

Hands, Heart, and Mind®

National Association for the Education of Young Children

AFFILIATE PLAY SYMPOSIUMS



A Collaborative Report of Outcomes

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A Collaborative Report of Outcomes

Presented by:

Department of Affiliate Relations of NAEYC

Play, Policy and Practice Interest Forum of NAEYC

&

Institute for Self Active Education

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with Baji Rankin and Barb Merrill

*“When personal desire prompts anyone to learn to do something well with the hands, an extremely complicated process is initiated that endows the work with a powerful emotional charge. People are changed, significantly and irreversibly it seems, when movement, thought, and feeling fuse during the active, long-term pursuit of personal goals” (From Frank R Wilson’s book, *The Hand: How its use shapes the Brain, Language, and Human Culture*, p. 5-6).*

INTRODUCTION

As reported in the January 2011 issue of *Young Children*, *Affiliate Successes: Building Play Leadership and Advocacy*, there is compelling evidence that active adult learning with open ended materials strengthens developmentally appropriate practices and promotes affiliate organizational development.

Building upon earlier *Hands, Heart and Mind* Play Symposium Training successes in Florida in (2006), New Mexico (2007), and Puerto Rico (2008), carefully guided “hands-on” adult play experiences have been conducted in Iowa (2009), California, Alaska and Maryland (2010). These *Hands, Heart and Mind* Play Symposiums were sponsored with a grant from the Department of Affiliate Relations and based on the intent to develop the sustainable capacity to provide ongoing networking and support for developmentally appropriate play within communities and beyond the scope of a one-day professional development event. The training process immerses the adult in an emotionally positive way that improves teacher knowledge and inspires play leadership within the affiliate infrastructure.

The primary purpose of this report is to share the efforts of four state affiliates in using play to support teachers and develop quality initiatives for promoting developmentally appropriate practices. This report serves as a means by which to share the responses of participants, insights, outcomes, recommendations, and the results of the research conducted during the state affiliate Play Symposiums. The research and documentation components have taken these trainings to a new level of professionalism. Photographs from each of the Play Symposiums are available for viewing on the Institute for Self Active Education website (www.ISAEplay.org). Each of the state Play Symposiums reflect distinct differences but also many similarities. Each Play Symposium will be discussed and then recommendations will be reviewed for future possibilities. It is significant to note that as a result of reported affiliate successes, the Nevada and Pittsburgh AEYC affiliates are working with the NAEYC Play, Policy and Practice Interest Forum and Institute for Self Active Education to conduct Play Symposiums and join with the other states that are moving forward to establish play committees as part of their strategic plan.

Play Symposium: Self Active Play Process

During these symposiums early childhood teachers, parents and program directors participate in solo, partner, and cooperative play experiences with open-ended materials. The participants used a variety of reusable resources—colorful foam, fabric, plastic caps, river rocks, birch tree pieces, bamboo, marbles, beads, cardboard tubes, ribbons, yarn, wire, wooden blocks, plastic springs and a variety of other unwanted discarded resources donated by a network of business partnerships established with the Reusable Resources Association.

After each play experience the participants write a reflection about their play experience. These journal responses explicitly detail how deeply many participants are touched and how insightful their self discoveries become as they realize the impact play has made in their own lives, and the implications for more intentional developmentally appropriate practices. Teachers, parents and program directors see more clearly the connection between the type of deep feelings and profound insights they felt and the benefits play has for children, too. It is through the process of self active play, fully engaging hands, heart and mind, that participants spontaneously express and discover the inner capacity to create harmony and order. In this way, self active play becomes a powerful medium for “self” discovery.



Play Symposium Trainers:

Walter F. Drew, Ed.D., is a national facilitator with the NAEYC Play, Policy and Practice Interest Forum (PPPIF) and Chairman of the Florida AECY Play Interest Forum. He is the Founder and Executive Director of the Institute for Self Active Education who advocates creative ways of using open-ended materials to promote and strengthen play-based learning as part of Developmentally Appropriate Practices within early childhood programs serving children from birth through age 8 and their families. He is a recipient of the Patricia Monighan Nourot Award, co-founder and President of the Reusable Resources Association, and creator of award winning Dr. Drew's Discovery Blocks, chosen "Best Toy of the Year" by the Parent's Choice Foundation in 1982.

Baji Rankin, Ed.D., has worked in early childhood for 39 years as a teacher of young children, a teacher of adults, a researcher, an organizer, a scholar and an administrator. She is Executive Director of the New Mexico Association for the Education of Young Children (NMAEYC), lead agency for T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® Scholarships NEW MEXICO, a scholarship program for people working in early childhood. Baji is committed to building early childhood programs with well educated and well compensated teachers who find renewal through promoting children's creativity and who have the skills to meet appropriate standards while supporting children's play. Baji is active in a variety of early childhood groups, including the NM Early Childhood Alliance (ECA), the Early Childhood Action Network (ECAN); the Decade of the Child (DoC). She serves on the NM Early Learning Advisory Council.

Marcia Nell, Ph.D., is the Director of Research and Professional Development for the Institute for Self Active Education. She is an assistant professor at Millersville University in Millersville, PA, where she teaches early childhood courses and supervises student teachers. Her research interests include play and creativity across the life cycle, Professional Development Schools, parent involvement, and teacher education programs. Marcia also leads Hands, Heart, and Mind self active play workshops and symposiums. Marcia was a public school teacher in the primary grades for twenty-five years. She is married with four children and two grandsons.



