

# Dimensions

of Early Childhood

Volume 50 • Number 2



Kindergartners' Conceptualization of Writing

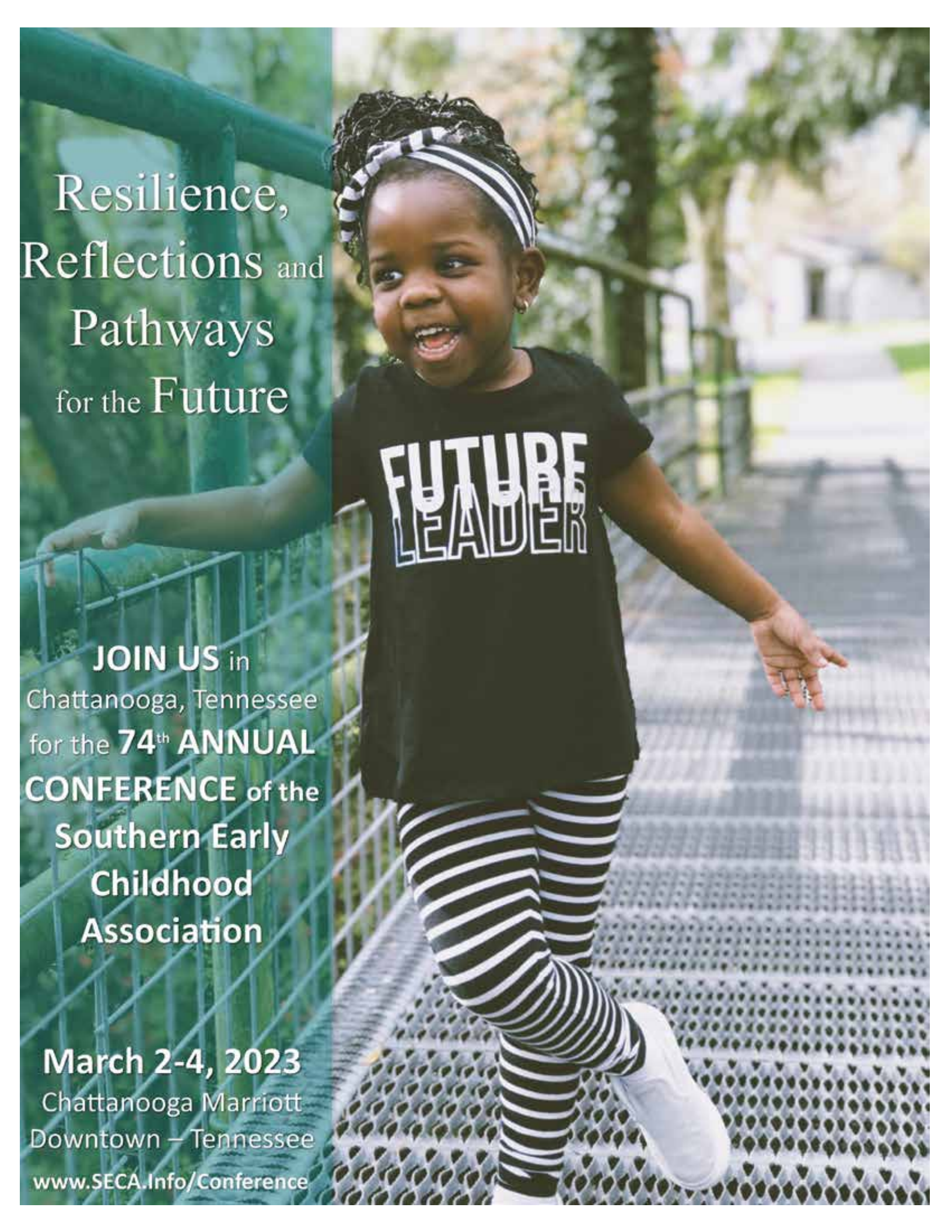
Using Texts to Accurately Represent Africa's Cultures and Promote  
Healthy Personal and Social Identities among Children

Learning Mathematics through Everyday Play in Prekindergarten

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**Editor:** Wilma Robles-Melendez, PhD  
*Dimensions of Early Childhood*

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## Take Time to Recharge This Summer

### *Tómese el Tiempo Para Recargar Energías Este Verano*

**Judy Whitesell**

Summer is upon us and what a joyous time. The weather is generally pleasant, and we're able to spend time outdoors with family and friends. Having the opportunity to meet with others helps young children (and the rest of us) to explore our communities, enabling social skills as well as cognitive skills. Fostering and keeping healthy relationships, managing conflict, making good decisions, and dealing with peer pressure are lifelong skills that we begin developing as young children. It is also a wonderful way to de-stress and lower anxiety, and I encourage you to take advantage of this time. What better way to learn than through play!

Just taking a quick minute to update you on the workings of your SECA Board of Directors. Thank you to all who attended, presented, or volunteered services to make the 2022 SECA/SCECA such a success. We had over 1,600 attendees utilizing virtual and face to face events. Since the conference, we've been verifying attendance and awarding credits for attendees. We've also been working on our strategic plan for the organization. Each commission has been diligently reviewing current policies and updating them as needed. Our summer board meeting will take place in June where we will finalize the plan. The 2023 Conference planning is also underway and we're seeking proposals for presentations in Chattanooga, Tennessee next March 2-4, 2023. If you are interested, please go to our website and check it out. Wishing you well.

El verano ya está con nosotros y es tiempo para disfrutar. El clima es generalmente agradable y podemos pasar tiempo al aire libre con familiares y amigos. Tener la oportunidad de reunirse con otros le ayuda a los niños pequeños (y al resto de nosotros) a explorar nuestras comunidades haciendo uso de sus habilidades sociales y cognitivas. Fomentar y mantener relaciones saludables, manejar conflictos, tomar buenas decisiones y lidiar con la presión de los compañeros son habilidades para toda la vida que comenzamos a desarrollar desde la infancia. También es una forma maravillosa de desestresarse y bajar la ansiedad por lo que te animo a que aproveches este tiempo. ¡Qué mejor manera de aprender, que a través del juego!

Aprovecho para dejarles saber lo que hemos estado haciendo en la Junta Directiva de SECA. Le damos las Gracias a todos los que asistieron, presentaron o que ofrecieron servicios como voluntarios y que hicieron que la Conferencia de SECA / SCECA 2022 fuera un éxito. Tuvimos más de 1,600 asistentes utilizando eventos virtuales y presenciales. Desde la conferencia, hemos estado verificando la asistencia y otorgando créditos para los asistentes. También hemos estado trabajando en nuestro plan estratégico para la organización. Cada comisión ha estado revisando diligentemente las políticas actuales y actualizándolas según sea necesario. Nuestra reunión de la junta de verano tendrá lugar en junio, donde finalizaremos el plan. La planificación de la Conferencia 2023 también está en marcha y estamos invitando propuestas para presentaciones en Chattanooga, Tennessee, del 2 al 4 de marzo de 2023. Si está interesado, vaya a nuestro sitio web para más información y detalles. Deseándoles todo lo mejor.

In Memory of  
**Becky Wood Whalen**  
by Dr. Janie Humphries



See **Page 37** to  
Meet the 2023 Candidates  
for SECA President Elect

## The Voices of Summer/Las Voces del Verano

Wilma Robles-Melendez, PhD

Summer is a time where the voices of children playfully enjoying what the season brings delight us with their enthusiasm. The warm air and the bright days ahead invite everyone to outdoor activities where play resonates as the thing to do. This time, as our communities continue to emerge from the pandemic, we also take a moment to elevate our thoughts for the future, a future that we hope is of peaceful understanding where no more violence will rob children's lives. The recent events in Uvalde, Texas, have affected us all. The collective heart of educators and society mourns for those young lives of children and their teachers taken away so unexpectedly and so violently. They leave us with their smiles, aspirations, and vibrant dreams of childhood and those of their committed teachers. This summer and beyond, to them we owe them to be kept in our memories and to be filled with the energy to ensure that no other children or teachers will leave us so early, victims of violence.



*El verano es una época donde las voces de los niños disfrutando juguetonamente de lo que nos trae la temporada nos deleitan con su genuino e infantil entusiasmo. El aire cálido y los días brillantes que se acercan invitan a todos a actividades al aire libre donde el juego resuena como lo que hay que hacer. Esta vez, a medida que nuestras comunidades continúan emergiendo de la pandemia, también nos tomamos un momento para elevar nuestros pensamientos para el futuro, un futuro que esperamos sea de comprensión pacífica donde no más violencia robe la vida de los niños. Lo ocurrido en Uvalde, Tejas, nos ha impactado a todos. El corazón colectivo de los educadores y la sociedad llora por esas jóvenes vidas de niños y sus maestros arrebatadas tan inesperadamente. Nos dejan con sus sonrisas, aspiraciones y sueños vibrantes con la inocencia de la niñez y con el ejemplo de compromiso de sus maestras. Este verano y más allá, a ellos les debemos que se mantengan en nuestra memoria y que nos llenemos con la energía para garantizar que ningún otro niño o maestro nos deje tan temprano, víctimas inocentes de la violencia.*



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# Kindergartners' Conceptualization of Writing

Rebecca G. Harper



are learning how to “create a written expression for what can be said orally,” (Freire and Macedo, 1987, p.35).

These assertions and observations are not surprising as kindergarten classrooms mark places of discovery and exploration through social and academic engagements, all of which contribute to the foundational knowledge of reading and writing in the world. Students' early literacy skills developed in kindergarten have a direct connection to future writing achievement in the later grades (Kent et al., 2014; Kim et al., 2015). For many, kindergarten is the first structured educational setting

*“Everybody wants to learn to write and draw pictures,”*

Emma (age 5)

*“When you read, you can learn how to use that word in your writing and then you don't have to ask for help because you can read and write!”*

Faye (age 6)

*“Good writers know their digger and sky letters,”*

Colton (age 5)

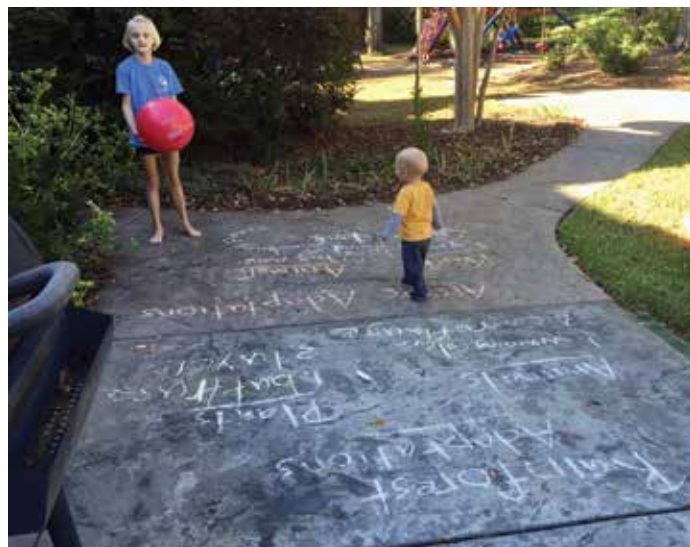
*“We write to read,”*

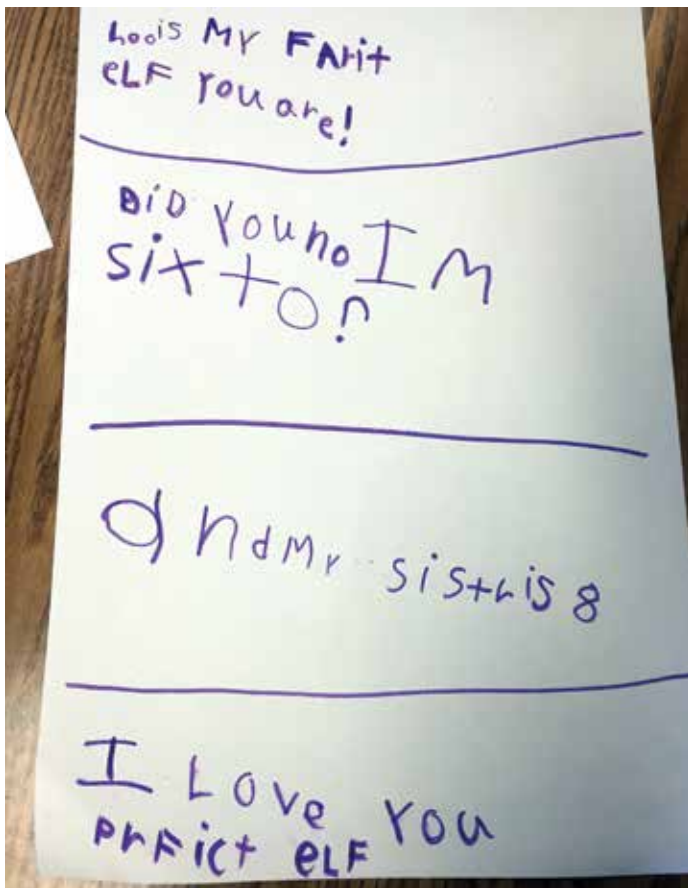
Macy Belle (age 6)

Kindergarten classrooms can produce prolific, confident, and quality writers when writing becomes part of daily classroom life. When students have opportunities to read and write widely, they can begin to understand the complex process of writing and its connection to reading. As Smith (2005) indicated, reading is the “fundamental human activity,” (p.1) and the most natural act in the world, as it is something that individuals do in their daily lives, in a number of settings, constantly. While reading can be considered as organic and natural, its connection and interdependence with writing is inherent. This natural and apparent connection between reading and writing was expressed by the kindergartners in the classroom I visited over the course of an academic year. The assertion, “We write to read,” served as a mantra and class motto for this young group of five- and six-year-olds, who had already proclaimed the two subjects as interconnected and symbiotic in nature. When students learn to read and write, they

experienced by students. Yet, prior to this introduction into the classroom, students take part in extensive literacy experiences that are direct products of the world in which they live and interact. Freire and Macedo (1987) remind us that before we read the word, we read the world, which always, precedes reading the word. Long before our students come into a structured educational setting, where academic standards often eclipse authentic experiences, they have been taking part in literacy engagements

**Figure 1. Home literacy activities might include things like drawing on the sidewalk. All photos courtesy of the author.**





**Figure 2. Example of how a six-year-old structured their written pieces.**

in their daily lives and through their home literacy practices. Research indicates that home literacy practices have a direct effect on their development of reading, language, and writing skills (Burgess et al., 2002; C. S. Puranik et al., 2018; Sénéchal & LeFevre, 2002; Sénéchal et al., 1998). There is emerging evidence that a child's home literacy practices have a direct impact on a student's emerging writing skills (D. Aram & Levin, 2001; C. S. Puranik et al., 2018; Skibbe et al., 2013). Home literacy activities might include writing thank you notes, reading books, cooking family recipes, writing out to-do lists, or drawing on the sidewalk, as seen in **Figure 1**, which is a photo with my children.

