboration and empathy. If we look back at Amy and Alisa's Beauty Parlor play we can see all of this in action. They are developing their flexibility and creativity when they pretend the tree branch is a comb, and they are developing social skills, such as collaboration and self-regulation when they

wait their turn for their "hair to be fixed". All of the skills children learn during play contribute to and enhance academic learning, so why deny children this opportunity?

### Purposeful Play

In Pepper's second reflection, she describes her daily ritual of admiring children at play. As she watches them she wonders if her "teachers understand the depth of the learning that is taking place in the small moments" that she can see. As Pepper watches children stomp in puddles and dramatize scenarios, such as the beauty parlor, she is able to see the many benefits that play has on a child's growth and development. According to Stuart Brown, author of *Play: How it Shapes the Brain, Opens the Imagination, and Invigorates the Soul*, play supports children's cognitive and social development. "(Play) has evolved over eons in many animal species to promote survival. It shapes the brain and makes animals smarter and more adaptable. In higher animals, it fosters empathy and makes possible complex social groups." (Stuart Brown, *Play*, 5) While play may seem like mere frivolity to the untrained eye, what is actually happening when children and animals engage in play is the development of skills necessary for life—skills such as self-regulation, collaboration, empathy, flexibility, persistence, imagination and curiosity.

### Risk-Taking

In her reflections, Pepper Robinson describes the process over product approach she and her teachers take at the Five Towns Early Learning Center. She writes, "By emphasizing process over product, by not rescuing or intruding, children can flex their problem-solving muscles. We believe in children's abilities - children are viewed as competent. At play children feel free to try things and make mistakes, discovering what works and what does not. When children are not afraid to fail, they can take risks and anything is possible."

In his book, *Free to Learn*, Peter Gray states that, "In the absence of concern about failure and others' judgments, children at play can devote all of their attention to the skills at which they are playing."

(p. 154). That is, in play children are not seeking approval from adults and in play children know there are no consequences for failure. Lev Vygotsky, Russian Psychologist famously said in a 1933 lecture, “*In play a child is always above his average age, above his daily behavior; in play it is as though he were a head taller than himself.*” This means that a child who might give up easily or be afraid to try a challenging academic task, can take risks when faced with the challenge of building a really tall block structure, for example. The beauty in this is that what a child learns in play lays the foundation for learning in other contexts. Children who become comfortable making mistakes and trying things again during play, soon learn to apply that same mindset to academic learning.

### Developing Dispositions for Learning

Pepper notes several other powerful dispositions, alongside risk taking, for learning: cooperation, curiosity, kindness, collaboration, and problem solving. The recent study *Early Social-Emotional Functioning and Public Health: The Relationship Between Kindergarten Social Competence and Future Wellness* found these essential skills to be better predictors of success later in life than academic skills. As a matter of fact, even a slight increase in this social competency yielded dramatic results. An Upworthy.com article about the study identified that: “An increase of a single point... showed a child would be 54% more likely to earn a high school diploma, twice as likely to graduate with a college degree, and 46% more likely to have a stable, full time job at the age of 25.” Pepper believes these skills “best develop during play” and researchers support that claim. In an article called “*How Play Wires Kids Brains for Social and Academic Success*” researcher Jaak Panskepp is quoted as saying, “The function of play is to build pro-social brains, social brains that know how to interact with others in positive ways.” As children create, innovate, and problem solve while playing, they are building the neural network that will support their continued growth and development in life: socially and academically.

It is easy to imagine the joy of the children at The Five Towns Early Learning Center, it is also easy to imagine how the skills, fostered by a thoughtful staff, will support children as they grow and learn throughout their lives. Each and every child deserves a space to play and thrive like this.

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## Purposeful Play

By Nancy Kohl, Susan Carlson, & Melissa Hurwitz  
 Rabbi Joseph Weinberg Early Childhood Center Potomac,  
 Maryland

*“Children have the need and right to play. Limiting play is like taking away the air children need to breathe; children are not just poorer, they are literally*

*emotionally, socially, and cognitively starved and we will quickly see the sad results” ~Nancy Kohl, 2016.*

Forty-five years ago, I embarked on my first experience as a volunteer classroom aide in a public school kindergarten in New York City. It was a large class with more than 30 children and there was only one teacher. I arrived to “help” and had little experience and only a little training. The teacher quickly gave me a group of six students and told me to take them out into the hallway and teach them. This first teaching experience turned out to be transformative.

Thankfully, because I didn’t know what to do, I decided to listen to the children. By listening to the children’s conversations and observing their interactions, there was space for and acceptance of their play which quickly focused on one of their favorite things: their daily snack of graham crackers. The children wanted to be heard and once they knew they were, they wanted to play. They created a game with evolving rules to see how many shapes could be made before they munched their crackers into crumbs. The play with crackers as the primary material for exploration, ignited conversations about food, family, favorites, and eventually led the way to exploration of identity, preferences, numbers, letters, shapes, cooking, and re-representations of cracker creations using a variety of materials.

That first experience taught me one of the most critical lessons I would ever have as an educator. Begin by listening. Listen with your whole being. Your listening becomes your attunement; an act of engagement that is based on the value and commitment to children’s play. This reciprocal relationship of listening and valuing play ignites children’s curiosity and creativity, and supports the construction of dispositions of critical thinking and problem solving, as children formulate and test theories.

Over the years I have witnessed many joyous play-filled moments when children follow their own curiosity and seek answers to their questions without adults taking over. I have been fortunate to observe

children inviting other children to explore the great ‘what if’ experiences, and I have also watched children and teachers exploring together in a scaffolding dance that deepens and delights both adult and child. I have been fortunate to work with several teams of thoughtful teachers who purposefully listen, reflect, and respond to the children’s curiosity and play.

This year, I was inspired by the experiences that took place in several of the three-year-old classes at the Rabbi

Joseph Weinberg Early Childhood Center in Potomac, Maryland. Worm play is probably not high on many



teachers’ list of exploration topics. However, one day, during the unusually rainy May, the Sunshine Kids, a class of three-year-olds taught by Melissa Hurwitz and Susan Carlson, ventured outside during a brief respite from the weather. They discovered a playground transformed. Water glistened on the play equipment and wet earth and sand beckoned to the children. As the children explored the changed landscape, a child discovered that the wet cement had hundreds of worms on it. He shouted to his friends, “Worms!” Everyone in the class raced over. Many of the worms were dead, which they discovered when they tried to pick them up and they didn’t move. Then, someone found a live one and everyone rushed to see. The children then continued to test the worms with their fingers until more live ones were found. The children excitedly showed their finds to their friends and teachers. The children wanted to dig in the dirt to see if they could find more worms, and were encouraged by the teachers. They then discovered a mossy area near a fence, rich with worms.

The teachers understood that the children’s high motivation would lead to their gaining and sustaining knowledge through the active process of direct experiences they themselves were constructing. The



educators recognized that if they had reacted with negative comments this enriching play might never have occurred. The educators understood that this precious opportunity was not the time to do a unit filled with lectures on worm facts. This was an educational moment for wonder, in which play would be the vehicle to a rich and meaningful experience provoked by children's curiosity and hunger to know more.

Most of the children had, of course, seen worms

before, but they had never been empowered to pick them up and observe them. Many were hesitant. "Yuck! Worms are gross!" a few children said. Others were scared they might bite them. Over time, perhaps encouraged by the excitement of and lack of fear in others, several reluctant children held a worm offered by another child. "It's okay, it's just wiggly," said one child to another to help reassure her. They wondered about many things as they observed the worms and formulated questions: Would they bite? How and what do they eat? Why do they like the dark? How do they see? Why do the worms like dirt? And, how do they move? Initially the children needed adult guidance to adjust their force when touching the worms. In a short time, the children learned how to carefully pick up and carry the worms. The teachers fostered and supported the children's increasing respect for living creatures. It was rewarding to see that Jewish beliefs and values of caring for nature and for all living things became not only meaningful but a responsibility that the children took seriously. [It is important to note that no worms were intentionally injured during the exploration.]

As the rainy days continued, the children repeatedly asked to bring the worms inside. Susan and Melissa responded to the children's request by putting

a little dirt and grass in a sand bucket, so that the worms could visit the classroom. The teachers cautioned the children that they couldn't keep the worms for long because it wasn't respectful or healthy to keep the worms in a poor environment without proper food, water, etc.

The teachers also noticed that the worm play deepened the children's understanding and connection with the natural world. The children's growing concern for the wellbeing of the worms generalized to other insects that shared the outside play area. The children began to formulate codes of conduct for the "ethical" treatment of worms and other insects. The teachers, recognizing that the children's passion for worm play needed to come into the classroom, asked the children if they wanted to construct an appropriate home for the worms. The children had formed a "friendship" with the worms and wanted to invite and interact with them in their classroom "home". The answer was a resounding "YES!"

A new question formed; how could the teachers help the children bring this desire for direct experience into the classroom? The teachers proposed to do research and to report back to the children. They brought books about worms into the class and consulted with worm experts on how to create a worm-friendly temporary habitat. As the teachers and children learned more about worms, they 'loaned' their expertise amongst each other and even shared their new found knowledge with other classes. [The Reggio Approach embraces the concept that children and adults loan knowledge and expertise. These exchanges are not random, but purposeful, and demonstrate children's capabilities to 'lend or borrow' knowledge to build theories.]



Night crawler worms were purchased and the children constructed a worm habitat using a simple diagram that Susan Carlson drew to be used as a guide. This worm habitat would sustain the worms and provide a way to observe their soil mixing and the tunnels they created.

