Presented at the 2026 IPA World Conference in Christchurch, New Zealand

The Child's Right to Play

IPA USA 2026 White Paper

USA IPA

American Association for the Child's Right to Play

A Critical Moment for Childhood

The child's right to play stands at a critical crossroads.

October 28, 2026

The IPA USA Board of Directors presents the 2026 White Paper

Across the United States and around the world, children are growing up in environments that increasingly prioritize performance, productivity, and measurable outcomes over the experiences that support healthy development. Academic pressures, overscheduled childhoods, increased screen use, heightened safety concerns, and diminishing opportunities for independent exploration have steadily eroded time, space, and freedom for play.

Yet the evidence has never been clearer: play is not a luxury, a reward, or a break from learning. Play is how children learn, develop, and thrive. Through play, children build social competence, emotional strength, creativity, decision-making skills, self-regulation, and the habits necessary for lifelong learning and well-being. Research spanning developmental psychology, education, neuroscience, public health, and child development consistently shows that play is a biological and developmental necessity.

Despite this growing body of evidence, many educational, community, and policy settings still undervalue play. Too often, decisions affecting children are driven by short-term outcomes rather than a long-term understanding of what children need to flourish. As a result, childhood itself is increasingly at risk.

The International Play Association USA (IPA USA) proudly presents the 2026 White Paper as a call to action for educators, policymakers, researchers, families, and advocates. Building on decades of scholarship and advocacy, this collection of 66 papers, written by 95 authors from six continents, 14 countries, and Hong Kong (Special Administrative Region of China), spanning 11 categories, brings together leading voices committed to protecting and advancing every child's right to play.

Within these pages, readers will find research-based insights, practical recommendations, and powerful examples that show why play matters and how to support it across homes, schools, communities, and public policy. More importantly, this White Paper serves as an advocacy resource, equipping readers with the evidence and tools needed to champion play in their local contexts.

The future of childhood depends on the choices we make today. By recognizing play as a fundamental right and an essential component of healthy development, we can create environments where all children have the opportunity to learn, grow, belong, and thrive.

IPA USA thanks the 95 authors for their time and commitment to advancing the Child's Right to Play. We invite you to read, share, and use this White Paper to strengthen your advocacy efforts and join us in safeguarding every child's right to play.

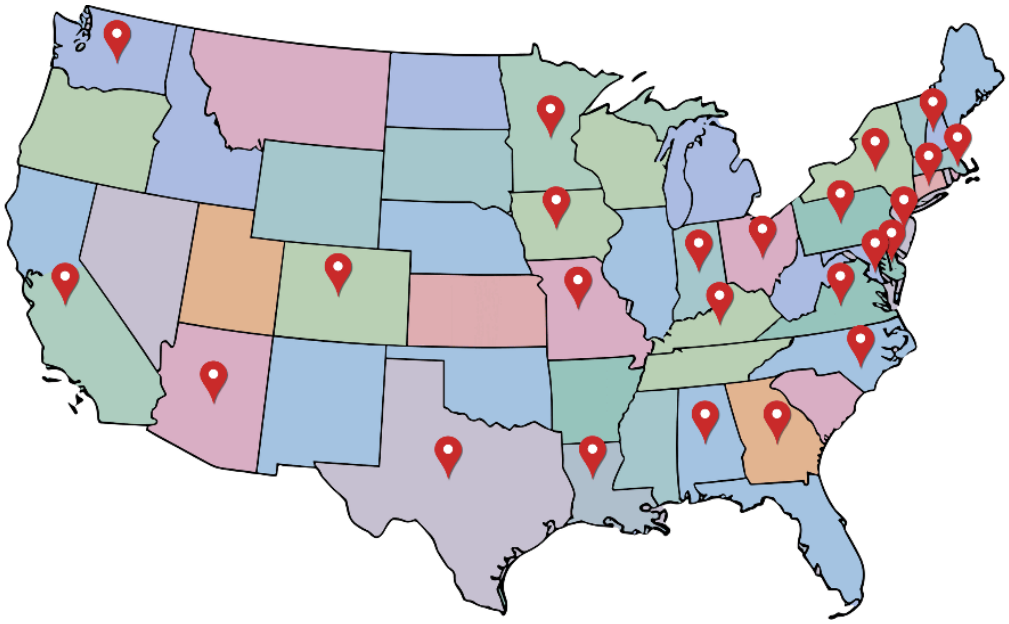
Deb Lawrence, Co-President, IPA USA **Brian Stone,** Co-President, IPA US

Return to Table of Contents

Fun Facts: A Visual Representation of the 2026 White Paper

Continents and Countries Represented

United States Represented



Return to Table of Contents

IPA USA Board of Directors (2026 – 2029)

Deb Lawrence – Co-President
Brian Stone – Co-President
Erin Casey – Vice President
LaDonna Atkins – Past President
Amanda McMickle – Treasurer
Ellen Cogan – Secretary
Carly Bedard – Member at Large
Bengi Sullu – Member at Large
Lindsay Dzielski – Membership

Committee Chairs

Jenn Beideman – Social Media Chair
Jessica Branch – Pop Up Playdays
Lindsay Dzielski – National Day of Play
Emily Holder – U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child
Kirstin Hommel – Recess
Sonia Jara – Nature Play
Rachel Larimore – Journal Editor
Kyler P. Leiter – Equity and Inclusion
Hans Petersen – Ready for Me
Michele Pullen – Ready for Me
Sam T. Sanders – Media
Elaine Zweig – State Chapters

Return to Table of Contents

How to Navigate This Document

This document has been formatted to include live links within the Table of Contents, and with anchors in other areas to assist with cross-referencing authors, essays, resources, etc..

With this formatting, our readers will more easily be able to revisit and share certain key topics, authors, or resources without needing to scroll through the entirety of the document.

To jump to a section listed in the Table of Contents, click on the item.

To jump to a particular executive summary or white paper, first navigate to the category it is listed under, then click on the executive summary or white paper title.

To return to the table of contents, click "**Return to Table of Contents**. This can be found in the bottom right corner of each page..

While we appreciate the size of this document and want our readers to be able to navigate it easily, we similarly hope that our readers will recognize the time, scope, effort, and passion for the subject matter that went into composing this white paper.

Please take the time to read it in its entirety before utilizing the navigation features to skip areas.

We hope you enjoy reading, and encourage you to share!

Questions? Contact us at info@ipausa.org.

Return to Table of Contents

Table of Contents

A Critical Moment for Childhood 2
Fun Facts: A Visual Representation of the 2026 White Paper 3
IPA USA Board of Directors (2026 – 2029) 4
How to Navigate This Document 5
Table of Contents 6
About IPA USA 7
About IPA World 16
Meet the Authors 20
Category Descriptions 44
Author Biographies 50
Press Release 92

Return to Table of Contents

About IPA USA

The American Association of the Child's Right to Play (DBA) IPA USA

Authors

Debra Lawrence, PhD, MA
Marcy Priess Guddemi, PhD, MBA

Debra Lawrence: is the Co-President of IPA USA and International IPA WORLD Council Member. Past Vice President and Secretary of IPA USA. Porch Play Chat facilitator, Quarterly Play Blast content writer.

Marcy Priess Guddemi: Past President of IPA/USA and International IPA WORLD Representative, Past Secretary of IPA WORLD, Past Treasurer IPA USA, Past Secretary of IPA USA, Past Newsletter Editor of IPA USA

Special thanks to Dr. Joe Frost (1933-2020), the First elected President of IPA USA and International Representative, Play and Playground Expert, author of numerous playbooks and articles, and mentor to many for his contributions to this document.

Our Vision

A world where all children can play

Our Mission

The purpose of IPA USA is to protect, preserve, and promote the child's right to play.

In 1973, the American Association for the Child's Right to Play was founded as a recognized branch/affiliate of the International Play Association (IPA WORLD). IPA USA is a not-for-profit organization holding a 501C3 with the IRS.

The American Association for the Child's Right to Play (DBAIPA USA) will celebrated its 50th Anniversary in 2023 at the Annual Conference in Greenville, SC.

IPA USA has identified a list of 12 fundamental, guiding principles that provide the direction for our organization, services, resources, and communications.

Return to Table of Contents

What is Play?

- Play is the work of childhood. Play is biologically driven. There are many types of play. The highest, purest form of play is spontaneous, freely chosen, intrinsically motivated, pleasurable, purposeless, and free from conflicts. For younger children, it also contains symbolism and elements of pretend (Gray, 2013).

Guiding Principles

- Play, along with the basic needs of nutrition, health, shelter, and education, is **vital for the development of all children from** birth to 18 years.
- Play is **integral and necessary** for social, emotional, cognitive, language, and physical development.
- Play **facilitates brain growth**, especially in the frontal cortex, where essential cognitive functions reside, including attention, self-regulation, working memory, and cognitive flexibility, all known as executive functions.
- Many foundational skills can only be developed **through play** and thus justify the essential need for recess for younger children and breaks for older children.
- Play opportunities are **needed for children both indoors and outdoors.**
- Play needs differ **among the age groups**: birth to age 2, pre-k, early elementary, upper elementary, middle school, and high school.
- Schools, especially pre-K and elementary schools, **need help understanding** that young children learn best through play.
- Schools need help and support in providing meaningful and appropriate play opportunities, such as experiential, inquiry, integrated, and emergent approaches to curriculum.
- **Families need help** recognizing that play is necessary for healthy development, and that family play also bonds the family and helps build happy childhoods.
- **Community services and regulators**, such as parks and recreation, city planning, playground inspectors, and housing developments, need help

Return to Table of Contents

understanding why opportunities for risky play should be included in their planning.

- All types of play are essential (e.g., physical play, such as running, climbing, swinging, etc.; block and construction play; play within art and music; games with rules; rough and tumble play; risky play; nature play; role-playing; etc.), but **child-directed, spontaneous play** is the most important type of play during the early years of birth through age eight.
- Children have the right to play as guaranteed by the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Affirmation

IPA USA is determined to sustain the momentum created by the International Year of the Child in 1979 to influence world opinion for the improvement of the lives of children; and:

AFFIRMS its belief in the United Nations' Declaration of the Rights of the Child, which in Article 7 states, "The child shall have full opportunity to play and recreation, which should be directed to the same purposes as education; society and the public authorities shall endeavor to promote the enjoyment of this right;" and endorses its belief in Article 31 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

RECOGNIZES that the population of children in developing countries is three-quarters of the world's total child population and that efforts directed at the promotion of education and literacy, and the stopping of environmental deprivation would improve the capacities of the poorest.

AFFIRMS its commitment to working with other national and international organizations to ensure basic conditions of survival for all children in order that they may fully develop as human beings.

ACKNOWLEDGES that each country is responsible for preparing its own courses of public and political action in the light of its culture, climate and social, political and economic structure;

Return to Table of Contents

RECOGNIZES that the full participation of the community is essential in planning and developing programs and services to meet the needs, wishes, and aspirations of children;

ASSURES its cooperation with UN agencies and other international and national organizations involved with children;

APPEALS to all countries and organizations to take action to counteract the alarming trends which jeopardize children's healthy development and to give high priority to long term programs designed to ensure for all time…

IPA-USA carries forth the mission of its parent organization, IPA World.

To accomplish the Vision, Mission, and Guiding Principles, IPA-USA does the following:

- Advocates for the ratification by the USA of the Convention of the Rights of the Child
- Acts as a resource for other national and international organizations and UN agencies by providing consultations, speakers, and serving on committees
- Increases awareness of the importance of play across the lifespan, infant, toddler, preschool, primary, middle, secondary, post-secondary, and adult play
- Produces Porch Play Chats, Podcasts/videos, which are conversations with people who are passionate about play. Porch Play Chats are available for free on the IPA USA YouTube Channel, IPA USA Facebook page, and Spotify.
- Published the Children in Crisis document In conjunction with the UNICEF Emergency Task Force; this document provides activities that support those working with children during a crisis.
- Promote Trees over Screens by selling T-shirts to support limiting screen time
- Hosts Virtual Town Hall Presentations –Conferences- Porch Play Chats- Children in Crisis Initiative – Ready for Me Campaign- Screen free Week-National Day of Play – Celebrates International Day of Play – Engages IPA Members in States to become a Chapter of IPA USA- Publishes a Quarterly Play Blast Newsletter - Provides mini grants to IPA USA members to sponsor Community Play Days

Return to Table of Contents

Discussing Hot Topics and providing strategies and resources to promote child-initiated play.

Benefits of IPA USA

- Publishes an e-journal- Practical idea to promote play in all settings
- Publishes a Quarterly Play Blast Newsletter
- Recruits IPA Members to form Regional or State Chapters (Ex IPA USA California)
- Provides Mini Grants for National Day of Play, International Day of Play, Community Play Days, and trainings that promote child-initiated play.
- Recognizes individuals who have dedicated their professional careers to advocating for play by awarding Doctor of Play Awards at annual conferences.
- Recognizes individuals who have demonstrated their advocacy in promoting the child's right to play by awarding the Child's Right to Play Advocacy Award at annual conferences.
- Provides Policy Briefs to members on a variety of topics.
- Discounts for IPA USA Conferences
- Opportunities to serve as a committee chair or run for the IPA USA Board

IPA USA aims to protect, preserve, and promote play as a fundamental right for all humans. Membership is open to any individual, group, or organization that endorses the right of children to play, as stated in the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of the Child (1959), Article 7, paragraph 3: "The child shall have full opportunity for play and recreation which should be directed to the same purposes as education; society and the public authorities shall endeavor to promote the enjoyment of the right..." and in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), Article 31:

1. States Parties recognize the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child, and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.

2. States Parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life. They shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational, and leisure activities.

Return to Table of Contents

IPA USA Conferences

IPA USA held triennial conferences from 1981 to 2013 and now holds them more frequently.

- 1981 University of Minnesota
- 1983 University of Minnesota
- 1983 Austin, TX
- 1985 Washington, DC
- 1986 Cincinnati, OH
- 1989 Cincinnati, OH
- 1992 Denton, TX
- 1995 Birmingham, AL
- 1997 Longmont, CO
- 2001 Hofstra University, NY
- 2003 Baltimore, MD
- 2007 Rochester, NY with TASP2010 Atlanta, GA with TASP
- 2013 University of Delaware
- 2014 Clemson, SC
- 2015 Clemson, SC
- 2017 New Brunswick, NJ Rutgers
- 2019 Harrisonburg, VA
- 2020 Speakers Series – Covid (online)
- 2022 San Antonio, TX
- 2024 Greenville, SC
- 2025 Louisville, Kentucky

Past Presidents of IPA USA

Paul Hogan*
Joe Frost
Tom Jambor
Marcy Guddemi
Ann Obar
Audrey Skrupskelis
Rhonda Clements
Olga Jarrett
Tom Reed
Dorothy Sluss
LaDonna Atkins
Deb Lawrence
Current: Deb Lawrence – Co-President
Current: Brian Stone – Co- President

Return to Table of Contents

IPA USA becomes an affiliate of IPA World

The American Association for the Child's Right to Play (IPA USA) was formed in Philadelphia in 1973 as the USA affiliate of IPA WORLD. IPA USA began by playground creator and author Paul Hogan's (1928-2021) 1967 trip to Europe. Hogan was checking out adventure playgrounds in London with Lady Allen of Hurtwood (founder of OMEP) when he first learned about IPA WORLD and began attending their meetings. The United States had IPA WORLD members before Hogan formed the affiliate. Mrs. Thomas Hess of Greenwich, Connecticut, was the first American member, and Pacific Oaks College and Children's School in Pasadena, California, was the first American organization member, having joined in 1969.