Iowa AEYC Play Symposium

May 15 - 16, 2009

Barbara Merrill, Executive Director of Iowa AEYC, shares one of her observations:

In my professional career I have yet to witness an event as emotion- provoking as the play symposium experience was for the participants in Iowa. Barely an hour into the experience, a teacher said, "I realize how disrespectful I have been to young children in my care. I have interrupted their thinking, their problem solving, their play. Already today's experience has me rethinking how I will interact with children in the future." As a coordinator of the event who was not fully participating at that moment, I remember stopping in my tracks and turning and looking at this teacher and the others in the room. Many heads were nodding. I realized the impact we were having on these professionals as well as on the hundreds of children they would be educating, caring for, and interacting with throughout their careers.

Background Information:

In 2008 NAEYC's Department of Affiliate Relations announced that three states would be chosen to pilot a Play Symposium, with funding supported by NAEYC. The Play Symposiums were not to be stand-alone events, but rather a continuing project that creates a series of professional development opportunities for the state affiliates that were to be chosen. With the approval of the Iowa AEYC Governing Board, a proposal was submitted, and Iowa was the first of three pilot states supported by the Department of Affiliate Relations.

On May 15, 2009 over 60 consultants, administrators, and state early childhood leaders gathered for a conversation and brief play experience. On May 16, 2009 over 160 teachers, administrators, consultants and instructors participated in the day-long Hands, Heart and Mind Play Symposium. Iowa AEYC created a DVD of the event, to use as a training tool as well as to use to seek funding to support play advocacy efforts. Some of the play coaches in training leadership met again with at NAEYC PDI in Charlotte and again at NAEYC conference in Washington in November, 2009. Two of the coaches attended the play retreat in St. Louis in June 2009. The Iowa AEYC state wide quarterly newsletter chose play as the theme for summer 2009 edition. (To view, see: http://www.iowaaeyc.org/pdf/Summer_newsletter_Iowa_AEYC.pdf)

The Iowa AEYC Governing Board officially established a Board Play Committee, with strategies and a formal plan. Several play workshops and experiences were presented at the annual state conference in October. As a result of this initiative developmentally appropriate play competencies were included in the new teaching and learning competencies created and adopted by the Iowa Department of Education.

Since 2010 the Iowa AEYC play committee has been meeting monthly. The Play Committee is composed of members from all corners of the state, from public schools, state government, public and private centers and preschools, Head Start, Child Care Resource & Referral, college faculty, and Iowa AEYC staff and board members. Most volunteer their time (or their agency was volunteering them) for this work. Members meet to set policy, strategize, plan outreach to others, and share successes. Several grants have been submitted to support this work.

Insights:

Play resources have been added to the Iowa AEYC website, at <http://www.iowaaeyc.org/play.cfm>. Members have worked to collect contributions of recyclable play materials, and one member has opened a recycle center in her community. Iowa AEYC has ten play coaches working with Dr. Drew towards their play coach certification. Since the initial play symposium, Iowa AEYC play coaches have facilitated five play experiences with a total of 176 participants, but many more requests are coming in for future events. The committee has established a fee structure for these events, depending on the time required and number of participants, to ensure that play coaches are reimbursed for some of their expenses and efforts. The play coaches are scheduled to receive their certification during the Iowa AEYC Fall Conference in October, 2011. The Iowa AEYC Play Committee is working on a training guide to insure consistency in the 3-hour or 6-hour play experiences across the state. The play committee continues to expand and grow, and has had the opportunity to participate in some special presentations and events, including presentation by Dr. Elena Bodrova sponsored by the Des Moines Public Schools, and Iowa AEYC 2010 Spring Leadership Workshop on Developmentally Appropriate Play featuring Gaye Grunland.

Responses of Participants: Samples of Journal Entries

*As a college professor in Early Childhood Education, the importance of play is a frequent topic of discussion in my classes. Play is clearly at the center of best practice. I use "hands on" activities to help participants see the importance of fostering play and creativity when I teach courses and workshops. When I have an opportunity to observe children actively engaging in play, it always brings a smile to my face and joy to my heart. I clearly consider myself a "play advocate". But what I came to realize during my experiences at the Play Symposium: Hands, Heart and Mind just held in Des Moines on May 15th and 16th was that **I have been speaking mainly from my "head knowledge", and that I have put my "heart knowledge" of play on the backburner.** (Melanie)*

*As an advocate for children and play, I really didn't think a play symposium would provide me with an experience I wasn't already familiar with. However, **I discovered that I had taken play for granted.** As an early childhood educator, play is my work. Not only must I provide many opportunities for children to play, but **I must use play as an opportunity to learn about and assess the children in my charge.** The Play Symposium helped me discover that I needed to take the work out of play; to find the joy of being playful in my work. As a play coach, I hope that not only can I instill an understanding of play experiences for children, but that I can encourage adults to take the work out of play. (Tammy)*

*The experience of the play symposium was a connection to the importance of play as the foundational concept for early education. Play is not only the vehicle for making cognitive skills and developing the self-regulation skills for academic success. Play is the opportunity to strengthen the infrastructure and build a culturally diverse experience that infuses all learning styles and develops trusting relationships. Play at the symposium was experienced with many people all at varying levels of engagement. **The experience developed a community of learners**, and for me it built a deeper understanding of assessing students. In our linear world it was somewhat of a challenge to switch my thinking to the holistic approach to play, once there it reconnected me to that inner creative child. I challenge everyone to put on your play hats and view play through the eyes of the children you serve. Play is overall the only thing I know of that is the best thing for anyone to experience from the youngest to the wisest. (Jennifer)*

