



DIMENSIONS

of Early Childhood

Improving Literacy Skills Using Dogs!

Celebrating the Writing Process

Early Use of Technology

Outdoor Learning

Volume 42, Number 1, 2014



Providing Nature-Inspired Outdoor Spaces for the Very Little Ones (Infants and Toddlers)

Year 3 of our Exemplary Outdoor Learning Classroom Contest

The Southern Early Childhood Association believes that quality outdoor learning spaces can provide valuable learning experiences for young children. Therefore, the third year of the **SECA Exemplary Outdoor Classroom Contest** has been designed to encourage early childhood programs to share their achievements in creating wonderful outdoor learning environments for infants and toddlers.

The purpose of the SECA Exemplary Outdoor Classroom Contest is to:

1. Highlight quality, nature-friendly outdoor learning environments that can be used as models for programs seeking to improve their own outdoor spaces.
2. Identify models of quality outdoor spaces which can be exemplified in each of the SECA Affiliate states.

Awards:

A maximum of one outdoor classroom per state will be recognized and will be acknowledged in the *Dimensions of Early Childhood* journal. One overall **SECA Exemplary Outdoor Classroom for Infants and Toddlers** will be selected. The Exemplary Outdoor Classroom will receive a plaque at the 2015 SECA Conference in New Orleans to be placed at their center or school.

For More information about how to submit an application, go to http://www.southernearlychildhood.org/seca_conference.php

Deadline to submit an application is June 15, 2014.

*Photo Courtesy of:
Our Neighborhood Child Development Center, Charlottesville, Virginia*



Southern Early Childhood Association

Editor - Mari Cortez

Cover photo courtesy of Knollwood Preschool/
Knollwood Community Church, Burke, Virginia

Dimensions of Early Childhood

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Authors are encouraged to download a copy of SECA's manuscript guidelines at http://www.southernearlychildhood.org/become_member_get_involved.php. Submit manuscripts that are typed and double spaced with references in APA style. E-mail manuscripts for review to the editor at editor@southernearlychildhood.org.

SECA serves the interests of early childhood educators concerned with child development, including university researchers and teacher educators; early childhood, kindergarten, and primary-grade teachers; and early childhood program administrators and proprietors. The association has affiliates in 13 Southern states. Non-affiliate memberships are available to anyone living outside the 13 affiliate states. For information about joining SECA, contact the executive offices at P.O. Box 55930, Little Rock, AR 72215-5930, (800) 305-7322. Members receive a one-year subscription to *Dimensions of Early Childhood* and discounts on SECA publications and conference registration fees.

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President's Message

Kathy Attaway

Hello my SECA friends,

As I begin my term as president of the Southern Early Childhood Association (SECA), I must take a moment to say thank you for this honor. One of my first opportunities as your president was to preside over the 2014 Annual Conference which just took place in Williamsburg, Virginia. As always the conference was a wonderful occasion that captured the essence of the Southern Early Childhood Association. Ideas were exchanged, connections were made, friendships were renewed and new friendships were begun.

Our conference this year focused on the importance of *Children's Play: Past, Present and Future*. The Southern Early Childhood Association has always held true to its belief that children learn best while at play. During the last two years we have spotlighted the idea of intentional outdoor learning spaces through our Exemplary Outdoor Classroom Contests.

As the early childhood community continues to emphasize how important it is for children to experience the real outdoors, SECA is right there applauding programs that intentionally take the time to get their children outside to experience, explore and enjoy. There is no experience more fulfilling for children than running and laughing as they swing, slide, bike and make mud pies outside. Imagine what a different experience it would be to have group time outside sitting on a blanket. Think about singing and dancing on an outdoor stage. Think of the conversations that might occur at the sandbox as the children pour, measure and create. Wonder at the different structures one would see if children were building with wooden planks and tree cookies outside. Question how high can one kick a ball when there are no ceilings or walls to interfere!

Imagine! I encourage you to challenge children's math skills while digging, measuring, comparing and predicting. Motivate healthy movement by organizing running races or large motor games. Bring stories about insects, trees and birds to life by taking them outside to read and explore. Give them *time* to explore, experience and enjoy all that the outdoors has to offer.

Please take the time to venture outside to see, hear, smell, touch and taste the real world before our children forget that there actually is one...just outside their windows.