In the early 1970s, IPA USA membership had grown to the point that a national representative was selected to be sent to the next IPA WORLD Council meeting; at that time, the meetings of the IPA WORLD Council were held at the triennial IPA WORLD Conferences. The first USA representative was Paul Hogan, attended the 1975 Milan meeting two years after IPA USA was formed. The first president of IPA USA was not " elected." While attending that 1975 conference, Hogan met Muriel Otter (Canadian), the IPA WORLD secretary. She "cornered him and made him president of IPA USA." He consequently started *PlayPlans* magazine and began to secure subscribers and more members for IPA USA.

Elaine Ostroff followed Paul as USA Representative to the 1978 International IPA WORLD meeting in Ottawa. Donna Seline also attended the Ottawa IPA WORLD conference in 1978 and was appointed USA national representative by IPA WORLD President Polly Hill of Canada. Seline organized a regional IPA USA conference in 1980 at the University of Minnesota with keynote speakers Polly Hill and Brian Sutton-Smith. In 1981, Seline was the USA Representative in Rotterdam. A subsequent national IPA USA conference was held in 1983 at the University of Minnesota with keynote speakers Janet McLean and Joe Frost.

Later, in June 1983, The International Conference on Play and Play Environments, sponsored by IPA USA and twelve other state, national, and international organizations, was held at the University of Texas at Austin. This was reputed to be the largest

Return to Table of Contents

gathering of play scholars ever convened, with more than 500 participants, and included representatives from twelve nations. At this conference, plans were initiated for a more formal organization of IPA USA and for the 1986 national conference in Cincinnati. After representing IPA USA in Ljubljana in 1984, Donna Seline submitted her resignation as national representative in July 1985, effective April 1986.

In February 1986, Donna Seline initiated calls for nominations for a formal Board of Directors for IPA/USA, and a mail election was held. Joe Frost (President and U.S. Representative to IPA WORLD World), Sue Wortham (Treasurer and Membership Coordinator), Marcy Guddemi (Newsletter Editor), and Board members Jay Beckwith, Harris Forusz, Roger Hart, Robin Moore, and Barbara Sampson were elected for three-year terms.

The 1986 IPA USA national conference was organized by Harris Forusz and was hosted by Adventure Playgrounds, Inc. and the University of Cincinnati. Formal resolutions were agreed upon, including a pronouncement of support for the IPA WORLD 1977 Declaration of the Child's Right to Play, adopted at the Malta conference in 1977 and revised at the Vienna conference in 1982. Additional details on modifying incorporation and bylaws documents were also addressed at this conference. Robin Moore and Joe Frost participated in the 1986 IPA WORLD Council meeting and special International Year of Peace seminar in Birmingham, UK. During this period, several adventure playgrounds were developed in the U.S. By 1987, IPA WORLD included members from fifty countries.

Thirty-five Americans attended the 1987 World Congress in Stockholm. By 1988 IPA USA membership had grown to 165. Later that year, a national conference was held in Washington, D. C., and it was organized by Barbara Sampson, Robin Moore, and Donna Seline. In 1988, Tom Jambor was elected president by mail vote. The 1988 IPA /USA Board members were Tom Jambor (President), Helge Stapel (Treasurer), Marcy Guddemi (Newsletter Editor), and Board Members Duraid Da'was, Robin Epstein, Harris Forusz, Paul Hogan, Lulu King, Mary Lillie, Ruth Morrison, Jack Pentes, Frank Rudloff, Donna Seline, Randy Smith, and William Weisz. In January 1989, this expanded Board met in Cincinnati and made plans for expanding revenue, newsletter,

Return to Table of Contents

and membership and creating a clearinghouse on information. At the Tokyo conference in 1990, Robin Moore of IPAUSA, already an IPA WORLD international officer, was the first American to be elected IPA WORLD president.

Return to Table of Contents

About IPA World

The International Play Association: Promoting the Child's Right to Play (DBA) IPA WORLD and the American Association of the Child's Right to Play (DBA) IPA USA

The International Play Association (IPA World)

In 1961, the International Play Association (IPA WORLD) was established. IPA WORLD is a non-governmental, charitable organization with members in 60 countries. Countries with ten active members can be recognized as country branches/affiliates, with representation on the IPA WORLD Council. When you join IPA World, you also become a member of an IPA Branch.

IPA WORLD Branch/Affiliate Countries are Listed Below.

- Australia
- Brazil
- Canada
- England
- Germany
- Hong Kong – Special Administrative Region of China
- India
- Ireland
- Japan
- New Zealand
- Nigeria
- North Ireland
- Portugal
- Scotland
- Sweden
- Taiwan
- Thailand
- Ukraine
- USA
- Wales

IPA WORLD History

- IPA WORLD is a charitable international non-governmental organization (NGO) founded in 1961.
- It provides a forum for exchange and action across disciplines and across sectors.
- IPA WORLD''s purpose is to protect, preserve, and promote the child's right to play as a fundamental human right.

In 1923, Save the Children (1919) founder Eglantyne Jebb, a British social reformer, drafted the Declaration of the Rights of the Child.1 Jebb believed that children's rights

Return to Table of Contents

should be especially protected and enforced. These ideas were adopted by the International Save the Children Union in Geneva on February 23, 1923, and endorsed by the League of Nations General Assembly on November 26, 1924, as the World Child Welfare Charter.

During the 1930s and 40s, there was growing interest in providing quality play opportunities, mainly due to the work of Lady Marjory Allen of Hurtwood (1897-1976), a British landscape architect who made playgrounds out of the waste materials of WWI bombed war sites. These playgrounds became known as adventure playgrounds. This seminar on playgrounds was held in Europe.

The need for international action was becoming more evident since the proclamations of 1923 were not enforceable by international law but rather only guidelines for countries to follow. Thus, with all this interest in play and playgrounds and unenforceable rights for the child, on November 20, 1959, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a much-expanded version as its own Declaration of the Rights of the Child, adding five more to make ten principles in place of the original five. Principle Nine of the 1959 Declaration of Rights addresses the child's right to "full opportunity to play and recreation..." In addition, November 20th was also adopted as the Universal Children's Day as the ongoing celebration of that event.

After the signing of the Declaration of the Rights of the Children, IPA WORLD was born in Scandinavia in 1961 as the International Playground Association and held its first conference in Copenhagen that year.

IPA WORLD has held 22 Triennial International Conferences thus far:

1961– **Copenhagen**
1964 – **Zurich**
1967 – **London/Liverpool**: Recreation and Play
1969 – **Paris**: Creative Play
1972 – **Vienna**: Play and Creativity
1975 – **Milan**: Adventure Playgrounds and Children's Creativity
1978 – **Ottawa**: Play in Human Settlements
1981 – **Rotterdam**: Growing up in an Adult World – Beyond Play & Recreation

Return to Table of Contents

1984 – **Ljubljana**: Innovation – Action
1987 – **Stockholm**: Creativity through Play
1990 – **Tokyo**: Play and Education
1993 – **Melbourne**: World Play Summit
1996 – **Espoo**: Dimensions of Play
1999 – **Lisbon**: The Community of Play
2002 – **Sao Paulo**: Culture and Play in Urban Spaces
2005 – **Berlin**: Play: Learning for Life
2008 – **Hong Kong**: Play in a Changing World
2011 – **Cardiff (Wales):** Playing into the Future – Surviving and Thriving
2014 – **Istanbul, Turkey** (19th Tri-Annual Conference)
2017 **– Calgary, Alberta, Canada** (20th Tri-Annual Conference)
2020 -- **Jaipur, India** (Cancelled due to Covid pandemic)
2023 – **Glasgow, Scotland** (Play: Rights and Responsibilities)
2026 - **Christchurch, New Zealand** (Innovating for Play**)**

Presidents of IPA WORLD

- C.T. Sorensen, Denmark
- Jens Sigsgaard, Denmark
- Valia Tanon, France
- Arvid Bengstsson, Sweden
- Polly Hill, Canada
- Nic Nilsson, Sweden
- Robin Moore, USA
- Jan van Gils, Belgium
- Michael Paris, Germany
- Theresa Casey, Scotland
- Robyn Monro-Miller, Australia

In 1979, The United Nations International Year of the Child injected IPA WORLD with new energy. Though IPA WORLD began its life with an emphasis on adventure playgrounds, it gradually changed its focus to play itself and to the child's right to play.

Return to Table of Contents

In 1989, the UN General Assembly Convention adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which strengthened the Declaration of Rights of 1959. On September 2, 1990, it became international law with one notable exception: the USA signed the Charter but has yet to ratify it.2 The Convention consists of 54 articles that address the basic human rights of children, to which all children everywhere are entitled. IPA WORLD was instrumental in adding to Article 31, specifically the words "the child's right play." Shortly thereafter, IPA WORLD changed its name to International Play Association: Promoting the Child's Right to Play.

Return to Table of Contents

Meet the Authors

Refereed White Paper: The 2026 IPA USA White Paper went through a formal evaluation process by subject-matter experts before publication. Each paper was reviewed by two reviewers.

Kim Adams, MA, Leadership Play Advocate and Consultant

Category: Leading for Play
Title: Press Play: A Story of Play, Inquiry, and Systems Change

Stephanie Adams, DHSc, OTR/L, OTA

Category: Play as a Biological Necessity
Title: The Role of Purposeful Play in Promoting Neurocognitive Development

Akosua Obuo Addo, PhD

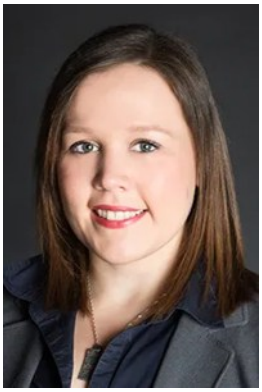
Category: Play Across the Lifespan
Title: Playful Pedagogies and Preservice Teachers' Mindsets

Sarah Aiono, EdD, Longworth Education, Aotearoa New Zealand

Category: Play and Culture
Title: Play as a Vessel for Justice and Belonging

View Author Biographies

Return to Table of Contents



Jenn Beideman, MPA

Category: Advocating for Play with Parents and Caregivers
Title: Press Start. Activating Family Voices to Advance Playful Solutions

Anna Beresin, PhD

Category: Play and Culture
Title: Hiding in Plain Sight: Play and Culture

Jennifer L. Berube, PhD

Category: Leading for Play
Title: Play IS Readiness: Rethinking What Prepares Children for Kindergarten

Preston Blackburn, BA

Category: Play as a Biological Necessity
Title: The Missing Link: How Physical Play Solves Today's Classroom Behavior Crisis and Prepares Children to Learn

View Author Biographies

Return to Table of Contents

Kimberly Blitch, PhD, The University of Alabama, Alabama Infant Toddler Specialist Network

Category: Play Across the Lifespan
Title: From the Womb to the Tomb: Play Across the Lifespan

Charlene Woodham Brickman, PhD

Category: It's a Child's Right
Title: Recess and the Value of Choice in the School Environment

Daniel Burton, BEd

Category: It's a Child's Right
Title: Adolescents Need Adventure Too: Making Room for Play in Year 7 Educated by Nature

Elsie Shih-Hua Chang

Category: Play and Climate Change
Title: The Taiwan Children's Play Declaration and Protocol for Replication

View Author Biographies

Return to Table of Contents

Susan Chlebowski, UK-trained Playworker and Forest School Leader

Category: Playwork
Title: Cultivating a Playwork Movement Part 1: Our National Play Deficit

Category: Playwork
Title: Cultivating a Playwork Movement Part 2: The Task Before Us

Tony Christopher, MBA
National Institute for Play

Category: Play as a Biological Necessity
Title: Why Play Is a Public Health Necessity

Cindy Chung, Play Taiwan

Category: Leading for Play
Title: Restoring Time and Space for Play in Taiwan

Marjorie Cole, MEd
President, IPA – Canada

Category: The Method, Strategies, and Principles of Play
Title: Reading for Resilience: Using Children's Literature to Support Early Childhood Mental Health

View Author Biographies

Return to Table of Contents

Tabitha Dell'Angelo, PhD

Category: Play Across the Lifespan
Title: Playful Pedagogies and Preservice Teachers' Mindsets

Cynthia DiCarlo, PhD
Louisiana State University

Category: The Method, Strategies, and Principles of Play
Title: How Reggio-Inspired Teachers Enact Playful Learning: Characteristics of the Reggio Emilia Philosophy in Practice

Category: The Method, Strategies, and Principles of Play
Title: Unlocking Potential: The Transformative Power of Loose Parts Play in Early Childhood Education

Mina Dilip, MSc, Play Therapist

Category: The Method, Strategies, and Principles of Play
Title: Play is a Powerful Therapeutic Tool

Chima Abimbola Eden, MSc

Category: Play in the Age of Algorithms
Title: How Our Brains Develop Through Play, and What Happens When Screens Get Involved

View Author Biographies

Return to Table of Contents

Julie Ernst, PhD

Category: Nature is Essential
Title: Fostering Young Children's Empathy through Nature Play

Michelle Fazio-Brunson, EdD
Northwestern State University of Louisiana

Category: The Method, Strategies, and Principles of Play
Title: Unlocking Potential: The Transformative Power of Loose Parts Play in Early Childhood Education

Tori K. Flint, PhD

Category: Leading for Play
Title: Reimagining Readiness: The Transformative Power of Play in Language and Literacy

Kate Allen Fox, MPP

Category: Advocating for Play with Parents and Caregivers
Title: Get-out-of-the-Way of Play: A Call-to-Action to Educate Parents About Their Role in Play

View Author Biographies

Return to Table of Contents

Rachel Franz, MEd

Category: Play in the Age of Algorithms
Title: Is Digital Play Really Play? Prioritizing Offline Play in a Commercialized World

April Giddens, EdD, Northwestern State University of Louisiana

Category: The Method, Strategies, and Principles of Play
Title: Unlocking Potential: The Transformative Power of Loose Parts P lay in Early Childhood Education

Stephanie Goloway, EdD

Category: The Method, Strategies, and Principles of Play
Title: This is Your Brain on Stories: Make-Believe Play, Fairy Tales and Resilience

Gennie Gorback, MEd

Category: Advocating for Play with Parents and Caregivers
Title: Get-out-of-the-Way of Play: A Call-to-Action to Educate Parents About Their Role in Play

View Author Biographies

Return to Table of Contents

Ruth V. Guirguis, EdD

Category: Play Across the Lifespan
Title: Playful Pedagogies and Preservice Teachers' Mindsets

Jackson R. Ham, PhD

Category: Play as a Biological Necessity
Title: Lessons from the Laboratory: Not All Rats Benefit from Play and Why That Matters for Children

Myae Han, PhD

Category: Advocating for Play with Parents and Caregivers
Title: Imaginary Companions as a Window into Pretend Play and Child Development

Category: Leading for Play
Title: Reimagining Readiness: The Transformative Power of Play in Language and Literacy

Callie Hendricks, BS

Category: Nature is Essential
Title: Nature and Place-based Environmental Education: A Primary Grade Teacher Focused Group Case Study in Wilmington, NC

View Author Biographies

Return to Table of Contents

Celia Hogan,
Nature Education Specialist

Category: Play in the Age of Algorithms
Title: Screens, Play, and the Developing Brain: Restoring Balance in Modern Childhood

Danielle Hunter, EdD

Category: The Method, Strategies, and Principles of Play
Title: Reframing Early Art Experiences: How Process Art Supports Real Learning

Opeoluwa Ihediohia, MEd. BEd

Category: Play in the Age of Algorithms
Title: How Our Brains Develop Through Play, and What Happens When Screens Get Involved

Mark Jackson, BS

Category: Leading for Play
Title: Kids Deserve More Than Just Change — They Deserve Justice

View Author Biographies

Return to Table of Contents

Denisha Jones, PhD, JD

Category: Leading for Play
Title: Ready for Me: A DEY Campaign to Change the Narrative About Going to Kindergarten

