“Addressing Standards through Play-Based Learning in Preschool and Kindergarten”

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Incorporating standards in early childhood programs does not mean giving up best practices! The Iowa Early Learning Standards are being updated to better reflect appropriate learning goals for children birth to five. Standards *can* be addressed in developmentally appropriate ways. Early educators know that the most successful approaches involve being child-responsive, family-focused, and play-based.

Early childhood professionals can and must stay true to the needs of young children!
We strongly believe that play and standards can fit together. But we never want to compromise the integrity of either play or standards in order to make them “fit” better. We believe that standards and play can be linked so that teachers can do what they are supposed to do: teach young children in ways that are right for them.
Agenda

- 8:30 a.m. Welcome, Introductions, & Plans for the Day
- 8:45 a.m. Gaye Gronlund:
  - Articulating the Benefits of Play
  - Clarifying Misconceptions and Facts about Standards
  - The Teacher’s Role is Key: Planning for Playful Learning
- 10:30 a.m. Break
- 10:45 a.m. Tom Rendon: The Research Base for Play & Learning
- 11:30 a.m. Getting Acquainted with Saving Play
- 12:00 p.m. Lunch
- 12:45 p.m. Playful Learning Experiences
- 1:45 p.m. Break & Like-Minded Group Discussions: Strategize next steps to move forward
- 2:45 p.m. Large Group Discussion with Small Groups Reporting Back
- 3:15 p.m. Communicating about Play & Standards with Others – Becoming an Advocate for Play
- 3:45 p.m. Closing, Next Steps, Evaluation
- 4:00 p.m. Good Afternoon!
I am an early childhood education consultant who works with programs across the country and the author of eight books published by Redleaf Press as well as several articles that have been published in the NAEYC journal, Young Children. I served as the Project Manager for NAEYC for resources related to the third edition of Developmentally Appropriate Practice. I have worked with three states on their early learning standards – New Mexico, Illinois, and Minnesota.

My publications are available at www.redleafpress.org and www.naeyc.org

• My work focuses on:
  • implementing learning through play and exploration
  • incorporating early learning standards
  • assessing children’s progress through observation and portfolios
  • and coaching teachers to implement more individualized curriculum
The issue: What happened to play?

- Less outdoor play
- Ubiquitous screen time
- Children not allowed to play without supervision
- Commercialization of toys related to media
- Less recess in schools
- Confusion about adult roles in play
- False dichotomy about play and academics
- Assumptions that play and standards do not go together
In the field of early childhood education, there is a battle going on about play.

With a focus on learning, building toward academic success, and implementing standards, teachers cannot rely on play.

Teachers should focus on exploration, child interests, and nurturing relationships. Standards will occur naturally.

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The Benefits of Child-Directed, Open-Ended Play

• Cognitive

• Physical: Brain Development and General Health

• Social Emotional

• Rehearsal for Life

• Approaches to Learning: Self-Regulation, Focus, Problem Solving
Support for the importance of play

Educators

Brain Researchers

Pediatricians

Evolutionary Biologists

Physical Health Advocates

Mental Health Experts

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The Importance of Play in the Early Years

Better cognitive and language performance at age 7

Strengthens cognitive capacities

Promotes school success

From Developmentally Appropriate Practice 3rd Ed. Copple & Bredekamp 2009

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From Curiosity: The Fuel of Development by Bruce Perry, M.D., Ph.D. http://teacher.scholastic.com/professional/bruceperry/curiosity.htm

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The Importance of Play in Promoting Healthy Child Development and Maintaining Strong Parent-Child Bond: Focus on Children in Poverty

Regina M. Milteer, MD, Kenneth R. Ginsburg, MD, MSED, and COUNCIL ON COMMUNICATIONS AND MEDIA COMMITTEE ON PSYCHOSOCIAL ASPECTS OF CHILD AND FAMILY HEALTH

ABSTRACT

This policy is a revision of the policy in 119 (1): 182.

From the American Academy of Pediatrics

http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/early/2011/12/21/peds.2011-2953.abstract

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Psychiatrists and Mental Health Experts: Play and Emotions

- Relieves stress & anxiety
- Facilitates successful social interactions
- Helps children deal with fears and trauma

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The Power of Pretend Play

• Pretend and abstract thinking

• Pretend and application of academic skills

• Pretend and self regulation

• Pretend as a behavior management strategy

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Evolutionary biologists say...

All young mammals play!!!!
Additional Resources about the Importance of Play

• *Play: How It Shapes the Brain, Opens the Imagination, and Invigorates the Soul* by Stuart Brown, M.D.

