



Play Policy & Practice CONNECTIONS

*Interest forum for early childhood practitioners
and researchers with a focus on children's play*

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National Association for the Education of Young Children (**NAEYC**)

Play Policy & Practice Connections

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Play in Early Childhood

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About Play, Policy & Practice Interest Forum

PPPC Interest Forum of NAEYC

In 1985 a group of play scholars led by Patricia Monighan Nourot and including Judith Van Horn, Ed Klugman, Dorothy Sluss, Lynn Cohen, and Sandi Stupiansky became recognized as the National Association for the Education of Young Children's (NAEYC) Play Policy and Practice Caucus.

The Play, Policy, Practice Interest Forum is a group of concerned teachers, teacher educators, researchers, business leaders and policymakers that examine play from multiple perspectives. Members articulate and debate new ideas related to play research, policy, and practice issues focused primarily on children's play.

Our mission statement describes the group's purpose:

- To connect persons who share an interest in play
 - To update and disseminate current knowledge about the multifaceted nature and developmental value of play,
- and
- To become a collective voice within the early childhood community, advocating for the value and importance of children's play.

We are engaged with NAEYC members throughout the year in NAEYC's Hello platform and through our publications. We are most visible at NAEYC's Annual Conference where members support presenters who offer sessions related to play. PPPIF holds a Research Roundtable where participants can present and discuss their current play research or discuss an idea they want to research. Also at this conference, we host our annual business meeting and awards ceremony.

About & Scope of PPPC

Play Practice & Policy Connections is an interdisciplinary, journal that provides an international forum for early childhood practitioners and researchers with a focus of play.

This journal is of particular relevance to play advocates, play researchers, and practitioners that emphasize play.

Play Practice & Policy Connections publishes innovative ideas, methodologies, events, and strategies that center play based innovations, reviews and scholarly comments on children's play, and original empirical scholarly articles related to play across cultures, generations, and disciplines.

The journal aims to:

- ◆ Contribute to the experiential and empirical knowledge related to children's play.
- ◆ Highlight the inter-relationships between play, policy and practice.
- ◆ Stimulate thinking in key areas of play-based advocacy, research, practice.

The NAEYC PPP Interest Forum co-facilitators will serve as the seminal Editorial Board charged with policy development, adding board members, work scope, and planning for the e-journal aspirations to offer blind peer-reviewed research articles. PPPC will continue to offer editorial reviews for book reviews, applications, anecdotes, and invited articles.



How to Join an Interest Forum

As an Interest Forum member—you get to *dig deep* in an interest area, *present* at conferences, *lead* discussions, and *support* your colleagues through discussions on **HELLO**.

Get Started:

1. Navigate to members.naeyc.org/eweb

Log in using your NAEYC Member ID and Password.

2. Once logged in...

Find the "Account Links" section and click on "Interests".

3. On the Interest page...

Simply click or unblock the checkboxes next to the Interest Forum you wish to join. Please note: It takes around 30 minutes for changes to apply in Hello.

Editorial Note

Smita Mathur

James Madison University, Virginia

Grace and Gratitude have been our fuel as we negotiated the pandemic. We ask for the same grace and gratitude for the delay in bringing out Volume 2, Issue 1 of *Play Policy & Practice Connections*. In any case, here we are, ready to share this e-journal with all play researchers, policymakers, and early childhood experts. So, the lockdown that started in March 2020 is over for many of us. We feel free to design a new normal where we can live our most authentic lives and make new beginnings while reclaiming parts of our pre-pandemic lives. And while we grieve our losses, we are looking forward to a new day and new ways. For others, the pandemic is here and fully present. We continue to move with caution and care for ourselves and our loved ones. Our children are still vulnerable to infections and not eligible for vaccinations. We worry about them, so we continue to keep our finger on the pulse of the mutations of the coronavirus, and that rise and fall of the spread with relentless stamina. Globally, our neighbors are not secured with vaccinations and readily available tests. We stand with you. For some of us, the pandemic was a non-issue. The call for masks, lockdowns, and leveling of the curve was an overreaction and a detriment to world economies and a needless interruption of a well-oiled machine in schools, government, and various industries.

In any case, we are here now. It's time to look forward. What lessons did we learn? How would we like to design the new normal? What stays, and what must be left behind? What play-based learning and innovations evolved as we navigated our way in and through COVID-19? How did the play unfold during the lockdown? Who did children play with? What did play among adults look like? How did we maintain, sustain, develop, and forge new friendships that we were mediated by online platforms? What did we learn about access to play? What unique social, psychological, emotional, physical, and cognitive needs were highlighted by COVID-19, and did we lean on play to find comfort and growth?

Yes, it's time to take stock, and in the following few issues, we will bring you new research that has emerged since 2019.

I want to thank Dr. Sonia Tiwari for her service as the co-editor and designer for Issue 1 Volume 1. Her energy and creative ideas will be missed. We wish her the best. Dr. Joanna Cemore Brigden, Associate Professor in Childhood Education and Family Studies at Missouri State University, Springfield has accepted my invitation to serve as the co-editor. I am excited about the future issues.

Play As Our Ethical Responsibility: Development and Moving Toward More Ethical Practices in Early Childhood Education

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What Is Our Ethical Responsibility to Young Children?

Leadership in early childhood encompasses commitments to children, families, colleagues, and society. This commitment is guided by ethical ideals and principles playing out on many levels co-existing between partners. Early childhood professionals find that direction in their guiding document the NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct and Statement of Commitment. Within that code lies, in addition to a multitude of other items, a principle to children. It is the first principle. NAEYC (2011) states that this one principle “has precedence above all others in this Code” (p. 3). The full principle reads: “Above all, we shall not harm children. We shall not participate in practices that are emotionally damaging, physically harming, disrespectful, degrading, dangerous, exploitative, or intimidating to children. This principle has precedence over all others in this Code” (pg. 3) This paper maintains that the current climate of many early childhood practices denies children the play they need to develop healthy minds, bodies, and relationships, which is harmful to children, and thus unethical. It is our ethical responsibility to respond to this crisis. Early childhood professionals will lead the way in educating, advocating, and ensuring our children are receiving the play they need and deserve during this “unique and valuable stage in the human life cycle” (NAEYC, 2011, p. 2).

The NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct and Statement of Commitment guides early childhood professionals. What are ethics? The study of right and wrong, or duty and obligation, which involves critical reflection on morality and the ability to make choices between values and the examination of the moral dimensions of relationships. What about the code specifically? It defines the core values of the field of early childhood and guides professionals in figuring out how to respond to multifaceted issues that arise. Both ideals that reflect exemplary professional practice (what we aspire towards), and principles (assist in resolving dilemmas) are set forth through a framework that addresses our responsibilities to children, to families, our colleagues, and society.

These ideals and principles are born from identified core values. Core values are commitments held by a profession that are consciously and knowingly embraced by its practitioners because they contribute to society. There is a difference between personal values and the core values of a professional. Standards of ethical behavior in early childhood care and education are based on commitment to the following core values that are deeply rooted in the history of the field (NAEYC, 2011):

- Appreciate childhood as a unique and valuable stage of the human life cycle
- Base our work on knowledge of how children develop and learn
- Appreciate and support the bond between the child and family

- Recognize that children are best understood and supported in the context of family, culture, community, and society
- Respect the dignity, worth, and uniqueness of everyone (child, family member, and colleague)
- Respect diversity in children, families, and colleagues
- Recognize that children and adults achieve their full potential in the context of relationships that are based on trust and respect (p. 1)

What Does Play Have to Do with Our Ethical Responsibility to Children?

Play is how children feel competent, it is how they match the new with the known, it is where they can do more than their day to day abilities, it is where they are free to take risks and try new things, it is where they are happy, where they are focused, where they are engaged, where they are in flow, where they are most authentically themselves, where they are joyous, where they make discoveries, where they learn, where they participate in the CRUCIAL physical, cognitive, social, and emotional skills, tasks, and activities that they NEED to develop fully. Those are prime reasons why it is educators’ ethical responsibility, particularly given the amount of time children are in their care throughout the day and given that above all that educator “shall not harm children” (NAEYC, 2011, p.3).

When children are denied the opportunity to engage in the world through play they are being harmed. To gain a sense of the situation let us look at some of the

ways the lack of play is harming our children’s physical development. A first-grade teacher recounts her experience (Heyding, 2017):

“Falling off chairs is epidemic. A Grade 1’s physiology is comparable to a penguin’s: They both waddle around aimlessly, have no ability to catch balls or use scissors and jabber on about things that do not seem to make any sense. They also have difficulty balancing themselves. Imagine twenty-three penguins trying to sit on chairs. This is what my classroom looks like. One week I took a tally. In total, my students fell off their chairs forty-four times.” (Para. 4)

The teacher writes this in a humorous way, but it is also a cry out, something is wrong. In this instance, lack of physical play is preventing children from developing their proprioceptive and vestibular systems. A child’s vestibular system is responsible for their sense of balance, awareness and is part of a child’s ability to focus, give attention, regulate emotion, and develop visual skills. If this sense is not developed it affects several other senses in the body (Hall, 2019). For example, fine motor development, and writing, is a related concern for early childhood educators. It used to be that every few years a kindergarten child might require Occupational Therapy. Now it is at least a handful of stu-

“You did then what you knew how to do,

Now that you know better, you do better.”

Maya Angelou (Winfrey, 1994)

dents each classroom year (Marselas, 2015). Children must be engaged in play enough of their day to develop their gross motor skills sufficiently before their fine motor skills can develop properly. Thus, our children are not ready for school tasks because their days have been filled with tasks that their bodies and minds are not supposed to be doing yet. They need to move. It was found that a preschooler has an energy level greater than endurance athletes (Birat et al., 2018), but unfortunately that child might only get to move once or twice a day for a 15-minute recess. And if that it will be restrictive. Some schoolyards have signs posted with rules such as “No running.” Children’s systems are not just being underdeveloped, they are missing the critical period for them to develop (by age 7), and it is leaving children underdeveloped and physically weaker (Hall, 2019). These examples are just a sampling of one of the many ways children are lacking the play they need to develop as a whole child.