As a literacy educator, my interest in how students conceptualize writing is one that I devote a significant amount of time and interest. Understanding how students make sense of reading and writing at an early age can assist educators in designing and implementing literacy engagements that are both high quality and effective. I also wondered how primary students might use lived literacy observations and experiences from their own worlds and apply them to writing in general. Because students often make assumptions regarding rules of language on their own and without direct instruction, I became fascinated with how this might transfer into a student's conceptualization of writing. Consider how young children learn language and apply what they know about oral language into their own speech. Children who are acquiring language often use words such as "goed," "bringed," and

"broke." In this sense, a child has learned a morphological rule and is overregularizing the rule by applying it to multiple words.

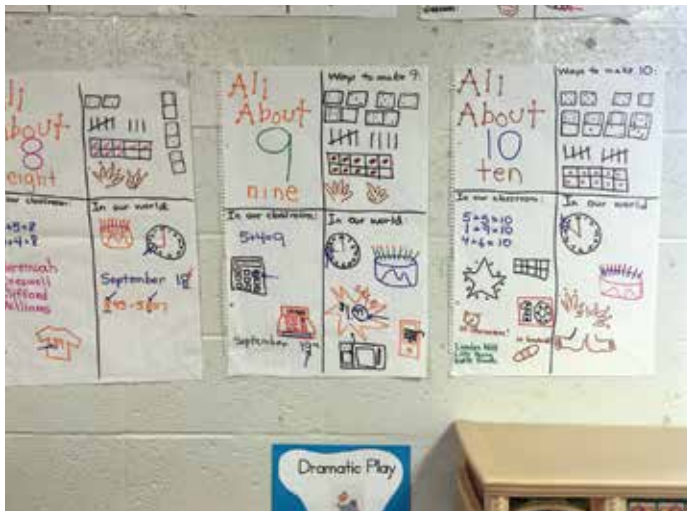
With this in mind, I began to think about how a young writer's observations about writing and words in the world might carry over into their own understandings and conceptualizations of writing. As a result, I pay special attention to how students structure their written pieces, how they begin to think about organization and the craft of writing, and how this transfers into their own writings.

For example, when I asked my six-year-old daughter why she drew lines in between each of her sentences in a picture (**Figure 2**), she told me, "So you will know I am done talking about that." What does that say about her conceptualization of writing? For one, it denotes organization. The line breaks occur after a complete thought has been written. You may also notice that the only punctuation she utilizes are the exciting ones (the question mark and exclamation point). As a teacher, what can this tell me? First of all, it lets me know that she is aware of the concept of complete thoughts and ideas – her line breaks serve as an initial means for separating complete thoughts, a pre-cursor to paragraph construction. Two, she has at least a rudimentary understanding of organization.

Similarly, primary students are often observed attempting to cram an entire sentence on one line even though they have run out of room. If you notice in **Figure 3**, this student completes the sentence by writing down the side of the paper instead of moving to the next line. When I asked why he did this, he replied, "Because I wasn't done yet." I could infer from this explanation that this student believes that complete thoughts or complete sentences must match up with each line on the paper. Although this would not

**Figure 3. Example of a student completing a sentence by writing down the side of the paper instead of moving to the next line.**





**Figure 4. A classroom's walls covered in charts, student work, and collaborative texts.**

apply to all primary students, it gives me insight into the thought process of this one young writer.

Conversations like these propelled me to further investigate students' conceptualizations of writing in a classroom setting. As a result, I spent a year in this kindergarten classroom, a year that went by quickly and was full of excitement, studying the literacy practices of one group of kindergarten students.

### Writing and Living in Kindergarten

Upon walking into the classroom, it was apparent that students had a wide variety of print examples to view and utilize throughout the day. The classroom walls were covered in teacher made charts, student work, and collaborative texts (Figure 4) that were created with both the teacher and students. There were very few examples of pre-made purchased charts and posters, with the overwhelming majority of print presented in the room being ones that were made during the academic year. Charts created by the teacher included examples specific to the current class, including student names and interests, which aided in creating a sense of ownership in the materials used and displayed in the class.

Having such a wide variety of print displayed supported students when they took part in a number of writing activities, particularly when they were encouraged to "Write the Room," an activity when students took their writer's notebooks around and wrote words they saw posted around the room. Plus, because the teacher frequently referred back to the posted texts and encouraged students to look around the room for examples of print, students began to understand the purpose of the charts as a classroom aid for learning. In addition to the student work and charts displayed, one main wall housed a large Velcro word wall that was posted at student height (not at the top of the wall next to the ceiling) and utilized words affixed with Velcro tape that could be easily removed from the wall and taken back to the desk for transcription. This simple fix helped assist students who had difficulty holding

a notebook and pencil while standing since they could take the needed word back to their desks for copying.

Students were encouraged to use writing to explain everyday occurrences and often wrote about topics of interest. These included video games such as Minecraft, their friends, animals, the movie, "Sharknado," family time together, and their teacher. Students also indicated that they were planning for writings that they had not started and had already begun thinking through possible topics for future stories. For example, Emma discussed possible topics and ideas for future stories that she could work on during writing workshop. "I haven't written about this yet, but I want to write about it-me and my brother playing kickball in the back yard." Although she had not started the drafting process, she was beginning the brainstorming process by thinking through what she might write about later.

Because students in this class wrote on a daily basis and throughout the day, it was not unusual to see them writing in multiple disciplines in cross content literacy engagements. For example, during a fairy tale unit highlighting "The Three Little Pigs," students took part in a variety of cross curricular lessons that addressed math and science concepts along with literacy standards. In cooperative groups, students built a variety of potential houses for the three pigs, which they then wrote about and described. After the houses were designed and constructed using a variety of household materials, students made individual predictions about what house would get destroyed.

These houses were also displayed outside the classroom with signs describing the materials used for construction as well as voting instructions and a ballot box (Figure 5). As parents, teachers, and students came by, they could view the houses and cast votes for the one they believed would be blown down by the Big Bad Wolf.

Throughout the week, the class would collect and tabulate the votes using tally marks on the board. After each tabulation, the teacher would ask the class a variety of numeracy related ques-

**Figure 5. During a fairy tale unit, students built a variety of potential houses for the Three Little Pigs, which they then wrote about and described.**







**Figure 6.** The kindergarten class created a *When I Was Young in Kindergarten* book modeled after Cynthia Rylant's book *When I Was Young in the Mountains*.

tions including, "How many more votes does The Stick House have than The Lego House?" Which house has the most vote?" How many votes have been cast in all?" All of these items were written, recorded, and discussed as a class.

After voting commenced, the students conducted an experiment replicating the Big Bad Wolf blowing a house down. For each house, the teacher would use a student volunteer who would blow on the house and mimic the Big Bad Wolf. The students observed and recorded their observations. After this part of the experiment was complete, the teacher used a hairdryer, set first on low and then on high, to attempt to blow down each house. Students recorded their observations and then compared their results to the voting tallies they had collected. They also revisited their hypotheses to determine which ones were accurate.

With this engagement, students were able to take part in a variety of standards-based engagements across a number of content areas. Reading and writing was represented in multiple ways (as a written record of observations, as a means to record predictions, and to describe an object).

Other writing experiences included the creation of a *When I Was Young in Kindergarten* book modeled after Cynthia Rylant's book *When I Was Young in the Mountains* (Figure 6). Students started this writing lesson by brainstorming places where they spent time in kindergarten and the teacher wrote the name of each place on chart paper. Students used sticky notes to write down activities that they did in a variety of places (the playground, the library, music class, etc.) and posted their ideas on chart paper. This served as their brainstorming for a class created book about their lives in kindergarten. Each student then drafted their own page for the class book and received a copy of the book. As a family literacy extension, the teacher sent home a template for family members and caregivers to complete alongside of the student.

On yet another day, students used Jerry Pallotta's "Who Would Win?" series to craft their own version of an animal battle using animal crackers as a writing prompt. Students used textual evidence to justify their predictions and added detail and information to their pictures

Through these types of engagements, students wrote for a variety of audiences centered around those who were part of their immediate lives including families and close friends. Throughout the day, students were encouraged to share their ideas with the class through discussion and Author's Chair and were frequently seen taking part in writing engagements related to literature and their lives.

## Learning to Write

*"Everybody wants to learn to write and draw pictures,"*

Katie (age 5)

When considering how they learned to write, students indicated they learned to write from their teacher, family members, and from classmates. They also explained that practicing writing was important. Often, they discussed how these writing teachers showed them how to spell words, write letters, words, and sentences, and helped them with their pictures and ideas. Macy Belle believed she learned how to write by looking at other people's writings.

Activities such as reading and writing the room helped students learn new words that they then transferred into their own writings. All students indicated that they used the word wall when learning how to spell words which helped them learn to write. Others indicated that they would look in the books they were reading for words they knew and would write them on their papers. Learning how to use upper and lower case letters was also considered important by Brandon who explained that this was how he learned to write.

Learning to write meant thinking about a topic and planning what you wanted to say in your sentence, according to Tanner, while Colton said he learned to write by drawing pictures and learning how to spell funny sounding words. Macy Belle defined writing as learning and, "saying stuff, but saying it in your picture."

Once someone learned to write, the next steps were considered easy for many. Rebecca explained that in order to write, you should, "Grab a pencil, you write some words, you have some crayons, and you write some pictures about your words." Students noted that in order to become a better writer, you had to practice. Paxton explained that he became a good writer by practicing and not doing "scribble scrabble."

## Writing Workshop for Kindergartners

*"Writing Workshop is when you close your eyes, think about your topic, grab it out of the sky and throw it in the air,"*

Colton (age 6)



Typical writing engagements in this kindergarten classroom were conducted utilizing writing workshop frameworks including the use of mentor texts, independent reading and writing, author's chair, and writing and revision time (Cruz, 2015). Time was integrated daily and students were seen composing multiple types of texts for a myriad of audiences.

Students described writing workshop as time for making books, coloring pictures, and making sentences. During this time, students made stories about topics and characters they cared about and remembered. Tanner indicated that during Writing Workshop, students try their best to write about their stories, while Rebecca explained that you had to use uppercase letters and spaces when writing during workshop time. She also explained that sometimes you draw pictures about something you might want to write about and then you could go back and add to your picture and words. Emma's description of Writing Workshop had similar characteristics, including the drawing and labeling of pictures that students revisited on later dates when they began to write about the picture and add to their sentences. This description of writing workshop indicates an understanding of revision, as both students discussed going back to a sample and adding to it.

Paxton described Writing Workshop as a time when you, "lay on the rug and visualize what your picture is. And you have to say stuff like what you are going to write about." This time in writing workshop was used as time for brainstorming ideas that didn't necessarily have to be shared with the class. Visualization was a key component of brainstorming and many students described how they would close their eyes and visualize what they wanted to write about.

Students recognized their writing could be used for a variety of purposes and could be written for different reasons and audiences. "I like to write about what I care about... I like to write about me," Tanner explained. He often wrote for his close family, including a song about Minecraft for his cousin. Students overwhelmingly wrote about topics close to them and ones they found interesting including their families, pets, and friends. And while students could not specifically identify the different writing genres, they were able to give examples of multiple topics, purposes, and audiences that they were using.

During writing workshop, they wrote and revised with writing buddies regularly. The best writing buddies were described as ones who were nice and helped their writing buddy spell and write words. Most students indicated their writing buddies were helpful, although a few students were frustrated when they wouldn't listen to them or weren't always "nice" to them. Paxton recalled a time when some people in class copied other people's writing which was "bad" and didn't make them good writing buddies. Good writing buddies were sometimes described as neat writers, could draw nice pictures to go with their sentences, practiced writing, and helped their partners spell words.

## We Write to Read

*"I guess you could learn how to read when you write,"*

Tanner (age 6)

Writing was seen as a concept that served multiple purposes, including assisting students with reading and learning, but also as something in which the product created was for not only the audience who would be reading it, but the writer who composed it. Tanner believed that writing was "special" because he could use it to communicate with family who lived far away. Rebecca believed that writing made her creative because she was able to write about the topics that she enjoyed. And Paxton explained that not knowing how to write meant that a student couldn't read either.

Because students knew that reading and writing were intimately connected, they were aware of the consequences of not knowing how to do one or the other and repeatedly described the "why" behind writing as an activity that helped them read. Faye explained that by writing, she became a better reader. "Because people had to help me... If you don't know how to read you have to just come to the teacher and just tell her, 'Can you help me read this book?' I learned that writing helped me read better. My teacher showed me how to write the word every single time if I don't know what that word is." Tanner explained that sounding out words helped you read better and that doing that could also help someone be a better writer.

Being able to write and then read words they saw in their books helped many of the students become better writers, which was needed to get to first grade. Emma explained that when writing words and letters you sometimes saw the same words in a book and then, "you know what that word is." Jace explained that writing helped him learn how to write sentences and make books, but that it started with learning his ABCs, which he said he could now teach others to do, whereas Colton said writing helped students learn to read so they could, "read books like grownups." However, one student indicated that writing, "makes your hand hurt sometimes," but later indicated that that was probably a good way to exercise your hands.

Emma shared, "Writing is writing. You write in a book and writing is like a book." She later explained that writing could be done more than once by going back to the story and adding details to the words or more drawings in the illustrations. In this

sense, Emma has conceptualized writing as a recursive process and is thinking about revision since she explains that writing can be done more than once.