Words from the Editor

Dr. Mari Cortez

I want to thank everyone for welcoming me to *Dimensions*. I am every excited because this is the first issue that I have the honor to edit. I have read so many great manuscripts that I want to encourage authors to continue submitting their work to our journal. We can only advance our field when we share our research and ideas with one another and *Dimensions* is the right venue! In this issue, we highlight three articles that focus on important aspects of child development including the use of technology, early literacy skills, and family engagement. Although the foci of the articles are different,

they share one commonality that is crucial for children's development and that is the role of the adult in children's lives. Pillow-Price and Yonts tell the story of a teacher named *Laura* and a dog-named *D.D.* The authors discuss the use of dogs to improve children's early literacy skills. The significance of this article is the teacher's motivation to look "outside of the box" for ways to increase children's opportunities for learning and development. Similarly, Lentz, Seo, and Gruner help us reflect on the use of technology by young children. The authors agree that we cannot keep technology away from children, but as educators we can certainly ensure that the technology used meets developmentally appropriate standards. Lastly, Hall and Axelrod remind us that families play an important role in early literacy development. Focusing on "funds of knowledge," the authors make a strong connection between family engagement and early literacy by using family celebrations. So as you can see we have interesting and relevant articles that I know you will enjoy and find them beneficial.

Palabras del Editor:

Quiero agradecer a todos por darme la bienvenida a *Dimensions*. Estoy muy emocionada porque este es el primer número de la revista que tengo el honor de editar. He tenido la oportunidad de leer magníficos manuscritos y quiero animar a otros autores que sigan presentando su trabajo a nuestra revista. Sólo podemos avanzar en nuestro campo cuando compartimos nuestras investigaciones e ideas entre sí y *Dimensions* es la revista adecuada. En esta edición, destacamos tres artículos que se centran en los aspectos importantes del desarrollo del niño como son el uso de la tecnología, la alfabetización temprana y la participación familiar. Aunque los focos de los artículos son diferentes, comparten algo en común que es crucial para el desarrollo de los niños y que incluye el papel de los adultos en la vida de los niños. Pillow-Price y Yonts cuentan la historia de una profesora llamada *Laura* y un perro llamado *D.D.* Los autores hablan de cómo se han utilizado perros para mejorar las habilidades de alfabetización de los niños. La importancia de este trabajo es la motivación de la profesora para mirar "fuera de la caja" maneras de aumentar las oportunidades de los niños para el aprendizaje. Del mismo modo, Lentz, Seo y Gruner ayudan a reflexionar sobre el uso de la tecnología por los niños pequeños. Los autores están de acuerdo en que no podemos mantener la tecnología alejada de los niños, pero como educadores ciertamente podemos asegurar que la tecnología utilizada cumpla con las normas apropiadas que en última instancia ayudarán a los niños en su desarrollo. Por último, Hall y Axelrod nos recuerdan el papel de la familia en el desarrollo de la alfabetización temprana. Centrándose en el concepto de "fondos de conocimiento," los autores intentan conectar el compromiso familiar con la alfabetización temprana mediante del uso de las celebraciones familiares. Pueden ver que tenemos artículos interesantes en este número, espero que les gusten y los encuentren de beneficio.

SOUTHERN EARLY CHILDHOOD ASSOCIATION CALL FOR PROPOSALS

66th Annual Conference – New Orleans, LA
January 15-17, 2015

Proposals Due June 15, 2014

Theme: The World From Our Front Porch: Community And Culture

Background:

Many of our beliefs about how children should be raised revolve around “front porch” experiences where family members, visitors and neighbors share their ideas and beliefs about how children learn and grow best. The “front porch” experience has also been a place of great nurture. Rocking in chairs, swinging on swings and lots of playing on and under the porch floor and near by yard has provided hours of meaningful engagement. How do we interpret these traditional beliefs in a culture of change.

Our world is changing quickly. The “front porch experience” is shrinking in children’s lives and time to sit around is not as valued as it once was in the South. What are the implications of these changes? What happens when new cultural groups move into our neighborhoods? What happens when standards for learning are created outside of our local town? What happens when there is only one parent or mother has to go to work or when grandparents are raising children?

The 2015 Conference will provide a variety of speakers and workshops centered around planning and providing for the children we see in today’s Southern child care facilities and schools. Workshop proposals may include new child development issues related to change, new roles for educators in teacher education and classrooms, classroom environmental changes and up to date parenting issues. Presentation of special projects both local and research based to find new ways to understand and work with children will be welcomed.