What Is Happening Now with Play

Memories of childhood where children played endlessly for hours is but a memory. Children today do not have the unstructured play time that children in the past did to develop, not just to their full potential, but to simply develop properly and their bodies and minds are asking for more time, figuratively and (Clements, 2004; Gaster, 1991; Hofferth & Sandberg, 2001; Wridt, 2004; Yogman et al., 2018). Compared to children of the last half of the 20th century, structure dominates today’s children through ever-increasing school structure, after-school classes, and their evening time with family filled with homework (Cooper, 2006; Cooper et al., 2006; Farmer, 2005; Patall et al., 2008). Additionally, students are losing their recess time due to pressure for more time on academics and a misunderstanding by teachers and administrators on the role of recess in development and achievement, which results in their taking away recess as a punishment (Henley et al., 2007; McMurrer, 2007). Doubly impacted are the children who are of lower socioeconomic status, who have less access to recess and are more likely to have recess taken away as punishment (Lee et al, 2007; Parsad & Lewis, 2006)

What has happened in our schools? A major problem is that perception of children’s development and ability has changed. Teachers expect more of children younger and younger, yet we know development has not changed over the last one hundred years (Guddemi et al., 2014). Another complication, decisions about young children’s education goals and expectations are being made by people who are not child development or early childhood education experts. Not only when it comes to policy, such as the Common Core, but most elementary schools are not led by principals who hold expertise in early childhood. Decision-makers do not know that early childhood, B-8, is different. Children’s brains are functioning differently than older children, and they LEARN differently. These children are developing their entire selves rapidly during this time and all parts of them need to be considered when making decisions about their goals, expectations, and how they spend their days.

Children learn by actively participating, making decisions, talking, and creating. I am alarmed at the expectation of “no talking” in early childhood settings. Vygotsky would be befuddled by the no talking and Piaget would be frustrated by the lack of child-initiated learning in so many classrooms. Most early childhood educators can tell you that the key to understanding children’s needs in the early childhood setting is to look at the writings of Vygotsky and Piaget. But, in most early childhood classrooms it is not there, there is so much direct instruction, and the children are passive learners.

“Undue pressure” is put upon children and teachers for children to read at age 5. “We are setting unrealistic reading goals and frequently using inappropriate methods to accomplish them” (Carlsson-Paige, 2015). Across the globe educational systems which produce the highest-achieving students, such as Japan and Finland, do not teach reading and direct instruction of academics until age 7 or 8 (Carlsson-Paige; IPA/USA, 2019). They recognize the unique time that is early childhood and how children develop. In the United States early learners are spending much more time in direct-instruction passive learner environments than 20 years ago (Bassok et al., 2016).

Just looking at kindergarten classrooms in public schools between 1998 and 2010 we see major differences: higher academic expectations both prior to kindergarten and during the kindergarten year, spend more time on advanced literacy and math content, more teacher-directed instruction, more teacher-directed assessment, and less time in art, music, science, and child-initiated learning (Bassok et al., 2016).

This is a bad trend. Not only do we know there are numerous benefits to engaging in more play during early childhood, but there is also no research that pushing academics, such as learning to read in kindergarten, has long term gains. Earlier is not better. In fact, earlier can be harmful. Below are some of the studies that compared child outcomes from direct-instruction classes and play-based classes.

High Scope Preschool Curriculum Comparison Study (PCCS) (Schweinhart & Weikart, 1997), a part of the larger Perry Preschool research, looked at children whose families were low-income. Three types of classes were used, two play-based, and one direct instruction. They found minor difference at the end of the year academically, but they followed these children until they were 40 years old. In later years, children in the direct instruction group needed special education services at an alarmingly higher rate than the play-based group. Forty-seven percent of the children in the direct instruction group needed services compared to only 6 percent in the play-based programs. Additionally, down the line, those in the play-based programs had fewer teenage pregnancies, were more likely to have graduated from high school, more likely to hold a job and have higher earnings, committed fewer crimes, and were more likely to own a home and car (High Scope, 2021).

A significant difference was found by Sezgin and Demiriz (2019) examining 48–60-month-old children who participated in play-based programming versus a control group of children. Those children who participated in the play-based programming showed greater behavioral self-regulation than the other children, which has been found related to student academic success.

Supporting that finding is another study that examined children from homes with low income with children aged three to middle school. These children’s language use during play was related to their literacy scores later in their schooling (Hart & Risley, 1995).

In Germany researchers examined children in fifty play-based kindergartens versus fifty direct instruction/cognition-driven kindergartens then followed them through age 10. They assessed children on seventeen measures, and those in play-based kindergartens scored much higher across all measures, such as reading, mathematics, oral expression, creativity, and social emotional adjustment. This study was the impetus for Germany to return to the play-based kindergartens they had prior to the early 1970s. They listened to the research and adapted to what was best for children (Darling-Hammond & Snyder, 1992;

Ewert & Braun 1978; Tietze 1987; Winkelmann et al., 1979).

Long-term benefits arise in play-based curriculums for children who are African American and from low-income homes in a study by Marcon (2002). More teacher-directed classrooms in preschool compared to play-based showed minor difference when children were in grade 3. However, six years down the road those from academically focused classrooms earned significantly lower grades than the children from the child-initiated classrooms. Additionally, teachers continually throughout the grades rated behavior lower for children in the academically focused preschool than in the child-initiated ones, and boys continued to be scored lower than girls by their teachers across the board.

These more child-initiated play classroom environments have shown to be better for boys whether looking at their current work or further down the road (Marcon, 1993; Miller & Bizzell, 1984). Thinking then of boys and African American boys, being in an academically focused early learning environment leads to the least successful outcomes. Lack of play and child-initiated spaces are hurting African American boys the most.

Why Do Children Need to Be Playing?

More of why we, as a field, need to be playing more in the classroom, outside on the playground, and in nature during early childhood is discussed in the next section speaking specifically to the different ways participating in play, whether in the classroom or outside, benefits early learners' whole development. Here we cover physical, social-emotional, and cognitive development. We begin with physical development.

Physical Development

Boys who sit still have a harder time learning to read. Researchers looked at physical activity in first grade and outcomes in subsequent grades. They found that the boys who spent the most time sitting in Grade 1, the fewer gains they made in the following two years. Sedentary time also had a negative impact on their ability to do math (Haapla et al., 2017).

Physical negative consequences to more academics and less play in the classroom and less recess time are here now. Specifically, children's motor planning (jumping, bouncing, running), auditory (retaining letters and sounds, listening to the teacher) and sensory input (behavior, focus, attention) are in trouble due to not enough time spent in physical pursuits where the left and right sides of the brain work together (Integrated Learning Strategies, 2015). Fine motor development develops after gross motor, so it is no wonder given the lack of outdoor play that young children are needing more occupational therapy than ever before (Dotson-Renta, 2016).

Lack of balance is associated with problems reading. Dr. Roz, Occupational Therapist says "Most of the patients I see that have reading and learning issues have a huge problem with balancing the functions of all of these senses. Their dominant sense should be a vision to guide and lead the body in everyday tasks, but it usually is not" (Grey & Coleman, 2019). Fidgeting is something that can annoy teachers, but it serves a purpose. Children need to move. Less fidgeting occurs when students are getting the physical exercise their bodies need (Rhea & Rivchun, 2018).

There are countless benefits to outdoor play (Fjortoft & Sageie, 2000). But some areas of physical health related to recess go overlooked. Nutritionally, students eat more of their lunch if they have recess prior to lunch time (Schmidt, 2003) and children who are outside early in the day and absorb vitamin D are better sleepers. And children who lack

play feel tired but have trouble eating and sleeping (Kresta, 2019).

Obesity and improving children's health through play is an essential part of the play conversation. Physical activity is essential for the healthy growth and development of children. Looking at 5- to 8-year-olds, 40% have significant cardiac risk factors such as high blood pressure, cholesterol, obesity, and an inactive lifestyle (Almon, 2018; IPA/USA, 2019). Children who are inactive in school are also more likely to be inactive after school (Jarrett, 2019). This inactiveness has also weakened bone development of young children (Khosla, 2003). Children are becoming heavier and weaker sitting through the school day.

Kwan (2019) reminds us that moving our bodies is a joy. This essential connectedness with our bodies and movement is pushed out of young children by making them sit and stay still so much of their days and then once they have become accustomed to a sedentary lifestyle, we then start pressuring them to be more active through organized sports or exercise. Keep that joy alive by acknowledging that movement is not bad. In addition to the joy movement brings, physical play is crucial for life-long health, as emphasized by Ginsburg, K. R. (2007) in his article from the American Academy of Pediatrics.

Social-Emotional Development

Social skills can be defined as children's ability to manage their environment. Children practice reciprocity, nurturance, and cooperation through play. They also further develop the cognitive skills that are crucial to positive social interactions, such as negotiating, compromising, and resolving disputes that are involved in social roles (Heckman et al., 2010). Veiga et al. (2016) examined children's play on the playground at recess and its relationship to many types of play. They found that play which included running and jumping was positively related to children's social competence as rated by the teacher. These findings lend themselves to the Piagetian belief that play reflects social competence.

Outdoor play provides opportunities for several types of play and experiences. It is the child's world. One of a few, if any, places left for children nowadays that is child crafted. They define the relationships, and they enforce the subsequent consequences of those relationships. This is where meaningful social interaction takes place. Here children have organic cooperation and turn taking as they create and play games (Pellegrini & Glickman, 1989; Rabinowitch & Knafo-Noam, 2015). Lots of negotiations, and problem solving occurs and specifically, social problems are solved in this space (Kwan, 2009; Schmidt, 2003) When children are outside, they tend to have more positive feelings towards each other, they are more likely to socialize. They practice and learn how to make friends and how to maintain those relationships (Kwan, 2009; Thompson & Thompson, 2007). In these interactions they are likely to experience syncing. Syncing is when children engage in a joint rhythmic movement, such as swinging together, or during musical interactions, think jump rope, hand jives, and such (Rabinowitch & Knafo-Noam, 2015). This inter-personal synchronization has been shown to increase positive social attitude, such as increasing a sense of similarity and affiliation and increased empathy (Rabinowitch, 2017; Rabinowitch & Knafo-Noam, 2015). It also has been shown to increase communication between partners, which led to increased coordination and cooperation (Rabinowitch & Meltzoff, 2017).

Recess is their world – and their world is culturally rich. Various cultures are present on the playground and cultural values are represented and shared through passed-down rituals at recess, such as songs, rhymes, and stories. And teachers can see a different side of their students.

Recess provides opportunities for social interactions that just do not happen within classroom walls (National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education, 2002, 2004 & National Association for Sport and Physical Education, 2004).

We also see decreased aggressive behavior and more feelings of peace when children are outside (Rhea & Rivchun, 2018). Playing outside relieves stress and decreases anxiety, which has been on the rise in younger and younger children (Dotson-Renta, 2016; Gray, 2013; IPA/USA 2019; Ladd et al., 1996; Yogman, 2018). Early childhood students have few coping skills to deal with their anxiety, worries, and frustration. Unfortunately, children are expected to be happy and compliant all the time while in school, which is unreasonable and unfair. Recess provides the needed time for children to deal with their emotional issues. Taking that away from children who are 'acting out' is unethical.

