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From the Guest Editors. . .

In this issue of *Connections* we take a look at the interrelatedness of the concepts of play, creativity, and resilience. Understanding the value of play as a learning tool is the typical view used in the early childhood field. But in this issue we want to take a deeper more complex look at play and how it impacts not only children as they grow and learn but also how play impacts our lives throughout the human life span. Play expanded beyond the confines of being “just” for children’s academic pursuits, allows one to consider it in a more spacious role in the lives of children and adults to promote healthy, wholesome, and resilient living. Considering play as a means of developing skills that promote resiliency in individuals has the capacity to build resiliency skills in organizations. We hope that readers find something in this issue to contribute to resiliency in their own lives!

Marcia Nell and Walter Drew

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Self Active Play: A Path to Professional Resiliency

Marcia L. Nell
Millersville University of PA

Self active play is based upon seven guiding principles which have grown out of the extensive professional development work done through the Institute for Self Active Education. These principles lay the foundational beliefs that inspire and continue the work for creative play, leadership, and advocacy.

Principles of Self Active Play

Principle 1: Play is a source of creative energy, a positive force and safe context for constructing meaningful self-knowledge and revitalizing the human spirit across the continuum of the human life cycle.

Principle 2: Hands-on play and art making with open ended materials reconnect the individual with earlier stages of human development, spontaneously balancing and strengthening hope, will, purpose, competence, fidelity, love, care, and wisdom.

Principle 3: The play space is a state of being which is self-constructed or co-constructed based on the players’ previous experiences and their perceptions of the levels of safety and trust leading into the play space.

Principle 4: Experiences within the play space elicits strong affect toward the play space such as feelings of protectiveness, a yearning to return, and desire for further exploration of higher levels of understanding and self-awareness.

Principle 5: The creative energy released within the play space is accelerated as players assume new pretend roles and as players thrill in discovering “Who will I be next?” and “What will I do next?”

Principle 6: Play is a source of energy for rekindling love, passion, and intimate relationships with other people and between players. These feelings are pervasive not just isolated to the play space but rather move forward as the player moves beyond the play space in their realities.

Principle 7: Play’s intrinsic qualities include spontaneity of the spirit, thinking deeply, feeling intensely, and building a trust in one’s intuitive self.

These principles acknowledge a creative energy within each of us that is released during play, which establishes a safe context for constructing meaningful knowledge and is released as the players discover new roles or new possibilities. We acknowledge the altered state of being that occurs during play and is recognized as the “play space,” which ignites or rekindles strong feelings between players, which are pervasive beyond the play space. Playing within a safe context enables the player to experiment with possibilities thus promoting planning, problem solving, adaptability, caring, tolerance, and communication--all recognized as characteristics present in resilient individuals (Rutter, 1979; 1985).

“Creativity involves generating that which is new, original, unique. We live all too often in molds, tight grooves, and to find the freedom necessary to break out of these restrictions we need a sense of playfulness which allows experimentation and change. . . . Change, admittedly, is hazardous. It serves both construction and destruction. But the uncracked mold stultifies growth and breeds stagnation.” (Erikson, 1988, p. 46-47)

The Principles for Self Active Play describe how play and art making with open ended materials reconnect the individual with earlier stages of human development, thus enabling the individual to balance and strengthen a sense of hope, will, purpose, competence, fidelity, love, care, and wisdom. Through self active play the social aspect of play is developed between players based on their previous play experiences. This social aspect develops tolerance, social responsiveness, adaptability, and an external support system. Becoming socially competent or responsible, and having a feeling of autonomy and a sense of purpose, are part of the characteristics described in the resiliency research, all of which are promoted through self active play (Garmezy, 1991; Richardson, 2002; Werner, 1982; Werner & Smith, 1992).

Principle seven speaks to the intrinsic qualities of play such as spontaneity of spirit, thinking deeply, feeling intensely, and building trust in one’s intuitive self. Resilient characteristics such as purpose of life, belief in a higher being, creativity, humor, tolerance, self-efficacy, and autonomy are characteristics that are nurtured during self active play (Dunn, 1994; Garmezy, 1991; Richardson, 2002; Werner, 1982; Werner & Smith 1992).

Educational Climate

The field of education is in the media limelight with the drastic funding cuts being made to school budgets across the country. In Pennsylvania, the newly elected governor has recommended significant cuts in state funding for higher education, local school districts, and early childhood education. According to Pennsylvania Governor Tom Corbett, “Pennsylvania needs to rethink how best to educate our children. We simply can’t work within a broken system. We need to change the whole system. We need a new set of priorities: child, parent, and teacher--and in that order” (Governor Tom Corbett 2011-12 Budget Address, March 8, 2011, p. 4). In this statement there is an acknowledgment of the need for changes to the “broken” educational system. Corbett’s suggestion for change includes cutting educational funding by a significant percentage, which includes cuts to higher education, K-12 school districts, and early childhood education. The educational climate in Pennsylvania is one of uncertainty and financial stresses, while at the same time the accountability for educational quality is being measured by the use of high stakes tests only. Certainly the time for change is now; politicians, policy makers, educational leaders, and the general public recognize the need for change, but how will this change be implemented? Using a more creative approach to finding solutions for our ailing school systems is called for; otherwise we continue to do the same thing and we will get the same results.

Richardson (2002) developed a resiliency model to facilitate an understanding of the process of change. This model helps to explain how individuals, groups, families, organizations, or systems manage or react to change. According to this model there are four possible reactions to change: resilient reintegration, reintegration back to status quo or equilibrium, reintegration with loss, or dysfunctional reintegration. Resilient reintegration as a reaction to change enables the gaining of some insight or personal growth due to the disruption or change. The second reaction is reintegration back to status quo or equilibrium, which means the individual bypasses opportunities for personal growth by remaining within the comfort zone. In the third reaction to change, reintegration with loss, the person gives up because the life disruptions are too overwhelming--lack of hope, drive, or motivation. The fourth option, dysfunctional reintegration, is described as responding to life disruptions by abusing drugs or other destructive coping mechanisms.

When we look at the possible reactions to change, we must wonder how will the educational system respond? One response would be to react in a dysfunctional reintegration manner by using destructive mechanisms such as continuing to complain, pointing fingers, assigning blame, or even eliminating the whole public educational system. No chance for growth with that response. Or we could reintegrate with loss--just keep doing what we have done without hope, drive, or motivation. I personally know teachers who have taken that route; we call this "teacher burnout." We could don our rose colored glasses and pretend that what we are currently doing is exactly what needs to be done, no change needed because it really would be uncomfortable to make the changes, and thus we ignore the obvious.

What would happen if we would embrace the idea of "resilient reintegration" for education? One avenue to begin the "resilient reintegration" process for education is through hands-on professional development programs aimed at giving individual teachers the empowerment to implement change within themselves, then to their classrooms, and ultimately affecting positive change within the children.