As the children expressed their ideas and knowledge through (but not limited to) conversations, drawing, painting, collage, and clay, their play increased and the content deepened. Conversational exchanges, books, and book making became especially important avenues for gaining and sharing knowledge. The children expressed their observations to one another not only to share excitement but to affirm their observations and theories. "Look at my worm. It's so big!" one child exclaimed. "It's so cute!" another said. They were able to retell to visitors how they discovered the worms and how they built their habitat. Stories were created about the worms. Books like *Yucky Worms* were read and discussed, deepening their worm knowledge. A sign was created for the worm documentation board. One child wrote the word "worms" on a piece of paper. Another child joined her and they used different materials to outline the letters and images of worms were drawn on the sign. A chart for documentation was created with the children, who provided their observations and knowledge of worm behavior.

The worm play continued to evolve with more digging, categorizing, and theory testing as the children invited each other to explore the great "what if" experiences of scientific exploration. The teachers noticed that during the investigation, the children gained considerable knowledge not only about worm habits, but also about the properties of soil, habitat, and the food required to sustain healthy worms. The children's senses were completely engaged as they discovered that the worms felt "cold", "wet", "wiggly", and "sandy." They delighted in gently holding the curled up worms in their palms or in watching a worm inch up and down their arms. What better way to learn how worms move and feel? One child said (as a worm curled around her wrist) "I have a worm bracelet." Others noticed, "It's tickling my hand." "It's crawling

up my arm." After looking at the worms under a magnifying glass the children discovered "It has lines." Worms were measured against each other to determine their size (biggest, smallest).

The children were also eager to represent their worm friends. They created easel paintings of worms in the grass or their habitat. "Worms in the grass" emerged from cut-and-paste creations with green and brown materials. Observational drawings of the worms allowed for another means of representation. The children also transferred their schemas of family play scenarios to the worms: "Look at my worm:" "I have a mommy worm;" "Mine is a baby worm;" "This is a worm daddy;" "We have a worm family!" They cared about the well-being of the worms, and treated them as family.

The children's delight and engagement with the worms continued until the school year ended. The daily routine continued with the children greeting and waking up the worms, as well as digging outside for more worms that were added to the classroom habitat. The teachers observed a new level of social development, as many children dug worms for one another and willingly shared the worms they had. Worm time took precedence over other play scenarios for many of the children.

The children were very proud of their worms and anyone who entered the classroom, parent or other teachers, were invited by the children to see the worms, the habitat the children had constructed, and to view the documentation and representations of their experiences. The children invited other classes to visit their worms in their worm-friendly habitat and this inspired three other classes to explore for worms outside and to create their own worm habitats. Before the school year ended, all of the classes donated their worms to a local naturalist educator.

During this exploration, it was striking how mindful the teachers were of the need for reflection time, not only for the children, who proposed, questioned, revised and consolidated their theories, but also themselves. Witnessing the skillful work of the

teachers, who listened and responded with such sensitivity to the children's play, has been inspiring. The teachers were willing to move in and out of their own teaching equilibrium to a place of uncertainty, as they worked in partnership with the children. It is extremely challenging to maintain a stance of openness, neither taking over or becoming disengaged from the children's play. The delicate balance of listening, reflecting, responding, provoking, and reflecting in an ongoing cycle requires courage and self-awareness on the part of educators. Curious young minds and supportive teachers, who recognize and facilitate in-depth play experiences, are key factors to learning-filled explorations. Teaching is, after all, an act of bravery, adaptability, and an affirmation of the belief in the capabilities of oneself and children.

**\*Incredibly, listening to children and affirming their play has become a revolutionary act.** Thinking back to my experience many years ago, I realize I had an early glimmer of what teaching could be at its best: a conscious state of receptivity, a constant and continually refreshed willingness to move beyond the familiar, and a commitment to cycles of observation, reflection, and transformation.

\*NOTE-Bold highlight is the editor's emphasis.

## Response to Purposeful Play

By Kathryn Hirsh-Pasek, Ph.D.

*Stanley and Debra Lefkowitz Faculty Fellow in the Department of Psychology at Temple University and a Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institution and coauthor of a Mandate for Playful Learning (2008) and Becoming Brilliant: What The Science Tells Us About Raising Successful Children (2016). <http://kathyhirshpasek.com/>*

### ***Plearning: A commentary on Kohl, Carlson and Hurwitz***

Kohl, Carlson and Hurwitz offer us a wonderful glimpse into the power of playful learning - what we sometimes call "plearning." Over the past three decades, forces of educational change rendered play a four letter word that like Voldemort, was never to be mentioned in the context of "real" learning.

Yet our image of the teacher in the front of the room spouting wisdom to passive children has not produced results. Nor have children profited when we train them like seals on letter-to-sound correspondence without having them engage in the conversations that build strong vocabulary that sticks. The lucky children in Kohl and colleagues' classroom knew names for the different kinds of worms. They understood "habitat" and they formed hypotheses about why those worms suddenly appeared when it rained, but not before. For them, learning the letter to sounds will translate into passages with real meaning. Play encouraged vocabulary learning along with a curious mindset. It reinforced attention. It contagiously reached all aspects of the children's learning by uniting them in a theme so that reading, tracing letters and creating art became a key part of the classroom educational environment. Play and learning just are not divorced.

In our work, we speak not only of a generic play, but of a particular type illuminated in this piece – *guided play*. Play is generally defined an activity that is 1) pleasurable and enjoyable, 2) has no extrinsic goals, 3) is spontaneous, 4) involves active engagement, 5) is generally all-engrossing, 6) often has a private reality, 7) is non-literal, and 8) can contain a certain element of make-believe (Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2009; Garvey, 1977). *Guided play* adds a new dimension where the child drives the learning, but adults either set up the environment in which children explore (as in a Montessori classroom) or support the children like coaches while commenting and building upon their interests (Weisberg et al., 2015; 2016). In guided play skilled teachers support a particular learning goal while being sensitive to the interests of the child. Teachers preserve the joy of learning and the child becomes the active explorer rather than the passive container for knowledge. Note how the study of worms – a child directed activity became a study that sparked interest throughout the year and how it all began with a simple act of listening. In our work, this type of guided play trumps both free play and direct instruction as a learning pedagogy (Fisher et al., 2013).

But this example also teaches us that there is more to master than the learning of content. Play here



fostered learning across a breadth of skills that are so important in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. In a wiki and google world, children can look up content in a matter of seconds. They will need a broader skillset to be successful. Our new book, *Becoming Brilliant: What Science Teaches Us About Raising Successful Children*, suggests that play encourages what we call the 6Cs – **collaboration** (getting along, social regulation); **communication** (language, listening); **content** (three Rs and executive function skills or learning to learn); **critical thinking** (using evidence to support a position); **creative innovation** (putting information together in new ways) and **confidence** (grit, learning from failure). And here, in this very passage, these authors demonstrate how teachers can grow a host of skills in the thematic treatment of something like the study of worms. Rest assured that what the children learned in this exercise will transfer to new contexts and contents as they move through life.

So, thank you Kohl, Carlson and Hurwitz for a lovely example of guided play and for demonstrating so beautifully how we can best use play to teach the skills most valued for 21<sup>st</sup> Century success. Play and learning are united concepts that must again be tightly woven together. Or, as Carla Rinaldi, the President of Reggio Children suggested, play and learning represent the two wings of a butterfly. Without each, the butterfly cannot soar in the wind. Think PLEARNING.

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### **Finding Waldorf-One Family's Journey to Discovering Head, Hands and Heart**

By Emily Adams  
Waldorf School, Denver, Colorado

#### ***The Dilemma***

When my daughter was in preschool the choice was so easy. We chose a preschool that valued play. The children spent hours of time outside every day, no matter the weather. In Colorado that meant we sent snowsuits and snow shoes, water bottles, sunscreen, and sun hats. In the classroom the children had their choice of painting, dress up, or other areas of play.

In graduate school I remember reading about and seeing videos focusing on the implementation of *Developmentally Appropriate Practice* (DAP) in elementary school settings. That information was a stark contrast to the quiet, teacher directed, technology dominated classrooms I visited when trying to choose a kindergarten for my own child. I struggled to find a

kindergarten that was compatible with what I knew about how children learn. I decided to try our neighborhood school. They had a small dress up area in the classroom and I hoped this was a sign that play would be a valuable part of the learning day. Sadly, it was not.

By January I was very concerned. The teacher was telling me that my daughter's test scores were average and we needed to get them up. I stared in disbelief that we were talking about a five-year-old. This child was coming home from hours of intense academics and playing imaginatively with equal intensity. I knew this school setting wasn't working. Not for her or for me. The children weren't even allowed to play in the dress up area. When was the play happening? When were children given opportunities to construct their understanding of the world based on their experiences? The only time children had that opportunity was during the two short periods of recess every day. It was missing entirely the hours of child-directed play - my vision of what kindergarten should provide.

I began searching for alternatives that would more closely align with what I knew was appropriate for young children. I toured a school that was pretty new – a charter school in our district that just re-located to a site closer to where we lived. It followed a Waldorf philosophy, but at the time I knew almost nothing about their values or approach. In the meeting before the tour they told us that they cherished and respected children's play and imagination. When we walked through the preschool and kindergarten classrooms I actually cried. The rooms were beautiful and the materials were all invitations to open-ended play. Even the elementary classrooms were aesthetically appealing. There was space to learn and move and I now know that those components often occur together in Waldorf schools.

I had been hoping to find a place for my daughter to attend first grade the following year. Instead we pulled her out of kindergarten and put her into the preschool class in this exquisite space. Since

then I have learned much about Waldorf and their focus on play as the avenue to learning.

### ***So, what happens in the beautiful spaces of a Waldorf School?***

In a Waldorf kindergarten there is time. Time inside and time outside where children are free to choose what they play with and how they play. There is a rhythm to the day. In ECE we might call this 'structure;' and it is. There is a predictable flow to the day, the week, and the year. There are no posted picture schedules – the rhythm is strong and children know what to expect. There is time for stories and puppet plays, snack and lunch, inside free play and hours of time outside. Each day is marked in subtle ways. Rather than a circle time where the teacher talks about days of the week, each day is represented by both a color of the rainbow and a grain. For example, on Mondays the teachers wear purple and the snack is rice. In this way children are surrounded by the sights, smells, and tastes of each day and begin to internalize the days of the week without ever using a calendar.