Springboard to Active Schools (2019) is an initiative of the National Public Health Institutes creating a group that includes the National Network of Public Health Institutes, Health Resources in Action, and the Center for Disease Control. In their recommendations they outline "do not exclude students from recess for disciplinary reasons or academic performance in the classroom" and "do not use physical activity during recess as punishment." Two tactics seen often in schools, sometimes even as part of a planned behavior initiative. A behavior initiative that includes these sorts of things does not understand the needs of early childhood children and does not follow recommended guidelines for physical activity. Ridgway (2003) studied the effects of recess on the classroom behavior of children with and without attention-deficit disorder. Levels of inappropriate behavior shown consistently higher on days with no recess, compared to days when children had recess. There was an increase of inappropriate behavior for all children progressively over time on days without recess. Interestingly, this progression did not occur on days when the participants had recess.

Vygotsky (1966) believes children satisfy certain needs and incentives in play. Wherever White (1958) asserts that individuals acquire personal satisfaction from feeling competent and play is a way of being productive, play is its own reward. Self-perceived confidence is associated with both positive peer relations and positive social competence (Coie & Dodge, 1998). Children's mental health suffers without play (Burdette & Whitaker, 2005; Burghardt, 2011; Pellis & Pellis, 2010; Siviy, 2010).

Play relieves stress in children (The Genius of Play 2017; Yogman 2018). Much recess into the human body is conducted using rats. Play is widely studied in the world of animals. When examining rats, we see play and stress linked. High amounts of play are associated with low levels of cortisol, the stress hormone, and play activate norepinephrine, the hormone that facilitates and improves learning at brain synapses (Garner et al., 2012; Siviy, 2008). This is important as anxiety is on the rise in younger children (Dotson-Renta, 2016) and is already a major crisis for teens. The rates for teens continue to rise, one in three adolescents aged 13-18 now meets the criteria for anxiety disorder (Merikangas, 2010).

Children today are more depressed than children during the great depression according to Gray (2013). Depression rose more than 60% for 14-17-year-olds and 47% for 12-13-year-olds and teens seen for suicidal thoughts or attempts doubled between 2007 and 2015. There is more depression without play. In an interview, Stuart Brown stated, "get more rough-and-tumble playback into young children's lives, and their mental health improves" (Shute, 2009). Something folks misunderstand is that pretend violence decreases the

incidence of real violence according to Brian Sutton-Smith (Brown & Kennard, 2000). Therefore, so many schools prevent rough-and-tumble play. It seems counterintuitive but pretending violence and physical contact serve an important purpose.

In play, the child gets to know themselves. They discover their self-identity, develop self-discipline and empathy, regulate emotions, conquer fears, delay gratification, and self-advocate (Cemore & Herwig, 2005; Ginsberg, K. R., 2006; Gray 2013; Pyle, 2002; Taylor et al., 2002; Wells, 2000). Last, but not least. It is fun! This is often why kids like coming to school, to play with their friends at recess. Play is related to happiness, which is a shared value for our children (Gray, 2013; Harper & Cemore Brigden, 2019).

Cognitive Development

A highly valued social cognitive skill in the classroom is to stay on-task. Recent studies have found a positive relationship between recess or physically demanding classroom lessons and students increased on-task behavior (Brez & Sheets, 2017; Grieco et al., 2016; Lundy & Trawick-Smith, 2021; Stapp & Karr, 2018). Students better attend following recess breaks and cognitively perform better as well (Ginsburg, H. P., 2007; Mezghanni et al., 2019; Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 2007; Stellino & Sinclair, 2008)

Outside play, such as recess, is linked with cognitive development such as better attention, following directions, more independence, better problem solving, more creativity (Rhea & Rivchun, 2018; Taylor et al., 2001, 2002). Awareness, reasoning, and observation skills increase in outdoor natural environments (Pyle, 2002) and executive functioning is improved immediately and compounds over time with aerobic exercise found on the playground (Best, 2010).

Play is thought to reflect the cognitive level of the child as well as contribute to development by providing the context for growth. When a child is deeply involved in play they are focused on the goal at hand and can sustain this focus for lengthy periods of time. This ability to focus is what the child needs later in the elementary school grades, for reading, writing, and arithmetic (Slade, 1998). This type of play also encourages the development of divergent thinking (decentration) or the ability to entertain alternative possibilities (Frost, 2010; Keen, 2011). Make-believe play exercises flexibility in thinking that allows one to solve problems from a fresh perspective or use a tool in a unique way.

Play incites wonder and awe. It encourages children to try, to explore, to innovate. While we have looked at children in terms of domains to help our own understanding of all that is developing within a child, each child is really one with their brain and body. Exercise and wonder allow the child to have a happy and healthy brain and body (IPA/USA, 2019).

With a focus on academics, we have lost creativity. Since 1990 creativity scores have been dropping significantly, most seriously for children in grades k-6th (Kim, 2011). Not only is play good for the health and development of children, but it is also what we need as a society. What do we need now when the answer to anything that has already been answered can be found in seconds on Google? We need to think about questions that have not been answered. Or even better, questions that have not been asked. Who is going to do this? The players! Those you can think differently, who can imagine, and explore.

How Do We Move Towards More Ethical Practices?

Now that we know all of this as a field of practitioners, how do we do better move forward? Teachers and administrators can make this happen through personal and public advocacy. Working through these circles of advocacy they can begin to build a system that honors our ideals so we can

lead the early childhood field to fulfill its ethical responsibilities to children.

Reflect on the circle of advocacy. Individuals can spend time thinking and printing the names of people, groups, and organizations to which they belong or have access to. Then expand out, not just people from their work, but also their neighborhood, where they shop, even where they get their check-ups, physical, and otherwise. As the list grows then think about each one on that list have their own circle of folks, and so on and so on. Now we can quickly see the possibility of the one voice extending further and further through personal circles. Below we discuss how teachers and administrators can specifically act within those school circles and the outer public ones.

Teachers In Their Schools

Advocacy can seem like a scary word, but teachers do it every day. Teachers are the experts. Remember that. Read that again. Confident people who have no expertise in what teachers do, speak up very loudly and very publicly about care and education. Teachers need to have at least enough confidence in themselves as those folks have in themselves. Teachers can make informed differences personally and publicly. Teachers are thinkers and doers. Teachers can figure out how, given the restrictions (or guidelines) given by the state, the district, and their immediate administration, to still advocate for play in the classroom and outdoors.

We need to play throughout our school day. When children are playful learners in the classroom, their play contributes to many positive social benefits. Kohlberg (1968), speaking of Rousseau in Kessen, states that “what is most important in the development of the child is that which comes from within him and that the pedagogical environment should be one which creates a climate to allow inner ‘goods’ (abilities and social virtues) to unfold and the inner ‘bad’ to come under **the** control of the inner good, rather than to be fixated by adult cultures” (p. 1014). Play allows the child the opportunities both to develop those skills valued as society and to inhibit those we do not value. Three specific ways teachers can act in their own classrooms are through teaching with play, playful teaching, and FACT Sheets. These three strategies work together.

Teach with Play!

There are many ways to teach with play. Real play, scheduling time for play, how you implement lessons and assess, spending time outdoors, prioritizing students’ recess time, and following play research help teachers to make playful choices with their students.

Teach with real play. Having children use hands-on materials in and of itself is NOT PLAY. That is simply effective, appropriate teaching of young children. In PLAY children make their own choices of what to do and how to do it. Be available for this throughout your class day.

Setting schedules for play. Setting schedules for the school day is another way teachers make decisions about what matters. Set up your times to consider the ebb and flow of children’s needs to be in the best place for learning. Considerations include but are not limited to time of day, active (high energy) and passive time (low energy), the timing of snacks and lunch, outside considerations (holidays, construction, weather), and balance of the large group, small group, and individual or solitary time.

Teachers choose how to implement lessons and assess. Objectives can be met in a multitude of ways. Most are more easily taught and assessed through unstructured playtime. Easy in the sense that children will be engaged, it will be naturally differentiated, and the teachers will have

time to build relationships and observe children. Assessing during unstructured playtime gives teachers a real view of what children can and can do, because they are doing, and are doing within their individual zone of proximal development.

Teachers can be encouraged by research that shows support of use of play for math development and achievement. Scores on classification and spatial perspective-taking tasks correlated significantly with the frequency of observed preschool dramatic play (Rubin & Maioni, 1975), using a storytelling context improves geometry skills in kindergarten (Casey, et al., 2008), and game-playing improved math scores on standardized tests better than drills for fifth graders (Ke, & Grabowski, 2007). Additionally, play and playful math motivate children and remove the anxiety often associated with math (Ginsburg, H. P., 2006). Literacy also has a clear link to play in the research. Play interventions increased vocabulary for at-risk preschoolers (Han et al., 2010), and play increased students’ vocabulary, narrative understanding, and fluency for children in early childhood settings (Fisher et al, 2011). There is a plethora of support for literacy and play in the research, these are just a couple. A recent focus of research is a re-emphasis on support for bilingual or ESL students. Two studies (Galeano, 2011; Norvell et. al., 2021) lend support for the use of play in preschool and primary grades in helping produce greater language skills and comfort with the use of a new language.

Spend time outdoors other than recess. Go outside. Some children can meet goals when outside that they could not meet indoors. How would a teacher know this about a particular child without spending classroom time outside? Knowing the benefits to being outdoors, not just at recess, teachers can plan more of their classroom time for outside. Whether it is daily, weekly, occasionally, or big project-based, there are many ways to incorporate more outside time into a class schedule. There are obvious ways to use the outdoors in science, but it is just as appropriate and stimulating to be outdoors for math, social studies, writing and reading. Outdoors can stimulate current ideas, inspire, or simply relax students enough to tackle tough skills.

Prioritize students’ recess time. Make ethical choices about consequences for misbehavior. Now that teachers know that not only is taking away recess counterproductive, but it also makes it more difficult to do their job, simply take removal of recess or directed physical activity during recess off the table. Several states mandate minimum recess times making it illegal to withhold recess from a student due to behavior or academic reasons. This trend is growing with several laws recently passing and currently under review (International Play Association 2021b; Shammass, 2019). There are plenty of productive ways to deal with misbehavior, many of which improve the teacher child relationships. The simple act of preserving recess gives children the freedom and safe space to work hard knowing their break will not be taken away. This will help reduce behavior issues and improve academic focus.

