In over 30 years of working with children, families, and teachers in Waldorf kindergartens all over the world, I have observed one consistent feature of childhood: creative play is a central activity in the lives of healthy children. Play helps children weave together all the elements of life as they experience it. It allows them to digest life and make it their own. It is an outlet for the fullness of their creativity, and it is an absolutely critical part of their childhood. With creative play, children blossom and flourish; without it, they suffer a serious decline. I am hardly the first to note this fact. The central importance of creative play in children’s healthy development is well supported by decades of research.

If we are to save play, we must first understand its nature. Creative play is like a spring that bubbles up from deep within a child. It is refreshing and enlivening. It is a natural part of the make-up of every healthy child. The child’s love of learning is intimately linked with a zest for play. Whether children are working on new physical skills, social relations, or cognitive content, they approach life with a playful spirit. As a friend said of her eight-month-old recently, “It just seems that she’s working all the time.” But is it work or play? In childhood there is no distinction.

Adults are convinced that we need to “teach” young children. It is certainly true that we need to set an example in all kinds of activities. We also need to create appropriate spaces where children can play and learn, and we need to lend a helping hand — and at times even intervene when things are going wrong. But mostly we need to honor the innate capacity for learning that moves the limbs and fills the soul of every healthy young child.

The simple truth is that young children are born with a most wonderful urge to grow and learn. They continually develop new skills and capacities, and if they are allowed to set the pace with a bit of help from the adult world they will work at all this in a playful and tireless way. Rather than respecting this innate drive to learn however, we treat children as if they can learn only what we adults can teach them. We strip them of their innate confidence in directing their own learning, hurry them along, and often wear them out. It is no wonder that so many teachers complain that by age nine or ten, children seem burned out and uninterested in learning.

In light of the concerted effort of corporations and government agencies to banish open-ended creative play and replace it with much narrower, defined play or focused learning of letters and numbers at ever earlier ages, it has become imperative that we band together and create a protective circle around childhood and the child’s need and right to play.

Joan Almon is co-founder of the Alliance for Childhood. For the complete text of this article, go to www.waldorfresearchinstitute.org/pdf/BAPlayAlmon.pdf
At the end of May Phyllis put together a trip to Community Playthings in upstate New York, to tour the workshop where they make their toys. It was work-related but also very spiritual. They have these gathering spaces all over the community, so they might be in the workshop building toys or equipment, then have a coffee break out in the woods. Our meals were prepared for us, many from scratch; they picked us wildflowers and made beautiful arrangements; we watched a sunset; and the children from their school sang and did an Irish dance for us.

We spent a lot of time talking together about toys, and how much we liked Community Playthings because they really get child development and are not afraid to take risks. They asked us about toys and materials we would like to see, and Phyllis had a lot to say about that, while reassuring them that what they make is really filling a need. She loves how natural and beautiful their products are and refers a lot of teachers and directors to them.

I had a good time talking with her about her gardening as we walked throughout the community. She really enjoyed being out in nature, and knew a lot of the flowers and fruit trees. It was a great time to not only talk shop, but also just to catch up—a beautiful, relaxing time.

It reminded me of how special her team meetings were. We often had them over at her house and she would prepare meals from scratch. It was important to Phyllis to feed people well, care for them and make them comfortable, so it was nice to have her on the other end—receiving the gifts that she normally gives to others. She seemed to be relaxed and at peace, enjoying herself. The whole experience was so aesthetically and spiritually pleasing—it was just too wonderful for words. I’m so thankful that she put the trip together and I got to be there with her.

Something that always stood out to me about Phyllis was that, even when she was having a hard day, she was one of the nicest and most considerate people I ever met. I’ll never forget the story she told about the time she was at a center where a teacher handed out one Lego to each child. In a situation where I would be going ballistic, she was able to not completely berate the teacher, but to acknowledge that the teacher was trying to do something with the children, and just didn’t have the information to know what was appropriate for them. Even when you see really bad things going on in a program, how can you find a positive, and use that positive to keep you going and to inspire the people you are working with? Phyllis could always find a way to do that.