Stories are a significant part of a Waldorf classroom and yet, visitors will notice quickly that there are very, very few books in the room. The teachers must be master storytellers and engage the children in stories that carefully chosen to resonate with both the time of year and the stage of life the children are experiencing. The children listen to, watch, and eventually play out the stories they hear. For instance, a teacher may start a new story on Monday with just telling the story. On Tuesday she adds songs, on Wednesday there are puppets. By Thursday and Friday the children are playing and acting the story out with each other.

### ***Waldorf met our family's needs***

I know that the Waldorf philosophy and approach is not for everyone. I understand that the founder of the philosophy held questionable and sometimes unacceptable beliefs. However, what I have found in this school is a place where adults deeply understand how children learn and that they acknowledge, honor and support the fact that play is central to that achievement. This is an environment

where children have the time and support to create an economy based on glass 'jewels' that magically reappear each morning in the large sand area. In this school children pretend to fight dragons, gently care for babies (sometimes the babies are logs), build forts, and sled in the winter. They set play tables with real dishes and flowers. They work out their relationships with each other with the guidance of teachers who know their personalities.

As other families that I know lament the lack of recess in their child's school, I am grateful that my kindergartener has hours of time outside. As other parents brag about their five-year-olds' progress in reading, I think about my child's head swirling with images from the stories she has been told. While some families drill their child on math, mine helped create an economic system where red jewels equaled two clear jewels and big jewels had varying agreed upon values based on their shape and color. Childhood is a brief fleeting time so I am grateful that my daughter has had the opportunity to be in an environment that focuses on the development of the whole child-head, hands, and heart. I believe that the greatest gift my child has received from this school and this experience has been the time to play.

## **Response to Finding Waldorf**

By Gigi Schweikert

*President and Chief Operating Officer for Lightbridge Franchise Company*

<http://www.redleafpress.org/assets/clientpages/Author-Spotlight-gigi-schweikert.aspx>  
<http://www.gigischweikert.com/>

Emily Adams' description of her dilemma to find a play based program for her Kindergartener is inspiring and encouraging, yet uncommon in my experience working with families. Sadly, most families I encounter desire a rigorous, academic program for their children, even for preschoolers. I have heard parents who choose a private early childhood program for their children remark, "I'm not paying for my child to play all day." The goal of these parents is for their children to learn and unfortunately most parents- and

most people- don't equate play with learning. These parents are not tough or bad but just unaware of early learning principles. As early childhood professionals we must accept our challenging predicament, recognizing that we have done an inadequate job educating families and society about the importance and benefits of play in the early years.

Play is learning. Yet, how do you measure play? We are in an educational whirlwind of sooner is better, numbers, competencies, and competition - test scores, Common Standards, grades, comparison of one child's score against another and eventually SATs and ACTs. The first Kindergarten Emily's daughter attended told Emily that her five-year-old's test scores were average. Is one child innately more competent than another? Does it matter? Can we move to assessing, "How is this child smart?" rather than "Is this child smart?" More importantly, how do you evaluate children who are creative, socially apt, and kind? These types of dispositions, competencies, and attitudes are ones that Hirsh-Pasek and Golinkoff (2016) would identify as being the cement that holds the developmental foundation together as children mature, helping them become competent, knowledgeable, and happy citizens while preparing them to be successful in a 21<sup>st</sup> century world that will no longer measure accomplishments by test scores alone.

We push play aside and our schools teach primarily to the first two intelligences of Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligences- verbal and mathematical. This results in children being measured with checklists and numbers, as if test scores are the complete picture of an individual and equates to success. In her acceptance speech from FairTest in 2015, Nancy Carlsson-Paige stated, "We have decades of research in child development and neuroscience that tell us that young children learn actively—they have to move, use their senses, get their hands on things, interact with other kids and teachers, create, invent. But in this twisted time, young children starting public Pre-K at the age of four are expected to learn through "rigorous instruction." In part, this harmful and unfortunately prevalent system is what motivated



Emily to begin a search for a school that actually demonstrated early childhood best practice.

Human existence and learning is constant and inseparable and play, as a channel of learning, should be a lifelong endeavor (Kane, Play Ethic, 2004). In a sense, don't architects, engineers, scientists, artists, writers, carpenters, chefs, and caretakers of young and old [just to name a few careers] spend a good deal of their day playing with ideas and engage in playful learning through exploration and discovery? Play is not just idle moments for children, but it is essential in order for them to be able to make sense of their worlds. As Emily asked, "When are children given the opportunity to construct their understanding of the world based on their experiences?" This question has a Piagetian bend since he claimed that play allowed children to practice things they had previously learned, but did not necessarily result in the learning of new things. I respectfully disagree with this conclusion. In contrast, Vygotskian theory states that play actually facilitates cognitive development. I believe that to be true. Play not only strengthens a children's understanding of the world about them, but allows them to experience and construct new learning. The child who rolls a toy car down a ramp quickly learns that the car goes further if the ramp is higher. That is new learning and through play children bolster the foundation of their development.

On Emily's tour of the Waldorf School, she learned that the program cherishes and respects children's play and imagination. I believe these values lie at the heart of excellent early childhood practice—we must cherish children, their play, and their childhood. So, how do we create an environment that cherishes and respects children and their play? By providing an emotional and physical space place where children have time to explore and discover within a flexible routine, or "predictable flow," that encourages child-directed activity.

If play is something children innately do to learn and construct meaning of their world, then isn't it just something that happens naturally? Yes, to a degree. Children are curious and excited about learning, but the

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way we as early childhood professionals interact with children and how we develop the environment can foster either a greater desire to learn in the children or – unfortunately- can begin to stifle their desire to explore and experiment. This stifling of play happens all too often in early childhood programs where academic and often meaningless activities are valued over play and rigid routines over a predictable flow.

I recommend using these strategies to support children's play:

- Play should be driven by the child's interest and timetable, not the adult's.
- Keep in mind that play is something that is *done with* children *not to* them.
- Observe the child's play and decide if it is simply an opportunity to watch or a moment to engage or play with the child.
- Participate in the experience by initially imitating the child's play.
- Keep the child's flow of interest by following the child's activity or demonstrating a similar activity for the child.
- Recognize the child's efforts by describing his play initiatives and/or asking questions about it.

Good teachers value and encourage play as natural and integral parts of children's experiences. Children learn from everything. Observe them, respond to their interests and explorations, play with them, support them, and enjoy them. When teachers are having fun observing and cherishing children's play, children experience the joy of being human. Could there be greater learning than that? Setting up a play space so that, as Emily describes, children can fight dragons, gently care for babies, and explore the outdoors, is the responsibility of the adult. At the same time, while educators need to be aware of children's emerging skills and probable next developmental steps to plan the learning environment and guide interactions, artificial activities and special exercises to teach these skills are not necessary.

Emily also concluded her article by stating, “I believe that the greatest gift my child has received from this school and this experience has been the time to play.” Made me ponder the undeniable fact that infancy though age eight is such a critical span of human development and yet, so fleeting. Therefore, I ask, “Are we bold enough as a society to allow one of our most highly valued commodities- TIME- to be used for play? And, more importantly, will we actually allow our children to have an authentic childhood?”

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## Meeting SFUCCS’ Core Values of Exploration and Experience, Respect, Joy and Relationships Through Play

By Lina Brasil Do Couto, Les Petits Infant Toddler Program;  
 Nita Pedersen, Espuleta Infant Toddler Program and  
 Tamara Cosic, Bright Clouds Infant Toddler Program  
 SFU Childcare Society, Burnaby  
 British Columbia, Canada

### Background

We are three curious, passionate and lifelong learners and Senior Early Childhood Educators working with Infants and Toddlers at SFU Childcare Society (SFUCCS), located on the campus of Simon Fraser University in Burnaby, BC, Canada. We see children as competent, capable and curious learners and we believe that, “*Play provides children with*

*opportunities to explore, to have various experiences and to be creative. Play allows children to build and expand on their developing skills and knowledge.*” Our programs focus on a play, emergent, and inquiry based learning approach, drawing inspiration from the Reggio Emilia philosophy. We enjoy collaborating and connecting with others, deriving support and creative insight from co-constructing knowledge and learning alongside the children and fellow educators. We value “giving the children time to experience the joy of being one or three or five years old” (Thornton and Brunton, 2007, p. 55).

Play is enhanced by the intentionality of the teachers/educators to create a space of freedom, openness and discovery. The principle of environment as the third teacher can and should be applied, just as readily outside as inside, by placing value on aesthetics, organization, thoughtfulness, provocation, communication and interaction. The environment should enable the children and teachers to express their potential, abilities and curiosity. At SFUCCS we are intentional in organizing specific spaces indoors and outdoors in order to stimulate children's imagination, creativity, exploration, discovery, engagement and sense of wonder.

Lately, we have been focusing on developing a space of open play with the creation of our mini-ateliers/studios where we envisioned a ‘place’, within our infant/toddler rooms, where our children could freely explore different art materials throughout the day. We desired a place for connections; where families, children and educators could gather to share in a variety of



experiences, enjoying deeper explorations of the environment; a place for collaboration, wonder, and working together.

A prime motivation to create this space was based on our acknowledgement that children deserve **respect**. *"We acknowledge their feelings, see things from their perspective and provide settings that are nurturing and supportive."*

**Nita's Reflection:** For quite a while I have had a vision of a space in Espuleta where children (infants and toddlers under three years) have the autonomy and independence to choose what they would like to engage with during play. We created our Studio as a space where children were free to be creative, to use this space without restriction and where they could focus on their interests. The children were able to come and go as they wished; there was no schedule around this space. In the beginning the Studio was a place where 'art' happened. But over time the Studio transformed and continues to evolve and change depending on the daily interests of the children.