Category: Leading for Play
Title: Time, Space, and Permission: Critical Ingredients for Integrating Play in Public Schools

Lucinda Jones, Early Interventionist and Key Worker

Category: Leading for Play
Title: Celebrating Play in Early Intervention: Every Child Deserves a Playful Journey

Dinah Awino Kawino, BS in Environmental Education

Category: Nature is Essential
Title: Nature-Based Play in Kenyan Early Learning through Play: *The Pendo Mazingira Framework*

April Kendrick, PhD, The University of Alabama, Alabama Infant Toddler Specialist Network

Category: Play Across the Lifespan
Title: From the Womb to the Tomb: Play Across the Lifespan

View Author Biographies

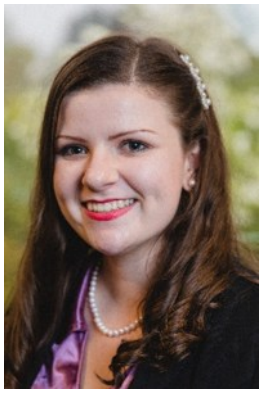
Return to Table of Contents

Fiona Kirkland, MEd
Play Scotland

Category: Leading for Play
Title: Realising the Right to Play through Pedagogy: A Scottish Perspective on Systemic Change in Education: "Embedding Play in National Education Systems"

Richard A. Kissel, PhD, Chief Program Officer, The DoSeum

Category: Leading for Play
Title: Strengthening Child, Teacher, and Parent Relationships Through Play



Stephanie Kuntz-McAllister, PhD

Category: Play Across the Lifespan
Title: "How come we never do anything fun?" Inspiring Play Advocates in the College Classroom

Anne Lamont, MEdSt

Category: Leading for Play
Title: The Power of Play: Why Unstructured Time Matters in Primary School

View Author Biographies

Return to Table of Contents

Debra Lawrence, PhD in Early Childhood, M.A. in Early Childhood, Professor, Delaware County Community College

Category: The Method, Strategies, and Principles of Play
Title: Part 1: Where Did All The Play Go? The Play Confusion: When Everything Is "Play," Nothing Is

Category: The Method, Strategies, and Principles of Play
Title: Where Did All The Play Go? Part 2 The Play Confusion: When Everything Is "Play," Nothing Is

Kyler P. Leiter, PhD, Equity, Inclusion, and Trauma-Informed Committee Chair

Category: Leading for Play
Title: Ready or Not, Here I Come: Redefining Kindergarten Readiness to Meet Children Where They Are Upon Arrival

Christine Jie Li, PhD

Category: Nature is Essential
Title: Nature and Place-based Environmental Education: A Primary Grade Teacher Focused Group Case Study in Wilmington, NC

Eugenia Lin

Category: Play and Climate Change
Title: The Taiwan Children's Play Declaration and Protocol for Replication

View Author Biographies

Return to Table of Contents

Xiang-Ru Lin, LLB

Category: Play and Climate Change
Title: The Taiwan Children's Play Declaration and Protocol for Replication

Abby Loebenberg, PhD

Category: Advocating for Play with Parents and Caregivers
Title: Indoor Play: Board and Card Games and Their Role in Parent-Supported Play

Miriam McCaleb, PhD

Category: Play in the Age of Algorithms
Title: Playful Parents in Technoference Times

Jonathan McCloud, PhD

Category: Playwork
Title: Cultivating a Playwork Movement Part 1: Our National Play Deficit

Category: Playwork
Title: Cultivating a Playwork Movement Part 2: The Task Before Us

View Author Biographies

Return to Table of Contents

Emma Melo, BA

Category: The Method, Strategies, and Principles of Play
Title: Explorers and Detectives: The Multimodality of Children's Literacy Development Through Play and the Role of the Educator

Sarah Jayne Meyer, MSc

Category: It's a Child's Right
Title: Unheard Voices, Unseen Play: Addressing the Research Silence Around Disabled and Neurodivergent Children's Perspectives on Play

Lin Moore, PhD, Texas Woman's University

Category: The Method, Strategies, and Principles of Play
Title: Children's Right to Play: Nurturing Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) Through Play in Early Childhood

Category: Play as a Biological Necessity
Title: Play Is for Everyone, or Is It?

Angie Nastovska, PhD, iLEAD California

Category: Leading for Play
Title: Reimagining the Educational Ecosystem: Modeling Play, Choice, and Community Partnership for Holistic Development

View Author Biographies

Return to Table of Contents

Chris Navarro, MA, Director of School & Community Programs, The Doseum

Category: Leading for Play
Title: Strengthening Child, Teacher, and Parent Relationships Through Play

Ananta Hari Noorsasetya, PhD

Category: Play and Climate Change
Title: Upcycled Materials for Play Equipment to Expand the Benefit of Playing in Nature in Urban Areas

Ju-Pi Pan, Play Taiwan

Category: Leading for Play
Title: Restoring Time and Space for Play in Taiwan

Sharon M. Peck, PhD

Category: Play Across the Lifespan
Title: Being Fully and Vibrantly Alive Through Play: Play in the College Classroom

Category: Play Across the Lifespan
Title: Playful Pedagogies and Preservice Teachers' Mindsets

View Author Biographies

Return to Table of Contents

Hans Petersen, MSE

Category: Leading for Play
Title: Ready for Me: A DEY Campaign to Change the Narrative About Going to Kindergarten

Michele Hemenway Pullen, university degrees in Psychology and Counseling, as well as Learning and Behavior Disorders. Specialized Pedagogy: background training in Waldorf Education and Early Childhood Education

Category: Leading for Play
Title: Ready for Me: A DEY Campaign to Change the Narrative About Going to Kindergarten

Veronica Purwaningsih, LLB

Category: Play and Climate Change
Title: Upcycled Materials for Play Equipment to Expand the Benefit of Playing in Nature in Urban Areas

Suzanne Quinn, PhD, KOMPAN Play Institute

Category: Leading for Play
Title: Play as a Biological Necessity: The Importance of Attractive and Playable Outdoor Play Spaces for the Healthy Development of All Children

View Author Biographies

Return to Table of Contents

Angela Rekers, PhD

Category: It's a Child's Right
Title: The Power of Outdoor Play Partnerships for Inclusion and Accessibility

Deborah J Rhea, EdD, LiiNK Project Director, Professor, Kinesiology, Texas Christian University

Category: Leading for Play
Title: Unstructured Outdoor Play is Essential for Sport Readiness

Sierra Roussos, MAE

Category: Leading for Play
Title: Ready for Me: A DEY Campaign to Change the Narrative About Going to Kindergarten

Alissa Rupp, FAIA

Category: The Method, Strategies, and Principles of Play
Title: Is Risk the Reward? Toward an Emphasis on Risk-Taking and Decision-Making in Play and Learning Spaces

View Author Biographies

Return to Table of Contents

Beth Saile, MS

Category: Nature is Essential
Title: Nature and Place-based Environmental Education: A Primary Grade Teacher Focused Group Case Study in Wilmington, NC

Deborah Schein, PhD

Category: The Method, Strategies, and Principles of Play
Title: Play, Spiritual Development, Spiritual Flourishing

Sara Scott, BEd

Category: Leading for Play
Title: The Power of Play: Why Unstructured Time Matters in Primary School

Ridhi Sethi, PhD, Human Development, MSc, Child Development, MEd

Category: Play and Climate Change
Title: The Impact of Environmental Changes on Children's Play Experiences

View Author Biographies

Return to Table of Contents

Autumn E. Smith, MEd
Louisiana State University

Category: The Method, Strategies, and Principles of Play
Title: How Reggio-Inspired Teachers Enact Playful Learning: Characteristics of the Reggio Emilia Philosophy in Practice

Brian A. Stone, EdD

Category: The Method, Strategies, and Principles of Play
Title: Phenomena-Based Play in the Outdoors

Bengi Sullu, PhD

Category: Advocating for Play with Parents and Caregivers
Title: How Parents Can Support Play

Anna Sutanto, MEM

Category: Play and Climate Change
Title: Upcycled Materials for Play Equipment to Expand the Benefit of Playing in Nature in Urban Areas

View Author Biographies

Return to Table of Contents

Evanthia Synodi, PhD

Category: Play as a Biological Necessity
Title: Play in Kindergartens in Greece

Katie Talarico, MSEd

Category: Play in the Age of Algorithms
Title: Let's Grow Brain P.O.W.E.R.! What Kids REALLY Need to Thrive and How Screens Interfere

Mugdha Thakurdesai, MArch

Category: The Method, Strategies, and Principles of Play
Title: Design for Play in Early Years

Wei-Shun Tseng, OT, Play Taiwan

Category: Leading for Play
Title: Restoring Time and Space for Play in Taiwan

Category: Play and Climate Change
Title: The Taiwan Children's Play Declaration and Protocol for Replication

View Author Biographies

Return to Table of Contents

Belma Tuğrul, PhD, Istanbul Aydın University, Istanbul, Türkiye

Category: The Method, Strategies, and Principles of Play
Title: 1001 Pathways to Learning Through LEGO® Play Pedagogy Play as a Vessel for Justice and Belonging

Tugce B. Arda Tuncdemir, PhD

Category: Play Across the Lifespan
Title: Playful Pedagogies and Preservice Teachers' Mindsets

Claire Underwood, PhD

Category: Nature is Essential
Title: Fostering Young Children's Empathy through Nature Play

Omar Vigo, PhD, Louisiana State University

Category: The Method, Strategies, and Principles of Play
Title: Unlocking Potential: The Transformative Power of Loose Parts Play in Early Childhood Education

View Author Biographies

Return to Table of Contents

Jackie Wang, Play Taiwan

Category: Leading for Play
Title: Restoring Time and Space for Play in Taiwan

Jen Hsiu-Chuan Wang
Play Taiwan

Category: Leading for Play
Title: Restoring Time and Space for Play in Taiwan

Category: Play and Climate Change
Title: The Taiwan Children's Play Declaration and Protocol for Replication

Rebecca Wax, BA

Category: Advocating for Play with Parents and Caregivers
Title: Imaginary Companions as a Window into Pretend Play and Child Development

G. Kate Webb, PhD
Adjunct Professor,
Texas Christian University

Category: Leading for Play
Title: Unstructured Outdoor Play is Essential for Sport Readiness

View Author Biographies

Return to Table of Contents

Linnea Westerlind, MSocSc

Category: It's a Child's Right
Title: How Parents Can Advocate for a Playful Childhood that Prioritizes Joy

Isaac Wetherley, BS

Category: It's a Child's Right
Title: Adolescents Need Adventure Too: Making Room for Play in Year 7 Educated by Nature

Tivy Whitlock, PhD
Community Programs Educator, The Doseum

Category: Leading for Play
Title: Strengthening Child, Teacher, and Parent Relationships Through Play

Jessie Ming Sin Wong, PhD

Category: Play in the Age of Algorithms
Title: The Algorithm in the "Toy Box": Navigating AI, Play, and Culture

View Author Biographies

Return to Table of Contents

Jill Wood, MLIS

Category: Playwork
Title: Cultivating a Playwork Movement Part 1: Our National Play Deficit

Category: Playwork
Title: Cultivating a Playwork Movement Part 2: The Task Before Us

Sera Yöndem, MA
Istanbul Kent University,
Istanbul, Türkiye

Category: The Method, Strategies, and Principles of Play
Title: 1001 Pathways to Learning Through LEGO® Play Pedagogy Play as a Vessel for Justice and Belonging

Elaine Zweig, PhD
Educational Consulting

Category: The Method, Strategies, and Principles of Play
Title: Children's Right to Play: Nurturing Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) Through Play in Early Childhood

Category: Play as a Biological Necessity
Title: Play Is for Everyone, or Is It?

With Sincere Gratitude

We extend our heartfelt thanks to all the contributors who dedicated their time and expertise to championing the right to play.

View Author Biographies

Return to Table of Contents

Category Descriptions

Advocating for Play with Parents and Caregivers

Parents and caregivers are among the most important advocates for children's right to play. The choices adults make, the environments they create, and the support they provide can profoundly influence children's opportunities for exploration, imagination, learning, and joy. The articles in this category highlight the essential role families play in protecting and promoting play in everyday life. From supporting pretend play and fostering meaningful family interactions through games to empowering parents as advocates for playful childhoods, these authors explore the many ways adults can nurture children's development through play. They also challenge caregivers to step back, recognizing that much of the richest learning happens when children have the freedom to direct their own play. Together, these articles provide research, practical strategies, and advocacy tools to help families create play-rich environments that support healthy development, strong relationships, and joyful childhoods.

It's a Child's Right

Play is not a privilege to be earned or a reward for good behavior. It is every child's fundamental right. The articles in this category explore how families, schools, communities, and organizations can help ensure that all children have meaningful opportunities to play, regardless of age, ability, or circumstance. From protecting recess and expanding opportunities for adventure and outdoor play to advancing inclusion, accessibility, and the voices of disabled and neurodivergent children, these authors highlight many ways to support and strengthen the right to play. They also offer practical advocacy strategies to help parents, educators, and community leaders create environments where joy, choice, belonging, and play are recognized as essential elements of childhood.

Return to Table of Contents

Leading for Play

Children need more than opportunities to play. They need adults willing to protect, champion, and advocate for play in schools, communities, and public policy. This category of articles explores how educators, families, researchers, administrators, and community leaders are working to create the conditions necessary for play to flourish. From rethinking school readiness and early intervention to strengthening relationships, promoting justice and equity, and restoring time and space for play, these authors challenge long-held assumptions about learning and development. Together, they demonstrate that meaningful systems change is possible when children's rights, needs, and voices are placed at the center of decision-making. The authors provide research, advocacy tools, and practical strategies to help readers lead the movement to protect childhood and advance every child's right to play.

Nature is Essential

Children are biologically connected to the natural world, yet opportunities to play, learn, and explore in nature continue to decline. Experiences in natural environments support children's physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development while fostering curiosity, empathy, environmental awareness, and a sense of belonging. The articles in this category examine how nature-based play and place-based education create meaningful opportunities for children to connect with their communities and the world around them. Drawing on perspectives from diverse cultural and geographic contexts, these authors highlight innovative approaches that support children's development while strengthening relationships with the natural environment. The research, frameworks, and practical strategies in these articles give readers tools to advocate for and create more meaningful opportunities for nature-based play and learning.

Return to Table of Contents

Play Across the Lifespan

Play is a lifelong human need that contributes to learning, well-being, creativity, connection, and personal growth from infancy through older adulthood. While play is often associated with childhood, its benefits extend across every stage of life, supporting curiosity, resilience, relationships, and a sense of vitality. The articles in this category explore how playful experiences enrich educational settings, shape professional preparation, and foster engagement in adulthood. From the college classroom to broader reflections on play across the human lifespan, these authors challenge readers to reconsider play as something to be protected, encouraged, and celebrated at every age. Through research, reflection, and practical examples, they show that play is not something we outgrow, but a fundamental part of what it means to be fully alive, connected, and continually learning.

Play as a Biological Necessity

Play is not simply a leisure activity or a break from learning. It is a biological necessity that supports healthy development, well-being, and lifelong learning. Across species and cultures, play serves as a powerful mechanism through which young individuals develop the cognitive, physical, social, and emotional capacities needed to thrive. The articles in this category explore the growing body of research demonstrating the essential role of play in neurocognitive development, physical health, self-regulation, social competence, and school success. They also examine key questions about equity, access, and the quality of children's play experiences across diverse contexts. From laboratory research and public health perspectives to classroom practice and international examples, these authors provide evidence, insights, and practical recommendations that reinforce a simple but powerful message: when children are denied opportunities to play, healthy development is compromised. These articles offer readers the research and advocacy tools needed to support and defend play as a fundamental biological necessity for all children.