When I was a Quality Improvement Coordinator and she was my supervisor, we went to a site together one morning, and since we live nearby, she invited me back to her house for lunch. Now I have an odd diet, but she insisted on making something from what she had in her kitchen that fit my needs exactly. Making lunch for your staff is not in a supervisor’s job description—especially not by hand! But she just said, “You worked hard today. I’ll make lunch and we’ll talk about the site visit”. Every QIC who worked with Phyllis has a story like this.
She nurtured everybody in that good way that everybody needs. It’s easy for us to nurture the children, but adults have bad days too. You have to nurture the adults you work with—not just the kids—and Phyllis was a role model for all of us.

**Tyrone Scott**

Phyllis and I worked together very closely on the Success By 6 (SB6) program during the past 7 ½ years, and I admired her in many ways. What stood out the most for me was her constant passion for the well-being of children. How she managed the SB6 project for DVAEYC clearly showed her commitment and determination to make child care programs better for children and families. When Phyllis believed that something was unjust for children, she was strong-minded in her efforts to bring about change and improvement.

Phyllis was kindhearted, well organized and a wealth of knowledge when it came to early childhood education. She generously shared her expertise with the many child care programs she worked with and she built lasting relationships with directors and teachers, based upon trust and mutual respect. In addition to her love for children, Phyllis was a lover of nature. She shared this passion by helping to teach many children, teachers and directors how to garden, and she would often transplant flowers from home to help start up a new garden at a child care center.

Phyllis often questioned the way things were done and she helped me learn to think more critically. As a result, we were able to make many programmatic changes to the SB6 program that have improved the quality of hundreds of child care centers and impacted the lives of thousands of children. It has been my honor and a true privilege to work with and learn from Phyllis. I will greatly miss her support and friendship, but know that her valuable contributions to our work will live on.

**Jackie Groetsch**

It was my first year as a lead teacher; I was fresh out of a bachelor’s program, where I had failed my initial student teaching and lacked the necessary certification to become a Pre-K Counts teacher. Needless to say, I NEEDED my certification. I had met Phyllis before, but never understood exactly what she did for DVAEYC. A few days before my newly-assigned college instructor arrived for observation, Phyllis came to my center with a tote bag full of magic. She was immediately thrust into chaos: Liam was letting his anger out on his best friends before clueing us in that it had something to do with unprocessed grief about “Biscuit;” his long-deceased cat. After Phyllis soothed his anger, she recommended the book, *The Tenth Good Thing About Barney*, which was perfect for Liam’s situation. We continued to our morning meeting, where she got everyone’s attention with a great singing game. With Phyllis by my side, I turned a corner and started becoming a real early childhood teacher.

She helped me in so many ways that first year, identifying my strengths and weaknesses and reminding me to keep shifting my perspective; then she continued to touch base with me every so often via email. The last message I received from her simply read “Hope you are having a great birthday. Wishing you all the best for a terrific year ahead!” I thought of her again during pre-ECERS discussions this spring about classroom alterations. (“I know just the person to help us with this!”)

Ms. Phyllis gave her heart to every classroom she invested herself in. I believe she is alive today, dwelling in those classrooms and in the energies of the teachers she’s trained and inspired. I know I will miss her tremendously, but will continue to follow where she led. Recently, during an intense game of Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes, one of my students declared, “When I grow up I want to be Ms. Emily,” but I know she was responding to the Ms. Phyllis in me.

**Emily E Morton**

On September 16th hundreds of children, childcare teachers and parents gathered at Franklin Park to send a message to our leaders that it’s not enough to support pre-K—we also have to fund it! Children’s musicians got everyone moving, Superintendent Hite greeted future students, and the children began construction of a giant mural to go to Harrisburg.
Learn Through Play

Khadijah Sabir, Lovie Lee’s Stars of Tomorrow

Lovie Lee’s Stars of Tomorrow and three other small programs joined forces in August to celebrate the end of the year with a day-long field trip to the Crayola Factory. Learn through Play was the theme. On the bus ride up, parents chose the activities they wanted to do with their children, then they had to go with their child and experience how it felt playing with them. At lunch, everybody talked about the activity they did with their children, and we connected those activities to the PA Learning Standards and talked about how to take it to the next level. Then they separated and went off, so it was just them and their kids again. On the bus ride home they were still sharing projects they had done.

I don’t know who was more excited, the parents or the children. In one activity, you drew a picture on a computer, then it would come alive on a big screen. In another activity, they used modeling clay, then could press it into a ring or something, or they did their artwork and then took it to a machine where it became a puzzle.