Art has become one of the mediums that we use to delve deeper into understanding the children's thoughts, theories and wonderings. For example, recently the children at Espuleta have been interested in monsters. We introduced charcoal as a new medium; the bold lines the children make to represent their emotions around monsters seem to provide a sense of power for them. This studio has become a place to gather a small group of children, providing numerous opportunities for collaborative and cooperative endeavors. Most importantly, it is a space where children have the freedom and ability to plan, implement and choose ways in which they can express themselves through play.

**Lina's Reflection:** Since the 'creation' of our mini-atelier at Les Petits, (infants and toddlers under age 3) I have been impressed by the sustained focus and creativity of our children. The mini-atelier helped me to realise what could be achieved with a common vision with children, educators and families. When I reflected on what I was experiencing, it built up my confidence to share my knowledge with my colleagues

and the wider community. As a lifelong learner, I seek to facilitate an environment where children feel safe to freely challenge, take risks, ask 'why', to explore their abilities as natural researchers, engage in making meaning in their world. Through this I am able to participate as a co-researcher in the constructing of their theories as they try to interpret reality, by themselves, as well as alongside their peers.



In our programs, play explorations happen indoors and outdoors and we believe it is important to connect these two spaces. Group investigations can involve many children or at times just two or three children. Provocations based on their interests are set up each morning inside and outside where the children decide on what they want to do and where for the day. They respond

individually with their own timing to the environment that is prepared by the educators. We offer daily



opportunities for each child to encounter a wide variety of materials where hands, mind, and emotions are all active, giving value to the expressiveness and creativity of every child. Each day our environment supports the freedom to participate in many experiences and ongoing projects that invigorate the lives of the children and educators in our Programs. We have learned to 'slow down', to provide time and flexibility, and to allow our explorations to influence our spaces, including our mini- ateliers/studios. We believe that when children are given the opportunity to freely live in a space that they then own, feel and find their comfort of fit within it.

**Tamara's Reflection:** When I think about play, I recall my childhood. Growing up in a small green village with a big heart, I spent my childhood outside, running through green fields, building houses in the forest, and making instruments out of pots and sticks for a rock band the children in the village created. We are lucky at SFUCCS to be situated on a mountain, with beautiful wooden playgrounds at every centre, surrounded by a forest, green trees and fresh mountain air, which remind me of home.

Children at Bright Clouds (Infant Toddler program) spend their time in the yard following their interests; currently turning bicycles upside, moving the pedals with their hands to see another perspective of how the wheels turn, and watering plants which we planted from seed over the spring. Young children have a particular way of interacting with the world, they learn through moving and doing, using their whole bodies to learn and express their theories. Experimentation through play opens up worlds, creates new venues for thinking and doing and actively extends experience. Through experimentation we discover how something works by identifying the relationships among structures, flows, and connections. *"Our childcare community emanates joy and hope through our work and relationships."* Educators demonstrate mutual respect and value each other's and the children's contributions. This enables the group to maintain positive relations and model the type of communication for everyone. *"We believe that trust is the foundation of every relationship. Building trust takes time and mutual respect."*

At SFUCCS we also visit the forest where children explore the wild where we recently started to build a stick house. Young children need a multi-sensory environment, and the outdoors speak to all the senses, so it is not surprising that children enjoy being outside. Digging, planting, watering, nurturing, and finally eating school grown vegetables and fruits creates the potential opportunity for laying down life-long healthy habits. Our Centers provide outdoor spaces where children's movement and high energy can be witnessed but we also feel it is important to have calm, peaceful places, and plants are great for

creating such sheltered, quiet locations. "Just as warm human relationship help to build an emotionally strong core, a connection with nature provides a sense of belonging that contributes to this resilience and offers emotional strategies for coping with stressful times" (White, 2008, p.35). Bringing the rhythm of the outdoors into children's and our lives is about slowing down, lingering, and bringing the consciousness of a poet that lives in all of us to the surface in order to be more mindful about our everyday



lives and everything that we do. Children are masters of living poetically; they fully immerse themselves into whatever they are doing, with their whole being, and adults should look upon children to recall this quality that can be lost in adulthood

### Final Thoughts

Children learn best when they have connected play experiences that allow them to build a framework of understanding. This requires the freedom and time for infants and toddlers to explore with materials, to experiment with them, to leave them and return to them at a later time. Our mini-ateliers/studios have been a place where relationships are being formed and cultivated, where "...children's curiosity inspires them to interact with other people, and with things and places in their environments" (BC Early Learning Framework, 2008, p. 1), and where play is fully supported.

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## Response to Meeting SFUCCS Core Values

By Emily Plank

Author of *Discovering the Culture of Childhood* (Redleaf Press, 2016).

[http://www.redleafpress.org/cw\\_contributorinfo.aspx?ContribID=77172&Name=Emily+Plank](http://www.redleafpress.org/cw_contributorinfo.aspx?ContribID=77172&Name=Emily+Plank)

I had the privilege of reviewing an article that discussed an early childhood program located outside of the United States. However, no matter the location, as early childhood educators we face the important task of clarifying our beliefs about the function and nature of play. Play, as both a subject of study and method of teaching, has become increasingly popular, and as more research describes the benefits of play, an increasing number of early childhood educators advocate for a “play-based” curriculum.

This important pursuit is clouded by the wide interpretations of what constitutes high-quality, genuine play. In seeking to articulate more clearly the nature of authentic play, it is important to specifically delineate what constitutes effective collaboration between adults and children in constructing play. Genuine play suffers from both over- and under-involvement of adults, but it thrives when the delicate balance between adults and children is preserved (Mercogliano 2008, 70). The masterful preservation of this balance clearly emerges in the descriptions of each of the play vignettes at the SFUCCS School. From a close examination of these, we can begin to characterize some key features about the supportive strategies that adults utilize and the actions and behavior children exhibit while engaged in genuine play.

The first aspect of the adult-child balance is that of teacher observation. Genuine play flourishes from unobtrusive intentional teachers who pay

attention to the themes that children are exploring, and who then use those observations to adjust the environment, as in Nita’s story of adding charcoal to the atelier area when the children showed an interest in monsters. However, is not simply the observation that it is important, but the way teachers use their observations that can preserve or impede genuine play. Teachers often use children’s interests to springboard into explorations with learning outcomes in different developmental domains. While this can be an excellent model for early childhood education, it must not be confused with genuine play since an explicit focus lacks the element of spontaneity and undefined end goals. (Hirsh-Pasek and Golinkoff, 2003, 10–11). David Elkind warns, “If adults feel that each spontaneous interest of a child is an opportunity for a lesson, the child’s opportunities for pure play are foreclosed.” (Elkind, 2007, 218) The children in Nita’s atelier area find a place supplied with materials that support their independent curious exploration rather than a classroom in which teachers have used their interest to define a unit of study; thus they have access to genuine play.

Closely connected to skillful teacher observation is care for the environment. Early childhood educators often conceptualize space and materials within their distinct microcosms: block area, dramatic play, reading corners, art tables, large body play spaces, quiet corners, inside, and outside. To support genuine play, we must embrace a more fluid approach. In Lina’s description she writes about continuity between the indoor and outdoor spaces, noting that children who are given freedom in the environment are focused and purposeful in their play. Tamara gives a wonderful example of supporting a flexible approach to materials when the babies and toddlers in her program spent time exploring upside-down bicycles. Flexibility and continuity support deep exploration that can sustain play for long periods of time (Plank, 2016, 76). As educators, we must pay careful attention to our environments, and guard ourselves against letting those environments become too inflexible. Children imagine space differently than adults. Supporting genuine play requires that adults give children creative freedom because of the

ownership they have of the spaces they inhabit. Authentic play happens in its most pure form in spaces controlled by children (Hall and Rudkin 2011, 94–111). An authentic feeling of possession of the space helps children access genuine play.

Finally, genuine play exists in a relationship between adults and children that is built on trust. Adults must trust that children are capable players, and that genuine play is essential to human development. As Elizabeth Jones and Gretchen Reynolds remind us, “When in doubt, trust the play. It is the children’s curriculum. Play that is scattered or potentially disruptive may require refocusing, but well-focused, complex play requires no intervention. It has its own rhythm and will come its own conclusion. It takes place on the children’s turf on which the adult has no legitimate role.” (2011, 62) Genuine play happens best when adults refrain from over-managing, and in order to do that, they have to trust that the children are capable. The three scenarios from the SFUCCS School provide a glimpse into environments where the trust in children being competent and capable is firmly entrenched.

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Check out this issue and our annual meeting minutes online at:

<http://pppconnections.wordpress.com/>

## The Magic of Ordinary Play

By Dr. Robin Ploof  
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The doors of Stepping Stones open at 7:30 am ready to welcome the twenty toddlers and preschoolers, teachers, and families who work and play at this NAEYC accredited Reggio-inspired early childhood program.

I prepare for the day deciding first to support the interest in clay work that has been emerging. I drape the table with a denim cloth and set six grapefruit sized balls of clay out around the table placing a larger lump of clay and a cutting wire in the middle of the table with a basket of clay tools. The finishing touch is a small bowl of water with a sponge. A second teacher greets children and families. This teacher helps children say good bye to their parents, transition in, and supports children in selecting an activity if they need help. A third teacher reads books as the children sitting with her select them.

Children are free to engage in one of the activities with a teacher or self-select from the various interest areas; Block play, sand play (we have a six foot by four foot indoor sandbox), easel painting, play in the sensory table with water, dramatic play, book corner, or writing center. These are open and available during the majority of the day. There is a table for manipulatives, puzzles, and games too, but for now I have appropriated it for the clay work.

As the morning unfolds a fourth teacher arrives. This teacher prepares an open snack and supports children as they pour milk, and spread *Sunbutter* on their bagels and sits with them while they are eating, engaging them in conversation about their

day, singing songs, and telling stories. This teacher cooks and serves a hot vegetarian lunch (with the help of the children), answers the phone and helps to manage the general transitions of the day.