Resilient Professional Development

During the summer of 2010, Millersville University offered the first Early Childhood Summer Institute (ECSI) entitled Creative Expression in Professional Practice. This was a week-long, three credit graduate course that utilized the self active play process as the centerpiece of the curriculum. The first two days of the Institute the participants were totally immersed in self active play experiences with open ended materials, movement, painting, drum making, mask making, clay, creative writing, journaling, readings, and reflective journaling. The entire two days were filled from 8:00 until 4:30 with personal creative experiences. On Wednesday, participants were asked to first read a selection from the book "Courage to Teach" by Parker Palmer (2007), which reads: "good teaching cannot be reduced to technique; good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher....The connections made by good teachers are held not in their methods but in their hearts--meaning heart in its ancient sense, as the place where intellect and emotion and spirit and will converge in the human self" (p. 10-11). The participants were then asked to think about two questions:

1. What did you experience in the last two days that helped you discover something about your inner self?
2. Why is learning any truth about your inner self important to your teaching?

The teachers discussed and reflected on their experiences over the previous two days and made significant connections between their experiences and their professional practice. The personal creative experiences provided concrete evidence to support the transfer of this personal knowledge to the need for children to have the same kind of experiences as part of their education. The teachers' understanding of the deep and profound effect creative activities have on one's development as a human being propelled them to want to change their professional practice in a resilient, reintegrative manner. Here are examples, in their words, of their determination for resiliency with professional practice:

"After listening to all the discussions today, I think that one thing that really stays in my mind is the statement: 'If you always tell them what you want, then that's exactly what you'll get!' After thinking more about this, it makes perfect sense. If I always give my student specific directions with a predetermined ending in mind, I will never get anything more than that. I am not allowing my students the chance to challenge their own minds or show their own creativity."

*"This class has stressed to me the importance of play, movement, natural materials, and creating. Since most of my educational experience has been in grades 6-11, and not having an early childhood certification, I have not had much experience teaching in a classroom without worksheets. This class has been **invaluable** as I look toward fall where I am to teach kindergarten for the first time. This is exactly what I was looking for and now I have a repertoire of ideas and experiences to take with me so I can create a fun, play-filled, educational kindergarten experience for my students."*



The teachers then worked in grade specific small groups to connect the different creative activities they personally experienced to specific early learning standards in reading and math. Some teachers were surprised to see how easy it was to connect creative expression with teaching reading and math. Here are comments from some of the Reflective Journals concerning these connections:

“What a great day! It was extremely beneficial to pull together everything we’ve experienced and learned on Monday and Tuesday. The topic of finding your authentic, inner self--the “who” part of teaching is both fascinating and relevant. To be quite honest, I struggled the first two days to see the purpose of all of the play activities--beyond the fact that play is important for children. NOW, however, everything is clearer, connected, and I’d like to continue to develop my action plan further, particularly as I come across new, unique materials for the kids to explore and create with.”

“The pace was much different today, we focused heavily on application. I am so excited to see all of the ways that the creative expressive activities can be applied to actual classrooms full of children. It was so reassuring to see how the creative activities directly relate to these Early Learning Standards. The professionals I work with are so worried about accountability, and this gives them exactly what they need--a direct connection with between creative expressive play and the state’s standards.”

The teachers developed Action Plans for their own creative expression in their professional practice. Each participant used self-constructed evidence, evidence from his or her assigned texts or other relevant research to substantiate their plan. Throughout the weeklong course the teachers accumulated confirmation as to their own creative abilities, their need for a professional attitude change, and a new sense of empowerment and professionalism that emphasizes their capability for being a catalyst of change and resilience. Here are some quotes from the Action Plans that reflect their perceptions of the importance of creativity to their personal and professional practice:

“Play as an adult can at first seem pointless, not an efficient use of time, or too open, when in fact it is actually a much needed experience for beings of all ages. Adult play reminded me to relax, focus, be content and be present in what I was doing. Seldom do we have opportunities to do this. Even a few minutes a day...even one minute a day of

reflection time can bring an unfathomable amount of peace to one’s soul.”

“The first thing that needs to happen is to change my attitude. Originally my attitude was that I was unable to do certain tasks. I am not a very creative person. Within this week, it is obvious that these statements are false. I have realized that movement happens in every person and we are all capable of doing different movements. I might not be the perfect artist but I have enough skill to get my thoughts across. Knowing that I am capable is the only attitude I need. That will allow me to carry on the positive outlook to my students, instilling in them that they are capable of accomplishing many things.”



“We are “Gap Fillers”: we as teachers of young children must fill the gaps that present themselves between research, values, practice, and administration. A good place to start is with the Pennsylvania Early Learning Standards. Use a language everyone understands. We know what we do and why we do it....AND that it is legit. I personally need to practice explaining on a different level than I have been in order to make myself feel satisfied.”

“I am currently a kindergarten teacher in an urban school district and from what I gather my school district is like most, the administrators are very controlling. If it is not reading, math, writing and/or content area, they feel it is pretty much a waste of time. So, my main concern is how can I use all these creative ways in my classroom? First, I am going to invite them into my classroom. I want them to see the creativity occurring and how the students are learning the PA standards and enjoying it! I am hoping I can break the mold that students learn best by sitting at their desks, repeating facts that will be tested. I understand change will not occur overnight or within the school year, but over time I hope change will transpire.”

“Change is difficult. We like to stay in our comfort zones.”

“Be a true advocate for what is right in the education of young children. Refuse to compromise developmental appropriateness and best practices for the sake of avoiding questioning or disdain from those who don’t understand. Provide information for administrators so they can better understand what happens in my classroom and why.”

Richardson (2002) explained the necessity for disruption in order for resiliency to be activated within an individual or an organization. Reacting to change in a resilient manner means there will be growth and those resilient qualities developed today provide added support when the next disruption appears. Understanding the “process” associated with developing resiliency has clear implications for the need to develop interventions or programs that enable resilient skills to be experimented with and practiced by teachers. Self-active play is one such intervention. As demonstrated during the Millersville Early Childhood Summer Institute, these teachers went through a personal and professional transformation that enabled them to develop resiliency in their professional practice. As outlined in their Action Plans they articulated their understanding of believing in their intuitive sense of what works for children and they now have developed a way of expressing their ideas—through the development of the skills for resilient reintegration.

Why is it important for teachers to see themselves as creative, both personally and professionally? Being creative is defined as being original and adaptable. Studies have shown that being creative is a strong predictor as to whether a person can reintegrate in resilient ways. Using resilient reintegration to react to change means growing from that change. Related to professional practice, being creative means finding original ways of solving problems within the classroom and making the necessary adaptations; providing ways to develop strategies, skills, and dispositions toward creativity will impact the ways teachers react to educational disruptions within the classroom and in educational organizations. Creative, resilient ways to meet the needs of children in our educational systems happen when teachers are creative and resilient.