Teachers can make research-based decisions on recess policy. When recess is on the daily schedule, it is not a revocable privilege but a necessary part of learning, and has some extended special recesses so children have time to create elaborate scenarios, are all ways teachers can make recess research findings work for them.

Follow play research. While this paper focuses on recent research on play, there are decades of research supporting the use of play in the early years and how it serves human development. Plus, it also makes teaching much more fun. When students are getting what they need, teaching is more fun. And finally, lawmakers are now supporting play in schools. In May of 2021 Oklahoma passed into law the “Play to Learn Act” (International

Play Association USA, 2021a). Among other things, the Act supports the use of play-based learning and prevents a school district from restricting a teachers' use of play-based methodologies.

Use Playful Teaching!

Playfulness is a “joyful readiness for anything” (Kane, 2005, p. 181) It is both an approach and mindset as well as the use of some strategies. A playful person has some characteristics such as humor, flexibility, warmth, affection, curiosity, and a love of learning (Snow & Tong, 2019). That openness and ready for anything as a teacher supports letting children make decisions and letting children explore materials and possibilities. Playful strategies give children freedom. The freedom of identity, the freedom to fail, the freedom of effort, and the freedom to experiment (Snow & Tong). Playful teaching can be using games, flipping lessons so that they explore the materials before you give instructions, use of humor and empathy in delivery, and intentionally creating open-ended experiences for children to think beyond the expected, to innovate. Playful teaching thrives on engagement, which research findings show that play engages children (Eberle, 2011; Henricks, 2012; Ke & Grabowski, 2007).

Create FACT Sheets.

A FACT sheet is like a personalized one-page Cliffs note. It shares the highlights, the need to know, the most important key information, in a bright and attractive one-page. The audience is the first to consider. Teachers can make different FACT Sheets for students, for parents, their peers, and their administrators. What is most important to a parent? What is most important to your administrator? Those are the questions that can get a teacher started in making a play FACT sheet. Then choose the most compelling, interesting statistics for your audience, using a straightforward way to convey that. You can individualize to inform, educate, and/or persuade. Different FACT sheets could be used at various parts of the year depending upon what is most on folks' minds and how well you know what your audience values.

Administrators in their schools

Within a school, administrators are the models. They set the tone. They can innovate, listen, create, value, and encourage.

Innovate. Administrators have enormous influence. They can dictate what must happen in their schools, within their district and state guidelines. By creating an environment of EVOLVING research-based policies their schools can be at the forefront within their district and state. They can show that research is not just for reading or just for what is forced upon them in the name of “research.” Administrators can be the innovators. They set the tone for the building.

Listen. Listen to all voices. A school environment is created and upheld by the administrators. To be a leader many voices need to be heard and valued. Create an environment where parents, students, and teachers are valued and heard. Many teachers want to teach with play.

Create. Create an environment where parents are valued in a tangible way. How do parents feel? Do you only know when something is wrong? Create active ways for parents to be heard, through parent groups, parent-teacher activities, family events, and forums for feedback throughout the year. Many parents want their children engaged and playing with their friends at recess.

Value. Create an environment where students' voices are heard and valued. Choices throughout the school curriculum give voice to students. Presentation of ideas and opportunities to share with other students, teachers, parents, and administrators builds community, connectedness, and

a sense that they are valued. Students want to play, and their favorite part of the day is recess.

Encouragement. Encourage teachers to grow professionally according to their strengths and needs. Empower teachers by choice of professional development opportunities. Not all teachers need the same. Providing choice gives them ownership and shows you value their individual efforts to further their knowledge outside of school sanctioned professional development. We know that ownership is so important for young early childhood students, it is important for their teachers as learners as well.

Teacher and Administrators Public Advocacy

Follow bills in your state or others. Some states have already passed recess bills. Know who the governing bodies in your state for early care and education are and the process by which they make decisions. Anyone can do it from a computer. Administrators and teachers can start letter-writing campaigns, create and/or sign petitions. Raise awareness for the issues at hand through social media, start local meetings or groups, and talk with as many people as people.

Participation in processes, like school board meetings, allows folks to see how decisions are made and why. It is also a place where anyone, including those most qualified to have informed opinions, teachers, and administrators, can speak and be heard.

Teachers and administrators can also advocate for their schools also by fostering positive relationships with their children and parents both at school and in the community. Join an organization that already supports play and be involved locally or virtually through online groups. These sorts of groups can be a wealth of knowledge and support in advocacy efforts and work in conjunction with the voices of parents who can be heard through PTA's, visiting school board meetings, and voting in school board and local government elections.

Policy

Teachers know the effects of policies first-hand. Why then are they not making policy, or at least influencing it? Many teachers feel unsure of how to affect policy beyond the local advocating for the individual students who are in their class. Attending school board meetings, looking up state bills, and contacting state representatives are ways teachers can make an impact. In many states when a bill affecting animals is up for debate there will be ~100x the number of calls and letters written compared to when a bill that affects young children is up. That is an area where teachers can make a sizable difference because they know the people it will affect and they have daily contact with them, whether it is the children, the parents, or their peer teachers.

Conclusion

There are many reasons to fight for children and their right to play in early childhood education, and many ways to fight for it. What is happening in education with the removal and/or reduction of recess denies children that they need to learn, grow, and be healthy. Coupling that with knowledge of the benefits of play in the classroom and at recess is enough to initiate a change. Within this article specific steps to take to move towards a more ethical practice involving play is shared to help those ready and willing to do so. The code of conduct states they must. Now that educators know all these things, they must do better. Educators must remind themselves of their position, their power, and their commitment to “furthering the values of early childhood education as they are reflected in the ideals and principles of the NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct” (NAEYC, 2011).

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Untangling Play from its Benefits in Play Advocacy

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Abstract: This paper argues for removing a discussion of play's benefits in play advocacy efforts. The argument is explored through the author's grappling with a question of whether play advocacy invites families to feel pressure or guilt. Some benefits of play are explored, play is defined as a larger entity from structured activities it is sometimes described in competition with, and an assertion is made that play for the sake of the benefits of play is not truly play and that scholars and practitioners advocating for play should attempt to invite play for the sake of play.

I was asked a question several months ago that I've been sitting with since. My graduate research focused on how play may be (re)claimed in communities. I resigned from my position as a primary teacher to continue studying play and to start a non-profit organization based on the community-constructed research. The question struggled with on these pages is something similar to, "is play just another one of the many overwhelming pressures on families?" It seems like many play scholars and advocates rightfully feel an urgency around their work in examining and communicating the loss of play and it can be difficult not to convert this sense of urgency to fear or blame. When asked this question I replied truthfully that yes, I do often think about this. I answered that I attempt to avoid any fear or shame-driven messaging when I speak to families or write about play.

Sometimes when I read about the loss of play over generations and how children's time outside of school, eating, and sleeping was once almost entirely available for play (Karsten, 2005; Valentine & McKendrick, 1997), I feel afraid. When I read about how young children face increasing pressures to meet standardized outcomes in school (Gunnarsdottir, 2014; Lewis, 2017; Nicolopoulou, 2010; Pyle & Danniels, 2017; Yoon & Templeton, 2019) or how they have less opportunities to spend time outdoors or engaged in physical activity (Aitken, 1993/1994; Rigolon, 2016; Valentine & McKendrick, 1997), I feel frustrated. When I read about how safety concerns appear to be increasingly weakening the practices around children's free and unsupervised play (Anderson et al., 2018; Nihlén Fahlquist, 2013; Harper, 2018) and risky play (Furedi, 2001; Laird et al., 2014; Lewis, 2017; Tovey, 2010) I feel discouraged. Sometimes, when I apply for play-related grants and am required to convince others of the significance of play for human beings, I can only describe how I feel as lonely. I understand the desire to communicate the effects of play deprivation, which are both severe and sobering (Brown, 2014), but I answered that I felt that at least describing the benefits of play appears to compel one towards it rather than paralyze them in fear or guilt.

As I became increasingly curious and fervent about play, I continued to attempt to communicate the rewards of play and was delighted that this appeared highly effective. Play seemed to become even more alluring to families and professionals working with children when we discussed how it helps us move (McFarland & Laird, 2017), be creative and communicate (Wasik & Jacobi-Vessels, 2017) take risks, and feel confident (Stephenson, 2003; Tovey, 2010). It helps us form meaningful relationships (Francis et al., 2002). It helps us feel joyful (Brockman et al., 2011; Closer

& Gleeve, 2008). It appears that one would do well to encourage children to spend as much time as possible at play in order for them to grow and develop into human beings that are good, healthy, confident, smart, and well. I took every opportunity presented to me to share the benefits of play.

Something was missing when I did this. I write this reflection as a suspended moment of my current grappling with the flawed method of encouraging play for children to experience its developmental benefits. To play and want bountiful play opportunities for children only to experience the benefits of play is deeply unplayful. Play is to do anything where the pleasure of doing it outweighs its consequence. Play is the prize of play (Meier, 1980). Although it may seem necessary in a competitive and individualistic world to examine and thread apart and share the advantages of play, this only fosters a world where play is stolen from itself. Play as an avenue for excellence or mastery of skills is not play at all. Play does not belong in the arena of discourse around selecting activities that may help children become superior adults. Play is ironically non-competitive. It appears that one need not worry a great deal about structured activities taking time away from play: the more I attend to play, the more it appears that it is inescapable. We are floating in a water of play and are at play when we realize our buoyancy. Perhaps play itself is playful; it remains mysterious yet widely recognized, fragile yet resilient, constant yet adaptive, and is a simultaneous hider and seeker. As I clumsily struggle to understand the very topic I yearn for expertise in, I at least am learning that play is an expansive and welcoming entity. I am learning to trust play's strength and desire to continue to hold us. Thereby, any activity does not rob us of play but can perhaps only distract us from it, and play leaks in anyways. Play is an entirely different and larger entity than any of the activities families may feel pressured to engage their children in. Whether one's language is motivating or fear-driven, I argue that to use language to tangle play with its benefits (or lack of play with its consequences), is to tether it to a place amongst activities where it is disguised as something less meaningful than it is. Dr. Patrick Lewis (2019), perhaps heeding Lev Vygotsky's (1966) wise caution against over-intellectualizing play, interrupts academic discussions of how play contributes to child development and compels readers to follow the lead of children who value play for the sake of play.