Workshop topics:

- **New understandings and interpretations of children and their development:** What are the latest discoveries made about children and how they learn. What are some tried and true beliefs we have forgotten in light of all the changes we face? All age levels of children will be considered.
- **New roles for teacher educators:** How have basic education of teachers changed in the last few years and what changes are in the near future.
- **Classroom changes and innovations:** These proposals may include new approaches to teaching, action research conducted by teachers, new ideas for teaching literacy and mathematics, infant and toddler environmental developments and general topics related to classroom practice. Classroom learners with special needs will be given priority.
- **Family issues:** These proposals may include research based parenting/family programs, technological advances in staying in contact with parents, tips for assisting parents in their journey to raise their children and any issues related to parents.
- **Promising Practices:** These proposals are required to describe a new approach to current educational and cultural issues impacting children in the south.
- **Technology Use with Children:** These proposals highlight appropriate use of technology with young children. All age levels infant and toddlers, preschoolers and school age will be considered to provide a variety of proposals. Proposals that cover multiple age levels will receive priority. Program administration and professional growth proposals are encouraged.

Proposed conference workshop sessions will be 1 hour in length.

Presenters willing to provide more in depth coverage may request a 1.5 hour session.

To access a copy of the 2015 Call for Proposals format and criteria,
go to http://www.southernearlychildhood.org/seca_conference.php

Sit, Stay, Read: Improving Literacy Skills Using Dogs!

A canine literacy specialist? Learn how a program utilized this unusual resource to promote gains in early literacy skills.

**Kathy Pillow-Price,
Nikki Yonts,
& Laura Stinson**

Walk into Laura Stinson's Pre-K classroom and you will see lots of happy faces all excited about reading. While this may not be unusual to observers, what is a bit strange is the help the children have sitting next to them on the reading mat. Laura uses the help of a canine literacy specialist, D.D. McGuffey, and her students' reactions make it clear that reading time is one of their favorite times of all! D.D. also makes no bones about the fact that she loves the children and that listening to them read and spending time with them is the highlight of her week as well.

The decision to add a canine literacy specialist to her classroom was not a snap decision. Always eager to try new things if it will help her students, Laura first learned about the use of literacy dogs while exercising and watching CNN one day. The news clip was about a program called *SitStayRead*, and Laura, who has always loved animals, was intrigued by the idea that introducing an animal into the classroom environment could impact motivation to read. She followed up by doing research online and reading articles. Her research convinced her of the benefits and encouraged her to speak to her principal about trying it in her classroom. With his support, Laura started looking for the appropriate dog. At this time Laura was teaching in a first grade classroom. She interviewed several dogs, put them through extensive trials, and finally settled on one named Mamie. Laura took Mamie once a week to spend the whole day in her first grade classroom for the next two years and felt it was beneficial to her class and their success.

Since this experience was so positive, when Laura transferred to a Pre-K classroom in the same district, she wanted to try and expand this program to her new classroom. Again, with the full support of her administration, she set out to introduce a literacy dog to her 4 year olds. That's when D. D. McGuffey came to work in

Laura's classroom twice a week. The children thrived and test scores rose. But, Laura is quick to point out that this looks easier than it actually is and that she has learned a LOT since she first started using a dog in her classroom.

The History Behind Canine Assisted Reading Programs

While the idea of using a dog in the classroom at first seems unorthodox, the history of using animals in therapeutic settings is extensive. The first documented use of animals in a therapeutic setting was in a mental institution in England in 1792 (Levinson, 1969). In North America, dogs were first used in therapy in 1919 at St. Elizabeth's Hospital in Washington, D.C. (Brodie & Biley, 1999). Most of the emphasis has been on using animals in adult clinical or hospital settings. It was only later that therapy animals were used in these settings with young children.

One of the first persons to investigate the benefits of using dogs to work with young children was child psychologist Boris Levinson in the 1960's and 1970's. Levinson found that his dog, Jingles, facilitated interactions between himself and his child patients, allowing him to establish a rapport with them (Levinson, 1969). Levinson found that the children were more willing to talk about their problems to the dog than to himself. Subsequent research has supported Levinson's findings in several areas, including stress reduction, (Nagengast, et al., 1997), emotional stability, self-esteem (Anderson & Olson, 2006; Zasloff & Hart, 1999), and increased attention (Prothmann, et al., 2006). While the research results were encouraging, they have focused mostly on therapeutic or hospital settings. There has been less emphasis on the benefits of using therapy dogs in academic

settings such as the classroom, which is why Laura's experience is so valuable. Such anecdotal evidence, along with more systematic research has shown mostly positive effects of having the dogs in the classroom (Burton, 1995; Limond, Bradshaw, & Cormack, 1997; Nebbe, 1991). One possible reason for this is the special relationships that often develop between children and dogs. Hart (2000) called the dogs "social lubricants", as they provided a "safe" environment for the children to open up to the teachers about their problems. These findings are promising, but more research needs to be done on the effectiveness of using therapy animals to help students learn new skills. The increase in specialized programs such as *SitStayRead* will help accomplish this goal.