The teacher who was greeting children engages them in a project of sewing aprons. One of our traditions is to make different yeast breads on Thursdays. Inspired by the book *The Apron* by Eric Carle, the teacher lends support to the children who are sewing aprons to wear when they bake bread. The teacher who was reading books works with children who want to build a train station in the block area. It is an ordinary morning filled with ordinary work and ordinary play.

### **Meanwhile back at the clay table...**

Karen who is four comes and sits next to me. She begins to work with her grapefruit sized lump of clay. Pinching, pushing, pulling, kneading, breaking off and adding on bits here and there. Other children join us, each engaged in their own act of making a three dimensional interpretation of an idea, emotion, or experience that comes to life through their lump of clay. Karen pauses to reflect on her work. "Look at this," she says, "this looks just like the face of the witch from the Wizard of Oz." Other children agree, but some offer her suggestions and feedback. "I think you need to need to make the eyes more googly." "Isn't her nose more pointier?" "You should make her look really scary, 'cause she's really scary."

I should have prefaced this by noting we had read the *Wizard of Oz* as a chapter book earlier in the year and some children, including Karen, had seen the movie at home. We had also listened to the music on CD and one of the teachers made a CD with various artists singing different versions of *Over the Rainbow*. All of the children had some frame of reference for their discussion. They began to talk about the witch. "What makes her so mean?" "Why doesn't she like Dorothy?" "I don't like it when the lightning comes out of her hands."

Karen announces that it is time to make another character. She directs me, "Robin you make the

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Tinman. I'll do the Scarecrow." I agree, but I say that I might need help with the hard parts. One of the other children volunteers to make the axe and someone else volunteers to make the Lion. As we work children come and go from the clay table, but Karen stays. Another child says, "You need the Munchkins – you don't have any of them." He joins us and proceeds to make some. Other questions emerge: "Where is the basket for Toto?" "Who will make Dorothy's house?"

The children continue their observations and discussions about the characters in the story. "The Lion he's scared of everything, but I'm only scared of the fire alarm." "If I had an axe like the Tin Man I would just chop that witch to pieces." They also begin to describe and discuss the various events in the story and the scenes where those events take place. As we work we sing the songs, we act out the story. Other children arrive at the clay table and work on a totally different idea; sometimes children come- not to work the clay- but to sing or watch the story be played out with the clay characters we have created.

I lost count of how many times that morning we played the story with our clay characters and sang the songs. Karen stayed at the clay table the whole time. Three and a half hours later we returned our clay to the clay bucket, cleaned up, and prepared to go outside where children continued to sing and play the story now using their whole bodies. As I reflect on this morning of deep rich play, I recognize that I could not have designed a better literacy lesson. No lesson I might have planned would have done more to further the children's understanding of character, setting, plot, story structure, problem, resolution, and theme than our morning of play with clay.

There was something transformative for me as the guide in this experience. My old teacher self might have been watching the clock, thinking about the next part of the daily agenda, worrying about missing circle time, or organizing my lesson for the morning. The play became the lesson. Letting my own agenda go and scaffolding what Karen brought to the table allowed me to be present, focused, and totally engaged with the children. Trusting the process and trusting the

play allowed a whole new experience to emerge. I was reminded of how powerful the act of ordinary play with a simple material can be as a tool for teaching and learning!

## The Response to The Magic of Ordinary Play

By Dr. Nancy Carlsson-Paige

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“The Magic of Ordinary Play” is a wonderful example that shows how play is the driving force in children’s learning. In it we see that play and learning are intertwined; two sides of the same coin.

There is an underlying structure in this classroom which is critically important in shaping the quality of the play the children create. It’s not the kind of overt structure where children attend to a teacher’s direct instruction, but a less visible one (Carlsson-Paige, August, 2016). Each teacher has a defined role--each attends to a different aspect of classroom life. The materials are thought-out, well organized, accessible to the children, and aesthetically pleasing. The children know how to make choices and are encouraged to choose the activities that interest them. These aspects of the underlying classroom structure help make this the high quality educational experience that it is. Clay, the material used in this example, is an open-ended material. It’s not defined; it doesn’t represent something specific. It’s the kind of material that allows children to bring their own experiences, feelings, and ideas to it and to invent their own original ideas (Carlsson-Paige, 2008). We see how the children’s play with clay grows and deepens the more they work with it. Children need the kind of sustained time this teacher allows for in order to get the full benefit of play.

Play is a vital component in literacy learning (Carlsson-Paige, McGlaughlin, Almon, 2015). Children need a strong basis in oral language before they can grapple with print. When children play, they do a lot of talking, and their language development flourishes. Children also need to develop a lot of background knowledge in order to be able to make sense of stories and the print system. We see how children’s background knowledge is developing in this classroom: teachers provide many different kinds of experiences that relate to the books they read to them. Children bake bread and sew aprons in connection with Eric Carle’s book *The Apron*. They reenact the story of *The Wizard of Oz* over and over as they play with clay; they talk extensively about the characters and storyline, each child building their own unique meanings and deeper understanding. This is the strong, developmentally sound foundation children need for literacy learning in the early years.



In this play-based classroom, children are discovering the true joy of learning. They are thriving as they engage with each other, their teachers and the rich materials available that further their play and learning. The teacher writing this episode trusts children’s inherent capacity to learn through play. She knows how to guide children into the deep, sustained play that will give each of them a solid and lasting foundation for later academic learning.

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## One Summer Day: Play at Parker-Chase

By Karen Walker, Ed.D., Texas Woman's University,  
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Parker-Chase Private Preschool, Plano, TX

Play is valued and supported at Parker-Chase Private Preschool in Plano, TX and this fact was indeed evident when we spent a morning with toddlers. Every child is placed in a classroom that is developmentally appropriate but they are not necessarily assigned by chronological age. The belief is that the classroom setting should be a place to comfortably challenge, but not overwhelm children. Ms. Sara and Ms. Chrystal have only been teaching together a few weeks. Sara has a Child Development Associate credential and has worked in early care and education for ten years, two and a half of those years spent in the toddler room at Parker-Chase. Chrystal came to the center two weeks ago and holds a Bachelor's degree in Child Development. In 1985, Parker-Chase participated in the NAEYC pilot credentialing program and has been accredited for more than twenty-six years.

Owner and director, Sherry Hall, is passionate about high-quality early childhood education and celebrates how Parker-Chase teachers regularly exceed the high expectations set out in the accreditation standards.

Throughout the day, children have large, uninterrupted blocks of time to actively engage in both indoor and outdoor play activities. Teachers

observe children and plan small and large group activities based on developmental needs.

Opportunities for play are integrated in the daily schedule and emerging curriculum. Quotes affirming play are placed high around the classroom and hallways as reminders to all adults about the value of play in this space. Children are encouraged to freely choose play activities that interest them. Ms. Sara and Ms. Chrystal support play by providing props and materials, asking and answering questions, and encouraging problem solving, as they simultaneously assess and reflect on children's strengths and areas for growth.

The classroom layout includes about six learning areas. The first obvious constructed space is the loft, a carpeted area with a Plexiglas banister overlooking the classroom. Seven carpeted steps are negotiated by these older, nimble toddlers. The workspace beneath the loft is cozy, dark, and intriguing to these young investigators. The table space has room for twelve children, and teachers can sit there, too, but no more than four or five at a time come join Ms. Sara for craft time. The next space of open flooring is near a set of blocks and cars, and this is where Ms. Chrystal prepares the contact paper activity described below. Finally, the carpeted book corner affords a moment of repose in the early morning sun.

Providing developmentally appropriate materials and activities fosters a toddler's pursuit for independence. This mid-summer morning, children used their fine motor skills to grasp and drop red, blue, and yellow counting bears into recycled plastic bottles. To help with organization, each child's activity was contained in a shallow tub. Some sorted their bears, placing them on corresponding colored paper. Serious concentration and purposeful movements could be observed as small hands worked to place bears in shake bottles, taking great delight in the rattle, rattle sound. Other children stuck torn strips of red, white, or blue tape to half-sheets of red, white, or blue construction paper (in anticipation of the upcoming American Independence Day celebration). The sticky tape was tricky, and one frustrated boy

asked for help with a piece that had rolled together. He was relieved when we removed it from his fingers and he was able to stick it to his paper beside other carefully placed pieces of tape.

Tape wasn't the only sticky activity happening this morning. Ms. Chrystal placed large pieces of clear contact paper, adhesive side up, on the floor in another area of the classroom. Children joyfully marched in the sun-filled space, experimenting with the amount of force needed to remove their shoe from the sticky surface. One boy, bent at the waist, to touch the paper with his fingers. Children clearly enjoyed this strange sensation of being connected to the ground. This simple activity promoted children's understating of physical science (Bucher & Hernández, 2016). Other children were efficiently climbing the stairs to the dramatic play center in the loft. Hands, knees, feet, and bottoms were all used to carefully ascend and descend. Some held the railing or wall, some carried items in their hands. The latter required a slower gait and more focus. With more practice, these children will be able to negotiate the steps using alternating feet. The loft and staircase offer not only a nice overview perspective of the class, but also a cozy place to gather below. Children pushed a few chairs together and engaged in quiet conversation privy only to them.

In the midst of all this busy activity, three students were enthusiastically engaged in an art activity at the far end of the table. Using spiky plastic rings dipped into paint, some with sparkles, children created printmaking art 'fireworks.' Meticulously dabbing paint and pressing the rings on their paper, the artist refined their masterpieces with care and deliberation.

Outdoor play resembled indoor play in its structure and reliance on learner choice and teacher guidance. Toddlers had free gross-motor play with toys under a shady awning, with morning light filtering through lush pecan trees. The open space allowed for big actions. The variety of plastic toys provided many tools to accommodate and enhance their use of emerging physical strength. The appeal to desire a toy being used by another child, even though

a similar toy was steps away, invoked the Toddler's Creed: "If I see it, IT'S MINE!" The open space meant that learner's choice was valued, and that teacher direction was minimal, though ever vigilant.