Let us return to the initial question of this paper: pretend with me, please, for a moment that one day there seems to be a discovery that the growing body of research describing

the benefits of play is fallacious and that there are no benefits to play. The fleeting joy and realization of our very humanness experienced only in the moment of play is all that one receives from it. If children spend all of their time reading and writing and counting and tracing letters and running laps they will be the most literate, intelligent, artistic, kind, and healthy human beings. Setting aside that this seems highly unlikely, I wonder if we should care. I look around at the world we live in which is the same world we have created and that children must now navigate and eventually inherit. I hope that they freely let play spill in and feel the weightlessness of play. I wish them the purity and courage to play, despite what we have left them.

I recognize that many play advocates and scholars are ahead of me in understanding play and perhaps in their own situation within it as a worthwhile endeavour. Perhaps they have contended with time. Perhaps they have journeyed into wondering not whether or not play is worth our time but on indulging that time is not a currency: our experience of it is. Time is not to be spent and to seek an investment on, but rather, something that passes in each moment that could be filled.

I have stopped heavily relying on communicating the benefits of play in my efforts of play advocacy. To do so is to contort play. I notice that as I untangle and free play from its benefits this seems to come down to a question of worthiness. Perhaps in our connectedness, our offerings to children are a deep offering to ourselves. Do we value ourselves enough to advocate for play for no other reason than because it makes us happy? Do we feel that happiness alone is worth pursuing through not spending our time, but rather, expanding it?

Again, an inquiry of time: I can't reverse time and answer this question the way I would like to, but I am grateful for the opportunity to sit in a state of wondering (Aoki, 1991/2005). As I move forward in play scholarship and play advocacy I hope that my embodied answer to the question of whether advocating for play is another means of guilt and pressure on families, is "no." Play that one feels duty-bound to indulge in or that one seeks for its compensations is only a caricature of play. I hope I can continue to learn from the many who have come before me who preserve the integrity, appeal, and sheer joy of play as worthwhile for no reason at all.

Conclusion

This paper offers scholars and practitioners working in play and play advocacy an illustration and perspective of grappling with the important and perhaps common concern of how to approach play advocacy in scholarship and practice that preserves the integrity of play. This paper contributes an often taken-for-granted reminder that as the empirical evidence supporting the benefits of play grows stronger, the play scholar/activist must oddly resist heavily relying on this evidence in play advocacy efforts for risk of ironically shattering the fragility of play only being play when it remains for play's sake.

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Treatise on Early Childhood Education in a Pandemic: Bubble Kindergarten

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Abstract: In August 2020, when it became apparent that it would be unsafe for children to attend public schools due to the ongoing outbreak of COVID-19, two families in Austin, Texas asked me to teach kindergarten to their 5-year-old children. By October, I was prepared to share my message about play-based education with all parents and educators. This is more than an anecdotal report – this is preaching on the power of play! We spent Mondays and Thursdays at the home of the twin girls, Sara and Brielle, while their two moms worked from home in other rooms. Tuesdays and Wednesdays were spent at Jeffrey’s house. Jeffrey lives with his mom, dad, three-year-old sister, and 8-year-old sister. His sisters were discouraged from interrupting our “kindergarten” time, so were not regularly included in our activities. This manuscript provides evidence for how the motivation to learn, and confidence of these young children directly correlated to the degree of freedom they had to play and explore their ideas, with healthy adult input and responsiveness. With the introduction of blended online learning from the public schools, play-based learning took a major inevitable hit. For some children, the pandemic provided a unique opportunity to play more than ever before, while for others, the quality and quantity of hands-on play were immensely reduced due to the increase in screen time. Much of this paper relates specifically to my observations of these few privileged children, but the commentary on the implications for children’s play in less ideal situations is also included.

“Are you our servant?”

The kids don’t know how to define their relationship to me. I expect them to clean up after themselves and I hold them accountable for treating me, others, materials, and spaces with respect. I am a partner in their learning and I guide them in developing plans for their days, but I am not “in charge.” The children are in charge of their learning – with support and guidance. They often accidentally call me “mom” or compare me to their babysitter, school teacher, or friends. Jeffrey even said once that he thinks I might be like Junie B. Jones.¹ I take that as a compliment.

A key part of my role is to encourage the children to see me as their equal, so that they may begin to understand that adults are people too; That all people have strengths and weaknesses. Many of us are firmly trained from a young age that “grown-ups” are people to be avoided and not trusted. Adults regularly lie about things that are important to kids, and kids learn the truth the hard way. Grown-ups often don’t want to hear what kids have to say. Kid’s feelings and actions are so often misunderstood.

Please do not misunderstand me on this point - we should not expose children to inappropriate content nor treat them entirely like adults. Children do not have the experiences that we have, so they are not mentally or physically prepared to respond to “adult” situations. But their ideas and dreams are still valid and worth discussing. Their current opinions and beliefs *do* matter. Every idea introduced to them now will stick with them for the rest of their lives. They are learning *now* the appropriate emotional responses to the various circumstances in their lives. Children grow up and become adults – but their core understanding of how “adults” perceive them *will not change*. Some young kids learn that adults laugh at whatever they say or do. They will learn to *expect* adults to laugh at them. When they become adults and all of their friends, and colleagues and partners are adults too – they will expect their friends, colleagues, and partners to laugh at them if they ever dare to share their ideas. The way we respond to children *now* will shape how they understand adult relationships *for the rest of their lives*. Let that sink in.

Children will come to expect (and imitate) the types of relationships and attitudes they see adults sharing. Thankfully, many adults quickly become aware of their unhealthy tendencies and work to improve them. But imagine a world in which people genuinely believe that everyone out there has good intentions. I believe there are no “bad children.” Most adults, myself included, were seriously misunderstood at some point in our childhood lives. We tried to share our dreams and instead had our struggles and feelings dismissed as misbehavior by a trusted parent, teacher, or coach.

So, yes children, I am your servant. I am devoted to supporting your dreams and endeavors. Because in each and every child there is a beautifully blossoming world of creativity. In early childhood, humans rapidly develop habits, tendencies, and emotional responses – while exploring their incredibly unique ideas. Let’s give children the ability to embrace their unique talents and challenges by allowing them to play. Children *want* to learn math when it is necessary to enhance the complexity of their play-world. They *want* to learn to read and write when they need to write letters to their new imaginary goo-monster-monkey friend named Dada!

Lessons from The Outdoor World

While on our daily walk in the neighborhood, the children and I stumbled upon an interesting cluster of trees in a small circle, leaning gently outwards. Jeffrey immediately tried climbing, as all of the nearby playgrounds were closed due to COVID-19 precautions. We often used the abandoned playground bike racks as pull-up bars for the same reason.

Initially, the twins watched in awe as Jeffrey carefully scooted his feet up the trunks, but soon felt called to the challenge and ran after him. They cried out in frustration when they were not able to climb up at all on their first try. When she finally managed to get one foot up, Brielle begged for me to quickly help her down. I calmly walked over and said, “Wow! You got one foot up! Feel how strong your legs are. You are holding yourself up safely. Trust yourself.”

As the children continued to attempt the climb, I continued to gently encourage them to safely challenge themselves. When I cheered for her to try to put her foot a few inches higher, Sara nervously whispered, “But what if I fall down?”

“What might happen if you fall down?” I asked back.

Jeffrey responded, “You could get a scratch. I got tons of scratches on my legs!”

We talked through the logical progression of events. At very worst, she might scratch herself a bit, so we might need to go home to wash it with soap and water before putting on a band-aid. “But what if I fall on my face?”

“You aren’t too high up, so I bet that if you fell on your face you would bonk your nose, and it might hurt a tiny bit and maybe you would get a small bruise.”

Jeffrey felt compelled to jump in, “And maybe you would have a little bloody nose!”

“Yes, that could happen. But I don’t think it would if you fell on your face from this height. But I also don’t think you will fall on your face because your arms and legs are really strong and you are being careful to hold yourself up. If you start to slip, I bet you can find a way to land on your feet. Trust yourself.”

Conversations with Siri

“Please show me pictures of a unicorn. Thank you.”

This tool that unlocks infinite information is understandably addictive, especially to young children whose sponge-minds are desperately seeking input to better understand their world. The infiniteness of the available content is mind-boggling for adults and obsession-inducing in children. Adults don’t know where unicorns live or how to find them, but *she* can show a million pictures of *real unicorns* in an instant!

“All I want to do is look at a screen or rest,” Sara moaned. Sure, the tablet engages their sight, hearing, and sometimes touch. But the feedback it provides is limited, and the children get visibly frustrated when their virtual assistant fails to respond like a human adult. But human adults don’t always have an answer. Tablets may appear to suck the life-force out of children, but those “answers” and never-ending games are irresistible.

Children inarguably learn from their technological extra limbs, but they often don’t understand the real-life applications for what they are learning. The technology isn’t going anywhere - it is too deeply integrated into our society - but this isn’t a message of hopelessness. We have the ability to intervene by ensuring that the connections to the real world remain intact. It is impressive to be a technological whiz-kid, but life is all about balance. Most “educational games” can be easily recreated with real-world objects in our homes or outdoors. It is our responsibility as caregivers and educators to guide children to those connections so that they may learn and grow from their play experiences, both online and off.

Zoom School

Teachers are among the most self-sacrificial people in our world. Most are willing to put in countless hours and excessive workloads with extremely high emotional and physical demands. They will do *anything* for their students. As we saw in the horrific Sandy Hook tragedy of 2012, *educators are willing to die for their students*. How many other careers demand that degree of sacrifice? And now we are asking many of those individuals to do an impossible task - to personally accept the responsibility of these young children’s mental and physical well-being in the middle of a pandemic, while meeting all normal state and national

standards... through video calls.

Due to the lock-down, many guardians have had a first-hand glance at what it takes to manage the undeniably necessary task of teaching children full-time. If not now, when will we demand more respect for educators and caregivers?

Unprecedented Times

It is vitally important that children do not lose this opportunity to play and learn. Play is not wasted time. Play is the time in which children form their foundational understandings of themselves, others, and the world with all of its intricacies. We must find a way for children to safely interact with one another and with healthy adults. And we must find a way that does not abuse the dedicated educators. This type of kindergarten bubble may be a potential model for a path forward. Parents and educators must communicate and work together so that all children’s needs are met. Every adult has *something* they could teach to young children, regardless of their career path or lifestyle.