Return to Table of Contents

Play and Climate Change

Climate change is reshaping the environments in which children live, learn, and play. Rising temperatures, extreme weather events, urbanization, environmental degradation, and the loss of natural play spaces increasingly affect children's opportunities for outdoor play and connection with nature. At the same time, communities worldwide are developing innovative approaches to create sustainable, accessible, and resilient play environments. The articles in this category explore the relationship between climate change and children's play experiences while highlighting practical solutions that support both environmental sustainability and the child's right to play. From using recycled and upcycled materials to community advocacy and policy initiatives, these authors offer research, examples, and strategies to help readers protect children's opportunities for play while contributing to a healthier, more sustainable future for all.

Play and Culture

Play does not occur in a vacuum. Children's play is shaped by the cultures, communities, traditions, values, and social experiences that surround them. At the same time, play serves as a powerful way for children to express identity, build relationships, make meaning of their experiences, and develop a sense of belonging. The articles in this category explore the dynamic relationship between play and culture, examining how play reflects, challenges, and transforms the social worlds children live in. Through discussions of justice, belonging, identity, and lived experience, these authors highlight the ways play can foster inclusion, amplify diverse perspectives, and create opportunities for connection across differences. The research and insights presented in these articles encourage readers to view play not only as an individual developmental process, but also as a cultural practice that helps children understand themselves, their communities, and their place in the world.

Return to Table of Contents

Play in the Age of Algorithms

Children today are growing up in a world increasingly shaped by screens, algorithms, artificial intelligence, and digital technologies that compete for their attention, influence their choices, and mediate their experiences. While technology offers new opportunities for connection, learning, and entertainment, it also raises important questions about children's development, well-being, relationships, and opportunities for authentic play. The articles in this category explore how digital technologies affect children's brains, behavior, learning, and family life, and what may be lost when screen-based experiences replace child-initiated play. From the influence of algorithms and artificial intelligence to the role of parents in restoring balance, these authors provide research, practical strategies, and critical perspectives that help readers navigate the challenges of modern childhood. Together, they reinforce a powerful message: as technology becomes increasingly integrated into daily life, protecting time, space, and opportunities for rich, meaningful play is more important than ever for healthy development and human flourishing.

Playwork

Play is a fundamental human need, but meaningful opportunities for child-directed play are increasingly under threat. As children's freedom, time, space, and access to play continue to diminish, the role of Playwork has never been more important. Rooted in the belief that children are experts in their own play, Playwork seeks to create and protect environments where children can freely choose, direct, and determine their play experiences.

The articles in this category introduce readers to the growing Playwork movement and examine the challenges posed by our modern play deficit. They explore why Playwork matters, how it supports children's healthy development and well-being, and what actions are needed to expand Playwork practices and advocacy efforts within communities. These authors offer a compelling vision for restoring play to its rightful place in children's lives, along with insights, strategies, and calls to action that can help readers become champions for child-led play. Through their collective work, they

Return to Table of Contents

remind us that protecting play requires both individual commitment and systemic change.

The Method, Strategies, and Principles of Play

Play is a powerful vehicle for learning, development, well-being, and human flourishing. Yet supporting meaningful play requires an understanding of the principles, environments, relationships, and pedagogical approaches that help children thrive. The articles in this category explore a wide range of play-based methods and strategies that support children's cognitive, social, emotional, creative, spiritual, and physical development. From loose parts, process art, storytelling, literacy, and outdoor learning to therapeutic play, social-emotional learning, risk-taking, and Reggio-inspired practices, these authors demonstrate the many pathways through which play fosters resilience, belonging, curiosity, and growth. Grounded in research and practical application, the articles provide educators, families, researchers, and practitioners with insights, tools, and approaches for creating environments where play can fulfill its transformative potential and support every child's right to learn, develop, and flourish through play.

Return to Table of Contents

Author Biographies

A | B | C | D | E | F | G | H | I | J | K | L | M | N | O | P | Q | R | S | T | U | V | W | X | Y | Z

A - B

Kim Adams | Stephanie Adams | Akosua Obuo Addo | Sarah Aiono
Jenn Beideman | Anna Beresin |Jennifer L. Berube | Preston Blackburn
Kimberly Blitch | Charlene Woodham Brickman | Daniel Burton

Kim Adams, MA, Leadership, Play Advocate and Consultant

Kim Adams (she/her) is a passionate play advocate, educator, and speaker with over 35 years of experience in early childhood education. She holds a BA in Creative Arts from San Jose State University and a Master's in Leadership from Saint Mary's College of California, where her action research focused on supporting teachers in embracing play as pedagogy.

Kim is the owner and lead teacher at Barron Park Playschool in Palo Alto, California, a play-responsive environment grounded in creativity, connection, and child-led learning. Beyond her school, she partners with public schools, private programs, and community organizations to provide professional development, consulting, and coaching that helps educators integrate play and creativity into curriculum, assessment, and practice.

A certified Positive Discipline Parent and Classroom Educator, Kim blends relational and restorative practices with hands-on, experiential learning. She has presented nationally and internationally for organizations including NAEYC, Region 9 Head Start, California Head Start, CAAEYC, EveryChild California, and the International Play Association (IPA). She currently serves on the board of Play-Learn-Live and is part of the leadership launching the California chapter of IPA USA.

Kim's work is fueled by the conviction that play is not just a strategy but a right, a mindset, and a catalyst for healthy development, creativity, and educational transformation.

Stephanie Adams, DHSc, OTR/L, OTA

Stephanie Adams, DHSc, OTR/L, OTA,is a seasoned Occupational Therapist with over 31 years of experience. Her career began in early intervention, where she helped parents integrate play into daily routines to support developmental milestones. While working in public schools for a decade, she tailored therapeutic strategies to meet the unique learning needs of the children she served.

Dr. Adams transitioned into higher education and now serves in an administrative role at Graceland University, where she is leading the

Return to Table of Contents

development of a new Occupational Therapy Doctorate program. Her ongoing research and presentations focus on the vital connection between play and cognitive development. Deeply passionate about preserving the role of play in an increasingly digital world, Dr. Adams believes that play is the foundation for all neurofunctional development and must remain central to how we support growth and learning across the lifespan.

Akosua Obuo Addo, PhD

Dr. Akosua Obuo Addo's research interests include international education, collaborative and comparative research on music play. Associate Professor Addo teaches elementary music methods to both non-music and music majors, and supervises student teachers. In the graduate program, Dr. Addo teaches qualitative research in arts education, research and scholarly issues, world music in the classroom, and supervises thesis writing.

Prior to her University of Minnesota appointment, Dr. Addo was assistant professor of music education at the University of Connecticut, Storrs, CT; a Visiting Postdoctoral Research Fellow at Roehampton Institute, London; and an administrator for the Centre for Intercultural Music Arts, City University, London, England.

Sarah Aiono, EdD, Longworth Education, Aotearoa New Zealand

Sarah Aiono is CEO of Longworth Education and a leading New Zealand expert in play pedagogy. A former classroom teacher turned international speaker and researcher, Sarah is dedicated to transforming education through evidence-based, culturally sustaining play practices.

She co-developed the Play-Based Learning Observation Tool (P-BLOT, 2018, 2024), a framework guiding teacher practice and coaching. In 2026, the P-BLOT was recognised as one of the top 100 global education innovations in the HundrED Global Collection and endorsed by Montessori Global Education for its global impact on child-centred pedagogy.

Through Longworth Education, Sarah and her team deliver professional learning across New Zealand, Canada, Australia, the UK, Nigeria and India, equipping teachers to balance curriculum demands with child-centred, developmentally appropriate practice. She also serves as New Zealand’s representative for the Global Recess Alliance and Oceania HundrED Community Lead, amplifying global conversations on the critical role of play.

Return to Table of Contents

Jenn Beideman, MPA

Jenn Beideman is a public policy leader and seasoned government affairs professional with a proven track record of driving systems-level change to improve child health, equity, and community well-being. Throughout her career, Jenn has built strong partnerships across government, nonprofit, and community sectors to advance policies that center whole child health and elevate the critical role of play in child development.

As Deputy Chief of Staff to the Rochester City Council, Jenn advises elected leaders on policy strategy, legislative initiatives, and constituent engagement. Before her government role, she served as Director of Whole Child Advocacy at Common Ground Health, where she led their children's health coalition, advancing local and statewide policy change through community partnership, policy analysis, and strategic communications. For a decade, her work advanced policies that advanced whole child health in our region – and ensured equitable outcomes for Rochester's children in the places they learn, live, and grow.

Among her signature accomplishments, Jenn created the **PlayROCs** campaign — a resident-led movement dedicated to creating safe, accessible play spaces in neighborhoods and schools across Rochester. Through this initiative, she empowered residents to reclaim public spaces for play while advancing the critical role of unstructured play in child development both in schools and communities. Her leadership has contributed to:

- Increased investment in city infrastructure for parks, green spaces, and traffic safety;
- The adoption of daily active recess policies in the Rochester City School District;
- The development of **Play Walk Downtown** and **Story Walks** at local libraries;
- Rochester's first **Playful Learning Summit**, convening cross-sector partners around play-based learning;
- Distribution of over 7,750 play kits during the pandemic to ensure continued access to play;
- Coordination of over 250 community play days through city-wide play events.

Jenn's expertise extends beyond Rochester, contributing thought leadership nationally through speaking engagements with the National Recreation and Park Association, the International Play Association, and the US Play Coalition. In recognition of her professional accomplishments and community impact, she was named a *Rochester Business Journal Forty Under 40* honoree.

Return to Table of Contents

Jenn holds a Master of Public Administration from SUNY Brockport and a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science from the University of Toronto. Driven by her passion for equitable public policy and the power of play, she continues to build coalitions that drive meaningful, lasting change for children and families.

Anna Beresin, PhD

Anna Beresin, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA; PhD, Folklore and Folklife; PhD, Psychology of Education, Child Cultures, joint degree, conferred with distinction, 1993.

A prolific writer and present. A founding member of the Global Recess Alliance

Jennifer L. Berube, PhD

An educator for over twenty-five years, Jennifer Berube, PhD., taught preschool, first grade, and third grade in Massachusetts and New Hampshire. Currently a playful learning coach with the Playful Learning Institute, Jennifer holds a CAGS in Educational Leadership and is a certified arts integration specialist. She has presented nationally and internationally. Jennifer believes in the power of teacher growth, reflective practice, and professional learning communities. She researches how play pedagogy affects teachers' well-being and self-efficacy. Jennifer supports teachers as they implement meaningful, creative, playful learning experiences for students.

Preston Blackburn, BA

Preston Blackburn, BA created Pop, Hop & Rock™ in 2000 when her daughters were preschoolers. What started as a simple exercise program has evolved into one that creates opportunities for kids to hone the fundamental strengths, skills, and motor patterns they need for a successful and happy school journey. Pop, Hop & Rock™ Coaches lead proprietary curriculum in school settings in the Richmond, Virginia area, where new games and activities are tested and honed before being shared widely. In 2019, Preston created Pivot to Play® to help teachers get kids moving during the school day to fill the play gap. Using brain science and logic, along with a treasure chest of games that help kids understand how to use their bodies for schoolwork while laying neural wiring for improved focus and behavior, Preston uses fun to help classrooms move from chaos to calm.

Preston has been honored to share her knowledge with educators and play advocates coast to coast and even abroad. In 2025 alone, she will travel almost 20,000 miles to spread the message that more physical play means happier classrooms.

Return to Table of Contents

Preston's proudest accomplishment is her two daughters, who initially inspired Pop, Hop & Rock™ and now use their career experience to advise and consult Pivot to Play® growth and development

Kimberly Blitch, PhD, The University of Alabama, Alabama Infant Toddler Specialist Network

Kimberly Blitch, PhD, is the program director of the Early Childhood Education (B.S.) major at The University of Alabama, which is accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and serves both on-campus and distance-learning students. As a teacher educator, she teaches students early childhood curriculum and instruction. In collaboration with Dr. April Kendrick, she oversees the Alabama Infant Toddler Specialist Network.

Charlene Woodham Brickman, PhD

Recess & Play, LLC is part of Athens Kids Collective, which is located in Athens, Georgia (USA). AKC is a hub for parents, meeting the needs of children and their families through speech therapy, mental health services, and tutoring. We also host professional character entertainment for your family and community celebrations! We are five female-owned small businesses under one roof and are proud to serve Athens-Clarke County, GA & the surrounding counties!

Daniel Burton, BEd

Daniel BEd is the CEO and co-founder of Educated by Nature, a world leader in play-based nature education since 2014. Playwork Practitioner - Foundation Course and Rites of Passage Facilitator - Level 1, The Rites of Passage Institute

With a background as a qualified primary school teacher, education consultant, rites of passage facilitator, musical theatre artist, and passionate nature connection mentor, Daniel plays a pivotal role in shaping the organisation's vision and initiatives.

Drawing on over ten years of experience working with thousands of Australian children, Educated by Nature has developed a suite of research-based pedagogies to bring education outdoors and has gained international acclaim for its innovative approach to outdoor learning. Daniel aims to be a thought leader, sharing expertise through workshops, speaking engagements, and consultation sessions in Australia and further afield.

Daniel's passion for nature and commitment to holistic education shines through in his work. He combines current research with practical examples,

drawing on a lifetime of learning and experience to provide comprehensive programs and transformative experiences for educators, parents, and children

Return to Table of Contents

alike. Through Educated by Nature, Daniel continues to advocate for the importance of play and outdoor learning, empowering individuals to explore, discover, and thrive in nature's classroom.

For more information visit Educated by Nature.

Return to Table of Contents

C - D

Elsie Shih-Hua Chang | Susan Chlebowski | Tony Christopher | Cindy Chung | Marjorie Cole
Tabitha Dell'Angelo | Cynthia DiCarlo | Mina Dilip

Elsie Shih-Hua Chang

elsiechang@ppfcc.org

Elsie Shih-Hua Chang is a content marketing consultant and coach with over twelve years of experience in the content industry. She began her career as a feature journalist and editor, specializing in interviews and content strategy. Today, she helps professionals create content that drives meaningful business results and sustainable revenue.

Susan Chlebowski, UK-trained Playworker and Forest School Leader

Susan Chlebowski is a UK-trained Playworker and Forest School Leader, Nature Play Consultant, and teacher trainer. She served as the director/head teacher of two nature preschools and facilitated a Forest Days program at an urban public school in Philadelphia. She works with universities, community leaders, and childcare providers to provide professional development that honors a child's right to experience play and nature as part of a healthy, happy childhood.

Tony Christopher, MBA, National Institute for Play

Tony Christopher, MBA - Tony bridges scientific play research with NIF Play's practical applications, helping to ensure the Institute's work remains grounded in current science while maintaining its credibility as a trusted, evidence-based authority. As the former Executive Director of NIF Play, he played a formative role in shaping the Institute's digital and intellectual foundation, including building its initial website, developing its early library of play research and resources, and launching the NIF Play newsletter.

Cindy Chung, Play Taiwan

cindychung@ppfcc.org

Cindy Chung currently serves as the leader of the Public Playground Group within PPFCC. She joined PPFCC while advocating for the renovation of her neighborhood playground. Through continuous participation in playground renovation meetings across various locations, she became familiar with relevant regulations and gained a deeper understanding of government agencies' maintenance and management considerations, as well as the constraints faced by design firms due to inspection standards. Today, she serves as a bridge facilitating communication in meetings, speaking up for children so that playgrounds can better reflect their needs.

Return to Table of Contents

Marjorie Cole, MEd, President, IPA – Canada

Marjorie has over 25 years of experience in education and is a certified teacher with a background in Language Arts and English. She has taught children of all ages—from preschool to post-secondary—in public, private, provincial, and international settings. Based in Calgary, Alberta, Canada, she currently works in early intervention for a play-based service provider, teaches part-time in early childcare certificate and diploma programs, and is a practicum advisor for elementary teachers at a local university.