What's Next? Future Possibilities:

The Iowa AEYC Play Committee continues to vision and brainstorm:

- Funding for sustained work, with the hope of having a ten-hour per week dedicated staff person, and the ability to offer play experiences and training experiences for little cost and provide leadership experiences for play coaches and committee members
- Creating leadership to work to infuse more developmentally appropriate play theory into cross-system work and state standards.
- Developing strategies to help early care and education teachers access recyclable play materials in their own communities
- Certify 6-10 play coaches by October 2011
- Offer professional development growth opportunities for lowans in the field around play
- Continue to work locally, state-wide, and with national partners
- Consider a public awareness/parent education campaign about the importance of play

Since 2009, Iowa has been pressing forward with their efforts to support play education and advocacy. We see in their successes exciting possibilities for other state and local affiliates to consider.



California AEYC Play Symposium

September 24-25, 2010

Sandra Giardi, Executive Director of the California AEYC, reflected on the effectiveness of the California symposium:

Our play symposium attendees truly appreciated the opportunity to add hands-on play practice to complement their learning about play theory. A number of participants reflected on the symposium's powerful reminder that learning through play is for all ages, not just children.

Background Information:

The California Play Symposium (CPS) was held in San Jose, California on September 24 & 25, 2010. There were over 150 attendees and was held over a 2 day period at the Marriott Hotel. The Play Symposium was conducted in a large ballroom with chairs arranged around the perimeter of the room for the participants. The open space in the center of the room provided ample "play space" for participants to engage in active solo, partner and cooperative play experiences. The California AEYC has posted on their website the ISAE Powerpoint Presentation used as part of the Play Symposium and a wonderful array of photos taken during the Play Symposium (<http://caeyc.org/main/page/navhome>). In addition they have posted a video taken by CAEYC staff. Photographs from the Play Symposium are also posted on the Institute for Self Active Education website (www.isaeplay.org) under the Recent Events: California Play Symposium.

Insights:

California was well organized and prepared for the Play Symposium. Communication was often and detailed between the presenters and CAEYC leadership, which provided for a seamless transition as the time for the Play Symposium drew near. Journals, articles, and other reproducible materials were sent via email and were ready for the Play Symposium. Presenters were able to get into the room to setup for the Play Symposium the evening before and clean up was smooth and unrushed.

Responses of the Participants: Samples of Journal Entries

*I was trying to see how tall I could make it. **It was great to feel the same excitement that my children feel when the blocks fell.** The experience was very relaxing – I was not thinking about all the things I have to do. I could just focus on the moment and what I was doing. I enjoyed the instrumental music and I'm considering changing some of my classroom's music. I was able to relax and think more clearly with this music. (Lorena)*

***It was amazing how consumed I became** in the activity. Before I knew it I had a plan to use all the pieces. I began to worry that there wouldn't be enough time. I began working at a feverish pace. **New ideas sprouted like seedlings** in the earth. When the facilitator announced that we were done, I felt frustrated and wished I could have finished. (Lars)*

***At first, I wasn't sure what to do.** I chose flat, rectangle wooden shapes and I always joke with my own boys, ages 9 and 4 that I need Legos for dummies so I started stacking to make a building and as I did this I realized I was giving myself a lot of negative feedback so I tried not to judge my construction, just see what happened. As I let go, my building became more challenging (to me) and as I added on I became very proud! (Tabitha)*

*I was building a tower that twisted on the way up and I was so bummed when I ran out of materials! I see this all the time with my kids and I usually congratulate them for what they made then try to redirect them elsewhere. Now I can see myself telling them I'm sorry for not having more materials for them and asking what they would do if they had more materials and seeing if I could find something that would work to carry out their vision. I also put myself in a position of ownership and how if someone would've wanted to help me finish my vision I would've not wanted the help. **It makes me also understand where the kids are coming from.** (Susie)*

***Content, soothing, stress free** (except when the time warning was announced) quiet. I didn't know shower curtains could be so inviting. Wanted blocks or sticks to play with. I now realize how my children feel when they really want a particular item to experience but are unable to get it. (Kathy)*

***I want my children to have as much fun exploring and experimenting as I did.** I'm also leading our first parent night in a couple of weeks and its just this (a hand-on playing night) to discover what their children in our co-op are discovering. I want these blocks for that night too, so other adults can become kids like I've just experienced becoming. I'm also a high school drama teacher in the afternoon, so I've always said I have the wonderful job of being able to play all day! (Nancy)*

*Sparkling gold and silver / soothing music. Kindred spirits. **A moment to be with my soul.** I did not want it to end! In my over scheduled life **I am reminded to take time to feel and sense the wonder of creation and creating.** Deep breathing – feeling my body from head to toe. (Marilyn)*

Research Findings:

As part of the ongoing inquiry into how the Play Symposiums impact participants, a Play Attitudinal Survey Instrument (PASI) was used during the California, Alaska and Maryland Play Symposiums. The open-ended questions on the instrument asked participants about their perceptions about barriers and the supports needed to use play as a learning tool in professional practice. The results are exhibited in Table 1 and Table 2.

Participants cited parents (41%) as being the number one barrier in using play as a learning tool. The second highest barrier was the teachers' own knowledge level (32%) for using play. These two findings indicate that there is a perceived need to provide educational opportunities that incorporate effective ways for adults, parents and teachers to develop a value of play as a learning tool. This concept is a strongly held belief from NAEYC and various other professional organizations such as the American Pediatric Association. Using a hands-on approach to facilitate adults' understanding on the value would be our recommendation. This recommendation is based on our on beliefs and the anecdotal data collected during the workshops but also it is supported by these national organizations, too.