• *Play = Learning: How Play Motivates and Enhances Children’s Cognitive and Social-Emotional Growth* by Dorothy G. Singer, Roberta Michnick Golinkoff, and Kathy Hirsh-Pasek

• *The Power of Play: How Spontaneous, Imaginative Activities Lead to Happier, Healthier Children* by David Elkind, Ph.D.

• *Developmentally Appropriate Play: Guiding Young Children to a Higher Level* by Gaye Gronlund

• *Purposeful Play: A Teacher’s Guide to Igniting Deep & Joyful Learning Across the Day* by Kristine Mraz, Allison Porcelli, and Cheryl Tyler

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We are emphasizing high-level play.

3 levels of play:

• High level, beneficial play

• Simplistic, repetitive play

• Chaotic, out of control play
Traits of Non-Productive Play

• Loud and high-pitched voices

• High levels of physicality

• Sometimes, extreme hilarity

• More disagreements

• Requires teacher intervention to settle children down

• Sometimes, the play is repetitive, imitative, or one-dimensional
Traits of High Level, Beneficial Play

- Children are highly engaged for extended periods of time ranging anywhere from fifteen minutes to over one hour.
- Few behavior problems arise even though disagreements may have to be negotiated and compromises reached. But these negotiations are often quick and agreeable.
- The noise level of productive play is at a reasonable volume and can easily be quieted if necessary with a brief and friendly reminder.
- Teachers are called upon for specific needs such as finding an item to complement the play or to help settle a disagreement so that the play can continue.
- Or, teachers are called upon to look, to provide feedback and affirmation. But then, the play continues. The teacher’s on-going involvement is not often needed.
- Creative use of materials is also seen in children’s productive play. Real objects are not necessarily needed because a small block can be a cell phone or a stack of connecting cubes can be a fire hose.
- Children assign roles to each other and play out those roles within the general flow of the play scenario.
What Benefits Do Standards Provide?

- Reasonable expectations for children from birth through preschool
- A common language for recognizing developmental milestones and trajectories
- Ability to communicate across programs and around the state

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Standards provide a target, a reasonable expectation for performance for typically developing children.

Teachers, then, observe and assess where each child is in relation to that target, that reasonable expectation.

Not every child will achieve every standard.

Every child has strengths and weaknesses in various domains, skills, and competencies.
Standards can help us communicate more effectively with families about their child’s growth, development, and learning.

And, in the process, provide our field with more accountability and develop greater professionalism.
It’s *not* the standards themselves that early educators should be concerned about – it’s *how* they are implemented.
Incorporating early learning standards into curriculum and assessment in programs for young children does not mean giving up developmentally appropriate practices.

Incorporating Standards Does Not Equal Standardization!!!!!!

The two can go together when standards are used in ways that are just right for young children!
To be developmentally appropriate means using the right set of standards for the age group for which they are designed...

- Teachers in preschool classrooms in Iowa focus on the Iowa Early Learning Standards.
- Teachers in kindergarten classrooms focus on the Iowa Core Standards for the end of kindergarten.
Child-directed, open-ended play can address standards

- In high-level, beneficial play children can practice and apply multiple standards.

- Play lends itself to standards that are broad and application-oriented more so than isolated, discreet skills or pieces of knowledge.

- Through planning, teachers can target standards for practice and mastery through provision of materials, integration with children’s interests and curricular content, and use of various teaching strategies as children play.
Teachers can help children work toward deep engagement in high-level, purposeful, complex play where much learning occurs.

This takes thoughtful planning and intentional play facilitation.
Teachers plan for high level play!!!

• They organize the environment and change materials as needed.

• They allow plenty of time in the daily schedule for high level play to develop.

• They plan for play with learning goals in mind.

• And they facilitate play experiences.
The teacher has planned the organization of the environment, the materials available, and the procedures for children to work and play within that environment.

And, s/he is ever ready to use multiple teaching strategies to help children be successful, learn, and grow!

Therefore, there is no such thing as *free* play...!
What else can you call your play time?

- Investigation Time
- Exploration Time
- Discovery Time
- Activity Time

- Choice Time
- Focused Play Time
- Playful Inquiry Time
- Do you have a favorite?
Teachers are intentional in planning the play environment

They make it as interesting, inviting, and organized as possible.

They add or change materials and rearrange furniture as they support children’s successful engagement in play.
When do you change materials in play areas?

• NOT EVERY WEEK!!!!!