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2010 Patricia Monighan Nourot Award

Sandra Waite-Stupiansky accepts the 2010 Patricia Monighan Nourot Award for “building the foundation for play scholarship” from the 2009 Nourot Award Winner, Walter Drew, at the NAEYC Annual Conference in Anaheim, CA, in November, 2010.



Play and Creativity: A Spiritual Matter¹

Jim Johnson
Penn State University

Aye, for the game of creating...there is needed a holy Yea unto life: its own will, willeth now the spirit. . . .

(Zarathustra Nietzsche)

Play and spirituality, contrary to popular opinion, are not two different things. The human spirit, our inner core, is seen in mindfulness, working, loving, and service. It is also seen in the play of children who are deeply absorbed in their activity and thoughts. We render an important service to children by nourishing their playfulness and their spirit.

Research on resilient children reveals that usually having an imagination is far from enough to pull oneself up by the bootstraps. Among other factors research points to how very important having a mentor and role model is who takes a special interest in a hard luck kid. But still, having a playful spirit and being imaginative and creative are workable ingredients and can inspire the resourceful teacher who wishes to make a difference in such a child's life.

What can strong play enthusiasts and researchers do?

Early childhood educators can help promote play and creativity in children by relentlessly advocating for developmentally appropriate practices (DAP) as proposed by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). Play and creativity are linchpins in constructivist epistemology and are clearly needed to begin tackling the socialization and educational dilemmas of the 21st century... and the personal dilemmas if not tragedies we all must face in living life. Play is an important engine of learning and well-being during the early years and beyond. Early childhood education and a play- and creativity-based curriculum must counteract the rigid test-driven curriculum that plagues so much of children's early schooling in the United States of America.

What is play and what is creativity?

Play and creativity are elusive, exceedingly complex, constructs. Each notion resists any attempt at precise definition. Two meanings for play I find useful when thinking about play in relation to young children and early childhood education include, first of all, the "to- and from-movement of play," and secondly, play's separation from ordinary reality. Johan Huizinga's *Homo Ludens* (noted in Gadamer, 1979) introduces the German word *Spiel* meaning 'dance' or 'play' as a backward and forward movement without effort and without goal or purpose other than its process itself. Here we see that the essential quality of playing is akin to the dynamic self-generating mobile process of life and nature itself. Play is an intrinsic self-renewing constant that for humans can enter into art, drama, games, language use, and human actions and ideations in general. Play in humans can also be said to be a separate mode of existing different from being in a reality state of mind used for adapting to ordinary life circumstances (Johnson, Christie, & Wardle, 2005).

Creativity, likewise, has many denotations and connotations in the English language. Although computers themselves cannot create or be creative, play as a spontaneous 'to and fro' process may be viewed as the binary system language for creativity software.

Creativity is hallmarked by originality and adaptability. The creative person does, or the creative act is, something brand new and technologically or aesthetically useful in a society. Original means it is not habitual and not routine; creative implies unconventional and intrinsically motivated, intentional actions--not actions governed by conventions or extrinsic rewards or blind luck. Unambiguous creativity is difficult to pin down. The creativity complex or syndrome, then, is comprised of intrinsic motivation, intentionality, adaptive and original to help distinguish genuine creativity from creativity-related processes such as discovering, inventing, and innovating, and pseudo-creative processes such as fantasizing, daydreaming, being contrary, and being disinhibited and impulsive (Runco, 2007). It's little wonder that creativity and resilience are naturally related. The very "to and fro movement of play" suggests the process of being resilient, that is the capacity to bounce back, to maintain form and function under stress, in essence to be able to move to and fro without breaking.

¹ This article is based on keynote address at the International Conference of Play and Creativity, Tainan, Taiwan, May 30-31, 2007.

Two characteristics about creativity discussed in the extant literature on this broad topic are particularly important for early childhood specialists and practitioners. First, everyday creativity has been distinguished from eminent creativity. For Howard Gardner, for instance, the criterion for adult or eminent creativity is that it must result in an original aesthetically or technologically useful product recognized and appreciated by mature members within a particular culture. A societal criterion applies. For everyday creativity, on the other hand, a personal criterion applies. The creative action, product or idea needs only to be original for that individual, and useful to that person and those in that person's immediate life, such as the person's parents, teachers, or peers. Clearly, creativity in the latter sense applies directly to early childhood education, but not creativity in the former sense.

As children or adults engage in constructive play, for instance, and with an array of unusual open-ended objects "create" a new three dimensional form bringing with it a sense of self delight, we consider this as a creative act, an expression of creativity. We can bestow the laurel of creativity on young children as well as on ordinary mortals in general, but our meaning of creativity is quite different than the meaning of the creative accomplishments of eminent individuals. However to the creating child or adult who experiences the flow of spontaneous creative energy, and the joy of rendering an idea or feeling purposefully expressed, the sense of accomplishment is the same. That sense of accomplishment, a feeling of competence, strengthens the power of self-efficacy, or said another way, resilience. In this way we see creativity as a wellspring for resiliency, a way of nourishing the spirit.

A second characteristic about creativity pertinent to early childhood is that it is domain specific and developmental. Parents and teachers need to recognize the many areas in which children (and adults) can express their creativity. These domains can be conceptualized in terms of Howard Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences (*i.e.*, logical mathematical, musical, bodily-kinesthetic, natural, interpersonal, etc.). Moreover, effortful learning and discipline (*i.e.*, time on task) propels the developmental progress that a child achieves in expressing his or her creativity in a particular domain. Accordingly, instead of asking 'what is creativity?' and 'why is that child creative?' one might more fruitfully ask 'where is the child's

creativity and what can be done to support and scaffold it?'(Chen, 2005).

Establishing link between play and creativity

Research has reported many correlates of play. One of the strongest findings is that imaginative play and divergent thinking are positively and significantly correlated. Both cross sectional and longitudinal research support this relationship (Johnson et al., 2005). As noted above, divergent thinking is a characteristic of creativity. One might infer then that play is related to creativity. One must be cautious in jumping to this conclusion, however.

Play is a necessary but not sufficient condition for creativity, especially the development of domain-specific creativity. Play is a two edged sword. While play is life affirming it may not necessarily be a positive force for creativity. Play is at the same time expressive and affective as well as a process that can be cognitively controlled. Play is ordered but it is ordered flexibly and not rigidly. Only when play and imagination are controlled flexibly can they serve positive socially useful creative functions. Play which serves creativity is flexible and not rigidly controlled; therefore, the child's imagination is not being subdued but is harnessed for creativity.