Marjorie serves as President of the International Play Association (IPA) Canada. She also delivers presentations and workshops, sharing her passion for play and supporting children and educators to reach their full potential. She holds a B.Ed. and M.Ed., with a focus on early childhood and mental health, and enjoys collecting early childhood children's books that promote resilience.

Tabitha Dell'Angelo, PhD

Dr. Dell'Angelo is a professor at The College of New Jersey and holds a Ph.D. in Interdisciplinary Studies in Human Development from the University of Pennsylvania. In 2009, she launched the Urban Education Program at The College of New Jersey, which is focused on recognizing and responding to conditions that contribute to inequities in schools. Over the years, she has worked on large- and small-scale program evaluation as well as consulting on projects aimed at working with underserved communities to create positive change.

She is also a playwright and storyteller and enjoys teaching and doing improvisational acting. She loves working with schools on how to incorporate playfulness and the arts in the classroom. Check out her TedxTCNJ Talk.

Cynthia DiCarlo, PhD, Louisiana State University

cdicar2@lsu.edu

Cynthia Fontcuberta DiCarlo, PhD, Diane Toups Goyette Professor in Early Childhood Education, is the Executive Director of the Early Childhood Education Institute at Louisiana State University.

Mina Dilip, MSc, Play Therapist

Mina holds an MSc in Psychology and is a Certified Play Therapist from Leeds Beckett University, UK, as well as an accredited Sand Tray Therapist certified by the Sand Tray Training Institute of New Mexico, USA. Mina is a qualified supervisor in her field, offering supervision, guidance, and mentorship services to other therapists. Mina holds a Master's degree in Psychology from Madras

Return to Table of Contents

University, and Diplomas in Child Psychology and Advanced Counseling Skills from Stonebridge Associated Colleges, UK.

As one of the few fully certified and accredited Play Therapists in India, Mina works intensively with children and adults, offering psychotherapeutic services through non-directive play therapy. Mina also guides and supports parents regularly. She offers parental coaching and uses simple neuroscience concepts to focus on co-regulation, helping parents build a secure connection with their children.

Mina has been associated with various educational institutions such as MOP Vaishnav College for Women, Montfort College, Bangalore, and Spastics Society of Tamil Nadu for several years, where she conducts training programs for students and staff on topics related to Psychology, Expressive Arts Therapy, and Play Therapy.

Occasionally, Mina offers group counseling and stress management programs in the corporate sector, and has worked with MRF, HCL, Accenture, FedEx, R R Donnelley, Wells Fargo, Barclays Bank, etc. She is registered with the Chennai Counselors' Foundation (CCF) as an RPC member and was recently elected President of CCF.

Return to Table of Contents

E - F

Chima Abimbola Eden | Julie Ernst | Michelle Fazio-Brunson | Tori K. Flint
Kate Allen Fox | Rachel Franz

Chima Abimbola Eden, MSc

Chima Abimbola Eden is an educational researcher, author, and advocate for equity and innovation in learning. With an MSc in Applied Educational & Social Research from the University of Strathclyde and a background in law from Madonna University, Eden brings a unique interdisciplinary perspective to educational scholarship.

Currently serving as an Online Adviser specializing in AI-Enhanced Education at Easy Learning Foundation School, Eden has pioneered the integration of artificial intelligence in educational settings while maintaining a steadfast commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Her research focuses on teacher well-being, educational technology accessibility, and culturally responsive pedagogy, with particular expertise in primary education in Nigeria and cross-cultural educational practices.

Eden is a prolific author with over 10 peer-reviewed publications in international journals, exploring topics ranging from AI-driven pedagogical strategies to social equity in education.

As an active member of professional organizations including the Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria, Eden continues to shape educational discourse through her research, writing, and mentorship. Her scholarly work bridges the gap between educational theory and practice, offering evidence-based solutions for creating more inclusive and effective learning environments.

When not writing or researching, Eden is passionate about community service and has dedicated significant time to mentoring students and supporting educational initiatives across Nigeria and internationally.

Julie Ernst, PhD

Julie Ernst is a Professor of Childhood Nature Studies and Environmental Education at the University of Minnesota Duluth. Her research focuses on the impact of nature play on children's learning, well-being, and development - see Flourishing in Nature research briefs. She can be reached at jernst@d.umn.edu

Michelle Fazio-Brunson, EdD, Northwestern State University of Louisiana

Michelle Fazio-Brunson directs the Early Childhood Education graduate programs at Northwestern State University. Dr. Brunson earned her B.A. in Elementary Education and her M.Ed. in Gifted and Talented Education at

Return to Table of Contents

Louisiana State University in Shreveport. She also holds an M.Ed. in Early Childhood Education and an EdD in Supervision, Curriculum, and Instruction, with a Concentration in Elementary Education and a Focus in Reading, from Texas A&M University in Commerce.

She was recently awarded the Marietta Lebreton Louisiana Studies Award (2024) and the Jean d'Amato Thomas Lifetime Achievement Award (2021) for her work in Cradle to Cradle to Prison Pipeline intervention, a collaborative effort with her husband, the Natchitoches Parish District Defender. She is passionate about using service learning and experiential learning opportunities, while maintaining community relationships, to remap the Cradle to Prison Pipeline into a Cradle to College Pipeline in her parish and across Louisiana.

Dr. Brunson lives with her husband, Brett, and son in Natchitoches, where she enjoys attending his school functions, athletic events, and musical performances.

Tori K. Flint, PhD

Tori K. Flint, PhD. is an Associate Professor of Literacy & Early Childhood Education at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette. She is also the Co-Founder and Co-Director of the Louisiana Center for Research and Education on Languages and Literacies. Her research spans early literacies, play, children's literature, and multimodality. Her new book is called *Sparking joyful learning: A teacher's guide to connecting play and reader response* (2024). Dr. Flint believes education should be joyful and that we should listen to and learn from children's brilliance.

Kate Allen Fox, MPP

Katie Allen Fox, MPP, is an award-winning children's author, speaker, and arts educator who specializes in picture books about science, nature, and the natural world.

Before transitioning to children's literature, Fox worked in public health. Combining her health sciences background with a passion for writing, she began creating picture books designed to inspire curiosity and wonder in children about STEM and nature.

Rachel Franz, MEd

Rachel Franz, MEd (she/her) is the Early Childhood Advocacy Program Director at Fairplay and a champion for the children's right to play. At Fairplay, she specializes in early childhood development and exposes how companies mislead families into believing screens are essential for kids to thrive. A former preschool teacher and director of an all-outdoor preschool in Seattle, Rachel also consults

Return to Table of Contents

with and trains early learning programs nationwide to expand access to play and nature. She is a member of IPA, serves on the advisory board of the Washington Nature Preschool Association, and lives in Seattle.

Return to Table of Contents

G - I

April Giddens | Stephanie Goloway | Gennie Gorback | Ruth V. Guirguis | Jackson R. Ham | Myae Han
Callie Hendricks | Celia Hogan | Danielle Hunter | Opeoluwa Ihediohia

April Giddens, EdD, Northwestern State University of Louisiana

giddensa@nsula.edu

Dr. April Giddens is the Interim Director and an Associate Professor in the School of Education at Northwestern State University in Natchitoches, Louisiana.

Stephanie Goloway, EdD

Stephanie Goloway, EdD is a lifelong educator and advocate for play, storytelling, and imagination. She has taught preschool, elementary school, and special education, and has also been a children's librarian and professional storyteller. She is now Professor Emerita of Education at the Community College of Allegheny County in Pittsburgh. Stephanie is the author of Happily Ever Resilient: Using Fairytales to Nurture Children Through Adversity, published by Redleaf Press, and loves to share “the ordinary magic of resilience” in her weekly newsletter and on her website, Imagination on the Move.

Gennie Gorback, MEd

Gennie Gorback, MEd, is an Early Childhood Educator, curriculum and picture book writer, former toy designer, and founder of Kindling Education Consulting. She serves on the Board of Directors for the California Kindergarten Association and has advocated for play for decades. She lives in the San Francisco Bay Area with her college sweetheart, two young daughters, and two cats.

Gennie is a co-author of the book GO PLAY: How Parents Can Empower Kids to Build Their Own Worlds, published by Broadleaf Books in Spring 2026.

Ruth V. Guirguis, EdD

Dr. Ruth Guirguis (she/her/ella) is a professor in the Teacher Education Department at BMCC/CUNY and President of the Association for the Study of Play (TASP). Her research, published articles, and books focus primarily on the relationship between self-regulation and play, as well as pedagogical practices that support students in higher education.

Jackson R. Ham, PhD

Jackson Ham, PhD is a neuroscientist who earned their from the University of Lethbridge. Their research explores play behaviour across a wide range of species, with a particular focus on the neurobiology of play and its functional and developmental consequences. Through this work, they aim to uncover how play

Return to Table of Contents

shapes brain function, social behaviour, and development. Dr. Ham is currently a post-doctoral research fellow with the Alzheimer Society of Canada.

Myae Han, PhD

Myae Han, PhD, is a professor in the Department of Human Development and Family Sciences at the University of Delaware, a past president of The Association for the Study of Play (TASP), and a past chair of the Early Education and Child Development SIG at the American Educational Research Association (AERA). She is a coeditor of Play & Culture Studies, Vol. 15, Play and Curriculum, and V. 16, Play and Literacy. Her research includes play-based intervention, early language and literacy development, and professional development of early childhood teachers.

Callie Hendricks, BS

Callie Hendricks was a UNCW undergraduate student in the Environmental Science department. Her research is centered around K-12 watershed education. She graduated in May of 2026, with a B.S. in Environmental Science with a concentration in conservation.

Celia Hogan, Nature Education Specialist

Celia Hogan, Diploma in Outdoor Education, is a passionate advocate for outdoor learning, nature play, and child wellbeing from Aotearoa New Zealand. She founded *Little Kiwis Nature Play*, co-chairs *Education Outdoors New Zealand (EONZ)*, and is an ambassador for *Smartphone Free Childhood NZ*. With a background in outdoor education, bush kindy facilitation, and parent education, Celia works across early childhood, primary, and adult sectors to strengthen connections between people, place, and practice.

Through her work with children, parents, and educators, Celia champions the right to play as a cornerstone of healthy development. Her mahi focuses on helping families and schools rediscover the power of unstructured, nature-based play and reducing the impact of screens on childhood. She combines current research in brain development with real-world practice to inspire more playful, connected, and resilient communities.

Danielle Hunter, EdD

Danielle Hunter, EdD, is an ECE professional with 17 years of experience in Early Childhood Education. During her career, Danielle has served as a teacher, assistant director, director, and most recently, Director of Education for a large, multi-state childcare company. In this role, Danielle has led curriculum

Return to Table of Contents

initiatives, developed educator training programs, and provided support to leaders and teachers at various levels.

Danielle holds a Doctorate in Early Childhood Education from National University, a Master's in Elementary Education from the University of St. Joseph's, and a Bachelor's in Communication Disorders from SCSU.

Danielle is most passionate about elevating the value of early childhood education and the extremely important role that these teachers play in shaping young children for a lifetime. She strongly believes in the power of high-quality teaching in these early years and advocates for developmentally appropriate classroom practices driven by what is best for young children, not outside pressures.

In addition to her work as an educator, Danielle is a mom of two and lives in Connecticut with her husband and their five dogs.

Opeoluwa Ihediohia, MEd, BEd

Opeoluwa Ihediohia is a Lagos-based preschool educator and early-years instructor with an M.Ed. in Early Childhood Education and a B.Ed. in Education Economics from the University of Lagos. Since 2016, she has worked at Grace Schools, where she designs engaging, child-centered learning experiences that build foundational academic, social, creative, and developmental skills. Her practice emphasizes safe and stimulating classroom environments, play-based learning, observation of individual learner needs, and strong support for children’s holistic development.

Return to Table of Contents

J - K

Mark Jackson | Denisha Jones | Lucinda Jones | Dinah Awino Kawino | April Kendrick
Fiona Kirkland | Richard A. Kissel | Stephanie Kuntz-McAllister

Mark Jackson, BS Criminal Justice

Driven criminal justice student, focusing on crime and criminal behavior. Committed, I want legal knowledge to support marginalized communities, promote fairness in legal processes, and advocate for community-based solutions to injustice. As I work toward becoming a paralegal, I want to start with what matters to me personally: "It takes a village to raise a child," which is one thing that led me to where I stand now.

Denisha Jones, PhD, JD

Denisha Jones, PhD, JD (she/her/ella), is the Executive Director of Defending the Early Years and an adjunct professor at Sarah Lawrence College and Howard University. Her research interests include organizing activist research projects that examine grassroots movements to achieve racial justice in education, documenting the value of play as a tool for liberation with an emphasis on global approaches to play, and collaborating with parents and educators to foster positive racial, ethnic, and cultural identity development in the early years. Her first co-edited book, *Black Lives Matter at School: An Uprising for Educational Justice*, was published in December 2020 by Haymarket Books. Denisha is a highly sought-after keynote speaker, educator, and consultant. For more information on her workshops and courses, visit D Jones Consultant | Joyful Teaching & Liberated Learning.

Lucinda Jones, Early Interventionist and Key Worker

Lucinda Jones is an enthusiastic and passionate Key Worker, Early Interventionist and Sector Capacity Building Project Officer at Bathurst Early Childhood Intervention Service (BECIS) in regional NSW. Graduating with a Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood- Special Education) from CSU Bathurst in 2001, Lucinda has over 25 years of experience across a diverse range of Early Childhood Services and Tertiary Education before taking on her multifaceted role at BECIS. Often described by her peers as a passionate and persuasive Early Childhood Professional, all aspects of Lucinda's work are driven by a dedication to play advocacy for children, especially those with developmental concerns, delays, or disabilities, their families, and community. Embedded in this passion is her advocacy for play rooted in connection, nature, loose parts, real-world resources, practicality, and unhurriedness. Lucinda's role within BECIS gives her the opportunity to advocate that play is an essential element in a child's early intervention journey. She is committed to empowering all stakeholders to

Return to Table of Contents

recognise that each child's play is as diverse, individual, joyful, and amazing as the child. Lucinda does this through direct key worker involvement with children and their families, as well as building the capacity of current and emerging Early Childhood Professionals within her community. In 2024, Lucinda undertook the Certificate in Playwork Practice (Foundation) with Play Australia. This solidified Lucinda's certainty that Early Interventionists play a vital role in promoting and advocating for children with developmental concerns, delays, and disabilities to flourish when interventions are provided through play. Lucinda thrives in sharing her passions in Early Childhood and has the ability to deliver with enthusiasm, excitement, and practicality, all with a splash of humour. She avidly advocates from the heart, promoting that play must be accessible, inclusive and equitable, with diversity in play celebrated. It is important for Lucinda to inspire peers to prioritise, promote and celebrate play as the most successful early intervention approach for each child.

Dinah Awino Kawino, BS in Environmental Education

Dinah Awino Kawino, BS in Environmental Education, is the founder of AkadiEco & Mentorship Ventures, a passionate Environmentalist & Green Transitions consultant. Her work focuses on nature-based connections; she knows eco-disconnection from her own lived experience, so she empowers both child-led play and adult re-pursuing of eco-agency, nurturing socio-ecological belonging, eco-empathy, and authentic environmental identity. Through her program Pendo Mazingira, Dinah partners with teachers and schools in Kenya to embed low-cost, culturally grounded nature play into everyday learning spaces.