As part of the PASI, the participants were asked whether they would be interested in being part of a follow-up project on the value of play. There was an overwhelming positive response to being part of the research. Contacts will be made and continued conversations and communications will be made with these participants as we document the long-term effects of the Play Symposiums.

During the NAEYC Annual Conference, several participants from the California Play Symposium spoke with the trainers outlining some of their work they were going to do as a result of having attended the Play Symposium. Follow up interviews and continued encouragement and communication will occur with these participants.

In January **Kathy Ramirez**, CAEYC Vice President, Executive Director of the Village Infant and Toddler Preschool, and Adjunct Instructor Pierce College shared her vision:

*"In my emergent curriculum program we use open-ended materials with the children all the time, but experiencing this process with adults and realizing the connection to the way children learn **really opened my eyes**. After the experience at the "Play Symposium" I took the information back to my local affiliate to share what I learned. At the College of the Canyons Early Childhood Center I presented a brief history of "play" using the power point from the Play Symposium, then engaged the teachers in solitary and cooperative play with a variety of open-ended materials.*

*Following each play session participants took time for reflection and discussed what they gleaned from their experience. After all of that we **played soft music and viewed pictures of their time together** as a way of ending a wonderful "play" experience. The excitement and joy of finding out about play and what children really are learning during this type of play experience give participants a new way of looking at "play" and skills for articulating why play is important.*

What I really want to do is to bring this to more teachers and students (pre-services?) to help them look at play differently. I am working with 3 other Pacific Oaks graduates to present two "Play is the Only Way" hands-on play sessions with 50 Early Childhood Educators at the Southern California Valley AEYC on Feb 24. The next step is to touch parents. We have a group called, "MOP's" (mothers of preschoolers) who come together twice a month. **We're planning Play workshops for parents in the San Fernando, Santa Clarita and Antelope Valley areas of Southern California."**

Kathy's statement illustrates how the hands-on, self active play process impacts one's professional practice beyond the initial contact. Kathy was inspired to develop collaborative outreach efforts to help teachers and parents understand the importance of play by using the same techniques used during the Play Symposium.



California Play Symposium
September 25, 2010
Barriers to Using Play as a Learning Tool

Table 1
(n=76)

	frequency	Percent of Participants
Play Knowledge and Values		
Parents' value of play	31	41%
Teachers' value of play (self)	24	32%
Colleagues' value of play	9	12%
Administrators' value	9	12%
Community's value of play	7	9%
Adults' need for control	3	4%
Teachers' Role in Play	3	4%
Resistance to change	2	3%
Lack of motivation & initiative	1	1%
Practice		
• Time (lack of)	18	24%
o Scheduling/routine mandates		
o Uninterrupted time		
o Transitions		
• Materials (need for supply of)	13	17%
• Space for storage		
• Set up/clean up		
Policy		
Testing and Accountability	4	5%
Environmental Spaces	3	4%
Politics	2	3%
Bureaucracy	2	3%
Funding	2	3%
Staffing reductions affecting safety	1	1%
Total Responses	(132)	

California Play Symposium
September 25, 2010
Supports Needed to Use Play as a Learning Tool

Table 2
(n=76)

	frequency	percent of participants
Play Knowledge and Values		
• Teacher Knowledge	24	32%
○ Workshops/Professional Development	8	11%
○ Research findings/Documenting	6	8%
○ Activities and ideas	5	7%
○ Success stories	3	4%
○ Models to engage in play	3	4%
○ Follow child's lead	2	3%
○ Opportunity for reflection	1	1%
○ Inspiration	1	1%
○ Relax	1	1%
• Parent Knowledge	14	18%
• Community	5	7%
• Politicians	1	1%
Practice		
• Materials	20	26%
○ DVD on value of play	1	1%
• Parent Workshops	9	17%
• Administration	8	11%
• Time	7	9%
○ Schedule/less structured		
○ Uninterrupted blocks of time		
Policy		
• Funding	6	8%
• More staff	3	4%
• Less paperwork	1	1%
• Less assessment	1	1%
• Information in Spanish	1	1%
Total Responses	131	



Alaska Play Symposium

October 29-30, 2010

Alaska AEYC board member Veronica Plumb comments that:

For some, the Hands, Heart, & Mind play experience was an emotional and revealing reflection of their personal philosophy. For others, the experience provided insights for reflection and thought about supporting play in classrooms and other places of childhood. Thought and reflection by 100-plus participants for future planning around play can only be seen as a very positive response.

Background Information:

The Alaska Play Symposium occurred over a two-day period from October 29 through October 30, 2010 in Fairbanks, Alaska. The Play Symposium was held at the Westmark Hotel in downtown Fairbanks. The facility was clean and easy to use for the Play Symposium. There was ample space for the play experiences. Alaska broke the workshops into 4 sessions over the two-day period. There was a morning and afternoon session on Friday and then also on Saturday. Participants attended the morning and afternoon sessions on either day. On Friday evening we also provided a Play Experience for Parents. Walter Drew presented a one and one half hour "hands-on" Key Note address on Friday. Each participant received a play kit of materials and a copy of "The Wisdom of Play" booklet donated by Community Playthings. In all, the trainers provided 6 different sessions during the Alaska Play Symposium. Photographs from the Alaska Play Symposium are posted on the Institute for Self Active Education website (www.isaeplay.org) under the Recent Events: Alaska Play Symposium.