Furthermore, in order to progress developmentally in any domain of potential creativity, the child must master a great deal of content knowledge and skills and acquire ability before the creative potential can become fully realized. Therefore, not only do parents and teachers need to support play and favorable learning dispositions in children, they must also provide developmental enrichment, social supports and learning opportunities to enable children to grow in their abilities, skills, knowledge and motivations to achieve.

What help do we need?

Psychology and child development theory might help teachers realize that creativity and play are related and that creativity is determined by forces from the child's past, forces in the present, and the force of the pull of the future. First, from the past, children's inborn proclivities to become creative are one factor to realize. In addition, adversity and suffering to overcome difficulties are important for creative potential. A past brimming with emotionally charged memories can make one very determined and motivated to find solutions and to cope with challenges, indeed generate resilience or the capacity to survive and overcome barriers to

successful functioning. Sublimation and compensation and overcompensation are at work here as ego-function defense mechanisms operating at full force in the service of building ego strength, self-efficacy, resilience, indeed spirit strength,...to believe and succeed.

Second, in the present teachers can help children by guiding them and scaffolding their learning experiences and by granting them open-ended activities to be creative and to then to value their creativity. Conflict and challenges, even turbulence and stress, bring out creativity provided that the level or intensity is optimal; and what is optimal varies from child to child so teachers must have close relations with children and know each child very well. Third, the future enters into the creativity equation combining with the force of the past and the force of the present. Teachers and parents must encourage hope in the future and help children have aspirations and to envision possibilities in the days and years ahead.

Teacher education needs to train teachers to realize that all human capacity is flexible and that one can enhance creative talent. Creativity happens by intention and by choice. Teachers need to model and encourage creativity; they must show children and their parents that they value and enjoy new and original things and that they appreciate creative people. Teachers and parents must remember the importance of creativity and playfulness when they are making choices for classroom or home activities, when they are in the toy stores, when they are in the library. Creativity enhancement tactics such as brain storming, using analogies, restructuring, transposing, and 'synectics' (making the strange familiar, making the familiar strange) should be used. Practicing taking the point of view of others is very useful because this can help a person think of alternatives. Envisioning alternatives in specific contexts and assuming the child's perspective is especially helpful in identifying and solving problems and in acting creatively overall.

Spontaneity and playfulness are useful for creativity expression and development; they help one take intellectual risks. The threat of evaluation and external sanction are relaxed. Teacher education should include improvisation and preparation for dealing with surprises and unexpected events. "Play is training for the unexpected. . . ." Teachers like everyone else should have procedures and heuristics for dealing with challenges and problems in a creative, not

routine or ritualized, manner. Finally, staying true to one's feelings, and being aware of one's feelings and knowledgeable about them--all this is critical for creative emotions. Emotional authenticity is part of creation intention and action (Runco, 2007). Hopefully, early childhood teacher education can succeed in making early childhood programs more conducive for building children's creative potential by producing creative teachers. Creative teachers make creativity a top educational goal and have the means of achieving this goal. ECE can lead the way for the rest of the educational system since we have a head start by valuing child's play—a necessary but not sufficient condition for creativity.

ECE classrooms and children can become more playful and creative when teachers themselves can become more playful and creative. The playful teacher and, even more important, the creative teacher must have administrative support for planning time. To accomplish creativity, teachers need a retreat from the hectic pace of modern living where teachers are rushed and multi-tasking all too often. Creativity spawns from play and from incubation periods of time for rest and reflection. Note that Waldorf education hints at the importance of a return to quiet tradition without modern technology and an embrace of nature's cycles and rhythms. Teachers need to be encouraged and supported in their quest to become more flexible and open—willing to imagine the possible outside the usual. Teacher's life-long experiences and their memories of their trials and tribulations, anguish and adversity, are seeds of willpower and determination to be creative. Unconscious forces can be tapped for creative ideas, and worked on to yield creative results. Mining these subliminal powers requires time for deep reflection and contemplation whereby improvements in creative teacher planning and creative curriculum development can result.

Conclusion

The disenfranchised and marginalized in any society can be viewed as a great untapped resource of potential creative talent in a society. This is because they have suffered so much and have endured adversity, experiences that can be important precursors to later creativity and wisdom (Hall, 2007). To state this metaphorically, we must not overlook the royalty in peasant's garb among us; for many of these unheralded people and children are wishing for a life that is an impossible dream for them now, but given a chance could make a big difference for all of

society in the future—the minorities, the poor, the disabled. Many are hidden treasures of creativity capital so important for nation building and world improvement. This is an important way for a nation to invest in its future

Creativity also arises in collaboration and teamwork; creativity is not necessarily just a solo effort. Group contexts can trigger creative problem identification, setting the parameters and generating problem-solving solutions. Social creativity and social resilience can happen anywhere for the sake of children and families served by early childhood education. Our world situation can use all the help it can get through joint enterprises in research and application and the sharing of ideas.

Effective adults working with children in ECE, and all adults living at this time of global stress, strife, and information overload, need to be adaptive and resilient, in touch with the creativity spirit. Only in this way can we begin to achieve the goal of helping children become more adaptive and resilient. Karen VanderVen (1998) asserts that the kind of person who will be able to live successfully in complex and chaotic times, and the kinds of attributes we must instill in our children, can be predicated on Proteus, the Greek sea god of many forms who could change to meet new conditions. Our Protean selves have great human resilience and will be able to adapt to fast occurring and great and profound changes in circumstance. And we can do this while remaining true to our inner core of being and to our internal sense of direction. . . *Deo volente!*

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The Creative Process : Exploring the Double-Duty Model of Glenn Richardson’s Resiliency Model

*Helen Walker
Messiah College*

A lovely way to imagine engaging regularly in the creative process is to know it also as a pedagogy for resiliency. This would mean that doing creative work in the classroom is not just about producing nice art or about taking a nice rest break from academics, or about stimulating the “creative side” of our students. It is also about providing a pedagogy for acquiring qualities that help at-risk people to thrive in the face of adversity.

Glenn Richardson (2002) defines a “resiliency model” of pedagogy. His list of resilient qualities includes initiative, maintaining inner focus, hopefulness, goal direction, enacting alternatives, and creativity. These qualities are acquired through a *law of disruption and reintegration*. Opportunities for “disruptions” of what he terms “biopsychospiritual homeostasis “ (a point in time when the whole person--mind/ body/spirit--has adapted to its status quo and is static) are what allow for the “bombardment” of internal and external factors (stressors , emotions, questions). These external factors lead to introspection, which then leads to questions of “Where do I go next?” This questioning guides the reintegration process back toward a new status quo. Once back, more opportunities for disruption create more practice through this process. Successful practicing of this model “is to experience insight or growth through the disruptions” and results in “strengthening resilient qualities” (p. 310).

What if practicing the creative process can be a positive practice of the law of disruption and reintegration? Like I said before, wouldn’t that be lovely?