• Changes are made to the environment when needed (not necessarily every week)
  
  • When the children are ignoring an area
  
  • When children are bored with what’s available
  
  • When their behavior is not productive in an area
  
  • When the teacher determines that a change is needed to support an interest of the children, a developmental need, or a topic of study or project that has emerged
“Children learn targeted information through exploration of a well-designed and structured environment around a general curricular goal that is designed to stimulate children’s natural curiosity, exploration, and play with learning-oriented materials. ..

...and through the support of adults who ask open-ended questions to gently guide the child’s exploration.”

Kathy Hirsh-Pasek & Roberta Michnick Golinkoff
http://preschoolmatters.org/2014/03/06/playful-learning-where-a-rich-curriculum-meets-a-playful-pedagogy/
The Teacher’s Role in Play

To act as a facilitator as children play

Therefore, at least one adult must be available at all times to facilitate!
Teaching strategies to work toward learning goals in play

- Play alongside children
- Model
- Provide scaffolding
- Provide provocations & challenges
Teaching strategies to work toward learning goals in play

Know When to Exit the Play

Observe & Be Ready to Step Back into the Play if Necessary

Reflect with children about their play
Let’s Start Emphasizing Playful Learning!!

• “Playful learning [where] children learn targeted information through exploration of a well-designed and structured environment … and through the support of adults who ask open-ended questions to gently guide the child’s exploration.”

Kathy Hirsh-Pasek & Roberta Michnick Golinkoff
http://preschoolmatters.org/2014/03/06/playful-learning-where-a-rich-curriculum-meets-a-playful-pedagogy/
Two great resources:

A Mandate for Playful Learning in Preschool: Presenting the Evidence

By Kathy Hirsh-Pasek, Roberta Michnick Golinkoff, Laura E. Berk, and Dorothy G. Singer
Oxford Press

Reaching Standards and Beyond in Kindergarten: Nurturing Children’s Sense of Wonder and Joy in Learning

By Gera Jacobs and Kathy Crowley
Corwin and NAEYC
For the next 45 minutes, move around the room with your tablemates ...

• Participate in each of the 7 Playful Learning activities.
• Discuss how a teacher could guide children in this activity so that it is playful and engaging and not teacher-led.
• For each activity, identify some Iowa Early Learning Standards that are being addressed.
• Record at least three of the standards (preferably from varying domains) that you identified for each activity.
• Be prepared to share your experiences with the large group.
Like-Minded Group Discussions

• Strategize next steps to move forward in linking play and the Iowa Early Learning Standards in your program

• We will break into four different like-minded discussion groups:
  1. Consultants, Trainers, Faculty Members, Policy Makers
  2. Teachers of Age 3 – Grade 3
  3. Family Child Care Providers & Infant-Toddler Teachers
  4. Program Administrators, Principals, Leaders

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Questions to Consider

1. What excites you about linking standards and child-directed, open-ended play?

2. What obstacles do you anticipate you will encounter in your role and setting?

3. What strategies can your group identify to overcome those obstacles?

Be prepared to share key points of your discussion with the large group.
Parents and family members, administrators, community members, and policy-makers do not necessarily know what high-quality care and education look like.

“All they do is play!”
Advocating for play

- Investigate and share the research support for play
- Plan for play experiences for children that are engaging, interesting, and challenging
- Engage with children in play - acting as a co-player and facilitator
- Recognize and work toward high level play
- Take children outdoors!!!
- Encourage pretend play and play where children can apply their skills and knowledge
Organizations specifically dedicated to promoting play

- NAEYC and DEC provide a united and collective voice to promote stronger policies on behalf of play along with:
  