Not all our parents could take off a Friday, but a lot of them did. They talked about how much they enjoyed the chance just to spend a fun day with their child—and they were as excited about playing as the children were!
Play to Practice: Connecting Teacher Play with Children’s Learning.

Patti Chapman, DVAEYC Quality Improvement Coordinator

DVAEYC recently partnered with Children’s Village to hold an all-day workshop with Drs. Walter F. Drew and Marcia Nell from the Institute for Self-Active Education, on “Play to Practice”. The day, spent immersed in play with unique open-ended sensory and tactile enriched materials, provided powerful insight into children’s play. We used cardboard tubes, yarn, string, rocks, beads, buttons, styrofoam, plastic caps, fabric strips and blocks along with a plethora of others which Dr. Drew calls “forgotten resources” to build complex cities, tall sky scrapers or create believe provided powerful insight into children’s play. We used cardboard tubes, in play with unique open-ended sensory and tactile enriched materials, Drs. Drew and Nell will be workshop presenters at DVAEYC annual conference in March 2015.

As our imaginations were awakened through self-active play, so was our understanding of the value of play through three important self-active play experiences: solo, partner and active intentional cooperative group play. With solo play opportunities, we experienced contemplation while engaging in quiet peaceful inwardsness of sensory delight. Partner play and cooperative group learning experiences offered the opportunity to work and play together, negotiating while developing trust and respect for each other’s ideas. Reflective activities and debriefing after each experience brought thoughtful insight and “ah ha” moments, as we now experienced such play through the eyes of children. In addition, this reflective process offered the discovery of new ways to guide play and promote developmentally appropriate practices, and identified the importance of ongoing self-reflection.

The important work of Drs. Drew and Nell shows that play using open-ended materials has proven to increase children’s sense of competency, extend and deepen their understanding of the world through hands-on experiences, and increase focused attention through freedom of choice. When parents and teachers apply these principles in practice, children find it easy to make connections through these learning experiences to math, science and literacy. Recognizing the value of play is a powerful way we can support our children to become problem solvers, manage frustrations and develop a sense of trust and cooperation with others.

Drs. Drew and Nell will be workshop presenters at DVAEYC annual conference in March 2015.

A Parent Reflects on the Crayola Factory Trip

Michelle Cannon

I’d like to give accolades to Lovie Lee’s Stars of Tomorrow. They weren’t just taking us on a trip—they knew what was there, what we needed to explore, and how to interact with our children in a way that would be fun for both of us.

My son has had difficulty with certain language skills, and a highlight for me was seeing new things he could do. When he said “It’s a magnet, it sticks together”, I heard vocabulary that I don’t usually hear, and that gave me an outlook on what they’re actually learning at Lovie Lee’s.

He and I got a whole week to interact with each other after the trip. As we have our busy lives, it’s easy to think that play is just play. Now, if he’s doing pretend play, or hide and go seek, or riding his bike, I’ve expanded by asking him more questions, getting him to problem solve more, giving him a chance to build and expand more on his language skills. When you come down to their level, they come out. They become totally different!

I commend Lovie Lee’s. My son has only been there a little over a year, and I can see a lot of growth. If you met him last year and came back now, you would be amazed! He gets outside services, and a therapist was astounded by his growth in just one year. Their curriculum and the ability to build on the different activities that they do on a daily basis helps all of the children to grow.

For more resources on play, consider the following:


Strategies to help understand how to plan for, guide, and identify purposeful play, including: creating complex rich environments; enhancing play through interaction and provocations; adding documentation to enrich play; and incorporating early learning standards into play.


Articles compiled from NAEYC’s Young Children address: play’s role in academic learning, toddler play, outdoor play, theories of play, adaptations for children with special needs, and media impact on play.


A thought-provoking and easy to read book by the “Ooey Gooey Lady”, filled with anecdotes and true life experiences, including seven things to do each day with your children: create, move, sing, discuss, observe, read, play.


A collection of articles from Exchange Magazine on: the spirit of play, the value of play, block play, make-believe play, and play culture.

From Play to Practice: Connecting Teachers’ Play to Children’s Learning, Marcia L. Nell and Walter F. Drew, NAEYC, 2013, 123 pp.