Special relationships often develop between children and dogs.

One reason that the use of therapy dogs in the classroom has been growing in popularity in the United States, is due to the launch of the first organized program called *Reading Education Assistance Dogs (R.E.A.D.)* by Intermountain Therapy Animals in 1999 (<http://www.therapyanimals.org>). The goal of this program was to provide struggling readers with a non-judgmental, empathic listener as they practiced their reading skills. Other programs have followed all over the country, including "Reading with Rover" in Washington State, "Read to your Breed" in California, and *Sit-StayRead*, etc. While there has been a dearth of research that has empiri-

cally assessed them, the anecdotal data offers support for the benefits of such programs. For example, students who have scored below grade and participated in R.E.A.D. have showed some improvement in their test scores, often improving on reading fluency and task persistence (Bueche, 2003; Newlin, 2003). It has been suggested that programs like R.E.A.D and Reading with Rover work because the dogs provide unconditional social support for the children, such that the children feel comfortable reading aloud to their "friend" (Anderson & Olson, 2006). These positive experiences with the dogs encourage the children to then interact with other children and the teacher (Walters, Esteves, & Stokes, 2008). When you ask Laura about these conclusions, she agrees, stating that the children connect with D.D. in ways that don't often occur when the kids are reading to an adult or each other.

Laura and D.D.

D.D. lived in a small home directly across the street from the school. She was already housebroken and required no potty breaks during her time in the classroom. Typically, this sweet basset hound came to Laura's classroom twice a week and on special occasions. She stayed for about 1 1/2 hours each day. D.D.'s owners took responsibility for transporting their dog to the school and for retrieving her from the classroom after she finished working with the children.

D.D. was in Laura's preschool class for three years. Class sizes ranged from 12-15 children. While the main goal for adding D.D. to the classroom was to enhance literacy skills, she interacted in numerous ways during her time in Laura's



Photo courtesy of the authors

classroom. For example, D.D. served to model good behavior to the children, walking quietly down the hallway, posing for a school picture, and listening to others as they read or sang. Additionally, D.D. played on the playground, served as bathroom monitor, and participated in community events such as a Christmas Parade and a fundraising event for the Humane Society. She even helped some children and parents overcome their fear of dogs! Most importantly, D.D. sat on the rug while Laura read to the children and modeled good listening skills. She also "worked" with individual children and with small groups of 1-3 at a time listening to them talk and read.

Some Things to Consider

The decision to add a resource such as D.D. into the classroom should not be made lightly. Laura gives the following advice to those that might want to consider adding a dog to their own classroom.

1. The first thing you will need is a lot of energy, drive, and commitment. If you are not a committed

animal lover, this is probably not an approach you should try.

2. You also need to have your research and information in place so you have an answer for those that might not be supportive at first. Be prepared that not everyone likes change and some might not embrace this as quickly as you would like. You also need to make sure you have permission and support from your administration to begin the process.
3. Finding the RIGHT dog is key! The dog's temperament is critical. You also need to make sure the animal is current on its shot records. Most organized programs that utilize dogs to aid in literacy instruction recommend using a dog that has gone through a certification process and has (at minimum) passed a Canine Good Citizen's test. Many recommend using a certified therapy dog.
4. Decide in advance how often the dog will visit the classroom, how you will deal with "potty" breaks during his/her time in the classroom, and who will be responsible for transporting the dog to and from the classroom.

Another teacher, Lori Friesen, (2009) writes about how she prepared her classroom for their visit by her dog, Tango:

Before I invited her out of her kennel, as a class we reviewed what we had researched and learned over the past two weeks about how to meet a new dog: stay seated and let the puppy come to you, put your hand out, palm-down to let her sniff you before petting her on her back or side. Ensure that you are gentle and quiet, because the puppy is little and may be afraid, just like us, if she hears sudden,

loud noises. We had removed our shoes in a class decision to prevent accidental injury to one of her tiny paws, and student volunteers had placed fresh water and a blanket on the floor nearby. Finally, the moment the students had been preparing for had come. (p. 105).