## Good Writers

*"I write really good and stay on the lines,"*

Paxton (age 5)

Overall, the kindergarten students in this study enjoyed writing and believed that they were good writers. Students varied in their descriptions of what constituted a good writer, but many indicated knowing letter and sound relationships was important. In fact, one student went into great detail in his description of how good writers knew their letter sounds. As he sounded out each letter from A to Z, he used the letter's gesture with the sound.

Colton also explained the importance of writing neatly and of knowing sky, fence, and digger letters. "Like the p is down there and the y and the g and the q. And the fence letters are little letters like e, a, and the little letters. And the sky letters are big." Rebecca reiterated this conceptualization of good writers being neat when she explained that she was a good writer because she knew, "sky, fence, and digger," letters. She elaborated that it was important to put those letters in the right places on the lines of the paper and keep them neat so people could read the story you had written.

Good writers were also described by kindergarteners as students who could write their names well, wrote neatly, and didn't make a lot of mistakes. Macy Belle indicated that good writers don't make a lot of mistakes. "Like I can't write a whole book without making 15 mistakes or something," but good writers were those who she believed did not make a lot of mistakes, including her mother and other authors.

Emma believed she was a good writer based on the previous qualifications and because she was a quick writer, while Macy Belle believed she was a good writer because she wrote long sentences and used quotation marks. Writing neatly was an important requirement as students explained that if you didn't write neatly, people could not go back and read it.

## What Next?

The environment created in this kindergarten classroom offered opportunities for a love of reading and writing to be cultivated and nurtured. Although the students had limited school based writing experiences prior to their entrance into kindergarten, all possessed multiple literacy experiences from their world which transferred into their writing experiences in the classrooms.

Classrooms that offer ample opportunities for authentic writing practice for a variety of audiences, across a wide range of genres, and for real, relevant reasons can aid students in understanding and experiencing what Yagelski (2012) explains as writing as praxis, which can serve as a vehicle for individual

and collective transformation. In this classroom, students were intimately aware of the connections and interdependence of reading and writing and the impact of each on the other. By offering the students ownership in their writing, and providing ample time for practice, students in this classroom began to understand the purposes and structure of a variety of writings. In many ways, this ownership paves the way for individual writing agency as students are able to determine their own topics and purposes and begin to write about what is important and matters to them. In this sense, writers begin to use writing for transformative purposes.

**Dr. Rebecca G. Harper** is an associate professor of language and literacy and the Director of the Augusta University Writing Project. She is the author of two content literacy books and several journal articles. Her research interests include content and critical literacy, writing instruction, and multiple literacies.

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# Using Texts to Accurately Represent Africa's Cultures and Promote Healthy Personal and Social Identities among Children

Ruth Facun-Granadozo, Olawale Olubowale and Chukwudebelu Franklin Ejiogu



countries in Africa has significantly increased (Anderson, 2017). In 2000, Africans made up 24% of all the foreign-born Black population in the United States. This figure went up to 39% in 2016 (Anderson & Lopez, 2018). Because of this immigration pattern, there are more African immigrant students in preschools and K-12 classrooms. Many of these students are second-generation Americans. They are U.S.-born, and they have limited experiences with their home culture. They may have briefly visited their parents' countries or not at all. What they know about their cultures of origin is what they learn from their homes and schools. African

## Introduction

What picture or word comes to mind when you hear Africa? Is it a picture of Simba, Tarzan, jungle, safari, giraffes, or zebras? Is it poverty, famine, war, malaria, or charity? What factors or experiences have influenced your associations between Africa and the said words or pictures?

Many are surprised to learn that Africans are not all Black people, and Africa is not a single country. It is the second biggest continent in terms of landmass, and it has a bigger land area than Europe and North America combined. It consists of 54 countries, each representing unique cultures that the world could learn from and appreciate. However, if at all, Africans are often misrepresented or under-represented in popular books and media. They are often presented as a single group of people; hence, other peoples' formed notion of Africans represents a single story (Adichie, 2009). This single story needs to change because it does not represent many Africans' lived experiences.

## Misconceptions about African Cultures and Microaggression

In the United States, the number of immigrants from different

families preserve their language and culture through their daily home experiences and gathering with other families from their countries. Children learn to be proud of their heritage through these activities. However, outside these contexts, they often receive a different message.

One of the authors had spoken to a couple of girls whose parents are from Zambia and Zimbabwe. These girls shared that their classmates asked if they were neighbors with giraffes and elephants, if their grandparents have real houses, and if people in Africa wear clothes. These girls came home upset that day. They had a deep conversation with their parents about what they could tell or show their peers if they gave such comments. One of the authors' graduate students from Cameroon shared a similar experience when she was student teaching in the United States. Her fifth-grade students asked if they have computers, cars, and stores in Cameroon and if they run across giraffes and elephants in the streets.

It is surprising to the authors that even college-educated adults seem to hold inaccurate concepts about people from Africa. This limited knowledge could appear as inappropriate comments against Africans. A Zimbabwean friend of the first author shared

something that happened when she was having a statewide meeting of early childhood educators. They were passionately talking about how they could work with children who speak another language at home, such as Spanish, Arabic, Mandarin, Vietnamese, and African. Hearing that they had included “African” as a language, this friend said, “There is not an African language!” The continent boasts more than 1,000 languages and dialects.

African immigrants in the United States also receive other forms of hurtful comments from well-meaning adults. For instance, while in flight, someone told one of the authors, “I am surprised that, coming from Africa, you speak English that well.” Another received an email saying, “To Whom It May Concern,” even though the sender knows his name.

The above anecdotes are examples of the microaggressions that African immigrants and their U.S.-born children experience because of the images people have formed of them. Microaggressions may be in the form of jokes or simple comments that seem small and unimportant to the microaggressors (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2020). Still, they send derogatory messages to the recipients, often members of marginalized groups (Sue et al., 2007), like Africans. The microaggressors are often unaware that they are sending these messages either because they do not have accurate knowledge or feel their comment is natural and harmless because the idea has been deeply ingrained in them.

Children should be guarded against hurtful experiences because of their differences. Even subtle experiences with racism have a lasting impact on their developing self-perceptions and worldviews (Kohli & Solórzano, 2012). It is often assumed that young children are unaware of racial differences and that they do not discriminate based on gender, relative wealth, and ethnicity, among others. Young children do notice differences. They quickly learn from their environment to attach values to those differences and mimic the dominant society’s discriminatory behavior unless those biases and behaviors are challenged (Neitzel, 2018).

## Identity Development and Multicultural Awareness

It is essential for all children to develop multicultural awareness, which involves appreciation and understanding of their culture and those of others without creating a feeling of superiority or inferiority toward their own identities (Morrison, 2018). Developing healthy, knowledgeable, and confident personal and social identities is the first of the interconnected core goals of anti-bias education. When children have developed healthy identities, they are positioned to succeed in the other goals. They learn to find joy in human diversity, recognize hurtful behavior, and stand up for themselves and others (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2020).

Many children learn about their African peers through popular media such as movies, books, and advertisements. For instance, films like *The Lion King* and *Madagascar* and their sequels are shown worldwide. Millions of families with young children have

watched or are planning to watch them. Such blockbuster movies inspire related books, television shows, toys, clothing, and many accessories that have become children’s favorites. What depictions of Africa and Africans do these movies show? How do these solidify the world’s stereotypical images of Africa and the Africans? Similarly, advertisements for charity causes in Africa show only poverty, food insecurity, chaos, and the likes. These are not representative of all Africans’ lives and experiences.

Even a few of the favorite books for read-aloud in the early childhood classrooms also strengthen stereotypes of Africans. For instance, in the *Giraffes Can’t Dance*, one can read: “Now every year in Africa, they hold the Jungle Dance, where every single animal turns up to skip and prance” (Andreae, 1999, p. 4). This book tells a beautiful and rhythmic story about the animals found in the safari; however, without thoughtful discussions about the setting, it may unintentionally make children believe that people in Africa are neighbors with giraffes, hippos, lions, and other animals.

The values gained from sharing multicultural literature with children are so powerful and so persuasive that we cannot dispute them (Norton, 1985; 2013). By engaging with texts, children get to understand geographical and natural history, discover the impact of sociological change, and read about great achievers of all backgrounds. As children identify with past and present achievers from their cultural group, they become proud of their heritage and improve their self-concept and sense of identity.

Children’s inaccurate or incomplete assumptions of their African immigrant peers can easily lead to prejudice, which provides an excuse for not learning about them (Follari, 2015). According to Derman-Sparks and Edwards (2020), “Invisibility erases identity and experiences – visibility affirms reality” (p. 27). African immigrants’ authentic home experiences and culture need to be made visible in young children’s classrooms for the African immigrant students in our school systems to develop a sense of pride and affirmation of their roots. Seeing their many stories, other children would avoid the danger of a single story (Adichie, 2009). Instead, they will develop a deeper understanding of their differences and similarities with their African immigrant peers. Having formed an accurate understanding of the different African cultures, especially those represented in their classrooms, these children will avoid unintentionally providing inaccurate comments or asking hurtful questions.

## Teachers’ Crucial Role

Early childhood educators are uniquely positioned to create cultural bridges that allow them and their students to adopt new ways of learning and understanding (Howard, 2018; NAEYC, 2022). To do this, teachers must acknowledge the differences among their classroom members (Follari, 2015). Doing so allows them to intentionally plan for experiences and environments that help their students become aware, respectful, and appreciative of differences. Teachers must also acknowledge that their own experiences and contexts influence their instructional decisions (NAEYC, 2022). Because most teachers in the United States, especially those in the early grades,

are White, middle-class, and female (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2021), they may not have a nuanced understanding of the experiences of individuals from diverse backgrounds. Thus, they need to exert a conscious effort to improve their cultural competency, which is one of the ways they can develop self-awareness while accepting other cultures and their values (Westerberg, 2016).

In addition to a lack of nuanced understanding of the experiences of other groups of people, early childhood teachers may have explicit and implicit biases towards children whose backgrounds are different from theirs. Unlike explicit bias, which they can reflect on and actively address, implicit bias can cause a host of unintentional negative outcomes like microaggressions in daily interactions. In a study conducted by Gilliam et al. (2016), early childhood educators who watched a video of diverse children unintentionally focused their attention on the Black child and expected this child to display challenging behaviors. This research finding demonstrates implicit bias-in-action. Implicit bias also affects the grading of student work, especially in the early years from kindergarten to 12th grade. Moreover, teachers interpret the behaviors of Black students as troublesome, thereby responding with harsher punishment (Westerberg, 2016).

The antidote to stereotypes, particularly those influenced by unconscious or implicit bias, is continually learning about group differences and multicultural viewpoints, thus, fostering true understanding (Marks, 2015). Early childhood professionals play a crucial role in changing the experiences of African children in U.S. classrooms. To be successful in this role, teachers need to educate themselves about Africa and the African cultures represented in their classrooms. Having improved knowledge will help them pick out books and implement engaging learning experiences that will not unintentionally send ill messages to the African children. Understanding African cultures will also enable them to answer students' questions more accurately.

### Resources to Improved Teachers' Understanding of Africa

The following are two websites that offer teachers and children helpful information related to Africa and its people.

- **UNESCO** (<https://en.unesco.org/general-history-africa>). This web page promotes not just the African culture but also breaks down how young children, especially those of African descent, can learn about their cultures. This website exposes teachers to using children's favorite comic and cartoon characters to bring to life the continent's rich nature. The information-packed website helps teachers be culturally competent in their learning and teaching young children about Africa, thereby bridging the gap that Africa is all about wildlife, poverty, and wars, as consistently shown in the popular media.
- **Britannica** (<https://www.britannica.com/place/Africa>). This website has informative content about Africa's geologic history, land, people, and economy. It includes vivid videos and images that teachers could use. The website contains extensive discussions of each part of Africa, the countries

located there, the history and characteristics of the people, and cultural development. However, the article also contains a concise 2-minute summary of all the information and facts about Africa for individuals who want a quick dose of information without reading the whole piece (Smedley et al., 2021).

### Using Authentic African Texts in Early Childhood Settings

Teachers help their students to continually learn about Africa and its people by including authentic African texts in the classroom. Doing so gives the children access to information that more accurately represents Africans' lived experiences, thus counteracting the development of stereotypical thinking about this group of people. Integrating other students' backgrounds into the classroom environment and curriculum appropriately can create a welcoming space where children feel a sense of pride in their diversity (Westerberg, 2016). Through texts authored by those who have a firsthand experience of the African cultures, African immigrants' children see their people's varied lives and experiences as parts of a larger human story. These texts mirror their home culture and reading them leads to self-affirmation. Also, engaging with these authentic texts serves as windows or sliding doors for other children as they walk or look through in imagination into the world that the authors have created or recreated for them (Sims-Bishop, 1990). Books reflecting multicultural families, people, and environments can broaden children's discoveries of their world. Authentic African texts are not as available as those written by famous American authors and published by major book companies; however, public libraries have some excellent titles. Because teachers can check out twenty books for an extended period from most libraries, making these texts available to the children should not be difficult.

### Strategies to Engage Children with Authentic Texts

There are many ways children of different ages could meaningfully engage with authentic African texts. When deciding which to implement, teachers must consider their students' current needs and interests.

**Picture Book Sharing.** This strategy involves oral interaction between the teacher and a child or a couple of them, which is an excellent way to introduce the diverse African cultures to infants and toddlers. In addition to the language dimension of the activity, the teacher could direct the child's attention to the pictures and print. For instance, the book *A Triangle is for Adaora* by Ifeoma Onyefulu (2000) is a powerful addition to the collection of books on shapes. This book introduces young children to things of different shapes coming from various African groups. Teachers encourage children to engage in the activity thoroughly and independently explore books by creating a devoted area for book sharing in their classrooms. This area includes comfortable seating, floor cushions, a low bookshelf, cloth baskets, and a display shelf with book covers shown (Otto, 2019).