Richardson emphasizes three aspects of the resiliency model which are especially relevant to considering whether or not we can and should successfully employ the creative process as a pedagogy of resiliency. First is his insistence that “disruptions are **required** to access the components of resilience because biopsychospiritual homeostasis makes no demands for improvement and growth described above” (p. 312.) Yet growth occurs **only** during the **movement through** the reintegrative process.

This means that what seems like the compassionate thing, to protect children from any more disruption in their chaotic lives, is **not** the compassionate thing. Without a positive practice of his law of disruption and reintegration, children will not become more resilient.

Second, Richardson also states that people want to stay in the comfort of homeostasis and often turn down opportunities for growth because they want to avoid the painful feelings during the disruptions—feelings like loss, hurt, confusion, and guilt. This tendency toward inertia leads to another important aspect of the resiliency model: the importance of motivation. Since people resist moving through this process because they want to stay in their comfort zones even though the movement is necessary for growth, strong motivation for practicing a mode of the process is most helpful. Here is where the creative process comes in: there is no creative process without engagement—which means motivation is present.

The question now is *Does artmaking cause a successful and positive navigation through Richardson's stages?* If so, we may indeed have found an effective pedagogy for developing the qualities of resiliency.

Third, Richardson posits a spiritual component of his resiliency model. Despite a resistance to the resiliency process because of comfort desire, he suggests there is also innate motivation toward resiliency: “a force within everyone that drives them to seek...harmony with a spiritual source of strength. This force is resilience” (p. 313). “During the current “spiritual renaissance...most believe that their strength comes from their God **or a creative source**” (p. 314). He suggests that there is already a lot going on naturally here for the educational system to plug into. What if high-risk students, who tend to believe that strength comes from a creative source, have the opportunity to practice a process with their minds, emotions, and spirit which develops their resilience skills? What if the Creative Process can be this work?

How does a Creative Process Model compare to Richardson's Resiliency Model? To explore this question, I describe my own creative writing process; present the stages named in Daniel Goleman, Paul Kaufman, and Michael Ray's *The Creative Spirit*; and summarize multiple theorists' ideas on the creative process as they may relate to resilience. I believe that each of these offerings

below offers pictures of a progression of disruption which produces opportunity for a bombardment of stressors which lead to introspection and questions of “Where do I go next?” which guide the reintegration process back to a new status quo.

Remembering Myself. . .

*I can't do this. How can I possibly start? How can I do something that I don't know how to do? It's not that I don't want to. I have been thinking about this idea for ages in brilliant brainstorming sessions. Now that I want to start writing things down though, I am **here** and stuck, and the thing I want to do is over **there**. I can't possibly cross the bridge to there. If anything has ever been clear to me, it is this clear fact-- I can't!*

*I am **there**. Amazing. I have begun something that I am paying attention to. The concentration has begun **toward** something. I don't have to know what. But actually I do have sort of a vision. I feel a trust—that this vague vision is a true one, that my goal will make itself known. I have several things now: hope and a goal and movement toward it.*

*My imagination turns on, lights are turned up, moving in and through darkness. I don't worry about the darkness; I have light. I like this! I have my inner eye and can see images of what to do next, the next piece of the puzzle taking some shape. When the shape fades, I go toward something else. It is just fine if something doesn't fit because there are more pieces where that one came from. I am on a roll. I trust that just like my car's headlights at night, my imagination will let me see down the road as I drive. As long as I don't turn off the lights, I can see to get all the way home. Traveling along in this moving creative process encourages me **NOT** to turn off my imagination because I sense I am a **CREATOR**, that God made me this way, that it is natural for me to do this. Just like he made me to love, think, forget--those other natural things that I just **DO**. It feels good to be doing what comes naturally.*

Now that I am started, I am hooked; I want to fulfill my emerging dream. I have overcome inertia; my attention is focused; the road ahead is clear enough to go. I trust myself, and trust that there is no one against me on this road. All are for me, rooting for me. I am in the flow, and time is on my side too. Time tells the world to stand still so I can make this Thing.

Questions propel me forward, but one question at a time—no fighting, no clamoring for my attention. I am in control. I am focused. In answer, I try out something, look at what I have done, decide what to do next and do it, look at that new thing, decide what to do next and do it, and so on and on.

It doesn't seem to matter what I don't know. It only matters what I do know because that tells me where I go next. Moving through this process makes me confident. I know I will get to my end.

Stages of the Creative Process

Listed below are terms for stages of a process that begins with a “problem” which takes one out of a status quo, starts a bombardment of emotions, questions, stressors, which lead down into an inner quest, then into a series of progressive questions which activates the mind/body/spirit to find the deeply, wholly satisfying solution, thus practicing Richardson’s law of disruption and reintegration.

Preparation is when you immerse yourself in the problem, searching out any information that may be relevant. The imagination roams free and you open yourself to anything relevant to the problem.

Frustration arises at the point when the rational, analytic mind, searching laboriously for a solution, reaches the limit of its abilities.

Incubation is when your unconscious is mulling over the relevant pieces, outside your focused awareness. You literally “sleep on it.”

Intuition is what the unconscious mind knows. In the imagination ideas are free to recombine with other ideas in novel patterns and unpredictable associations. They plug into deep feelings. Imagery is created from the “intelligence” of the senses. When new things are discovered, they have no name and sometimes defy description. It takes commitment to risk to explore the “dark of the unknown.”

Illumination: All of a sudden answers come to you from nowhere. You are “in the flow” and time slows.

These stages or steps will be repeated many times over the course of a complex creation or problem solving process. (pp. 18-23).

Comments from Two Theorists

Elizabeth J. Andrews (2009), in “Looking, Deciding, Looking, Deciding: A Portrait of Creative Problem Solving as a Component of Visual Arts Education,” interviewed two artists about their early schooling in a rural PA school with a curriculum which was an informal

experiment in creative thinking skills. The heart of the curriculum focused on trying new thinking through solving problems. Both artists spoke of their resiliency as adult artists.

The teacher, Mrs. V, regularly entered her class of students in competitions and used “the terms set out by various competitions” (p. 7). The purpose of this choice was to raise the stakes (“It was exciting,” and the “reward was a chance to take a trip rather than grades or winning” (pp. 7-8). The projects “made them alert to thinking through problems in multiple ways—we often considered all possibilities without censoring ourselves before making a decision” (p. 8). They often had projects where they had to make things physically work: constructing something, creating a visceral experience of creative thinking. “We took it seriously,” one said. “We saw it as an opportunity to try things out” (p. 8).

One of the artists said that this long-term experimental curriculum (from grades three through twelve) gave her confidence in solving problems as an adult: “I know that if I want to do something, I can figure out ways to do it. All factors don’t have to be perfect.... I can [paint] in many different conditions. I just have to find the space, and then figure out how to make it work” The other artist attributes to this early school learning his attitude that “all problems are puzzles that can be figured out.... I don’t know what to do next—but I have every confidence that I will figure it out” (p. 8).