April Kendrick, PhD, The University of Alabama, Alabama Infant Toddler Specialist Network

April Kendrick, PhD is an associate professor in the College of Human Environmental Sciences and Director of Child Development Resources at The University of Alabama, which is an agency primarily funded through multiple grants serving the following primary areas: Training early childhood teachers; providing Parent Services; developing a statewide Infant Toddler Specialist Network; and Infant Early Childhood Mental Health. April has a BS in Early Child Development, a Master's in Human Development and Family Studies, and a PhD in Developmental Psychology, all from The University of Alabama. She has taught in the Human Development and Psychology departments, focusing mainly on *early childhood development*. Dr. Kendrick also has over 25 years of experience in early childhood, including teaching and directing large child development programs (state-licensed, NAEYC University Lab Schools) and supporting diverse programs. Her research interests include children's play behaviors, infant and early childhood mental health, and kindergarten readiness.

Return to Table of Contents

Fiona Kirkland, MEd, Play Scotland, Leading for Play

Fiona Kirkland, MEd is the Play Pedagogy Programme Lead at Play Scotland, the national organisation for children's play in Scotland. She co-developed and leads the Play Pedagogy Award, a national framework that supports schools to embed play-based learning across primary education. Fiona also co-authored the SQA Level 8 Pedagogy of Play qualification and delivers professional learning focused on play pedagogy, children's rights, and educational change. With a background in early years and primary education, she has worked with diverse communities across Scotland and contributes to national projects on play sufficiency, place-based learning, and curriculum reform. Fiona regularly shares her work at national and international conferences, including presenting at the IPA World Conference in Glasgow (2023). She holds a BA in Childhood Practice and is completing an MEd in Early Years Pedagogy at the University of Strathclyde. Her work is grounded in practice but driven by a commitment to educational equity, children's rights, and system-level change.

Richard A. Kissel, PhD, Chief Program Officer, The DoSeum

Chief Program Officer
The DoSeum
210.572.0606
rkissel@thedoseum.org

With 30 years of experience in the museum field, Dr. Richard Kissel is the Chief Program Officer at The DoSeum, where he oversees guest experience, educational programming, and special events for San Antonio's only museum dedicated to early learners. He also serves as an instructor and course developer for the online Museum Studies graduate program at Johns Hopkins University. Before his current work, Richard served in leadership and education-based roles at Yale's Peabody Museum; the Paleontological Research Institution in Ithaca, New York; and Chicago's Field Museum. Richard holds an MS in Geosciences from Texas Tech University and a PhD in Ecology and Evolutionary Biology from the University of Toronto.

Stephanie Kuntz-McAllister, PhD

Stephanie Kuntz-McAllister, PhD, holds a degree in Human Development and Family Sciences from the University of Delaware. She holds an M.S. and B.S. in Child Development from the University of La Verne. Stephanie has worked at NAEYC-accredited Child Development Centers. She has also worked as an Early Intervention Home Visitor, using parent coaching to support children ages 0-3 with developmental delays or at high risk of developing them, and their families. Her research aims to help promote positive outcomes and resilience in young

Return to Table of Contents

children with disabilities and their families. As a practitioner, Stephanie supported parents in utilizing the power of play to support their children with disabilities. As a researcher, she explores play as a source of resilience for children with disabilities and their families. As a course instructor, she integrates playful approaches to teaching and curriculum design for her undergraduate students to help empower them as advocates for play.

Return to Table of Contents

L - M

Anne Lamont | Debra Lawrence | Kyler P. Leiter | Christine Jie Li | Eugenia Lin | Xiang-Ru Lin
Abby Loebenberg | Miriam McCaleb | Jonathan McCloud | Emma Melo | Sarah Jayne Meyer | Lin Moore

Anne Lamont, MEdSt

Anne Lamont is an experienced education leader with more than 35 years in South Australian public education, recognised for building collaborative cultures, developing leadership capability, and improving outcomes for children and young people.

Since 2018, Anne has been Education Director of the Felixstow 3 Portfolio, which includes preschool, primary and secondary schools. In this role, they provide strategic leadership and coaching to school and preschool leaders, fosters innovation, and strengthen collective capacity across diverse educational contexts.

A hallmark of Anne's leadership has been cultivating a culture of trust and professional learning through structures such as the "Leaders Sharing Practice" program, enabling leaders to reflect openly on their challenges and successes. Key initiatives have included leading the Time2Play project to expand opportunities for unstructured play, with measurable benefits for student wellbeing, creativity, and social development. Anne has also co-designed targeted action projects to strengthen sustained student achievement in literacy and numeracy.

Previously, Anne was Principal of Stradbroke School (2008–2017), successfully leading the amalgamation of the junior primary and primary schools and strengthening delivery of the International Baccalaureate Primary and Middle Years Programmes. Earlier roles included principalships at Wynn Vale Junior Primary School and Terowie Rural School, as well as curriculum and leadership positions at district and state levels. Anne's work is guided by a belief that even the most complex challenges can drive creativity, collaboration, and positive transformation for both learners and leaders.

Debra Lawrence, PhD in Early Childhood, M.A. in Early Childhood, Professor, Delaware County Community College

Debra L. Lawrence has over 48 years of experience in early care and education.

She has presented workshops and seminars at international, national, state, and local levels. Debra's leadership positions include Colorado AEYC President, Governor-Appointed Early Childhood School Readiness Legislative Committee member, and NAEYC Governing Board Member. She is currently the President of

Return to Table of Contents

the American Association for the Child's Right to Play, the International Play Association's USA affiliate.

She is the author of *How Public Investment Contributes to High-Quality Early Childhood Programs, Lessons from Pennsylvania,* and contributed to *Learning from Head Start*. In addition, she has a chapter on Bronfenbrenner and Play in the publication *Scholarly Snapshots*. She has two articles in the IPA USA White Paper. She is the recipient of numerous awards. She recently received the National Association for the Education of Young Children Ed Klugman Lifetime Achievement Award as an Advocate for Play and the Delaware County Community College President's Award for Excellence.

Debra holds a bachelor's degree in social research, social structure, and social change, a master's degree in early childhood education, and a Ph.D. in Early Childhood Education.

Her research interests include curriculum and environments that strengthen learning dispositions, play as the foundation of all curricula, and positive and supportive environments that foster children's ability to reach their potential.

Kyler P. Leiter, PhD, Equity, Inclusion, and Trauma-Informed Committee Chair

Dr. Kyler Leiter is a passionate early childhood scholar and educator with over 10 years of experience in public education. In addition to teaching pre-K, he teaches play courses at Mount St. Mary's University, where he serves on the ECE Advisory Board. He also chairs IPA's Equity, Inclusion, and Trauma-Informed Committee and is committed to advancing innovative research, developing play-based curricula, and mentoring future educators for diverse and equitable early childhood settings. His research interests include international perspectives within early childhood education, play-based pedagogies, redefining the professionalism of ECE educators, and examining gender differences within play schemas.

Christine Jie Li, PhD

Dr. Christine Li works at the University of North Carolina Wilmington as an Assistant Professor in Environmental Education and Outreach. She earned her B.S. in Environmental Science, her M.Ed in Environmental Education from University of Minnesota Duluth, and her Ph.D. from the School of Forest, Fisheries, & Geomatics Sciences with a graduate minor Research and Evaluation Methodology from the College of Education at the University of Florida. Dr. Li's has experience as a science teacher in K-12 settings, nature centers, and colleges. Her research aims to assess the needs and effectiveness of EE programs involving

Return to Table of Contents

youth and adults from underserved communities and understanding factors in participation. She utilized public deliberation and curriculum development to support educators on environmental issues such as climate change. She is a member of the North American Association for Environmental Education, an organization that supporting educators and all citizens with cutting-edge education resources, programming and civic engagement. She enjoys hiking with her dog, traveling, crabbing with her family, and baking

Eugenia Lin

eugenialin806@gmail.com

With ten years of experience in online content planning and editing, Eugenia Lin is an advocate for children's right to play and a mother of two. She hopes every child can easily find play spaces that fit their physical and emotional needs, so that play becomes part of everyday life. She believes play is the foundation of growth. Through play, children can challenge themselves, express their preferences, and develop confidence, courage, and creativity. This "power that no one can take away" is the driving force behind her work.

Xiang-Ru Lin, LLB

Xiang-Ru Lin majored in law during her undergraduate and graduate studies, originally aspiring to pursue a career in the legal field, but took a significant turn after having children. Recognizing that Taiwanese society has limited understanding of children's right to play and children's right to expression, she became involved in advocacy work with the Taiwan Alliance for Children's Right to Play. She hopes to influence more adults to appreciate children's play, listen to children's voices, and protect children's right to play.

Abby Loebenberg, PhD

Abby Loebenberg, PhD, is an Honors Faculty Fellow and Teaching Professor at Barrett, the Honors College at Arizona State University. She holds a PhD in Social and Cultural Anthropology and an MPhil in Material Anthropology and Museum Ethnography from the University of Oxford. She received her B.Arch from the University of Cape Town. As a scholar, she studies play and games and has published in peer-reviewed journals, contributed book chapters, and presented at conferences. As a teacher who integrates an interdisciplinary approach to the study of material and visual cultures, her special interests are play, games, and design.

Return to Table of Contents

Miriam McCaleb, PhD

Miriam McCaleb, PhD, is an award-winning researcher whose most recent project examined how best to support healthy smartphone habits for new mums during the transition to parenthood. This is important for prioritising the parent-infant connection, and therefore optimising child development.

Dr. McCaleb is a former kindergarten teacher who taught adults at Tennessee Tech University and the Christchurch College of Education in New Zealand. She has worked with parents, Police, and prisoners. She writes for various parenting magazines, is a founding member of the Brainwave Trust, and she sporadically blogs at baby.geek.nz.

As a presenter, highlights have been the International Neurosequential Model Symposium in Canada and the World Association for Infant Mental Health (WAIMH) in Dublin in 2023. That opportunity led to her ongoing involvement with the Global Digital Alliance, where she works within WAIMH to support education on distracted caregiving and digital childhoods.

Dr. McCaleb is the mother of two great girls; she believes RELATIONSHIPS & PLAY are vital life forces like oxygen or water, and she makes a mean courgette relish.

Jonathan McCloud, PhD

Jonathan McCloud is an Assistant Professor of Education at Roanoke College. He received his PhD in Curriculum & Instruction, with an emphasis in Educational Psychology, from Virginia Tech in 2015. His research and teaching have included peer observation of teaching in higher education, the pedagogy of play, and the relationship between play and health and well-being. Jonathan's scholarly pursuits are linked by respect and care for the individual, and he is most interested in how democratic structures and agentive practices foster play. Jonathan's work with pre-service and professional educators focuses on reflecting on underlying assumptions about the teacher/adult role in the educational environment. Jonathan is a former classical guitarist and enjoys learning about Mister Rogers, cooking, and gardening. He also likes sunshine on his shoulders.

Emma Melo, BA

Emma has a BA in English, Theater, and Dance and is the Program Coordinator at Highland Presbyterian Nursery and Weekday School in Louisville, Kentucky. She helps with curriculum development, professional development, play and learning facilitation, environments and materials, and teaches art. She is also a faculty member and adult student at the Louisville Ballet School. Emma

Return to Table of Contents

believes wholeheartedly in the Reggio Emilia concept of the Hundred Languages of Children and that children express themselves through many modalities. She believes good teaching starts with good listening. As Early Childhood Educators, we strive to be close observers and interpreters of children's play, theories, ideas, questions, challenges, interests, growth, and development, and to respond in ways that expand, support, and continue that growth trajectory. As educators, we challenge ourselves to be curious learners alongside the children, with the responsibility to help them make meaning and understanding out of their work and play. Emma is a fierce advocate for childhood and that children have the right to have this short and special time in their lives preserved for growth through play, wonder, belonging, and joyful learning. She calls Highland Pres. "The Magical Place" and keeps a personal motto for what she does for a living: "The Art of Play." Emma prefers to be outdoors whenever possible.

Sarah Jayne Meyer, MSc

Sarah Jayne Meyer, MSc, holds a Psychology degree from the Open University and is currently pursuing an MSc in Psychological Research Methods at the University of Stirling. Her academic and professional interests centre around play, children's rights, and disability inclusion.

With over five years of experience in specialist education, Sarah's background also includes roles as a play and forest school assistant, as well as a previous career in marketing. A passionate advocate for free and adventurous play, she brings both professional insight and personal commitment as a mother to her work. She is currently developing a PhD proposal exploring the experiences of disabled and neurodivergent children in adventurous play settings.

Lin Moore, PhD

Professor of Early Childhood Education
Texas Woman's University
lmoore@twu.edu

Dr. Lin Moore is a Professor of Early Childhood Education at Texas Woman's University. She teaches courses in early childhood curriculum, play, action research, and leadership. Research interests include perceptions of play, parental engagement, English language learners, and mentoring programs. She edited an Early Childhood Education monograph, authored 35 articles/technical reports, and presented 100+ conference workshops. Recently, Dr. Moore co-authored a textbook for adoption by community colleges. Awards include Texas Teacher Educator of the Year, Who's Who Among America's Teachers, and Senior Fellow, Advanced Higher Education.

Return to Table of Contents

N - Q

Angie Nastovska | Chris Navarro | Ananta Hari Noorsasetya | Ju-Pi Pan | Sharon M. Peck Hans Petersen | Michele Hemenway Pullen | Veronica Purwaningsih | Suzanne Quinn

Angie Nastovska, PhD, iLEAD California

Angie Jasna Nastovska, PhD, is a globally minded educator and academic leader with over 20 years of experience in curriculum design, instructional innovation, and educational leadership. She serves as Director of Curriculum and Assessment with the iLEAD Schools Network, is an adjunct professor at United States University, and leads workshops for the IB Programs.

Angie holds a PhD in Educational Leadership and has led national and international initiatives in project-based learning, competency-based education, authentic assessment, and social-emotional learning. Her work includes collaborations with IB Global, MIT, Penn State, and the Deeper Learning Leadership Forum, as well as partnerships to redesign PBL and portfolio-based learning. Angie is a published author on the IB Career-related Programme Core and is deeply committed to learner-centered, globally connected education.

Chris Navarro, MA

Director, School & Community Programs
The DoSeum
210.572.0655
cnavarro@thedoseum.org

Chris has 30 years of experience as a community educator – teaching K-12 theatre arts, ELAR, and digital communication and coordinating informal education programs. He is a Fellow in the Association of Science and Technical Centers' Diversity and Leadership Development Fellowship, a graduate of the National Association of Latino Arts and Culture Leadership Institute, and a Teacher Consultant for the National Writing Project. He directs The DoSeum outreach programming, including partnerships with schools, colleges/ universities, and community organizations. He directs the design of educational content, drawing on training from the Engineering is Elementary Teacher Educator Institute, Thinking & Learning in the Maker Centered Classroom from Harvard Graduate School of Education, and Visual

Return to Table of Contents

Ananta Hari Noorsasetya, PhD

Institut Seni Indonesia Yogyakarta
Doctor's Degree, Art Creation
LinkedIn Profile

Ananta Hari Noorsasetya, PhD is an experimental artist and academic focused on toy-inspired design using upcycled materials. Currently, he is a lecturer at the Faculty of Design and Creative Art at Mercu Buana University, Jakarta, Indonesia, and a Research Associate at the Industrial Heritage Museum (MUJI)

Education:

- Indonesian Art Institute (ISI Yogyakarta): Doctorate in Art Creation & Assessment, 2024
- Mercu Buana University, Jakarta: Masters in Communication, 2014
- Indonesian Art Institute (ISI Yogyakarta): Bachelor of Arts, 2007

Experience:

- Lecturer of design and creative arts
- Art Director for Wayang (Traditional Puppet Museum)
- Photographer for Antara News Agency

Ju-Pi Pan, Play Taiwan

rubypan@ppfcc.org

Ju-Pi Pan is currently serving as Secretary General of Taiwan Parks and Playgrounds for Children by Children. She is a children's play rights advocate with ten years of experience in teaching and implementing the Convention on the Rights of the Child. She focuses on child-friendly environment design, participates in and supervises the transformation of public space playgrounds, promotes national play policies, provides educational training to cultivate professional advocates, and is committed to realizing children's right to play and right to expression.