**Interactive Read-Aloud.** This strategy is among the preschoolers' and kindergartners' favorite activities in school. In

this activity, children do not just listen to a text being read; they are actively involved by asking and answering questions, making predictions, etc. Interactive read-aloud permits the teacher and children to construct knowledge and enhance literacy skills (Wiseman, 2011). Through this activity, teachers scaffold children's understanding of the book being read by strategically asking questions, modeling strategies for comprehension, and teaching vocabulary and concepts by inserting a short definition of uncommon words or a description of unfamiliar pictures (McGee & Schickedanz, 2007). Asking higher-order-thinking (HOT) questions during an interactive read-aloud of an authentic African text facilitates a deeper understanding of the Africans and their cultures among children. These questions do not have one clear answer. The children's prior knowledge and experiences would influence their responses. HOT questions allow children to connect their real-life experiences and the information presented in the text and critically evaluate their current understanding. When discussing these connections within the context of group discussion after an interactive read-aloud, children learn from their peers and vice versa.

**Literacy Station.** Placing authentic African texts in the literacy station, especially after introducing these to the children through an interactive read-aloud, extends and deepens their understanding. The literacy station includes a library and writing station. It allows children to make choices and collaborate with their peers (Morrow, 2020). Teachers offer the children opportunities to increase their awareness of Africa's cultures by including texts about them in this area. "Children in classrooms with literature collections read and look at books 50% more often than children in classrooms without such collections" (Morrow, 2020, p. 283). Through interacting with the authentic African texts – independently or in small groups in the literacy station, children move away from the single story about Africans that popular media perpetuates.

Teachers can further sustain children's engagement with the text read to them by turning the literacy station into a work station (Diller, 2003). Literacy work stations offer children multiple opportunities to deepen their conceptual understanding and practice their previously learned literacy skills. Involving the African parents in the development of the literacy work station would ensure that the experiences represent accurate information and not strengthen stereotypical thinking among the children. Families could bring artifacts and introduce the materials to the children through a minilesson.

**Graphic Organizers.** This strategy enhances the interactive read-aloud experience for kindergarteners and primary school-aged children. Simpler versions of the graphic organizers using pictures or simpler vocabulary words are also great for preschoolers. A K-W-L chart is an excellent tool for identifying children's misconceptions before reading a book. These misconceptions are good discussion points during and after reading a book. Writing the accurate concepts under the L column of the chart will help children remember the accurate information. Bubble maps are great for populating information in various categories about a topic. Through the different circles in the bubble

map, teachers and children could expand their understanding of a specific African group of people. A Venn diagram helps children identify how the Africans depicted in the text are like or different from them. Further, they could compare texts on a similar topic from various African cultures. Examining multiple sources of information, including texts, gives children "opportunities to authentically explore their questions" (Strachan & Block, 2020, p.42). Students enhance their understanding of Africa and the Africans in an engaging, informative, and positive manner through such activities.

Finally, inviting African immigrants (if there are any in the area) to talk about their home culture and their people's stories is an excellent way to deepen children's understanding of them. Having a live interaction with the children allows questions to be answered and more authentic stories to be told. The guests may even have artifacts from their home culture to share.

## Sample Book List

The table following presents a selection of authentic African texts that represent varied cultures. In addition to the things unique to the African contexts shown in the books, the ones like other children's experiences are included in the description. These similarities make children identify with their peers. When reading these books, children would see that, like them, the children in the African context depicted in the book love to play; however, they may have different toys and play other games.

By thoughtfully introducing and implementing meaningful learning experiences involving texts that depict authentic African experiences and culture, teachers help children – Africans and non-Africans alike, to form healthy, confident, and knowledgeable personal and social identities.

## Conclusion

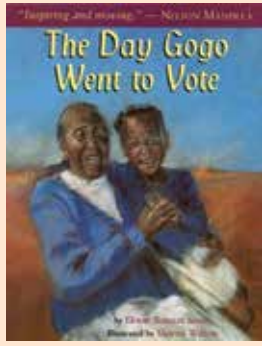
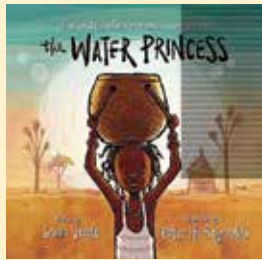
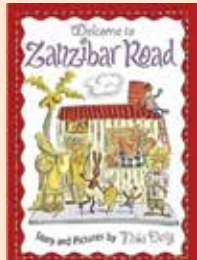
After engaging with several authentic texts on Africa and Africans, children may fully understand that Africa is not a single country, and its people represent varied and rich cultures. Like other civilizations, they have progressed with the advancement of technology. Although, when introducing authentic texts representing the different African cultures, teachers should be careful not to generalize the information. They must ensure that they have thoroughly studied the cultures depicted in the books before introducing them so they can answer children's questions accurately. Doing so will also help teachers catch inaccurate, stereotypical, or hurtful comments and provide children with learning experiences that would help them develop a sound conceptual understanding of the African cultures in the texts. The stories' contexts must be discussed (i.e., how is it like where the story happened). Multiple texts should be made available so children can see that even within one country, children have varied experiences. It is also vital for children to realize that, like any other country, African countries are beautiful in diverse ways, and parts of some African countries have unique challenges such as war, extreme poverty, malnutrition, and political unrest.

**Table 1. Selection of Children’s Books Addressing African Stories**

Title	Description and Culture Depicted	Title	Description and Culture Depicted
<p><i>A is for Africa</i> by Ifeoma Onyefulu (Nigeria)</p> 	<p>This book features snapshots of different African crafts and costumes, occasions and fun, and day-to-day life that correspond to the letters of the alphabet.</p>	<p><i>Grandpa Cacao: A Tale of Chocolate, from Farm to Family</i> by Elizabeth Zunon (the Republic of Côte d’Ivoire)</p> 	<p>The book is about a father telling his daughter about the family’s cocoa farm in the Republic of Côte d’Ivoire and chocolate (Grandpa’s Kente cloth - only worn on special occasions, chocolate from the Republic of Côte d’Ivoire, orally passing traditions to children)</p>
<p><i>A South African Night</i> by Rachel Isadora (South Africa)</p> 	<p>The book depicts two sides of African life. The night-time, when the city goes to sleep and at the same time many animals come out to feed and hunt in a distant place. (Some Africans are white, different clothes people wear, houses, city streets, parents holding their children’s hands when walking, different animals over 200 miles away from the setting of the story).</p>	<p><i>I Lost My Tooth in Africa</i> by Penda Diakite (Mali/USA), Illus. by Baba Wague Diakite (Mali)</p> 	<p>Amina is hoping to lose her wiggly tooth in Africa so she can get a special gift from the African tooth fairy (folklore).</p>
<p><i>Baby Goes to Market</i> by Atinuke (Nigeria)</p> 	<p>Baby goes to market with mummy and receives lots of gifts from the traders (market scene, clothing, the way a baby is carried, vehicles, everyone’s fondness for children).</p>	<p><i>Look at This! (Home, Play, Clothes)</i> by Ifeoma Onyefulu (Nigeria)</p> 	<p>The books show actual pictures of common objects used at home, toys, and clothing in different African settings.</p>
<p><i>Grandma Comes to Stay</i> by Ifeoma Onyefulu (Nigeria)</p> 	<p>Grandma has come for a visit, and Stephanie will be spending the whole time with her (food, houses, tying the head-gear, market, drum, unique and similar clothing, festival, involvement of grandparents in raising the children)</p>	<p><i>My Life in Kenya</i> by Alex Woolf (British)</p> 	<p>Based on the true story of a Kenyan girl who takes us through what her life is like, discussing her native language, food, and struggles she faces daily.</p>



Title	Description and Culture Depicted
<p><i>Not So Fast Songololo</i> by Niki Daly (South Africa)</p> 	<p>The book depicts life in South Africa but with a modern look of a boy helping his grandmother with her shopping in the city, and his grandmother bought him new shoes because his old ones were bad. (Names, a child's day with his grandmother, different vehicles, city market)</p>
<p><i>Once Upon a Time</i> by Niki Daly (South Africa)</p> 	<p>This is a book about an African child facing schooling challenges unique to her experience (e.g., walking a long distance to school) and like many other children (learning to read).</p>
<p><i>One Plastic Bag</i> by Isatou Ceesay (Gambia) &amp; The Recycling Women of the Gambia</p> 	<p>Based on a true story about Gambian women's decision to recycle plastic bags into crocheted bags to clean their community (collective effort for the common good, perseverance).</p>
<p><i>Somewhere in Africa</i> by Ingrid Mennen (South Africa) &amp; Niki Daly (South Africa), Illus. by Nicolaas Maritz (South Africa)</p> 	<p>A little boy in an African city loves to read books about African animals, but he has not seen one in person. An African child's experience is contrary to what many inaccurately assume (e.g., animals are all over Africa).</p>

Title	Description and Culture Depicted
<p><i>The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind</i> by William Kamkwamba (Malawi)</p> 	<p>Based on a true story, the boy saw a need in his community and created windmills for power out of scrap and trash. The life and culture of an African village are explicit throughout the text (farming, perseverance, village houses, value of schooling).</p>
<p><i>The Day Gogo Went to Vote</i> by Elinor Batezat Sisulu (Zimbabwe), Illus. by Sharon Wilson (Unknown)</p> 	<p>This book tells a beautiful story about Gogo casting her vote in their country's first election. (Zulu and Xhosa language: Gogo for grandmother, child accompanying his grandparent, voting machine, cars, accommodation for the elderly)</p>
<p><i>The Water Princess</i> by Susan Verde (America), Illus. by Peter H. Reynolds (Canada)</p> 	<p>Georgie's village lacks water. She must travel far to get water every day. (Endurance, family, children helping with the family chores, games, village houses, artifacts, and clothing)</p>
<p><i>Welcome to Zanzibar Road</i> by Niki Daly (South Africa)</p> 	<p>The story is about neighbors and friends helping each other. Neighborhood dynamics (helping each other for the common good, animals)</p>

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# Learning Mathematics through Everyday Play in Prekindergarten

José Lema and Stacie Summers



In today's fast paced early childhood classrooms, mathematics play activities in prekindergarten settings are not consistently supported. Administrators and educators have discussed with great intensity and passion about incorporating mathematics play in prekindergarten classrooms. Both groups discussed the benefits and reservations of incorporating mathematics play activities as part of daily learning. For example, some teachers stated that their daily schedule is limited due to other academic areas such as literacy and other curriculum content. However, research has demonstrated that incorporating daily mathematics play activities in prekindergarten classrooms helps children to engage in learning, develop cognitive skills, social skills, and the emotional skills necessary for school readiness as well as performance tasks in kindergarten and beyond (Clements et al., 2014). This article focuses on some of the mathematical skills and concepts prekindergarten children develop through intentionally planned play activities.

## How Does Prekindergarten Promote Mathematics?

Mathematics includes many concepts and skills that help pre-

kindergarten children organize and make sense of their world. Some of these concepts and skills learned in the prekindergarten curriculum include *matching, counting, classifying, comparing, ordering, and measuring* (Butera, 2014). In addition, prekindergarten mathematics curriculum includes shapes, geometry and spatial sense, numbers, and number symbols (Texas Education Agency, 2015). Promoting these mathematical skills through play activities can help prekindergarten children to develop these concepts in a fun way while also enhancing their inductive and deductive reasoning skills.

As children grow physically and cognitively, their mathematical ideas and concepts

also grow and develop. Their development does not follow a specific trajectory because each child follows their own developmental path. Each developmental path follows a series or sequence of steps which each child reaches one at a time (Clements & Sarama, 2016).

## How Do Mathematics Play Activities Benefit Prekindergarten Children?

Children can discriminate quantities early in their lives. Thus, one way to help them develop vocabulary is through mathematics. Mathematics concept words such as "more" or "less" enable children to learn quantity discrimination. Therefore, basic numerical concepts can be learned during the play. Children can acquire precise number words and the number sequences, including counting the number of objects in a set. Therefore, teachers can help children to grasp these complex mathematical concepts through play.

Trawick-Smith, Swaminathan and Liu (2016) stated that play activities enhance mathematical thinking and other complex cognitive development in children. However, some prekindergarten

teachers are reluctant to include mathematics play. They tend to spend more time on teacher-centered instruction rather than incorporating child-centered mathematics play activities.

Other teachers provide limited time for children to learn mathematics through play activities or learning centers. They tend to focus more on content and other academic learning. Prekindergarten classrooms that support daily mathematics play activities are engaging in high-level free play mathematics activities. These high-level free play mathematics activities enable children to develop autonomy and self-regulation skills. Therefore, learning mathematics through play should be incorporated daily as intrinsic mathematics classroom instruction.

Mathematics play activities are essential to develop academic, social, emotional, and career development which helps prekindergarten children to grasp mathematics concepts in the following categories: Classifying, exploring magnitude, enumerating, investigating dynamics, studying patterns, and exploring spatial relationships (Wichstrom et al., 2019). Prekindergarten teachers incorporate mathematics play activities in a fun way across all subjects, including literacy and vocabulary development. Research supports that incorporating daily mathematics play activities in prekindergarten curriculum has a positive effect for later learning in kindergarten and beyond (Stebler et.al, 2013). Mathematics education in kindergarten develops verbalization, reasoning, and problem-solving skills. Children from four to six years old demonstrate enormous progress in their mathematics acquisition through play activities.

Mathematics play activities promote executive functions such as self-control of thinking, behavior, and emotions. Teacher interactions may assist children to develop self-regulation processes, including self-talk to guide thinking and problem solving (Trawick-Smith et al., 2016). Incorporating mathematics play activities enable prekindergarten teachers to use scaffolding strategies and help children understand complex mathematic concepts. There are three types of learning experiences: *naturalistic*, *informal*, and *structured*.

### Naturalistic Learning Experiences

Naturalistic learning experiences are initiated by the child during their daily activities. For example, children can use their senses and muscles to learn about mathematics concepts such as *shape*, *size*, *time*, and *amount*. Mathematics play activities enable children to learn these concepts in a natural setting. Examples of naturalistic play are listed below.