As said before, both artists spoke of their resiliency as adult artists.

Dee Coulter (1989), in *The Inner Dynamics of Creativity*, defines “rigor” as a quality that is discovered through the discipline of practicing a full, sustained, and passionate creative process that reaches closure with a sense of achievement from making something. Once discovered through experience, this attitude of rigor can be called into play and “aimed” intentionally in a different direction, to use in the process of working through another problem-solving situation. She suggests that we intuit how to turn our full attention to a task at hand once we experience this full process with our body, mind, and spirit. Rigor and redirecting rigor are deepening abilities.

Her definition seems to combine many of the traits of resilient children and speak to the intention of a resiliency model curriculum: to have children

experience the personal (inner) process of rigor and use it at will throughout their lives.

A Final Thought and More Questions—to Consider for Our Own Resiliency/Creativity Curriculum

Having entered into a quest to fulfill a creative process, having activated the imagination toward a goal, the subconscious has been recruited. That means despite the stressors in our conscious awareness, work in the subconscious is still being done. This productive (positive) inner life seems like a key to resilience. The interplay of consciousness and the subconscious is the nature of our daily lives. Surely, then, the more experience the child has with a pleasurable process, one where the vision of her own choosing pulls in factors (ideas, feelings, images) through her imagination, which fully belongs to her and is in her control only, one where she experiences forward movement, and where emerges a generous inner helpmate, the more that child will know that she is a “Can Do” girl. When this girl has the chance to say often to her subconscious (or more specifically to her helpmate Incubation), “Aha! Thank you, Self! This is just the answer I was waiting for,” she is deepening her resiliency.

And final questions about balance that seem pertinent: Mrs. V, the teacher of Elizabeth Andrew’s research, allowed her students to explore with very few standards of right and wrong, of correctness. Even though her students entered contests, she downplayed grades and winning. Yet, commonly within an educational system, practicing the creative process in a particular medium brings awareness of standards. Teachers normally teach standards. Does that mean that the student creator will increasingly internalize the standards into his/her goals? Into his/her visions? Is there a direct correlation between how important the standards become to the creator and how much “room” is left for the imagination to create the light for the drive through the creative process? For a deep practice of a resiliency model, how much must external standards stay out of the equation? How much “room” does the imagination need before the light gets turned off?

How fragile is incubation in the creative process, the unconscious attention paid to solving an artistic “problem”? Can it easily get side tracked, like our conscious attention? Are these questions, while we are on the subject, about two more areas where resiliency can come into play?

These connections between the models may ring truer the more we can deeply understand the whole person each of us is. As we find it impossible to ignore or deny part of ourselves, as this complex truth draws us on and becomes the vision for our imagination to see, questions about where we go next will lead us toward more understanding of how to teach our children what they most need to learn.

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Play as Self Discovery *Tom Hendricks* *Elon University*

How do people discover who they are? How do they acquire confidence that those understandings are the “right” or most useful ways of thinking about themselves? Such questions--of identity and selfhood--are central to the journey we call childhood. But they are also challenges to people at every stage of life. This article considers the roles of ritual and play in these processes of self-discovery.

Ritualized identities

One classic response to the issue of how individuals create and sustain identities was provided by the sociologist Erving Goffman. Goffman (1967) argued that people’s daily encounters can be described as a never-ending series of “interaction rituals.” When we meet and greet each other and then engage in the most ordinary kinds of conversation, what we are *really* doing is acting out (what we understand to be) our own identities in that situation, and more generally, within society at large. So conceived, social life centers on acts of mutual recognition where people effectively say to one another: Yes, I recognize you to be the kind of person you claim to be and I accord you all the rights and responsibilities that are appropriate to a person of that sort. Affirmed in that way, we consolidate our

visions of ourselves as husbands and wives, children, friends, co-workers, and the like and carry those identities from one setting to the next. By the same processes, we draw conclusions about much more subtle matters, such as our being (putatively) smart, attractive, shy, or funny. People find their places in the world--including that personal identity that no one else holds--through acts of public confirmation.

Of course, we can also be disaffirmed. That is, other people may fail to recognize our preferred identities. They can contradict what we say, ignore us, banish us from their midst, subject us to humiliation and ridicule, and, in a hundred other ways, commit acts of disrespect and punishment that demote our status in the group and prevent us from being the persons we wish to be. Young and old alike know what it means to be discredited. And the most flagrant forms of this sometimes persist as feelings of violation that last a lifetime.

Goffman's theory is very much about the continuities that exist in our lives. The interaction rituals described above--chatting with an acquaintance in a grocery store, submitting a report to our boss, giving someone a hug, and so forth--are essentially identity ceremonies. When we show respect for the identities of other people, we demonstrate what he calls "deference." When we respect our own identities--by aligning our behaviors with them and by otherwise staying "in character"--we exhibit "demeanor." Those who manage their preferred identities well under the most trying circumstances are said to have "poise." Those who rescue the identities of others who are about to "lose face" are acknowledged to have "tact." The art of social life is putting forward preferred visions of the self and then getting others to support those visions.

Most of us, I think, would grant that our relationships have this ritualistic character. Interacting with others means acknowledging pre-established cultural forms--rules about behavior, recognized statuses, conventions of language, knowledge of group identity, and the like. We rely on these informational frameworks to communicate and to accomplish our objectives. We are aware that missteps in a situation--saying the wrong thing, inadvertently disrespecting someone, letting our behavior escape conscious control--can not only ruin our performance at that moment but also spill outward and stain our more general reputation. Who of us wishes to be remembered as that man or woman--or boy or girl-

-who "embarrassed" themselves by inappropriate actions and who must now bear "shame" for what they've done?

Just because we are almost always "on stage," to use another of Goffman's (1959) metaphors, and because terrible performances will indeed be discussed by gossips, we may be very hesitant, indeed fearful, about trying out new identities. Clearly, the safest course-- if we wish to avoid the condemnation or ridicule of others--is to conform to the identities we've already established or to rely on the ones that people are now granting us. Similarly, we should conform to the norms that have been established for those identities. In such ways, we escape being characterized as a "blowhard," "fool," "incompetent," or "liar."

Young children--and the child in all of us--understand this system of mutual courtesies--of "please-and-thank-you"--well enough. But if most of social life discourages us from being too extravagant in our self claims, how are new identities created and explored? In the following, I argue that this process of experimentation--what Lin and Reifel (1999) term the "laboratory of the possible" (p. 151) is one of the central functions of the activities we call *play*.