A challenge to rediscover play with stuff, and to build one’s understanding of children’s learning through reflection on one’s own play experience.


Short essays on the history of play, time, imagination, brain research, current trends, building blocks for learning, active learning, nature, and open-ended and creative play.


Information, guidance and support to help teachers understand the vast impact and significance play has on young children, including a discussion on early learning standards, and a play checklist to help identify exactly where a child is encountering cooperative play problems and activities to address those challenges.
Congratulations

to three DVAEYC members who were among the winners of this year’s Terri Lynne Lokoff National Child Care Teacher Awards.

Amy Wertz
Bright Horizons at Merck Upper Gwynedd

The project:
A Vine House was purchased to house an infant sensory garden. Over time the children will be exposed to different plants that entice their senses (sunflowers for sight, cucumbers for taste, elephant’s ear for touch, and mint for smell). There is also a stone path, bird houses, and watering cans to enhance the garden.

Reflections:
What makes me proud of our profession is how we support children’s success in future education. I’m proud when they return to the school and talk about their experiences, and when parents recognize the love and effort put into the children, their care, and their education.

Liz Gould
Children’s Village, Philadelphia

The project:
I bought 6 digital cameras that I sent home with the children over the weekend. They used the cameras to photograph anything and everything and then brought them back on Monday to share with the class. This helped bridge the home-school connection and gave children, who otherwise would not have the language to communicate what they did over the weekend, the ability to share with us. I taught in a primarily Chinese speaking classroom so children were just learning the basics of communication. Giving them the cameras allowed them a different form of communication and they loved being able to show off everything they took pictures of. They glued pictures to construction paper and we displayed them in the hallway for everyone to see.

Reflections:
The people in our profession are proud of what we do. We know the importance of a high quality Pre-K education and we will preach it to anyone who asks. What we do with the children in our classrooms give them the backbone for the rest of their education. The basic foundations of what they learn in Pre-K will determine their success throughout their school career.

Outside of the classroom, it is difficult when you face so many adversities from people outside of the field of Education. So many people do not consider ECE to be a real career or important for children, though I think this is changing for the better. Inside the classroom, you are faced with the challenge of 20 very different children looking to you for care and guidance.

What keeps me going is the knowledge that ECE isn’t going away. Our government is now (finally) realizing the importance of investing in high quality education and I will continue to do my job to help as many people (both practitioners in the field and children) as I can until high quality Pre-K is available for everyone.
Monica Detwiler  
Salford Mennonite Child Care Centers

The project:

The project that I implemented was international sports. As our communities are becoming more diverse, it is more important than ever to give children the experiences of others in their community as well as an understanding of those around the world. The best part about the project is seeing how much my class is learning about other cultures through sports and active play. Every time we go outside they always ask if they may pick out a sport to play from the shed. It is such a joy to see not only my class benefit from this project, but all of the kids at the center. I made sure all of the equipment is accessible to every teacher and their classes, so their children are able to expand their knowledge.

Reflections:

Watching the children absorb and put into practice what I have taught them makes me extremely proud. While helping the children meet their milestones, it brings the importance of what we do to the attention of the parents. This in turn helps educate them and confirm that early childhood years are so important.

Having to be conscious of a budget makes it challenging; however it is not how much you have, but what you do with what you have to maximize the learning of your children. Using the resources you have is important, while continuing to enhance relationships in your community to expand your resources.

First and foremost what keeps me going is my passion for the children and what I do. By keeping their ratios under PA state requirements, Salford Mennonite Child Care Centers give teachers like myself the opportunity to do what we love each day, which is teaching and truly having the opportunity to care for the child. When you love what you do and take pride in your work with the children, others will notice. This gives me the chance to talk and educate parents, family, and others in the community on the significance of early childhood education.

Membership Matters

As of September 1, DVAEYC membership now stands at 1950!