We hated for our time with these two-year-olds to be over. Their play was purposeful, planned, and thoughtfully considered by their teachers. The adage, "Play is the work of children" was evident by the children's display of energetic engagement and joy. Each activity was helping prepare them for more challenging, independent, and inspiring play. As we wandered down the hall, we ventured into a classroom of four-year-olds to find a group of children playing *Chutes and Ladders*. There was no adult providing instruction or solving problems. These very young children were playing a game with rules, and playing it successfully. Mildred Parten (1932) would have recognized this cooperative play!

### Concluding Thoughts

The adult-initiated, child-directed guided play (Weisberg, Kittredge, Hirsh-Pasek, Golinkoff, & Klahr, 2015) we observed in the two-year-old classroom was intentional. The adults structured the environment, but the children maintained control. Ms. Sara and Ms. Chrystal provided developmentally appropriate materials – sticky tape, contact paper, counting bears, paint and paper – to engage the toddlers, but the children were in control of their play. The teachers enhanced play by asking open-ended questions, but again, respected children's choices. When we reflected on the activities we observed in the two-year-old classroom, we realized that the program – and teachers – at Parker-Chase provide the appropriate play opportunities for growth and development so that these toddlers will eventually become the four-year-olds who are able to negotiate, problem-solve, and magnificently work together. This is truly a testament to the role that play has in children's lives and development.

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## Response to One Summer Day

By Scott G. Eberle, Ph.D.

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*<https://www.psychologytoday.com/experts/scott-g-eberle-phd>*

This heartening story of good sense, good care, and imaginative preparation, comes to us from a private pre-school in Plano, Texas, one of several thriving suburbs, north of Dallas. Administrators and schoolteachers value and promote play at this school. They insure intervals of play during the school day. They design classrooms for play and stock them imaginatively with materials that encourage experimentation. And they encourage a culture that recognizes toddlers' need for independent discovery.

The school has labeled its spaces with hortatory quotations about the value of play, for the benefit of adults who tend to forget. Here in this note Walker and Thompson include a famous remark from Maria Montessori equating work and play, which amounted to high praise at the beginning of the twentieth century. The sentiment put her at the vanguard of educational thinking then, but it seems slightly antique now by appearing to appraise work instrumentally over play, or by assuming that play is rehearsal in service of some distant gain. In fact though, as the kids' discoveries at the Parker-Chase school verify, play contains and embraces its own pursuits that yield current dividends independent of

future returns. It's a tonic to read of an educational experience that celebrates joy and delight.

That it's necessary to congratulate and specially recognize the approach this school takes with its toddlers measures in part how far American education has drifted along in its vast, misguided social-psychological experiment that has devalued play as a learning experience. I will not be the first to say that the panicky effort to leave no child behind has left a generation of American children deprived of occasions for inspiration and spontaneity as schools across the nation have continued to close opportunities for children to satisfy their curiosities independently. The country will pay a price as it produces less independent, less innovative, and less secure graduates.

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## The Power of Play

By Becky Krueger, MA  
Hilltop Children's Center  
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## The Provocation

Several weeks ago in my classroom of 3-5 year olds, Lily returned from her family vacation with a special gift for our classroom: a set of colorful pretend candies made of blown glass, purchased at a glass museum during her trip. We were all immediately captivated by the brightly hued, swirl-patterned little candies and, as teachers, we wondered how best to present and offer them up to the children. Should we keep them at the art table for observation and representational drawing, since they seemed a bit fragile for the dramatic play area? Should we transfer them from their plastic case to a more aesthetically pleasing basket instead? Should we have a conversation with the group about careful handling before making them available in the classroom? With these questions still in our minds, we decided to let

Lily choose where and how to present her gift to the children that day. What unfolded over the next several days taught us yet another lesson in the power of children's capabilities, their deep imaginations, and the critical importance of learning through play.

### ***The Play Commences***

Once Lily had shown us her delightful candy set, she decided that the drama area was the best place for it to reside. With only a few reminders to the children to treat these glass treasures gently, we sat back to observe what would happen next. As the children took up the glass candies in their play, we could see that several children had already devised a purpose and plan for these objects. Bella and Toni set to work creating a 'candy store' atop the block shelf from where they invited other children by calling out, "Who wants to buy some candy?" Luis and his mom approached the shelf as eager customers, and handed over invisible money in exchange for a colorful treat. Lily and Ari were also intrigued by the invitation and skipped over to be the next customers. As Bella and Toni worked their candy counter, we observed them take on some of the adult roles they've no doubt observed in the world around them: Bella handed out the candy to paying customers and restocked the supplies as needed, using little jewels from our dramatic play materials collection; Ari inserted himself as one of the store workers and grabbed a clipboard to write up a 'list' of how many customers there were and what was available in the store that day; Toni pretended to talk on her cell phone (represented by a square wooden tile) using phrases like, "We're working, sorry. You've called three times!" and "You can buy the candy with a credit card." After several minutes of candy store play, Bella & Toni announced that the candy store was closing and it was time for customers to return any candies they had purchased. Once the candies were placed carefully back in their tray, Toni exclaimed, "The candy store is open again!" The play resumed with both old and new players moving in and out of the game throughout the morning.

Over the subsequent days and weeks, we watched the children's ideas take different shape and come to life. Some began using the candies as centerpieces in decorative arrangements they'd assemble upon silver plates and cups, while others continued to use them as more literal objects in their 'candy store' play. As two children sat across from each other at the snack table pretending to feed the little candies to one another,



another group of children included them as 'magic poison' in their family game. "The baby died!" Toni exclaimed. Assuming this was from the magic poison, yet wanting to know more about her thinking behind the play, I asked her, "How did the baby die?" Toni replied, "She has cancer." I knew that a relative of Toni's had been battling late stage cancer over the past year, but this was the first moment I'd heard her even speak the word in our classroom. I was floored by how, in this simple statement, Toni revealed that she was still processing what all that meant to her and to her family.

### ***Why is this illustration of play important?***

What do these scenarios and interactions demonstrate about play and the role it serves in children's learning and development? And why should we be fighting for this kind of play-based classroom experience for all young children?

The answers, I believe, lie not only in the description of the play itself, but in the careful consideration of the skills and dispositions being practiced and strengthened by the children involved in the play. As each of these children engaged in different play scenarios, they had to call upon their abilities to compromise, to listen, to take turns, to communicate their needs and ideas, and to manage



their emotions if the play wasn't going the way they wanted. These are some crucial life skills we label under the umbrella of *self-regulation*, *problem-solving*, and *social/emotional skills*, and they serve as the building blocks of children's later success in school and life. The children also exercised *cognitive flexibility*, or *divergent thinking*, as they decided how to use each item in their play, inserting the glass candies and jewels not only as concrete objects but also as symbolic ones (shifting the play from candy store to 'magic poison,' for example). In the act of creating patterns and displays by color, the children called upon their spatial reasoning and their ability to classify and sort objects, two skills included in the arena of *mathematical* and *scientific thinking skills* in young children. As each child carefully handled the little glass treasures, they practiced and strengthened the *fine motor skills* of their hands, an important building block for writing. And speaking of writing, one can see the foundation of this *early literacy* skill already emerging in this play: the act of picking up the clipboard and pen, of wanting to put one's ideas on paper, and then engaging in 'scribble' writing are all critical precursors to the act of writing itself, as well as an indication of the children's emerging understanding that 'print has meaning.'

It's equally important to highlight that the seemingly simple act of coming up with these ideas themselves (the candy store, the arrangements, the meal time, the magic poison game) reveals the nature of all children to deepen their own understanding of the world by reenacting what they see and hear around them: the experience of being in a store, of watching transactions between adults, of observing patterns and displays in their homes and community spaces and through media, of being at the dinner table while mom or dad feed the baby, or of witnessing and talking with loved ones about death. By giving children the space and time to act out these scenarios, we are helping them learn about, explore, and process their world. Sometimes at Hilltop we sit back and take on the role of reflective observers; more often we find ways to offer up appropriate supports to extend the play, help the children find success, or guide them through the challenges. For example, while playing with these

materials moments would arise when two children needed help resolving a disagreement about who could sell and who could buy the candy. When one child accidentally broke a glass candy, we worked with that child to find a solution (hot glue did the trick for a while), and took the opportunity to talk with the whole group of players about which ideas/strategies they might use in order to ensure that nothing else got broken. Rather than removing the candies or imposing stricter rules, we chose to engage the children in a dialogue and problem-solving process. This experience provided them with an initial introduction to the responsibilities one encounters living in a democratic and participatory society.

### ***How and why we support play***

Finally, it's important to describe the context in which this play was supported and allowed to unfold. In our classroom, the drama area is not limited to a pre-set theme or category of play (such as 'kitchen' or 'store'), but instead features a wide variety of open-ended and inviting materials that give children the space and practice to imagine and invent their own types of play. We design our morning schedule in such a way that children are given long stretches of time to invest and engage in their play, and the teachers tune in to those spaces and the conversations between children in order to offer support, guidance (when appropriate), and often to document the children's work by taking notes and photographs. Rich and meaningful play, such as the kind I've described here, is able to emerge because as teachers we have set the stage for it to unfold every day in our classrooms.

Simply put, play works. It's the realm in which children learn deeply about their world, their community, their capabilities, and themselves. Play enables children to learn how to be with one another, how to solve problems, and how to use their minds and bodies in creative, positive ways. And it's the first leg of their journey in becoming the life-long learners who will evolve into the future leaders of our society. Now that sounds like an early education approach worth defending every single day.