Identities at play

As we've seen, Goffman argues that social behavior is consequential. Honored--and dishonored--statuses may be carried from one setting to the next (see Goffman, 1963). All this raises the question: Are there socially structured occasions where people can escape this chain-of-consequence? This theme dominates the writing of such play scholars as Huiizinga (1955) and Caillois (1961). As they explain, play events are settings where people can try out new behavior--and identities--without fear of consequence. When we play, we adopt a light-hearted, provisional attitude. We are permitted to hold statuses (such as fearless pirates, daring sports heroes, and beautiful pop stars) that have little connection to our ordinary lives. We mimic the behaviors of our idols and imagine what it would be like to inhabit their circumstances. We speak their words and perform their actions and, in this hypothetical way, feel the emotions that attend success and failure, acceptance and rejection.

These scenarios feel even more "real" when other (non-imagined) people join the action and play their parts with equal determination and skill. Now we discover we cannot have our way as

easily as we do in our dreams. Other people resist us with concrete behaviors and present us with their own ideas of what should be done. They may confound us by behaving as “cheats” or “bullies,” or worse, by being “spoilsports” who declare that the world we have created is silly and unsound. Much more happily, they can also give credence to the whole affair by affirming our shared (if only momentary) commitments. At some level of course, we recognize that this field of challenges is “only play,” a fictional world that must yield to our mother’s calls to come home for dinner, to the requirements of homework, or to a painfully skinned knee.

The play world may be charged rightly with being temporary, indulgent, and socially unimportant. But these qualities are also play’s greatest strengths. Just because play is recognized as being different from more consequential behaviors, that sense of difference allows players to consider--in a much sharper or more distilled way--themes that are central to the *experience* of being human. In much of life, we look backward and then ahead. As players, we focus primarily on the requirements of the present. Sequestered from outside interferences--including those who would judge our behavior to be incorrect or inappropriate--we commit ourselves to curious playing rules, skill sets, material equipment, costumes, and ends of action. We entertain (in mock seriousness) the prospect of being a pirate or baseball player. In so doing, we explore what this identity means physically (what bodily qualities and skills are needed to perform pertinent actions), psychologically (what thoughts and emotions rise within us), socially (what human alliances and divisions are required), and culturally (what publicly shared beliefs, values, and artifacts are manifest). Unlike ritualists--who carry their identities into the next stages of life-- players are granted the freedom to explore statuses, to ruminate on those experiences and then (and at times of their choosing) to apply those lessons to the other parts of life or to leave them forever on the playground.

Selves compared to identities

Social scientists sometimes distinguish between identity and selfhood (Brannaman, 2001). Identity refers to the publicly acknowledged versions of ourselves (qualities, including facts of biography, that define to others who we are). Selfhood, on the other hand, refers to our own interior or subjective experiences of *who we feel ourselves to be* as active agents in the world. Dead people have

identities; only living people have selves. In much the same way, the dead can be central figures in rituals, for such events focus on the ways in which other people define us and guide us into the future. However, play requires energetic selves, people who have taken it upon themselves to create fictional (and sometimes silly) worlds and then to bring these worlds to life.

Most of the great theories of play have emphasized this theme of active assemblage. For example, the poet Schiller (1795/1965) postulated the existence of a “play drive,” an inborn desire to create and then explore the formal possibilities of life without enduring consequence. Huizinga’s (1955) list of defining qualities of play gives primacy to freedom or voluntarism (his other traits are difference from ordinary affairs, seclusion and limitation, exploration of the tension between order and disorder, and secrecy). Caillois (1961) emphasizes play’s freedom and “fictive” qualities (his other defining traits are separation, uncertainty, uselessness, and rule orientation). Freud (1967) emphasizes the degree to which play is a psychological projection, an imaginatively created (and often quite elaborate) scenario where the player ponders the emotional implications of positions and actions. Piaget (1962) claims that play is pure “assimilation,” a trying out of personally managed action-strategies or “schemas” and then repeating these to attain feelings of psychological stability and competence. In all these ways, play celebrates the power of human beings to determine their own visions of themselves without fear of public reprisal. That commitment is also central to the work of play therapists and play advocacy organizations (see Principles of Self-Active Play on p. 1).

As I have argued in other contexts (Henricks, 2006; 2010), play is different from ritual--and from its even closer cousin, *communitas*--in the sense that play features “ascending meaning.” What makes play playful is the extent to which participants actively create or construct their own patterns of thought and behavior. Ritualists follow lines of action that have been established for them, either as pre-existing forms or as guides that are controlled by others. Players make the world their own through self-willed assertion. They improvise, resist, and rebel. That inquisitive, impish spirit is everything. Although every play theorist emphasizes the usefulness of rules (especially in “games”), these are not sacred in themselves (see Caillois, 1961). They are only devices that move the action along. Players do not

crave the solemnity, conformity, and security that come from rule-adherence; they desire fun. Play is the search for the experience of pleasurable tension that lives in the borderland between being entirely under one's own control and entirely at the mercy of the forces of otherness.

Varieties of self-standing

I've claimed that play centers on the patterns of personal awareness that occur when people test the conditions of their own existence. Players wish to experience themselves as willful agents who direct their own behaviors and acquire their own positions. However, it would be incorrect to say that these experiences of position or "standing" are all the same. Quite the opposite, *how* people play depends on the character of the elements that are their playthings.

A different way of saying this is that play features a dialectical relationship between the subject (the person who wishes to direct the action) and the object world (those forms and forces that are the foci of the player's attention and that may have their own ambitions about what is to occur). Those "objects" may include material forms in the environment, other people, animals, cultural representations, and even the biological and psychological foundations of the player herself. Playing means "taking on" these elements and seeing what subjectivity can do with them.

Although play can be defined by this testing, improvisational quality, few would argue that all play activities exhibit the same pattern of orderliness and emotional tone. How we play depends on with whom (and with what) we are playing. To give an example, playing with a rock (perhaps by throwing it at a tree) has a different character than playing with a large, rambunctious dog or with another person. And playing with a person who is similar in age and skill is to be distinguished from playing with someone who is much older or younger or who possesses quite different levels of ability.

Elsewhere, I've identified four of these different play styles as "manipulation," "rebellion," "dialogue," and "exploration" (Henricks, 2010). Manipulation is the pattern of play emphasized in Piaget's (1962) theory of play as assimilation and in the "play as progress" rhetoric (Sutton-Smith, 1997) that is dominant in psychological and educational studies of play. When children--or adults--play with material objects, abstract symbols, or even with their own bodies and their

movements, they have the opportunity to direct the course of action without undue interference from another being's will. The subject controls the pattern and pace of the activity. Players can gaze at their own constructions and decide what to do next.

A second pattern is "rebellion." Often players take their chances with forms and forces that are too powerful for them to control. When one is over-matched the best that can be accomplished are modes of taunting, symbolic resistance, and escape. Vandalism, vulgarity, and other patterns of subterfuge have special appeal (see Sutton-Smith, 1997). Like graffiti artists--or like children confronting powerful adults--players make their marks on the walls of the world and scurry away. These patterns of childhood play, however unappealing they may be to adult supervisors, are valuable and perhaps necessary. Just as manipulative play teaches what it means to be *privileged* or in control of the world, rebellious play teaches what kinds of freedom and resistance can be found amidst *subordination*.