Insights:

Alaska was fairly well organized and made good attempts at communicating with the trainers to assure a successful Play Symposium. The physical environment supported the assurance of a successful Play Symposium. The organizers communicated with the trainers to verify specifications for room size, room set up, and print outs for use in the Play Symposium. This training was an intense training in that there were 6 sessions to prepare and present. Understandably, it is difficult for Alaska to get presenters to come and therefore the need to get the most for their time and money.

Responses of the Participants:

Participants shared through their journals many of the same themes as from the California Play Symposium; such as impact on professional practice, changes in professional practice, their ability to focus, the soft music, understanding where the children are coming from and how children are feeling. But the Alaska Play Symposium participants shared many personal insights as they reflected on their play experience.

It put me at peace, a time where I could just play and not feel hurried, or worried, not have to be on the lookout for my younger siblings a time for me to play just play! Very peaceful reflection of my childhood. I feel like an engineer building our own private lake houses. (Gisela)

I felt at peace, something that has been missing from my life for the last several years. I heard a waterfall through the music and because have been drawn to waterfalls in all my years of life experiences, I used the rocks to crate a waterfall in the islands of the Caribbean. (Laura)

This was such a strong powerful emotional time for me. *I had a pile of rocks, which became a path. My husband passed away four years ago and I walk a path everyday as therapy. It can be an older, familiar one or a brand new one that I might now know where it leads. I take pictures of paths of all kinds. When my husband died the path that I was on was lost and destroyed. Each piece then I decided to create my own path – I don't know where I twill lead but I am determined to find my way along it.* (Sally)

I created a butterfly because I am changing constantly in so many ways. *I have been a victim of child abuse (sexual, mental, and physical) and neglect and I also struggle everyday with stress, depression and old scares.* (Grika)

This experience took me back to when I was five. *We lived in a log cabin and I remember the trees and the smells of the cabin as I was playing with the wood, touching it, smelling it, the memories of living in that cabin flooded back to me. That year was the best year. I remember leaving that place and everything changing. My childhood was gone, my play was gone, it wasn't me for me to grow up. This experience taught us how important play really is. I wonder if things would have been different had I been allowed to play more.* (Robyn)

Research Findings:

The results derived from the PASI given at the Alaska Play Symposium are similar to the results of California (see Table 3 and 4). Parents were viewed as the leading barrier (49%) to using play as a learning tool. Teachers were also viewed as a barrier (25%). Both the need for more time and more materials (30%) were also cited as barriers to using play as a learning tool.

But the Alaska results also revealed that teachers viewed a child's disposition to play as a barrier (16%). This is an interesting finding when compared to the rise of childhood obesity, especially in Alaska. This warrants further investigation and possible interventions for supporting children in their own play.

Along with the barriers, the participant also indicated the types of support they needed in order to use play as a learning tool. Alaska cited the need for more play knowledge (77%) as the number one support. This need for support for play

knowledge was broken down into the need for support of play knowledge for teachers (38%), parents (16%), and community (5%). They also cited materials (48%) as the number two support needed in order to use play as a learning tool.



Alaska Play Symposium

October 29 and 30, 2010

Barriers to Using Play as a Learning Tool

Table 3

(n=61)

	frequency	Percent of Participants
Play Knowledge and Values		
• Parents' value of play	30	49%
• Teachers' value of play (self)	15	25%
• Child's Value of Play	10	16%
○ Disposition toward play		
○ Opportunities/Restraining		
○ Following Rules		
• Administrators' value	5	8%
Practice		
• Time (lack of)	18	30%
○ Scheduling/routine mandates		
○ Uninterrupted time		
○ Transitions		
• Materials (need for supply of)	18	30%
○ Space for storage		
○ Set up/clean up		
• Adult Interference	8	13%
• No Access	1	2%
Policy		
• Environmental Spaces	8	13%
• Standards	5	8%
• Politics	3	5%
• Safety	3	5%
• Funding	2	3%
Total Responses	(135)	

Alaska Play Symposium

October 29 and 30, 2010

Supports Needed to Use Play as a Learning Tool

Table 4

(n=61)

	frequency	percent of participants
Play Knowledge and Values	(43)	(70%)
• Teacher Play Knowledge	23	38%
○ Activities and ideas		
○ Models to manage play		
○ Research findings/Documenting		
○ Workshops/Professional Development		
• Parent Play Knowledge	10	16%
• Teacher's Dispositions	5	8%
• Community Play Knowledge	3	5%
• Child's Dispositions	2	3%
Practice		
• Materials	29	48%
• Time	10	16%
○ Schedule/less structured		
○ Uninterrupted blocks of time		
• Advocate to Parent	6	10%
• Space	3	5%
• Administration	3	5%
• Workshop for Parents	1	2%
•		
Policy		
• Funding	2	3%
• Staffing	2	3%
• Media	1	2%
• Less mandated	1	2%
Total Responses	(101)	



Maryland Play Symposium November 20, 2010

Following the Maryland AEYC Play Symposium, Greg Stevens, co-president of the Maryland AEYC, explained that:

The play symposium was a professional development opportunity for Maryland's early childhood community in response to members' demands that there should be some balance to the heightened school- readiness, standards-based training opportunities flooding the market throughout the state. The response to the symposium has been over- whelming, indicating the huge need for such opportunities now and in the future.