- Jamal takes a spoon from the kitchen drawer in the dramatics play center. "This is big." Treyvon says, "Yes."
- Aliyah hands Valentina a block saying, "This is rectangle!"
- Mateo is playing with an apple, an orange, and a pineapple. "I have three pieces of fruits" (Holds up three fingers.)

Teachers can observe how each child is progressing based on their responses and interactions with other children. Praising the children's efforts during the play activities encourages children to learn these mathematics concepts.

### Informal Learning Experiences

Informal learning experiences are led by the teacher; however, they are not preplanned. They occur when the teacher determines it is time to intervene. This can happen for various reasons such as the child makes a mistake; the child is having difficulty; or the child is on the right track, but they need some assistance from the teacher. This type of play encourages children to use their wishes, needs, and imaginations as they interact with their friends (Belknap & Hazler, 2014). Examples of informal learning experiences are displayed below.

- Ebony has a bag of plastic animals. Her teacher asks, "Do you have enough for everyone?" Ebony replies, "I don't know." The teacher asks, "How can you find out?" Ebony says, "I don't know." The teacher intervenes by saying, "I will help you. We count them."

This interaction allows the teacher to help Ebony to develop her counting skills by incorporating mathematics play activities.

### Structured Learning Experiences

Structured learning experiences are specific planned activities. Teachers can plan mathematics play activities by creating an environment that provides opportunities for children to explore various mathematics concepts such as comparing, number recognition and other concepts such as geometry. Planned play activities provide many opportunities for children to create connections with mathematics (Texas Education Agency, 2015). Some examples of structured learning experiences are displayed below.

- The teacher is with an individual child at a specific time. The teacher says, "Diego, I have some block here for you to count. How many blocks are in this pile?" The child counts the blocks, and the teacher observes and helps the child.
- The teacher is with a group of four students at the pretend and learning center. Children are sorting and classifying kitchen items by sizes. Teachers asks, "Can you arrange these items in order from smallest to largest?"

These opportunities support children to explore structured learning activities. Teachers can intervene in these types of learning situations.

### Play and Divergent Thinking

Play is a natural form of creativity which involves cognitive and affective processes. These processes are based on experiences of emotions and incorporation of affect themes from memory or imagination, involving creativity and play. Divergent thinking is the ability to generate a variety of ideas that children develop from their daily play experiences. Daily play activities enable prekindergarten children to utilize their imaginations by mentally transforming toys into a variety of elements or objects to explore different role-playing scenarios. Divergent play is related to children's mathematics achievement scores (Wallace et al., 2015). Divergent thinking is powerful when it is incorporated in early mathematics learning in prekindergarten classrooms. It stimulates interest in mathematics throughout play activities for all children in the classroom.

## Defining Mathematics Play in Prekindergarten

Play is defined in various forms across disciplines. Play emphasizes the process or experience, which is spontaneous, voluntary, and self-motivated (Bateson, 2011). Gray (2012) describes play as an activity that is “self-chosen and self-directed; intrinsically motivated; guided by mental rules; imaginative; and involves an active alert; but non-stressed frame of mind” (p. 355). There are three types of play activities free play, guided play, and teacher-directed play (Wichstrom et al., 2019).



### Free Play

Free play is defined as play that is chosen by children and centers around their activities and interests and is not chosen and directed by adults (Manning, 2019). In this type of play, children are directing their own activities, using their imaginations, and growing their critical thinking skills. As early childhood educators, we need to create a classroom full of materials that can engage students in this type of exploratory play. For example, in the creative arts center you begin by gathering bins, tubs, or baskets and label them according to the materials inside. This helps to develop an organized area and allows children to explore and work independently. The bins can be filled with different types of paper, drawing, and writing materials, paints, modeling clay and playdough, glue, scissors, twine, ribbon, pom poms, small rocks, shells, feathers, twigs, leaves, or dried flowers. The list of materials used for free play in this center is endless and can be changed or added to depending on your students and their interests.

Through their free play in the creative arts center, children are learning across many areas of the preschool curriculum. They are learning mathematics as they create patterns, shapes, rhythms,

### Figure 1. Free Play Opportunities that Engage Children

- Dress up/pretend play
- Role play
- Building with blocks, Legos, and other building materials
- Creating with multiple art materials
- Play-dough or modeling clay
- Sorting with buttons, pom poms, beads, shells into egg cartons or containers
- Felt board with story items to encourage storytelling
- Shape, color, and size sorting trays
- Measuring cups and containers at a sensory table

classification, sequencing, and problem-solving skills. They are learning literacy skills by drawing, writing, painting, and talking about what they have created. Science is being explored as they create with colors, textures, building, and experimenting.

Free play in the preschool classroom is vital. It allows the children to work on problem solving skills, enhances cognitive development, and learning through sensory experiences (Garhart-Mooney, 2006). **Figure 1** has a list of free play opportunities that children can engage in while in their preschool classroom.

### Guided Play

Guided play is a form of play in which children’s activities are scaffolded by teachers, allowing children’s actions to lead them to the learning objective (Weisberg & Zosh, 2018). Teachers can provide this scaffolding by arranging their classroom environment in ways that provides educational materials centered around their educational goals. Then, during guided play, teachers can respond in a sensitive manner by using open-ended questioning and allowing children to explore the materials. In the preschool classroom, guided play can support mathematics learning. For example, the preschool teacher wants the students to learn about various shapes. This can be accomplished by providing students with math manipulatives in different shapes. Children can be invited to explore these materials while the teacher asks questions to scaffold their knowledge about the different shapes. The following are types of open-ended questions the teacher could ask.

- Can you tell me about these different shapes?
- How are these shapes different?
- Can you tell me how these shapes are the same?

Guided play provides an excellent learning opportunity because it allows children autonomy and discovery in their education.



It helps to ensure children's love of learning and promote their immersion in their exploration of discovery while teachers offer their support and guidance in knowledge acquisition. Using guided play in the curriculum provides environmental and psychological factors that gently shape not only the desired outcomes in learning but also a more positive outlook toward learning itself (Weisberg et al., 2014).

### Teacher Directed Play

Wickstrom et al. (2019) reported that teacher-directed play is commonly observed in early childhood classrooms. In this type of play, the teacher controls the game or play activity. Children work together in an activity designed by their teacher. Children are required to follow specific steps to play the game. The teacher monitors the game as children play and learn specific content concepts such as mathematics. Mathematics play activities allow children to build their own knowledge by exploring and playing with their friends. Thus, teacher directed mathematics play activities is not recommended in prekindergarten classrooms. Teachers provide opportunities for children to cooperate and interact with other children through play. Restricting children from making their own choices can discourage their creativity; however, teacher directed play activities may be implemented in upper grades.

### Some Play Activities to Integrate in Prekindergarten Centers

Informal mathematics experiences occur during the play time. Centers provide valuable experiences for prekindergarten children to explore mathematics concepts. For example, children have many opportunities in centers to develop their mathematical thinking and problem-solving experiences, including language and vocabulary (Circle Pre-K Curriculum, 2021). Incorporating

centers for children to explore and play help them to continue practicing and developing their mathematics skills. The following mathematics manipulatives and artifacts can be integrated at centers for children to explore.

- Fruits and vegetables at the science center
- Play money to purchase food at the pet store
- Blocks or geometric shapes to build homes and bridges at the construction center
- Plastic tools such as plastic hammer, screwdriver, and pliers at the pretend and learning center.

Children benefit from these centers when teachers join them by asking questions, scaffolding tasks, and helping them to use mathematics vocabulary.

### Conclusion

Various studies have investigated mathematics development in prekindergarten classrooms that benefit children in kindergarten and the early years of primary school (Clements & Sarama, 2016). Developing mathematics concepts such as counting, numeracy, geometry, and understanding quantities and their relationships in prekindergarten predict children's performance and achievement in upper grade mathematics (Reid, 2016). Mathematics play activities encourage and motivate children to develop these concepts as they play and interact with their teachers and friends in the classroom. Also, it predicts children's vocabulary and literacy skills such as reading comprehension. Thus, integrating everyday mathematics play activities such as centers in prekindergarten classrooms enhance children's cognitive thinking and affective process development in a natural manner.

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# Aprendiendo matemáticas a través del juego diario en el aula de Prekindergarten

José Lema y Stacie Summers



los niños de prekindergarten desarrollan a través de actividades de juego planificadas intencionalmente.

## ¿Cómo se promueven las matemáticas en el aula de prekindergarten?

Las matemáticas incluyen muchos conceptos y habilidades que ayudan a los niños de prekindergarten a organizarse y dar sentido a su mundo. Algunos de estos conceptos y habilidades aprendidas en el currículo de prekindergarten incluyen *emparejar*, *contar*, *clasificar*, *comparar*, *ordenar* y *medir* (Butera, 2014). Además, el currículo de matemáticas prekindergarten incluye formas, geometría y sentido espacial, números y símbolos numéricos (Agencia de Educación de Texas, 2015). Promover estas habilidades

Con el rápido ritmo de hoy, las actividades de juego sobre matemáticas en entornos de prekindergarten no reciben apoyo de manera consistente. Los administradores y maestros han discutido con gran intensidad y pasión sobre la incorporación del juego con las matemáticas en las aulas de prekindergarten. Ambos han conversado sobre los beneficios y reservas de incorporar actividades de juego de matemáticas como parte del aprendizaje diario. Por ejemplo, algunos maestros declararon que su horario diario es limitado debido a la atención de otras áreas académicas como la alfabetización y otros contenidos curriculares. Sin embargo, las investigaciones han demostrado que la incorporación de actividades diarias de juego con las matemáticas en las aulas de prekindergarten ayuda a los niños a participar en el aprendizaje, desarrollar habilidades cognitivas, habilidades sociales y las habilidades emocionales necesarias para su preparación escolar, así como las tareas de rendimiento en el jardín de infantes y más allá (Clements et al., 2014). Este artículo se centra en algunas de las habilidades y conceptos matemáticos que

matemáticas a través de actividades de juego puede ayudar a los niños prekindergarten a desarrollar estos conceptos de una manera divertida al tiempo que mejoran sus habilidades de razonamiento inductivo y deductivo.

A medida que los niños crecen física y cognitivamente, sus ideas y conceptos matemáticos también crecen y se desarrollan. Su desarrollo no sigue una trayectoria específica porque cada niño sigue su propia ruta de desarrollo. Cada ruta de desarrollo sigue una serie o secuencia de pasos que cada niño alcanza uno a la vez (Clements y Sarama, 2016).

## ¿Cómo benefician las actividades de juego de matemáticas a los niños de Prekindergarten?

Los niños pueden saber discriminar cuantitativamente desde temprano en sus vidas. Por lo tanto, una forma de ayudarlos a desarrollar vocabulario es a través de las matemáticas. Las palabras



conceptuales de matemáticas como “más” o “menos” permiten a los niños aprender la discriminación cuantitativa. Por lo tanto, los conceptos numéricos básicos se pueden aprender durante el juego. Los niños pueden adquirir palabras numéricas precisas y secuencias numéricas, que están incluidas en el conteo del número de objetos en un conjunto. Es por lo tanto que a través del juego los maestros pueden ayudar a los niños a comprender estos conceptos matemáticos que son más complejos.

Trawick-Smith, Swaminathan y Liu (2016) afirmaron que las actividades de juego mejoran el pensamiento matemático y otros desarrollos cognitivos complejos en los niños. Sin embargo, algunos maestros de prekindergarten son reacios a incluir el juego de matemáticas. Tienden a pasar más tiempo en la instrucción dirigida por el maestro en lugar de incorporar actividades de juego de matemáticas centradas en el niño.

Otros maestros proporcionan tiempo limitado para que los niños aprendan matemáticas a través de actividades de juego o centros de aprendizaje. Tienden a centrarse más en el contenido y otros aprendizajes académicos. Las aulas de Prekindergarten que apoyan las actividades diarias de juego de matemáticas están participando en actividades de matemáticas de juego libre de alto nivel. Estas actividades matemáticas de juego libre de alto nivel permiten a los niños desarrollar habilidades de autonomía y autorregulación. Por lo tanto, el aprendizaje de las matemáticas a través del juego debe incorporarse diariamente como instrucción intrínseca de matemáticas en el aula.

Las actividades de juego de matemáticas son esenciales para desarrollar el desarrollo académico, social, emocional y profesional que ayuda a los niños prekindergarten a comprender los conceptos matemáticos en las siguientes categorías: clasificar, explorar la magnitud, enumerar, investigar dinámicas, estudiar patrones y explorar relaciones espaciales (Wichstrom et al., 2019). Los maestros de Prekindergarten incorporan actividades de juego de matemáticas de una manera divertida en todas las materias, incluida la alfabetización y el desarrollo del vocabulario. La investigación apoya que la incorporación de actividades diarias de juego de matemáticas en el currículo de prekindergarten tiene un efecto positivo para el aprendizaje posterior en el jardín de infantes y más allá (Stebler et al., 2013). La educación matemática en el nivel preescolar propicia el desarrollo de las habilidades verbales, razonamiento y resolución de problemas. Los niños de cuatro a seis años demuestran un enorme progreso en su adquisición de matemáticas a través de las actividades de juego.

Las actividades de juego de matemáticas promueven funciones ejecutivas como el autocontrol del pensamiento, el comportamiento y las emociones. Las interacciones con los maestros pueden ayudar a los niños a desarrollar procesos de autorregulación, incluido el diálogo interno para guiar el pensamiento y la resolución de problemas (Trawick-Smith et al., 2016). La incorporación de actividades de juego de matemáticas permite a los maestros de prekindergarten usar estrategias de andamiaje y ayudar a los niños a comprender conceptos matemáticos complejos. Hay tres tipos de experiencias de aprendizaje: *naturalistas*, *informales* y *estructuradas*.

### Experiencia de aprendizaje naturalistas

Las experiencias de aprendizaje naturalista son iniciadas por el niño durante sus actividades diarias. Por ejemplo, los niños pueden usar sus sentidos y músculos para aprender sobre conceptos matemáticos como *la forma, el tamaño, el tiempo y la cantidad*. Las actividades de juego de matemáticas permiten que los niños aprendan estos conceptos en un entorno natural. A continuación, se enumeran algunos ejemplos de juego naturalístico.