## Response to the Power of Play

By Ben Mardell

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Becky Krueger of the Hilltop Children's Center in Seattle describes what happens when Lily, one of the children in her preschool class, brings in glass beads shaped like candies. Krueger argues convincingly that the resulting play is beneficial to her children's social, emotional, intellectual and physical development. Here she is aligned with a robust and growing body of research that confirms the developmental benefits of play (Singer, Golinkoff, & Hirsh-Pasek, 2006; LEGO Learning Institute, 2013). This research fills volumes. Play's role in the development of self-regulation—the ability to defer gratification, control impulses, and direct one's attention—is particularly important in the preschool years. Vygotsky (1978) was the first to point out how play provides children the motivation and the tools to follow rules and pay attention. Studies confirm a positive relationship between play and self-regulation (e.g., Elias & Berk, 2002). These self-regulatory skills predict important outcomes including peer acceptance in elementary school, positive self worth, and college completion (Frost, Wortham, & Reifel, 2012; McClelland, Acock, Piccinin, Rhea, & Stallings, 2013).

Krueger maintains that learning through play needs to be defended, and she is right to recognize that play is under threat (Miller & Almon, 2009). However, in the face of incontrovertible research on the developmental benefits of play, one is left to wonder why play is so maligned. Certainly an unintended consequence of the school reform movement has been a decline in play-based early childhood curriculum (Ball, 2013). But the picture is more complex. David Kushner (2012) explains that there is an uneasy relationship between play and school, arguing that there are “unremitting contradictions” between the

two. In play the players lose their sense of time. Schools are governed by schedules. Play can be chaotic, messy and loud. Schools aspire to be places of order. In play children take physical and psychological risks. Schools are places where children should be safe. In play children are in charge. At school it is the adults who set agenda. While I appreciate Kushner bringing attention to these contradictions, I prefer to see them as paradoxes to be examined and worked with. Colleagues and I are currently looking at how exploring these paradoxes can help bring more learning through play into schools (Mardell, Wilson, Ryan, Krechevsky, Etel, & Baker, 2016). Hilltop seems like a place where the paradoxes of school and play are embraced and help energize the learning environment.

It is striking that the provocation for the rich play Krueger describes, the glass beads, came from a child. That Lily wants to share her treasure with her school community is a wonderful act of generosity. That the teachers welcome her gift is also noteworthy (it is not dismissed as a distraction from the official curriculum; it is made part of the curriculum). The interaction speaks to the democratic nature of the Hilltop community. It is not surprising that Krueger explicitly links play and democracy, and is a point worth emphasizing. In play children develop agency (Clapp, Ross, Ryan, & Tishman, in press). They develop the ability to collaborate (Paley, 1990; Mardell, 2002). In play children identify problems and create solutions. These are all essential elements of a democratic society. Indeed, one can think of play as the genesis of democracy. Because of this, Krueger's conclusion is well taken- that learning through play is an, “Early education approach worth defending every single day.”

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## **Playful in Everything We Do: The Integration of Play in a Pre-Kindergarten Classroom**

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Play is the vehicle for healthy child development. However, it is not by itself a cure-all if the setting is not striving to achieve developmentally appropriate practice standards. Play must take place within the context of a clear understanding of child development, healthy adult-child interactions, and a developmentally appropriate environment. Simply placing a time block of “Free Play” on the classroom schedule is not, by itself, enough to realize the positive benefits of play. Play must be supported by developmentally appropriate practice.

Unfortunately, research indicates that this is not occurring in the typical ECE program (Yoshikawa, Weiland, Brooks-Gunn, Burchinal, Espinoza, Gormley et al., 2013, p. 1). Therefore, it's important to understand how to effectively infuse daily activities with play. What does effectively integrating play within an early childhood classroom look like?

The center that was the focus of this case study is a non-profit, independent early care and education center located in Dayton, OH. The center is open Monday through Friday from 6:30 AM until 6:00 PM. The selected classroom serves students from 3 ½ years old through Kindergarten entry. Roughly half of the students enrolled at the center receive subsidies to support their attendance through Title XX funding. The Pre-Kindergarten lead teacher holds an Associate's degree in Early Childhood Education and has less than five years experience working in the field. The assistant teacher has some post-secondary training in child development and has over five years'

experience working in the field. The center receives training, mentoring, and coaching from The Lynda A. Cohen Center for the Study of Child Development. The posted daily schedule (see sidebar) does not distinguish between students having free play or not, but rather focuses on the person initiating the activity. This is an important distinction as it avoids limiting play to a specific time frame outside of which no one is “allowed” to play. The teachers understand that play happens naturally and intrinsically throughout each activity and throughout each day.

### **A Typical Day: Developmentally Appropriate Playful Interactions & Routines**

On a typical day the students arrive, come into the classroom and prepare for breakfast. Breakfast itself is viewed as a beneficial activity in which various aspects of play-centric approaches grounded in a robust understanding of child development may be observed. All of the food, utensils, and other materials needed for breakfast are delivered to the classroom in a bin. Students are aware of the classroom routine and wash their hands prior to handling any items from the bin. These routines are built through teacher modeling and positive reinforcement for following the expected routine. For example, the teachers will explicitly model handwashing and say phrases such as, “I have to wash my hands before setting the table for breakfast,” and facilitate this process hand-over-hand with students, as necessary. Teachers provide positive reinforcement for following the classroom routine through three-part “I” messages such as: “Wow, David! When I see you washing your hands before taking items out of the bin, I feel so happy I want to clap my hands!” These messages are used intentionally to promote the desired behavioral outcome. These messages assist in building a classroom community, model expansive language usage, tie classroom actions to their impact on emotional intelligence, develop social competence, and promote moral development. The emphasis is on playful adult-child interactions. Teachers display a positive affect celebrating and highlighting outcomes through modeling that cultivates a caring community of learners. During handwashing, teachers can be heard singing songs,

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demonstrably showing interest in how the water and soap make bubbles, and are smiling with students. Students are engaged and self-regulated, displaying autonomy and initiative while enjoying the classroom environment. This playful interaction with children supports the development of executive function skills such as self-regulation, working memory, and cognitive flexibility (Obradović, Portilla, & Boyce, p. 325, 2012). Research indicates that self-regulatory ability contributes to social competence and academic performance (Rimm-Kaufman & Wanless, p. 300-301). Making all adult-child interactions playful increases student enjoyment and improves positive feelings toward school (Domitrovich, Moore, & Thompson, p. 393, 2012). Viewing activities, routines, and interactions as having the potential to be made playful circumvents the issue of viewing play as a distinct and separate process from education goals. Adult-child interactions, as a focus for integrated play, are critical since adult-child interactions have the strongest correlation to learning (Sabol, Hong, Pianta & Burchinal, 2013, p. 846). Play can be integrated throughout the entire day when teachers are able to avoid thinking of play as a discrete act and understand that children use play to learn.

Following breakfast, children and adults continue active play. The teachers in this classroom have intentionally created an environment in which the natural tendency of children to engage in play, persisting until achieving mastery, leads to positive outcomes across all domains of child development. For example, some students decide to get paper, markers, crayons, and pencils and bring them to a table. At no point does either adult suggest the activity or set aside writing, drawing, or art time. Students are given the freedom to self-regulate, take initiative, and exercise decision making in choosing their activities. Once at the table, students begin drawing and writing on their own. Teachers sit nearby and wait for opportunities to engage with students without taking over the activity. One child, Samantha, writes down her name. A few moments later, she decides she wants to write down her friend’s name as well. She asks the teacher how to spell the friend’s name. In this instance, and thousands of other instances like it, the



teacher makes a decision to either emphasize the product or embrace the process. The teacher chooses to embrace the process and, using a modeling approach, begins scaffolding the process of how to figure out the spelling of a friend's name. The interaction proceeds as follows:

Samantha: "How do you spell Jessica?"

Teacher: "Ah, so you're trying to figure out how to spell your friend's name."

Samantha: "Yeah, I want to write her name here [points at paper]."

Teacher: "Right there on the paper. Hmm, if I wanted to know how to spell someone's name, I wonder how I could figure it out?"

Notice how the teacher is avoiding simply telling Samantha how to spell the friend's name. The teacher is empathizing with the child, letting the child know that she understands the child's desire to spell her friend's name, and modeling a thought process for determining a solution. In this playful interaction, there is not an emphasis on getting the correct answer as soon as possible. The teacher is showing an understanding that, an important component of pre-K education is stimulating language and providing supportive interaction between adults and children (Yoshikawa et al., 2013, p. 1). As it should be for all play, the interaction is open-ended, allowing time to explore thoughts. This interactional model is unstructured from the child's perspective, yet intentional from the adult's. The interaction continues:

Samantha: "Well, I could... [looks around] check the cubbie."

Teacher: "Oh, you think the cubbie could show you how to spell Jessica?"

Samantha: "Yeah, her name's on there because our names are on all of them."

Teacher: "That's true everyone's name *is* on his or her cubbie!"

The child then gets up and goes over to the cubbie, but finds that she is having difficulty writing on the paper. She then goes to a shelf and grabs a clipboard and places the paper on it. She returns to the cubbie and

writes down her friend's name. She returns to the teacher:

Samantha: "Look, I put Jessica right here. Here's her 'J' and then there's two 'S's'. Do you see the 'S' like the snake?"

Teacher: "I do see the two 'S's' right there. J-E-S-S-I-C-A spells Jessica. And you remembered how the word 'snake' starts with an 'S'."

Samantha: "Yeah! My mom said that she don't like snakes. One time she saw a snake and she screamed like this: 'Ahhh!'"

These types of interactions happen hundreds of times every day. A student has a question and the teacher makes a decision on whether to focus on the product or the process. In focusing on the process, the interaction moves from being a transaction where information is transferred from the teacher to the student into a playful interaction in which the teacher facilitates the process of problem solving.