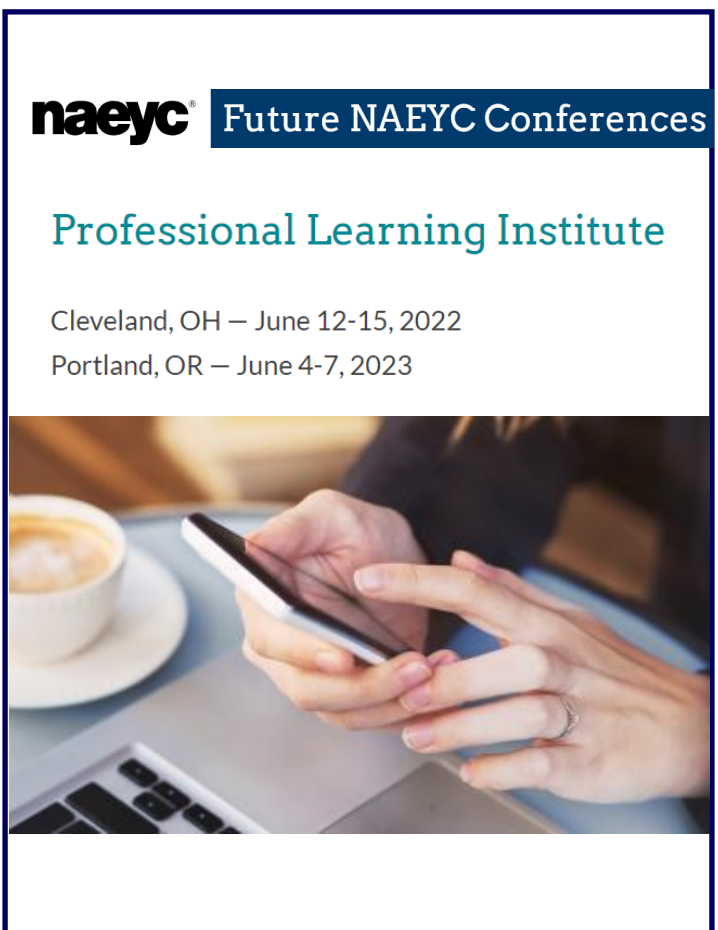
Parents, politicians, and educators – we have the opportunity now to reset the standards of education for the children in our care. Our school systems did the best they could, given their resources and circumstances, and I bear them no ill-will. But our children deserve better. We can do better. No simple answer exists for this systematic problem, but I am dedicated to becoming part of the solution.

Footnotes

¹ I highly recommend reading and discussing the shenanigans of Junie B. Jones with your young children (Park, 1992).

Reference

Park, B., & Brunkus, D. (1992). *Junie B. Jones and the Stupid Smelly Bus (Junie B. Jones, No. 1)* (Illustrated ed.). Random House Books for Young Readers.



The image is a promotional banner for NAEYC Future NAEYC Conferences. It features the NAEYC logo on the left and the text "Future NAEYC Conferences" in white on a dark blue background on the right. Below this, "Professional Learning Institute" is written in a teal color. The dates and locations are listed: "Cleveland, OH – June 12-15, 2022" and "Portland, OR – June 4-7, 2023". At the bottom of the banner is a photograph of a person's hands holding a smartphone, with a laptop and a coffee cup visible in the background.

Play Anecdote: Socio-Dramatic Play After COVID-19

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Vignette

Isa is focused on the tall tower of blocks she has built. She stands up and smiles while comparing her height to her tower. She turns to Imani, who is sitting on the floor as well and tells him "look at me" I did it. It's big. Look!" Imani looks and smiles and says "can I touch it?" Isa says "ok. be gentle or it will fall". Imani drops his blocks and stands up. Before he can take a step towards Isa, Mrs. A says, "remember Imani, we must stay in our own space". Imani immediately returns his foot back and sits back on his knees. Each child in Mrs. A's pre-k classroom is sitting in their own area while they play alone. They are constantly reminded in a soft voice to stay in their space. Mrs. A walks around with her mask on and checks in on each child as they play. From time to time the kids look up and stare at each other play. They point at each other and call each other names to get each other's attention. Many times they forget and try to get up but are quickly told to "sit in their area" by Mrs. A or sometimes by other children in the classroom. Solitary play has become the norm and expected type of play for this four-year old classroom.

What has become of play in the pre-school classroom? What will become of sociodramatic play once all children are back in person? Will they remember to share, play with each other, comfort each other and give a hug when a friend is sad? How will children play when we integrate back into the classroom?

Due to COVID-19 many preschool had to close their doors to many preschool students and quickly shift to online instruction. While virtual learning has been challenging for all age groups, it has been specifically challenging for younger students. Engaging younger students with hands on activities posed a real challenge online as it required adult supervision from home.

This challenge called for many parents and educators to support younger student returning to the classroom. Which is why when some preschools were allowed to re-open with several structural changes, many preschools were quick to adapt to these new safety protocols. Such as wearing masks, socially distancing, washing hands, refraining from sharing any toys in the classroom and disinfecting all areas of the classroom throughout the day. Actions such as socially distancing, or sharing are actions contradicting founding principles of the preschool classroom. Children were re-taught to remain physically distance from one another, not share toys, exchange hugs, holds hands, or play together. Young students were re-taught that every time they finished drawing, or playing with a toy, it did not go back in the bin but in the bin labeled use. For months preschools operated under these guidelines in an effort to support both parents in their communities by keeping their doors open. Parents were not allowed to drop off or pick their children from their classroom but rather waited outside. Making drop off challenging for some young learners who still adjusting to school.

So, what will be the outcomes of these past months on the social and emotional skills and type of play once these

safety guidelines are no longer required? I anticipate a period of reteaching core competency such as sharing, taking turns, teaching them to sit next to one another without the "your to close" remarks. The level of comfort will vary with each child and each child's family and we need to plan for a transitional period of inclusivity for those young ones who will not be ready to head back into the socio-dramatic area and pick up from they left a year ago. A greater concern is, how long will this transitional period be and are we prepared to offer these supportive spaces for young children? Moreover, are in service educators receiving the professional development to support this transitional period for students attending schools five days a week.

Extensive reviews on play, specifically, Sociodramatic play suggest that young children express their thoughts in feelings in ways that they are able to without having to solely depend on their language skills. According to Sutton-Smith (2016) play not only supports academic achievement in young children, but also a emotional skills. Sociodramatic play allows young children to create a narrative and engage in different role perspectives. According to Korat, et al. (2003) most researchers of children's pretend play have linked social competence, socially appropriate behaviors and mental processes through role play (Roskos & Christie, 2001; Tsao, 2008; Vygotsky 1978). What will the effects of not learning to participate in sociodramatic play be in young learners?. Moreover, what will be the interconnected consequences that play and academics such as language development and regulatory skills? Finally, another concern is if pre and in-service teachers will received adequate support to support their incoming students.

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Building Resilience Through Play

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The world can be a frightening place and, despite our best efforts, it's not possible to shield children from the ups and downs they'll experience in life. Raising resilient children, however, *is* possible. As caregivers, a role we must undertake is protecting our children by preparing them for the world. To achieve this, we can arm young learners with the tools they need to respond to challenges in childhood and help them navigate successfully throughout their teen years and into adulthood.

It's not uncommon for resilience to be linked to adverse childhood experiences (Joining Forces for Children, 2022). However, resilience is not reserved for only those who have experienced trauma; there is value in teaching resilience to all children. Look at Mel.

Mel is quiet and easy-going. This child follows the rules, listens attentively, and when playing, is always laughing, and smiling with their friends. If the schedule changes unexpectedly, Mel tends to go with the flow. When playing outside, the teacher notices that Mel spends most of their time on the swing, confidently pumping their legs and swinging themselves higher than all the other children. However, the teacher notices that Mel is frequently looking at the children on the monkey bars. Mel intently watches as the children swing from bar to bar.

At first glance, they appear to be a well-adjusted child, but there is a pattern in how they avoid challenges. It's easy for us to see, in Mel, a child that is successful at school because they're following directions, passive in response to change, and playing confidently. What we may be missing is their low confidence in other areas, avoidance of risk, and lack of coping strategies. Our goal as educators is to grow the entire child, noticing these teachable moments and providing support as they learn to overcome obstacles.

The teacher notices Mel watching their peers playing on the monkey bars and approaches Mel, asking if they'd like to join. Mel's face contorts and they quickly shake their head "no," running away from the swings and the teacher.

As early childhood educators, we witnessed daily interactions with children who were easily frustrated, lacked confidence, and frequently quit tasks and activities. As a trauma informed center, we reflected on our philosophy and pedagogy and asked ourselves why children appeared to be giving up so easily. We wondered why our learners were showing such little growth in persistence. There was a realization that as adults we often jumped in and helped with

many of the day's daily tasks. By stepping in, we were taking away the children's agency, their space and motivation to learn. If we wanted our children to approach challenges and change with positivity and confidence, we needed to teach them to develop resilience. We knew that by developing the skills associated with resilience, our learners would be happier, and come to understand that they could approach any of life's challenges.

Today's families, especially the children, are under tremendous stress with the potential to damage both their physical health and psychological well-being. This stress can come from numerous factors. According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, "Individual trauma results from an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being" (2019, para. 2). Educators must recognize the impact of individual perception. When a person experiences an event that falls outside of their capabilities or resources, the result is a stress response - a trauma - that may be emotionally or physically damaging. It is out of our control to prevent adversity and daily stress, but we can teach each child to be more resilient by changing how they think regarding challenges and setbacks. What is important for us all to know, and why the CDC recognizes trauma as the most basic public health issue in the US today, is that trauma can affect a person's functioning at all levels (Centers for Disease Control, 2019).

Think about a child's life as a seesaw where the weight on one side impacts the other. When we learn to think about resilience this way, we can better understand its value. If a child encounters stress or challenges, the weight from those will pull down the corresponding side of the scale. Positive experiences and elements will help level the scale and keep it balanced. Additionally, if a child is armed with protective factors, the movement of the scale is permanently impacted. It prevents stress from having as large of an impact on the child (Joining Forces for Children, 2022). Research has shown that these protective factors can be taught and, the earlier a child is introduced to them, the more equipped they will be when challenges arise.

Resilience is often described as the ability to bounce back from disappointment, challenges, failure, stress, and traumatic events. In our observations of young children at play, we learned that resilient children are more likely to take healthy risks because they do not fear falling short of ex-

expectations or making mistakes. These learners can identify their limits yet possess the confidence to push themselves outside of their comfort zones. They can act independently because they are assertive, responsible, trustworthy and take initiative. This allows them to have a genuine interest in their education. They are curious, brave, and trusting of their instincts. Resilient learners can set and attain realistic goals while maintaining a sense of purpose and a positive outlook on life. Resilience also builds character, so these children will be empathetic to others.