- *Jamal toma una cuchara del cajón de la cocina en el centro de juegos dramáticos. “Esto es grande”. Treyvon dice: “Sí”.*
- *Aliyah le entrega a Valentina un bloque diciendo: “¡Esto es un rectángulo!”*
- *Mateo está jugando con una manzana, una naranja y una piña. “Tengo tres pedazos de frutas” (Levanta tres dedos).*

Los maestros pueden observar cómo progresa cada niño en función de sus respuestas e interacciones con otros niños. El elogiar los esfuerzos de los niños durante las actividades de juego alienta a los niños a aprender estos conceptos matemáticos.

### Aprendiendo a través de las Experiencias informales

Las experiencias informales de aprendizaje son dirigidas por el maestro; sin embargo, no están previamente planificadas. Ocurren cuando el maestro observa y determina que es hora de intervenir. Hay varias razones que explican porque es momento para intervenir, como lo es por ejemplo, cuando vemos que el niño comete un error; cuando el niño está teniendo dificultades; o el niño está en el camino a la respuesta correcta, pero necesita ayuda del maestro. Este tipo de juego alienta a los niños a usar sus deseos, necesidades e imaginaciones mientras interactúan con sus amigos (Belknap y Hazler, 2014). A continuación, se muestra un ejemplo de experiencias de aprendizaje informal, no planificado.

- *Ebony tiene una bolsa de animales de plástico. Su maestra le pregunta: “¿Tienes suficiente para todos?” Ebony responde: “No lo sé”. El maestro pregunta: “¿Cómo puedes averiguarlo?” Ebony dice: “No lo sé”. El maestro interviene diciendo: “Te ayudaré. Vamos a contarlos.”*

Esta interacción permite al maestro ayudar a Ebony a desarrollar sus habilidades de conteo mediante la incorporación de actividades de juego con las matemáticas.

### Las experiencias estructuradas

Las experiencias de aprendizaje estructuradas son actividades planificadas de forma específica. Los maestros pueden planificar actividades de juego de matemáticas mediante la creación de un entorno que brinde oportunidades para que los niños exploren varios conceptos matemáticos como la comparación, el reconocimiento de números y otros conceptos como la geometría. Las actividades de juego planificadas brindan muchas oportunidades para que los niños creen conexiones con las matemáticas (Agencia de Educación de Texas, 2015). A continuación se muestran algunos ejemplos de experiencias de aprendizaje estructurado.



## Definición del Juego Matemático en el Prekindergarten

El juego se define en varias formas en todas las disciplinas. El juego enfatiza el proceso o la experiencia, que es espontánea, voluntaria y autodirigida (Bateson, 2011). Gray (2012) describe el juego como una actividad que es "autoelegida y autodirigida; intrínsecamente motivado; guiado por reglas mentales; imaginativo; e implica una alerta activa; pero un estado de ánimo no estresado" (p. 355). Hay tres tipos de actividades de juego: *juego libre*, *juego guiado* y *juego dirigido por el maestro* (Wichstrom et al., 2019).

- El maestro está con un niño en un momento específico. El maestro dice: "Diego, tengo un bloque aquí para que cuentes. ¿Cuántos bloques hay en esta pila?" El niño cuenta los bloques, y el maestro observa y ayuda al niño.
- El maestro está con un grupo de cuatro estudiantes en el centro de simulación y aprendizaje. Los niños están clasificando y clasifican los artículos de cocina por tamaños. Los maestros preguntan: "¿Puedes organizar estos artículos en orden de menor a mayor?"

Estas oportunidades ayudan a los niños a explorar actividades de aprendizaje estructurado. Los maestros pueden intervenir en este tipo de situaciones de aprendizaje.

### Juego y pensamiento divergente

El juego es una forma natural de creatividad que involucra procesos cognitivos y afectivos. Estos procesos se basan en experiencias de emociones e incorporación de temas afectivos desde la memoria o la imaginación, así involucrando la creatividad y el juego. El pensamiento divergente es la capacidad de generar una variedad de ideas que los niños desarrollan a partir de sus experiencias diarias de juego. Las actividades de juego diarias permiten a los niños de prekindergarten utilizar su imaginación transformando mentalmente los juguetes en una variedad de elementos u objetos para explorar diferentes escenarios en el juego de roles.

El juego divergente está relacionado con los resultados del rendimiento en matemáticas de los niños (Wallace et al., 2015). El pensamiento divergente es muy eficaz cuando se incorpora en el aprendizaje temprano de matemáticas en aulas de prekindergarten. El mismo estimula el interés en las matemáticas a través de actividades de juego para todos los niños en el aula.

### Juego libre

El juego libre se define como el juego que es elegido por los niños y se centra en sus actividades e intereses y no es elegido y dirigido por adultos (Manning, 2019). En este tipo de juego, los niños están dirigiendo sus propias actividades, usando su imaginación y haciendo crecer sus escuelas de pensamiento crítico. Como educadores de la primera infancia, necesitamos crear un aula llena de materiales que puedan involucrar a los estudiantes en este tipo de juego exploratorio. Por ejemplo, en el centro de artes creativas puedes comenzar reuniendo contenedores, tinas o canastas y las etiquetas de acuerdo con los materiales que contienen. Esto ayuda a desarrollar un área organizada y permite a los niños explorar y trabajar de forma independiente. Los contenedores se pueden llenar con diferentes tipos de papel, materiales de dibujo y escritura, pinturas, arcilla de modelado y plastilina, pegamento, tijeras, cordel, cinta, pompones, rocas pequeñas, conchas, plumas, ramitas, hojas o flores secas. La lista de materiales utilizados para el juego libre en este centro es interminable y se puede cambiar o añadir dependiendo de los estudiantes y sus intereses.

A través del juego espontáneo en el centro de artes creativas, se propicia el aprendizaje en muchas áreas del currículo preescolar. A través del mismo están aprendiendo matemáticas a medida que crean patrones, formas, ritmos, clasifican, establecen secuencias y aprenden las destrezas para resolver problemas. También están aprendiendo destrezas de alfabetización dibujando, escribiendo, pintando y hablando sobre lo que han creado. Las ciencias están siendo exploradas a medida que crean con colores, texturas, construyendo y experimentando.

El juego libre en el aula de preescolar es vital. Permite a los niños trabajar en destrezas de resolución de problemas, mejora el desarrollo cognitivo y el aprendizaje a través de experiencias sensoriales

(Garhart-Mooney, 2006). En la Figura 1 aparece una lista de oportunidades de juego libre en las que los niños pueden participar mientras están en el aula de preescolar.

### Juego dirigido

El juego dirigido es una forma de juego en la que las actividades de los niños son andamiadas o apoyadas por los maestros, lo que permite que lo que hacen los niños los lleven a lograr los objetivos de aprendizaje (Weisberg y Zosh, 2018). Los maestros pueden proporcionar este andamiaje organizando el entorno de su aula de manera que proporcione materiales educativos centrados en sus objetivos educativos. Luego, durante el juego guiado, los maestros pueden responder de manera sensible mediante el uso de preguntas abiertas y permitiendo que los niños exploren los materiales.

En el aula de preescolar, el juego guiado puede apoyar el aprendizaje de las matemáticas. Por ejemplo, el maestro de preescolar busca que los estudiantes aprendan sobre las diferentes formas. Esto se puede lograr proporcionando a los estudiantes manipulativos matemáticos con diferentes formas. Se puede invitar a los niños a explorar estos materiales mientras el maestro hace preguntas para andamiar sus conocimientos sobre las diferentes formas. Los siguientes son tipos de preguntas abiertas que el maestro podría hacer.

- ¿Puedes hablarme sobre estas diferentes formas?
- ¿En qué se diferencian estas formas?
- ¿Puedes decirme cómo estas formas son iguales?

El juego guiado proporciona una excelente oportunidad de

### Figura 1. Oportunidades de juego espontáneo que involucran a los niños

- Disfrazarse /representar
- Juego de roles
- Construcción con bloques, Legos® y otros materiales de construcción
- Experiencias de creación con diferentes materiales de arte
- Plastilina o arcilla de modelado
- Clasificación con botones, pompones, cuentas, cáscaras en cartones de huevos o recipientes
- Tablero de fieltro con elementos de un cuento para fomentar la narración de cuentos
- Bandejas de clasificación de forma, color y tamaño
- Vasos y recipientes de medición en la mesa sensorial



aprendizaje porque permite a los niños tener autonomía y manejar su capacidad para descubrir en su experiencia educativa. Ayuda a apoyar el amor de los niños por el aprendizaje y promueve su inmersión en lo que exploran y descubren, mientras que los maestros ofrecen su apoyo y orientación en la adquisición de conocimientos. El uso del juego guiado en el currículo proporciona factores ambientales y psicológicos que moldean suavemente no solo los resultados deseados en el aprendizaje, sino también una perspectiva más positiva hacia el aprendizaje en sí mismo (Weisberg et al., 2014).

### Juego dirigido por el maestro

Wickstrom et al. (2019) informó que el juego dirigido por el maestro se observa comúnmente en las aulas de la primera infancia. En este tipo de juego, el educador controla el juego o la actividad de juego. Los niños trabajan juntos en una actividad diseñada por su maestro. Los niños deben seguir pasos específicos para jugar el juego. El maestro monitorea el juego mientras los niños juegan y aprenden conceptos de contenido específicos como las matemáticas. Sabemos que las actividades de juego de matemáticas permiten a los niños desarrollar su propio conocimiento mientras están explorando y jugando con sus amigos. Por lo tanto, las actividades de juego de matemáticas donde estas son dirigidas por el maestro no se recomiendan en las aulas de prekindergarten. Los maestros brindan oportunidades para que los niños cooperen e interactúen con otros niños a través del juego. Restringir que los niños tomen sus propias decisiones puede desalentar su creatividad; sin embargo, las actividades de juego dirigidas por el maestro pueden implementarse en los grados superiores.

### Algunas actividades lúdicas para integrar en los centros de trabajo en el prekindergarten

Las experiencias matemáticas informales ocurren durante el tiempo

de juego. Los centros de trabajo en el aula proporcionan experiencias valiosas para que los niños prekindergarten exploren conceptos matemáticos. Por ejemplo, los niños tienen muchas oportunidades en los centros para desarrollar su pensamiento matemático y experiencias de resolución de problemas, incluyendo el lenguaje y el vocabulario (Circle Pre-K Curriculum, 2021). La incorporación de centros para que los niños exploren y jueguen les ayuda a seguir practicando y desarrollando sus habilidades matemáticas. Los siguientes manipulativos y objetos matemáticos se pueden integrar en centros para que los niños exploren.

- Frutas y verduras en el centro de ciencias
- Dinero ficticio para comprar comida en la tienda de mascotas
- Bloques o formas geométricas para construir casas y puentes en el centro de construcción
- Herramientas de plástico como martillo de plástico, destornillador y alicates en el centro de simulación y aprendizaje.

Los niños se benefician de estos centros cuando los maestros se unen a ellos haciendo preguntas, apoyando en su desarrollo y ayudándoles a usar el vocabulario matemático.

## Conclusión

Varios estudios han investigado el desarrollo de las matemáticas en aulas prekindergarten que benefician a los niños en el jardín de infantes y durante los primeros años de la escuela primaria (Clements y Sarama, 2016). Desarrollar conceptos matemáticos como contar, aritmética, geometría y comprender las cantidades y sus relaciones durante el prekindergarten ayuda a predecir el aprovechamiento y el rendimiento de los niños en las matemáticas más adelante en los grados superiores (Reid, 2016). Las actividades de juego con las matemáticas alientan y motivan a los niños a desarrollar estos conceptos mientras juegan e interactúan con sus maestros y amigos en el aula. Además, predice el vocabulario de los niños y sus destrezas de alfabetización, como la comprensión de lectura. Por lo tanto, la integración de las actividades cotidianas de juego con las matemáticas, como los centros en las aulas de prekindergarten, mejora el pensamiento cognitivo y el desarrollo del proceso afectivo de los niños de una manera natural.

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# Big Learning, Play and Fun in The Great Outdoors

Helene Arbouet Harte, Jaesook L. Gilbert, and Susan Griebing



door learning experiences are endless for children as they experiment with “contained” or relatively safe risk-taking and learn to be flexible through outdoor play (Haywood-Bird, 2017). For young children, play is learning, and learning is play. Therefore, this paper will endeavor to illustrate the integral nature of outdoor play in supporting all areas of development in young children and provide some strategies for supporting outdoor experiences.

## Benefits of Outdoor Play

An increasing amount of time is spent with technology and indoors today. Children 8-years-old and younger spend an average of two hours and 19 minutes a day looking at screens. Forty-two percent of children zero to age eight have a tablet device of their own (Common Sense Media, 2017).

According to the American Academy Pediatrics, media takes time away from meaningful play both inside and outside (Yogman et al., 2018). With disruption to care and increased use of devices that occurred due to the COVID-19 pandemic, children need opportunities to get outside now more than ever. Okur-Berberoglu (2021) provide evidence for how outdoor play can reduce screen time for young children and many benefits of unstructured outdoor play.

In addition to time away from screens, time outdoors provides opportunities for exposure to sunlight, which could act as potential coronavirus deterrent (Ratnesar et al., 2020) as well as providing a boost in mood as well as other positive physiological impacts (Baggerly et al., 2015). Honig (2019) describes the almost healing powers of outdoor play: “The fresh air of outdoors is like a ‘mental floss’ that can help clear out children’s cobwebs of grumpiness and feelings of confinement from too many childcare hours indoors” (p.10). Outdoor learning has a positive influence on physical development, social emotional development, peer interaction and academics (Deaver & Wright, 2018).

Playing outdoors is important for motor skills, developing friendships, and helping children learn about the importance of exercise (Yogman et al., 2018). Outside children can be physically active, which can help with mental focus as well as fitness. Outdoor play can provide a context for learning and opportunities to apply content related to science, social studies, and math.