Return to Table of Contents

Sharon M. Peck, PhD

1 College Circle, Geneseo, NY 14454
(585) 729-4326
peck@geneseo.edu
X Profile: @puppeteller
LinkedIn Profile

Sharon M. Peck, PhD., is an Associate Professor of Literacy at the State University of New York at Geneseo School of Education. She provides undergraduate and graduate instruction, runs an urban literacy clinic, and studies play. As a play advocate, Sharon works with regional agencies to support children's access to play at home and at school. She is a teaching artist, puppeteer, balloon twister, and clown. Her interests relate to playful literacy pedagogy, language arts applications, urban literacy instruction, and place-based pedagogies.

Hans Petersen, MSE

Hans Petersen MSE (he/him) is the Regional Child Care Administrator for the Jefferson Region of Child Care Aware of Kentucky, a role he has held since May 2021 after three years as the region's Training Coach.

He holds a Master's Degree in Interdisciplinary Early Childhood/Special Education from the University of Louisville and has been in the field of early childhood education for nearly 30 years, working in child care center-based as well as public and independent school early care and education settings in the roles of lead and assistant preschool teacher, Spanish instructor, ESL teacher, assistant director, and curriculum specialist. He currently co-facilitates the Defending the Early Years Kentucky Area Working Group with his wife, Michele Pullen.

Michele Hemenway Pullen

Michele Hemenway Pullen is an educator with over 40 years of teaching experience. She has worked in justice and liberation curriculum writing for over 25 years, leading workshops with parents, teachers, and youth programming providers nationwide. She holds university degrees in **Psychology and Counseling,** as well as **Learning and Behavior Disorders**.

Specialized Pedagogy: She has extensive, formalized background training in **Waldorf Education** and **Early Childhood Education**

Return to Table of Contents

Professional Certifications: She is a **Certified All Kinds of Minds evaluator**, a framework specialized in understanding variation in human learning to support neurodivergent students.

She teaches at the University of Louisville College of Education and Human Development. She is a project specialist for the Early Childhood Research Center, developing and implementing Early Childhood Professional Development and Student Teacher Supervision and Support. To read about her work, visit Exchange Press, where she's published. She is currently co-facilitating the Defending the Early Years Kentucky Area Working Group with her husband, Hans Petersen.

Veronica Purwaningsih, LLB

Veronica Purwaningsih, LLB is a lawyer who advocates for children's rights, drawing on two decades of experience empowering women and children across remote areas in Indonesia. She is currently based in Papua to support the development of civil society organisations focusing on women.

Education:

Faculty of Law, Gadjah Mada University, 1997: Bachelor of Law
Licensed Advocate of Peradi Indonesia

Experience:

- Facilitator of gender training for various civil society organizations
- Recovery and assistance for juvenile offenders
  - Assistance program for female laborers.

Suzanne Quinn, PhD, KOMPAN Play Institute

Suzanne Flannery Quinn, PhD (Syracuse University, USA), is the manager of KOMPAN Play Institute, Americas. In this role, Suzanne researches child development, focusing on how children and families use playgrounds. This research helps playground designers and playground owners to create exciting playgrounds that are thrilling for children of all abilities to play together in a common space, with sustainable materials in naturalized environments. Suzanne has a background in research and teaching at universities in the US and the UK, and is the author of a catalogue of peer-reviewed empirical research and theory in human development.

Return to Table of Contents

R - S

Angela Rekers | Deborah J Rhea | Sierra Roussos | Alissa Rupp | Beth Saile | Deborah Schein | Sara Scott
Ridhi Sethi | Autumn E. Smith | Brian A. Stone | Bengi Sullu | Anna Sutanto | Evanthia Synodi

Angela Rekers, PhD

Angela Rekers, PhD, is an Associate Professor in the School of Education at St. Ambrose University, Davenport, Iowa, USA. She teaches in the Early Childhood Education/Special Education teacher preparation program. She is the Curriculum Lead for the Early Childhood Education with Special Education Endorsement teacher licensure program. A dual citizen, Angela spent 30 years in Wales, where she worked in outdoor education and play as a forest school leader and Level 4 trainer. She holds an MSc in Environmental Education for Sustainability and a PhD in Education and Communities with a focus on early childhood development, both in the classroom and at forest school.

Previously, Angela spent 20 years working for a non-profit organization in Wales, UK, delivering Forest School and outdoor learning and play training for teachers, playworkers, youth workers, and conservation staff. She also delivered sessions for people of all ages and abilities, including schools, refugee groups, women's shelters, families, and children with additional needs. Her expertise and publications focus on play, children's behavioral challenges/competencies, adult-child-environment interactions, and intra-activity. Angela has spoken on outdoor play at conferences, including The Children and Nature Network, Natural Start, American Education Research Association, British Education Research Association, European Early Childhood Education Research Association, and the University of Iowa Scanlon Center for School Mental Health BEST Summit.

Deborah J Rhea, EdD, LiiNK Project Director, Professor, Kinesiology, Texas Christian University

Project Creator & Director

Dr. Debbie Rhea, EdD, is a full professor in Kinesiology and Associate Dean of Research and Health Sciences in HCNHS at Texas Christian University. She prepares K-12 physical education teachers and is fully invested in her newest research called LiiNK (Let's Inspire Innovation 'N kids), which examines whole-child development through the addition of unstructured, outdoor play breaks and character development in the school day. Rhea has received national media attention for LiiNK from outlets such as The Today Show, The Washington Post, and NBC Nightly News. She has published in numerous journals and presented professionally on many different topics related to living a healthy and productive life. Rhea has received the Healthcare Hero award from the Dallas Business Journal and the Fort Worth Business Press for her research to create intrinsically

Return to Table of Contents

motivated, active, healthy children. A Dallas native, Rhea graduated from Dallas Public Schools, the University of Texas at Arlington, and the University of Houston. Go to the LiiNK Center for Healthy Play for more information.

Sierra Roussos, MAE

Sierra Roussos, MAE (she/her), is a dedicated leader and educator known for fostering collaboration and building community capacity. As an early childhood educator, she advocates for children's rights and equity. She is devoted to ensuring all children have access to caring, child-centered, and child-led early learning environments that honor their autonomy and right to play, and works to extend evidence-based, student-centered, developmentally appropriate practice across all educational settings. Committed to continuous learning, she pursues opportunities for her own professional and personal growth while supporting the ongoing development of those she mentors. Sierra is currently pursuing a Doctorate of Education in Organizational Leadership at Marian University. She is excited to use her leadership skills as the Volunteer Research Coordinator for DEY to support the reach and impact of the DEY Advocacy Campaign.

Alissa Rupp, FAIA, NCARB, LEED AP

Founder and Principal, FRAME | Integrative Design Strategies
M. Arch, University of Washington, 1996
BA, Vassar College, 1989
+1.206.234.7217
Alissa@FrameDesignStrategies.com

FRAME founder Alissa Rupp is a recognized leader in designing places for community building, informal education, and lifelong learning. She works with the conviction that we can improve public life through the serious work of creating spaces where art, nature, culture and play intersect. Her wide definition of "client" includes an organization's staff, visitors, stakeholders, volunteers, collections, and even the flora and fauna of the project site.

Alissa's early career was forged in children's museums; her staff roles at the Boston and Seattle Children's Museums led her to pursue architecture and exhibit design so she could collaborate with many museums on significant projects. Since then, she has worked across the US and around the world, serving Informal Education and Playful Learning through design, strategic planning, and thoughtfully executed projects.

Career highlights include award-winning design and planning work on projects serving over 20 million people annually, including museums, gardens, visitor centers, aquaria, and children's facilities. Many of those projects are credited to

Return to Table of Contents

her and the interdisciplinary team at The Portico Group, the Seattle firm where she spent 21 years and eventually served as CEO and President.

Alissa is the Co-founder of Design for Early Learning, encouraging design professionals and educators to collaborate on beautiful, joyful, and inspiring spaces for our world's youngest citizens. She enjoys presenting at national and international conferences on a wide array of topics, such as Effective Design and Planning for Cultural Institutions, Inclusive Design Strategies, Risk and Childhood in Design, and the Care and Feeding of Project Teams. She is a guest lecturer (2026) at the University of Washington, Department of Museology.

Beth Saile, MS

Beth Saile is completing her M.S. in Environmental Education and GIS Certificate at the University of North Carolina Wilmington (Dec 2025). Her graduate work focuses on place-based learning, including developing local environmental science lessons for upper elementary students and a teacher focus group study exploring classroom implementation. A lifelong nature enthusiast, Beth enjoys hiking, reading, and spending time with her daughter, Luna, and their five cats.

Second bio submitted: Beth Saile is completing her M.S. in Environmental Education and GIS Certificate at the University of North Carolina Wilmington (Dec 2025). Her graduate work focuses on place-based learning, including developing local environmental science lessons for upper elementary students and a teacher focus group study exploring classroom implementation. A lifelong nature enthusiast, Beth enjoys hiking, reading, and spending time with her daughter, Luna, and their five cats.

Deborah Schein, PhD

Deb has been an early childhood educator since 1972 and earned her PhD in ECE, with a focus on spiritual development, in 2012. She has taught at several colleges, most recently at Champlain College, where she taught the play-based Master of Education program. She founded Growing Wonder, which supports ongoing research, dialogue, and activities around spiritual development, nature, play, peace, and well-being. Deb has written two books on spirituality and is currently an editor for Soul to Soul, a journal for practitioners and researchers interested in all aspects of children's spirituality. She also founded a rock garden at Bass Lake in Saint Louis Park and co-founded the Loose Parts Laboratory of Minnesota, where materials are saved from landfills and made available for artists, educators, and tray-scapes for seniors.

Return to Table of Contents

Sara Scott, BEd

Sara is a highly experienced and respected education leader with over 30 years of experience across the UK and Australia. She holds a Bachelor of Education (Hons) from Goldsmiths College, University of London, and has held leadership roles ranging from classroom teacher to principal and system-level education lead.

Currently serving as **Education Lead, Schools** at the Felixstow Education Office in Adelaide, South Australia, she supports school leaders through coaching, strategic collaboration, and system-wide professional learning. Her work focuses on improving student educational outcomes through inclusive practices, culturally responsive leadership, and evidence-informed improvement planning.

As **Principal of Ridgehaven Primary School and Preschool** (2021–2023), she led significant improvements in student wellbeing, inclusive education, leadership development, and community engagement. Before that, she was **Deputy Principal at Stradbroke School**, leading literacy, inclusive education, and teacher development initiatives.

Sara is known for her collaborative, thoughtful, and resilient leadership style. She has a strong record of building others' capacity, fostering shared learning, and aligning system priorities with local school needs to drive meaningful change.

Ridhi Sethi, PhD Human Development, MSc Child Development, MEd

Ridhi Sethi, PhD, has over twenty years of experience in human development, research, early care, and education. She works as a guest faculty member at the School of Vocational Studies at B.R. Ambedkar University. Before that, she worked as an assistant professor in the Department of Human Development and Childhood Studies at Lady Irwin College, New Delhi, India. She advocates for play and safe daycares for children and supports parents. She has researched in the I.T. industry for eight years and has advised organizations and industry bodies on helping parents at work. She founded an early childhood network called Child Care for All and runs a website that shares the latest early childhood research. She advocates for child care support for working parents, and as a needs assessment specialist, she has shown expertise in assessing employees' child care needs and recommending on-site child care programs. She is committed to translating her research for the public through articles, blog posts, and commentaries featured in outlets such as People Matters. She has been a consultant to Sesame Workshop India on programmes for children.

Return to Table of Contents

She is trained at the Centre of Developing Child at Harvard University and is currently part of many international ECCE networks such as ARNEC and ECDAN. She has disseminated her work at several national and international conferences organized by several prominent institutions such as the London School of Economics and Political Science, ISSA, International Play Organization, NASSCOM, and CII. She is currently a member of the Assocham National Task Force on Early Childhood Education. She has conceptualized and conducted many research projects in early childhood. She has also researched preschool materials and ECCE teacher training available in India.

Autumn E. Smith, MEd, Louisiana State University

Lead Teacher
Pathways Trainer
asmi435@lsu.edu

Throughout college, I have spent the summers working at camps. I have worked at Camp Dynamics, a specialized camp for children with learning, communication, and behavioral differences, and at Tiger's Den, a summer camp held at the LSU UREC. I have also interned in pre-K and third-grade classrooms and was a student teacher in kindergarten and second-grade classrooms. In my spare time, I enjoy reading, baking, taking my dog on bike rides, going to LSU football games, and spending time with my friends and family. I believe the teacher's most important role is to give each student the tools and techniques needed to become a critical thinker and an effective agent of change in their society. Every student can positively influence the world, and by developing analysis and problem-solving skills, expanding global awareness, and adopting a cooperative, inquiring attitude, students can achieve this goal and thrive beyond the classroom. Society cannot progress without well-educated, self-motivated individuals equipped with the research skills and the desire to improve humanity needed to facilitate change.

Brian A. Stone, EdD

Brian Stone, EdD, is an Assistant Professor at Northern Arizona University. He is the faculty lead for the Museum of Northern Arizona Partnership program at NAU. He received his doctorate in curriculum and instruction with a content concentration in science and math education. He also holds two master's degrees, one in elementary education and another in World War II studies. He teaches both undergraduate and graduate courses, including courses in the doctoral program. Dr. Stone specializes in science education, but also teaches methods courses in social studies, math, literacy, and assessment. While at NAU, Dr. Stone has led multiple study abroad trips all around the world to study multiage

Return to Table of Contents

education and integrated curriculum. He has taken students to New Zealand, Australia, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, and France. Dr. Stone also serves as the editor for the STEAM section of the *International Journal of the Whole Child*. He is a member of the editorial board for the Journal of Research in Childhood Education. He is a Play Ambassador and recurring Expert Contributor for the Genius of Play (a non-profit website devoted to play advocacy), which is a part of The Toy Association. Dr. Stone has many areas of expertise and interest, including scientific inquiry, play, integrated curriculum, and multiage education. Before teaching in higher education, Dr. Stone served as a 4th-, 5th-, and 6th-grade multiage teacher. He was the lead multiage teacher at his school and helped other multiage teachers implement multiage strategies in the classroom. He also works as an educational consultant, traveling across the United States and around the world to help schools implement multiage programs. Dr. Stone has authored many peer-reviewed journal articles and book chapters in the aforementioned areas.

Bengi Sullu, PhD

Bengi is a Lecturer in the Department of Social & Behavioral Sciences at Medgar Evers College, CUNY. She earned her PhD in Critical Social/Personality & Environmental Psychology from The Graduate Center of The City University of New York, with concentrations in Critical Theory and Qualitative Methods. Her dissertation focused on the advocacy for children's right to play in Turkey (where she is from). She has published in journals like Children's Geographies and Qualitative Psychology. Her broader research interests are at the intersection of social and environmental change and human development.

Anna Sutanto, MEM

Anna Sutanto, MEM believes that playing in nature strengthens commitment to nurturing sustainability. Using her background in sociology alongside environmental management and development, she is the program director of PlastikDetox, an environmental organization based in Bali, Indonesia, while developing SUCI, a study centre for the Industrial Heritage Museum (MUJI).