Background Information:

The Maryland Play Symposium was a full day, which occurred on November 20, 2010. There were 85 participants that attended the Symposium. The MDAEYC held the attendance to 85 and therefore met their anticipated attendance criteria. The Symposium was held in a room at the student center on the University of Maryland main campus. Participants received a copy of "The Wisdom of Play" booklet donated by Community Playthings. Photographs from the Play Symposium are posted on the Institute for Self Active Education website (www.isaeplay.org) under the Recent Events: Maryland Play Symposium.

Insights:

The Maryland AEYC leadership and members were very excited about holding the Play Symposium. There was communication between presenters and MDAEYC regarding logistics. Materials to be copied were sent prior to the Play Symposium. The Maryland Play Symposium was held on the main campus of The University of Maryland in a room that was narrow and long, which made it difficult for some participants to hear. For future reference, rooms used for the Play Symposiums need adequate space for a hands-on type format and the possibility of needing microphones to ease any difficulty with hearing.

Responses of the Participants:

Participants shared through their journals many of the same themes as from the California and Alaska Play Symposiums; such as impact on professional practice, changes in professional practice, their ability to focus, the soft music, understanding where the children are coming from and how children are feeling. In the Maryland journals there was an unusually large number of journal responses about the sense of freedom the participants felt during the solo play experience. This could be in response to the large amount of “direction” from the state as to what should go on within an early childhood classroom.

The music helped me get inspired to create what I did. **Playing alone feels so calming**, you’re concentrating and thinking what you can do. (Tan)

I felt I was in control of making my own decision as to what I could make. No one could take the pieces I wanted to use. I sorted by texture – smallest to largest. I stacked them as tall as I could without it falling. (Natasha)

It was difficult to play by myself at first – I wanted to play with somebody else. Then I began to get creative. I looked around to see what others were doing. I get a lot of joy from watching others play. (Mary).

Open ended free play – tactile – made noise – slid easily – counting by stacks 339. There was sensory experience and an auditory experience. I felt like I was creating something but needed more room. After I was done counting I began to “play” with the structure and pattern adjusting its height and stacks. Torn between wanting direction and not. (Teresa)

I enjoyed first knocking out the rest of the world, listening to the music and feeling relaxed. Never got a chance to do that. **Never realized how complicated play can be.** (Carolyn)

I realized in my moment of play I experienced cause and effect, counted, tested, created, pretended, worked on special awareness. I felt things, saw things, heard things. (Dessie)

I felt independence and creative. Not having to share/communicate/cooperate. **A feeling of self-accomplishment.** The routine of layering was comforting. (Judy)

Also, I noticed how it took some people time to get started and made me realize that this can be useful when working with children. Do you leave them be or try to “jump” start the process. As a teacher, this also made me aware of the potential in a simple material and defining play space, which we have been exploring in our own classroom. (Renee)

Beautiful inner experience. Touching them, thinking about the rocks and where they had been, analyzing them, peacefully, and temperatures, according to sizes and textures, pretending to build a white village; do different paths and place them as in a puzzle.; create bridges to nowhere and felt your imagination flow. **A sense of freedom, of nature, of organization. I felt like a perfect architect** arranging and rearranging the rocks with no “wrong’ answer. Going back in time to where I was raised and thinking about the ocean, the smell, the sound of water, the fine sand...(Michelle)

When I started to play I had an idea of creating a crashing wave on a beach using the bows like mosaic chips. I felt a sense of urgency, that these might not be enough time to finish my project (note to self- this is interesting, is the how the kids feel when its almost time for snack/transition?)(Maris)

As I worked I kept worrying that time would be up before I completed a pattern or used all of the materials. (Sara)

I thought about my students in pre-school and I also thought about myself as a young girl who enjoyed playing. I was able to experience again the joy of play that was forgotten and reliving the experience was relaxing and enjoyable. I realized that play gives so much joy to children and is a very important part in their childhood. (Maria)

I went from being self-conscious about playing to feeling liberated from the constraints of the “real” world. Where I started out feeling all alone, I became glad that I was all alone. I wish for the children I teach the time and freedom to play. (Ellen)

One of the participants from the Maryland Play Symposium emailed us two days after the symposium stating how much he enjoyed the symposium but felt it would be beneficial if we had provided more “research” to support the use of play. Ultimately, the hands on component of the Play Symposiums provide participants with a concrete experience with which they can continue to reflect upon and make meaning for their professional practice well after the Play Symposium is finished. There is a need for both the experience and the research in order to provide the insight and understanding necessary to change attitudes and activate value systems. As seen in the email response below from the same participant but a full week after the Play Symposium, the hands on play experience has lasting impact and provides the foundation for reflection and deep thinking.

“On reflection about the experience about a week later, it really did raise my spirits, living up to Daniel Siegel and Vivian Paley’s hypotheses that play integrates the various parts of the brain that usually don’t connect, such as the sensory, the emotional, and the cognitive. As you might imagine I spend too much of my time in front of a computer, thinking and not feeling. This play experience got me out of that mode, into being. It fostered creativity and opened wider perceptive horizons as well as social trust and awareness. Thank you!” (John)



Research Findings:

The results of the PASI from the Maryland Play Symposium are similar to the results of California and Alaska (see Table 5 and 6). Parents were viewed as the leading barrier (45%) to using play as a learning tool. Testing, accountability, and academic pressures (43%) were cited as the second highest barrier to using play as a learning tool. Politics and the Maryland Department of Education (30%) were cited as the third largest barriers.