*Tina’s childcare center is a nature-based school. The children spend most of the day outdoors, even in rain and snow. Her student, Jaylyn, arrives for the day and heads immediately to the mud kitchen located on the playground. The mud kitchen has all sorts of measuring cups, pitchers to pour water and spoons for stirring. It is one of Jaylyn’s favorite places to play. She mixes natural materials with mud today and offers it to Tina as “pie”. Tina asks Jaylyn, “How many pieces of pie do you have?” Jaylyn replies, “Eight, one for each girl.” Tina then guides her in a discussion of how to divide up the pie so that she is sure everyone gets the same size amount. Jaylyn and Tina explore different ways to get equal parts, with Jaylyn determining that measuring the pieces with a small plate will work best.*

Play allows children to experience joy in the moment of learning. Play reduces stress and builds resiliency as it provides opportunities to problem-solve and build confidence (Guirguis & Longley, 2021). Play, especially during abnormal times, is important and can be therapeutic to children (Graber et al., 2020; Guirguis & Longley, 2021). Parrott and Cohen (2020) highlight the benefit of unstructured play to children’s overall learning in their case study.

Outdoor play typically has no restrictions or end goal in mind. Playing outdoors, such as jumping into a puddle of water or making a mud pie, allows children to be in the moment and revel in the sensations from their actions. The possibilities of out-



Potted plants are a way to engage children with nature.

Ethical Conduct and Professional Standards, and 5. Competencies for Early Childhood Educators) have guidance applicable to outdoor learning. **Table 1** describes this connection between the five NAEYC foundational documents' guidance and outdoor learning.

NAEYC's Developmentally Appropriate Practice Position Statement (2020) calls for children to have daily experiences outdoors and opportunities to engage with nature. Outdoor play should extend and enhance the indoor classroom environment as well as support all areas of development

every day (Deaver & Wright, 2018). Deaver and Wright (2018) suggest early childhood educators “plan a mix of indoor and outdoor activities such that children’s time indoors prepares them for, reflects, and extends the ideas they explore in nature” (p. 25). Creating experiences and engaging children with outdoor learning may seem overwhelming, particularly when schools lack funding and resources. Early care and education professionals can facilitate children’s interaction outside by beginning with small steps, maximizing place-based learning and resources, focusing on accessibility, thinking about the outdoors in/indoors out concept, and extending children’s thinking.

When exploring outdoors, children can observe change over time, enjoy beauty, build observation skills, and learn vocabulary in context (Honig, 2019).

Barrable (2019) argues that connecting to nature should be a goal in early childhood education frameworks. Positive connections to nature are good for children’s well-being and may help with care and concern for the environment and sustainability. Ernst et al. (2019) conducted pre-post tests using the Devereaux Early Childhood Assessment for Preschoolers (DECA) with 78 three- to five-year-old children across four nature preschools in Minnesota. They found increased protective factors including self-regulation and initiative from the beginning to the end of the preschool year. Outdoor play is fun, healthy and has a range of benefits to children’s development. Early care and education providers can rediscover the joys of outdoor play and facilitate learning for young children.

### Strategies for Engaging Children Outdoors

Engaging children outdoors does not happen by accident. As with teaching in all other areas of the classroom, intentionality, careful planning, setting up the environment, consideration of various content areas as well as developmental domains, and collaboration is integral. Intentional planning by educators is especially critical because research (e.g., Ernst, 2014; Ernst & Tornabene, 2012; Torkos, 2018) found teachers had concerns about time, safety, weather, parent support or buy-in, student supervision, management, and disability accessibility, among other issues. However, the benefits of the outdoors described in the above section outweigh the challenges that can arise. Additionally, all five of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) foundational documents (i.e., 1. Developmentally Appropriate Practice, 2. Early Childhood Program Standards, 3. Advancing Equity in Early Childhood, 4. the Code of

#### Taking Small Steps

Engaging children outdoors does not have to mean purchasing new playground equipment or hiring a company to build a natural playscape. A quick perusal of Pinterest (pinterest.com) will generate many ideas about how to affordably enhance the outdoor areas. If educators consider outdoor experiences as part of the overall philosophy of teaching and learning, the opportunities will become apparent.

Using natural and recycled materials is free and collecting them can be part of the curriculum and a way to engage families. An easy and inexpensive way to enhance any outdoor learning space is to include loose parts (Nicholson, 1971). Loose parts are primarily upcycled materials that can be manipulated in many ways and used to create designs, forts, dramatic play and more. The idea of loose parts provides economical and exciting ways to encourage creativity and imagination outdoors. Some examples of outdoor loose parts are branches (trimmed to remove anything potentially harmful), shells, tires, PVC pipe, stones, old DVDs, old picture frames, blocks of wood and large metal washers. Like any open-ended material, a loose part can become anything the child intends it to be. Loose parts provide endless

**Table 1. Five NAEYC Foundational Documents' Guidance and Outdoor Learning Connection**

Foundational Document	Guidance	Application to Outdoor Learning
Developmentally Appropriate Practice	Outdoor experiences, including opportunities to interact with the natural world, are provided daily for children of all ages." (p. 17)	Intentionally design activities to engage with nature and use the senses outdoors. Some examples include going on nature scavenger hunts where pictures and words can be used to find items to look for outdoors with partners or playing guessing games with natural materials children can feel in a bag or box to match to items children learned during their time outside.
Early Childhood Program Standards	"#8. Community Relationships Program Standard: The program establishes relationships with and uses the resources of the children's communities to support the achievement of program goals." (p. 3)	When programs lack space and resources, community partnerships with community nature centers, botanical gardens, city parks, and/or zoos can be used to help meet goals. If an outdoor setting is limited or unavailable, consider whether a field trip to another site or a visitor from a community program can provide opportunities to engage with nature. Local high school or college students studying environmental education can also help with creating and maintaining gardens.
Advancing Equity in Early Childhood Education	"...work to ensure that all children have equitable access to the learning environment, the materials, and the adult-child and child-child interactions that help children thrive." (p. 5)	Outdoor learning environments should be accessible to all children. Access to outdoor environments may vary outside of school; therefore, analyze outdoor learning areas and ask yourself how children with different abilities will use the materials. What alternatives can you provide for areas that cannot be accessed? What are some ways different cultures and backgrounds are included?
Code of Ethical Conduct	"I-1.5 To create and maintain safe and healthy settings that foster children's social, emotional, cognitive, and physical development." (p. 2)	Early care and education providers have an ethical responsibility to create outdoor environments that are safe and give children choices. Therefore, discuss safety guidelines for outdoors as a class and provide options for active engagement such as chasing, digging, crawling, etc. or opportunities for individual quiet activities outdoors such as sketching and photographing.
Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators	"4c: Use a broad repertoire of developmentally appropriate, culturally and linguistically relevant, anti-bias, evidence-based teaching skills and strategies that reflect the principles of universal design for learning." (p. 10)	Early care and education providers ought to know and understand health and safety guidelines, how to help children develop fine motor and gross motor skills, and plan to meet the needs of all children in outdoor environments. Think about how to plan intentionally using resources such as state standards and professional organization guidance while integrating curriculum areas. It can help to use children's books for context. For example, if you live in a region where there is snow, read books like <i>The Snowy Day</i> by Ezra Jack Keats and <i>First Snow</i> by Bomi Park. Play in the snow outdoors and bring snow into the sensory table. Provide tools for children to scoop, touch, examine and make predictions about snow.

possibilities for creative play and problem-solving. Loose parts should be accessible and stored where children can reach them easily and be regularly replenished, changed, and added to (Daly & Beloglovsky, 2015).

Urban centers with limited resources in surrounding nature will need to be creative in finding areas and ways for children to engage with nature. Potted plants that the children maintain is one solution. These can provide garden space for children to grow vegetables and flowers, record that growth in nature journals and enjoy a beautiful salad throughout the summer. A potted milkweed plant and butterfly bushes will attract bees and butterflies and your local nursery can recommend other plants to nurture a child's curiosity in nature. The community in which schools are located can also serve as places to engage and notice nature. Children can look for and listen to birds and squirrels even in cities and on nature walks.

### Place Based Learning and Resources

There are several models of outdoor learning. One is Place Based Outdoor Learning (PBOL). The main principle of PBOL is the importance of people being educated about the world they live in. This would include "our gardens, green spaces, local businesses and towns" (Lloyd et al., 2018, p. 49). Therefore, PBOL occurs in a local, authentic zone or space (e.g., school ground), facilitates an integrated curriculum approach, and increases the relationships between teacher and student.

Resources for Place Based Outdoor Learning can be enhanced with community partnerships. Partner with nature centers, botanical gardens, city parks and zoos to help with topic investigations, and access to natural settings. Outdoor learning can happen in playgrounds, parks, on nature walks and on neighborhood walks. Reflect on ways to adapt what is available to you. When there are plans to visit the local nature center, spend time reading books about and discussing what a nature center is and what they might see. When you are visiting a large place, for example, the zoo, narrow your visit to just a few animals and learn about those animals with the children before you go through books and videos. Make a list of questions they have and what they wonder about. Planning beforehand with the children can enhance their learning experience during these visits. Journaling, sketching, and photographing can extend learning after the visits through recall and reflection back in the classroom. As children are engaged in the world in which they live, unprecedented events may afford unanticipated opportunities.

During the 2020 pandemic, many schools moved classrooms outdoors as a cost-effective method to increase school capacity (National Academies of Sciences Engineering Medicine, 2020) since research has shown that the COVID-19 virus does not live long in the outdoors due to sunlight and air circulation (National Academies of Sciences Engineering Medicine, 2020; Prather et al., 2020). Some low-cost ways to provide an outdoor learning environment are to look for spaces that naturally provide shade or sunlight. Hay bales can offer inexpensive seating (Tate, 2020). Sharon Danks of Green Schoolyards suggests clothing is also an infrastructure, so having donations of coats, hats, gloves, and

boots will be essential to spending most of the day outdoors (Tate, 2020). Research has shown that outdoor learning not only improves mental and physical health, but also helps develop a sense of place and civic duty. Outdoor learning is engaging and fun for children and families; it also improves performance as well as behavior (Glassy & Tandon, 2020; Okur-Berberoglu, 2021). The view and will for outdoor play have evolved due to COVID-19 so early care and education providers must continue to ponder the new perspective on learning and ways of teaching children. It is essential to consider how to include all children in outdoor play.

### Accessibility

Plan outdoor activities with all children in mind from the onset, not as an afterthought. If a space is truly accessible, it can be used by children with and without disabilities. Children of various backgrounds will feel welcomed and visible. The environment will provide ways to use and get to the materials for all the children. Accessibility is related to equity. Children may not all use materials and spaces in the same way, but they should all have opportunities to use materials. Just as children should see themselves represented and have opportunities to learn about others indoors, they should also have that representation and opportunity in the outdoor environment. Making outdoor learning accessible to children with disabilities may mean providing noise cancelling headphones or gloves for children with sensory issues. A raised gardening bed might be needed for a child in a wheelchair. A choice board might be helpful for some children. Some children may need breaks or extra time when engaged in outdoor play (Harte, 2013). Consider the needs of individual children according to their development, interests, skills, and approaches to a task to motivate the engagement of all children.

### Outdoors In / Indoors Out

In addition, outdoor experiences can be extended into the classroom by bringing natural materials in. Plants, seeds, pinecones, rocks, feathers, and other natural materials can be sorted, sketched, examined, and compared. Bringing materials into the classroom can promote curiosity and wonder. Allow children to look at materials with a magnifying glass or digital microscope. Natural materials can be used for collages. Snow can be placed in the sensory table. If there are windows, children can look and listen for animals. Make and set up bird feeders and squirrel feeders outside the classroom window. Make predictions and ask questions. Incubate eggs. Watch caterpillars grow into butterflies. After studying animals and their habitats outside, at nature centers, at zoos, and in books, children can try to recreate these habitats on a smaller scale in the classroom with plastic animals and natural materials. Local nature centers or zoos can also be invited to come to the classroom. A garden can be planted inside and observed. A vegetable garden tasting helps children learn about healthy foods as well as where food comes from.

Take the indoor classroom outside too. Weather friendly equipment can extend learning outdoors. Dramatic play, painting, music, writing, and building can all be done outdoors. If you have the space, keep tables outside for children to work at. Tables and chairs for the outside do not have to be purchased



but can be made from weather resistant materials. For example, logs can be used as chairs or tables, pending size. Left-over deck material also makes good outdoor table. A donated pipe can become a tunnel to crawl through and can be topped with dirt and grass to integrate it into the space. Many schools, like Tina's in the opening vignette, have learned that the creation of mud kitchen outside provides many benefits to children (White, 2012). The mud kitchen is an outdoor dramatic play area where children can play at cooking, mixing, and serving nature inspired cuisine. A mud kitchen can be constructed out of recycled materials. Pots and pans from the local thrift store and garage sales can be used to cook with. Dirt can come from



a digging area in the playground and natural materials such as rocks, sticks and leaves can be mixed to make those mud pies. A bucket of water can be close by for easy cleaning of hands when children are finished with their creations. International Mud Day, June 29, offers wonderful opportunity for the early childhood community to join efforts in celebrating nature, the outdoors, and getting messy. Early care and education providers can help children extend their thinking as children explore and enjoy the International Mud Day activities.

### Extending Children's Thinking

Edwards (1998) highlighted the teacher's role in "provoking occasions of discovery through a kind of alert inspired listening and simulation of children's dialogue, co-action, and co-construction of knowledge" (p. 182). The goal is to extend thinking and "open up the possibilities" (Kantor & Whaley, 1998, p. 322) for children.

Strasser and Bresson (2017) provide a framework for extending children's thinking using higher-level questions. Higher level questions allow children to extend their thinking and respond in their own way. The various levels of questioning in Strasser and Bresson's (2017) framework increase in complexity based on Bloom's Taxonomy. These levels include remember, understand, apply, analyze, evaluate, and create. Each requires a different type of thinking. Building upon Bloom's Taxonomy questions become increasingly complex; thereby, encouraging children to progress from identification and explanation to experimentation and construction. For example, a teacher engaging children outdoors could ask, "What color is this leaf?" This question is about naming and at the lowest level of Bloom's Taxonomy. "Tell me about this leaf" requires children to describe and explain. "When

have you seen this type of leaf before?" encourages some further explanation and application. A question such as "What is the same or different about these leaves?" encourages comparison or analysis. A question such as "What can you make with these leaves?" encourages creation. Mankiw (2017) suggests an intentional planning process which includes introducing children to new outdoor spaces, ensuring access to scientific tools such as magnifying glasses, documenting learning with photographs, and making connections to children's literature. This intentional process provides multiple opportunities, settings, and prompts for exploration and authentic teacher questions.