Children feel comfortable reading aloud to their "friend".

Friesen goes on to discuss how engaged her class became with learning when Tango was present. This eventually led her to conduct preliminary research on how a therapy dog might stimulate student literacy engagement in an elementary classroom. Citing that dogs "offer a multi-sensory learning experience, are highly sociable and responsive to humans, and possess a capacity for limited comprehension of oral

language," she called for further research into integrating dogs into learning environments.

While Laura Stinson did not bring D.D. into her classroom for the sake of research per se, some interesting unofficial data have been discovered. The *Qualls Early Learning Inventory* (QELI) is an observational measure that focuses on six key areas linked to future success in school and is given to all children entering public kindergarten in Arkansas to provide a quick "snapshot" of the child as they enter kindergarten. The inventory assesses developing behaviors, so it can be used to inform classroom instruction. Summaries of student scores can compare different group's results to national, state and district data on the developmental progress of students and in Laura's case the scores tell us that something positive is happening in her classroom.

The results from 2010 and 2011 are illustrated in Chart A and B, showing that the averages of students coming out of Laura's Pre-K classroom that scored "developed" or "proficient" are significantly higher



D. D. at work in Laura's classroom.

Photo courtesy of the authors

Chart A – 2011 QELI Average Scores
(Percent that scored developed or proficient)

September 2011 QELI Kindergarten Test Score Averages	General knowledge	Written Language	Oral Communication
District average	35%	36%	37%
State average	34%	23%	33%
Laura's	77%	66%	66%

Chart B – 2010 QELI Average Scores
(Percent that scored developed or proficient)

September 2010 QELI Kindergarten Test Score Averages	General knowledge	Written Language	Oral Communication
District average	48%	46%	44%
State average	34%	23%	33%
Laura's	81%	81%	72%

than both the district and state averages. This suggests that further (more formalized) research is warranted into how canines can be used to support children's reading efforts not only in Laura's classroom, but in other classrooms as well. We plan to work with Laura and others in the future to more systematically study the impact that the dogs are having on literacy.

Concluding Remarks

There are a lot of positive reasons to consider involving canines in your school's literacy program. Teachers who have already successfully implemented canine literacy programs agree that children who struggle with reading benefit from interacting with a non-judgmental animal. Research shows that children with low self-esteem are more likely to feel comfortable reading to a dog as they tend to forget their limitations

all the while improving their reading skills, but more research needs to be conducted.

For those interested in exploring this further we offer the following tips:

1. Go to the websites of established programs and read about them. Gather information. Try these in the beginning:
 - Sit,Stay,Read at www.sitstayread.org
 - Reading with Rover at www.readingwithrover.org
 - R.E.A.D. at www.therapyanimals.org/R.E.A.D.
2. Use information to introduce the concept to administrators, parents, and other faculty/staff members.
3. Get ready to enjoy placing a dog with a student in a one-on-one relationship and allowing the child to read aloud without

pressure. Then document and share your results.

Last, please remember that almost all programs recommend using a **registered therapy dog** that has *at a minimum* qualified as a canine good citizen.

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About the Authors

Kathy Pillow-Price, Ed.D., is the Executive Director of The Arkansas Home Visiting Network. Previously she worked in a wide variety of academic and programmatic roles in the area of early childhood including as the Director of the Teacher Education program for Lyon College, in public schools, and as a director of a faith-based program for preschool children.

Nikki Yonts, Ph.D., is an Assistant Professor of Psychology and Education for Lyon College in Batesville, Arkansas. Her research focuses on the influences that popular media such as television and video games have on young children's cognitive and social development. She is particularly interested in improving literacy skills in young readers.

Laura Stinson, M.S.Ed., has worked with children in Florida, New York and Arkansas for four decades. Laura used

a dog in her preschool and first-grade classroom to help children with everything from reading and math to behavior therapy and yoga. She currently teaches and directs a flute choir at Lyon College as well as leads a treble choir and recorder band for young children.

SECA's 3 C's: Coffee, Conversation and Content Communities and Culture

Background:

Our focus for the 2015 conference is Community and Culture. What community and cultural values are transferring to young children in a new age of working mothers, distant nuclear families, technological changes and changing national curriculum changes? Because of positive feedback from the 2014 conference, the Professional Development Commission is offering a new presentation format for the second year so that multiple presentations can be experienced during the conference. The Professional Development Commission of SECA will host the sessions.