An interesting finding in the participants' perceptions for the need for support for using play as a learning tool was in the area of play knowledge. The participants cited teacher knowledge (59%), parent play knowledge (42%) and administration knowledge (33%) as the three largest areas for support. Therefore, the participants recognize the need to build a knowledge base for the importance of play in the lives of children and adults. This is a continued area of need from all three Play Symposiums.



Maryland Play Symposium

November 20, 2010

Barriers to Using Play as a Learning Tool

Table 5(n=69)

	frequency	Percent of Participants
Play Knowledge and Values		
• Parents' value of play	31	45%
• Administrators' value	9	13%
• Other Teachers' value of play	7	10%
• Community/cultural value of play	1	1%
Practice		
• Materials	21	30%
○ Need for supply of materials		
○ Space for storage of materials		
• Time (lack of)	20	29%
○ Scheduling/routine mandates		
○ Uninterrupted time		
○ Transitions		
Policy		
• Testing/Accountability/Academic Pressures	30	43%
• Politics/MD State Department of Education	21	30%
• Environmental Spaces/Class size	4	6%
• Safety	3	4%
• Competition	2	3%
• Age	2	3%
• Technology	1	1%
• Funding	1	1%

Maryland Play Symposium

November 20, 2010

Supports Needed to Use Play as a Learning Tool

Table 6 (n=69)

	frequency	Percent of Participants
Play Knowledge and Values		
• Teacher Play Knowledge	(41)	(59%)
○ Workshops/Professional Development	11	16%
○ Models to engage in play/letting child play	7	10%
○ Research findings	6	9%
○ Activities and ideas	6	9%
○ Connect learning through play to standards	5	7%
○ Success stories/validation	3	4%
○ Inspiration/courage	2	3%
○ Follow child's lead	1	1%
• Parent Play Knowledge	29	42%
• Administration Play Knowledge	23	33%
• Politicians Play Knowledge	3	4%
Practice		
• Materials	17	25%
• Time	5	7%
○ Schedule/less structured		
○ Uninterrupted blocks of time		
Policy		
• Funding	3	4%
Total Responses		121

The PASI also included a question, which asked the participants to rate the Play Symposium using a scale of 0-100. The chart below indicates the responses from the three different state Play Symposiums. All three states revealed a highly positive rating for the Play Symposiums. Maryland's rating was lower in part due to the environmental issues stated earlier in this report-space, noise, and the need for a microphone.

State	Overall Rating
California	94
Alaska	93
Maryland	85

Summary

The affiliate Hands, Heart and Mind Play Symposium has added a unique and enjoyable professional development tool to the resources for strengthening play research, policy, practice and leadership within the NAEYC family of state and local affiliates.

It is highly significant that NAEYC's Department of Affiliate Relations is an active partner advocating and supporting this experience-centered professional development process, which models and is consistent with developmentally appropriate practices recommended for the education of young children. Furthermore, the active involvement NAEYC's Department of Affiliate Relations provides an *operational support model* demonstrating how state affiliates can in turn promote and support quality play initiatives within *local affiliates*.

As reported in this Collaborative Report and in the January 2011 issue of *Young Children*, *Affiliate Successes: Building Play Leadership and Advocacy*, there is compelling evidence that thoughtfully guided hands-on adult self active play with open ended materials is an effective professional development strategy that leads to improvement in teacher knowledge and strengthening play leadership initiatives within the affiliate infrastructure. This professional development process incorporates valid effective strategies such as: *focuses on specific curriculum, designed to engage, supported by coaching or modeling, and connected to teachers' collaborative work* (Jaquith, Mindich, Wei, & Darling Hammond, 2010, p. 12).

The "eye opening" emotional experiences of participants reached beyond the obvious benefits of using play and manipulative resources to improve children's performance in the content areas, such as literacy, mathematics and science. Participants made the connection between their own deeply felt play and ways to better understand and guide the play of children. Participants expanded their understanding of play and how it promotes the development of broader life skills such as those outlined by Ellen Galinsky's "Mind in the Making": *focus and self-control; perspective taking; communicating; making connections; critical thinking; taking on challenges; and self-directed, engaged learning*.

According to Bloom's Taxonomy, *thinking skills include knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation*, all of which occur as participants engage in play and make judgments about its value and importance to their professional practice. Through many of the journal comments, discussions, and interviews, we see participants validate their inner feelings about the value of play. If the intensity of the perceived value is felt emotionally, then resultant positive action is far more likely to ensue.

Research conducted during the Play Symposiums indicates that teachers perceive parents as one of the main barriers in using play as a learning tool. The Play Symposium is a highly effective model, easy to replicate by affiliates in order to inform and educate parents, as well as teachers. The awakening benefits for parents offer an ideal opportunity to invite them to become members of the National Association for the Education of Young Children.

The Play Attitude Survey Instrument (PASI) revealed that the participants perceived "play knowledge" was of utmost importance for parents, teachers, and other adults that have influence in the decision making that affect children. In response to these findings, the Institute for Self Active Education, in collaborations with several state affiliates, has developed a pilot Parent Play Education program designed specifically to provide parents with hands-on play experiences that build *play knowledge, play skills, and the attitude to advocate for their children's right to play*. This program entitled "Let My Children Play" is a direct result of our findings from the Affiliate Play Symposiums. A national media campaign is being launched for "Let My Children Play" in collaboration with several other national organizations to promote parent play education.