In summary, children's learning, engagement, and enjoyment of outdoor play can happen for all schools or programs when early care and education professionals focus on small steps, place-based resources, accessibility, planning for outdoors in/indoors out activities, and extending children's thinking.

### Conclusion

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) position statement on advancing equity in early childhood education (2019) asserts that "all children have the right to equitable learning opportunities" (p. 1). Thus, educators have a responsibility to level the playing field and provide access and opportunity for all children. Outdoor play is not exempt.

Maria Montessori (Montessori, 1964) asserted that play is the work of young children. Honig (2019) reminds us that, outdoors play and learning is not limited to schools that exist predominantly outdoors such as forest schools. The resources of programs, having access to nature based playscapes, or having

**Table 2. Suggested Books and Websites**

Books for Planning	<i>How to Raise a Wild Child: The Art and Science of Falling in Love with Nature</i> - Scott D. Sampson <i>The Great Outdoors: Advocating for Natural Spaces for Young Children</i> – Mary S. Rivkin with Deborah Schein
Children’s Books	<i>Do Princesses Wear Hiking Boots?</i> - Carmela LaVigna Coyle <i>Planting A Rainbow</i> – Lois Ehlert <i>Call Me Tree / Lláname árbol</i> (English and Spanish Edition) - Maya Christina Gonzalez <i>The Snowy Day</i> - Ezra Jack Keats <i>Blueberries for Sal</i> - Robert McCloskey <i>First Snow</i> - Bomi Park
Websites	The Wisdom of Nature - <a href="https://www.communityplaythings.com/resources/literature/wisdom-of-nature">https://www.communityplaythings.com/resources/literature/wisdom-of-nature</a> National Wildlife Federation - <a href="https://www.nwf.org/Kids-and-Family/Connecting-Kids-and-Nature">https://www.nwf.org/Kids-and-Family/Connecting-Kids-and-Nature</a>

limited outdoor space, should not matter. Children, regardless of the varied settings, opportunities, and resources of early care and education programs, have a right to experience the benefits of outdoors because outdoor play and learning opportunities are critical to children’s overall wellness and positive development across domains. The benefits outweigh the challenges, and the impact of outdoor learning on children is positive. We know time and resources are scarce, especially during this period of accountability. However, children’s learning, especially academic progress, benefits from outdoor play.

### Resources and Supports

While some programs may have the access, resources, and expertise to write grants, this is not necessary to obtain materials and create spaces to engage children outdoors. Websites like <https://www.donorschoose.org/> and <https://www.adoptaclassroom.org/> make requesting funding for specific small, individually classroom based projects more accessible. Educators can create wish lists on retail sites.

Engaging children outdoors does not have to be expensive or large scale. Programs such as The Natural Start Alliance (<http://www.naturalstart.org/>) provide free resources and guidelines. There is a wealth of materials for planning, reading to and with children and seeing what others have done and are doing. **Table 2** provides a few suggestions. Outdoor play is beneficial, joyful and accessible. A few small steps can make a big difference.

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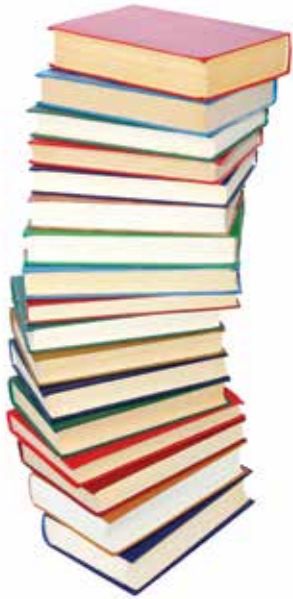
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## Children's Book Review

By Dina Costa Treff

# *Our Class is a Family*



*Our Class is a Family*, written by Shannon Olsen and illustrated by Sandie Sonke, is an amazing ode to what truly transcends in birth through age five classrooms. Children are introduced to the idea that a classroom is more than a teacher and children. It is a shared space, a community of learners. Relationships are established. All are welcome. Diversity is embraced. Figurative safety nets abound. Space and time for mistakes are present. All

of this helps to mold and shape our little ones. Olsen's story is one where children can quickly understand the similarities to a family and see that they are a part of a group together that has so many aspects of family. Sonke's illustrations beautifully show the true differences that are present in classrooms. Children are able to see themselves and their peers represented within the book and their community. *Our Class is a Family* is great for children ages 2 years to 6 years.

*Our class is a family* [Nuestra clase es una familia], escrita por Shannon Olsen e ilustrada por Sandie Sonke es una oda increíble a lo que realmente trasciende en las aulas de cero hasta los cinco años. A los niños se les presenta la idea de que un aula es más que un maestro y los niños. Es un espacio compartido, una comunidad de estudiantes. Las relaciones se establecen. Todos son bienvenidos. Se abraza la diversidad. Abundan figurativamente las redes de seguridad. El espacio y el tiempo para los errores están presentes. Todo esto ayuda a moldear y dar forma a nuestros pequeños. La historia de Olsen es una en la que los niños pueden entender rápidamente las similitudes con una familia y ver que son parte de un grupo que tiene tantos aspectos semejantes a los de una familia. Las ilustraciones de Sonke muestran maravillosamente las verdaderas diferencias que están presentes en las aulas. Los niños pueden verse a sí mismos y a sus compañeros representados dentro del libro y su comunidad. *Our class is a family* [Nuestra clase es una familia] es ideal para niños de 2 años a 6 años.

**Dina Costa Treff** is the Lead Teacher of the Preschool Program at the Child Development Lab at the McPhaul Center College of Family and Consumer Sciences of University of Georgia. She is the District Representative, Georgia Association for the Education of Young Children.

# Meet The 2023 Candidates For SECA President Elect

Why do you want to be the President of SECA? What attributes and strengths would you bring to the position?



Crystal Campbell, SC

Why do I want to be President of SECA? I have thought long and hard about running for SECA President for I was not totally sure that I was knowledgeable and seasoned enough for such a high honor. However, when the deadline was extended I felt this was a door opening for me to at least try. So, I prayed and discussed the opportunity with my family and friends, I realized that I am knowledgeable and capable of serving.

As SECA President I want to serve the teachers, directors, parents and children of the Southern States. I have spent my entire career teaching. I love teaching and sharing and watching the excitement of children learning, helping families and building up the teaching profession. I want to be a part of an organization that strives to help and nurture families and children. I want to be SECA President to build relationships with all of the States so we can see that we have more in common than we know. I want to be a change agent that supports diversity, inclusion and equity for ALL children. SECA is and should be that type of organization and I would deem it an honor to be a servant leader to help make it happen.

I bring to the table my expertise in early childhood, my leadership ability, my interpersonal skills, my love of people and most importantly my love for my Savior Jesus Christ.



Collette Sawyer, OK

My desire is to be a part of something bigger than myself, to make a difference and have an impact that builds a brighter future for young children. By aligning myself with and partnering with others who have a vision for providing high-quality care for young children as well as the staff who are caring for and teaching them, I believe we make a difference. I witnessed firsthand the heart, vision, and passion SECA has for young children, their families as well as those who care for and teach them when I participated in the strategic planning meeting. My heart was connected to SECA.

I will bring to the organization passion, leadership, organization, and a willingness to learn. In addition, I will come with a desire to dive deep and engage with others to make an impact in our industry. As a former teacher, administrator, coach, and now a project manager, I bring over 35 years of dedication, and extensive experiences in early childhood to the association and our membership.

We'll periodically publish candidates bios, articles, videos on the SECA website at [www.seca.info/presidentelect](http://www.seca.info/presidentelect).

## Every Day is a Time to Play!

**Eric Robles**

Every day is a new opportunity for young children to build and gain new skills. With the summer days, there are many special occasions to engage young children in playful experiences continuing to support their development. In the classroom, many meaningful skills are learned as children engage in play activities. Play is especially an activity for building emotional and social connections (Yogman et al, 2018), a major factor contributing to a child's successful development and wellbeing (Kostelnik et al, 2018). Through play, interactions with parents, adults, and with peers are occasions that lead the young child to begin experiencing and establishing relationships with others. Social and emotional connections are especially significant representing the emerging network of relationships that a child is building. Relationships are fostered both through daily experiences where children engage in play experiences, whether planned or spontaneously emerging from the child. Play is as well, a way for very young children to learn, explore, and make sense about what surround them. Explorations through play are fundamental to building ideas and making connections with people and places (Pinchover, 2017).

Because of the importance that play has for young children, it is important to consider how classroom experiences promote and invite children to play. Here are some suggestions to ensure play permeates your classroom environment:

- *Check the schedule:* Is there a balance of time provided for children to engage in free play and in planned play experiences?
- *Provide materials and manipulatives:* Do they have a variety of

Cada día es una nueva oportunidad para que los niños pequeños, especialmente durante los primeros tres años, puedan desarrollar y adquirir nuevas habilidades. Con los días de verano, hay muchas ocasiones especiales para involucrar a los niños pequeños en experiencias lúdicas que continúan apoyando su desarrollo. En el aula, se aprenden muchas habilidades significativas a medida que los niños participan en actividades de juego. El juego es especialmente una actividad que ayuda a construir conexiones emocionales y sociales (Yogman et al, 2018), un factor importante que apoya al desarrollo y bienestar exitoso de los niños (Kostelnik et al, 2018). Las interacciones con los padres, los adultos y los compañeros a través del juego son ocasiones que llevan al niño pequeño a comenzar a experimentar y establecer relaciones con los demás. Las conexiones sociales y emocionales son especialmente significativas al representar la red emergente de relaciones que un niño está construyendo. Las relaciones se fomentan a través de experiencias diarias en las que los niños participan en experiencias de juego, ya sean planificadas o que emergen espontáneamente del niño. El juego también es una forma para que los niños muy pequeños aprendan, exploren y le den sentido a lo que los rodea. En este caso, las exploraciones a través del juego resultan ser fundamentales para construir ideas y hacer conexiones con las personas y las realidades donde viven los pequeños (Pinchover, 2017).

Dada la importancia que el juego tiene para los niños pequeños,

items to encourage play activities?

- *Encourage different types of play activities:* Are they provided invitations that encourage a variety of play experiences?
- *Participate as a collaborator in children's play:* Do I join children and contribute to their play script?
- *Engage children to talk about their play:* Are children invited to talk about what they were doing while playing?

Play remains as one of the universal experiences common and connecting all children. A right recognized by the Convention on the Rights of the Child; today, the role of play continues to be a central point in promoting children's successful development. Enjoyable and engaging, let's make sure that every day is a new opportunity for children to play.

**Eric Robles, BA**, is a graduate student in school psychology at Interamerican University in San Juan, PR. His research interests address issues about diversity, social justice, and social development during the early and middle childhood years.

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es importante considerar cómo las experiencias en el aula promueven e invitan a los niños a jugar. Aquí hay algunas sugerencias para garantizar que el juego esté presente en el entorno del aula del nivel temprano:

- *Verifique el horario:* ¿Hay un equilibrio de tiempo proporcionado para que los niños participen tanto en actividades de juego libre o espontaneo como en experiencias de juego planificadas?
- *Proporcionar materiales y manipulativos:* ¿Existe una variedad de elementos para fomentar las actividades de juego? ¿Son estos apropiados para los niños de cero a tres años?
- *Fomentar diferentes tipos de actividades de juego:* ¿Se les proporcionan oportunidades que fomentan e invitan a una variedad de experiencias de juego?
- *Participación como colaborador en el juego infantil:* ¿Participas con los niños y contribuyes a su experiencia juego?
- *Hablar y mantener conversaciones sobre su juego:* ¿Se invita a los niños a hablar sobre lo que estaban haciendo mientras jugaban?

El juego sigue siendo una de las experiencias universales que son comunes y que conectan a todos los niños. Un derecho reconocido por la Convención sobre los Derechos del Niño; hoy, el papel del juego sigue siendo un punto central en la promoción del desarrollo exitoso de los niños. Agradable e interesante, asegúrenos de que cada día sea una nueva oportunidad para que los niños jueguen.



# Dimensions of Early Childhood

**2023 Special Issue**

*Resilience, Reflections, and  
Pathways for the Future*

**Call for Manuscripts**  
Submissions due:  
**September 15, 2022**

**Guest Editors:** Karen Walker, Diane Bales and Dina Costa-Treff

Send your manuscript to **editor@seca.info**

Society has faced in recent years the challenge of a pandemic that is now ending. While other challenges emerge, it is time to reflect on the resilience of children, families, and early childhood practitioners, and how it contributed to overcoming a major societal challenge. Resilience, the ability to face and overcome difficult experiences (Masten 2014), serves as a coping factor when dealing with stressful and traumatic circumstances. Responsive efforts from early childhood educators are known to enhance children's resilient behaviors (Erdman et al., 2019; Sorrels, 2015). The trauma from the recent pandemic experience along with many others that has impacted children, demands attention from early childhood educators.

The special issue is aimed at exploring and reflecting on resilience during the early childhood years and how experiences and practices that contribute to support children's holistic learning and development (Birth-age 8). We are seeking manuscripts with a reflective focus on resilience and considerations to its role in overcoming adversity during early childhood, on experiences to support its development, and on practices that support children and their families during times of conflict and challenge.

Possible topics include the following as well as other related ones:

Protective factors during childhood	Teacher preparation and children's resilience
Implications of resiliency during childhood years	Lessons learned about resilience from the pandemic
Role of early childhood educators	Social and emotional supports
Resilient behaviors and children's wellbeing	Spirituality and children's resilience
Diversity factors supporting resilience	Brain development and resilient behaviors
Responses to adverse children experiences	Trauma informed care practices
Ecological supports for resilience	Social disparities and supports for resilience
Interventions that support resilience	Reflections on practices supporting children and families' resilience

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