Education:

- Atma Jaya University of Yogyakarta, 2005: Bachelor of Social Sciences
- Australian National University, 2016, Masters of Environmental Management and Development

Experience:

- Trainer and facilitator of waste prevention
- Relationship manager for F&B sector
- Researcher on the topics of social identity and child laborers

Return to Table of Contents

Evanthia Synodi, PhD

Associate Professor of Comparative Early Childhood Education, Department of Preschool Education, University of Crete

Research Fields

- Teachers' Professionalism
- Initial Teacher Education
- Play
- Children's Rights
- Curricula for Early Childhood Education
- Gender and Education
- Oral Language in Kindergarten

Return to Table of Contents

T - V

Katie Talarico | Mugdha Thakurdesai | Wei-Shun Tseng | Belma Tuğrul
Tugce B. Arda Tuncdemir | Claire Underwood | Omar Vigo

Katie Talarico, MSEd

Katie Talarico, MSEd is a certified digital wellness educator, parent, former teacher, and Princeton University graduate. She is passionate about healthy child development and has been a member of the Screen Time Action Network since 2017. She created the Let's Grow Brain P.O.W.E.R. program for the preschool she taught in to provide a simple, memorable way to remind families of the wonderfully simple ways they already help their children thrive.

Mugdha Thakurdesai, MArch

Mugdha Thakurdesai, MArch, is a Design Principal at Education Design International. An architect and designer at heart, she is deeply committed to creating sustainable, safe, and inspiring spaces for children. Her professional journey spans multiple continents, giving her a **global perspective on the future of learning environments**. Mugdha is especially passionate about **human-centric, child-friendly design**, approaching each project as an opportunity to foster agency, creativity, and well-being in students. She views learning spaces as a **third teacher**—a silent but powerful influence on behavior, interaction, and growth. She believes schools should be more than buildings; they should be communities that reflect learners' aspirations and society's values.

Her work is rooted in **ongoing research into learning outcomes and educational efficiency**, which she translates into creative learning communities worldwide. By integrating insights from **pedagogical and psychological research** into spatial design, she has created environments that support holistic growth, with particular emphasis on **play-based learning**.

Mugdha also loves sharing her knowledge by writing about design and architecture, and has contributed to various platforms. Her work reflects the belief that well-designed spaces can **empower students, inspire teachers, and strengthen communities.**

Linkedin Profile

Publications/ Articles:

- Beyond Brick & Mortar: Building Adaptable and Innovative Learning Spaces
- Designing Safe Spaces: Learnings From The Past, Plan For The Future
- Extreme School Makeovers

Return to Table of Contents

Wei-Shun Tseng, OT, Play Taiwan

ofun.edu@gmail.com

An Occupational Therapist with nearly 20 years of clinical experience, currently working at Taipei Veterans General Hospital, focuses on interdisciplinary collaboration and providing holistic, client-centered care. His academic background combines expertise in both health education and clinical occupational therapy, enabling me to approach healthcare with a holistic and preventive perspective. In clinical work, he observed an increasing number of children with developmental delays and noticed that children are being exposed to mobile devices more frequently. so, play and playgrounds in daily life are extremely important and represent a vital area where occupational therapy and health promotion can come together in advocacy and action. As **Vice Chairperson of Taiwan Parks & Playgrounds for Children by Children** (2023 – Present). In this role, I collaborate with local governments and NGOs to promote inclusive, accessible, and child-friendly play spaces throughout Taiwan. And committed to making children's play spaces more diverse and challenging, protecting children's right to play, and advocating for their deserved playtime.

Belma Tuğrul, PhD, Istanbul Aydın University, Istanbul, Türkiye

A Leader Supporting Children's Right to Play

Prof. Dr. Belma Tuğrul is an educator who has pioneered significant efforts in defending children's right to play. With a broad vision in the fields of play and education, Through her academic research in the field of play, she has scientifically demonstrated the importance of play in child development, making valuable contributions to educational literature. Beyond defending children's right to play, she develops strategic approaches to enhance the applicability of this right. Her work highlights the critical role of play in children's cognitive, emotional, and social development, helping educators and parents become more aware and conscious of this issue.

During the pandemic, she founded the world's largest wall-less kindergarten, where teachers reached children through television, ensuring uninterrupted access to education. This innovative initiative not only contributes to the physical, mental, and emotional development of children but also provides a learning environment that fosters their sense of curiosity and desire to explore.

Her theses and projects in the field of play reflect her deep knowledge and passion. These studies provide essential data and strategies for advocating and promoting the right to play. Serving as a Play Consultant at the Ministry of National Education and UNICEF enables her to bring her expertise and

Return to Table of Contents

experience to a broader audience. Through these roles, she contributes to the shaping of educational policies and child rights programs to include the right to play, taking significant steps towards the recognition and implementation of this right at both national and international levels.

The Lifeline project, in particular, involves work with village teachers, contributing to improving the quality of education for children in rural areas.

Tugce B. Arda Tuncdemir, PhD

Dr. Tugce B. Arda Tuncdemir earned her Ph.D. in the Curriculum and Instruction Department, with an Early Childhood Education emphasis, at Penn State University.

Her research interests are play, creative drama, social-emotional learning, anti-bias education, culturally responsive pedagogy, ethics in early childhood, and teacher education, shared through presentations, book chapters, and journals. She has been awarded the PPPIF at NAEYC Walter F. Drew Emerging Play Scholar Award 2018 and is the 2022-2023 President of The Association for the Study of Play.

Claire Underwood, PhD

Claire Underwood is a PhD at the Univ. of Cincinnati's Arlitt Center for Education, Research, & Sustainability. She has worked in nonprofit leadership and community organizing for over a decade, focusing on environmental and social justice. Her current work focuses on land-based pedagogies in early childhood education.

Omar Vigo, PhD, Louisiana State University

ovigo1@lsu.edu

Omar Vigo, Ed.D. candidate, is a faculty member in the bilingual Early Childhood Education program at the Community College of Rhode Island and an adjunct Early Childhood Education Professor at Baton Rouge Community College.

Return to Table of Contents

W - Z

Jackie Wang | Jen Hsiu-Chuan Wang | Rebecca Wax | G. Kate Webb | Linnea Westerlind
Isaac Wetherley | Tivy Whitlock | Jessie Ming Sin Wong | Jill Wood | Sera Yöndem | Elaine Zweig

Jackie Wang, Play Taiwan

Jackie's career journey started as a tech journalist and e-commerce product manager. However, everything changed when she became a mom to twin boys. This new role opened her eyes to the lack of play spaces for children and a societal culture of overprotection in Taiwan.

This inspired her to become an advocate for children's right to play. She hopes to create a more child-friendly society with better play environments for the next generation. She's also the co-author of the book, *The Power of Park Play*.

Jen Hsiu-Chuan Wang, Play Taiwan

jenwang@ppfcc.org

Jen Hsiu-Chuan Wang is currently serving as Chairlady of **Taiwan Parks and Playgrounds for Children by Children**. She has extensive expertise in User Experience Research. Previously, she established experience metrics frameworks in enterprise environments and led researsch teams serving industry-leading companies across various sectors, helping companies create products and services that truly resonate with people. Currently, she is dedicated to introducing user-centered concepts to advocate for more play spaces for children. With substantial hands-on experience in child development and public policy, she has successfully transitioned from a technology industry researcher to a leading advocate for children's rights.

Rebecca Wax, BA

Rebecca Wax, BA, holds a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology from the University of Delaware and is currently pursuing a master's degree in Human Development and Family Sciences at the same institution. She works as a Registered Behavior Technician (RBT), supporting young children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Her interests focus on supporting individuals with ASD through developmental transitions, particularly in early adulthood, as well as the critical role of play in early childhood. Her current research explores the continuity and evolution of services and support systems for individuals with ASD as they transition into adulthood.

G. Kate Webb, PhD, Adjunct Professor, Texas Christian University

G. Kate Webb, PhD, is a lecturer of Kinesiology at Texas Christian University, a NASM performance enhancement coach, and a certified Life Science and Physical

Return to Table of Contents

Education teacher. Dr. Webb was an All-American heptathlete in college and is an Athletic Hall of Fame inductee in her hometown and at her alma mater, Tarleton State University. Dr. Webb spent her early career as a track and field coach and educator in Texas public schools, then transitioned into performance coaching and fitness. Dr. Webb's dissertation research highlights the importance of unstructured outdoor play in developing muscle strength, the use of unilateral, bilateral, and contralateral movements, and appropriate strength-testing measures needed to prevent injuries and increase future movement opportunities in children and adolescents. Dr. Webb has presented at conferences and published journal articles about her research.

Linnea Westerlind, MSocSc

Linnea Westerlind, MSocSc, is the author of *Discovering Seattle Parks: A Local's Guide* and the co-founder of the grassroots parent network Outdoor Childhood Puget Sound. As a volunteer with the King County Play Equity Coalition, she helped lead the successful statewide effort to mandate minimum recess time in Washington state in 2023. She serves on the board of her local YMCA branch and is an active PTA member. Linnea has a bachelor's degree in journalism/public relations from Western Washington University and a master's in development studies from Uppsala University in Sweden. A nonprofit communications consultant, she lives in Seattle with her family. LinkedIn profile (https://www.linkedin.com/in/linnea-westerlind/)

Isaac Wetherley, BS

Isaac is the Operations Manager at Educated by Nature, where he has been inspiring children, teenagers, and adults to connect with the natural world for the past eight years. Beginning his journey as a junior playworker, Isaac has developed a deep passion for outdoor education and fostering meaningful nature experiences.

Isaac holds a Bachelor of Science from the University of Western Australia, with a double major in Human Geography and Planning, and Geographical Sciences. His academic background complements his practical experience, providing a unique perspective on environmental education and sustainability.

In addition to his professional role, Isaac is an active volunteer with Scouts WA, serving as the Deputy Chief Commissioner Youth Support. His leadership in this capacity underscores his dedication to empowering young people through skills, adventure, and connection to the environment.

Isaac thrives in the outdoors, whether it's hiking the Bibbulmun Track, abseiling Bluff Knoll, or simply enjoying a weekend of camping under the stars.

Return to Table of Contents

Tivy Whitlock, PhD, Community Programs Educator, The Doseum

210.572.0628
twhitlock@thedoseum.org

Dr. Tivy is a creative and inspiring educator who brings three decades of experience in education, workforce and professional development, and technology to the DoSeum as the Community Programs Educator. She is a master certified trainer who works with school-age parents as young as 11 and grandparents raising young children. Her research focuses on learning through play, adult development, parent engagement, strengthening teacher-parent relationships, and empathic communication. She's dedicated to building community and helping individuals reach their fullest potential through critical connections that align with new ways we think, learn, and interact.

Jessie Ming Sin Wong, PhD

Jessie Wong, PhD, is a passionate advocate for children's rights and brings a global perspective to early childhood education. A leader in her field, she is the current Vice President of the World Organization for Early Childhood Education (OMEP)-Hong Kong. Dr. Wong is the Program Leader in Early Childhood Education at Hong Kong Metropolitan University (HKMU), where her research on development and education policy has been published in prestigious academic journals and recognized with grants from the Hong Kong Research Grant Council.

In recognition of her work, she received HKMU's Outstanding Research Publication Gold Award in 2023. She holds a PhD in Early Childhood Education Policy and a Master of Social Work (Distinction) from The University of Hong Kong, as well as a B.A. in Psychology with a Specialization in Computing from the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). She is also a Registered Social Worker in Hong Kong.

Jill Wood, MLIS

Jill Wood, MLIS founded and manages Adventure Play at The Parish School, in Houston, Texas, one of only a handful of adventure playgrounds in the United States staffed by trained playworkers, and the only one based at a school for children with communication delays and learning differences. She is founder of Bayou City Play, a group of playworkers, artists, and therapists who partner with organizations to improve play opportunities in the Houston metro area, and is regional consultant for nonprofit Pop-Up Adventure Play. She is also a school librarian committed to the idea that play environments and book shelves are best

Return to Table of Contents

when they have a lot of choices, make space for the full breadth of humanity, and no one is telling people exactly what to choose.

Sera Yöndem, MA, Istanbul Kent University, Istanbul, Türkiye

Sera Yöndem is a prominent Turkish educator, academic lecturer, and the LEGO® Education Academy Turkey Coordinator and Trainer. Born in Istanbul in 1983, she has become widely recognized for her pioneering work in preschool and primary education, with a particular focus on experiential "learning through play" models. Her career bridges theory and practice, with a focus on educational toy design, early STEM education, and AI literacy in early childhood classrooms.

Yöndem pursued her foundational higher education in early childhood and preschool education and eventually completed her Master of Arts (MA) in Education at İstanbul Aydın Üniversitesi. Early in her career, she discovered the profound impact that tangible building tools could have on children's cognitive development. This realization led her to travel to Denmark for international training through Teknokta, the official LEGO® Education partner in Turkey, where she became a certified international academy trainer.

Throughout her career, Yöndem has gathered extensive hands-on teaching experience. She spent many years working as a preschool teacher and Turkish department coordinator at the prestigious Ulus Private Jewish Schools (*Özel Ulus Musevi Okulları*). She also contributed to public early education as a kindergarten teacher for TRT EBA Anaokulu.

Elaine Zweig, PhD, Educational Consulting

Elaine Zweig, PhD, is an Early Childhood Specialist with decades of successful experience in working with children of all ages and grade levels. Having taught as a professor and now as an Educational Consultant, Dr. Zweig has presented over 50 workshops at local, state, and national training conferences to showcase early childhood trends and teacher education. She has authored and co-authored textbooks and has reviewed books, articles, and technical reports. She believes that children develop a sense of self and learn to make sense of the world around them through play.

Return to Table of Contents

Press Release

October 28,2026 – For Immediate Release

The International Play Association USA (IPA USA) and its Board of Directors proudly present the 2026 White Paper as a call to action for educators, policymakers, researchers, families, and advocates. Building on decades of scholarship and advocacy, this collection is an International Edition of 66 papers, written by 95 authors from six continents, 14 countries, and Hong Kong (Special Administrative Region of China), spanning 11 categories, and bringing together leading voices committed to protecting and advancing every child's right to play.

A Critical Moment for Childhood

The child's right to play stands at a critical crossroads.

Across the United States and around the world, children are growing up in environments that increasingly prioritize performance, productivity, and measurable outcomes over the experiences that support healthy development. Academic pressures, overscheduled childhoods, increased screen use, heightened safety concerns, and diminishing opportunities for independent exploration have steadily eroded time, space, and freedom for play.

The Myths surrounding play do not acknowledge why child-led free play is a requirement of childhood. Play is not a luxury, a reward, or a break from learning. Play is how children learn, develop, and thrive. Through play, children build social competence, emotional strength, creativity, decision-making skills, self-regulation, and the habits necessary for lifelong learning and well-being. Research spanning developmental psychology, education, neuroscience, public health, and child development consistently shows that play is a biological and developmental necessity.

Despite this growing body of evidence, denial of the necessity for child-led free play still exists. Too often, decisions affecting children are driven by short-term outcomes rather than a long-term understanding of what children need to flourish. As a result, childhood itself is increasingly at risk.

Within these pages, readers will find research-based insights, practical recommendations, and powerful examples that show why play matters and how to support it across homes, schools, communities, and public policy. More importantly, this White Paper serves as an advocacy resource, equipping readers with the evidence and tools needed to champion play in their local contexts.

The future of childhood depends on the choices we make today. By recognizing play as a fundamental right and an essential component of healthy development, we can create environments where all children have the opportunity to learn, grow, belong, and thrive.

IPA USA's Board of Directors thanks the 95 authors for their time and commitment to advancing the Child's Right to Play.

We invite you to read, share, and use this White Paper to strengthen your advocacy efforts and join us in safeguarding every child's right to play.

Deb Lawrence, Co-President, IPA USA **Brian Stone**, Co-President, IPA USA

Contact information – info@ipausa.org – IPAUSA.org/whitepaper

Return to Table of Contents