Implications for the Future

The Affiliate Play Symposiums demonstrate what can happen when National and State Affiliates join hands and work together with Interest Forums to strengthen developmentally appropriate practices. Play symposium host states continue to report positive outcomes from participants, new and engaging projects of member outreach and support, and a new way to connect to policy makers within their communities about the value and importance of play in a young child's daily experiences. When early childhood educators and parents look for reasons to join their State Affiliate, play inspires passion in potential members. The play symposium experience also gives AEYC State Affiliates leadership roles in promoting developmentally appropriate practices at the state level and the opportunity to guide other state systems.

As the symposiums and related quality play initiatives grow in each state, the communities of "players" come closer to making play the most natural experience for young children and the center of the curriculum. The future hope is for an informed play community comprised of not only early childhood educators, but also parents, business leaders, and civil servants who understand and value play in the lives of children, adults, and families.

Recommendations:

The vision is to continue to build upon state affiliate quality play leadership initiatives in order to generate greater passion and proactive support for hands-on professional development play training within all NAEYC affiliates.

The following recommendations are suggested as an active collaborative strategy linking national, state and local affiliates with Interest Forums, thus aligning energy and demonstrating intentionality to strengthen the entire NAEYC community. We urge the NAEYC Board of Directors and staff to assist in ways that:

1. Encourage and support early childhood professional development that features hand-on, process oriented play training in both pre-service and In-service education.

This evidence based, best practice is consistent with developmentally appropriate practices and quality staff training procedures recommended by the Arnie Duncan, US Secretary of Education and "Race to the Top" thus helping to insure alignment with national and state early childhood standard that advocate for active, engaged teaching and learning. (Copple, C., & S. Bredekamp, eds. 2009)

2. Encourage and support on-going research to determine how and in what ways hands-on play focused professional development strengthens professional practice and builds organizational resilience including new memberships.

Research is key to improving play policy and practice. There is a recognized need for quality research to substantiate the importance of play in classroom practice and professional development. An overwhelming number of affiliate play symposium participants indicated their willingness on the Play Survey to be part of an on-going research in how the Play Symposium has impacted them in their professional practice and in their own lives. Additionally, affiliate executive directors and board members reported real benefits to their organizational objectives, including strengthening collaboration with community organizations and new NAEYC memberships by people attending the symposiums.

3. Encourage and support the development of State and Local Affiliate Play Committees (precursor to establishing Play, Policy and Practice Interest Forums) as an active part of the organizational infrastructure.

A gap exists between current play research and practice. *Developmentally Appropriate Practices* places quality play at the center of the early childhood curriculum and yet it is overlooked and undervalued by many parents and policy makers, as well as many teachers and administrators. The intentional focus of the Play Committees serve to energize interest and stimulate play leadership within state affiliates. As a result of the Play Symposiums, state AEYC affiliate Play Committees now exist in Florida, Iowa, and Nevada.

4. *Encourage and support hands-on parent play education as an effective strategy to inform and educate them about the critical importance of play in the lives of their children, the wellbeing of the family, and across the human life span.*

The research evidence reported from the affiliate play symposiums clearly reveals that teachers feel parents are barriers to implementing play in early childhood programs. Parents lack knowledge in understanding how play contributes to education and healthy human development. This fact is a huge dilemma in promoting quality play as learning in the classroom. One proven effective strategy for helping parent's make the connection between play and education is to immerse parents in their own carefully guided hands-on play education training. This practice matches and is consistent with NAEYC's Vision 2015 and the professional development process. This meaningful training relationship is an opportunity to invite parents to become members of NAEYC. (Ginsburg 2007, American Academy of Pediatrics)

5. *Encourage and support the development of business partnerships as environmental, professional development support systems.*

Most businesses generate an abundance of unwanted by-products, over-runs, obsolete, reject items and pay costly fees to dispose of them. Local businesses and industries give away bamboo, plastic rings, foam shapes, cardboard tubes, fabric, yarn, wood, wire, paper, and many other things that fascinate and inspire creativity in children and teachers. This proven quality "going green" strategy supports creative learning as children think, plan, and observe what happens when using these items to count, sort, stack, build, make books, create art, and "do" active science and mathematics.

Using these materials lets children and families see reusable items in a new way. They learn that materials can serve numerous purposes. A piece of pink foam becomes carpet in the doll house; buttons and bottle caps are perfect for sorting by size, color, and shape. Instead of continuing to throw away or replace items, families might donate them to the program or find new uses for them at home. (NAEYC, *Teaching Young Children*, Why Reuse Resources? 2008)

6. *Encourage affiliates to develop a dedicated cadre of affiliate "play coaches" in collaboration with the Institute for Self Active Education and/or other qualified early childhood training organizations.*

Qualified affiliate play coaches are offering hands-on play experiences within their respective communities as an effective strategy to improve developmentally appropriate practice. Florida and Iowa are pioneering this innovative emergent process of training affiliate play coaches to help bridge the gap between current play research and professional practice.

7. *Encourage and support the development of a Play, Policy and Practice Affiliate Leadership Network devoted to strengthening play research, policy and practice.*

This leadership support system is focused on identifying and sharing successful affiliate play initiatives happening *at the state and local level*. The following affiliate leaders are engaged with the Play, Policy and Practice Interest Forum to explore this initiative: Suzanne Gellens Executive Director Florida AEYC, Baji Rankin Executive Director New Mexico AEYC, Barbara Merrill Executive Director Iowa AEYC, Veronica Plumb Alaska AEYC, Kathy Ramirez California AEYC, Greg Stevens Maryland AEYC, Jamie Brother Nevada AEYC, and Ernie Dettore Pittsburgh AEYC.

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