In a world that is constantly changing, an education in resilience is essential. Children must be taught to identify and develop their strengths as well as learn additional skills that will prepare them for future challenges. These skills will help them cope with difficult situations and the emotions surrounding them. It has been argued that some individuals are predisposed to be resilient (*Resilience*, 2022), but our experiences have taught us that young children have the potential to increase their resilience through deliberate instruction. Over time, children will develop their strengths and learn skills to help them rebound from hardships and prepare them for future challenges. They must learn to be resilient to succeed in life. Most importantly, resilient children become resilient adults.

As we looked for ways to better serve our young learners, we came across the work of pediatrician Dr. Kenneth Ginsburg. His 7 Cs, seven building blocks of resilience (*The 7 Cs: The Essential Building Blocks of Resilience*, n.d.), emerged from the positive youth development movement started by Rick Little and colleagues at the International Youth Foundation. Initially, Little and colleagues described four Cs: Confidence, Competence, Connection, and Character; they later added Contribution. Ginsburg supplemented this list with the final two Cs, Coping and Control. These Cs resonated with us, and we decided to create a developmentally appropriate curriculum that incorporated them.

Originally written regarding adolescents, we saw great potential in these ideas as the basis for a preschool curriculum that could be embedded through play. When we began this project, the C concepts were abstract and difficult for preschoolers to grasp. The first step was to take each C and transform it into something tangible and developmentally appropriate for young learners. We began this process by creating a short mantra, or phrase, that could be routinely and repeatedly used within a school setting. The two goals behind these mantras were to help the children more fully understand each of the seven concepts we were going to introduce and to also help create consistency, in both language and practice, in our school community. When a teachable moment presented itself, these mantras could be inserted into the conversation to help a child draw a connection to their own actions or emotions. These repeated phrases also had the potential to encourage a learner to take the next steps within a personal challenge or setback - the piece we had been missing.

As the children explored their environment and relationships through play, the mantras helped us to reinforce each C. Consistency in all areas of the classroom, as well as be-

tween staff and learner's families, was the key to this reinforcement. Common language, including the mantras, made this possible. Perhaps the best outcome of these mantras was the ability they gave to the young learners who, through the repetition of these simple phrases and teacher modeling of their meanings, became part of a learning community that supported one another during challenges.

During morning play time, Mel and a few other children are building a complex structure in the block area when they hear the teacher greet an arriving classmate, Tommy. A few minutes later, Mel notices that Tommy still has not found a place to play, but he is intently watching Mel and other classmates build. When Tommy sees Mel looking at him, he begins a conversation, saying, "I really like playing in blocks, too. What are you building?" Mel responds, telling Tommy that all of the children in the group are having a tough time getting some blocks to stand upright. Tommy grabs a few blocks and suggests placements of those blocks that might help. Mel shows gratitude by thanking Tommy and clapping their hands together enthusiastically. Tommy smiles from "ear to ear" and remains with the group for the rest of play time.

One of Ginsburg's seven Cs is Connection, which we define as the establishment of trusting and respectful relationships that a child can depend on. It's evident from this scenario that Mel and Tommy felt comfortable around one another, the result of successful community building within the classroom. This begins by intentionally teaching children how to make connections. With our young learners, we first began with visible similarities, such as round items in a lunch, the same colors of shirts, all without focusing on materialistic attention or our own feelings about these items. It's important for us as educators to help children identify these connections and then to build on them. We used common language such as, "I noticed that you both have blue shirts on. You have a connection!" We then moved on to more classroom-related similarities, such as two children grabbing for the same block. "You both had a plan for that shape!" The final step was relating this connection to less tangible objects. By teaching the mantra "I need you. You need me. We are a community," children learn the importance of relationships such as the one described above. We saw the result of this with Mel and Tommy. Both learners were able to identify that they could help the other. Their own needs were also being met. All the while, Mel was learning that we can reach out to people we trust for help, no matter what the situation. Without the teacher specifically bringing up Mel's concern about the monkey bars, the child is still experiencing the benefits of connection and practicing words which could be used later to advocate for themselves.

Mel arrives at school and joins a few classmates who are playing dress-up. As the children are interacting, Mel notices a child crying near the door. Mel has never seen this child before; it's their first day

at this school. Mel watches closely as the teacher speaks calmly to the child. As the new student begins to relax in the unfamiliar space, Mel sees the teacher walk them around the room, pointing out different activities that are available and introducing them to the children already playing in each.

We teach children puzzle strategies, such as rotating the piece or matching colors. We teach them how to build taller block towers by strengthening the base or lining up edges. Earlier, we mentioned Mel's success on the swings. These are all skills that need to be learned. The same goes for social or emotional skills, like entering play or coping with one's emotions. Referencing Ginsburg's research and applying it to young learners, we have defined coping as being prepared to respond to life's challenges in healthy ways. A large part of teaching a child how to cope is helping them identify emotions. This learning process can begin through teacher modeling and self-talk. The first step is helping a child label an emotion through conversations about facial expressions, tone, and body language. As a child notices these in themselves and others, their understanding of emotions and their names increases. This vocabulary is a necessary step in helping them talk through their fears, concerns, and needs. In the above scenario, Mel notices a child experiencing a big emotion. While the two students did not interact, Mel can still take away several important lessons from the events. First, they observe the teacher remaining calm in a difficult situation. Modeling, such as this, is an excellent way for children to learn. It sets realistic expectations while reinforcing what those look like. Second, it provides Mel with an understanding that others experience similar emotions. If Mel observes another child successfully working through their own challenge, it can reassure Mel that they can do the same. With the help of the mantra, "I practice healthy ways to respond to my emotions," Mel can begin to identify their specific emotions, such as fear of the monkey bars, and then practice coping strategies that can be used to help him work through that fear. We see a secondary teaching moment that continues to build a foundation for Mel learning how to approach challenges in appropriate ways.

Mel and Kat are good friends and often spend their outside time together, ignoring the other children as they construct elaborate superhero scenarios to act out. Today, as Jaxon approaches them, they run away giggling and laughing. Suddenly, they stop running and huddle together whispering. After a brief conversation, they run over to Jaxon and ask if he wants to play with them. The three of them spend the rest of their outside play time rescuing animals and people from imaginary monsters.

For the C of Character, Ginsburg believes that children should have an understanding of what's right and wrong (2015, p. 26). As adults, we understood the complexity of issues, so we felt it necessary to simplify this for young learners. Our mantra, "I make S.M.A.R.T. (sincere, mindful, attentive, responsible, trustworthy) decisions even when no one is watching," was designed to help young learners

grasp the concept of internal motivation, of making the right decision because they believe it to be right. By creating an acronym of the word "smart" that aligns with our guidelines for decision-making, we can introduce one piece at a time, gradually building on the accountability of our choices. This intentional instruction is the prerequisite to children making their own decisions during play. So often we observe children making good decisions as part of a cause-and-effect relationship. Through experience, they may notice patterns of praise or rewards that draw them toward making the best decision. Unfortunately, when frequent external motivation is removed, a child is less likely to do the right thing. In the scenario with Mel and Kat, both children were unaware of the teacher, yet they still made a S.M.A.R.T. decision. In that moment, they displayed an example of good character, built up through practice provided by the teacher. We can help young learners become comfortable in their decision-making by giving them choices during play that require them to work through the impact, including consequences, of their choices. We can then revisit those choices and how they connect to the S.M.A.R.T. acronym. The more experience a child has in this area, the more they will be able to apply learned lessons to future decisions.

Out of all the equipment on the playground, Mel really enjoys the swings. They recently learned how to pump their legs to keep their body swinging. They were quite proud of this accomplishment, happily shouting to the teachers as they passed, "Look at me! I'm swinging by myself!" Yesterday morning, during outside play time, Dakota was sitting on the swings, patiently waiting for a teacher to push her. Mel walked over to the swings and said, "Dakota, do you want me to push you?" When Dakota answered in the affirmative, Mel started pushing her and said, "I'm good at swinging. I can teach you how. When you go up, put your legs out and when you go back, bend them in." After a few attempts with Mel calling out instructions, "Out, in, out, in," and then demonstrating on the second swing, Dakota figured out the motion. The two swung together for the rest of their time outside.

Here, Mel is beginning to see the value of their hard work and the result of that effort as it transforms into skill. Not only does their success on the swings provide them with a sense of pride, it also becomes a way for Mel to contribute to the classroom community. According to Ginsburg, when a child contributes, they gain a sense of purpose (2015, p. 27). They begin to understand that they have value in the world; this feeling helps motivate them to continue working toward the greater good. We encouraged this concept of contribution among young learners with the mantra, "I can help people and make a difference." By initiating discussions about each child's individual strengths in and out of the classroom, we were able to connect students by skill and need. This also helped to foster continued growth within the class community by referring back to the mantra from the C of Connection, "I need you. You need me. We are a community."

We used these mantras, and those of the other Cs, to hone our common language. As educators, our consistency in the classroom is one of our greatest strengths. We can teach young learners about reciprocal relationships, advocating for needs, emotional well-being, and more, much of it taught through indirect interactions within the classroom environment. By consistent use of language and clear expectations, learners know what to expect and can feel safe in our spaces, a prerequisite for engaged learning. These teaching strategies help us create an environment that is constantly improving the social and emotional skills of our learners, including their ability to be resilient.

We define “environment” in both a physical and emotional sense, meaning we teach young learners through intentional classroom organization, expectations, and language that is built around the 7 Cs. In doing so, we can create an environment where children are surrounded by opportunities that will increase their resilience. The physical environment allows them to access materials that provide a variety of choices, boost their creativity, and allow them to problem-solve. The emotional environment is developed through the use of common language. As the children play in the physical environment, they can use our mantras to help them talk through problems or advocate for their own needs, building emotional stability in the classroom. The teacher’s role in this is to provide support by first observing a child and then facilitating learning through what Ginsburg calls a “choreographed conversation” (2015, p.83). Rather than jumping in with a solution or decision, an educator can use intentional questions or statements that help guide a young learner. This has the most success when paired with an environment that supports making mistakes and multiple attempts.

Excitedly choosing the block center during play time, Mel quickly begins grabbing blocks off the shelf and adding them to their growing tower. The structure collapses and Mel starts to rebuild. The teacher watches as this occurs several more times, paying close attention to see if Mel needs guidance or support, but Mel chooses to clean up their space and move to a new center. However, Mel does not remain in this new center for long. Returning to blocks, the teacher observes Mel as they utilize new building strategies, also applying what they had learned previously from a peer.