  - The International Play Association ([www.ipaworld.org](http://www.ipaworld.org))
  - NAEYC Play, Policy, and Practice Interest Forum ([www.naeyc.org/community/interest-forums](http://www.naeyc.org/community/interest-forums))
  - The Ultimate Block Party: The Arts and Sciences of Play ([www.ultimateblockparty.com](http://www.ultimateblockparty.com))
  - The Alliance for Childhood ([www.allianceforchildhood.org](http://www.allianceforchildhood.org))
  - Defending the Early Years ([www.deyproject.org](http://www.deyproject.org))
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| The attitude that it is “just play” and not true learning. | • Play is a natural way for humans to learn. It involves investigation, problem solving, innovation, teamwork, and cooperation, all important life skills.  
  • Teachers engage in careful planning for play.  
  • The goal is for children to engage in high-level play experiences (not chaotic or simplistic).  
  • Teachers engage with children as they play, observing and interacting to support and enhance children’s learning |
| There is no time for play in the school day.            | • If play is a key strategy for learning, how can school not allow time for learning? If schools allow time for learning, why can’t some of that time be used for play-based learning? |
| Play requires a lot of planning, and there is no time for that. | • It does take a lot of time. But investments in careful and thorough planning time in the beginning mean less time is necessary later on. |
| Our early childhood teachers do not have strong early childhood backgrounds. | • The important characteristic that many early childhood teachers have, which really all teachers should have, is responsiveness to individual students.  
  • Many teachers are more responsive to materials, curricula, standards, school culture, and external expectations.  
  • Create professional development opportunities that emphasize child-focused and responsive practices. In other words, if your teachers do not have the skills to teach young children, teach them. |
| Play is part of early childhood and that is not where real academic learning takes place. | • Early childhood education is not just watered-down curriculum from later grades. Preschool and kindergarten education is building the foundation for all future learning.  
  • Young children are acquiring an incredible amount of knowledge and developing great varieties of skills, and their thinking is deep and complex. Some of the barriers to seeing that complexity lie in their undeveloped communication skills. Real academic learning is indeed taking place as children play. |
You can communicate with others about learning in play through:

• Resources, pamphlets, and articles
• Announcements and newsletters
• Lesson plans
• Bulletin boards and play area signs
• Displays of children’s work
• Family events
Why Children PLAY

A Family Companion to
Developmentally Appropriate Play

Gaye Gronlund
How to Support Children’s Approaches to Learning? Play with Them!

By Gaye Gronlund

As a parent, you want your children to learn all that they can—to grasp math concepts, to be curious about exploring the world, and to learn to read and write. Did you know that you can help your son or daughter academically by playing with them? Play and learning go together!

What kind of play helps children learn the best? Play that really engages children—play that they will focus on and stay with even when problems arise. This kind of play helps children develop their approaches to learning—in other words, the ways they respond to learning situations. Curiosity about the world, initiative and problem solving, and focused attention are


10 Things Every Parent Should Know about Play
by Laurel Bongiorno

1. Children learn through their play. Don’t underestimate the value of play. Children learn and develop:

   - cognitive skills – like math and problem solving in a pretend grocery store
   - physical abilities – like balancing blocks and running on the playground
   - new vocabulary – like the words they need to play with toy dinosaurs
   - social skills – like playing together in a pretend car wash
   - literacy skills – like creating a menu for a pretend restaurant

Related Articles:
Why This Toy?
Toys as Tools: Everyday Science Experiences
Portfolios

A portfolio is an important tool for communicating not only about a child’s learning, but also about early learning standards

- It provides evidence to support conclusions about the child’s strengths, skills, and capabilities

From Planning for Play, Observation, and Learning in Preschool and Kindergarten Gronlund 2012

You can download the forms at www.redleafpress.org

They are under the title of the book in Web Components.
Dedicated Family Bulletin Boards

• Put it where families will see it
• Update regularly, and encourage families to check it regularly
• Use it as a conversation starter with families
• Include photos of children working and playing; children’s art and projects; descriptions of what children are learning ...what else?

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Make Play Area Signs with Links to Learning Goals

When I use my senses to play, I am...

- using my whole body
- integrating my senses with each other
- learning to regulate my body and my emotions
- learning about my environment
- exploring new ideas
- becoming comfortable with new experiences
- building relationships
- learning to use tools
Displays of Children’s Work

When you post children’s work, take a moment to include information about...

• how the child made it
• what he/she had to say about it
• why you think it’s interesting or important
• how it connects with learning standards
Here's a link to these generic learning goals that you can print on Avery labels:

Invite family members to join their child at school (either during the day or in the evening) and set up play areas with clear directions for ways to work together in that area.

- Read books together in the class library
- Paint pictures together at the easel
- Make things together at the playdough table
- Build something together with blocks or Legos
- Measure water or sand together at the sensory table
- “Cook” dinner together in the play kitchen
- Listen to a story together at the listening center
- Enjoy snack together at the snack table
Make sure that you have opportunities for play in your own life!!!
We can replenish and nourish ourselves for our work by...

**Relishing our time with our loved ones**

**Taking time for ourselves by exercising, reading, engaging in crafts, cooking favorite foods, gardening, getting together with friends, seeing movies, reading books, and enjoying music or the outdoors**

**Nourishing our souls whether in a loving relationship, a meaningful friendship, a religious community, or a service project**

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How do you take care of yourself?

I take care of my physical health by...

I take care of my mental health by...

I take care of my spiritual health by...
The goal of our work is to be child-focused, to know each child well, and to delight in each child.

Play is the way to make children’s learning and your job more delightful!