Thanks to all those who have renewed since June 1, and welcome to the 58 new members:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Allison Ardre</th>
<th>Stephanie Fields</th>
<th>Sharon Knox</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Janet Beerey</td>
<td>Jean Garnett</td>
<td>Sharon A McGrath</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosaida Benitez</td>
<td>Beverly Garnett</td>
<td>Peggy McManus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stephanie Marie Bentz</td>
<td>Christine Geiger</td>
<td>Martha Messier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rozita Bolton</td>
<td>Alessandra Gonzalez</td>
<td>Dawn Hock</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melanie Brennan</td>
<td>Anne Harris</td>
<td>Christine Ostrowski</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kathleen Brown</td>
<td>Patricia Hawkins</td>
<td>Gowendyln Parham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cashia Bryant</td>
<td>Jacqueline Jay</td>
<td>June Patterson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stephanie Christie</td>
<td>Christianne Jean-Pierre</td>
<td>Minerva Perez</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christina Christman</td>
<td>Marketh Johnson</td>
<td>WendyChristine Peterson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbara Coleman</td>
<td>Joseylnne Jones</td>
<td>Sharon Phillips</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leona Cooper</td>
<td>Deborah Karpinsky</td>
<td>Andrea Rees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lauren Detweller</td>
<td>Wendy Kelly</td>
<td>Karen L Renner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kathleen Dougherty</td>
<td>Elizabeth Knight</td>
<td>Sherry Rivers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jonathan Dunch</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Be sure your current membership is valid through the end of March 2015 to be able to benefit from the Early Bird Conference rate.

Enjoy your Member Benefits:

- Bi-Monthly DVAEYC newsletter, Connection
- Bi-Weekly DVAEYC electronic newsletter, eConnection
- NAEYC Journal
- Discounts on DVAEYC Conference and trainings
- Discounts on NAEYC Conference
- 20% discount on products in NAEYC’s catalog/store
- Free Membership to SharedSource PA
- Receive 15% discount at any of Becker’s Parent/Teacher Stores when you show your membership card.

Be a Child Care HEALTH ADVOCATE

Susan Aronson

The lower ERS scores in health and safety and the tendency to focus last on this area requires that a spotlight be put on professional development in health and safety. We have a long way to go to meet the recommendation that at least one staff person in each center be identified as a child care health advocate. We suggest the advocate be the director, assistant director or a lead teacher, someone whom the staff recognize as the person who, while not necessarily doing all the health-related tasks, sees that they are done.

The curriculum of the Child Health Advocate Course reflects best practice standards, and the 15 classes address health and safety items in the Environmental Rating Scales. They also include how to comply with the health and safety criteria in the NAEYC Accreditation Standards. Over 170 students have taken the course and have told us that the assignments to implement the learning content in their programs week by week have resulted in significant improvement of their programs.

The course is licensed to Northampton Community College by the PA chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics and is freshly updated, as I have done every two years. Judy Rex and Karen Stone are the excellent NCC nurse instructors who teach the course online with my participation as (volunteer) guest faculty. To enhance the 15 weeks of classes, we have 7 live interactive online sessions distributed throughout. Support from the SERK has allowed NCC to offer the course this fall at a much reduced cost.

For questions about registration for the course, please contact the NCC Admissions Department at 610-861-5500. For more information about the content of each class, view the announcement of the current course under “News” on the ECELS website at www.ecels-healthychildcarepa.org or contact ECELS by e-mail: ecels@paaap.org.

Enjoy your Member Benefits:

- Bi-Monthly DVAEYC newsletter, Connection
- Bi-Weekly DVAEYC electronic newsletter, eConnection
- NAEYC Journal
- Discounts on DVAEYC Conference and trainings
- Discounts on NAEYC Conference
- 20% discount on products in NAEYC’s catalog/store
- Free Membership to SharedSource PA
- Receive 15% discount at any of Becker’s Parent/Teacher Stores when you show your membership card.
EARLY LEARNING: WHAT’S PLAY GOT TO DO WITH IT?

March 20th-21st, 2015

The conference will bring together nationally known speakers and play experts, play-focused organizations and non-profits, and early childhood professionals from the Delaware Valley region for two days of professional development and learning at the Pennsylvania Convention Center.

DVAEYC champions high quality early care and education for all young children (birth-eight) in Southeastern Pennsylvania through professional development, advocacy, and public engagement.

Patricia Baxter, President
Sharon Easterling, Executive Director
Pamela Haines, Connection Editor

PLEASE CONSIDER DVAEYC WHEN MAKING YOUR UNITED WAY CONTRIBUTION DONOR OPTION #4549