In this moment, Mel possessed control of their efforts. Through free play choices, they were able to make a personalized decision about when to approach the challenge and how much time they wanted to dedicate to it. By giving young learners opportunities to make choices like these, they can feel safe in their environment. They gain the freedom to approach challenges comfortably, without shameful external pressure or impulses to withdraw. To further teach this C of Control, we used the mantra, “I cannot control everything, but I can respond in a positive way.” We then identified parts of our day that we had no control over, such as weather, and distinguished them from those that we could apply choices to, such as preparedness. Mel’s frustration

level remained low as they continued working, coping with big emotions in appropriate ways and channeling these emotions into new attempts. Here, we see the interconnectedness of Ginsburg’s Cs (2015). When Mel experienced continued failure with their block structure, their feelings of control allowed them to apply appropriate coping strategies as they worked through each setback. This includes their decision to take a break and move to a new center. After returning to the challenging center, Mel applied new strategies to their attempts, building off a peer connection. We want our learners to feel competent, which means truly believing they possess the skills to work toward a goal. As we encourage children to try again, we use the mantra, “I can try. I am capable.” In addition to this belief, they must also be eager to determine what skills they need to work on to be successful and then take steps to accomplish that goal.

Mel runs to the swings when outdoor play time starts. They hop onto the seat and begin to pump their legs, getting higher and higher. As the swing moves forward, Mel’s placement shifts, causing them to fall onto the ground. At first, Mel is stunned; they had not fallen off the swing all school year. When the class goes back outside later that day, Mel walks toward the swing set, but then pauses. They stare at the swings for a moment before deciding to play somewhere else.

The next day, when the class returns to the playground, the teacher watches as Mel displays some initial hesitation. After a few minutes of standing near the swings, Mel moves closer and hops back on. They first take the time to check their position in the seat, grip the chains tightly, and begin to pump their legs.

Even when a child is competent in an area, setbacks can still occur. Mel frequently practiced their swinging techniques, improving their ability over time, and eventually, felt confident enough to share this skill with a peer. Unfortunately, their confidence was challenged by self-doubt after a fall. We strive to help young learners focus on their efforts by learning from past mistakes or failures and helping them understand that these moments are valuable learning opportunities. Through their successes resulting from continued efforts and risk-taking, children can feel competent. We know that competence is a building block of confidence. Confidence does not rely on a perfect performance; it’s continuing to move forward. To illustrate this, our mantra for competence, “I can try. I am capable,” graduates to our mantra for confidence, “I can!” spoken with enthusiasm. We kept this one simple to emphasize the importance of attitude. Ginsburg explains, “Confidence is not warm and fuzzy self-esteem that supposedly results from telling kids they’re special or precious” (2015, p.25). Confidence is not built through praise. Instead, our goal for each learner is to build intrinsic motivation and foster an attitude of continued growth. In order to give children, the space to find their own solutions, it’s necessary for educators to step away. However, we must also be ready to offer guidance as needed. As part of a child’s support system, the words we use are

extremely important. Choreographed conversations with learners can include an acknowledgement of the child's emotions, an observation about their various strategies, and a comment about their continued efforts, while highlighting their potential needs using open-ended questions. Intentional conversations such as these establish an environment that focuses on student problem solving. It's vital that children learn to work through their own challenges.

Throughout our journey of teaching and implementing the 7 Cs in our school community, we realized how much each C was connected to all the others. When we introduce the C of Connection, we teach children how to form and nurture healthy relationships. They can rely on these as a strategy within the C of Coping. This, in turn, influences the C of Contribution where a child may identify a need in their community and offer their expertise. Mel serves as an example of how a play-based environment can present a variety of naturally occurring learning opportunities for young learners. As they explore the opportunities within the classroom, they experience scenarios that require the use of each C. Ginsburg refers to the Cs as the "ingredients of resilience" (2015, p. 29). If we think about them as such, mixing them together to create a completed product, we begin to understand them not as seven individual concepts, but as an interconnected web (Ginsburg & Jablow, 2015).

Reviewing our observations of Mel allows us to study this web. Mel's connection to Tommy helps him contribute to the block structure, and by contributing, he is building his character and forming stronger connections with Mel. The reinforcement Mel gives enhances Tommy's confidence. Watching the teacher introduce the new student to others in the classroom reinforces Mel's concept of connection. Mel and Kat, through their sense of connection, also display character as they invite Jaxon into their play. Having recently developed the skill, Mel felt competent in helping Dakota on the swings. As a result of this competence, Mel contributes to Dakota's play by teaching her how to pump; Mel understands that they can help people and make a difference. As we watch Mel struggle in the block center, we observe their use of healthy coping strategies. Instead of getting frustrated, they leave the block center, choosing to return when they feel more competent and in control. When Mel falls off the swing, we can see their confidence falter, yet they demonstrate healthy coping strategies by leaving the swings until they feel more competent to try again. Remembering "I cannot control everything, but I can respond in a positive way," Mel feels a sense of control as they check their position on the swing and hold on tighter. Mel manages the swing challenge by displaying the resilience they need to understand that despite this setback they can succeed.

By the end of the school year, it was evident that our students were becoming more resilient, just as we see Mel in these vignettes become more resilient. They felt connected to a supportive classroom community, which influenced their realization that they could contribute by helping people and make a difference. Confident in their abilities, they approached challenges with a positive attitude, realizing they

could respond in a positive way to experiences that were out of their control. They chose to make S.M.A.R.T. decisions, even when no one was looking and demonstrated their good character. The learning environment gave them the opportunity to utilize the healthy coping strategies that had been modeled and taught. Finally, they felt capable, so they tried, and tried again. Mel had repeated opportunities to practice all these teacher-taught skills while playing and interacting with their peers. As a result of that practice, Mel's play was enhanced to a whole new level in which the play became the perfect opportunity to explore new challenges and realize that attempting those new challenges was not as scary or as overwhelming as they first thought. When play is child-driven and under the eye of the observant educator, children have numerous opportunities to practice and reinforce their resiliency skills. As Mel continues to feel competent this will deepen their sense of confidence which will enhance their sense of control and possibly give them the courage to try the monkey bars.

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Technology and Play: Where do you stand?

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Watching my great-niece facetime with her grandmother, then sit back and open the PBS Kids app on her mom's phone to start streaming a video surprised and amazed me. It mademe question what I thought I knew about play and technology and how those two fields intersect.After this Saturday morning observation, I decided to dig deep and unpack my preconceived notions about the role of technology in play. Technology has many aspects that impact play and most people have opposite reactions to the use of technology as a medium of play for young children.

If you had asked me about screen time and young children's play two years ago, I wouldhave said, "no, young children do not need screen time." It was and is still my firm belief that adult caregivers should limit screen time for young children. In fact, the American Academy for Pediatrics says that children five and under should have less than an hour a day of screen time (American Psychological Association, 2020). But, of course, this is all rhetoric now. Today we live in a post-pandemic world. A world where our new truth includes sheltering in place, groceries delivered to your door, sanitizer stations, at-home learning, and online classes. It is because of this that the topic of digital play should be at the forefront. We are ten years removed from the 2012 Global Summit on Childhood that stated that the disappearance of play was endangering the lives of our children (Warshaw, 2020). Moreover, we live in a technological world. Our children, like it or not, are digital natives. I venture to say that most three-year-olds can work a cell phone better than most adults. In fact, a toddler taught me that making the pinching motion with my index finger and thumb on the screen of my phone would shrink or enlarge the screen.

Play existed long before there was technology. Children have been using sticks, rocks, and cardboard boxes to entertain themselves for years, but technology has begun to move us in other directions. This use of technology started with the technology used by manufacturers to mass create and make toys more affordable and more accessible for children. These changes in the benefits of technology grew into technology as a means for play. Technology in toys began with handheld and manipulated toy trains and dolls and morphed into more technical toys such as computer-driven games like handheld game boys and other gaming systems (Frost, 2012).

Proponents of technology in play are quick to remind me that pilots receive their training on flight simulators that are very "game-like" and that some surgeons use controllers and joysticks in complex operations. I frankly sit on the other side of the fence. I like to see kids jumping in puddles and deep in pretend play. However, 2020 and the pandemic that gripped the world with so much

technology for classrooms and for connecting with quarantine family members, technology and screen time lost some of their luster for younger children. Once again, family game time included board games and going outside to explore nature was once again novel and a great way to connect and pass the time together with loved ones (Holiday, 2021).

Most people have firm beliefs on either end of the technology spectrum. They are either proponents of technology for children or opponents of it. Where do you stand?

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WHERE DO YOU STAND?

Responses to this article on technology and play will be accepted for review to publish in a future issue of Play, Policy, and Practice Connections. Follow our journal manuscript guidelines for submission.

We look forward to hearing from you.

(References continued from page 12, “Play as Our Ethical Responsibility” by Joanna J. Cemore Brigden)

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Play Policy & Practice
Connections

Call for Submissions

Submission Guidelines

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Type of Manuscripts

Articles These include original, never published, theoretical and empirical articles that advance our knowledge and understanding of play. Articles should be no longer than 2500 words.

Reviews These focus on past empirical and/or conceptual and theoretical work. They are expected to synthesize, analyze, and/or critically evaluate a topic or issue relevant to children's play, should appeal to a broad audience, and are followed by a small number of solicited commentaries.

Anecdotes These include non-fiction thought-provoking personal experiences, perspectives, stories, and incidents that bring out important revelations related to play policy and/or practice for ECE. Anecdotes should be no longer than 1500 words.

Photo Documents We invite practitioners to share photo documentation of their work. A series of 10 high-resolution photos (150 PPI) along with a maximum of 50-word captions for each photo. Short video clips of no more than 30 seconds can be embedded in the photo document. Acceptable video formats include MOV, AVI, MP4, and MPEG-2. Please include a summary of them and a visual message.

Book, Film, or Toy Review Submit reviews related to play, play policy and/or practice related to ECE. Reviews should be no longer than 750 words.

Advocacy & Activism in ECE We invite articles that shed light on activism efforts within ECE and advocacy of play, play policy and practice issues. Advocacy articles should be no longer than 2500 words.

Timeline

Submissions are due on **August 1, 2022**. The issue will be published by **December 10, 2022**.

Formatting

Manuscripts must conform to The Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (APA) 7th Edition. Manuscripts are to be submitted in Word format, double-spaced, with 1 inch on the left, right, top, and bottom margins, and using Times New Roman 12 points.

How to submit

Please submit a word document by email to mathursx@jmu.edu

Review process

The journal will follow a double-blind peer-review process for research articles and editorial reviews for all other submissions.