Different again is a third mode, "dialogue." Many play events feature a spirited interaction between equally-matched participants. Neither controls the action entirely; each player gives and gets, asserts himself and then responds to others' assertions. When people are almost perfectly matched with persistent challenges, the result is a level of deep involvement that Csikszentmihalyi (1990) calls "flow." Under conditions of mutuality or *reciprocity*, players sense both the tenuous, unpredictable character of their own standings from one moment to the next as well as the realization that any outcomes of the event are the results of conjoint participation (Vygotsky, 1976).

The final form of play, "exploration," arises when the player is not in a direct, interactive relationship with the objects of her concern. Instead, she regards that object at a distance, perhaps holding it at arm's length or taking it imaginatively into her mind. This more distanced or *marginal* relationship of the self and its circumstance has been emphasized by some psychologists (see Singer, 1992). When we play in this way, we dream of possible scenarios. Sometimes this mental play is enough for us. Often, it is the prelude for the three more active strategies described above.

However important the pre-established formats of the ritual order may be for guiding our lives,

people need play formats so that they can plot alternative futures for themselves. But our investigations of playful identities and behaviors are not steady or predictable. Sometimes we manipulate the world in the style of workers; sometimes we resist and rebel. We engage in dialogues with our playmates and alternately step back to think about what we have done and what we will do next. Play is filled with ups and downs, successes and failures. By sorting through the implications of our playful identities, we learn what is possible for us in other arenas of life.

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Play at the Center of Curriculum: A Book Review Rebecca Kovacs Edinboro University of PA

As an aspiring teacher at Edinboro University of Pennsylvania studying early childhood and special education, I was assigned to read the book, *Play at the Center of the Curriculum*. For the play enthusiast, the book seems like a dream come true. This is the newest edition of the classic text written by authors Judith Van Hoorn, the late Patricia Monighan Nourot, Barbara Scales, and Keith Alward. For this review, the purpose of the text, organization, clarity of ideas, reading level, use of examples/vignettes and special education highlights will be analyzed. I also solicited the opinions of my fellow classmates in the “play course” to include in this review.

To summarize, this text’s main point is to reveal the benefits of play in terms of meeting developmental and academic standards, and to relate it in a practical way for readers to understand. In an emergent play-centered curriculum, important developmental and educational standards can be met by informed and active educators. No longer is a child “just playing” but instead is exploring the world, utilizing problem-solving skills, and developing social connections. The developmental milestones met in a play centered curriculum have long-lasting positive implications. As stated by the authors, “*Play at the Center of the Curriculum* is a resource for those who want to engage children in a developmental zone where children and teachers are learning from and with each other” (Van Hoorn et al., 2010, p. viii). This emergent approach to education provides a beneficial learning process for all. The authors methodically cover the importance of play throughout the text tapping into research on play, child development theories, and lots of real life examples and vignettes.

In terms of organization of the text, there are two levels to consider: the order of chapters and the

layout of each chapter. The rationale behind the ordering of chapters was logical, beginning with basic information teachers must be aware of, such as theories of play, development, and ways to orchestrate play. After establishing a foundation of types of play, the authors discuss how content areas can be addressed in play. The final chapters cover socialization, outdoor play, and toys. As for the organization of the chapters themselves, the main topics are set in bold typeface followed by text to explain those ideas. The bolded main ideas are very clear and provide structure for the overall chapter topic. As one of my classmates stated, “*I like how the ideas flow into one another in each of the chapters and how the examples are given.*” This organization aided with the clarity of ideas. In this text, a logical ordering of concepts and ideas was present. The ideas featured were not difficult to follow. To add further clarification, the ideas and concepts are accompanied by an example or vignette.

The reading level in this text is appropriate for the collegiate level. Some may find some concepts present in the text to be confusing. This difficulty can be attributed to the fact that in order to fully understand the concepts in this book, the reader requires at least an introductory background in child development and psychology. However, if these subjects are new to the reader, this is where the use of examples comes into play. Through the use of examples, the authors clarify concepts as they present them. By providing these examples, the difficulty level of the reading is significantly lessened.

As mentioned above, the use of examples and vignettes is very useful to the reader. These examples can be considered as one of the main strengths of this text. A fellow student stated that, “*the book also provides a lot of good examples and stories which help to illustrate the topics and theories.*” The examples connect theory with real life; this helps the reader visualize how children and instructors could act in a given situation, helping prepare those with little experience with children or the classroom setting.

In addition to the regular examples, the addition of special education highlights is included in this edition. It is refreshing to see these examples of young children with special needs. Many of my classmates are in the special education field as well. The inclusion of these examples advance and build upon the knowledge we already have about children with special needs. These examples show

adaptations which teachers can make in the classroom setting. This helps teachers become familiar with how students with special needs play and shows ways to make the most of time spent playing.

After reading the book, I formulated a few suggestions for the authors. The topmost concern was the presentation of key vocabulary terms. The text does not noticeably point out key vocabulary words in a consistent manner. Better highlighting, underlining, or listing of key words at the end of each chapter or side of the page would be a welcome improvement. The next area I noted were some ideas were unclear as presented in the text. These were few, but clarifications in these areas would help readers. One such example is when the authors discuss Piaget’s constructivist view. In chapter two, the psychological processes of accommodation, assimilation, and equilibrium are discussed. However, the authors only provide one real-life example while only lightly touching on the others. Real life examples for each of these could better explain these terms for those who are not familiar with Piagetian theory. Another issue was with a few of the special education examples. For the most part, a majority of these examples feature the current practice of person-centered terminology, but not all. Person-centered terminology reduces the negative stigma of labeling. For example, it is more appropriate to say, “a student with autism” rather than “an autistic student.” Placing the person first also creates a more positive atmosphere. While on the topic of special education, one suggestion would be to have a separate chapter devoted to special education while still keeping the special education examples in place. This may widen the audience and attract more special education teachers who would be interested in the book. One final interest that a few of my classmates and I shared was the addition of more pictures in the book. Images coupled with vignettes would help the reader connect concepts to reality. The inclusion of pictures may help attract the attention of today’s visual generation. Not all students learn concepts just by reading text. For some students, visual prompts are just as important as vocabulary.

For a college student, this book is an enjoyable and insightful read and a refreshing break from jargon-filled textbooks. To me, this book feels genuine and has a stable grounding in reality.

Reference

Van Hoorn, J, Nourot, P.M., Scales, B., & Alward, K. R. (2010). *Play at the center of the curriculum*. NY: Teachers College Press.