## Conclusion

Play is not simply confined to a specific time of day when children pretend they are a superhero, doctor, or mother. Play happens all the time. Play is interactional by nature and interactions between children and adults are integrally tied to learning (Hamre, Downer, Jamil & Pianta, 2012, p. 509). This is why play must occur in a developmentally appropriate environment that includes positive adult-child interactions. Research suggests that the typical early care and education classroom experience does not adequately prepare young children for kindergarten (Hamre, Downer, Jamil & Pianta, 2012, p. 507). A teacher who views play as happening at a specific time during the day may miss out on the scaffolding opportunity that is demonstrated in the example interaction, above, between the teacher and Samantha. Early care and education professionals need to recognize opportunities for playful engagement with young children. Teaching, as facilitating the learning process, and playful adult-child interactions are one in the same within the context of a developmentally appropriate classroom. Playful adult-child interaction is an effective way to ensure positive outcomes for young children.

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## Response to Playful in Everything We Do

By Sandi Waite-Stupiansky, Ph.D.  
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Edinboro University of Pennsylvania. Shas has authored

several books including, *Theories of Early Childhood Education: Developmental, Behaviorist, and Critical* (in press)

First of all, I would love to see the early childhood program that Nunamaker and Mosier describe in action. It sounds like the kind of environment we all would want for our children and grandchildren. It's full of children's choices, playful interactions, and curious, respectful children and adults.

A few of the distinctions used in this program that stand out to me as notable is the authors' criticism of the use of "free play" in early childhood settings. I couldn't agree more. The words we use to describe play are so important because they color the way we filter our perceptions. This is true when we use words to describe play such as "free." A few years back, I heard Lilian Katz speak at the NAEYC annual conference. One of the points she made is that she hates the term "free play" because it conjures up images of children acting in any way that they like, almost like wild animals. After realizing how right she was, I searched my vocabulary for an alternative term and offered the term "spontaneous play." To me, spontaneous play is sparked by the child, not by the adults. It is extemporaneous, full of choices, and internal motives. The authors of this case study uses the term "student initiated activities," which makes sense to me, too. The term "student initiated activity" implies child autonomy and active learning, both of which are part of developmentally appropriate practices. My only reservation about using this term is that it does not use the term "play," which might be by design if parents, administrators, and colleagues shy away from using play because they are envisioning free play with all of the caveats stated above.

Moving on, the authors describe the playful learning and playful interactions that occur throughout the day in this program. This sense of playfulness makes for a lively, interesting, and respectful setting. Reading this reminded me of Joan Almon's distinction between "playful learning" and "learningful play." In this case, I think the authors are describing playful

learning, which is important and appropriate in early childhood environments. Yet, along with Almon, I would like to challenge the teachers to include “learningful play” in their program as well, if they do not do so already. This is the type of spontaneous play that play theorists advocate as having play for play’s sake, allowing children to enter into the flow of play with few constraints put upon them, such as what materials to use, with whom to play, how long to stay in the same play frame, and so on. Often, we as educators look to play as a means to achieving an academic or developmental goal, whether it’s language enhancement, cognitive skills, physical goals, or social problem solving, to name a few. That is fine, but there is also a place for “true” play that meets the definition used by play theorists of child initiated, suspended reality, process over product, among other criteria. For a thorough definition and description of using this type of play at the center of the curriculum, see Van Hoorn, Nourot, Scales, and Alward (2015). To be truly “play-based,” as the authors describe their program, it needs to offer both playful learning and learningful play.

Overall, Nunamaker and Mosier describe an exceptional developmentally appropriate early childhood education program that is worthy of emulating as a model ECE approach. My pointing out some of the ways we use words to describe play and learning are intended to challenge the teachers and administrators to consider some of the nuances within the culture of play as put forth by play theorists, researchers, and advocates. Communicating precisely to each other and the wider audience about play strengthens our position as play advocates. In that spirit, I applaud the teachers and administrators of this program for the work that they are doing to move the conversation forward with their actions and words.

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## Enfield Plays On!

Written by members of the Play Committee of KITE  
Enfield, CT

When you think about play you might picture a child, sitting alone and interacting with a toy; or perhaps you imagine a group of children playing together, maybe with parents and teachers joining in. But in a small section of Northern Connecticut, play is much bigger than that. This fall [2016], Enfield will engage in a campaign to bring play to the forefront and solidify it as the cornerstone of young learning in the community. In this town, play is not simply an idle pastime; Enfield, Connecticut takes play very seriously.

Perhaps it is because the town of approximately

44,000 residents on the Massachusetts border is home to one of the LEGO Group’s Global Hubs or maybe it is because Enfield boasts the state’s only free community college child care program for its students’ children. It could be because the public schools have recently integrated dramatic play opportunities that focus on building executive function skills in all of its kindergarten classrooms. It may even be the result of the collaborative group, known as KITE (Key Initiatives to Early Education) that brings parents and professionals together monthly to focus on issues of importance such as ensuring that all families are empowered to access quality care and equal educational opportunities. Whatever the reasons, it seems fitting that Enfield is launching a community wide, play-focused initiative entitled *Enfield Plays On!*



Although KITE has been a supporter of purposeful play since its inception, the collaborative has recently identified the lack of emphasis on play

both in schools and in homes as a significant and real barrier to the overall health, wellness, and learning for children and families. The notion of promoting play throughout the entire town started with a video (*Caine's Arcade* - [cainesarcade.com](http://cainesarcade.com)) that was shown at a Play Committee meeting. The film focuses on nine-year-old Caine Monroy who spends his summer vacation building an elaborate cardboard arcade inside his father's used auto parts store. Throughout the entire summer, not one person came to the arcade until a filmmaker stopped in, spotted the arcade, and created a film about this amazing child and the depths to which his imagination took him. Inspired by the spirit of such ingenuity and realizing the potential impact that play offered, the Enfield community began its planning.

***Enfield Plays On!*** In September 2016, the town wide public awareness campaign, to inform, incorporate, and increase play in the Enfield community will formally kick off. The goal is to put hundreds of children on track for success in school and for life. Specifically, the committee hopes to share with families, caregivers, and the general public the critical concept that play contributes to children's cognitive, physical, social and emotional growth. Unfortunately, play is widely regarded in today's society as secondary to formal learning. However, whether it is pretending to be an astronaut on the moon, building with blocks, or being involved in a game of hide and seek, play has repeatedly proven to be the way children learn best.

To help parents incorporate play as part of their children's daily lives, KITE will plaster the town with the *Play On!* logo and put wooden cutouts of "play pals" in various locations around town. Parents will be encouraged to take photos of their families with the pals – or playing together anywhere - and share them on the *Enfield Plays On* Facebook page. Information on the campaign itself, as well as notices of town wide activities for families will be available at a variety of town locations, including businesses, restaurants, stores, doctor's offices – anywhere a family might go. Posters of various play themes including nostalgia, imaginary, or outdoor play, will be spread throughout town to encourage adults to remember their own

childhood play experiences and to think about how they might recreate them.

While the campaign's physical presence has yet to be seen around town, the enthusiasm for it is already far reaching. Elected officials, the superintendent of schools, community college faculty, social workers, business owners, pediatricians, and families all support the initiative. These same types of people have worked with KITE throughout its 18-history, along with clergy, state legislators, librarians, firefighters, and many others who see the immense value in ensuring quality experiences for the town's youngest citizens and their families.

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For KITE members, play is a serious endeavor in Enfield. However, ask any child or family member and they might not see it that way. What they see are ample opportunities for fun and togetherness, free of charge, in their town. KITE has been recognized at the statewide level for its collaborative spirit and its success at shining the light on young children and families in effective ways. KITE will submit an application in April 2017 for Enfield to receive a Playful City USA designation from the nonprofit KaBOOM as a result of its initiatives. According to the KaBOOM website the honor would signify national recognition "for taking bold steps to create more play opportunities for all kids."

The calendar of KITE activities is jam-packed with fun events, ranging from "Family Day" - an annual kick off to the new school year for children and families - to workshops for early childhood providers,



such as those that focus on integrating play and math, or redesigning dramatic play areas to incorporate executive function skills. KITE certifies and celebrates each child as a 'first reader' when they are able to read a book, aligns learning for children ages three years to grade three, creates a smooth transition for children entering kindergarten, and teams up with firefighters to deliver books to kindergarten, Head Start and the Town of Enfield Child Development Center classes. There's the serious and the silly, all sharing the same goal: to improve the lives of families and their young children.

Play is now front and center in, Enfield; valued and modeled, talked about and engaged in, thanks to the vision of the KITE collaborative. Enfield has made play a priority and woven it into the fabric of what people discuss when they choose to raise children in this community and participate in events that bring families together.

In our town, the benefits of play are far reaching and evident everywhere, from our energetic collaborative, to the parks, libraries, playgrounds, schools, and backyards that comprise our community. All of this is a direct result of the work of those invested in early childhood, combined with the support of our stakeholders and enthusiasm of our schools and families.

In order to benefit our children now- and in the future- Enfield, Connecticut will continue to ***Play On!***

### **Learn more about the schools and classrooms featured in this issue:**

Centro Las Olas, Bilingual Childcare Center, San Francisco, CA: <http://www.centrolasolas.com/>

The Five Towns Early Learning Childcare Center, Inwood, NY: <http://fivetownselc.org/>

Rabbi Joseph Weinberg Early Childhood Center  
Potomac, Maryland:  
<http://www.whctemple.org/education/early-childhood/ecc-maryland>

SFU Childcare Society, British Columbia, Canada  
<http://www.sfu.ca/childcare.html>

Stepping Stones Children's Center, Burlington, Vermont:  
<http://www.steppingstoneschildrencenter.com/>

Parker-Chase Preschool, Plato, Texas:  
<http://parker-chase.com/>

Hilltop Children's Center, Seattle, Washington:  
<http://hilltopcc.com/>

***Join us for the Play, Policy and  
Practice Interest Forum Annual  
Meeting in LA!***

***Nov. 4<sup>th</sup>***

***JW Marriot, Atrium 3***