The 2015 SECA Conference will host multiple Coffee, Conversation and Content sessions which have 3 to 4 presenters. Presenters will submit a 5 – 7 slide Power Point presentation which visually demonstrates their presentation. They will also write a one page abstract including a clear and concise summary of the activity and additional references, replication and contact information. Participants will circulate during the session while viewing Power Point presentations, reading abstracts and questioning presenters. Presentations selected for the conference will also be available on the SECA website after the conference.

Workshop topics may include, but are not restricted to the following:

- *All age levels from Pre-birth – Age 8*
- **School and Child Care Center Innovations to address community and cultural changes**
- **Program Administration**
- **Professional Growth and Teacher Preparation**

Deadline to submit a proposal is June 15, 2014.
Submissions should be sent to presenters@southernearlychildhood.org.

Go to http://www.southernearlychildhood.org/seca_conference.php.

Inviting Families to Celebrate in the Writing Process

Families play an important role in helping children to develop writing skills. Learn how to promote successful parent engagement and develop bridges between school and home.

**Anna H. Hall
& Ysaaca Axelrod**

Family involvement has been found to play an important role in developing social capital for children's writing success in school (Coleman, 1988; Ren & Hu, 2011). Coleman (1988) describes social capital as a network of social relationships that exist in the family as well as between the family and school. Moll and colleagues (1992) describe these social networks as flexible and adaptive groups of individuals in the community that work together to facilitate the development and exchange of resources to build on the "funds of knowledge" of a community. As families become interconnected through social networks, they increase their ability to thrive and their children's ability to read and write in formal settings.

The term "funds of knowledge" refers to skills and practices that families or communities possess that have been developed through labor histories and/or shared community experiences. Teachers and schools are encouraged to learn about each child's or communities' "funds of knowledge" in order to build on their rich cultural and cognitive resources.

Seminal research including Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) and Epstein's Model for Parent Involvement (1995) focus on the child as the learner, the child within the family, and the systems and factors that impact their lives. These theories suggest children's lives are embedded in their families and communities; therefore successful early childhood experiences are dependent upon strong partnerships with families (NAEYC, 2009). Furthermore, NAEYC's position statement on standards for early childhood professional preparation programs, the second standard—Building family and community relationships—specifies the importance of involving all families in their children's development and education. Although it is evident that advocacy for strong school and family relationships exists, many teachers and

schools struggle to find ways to engage families in their classrooms. At the same time, research on families from diverse cultural and linguistic groups points to differences in perceptions of what it means to be involved, support children's education, as well as assumptions about education (Dantas & Manyak, 2010).

While in this article we are talking about a traditional form of family engagement during writing celebrations, we attempt to find ways to create bridges between family and school cultures that can serve as a foundation for more meaningful relationship building around literacy practices since family involvement has also been identified as a strong predictor of improved child literacy in recent literature (Dearing, Kreider, Simpkins & Weiss, 2006; National Research Council, 2001). We also address some of the ways in which families can be invited and involved in their children's writing celebrations including families of culturally and linguistically diverse children.

**Strong
partnerships with
families promote
successful early
childhood
experiences.**

The Importance of Sharing —The Writing Workshop

Process-oriented writing strategies such as the writing workshop focus on teaching elementary school children

the craft of writing by guiding them through the writing process (i.e., prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing; Fletcher & Portalupi, 2001). As children observe their teacher model writing through daily mini-lessons, write individually on self-chosen topics for extended periods, and regularly share their writing with their classmates, they begin to view themselves as authors.

As young children begin to view themselves as authors, they simultaneously develop their sense of audience (Wollman-Bonilla, 2001). The sharing of children's work with other members of the class, posting on bulletin boards, or invitation to families to join in sharing of publications is an excellent way to get families and peers involved in children's writing. Although all parts of the writing process are important, allowing time for children to share and celebrate their writing often provides purpose for all other stages of the writing process (McCallister, 2008).



Photo by Elisabeth Nichols

Early writing skills develop with the support of families and teachers.

Writing celebrations can include all families.

Writing celebrations (i.e., special times or events designed for children to commemorate their accomplishments in the writing process and share their writing with an audience) provide a purpose for writing and an “outlet for the irrepressible human desire (and need) to share stories and experiences” (McCallister, 2008, p. 463). They also serve as a culminating activity, which celebrate the accomplishments of young authors and show growth over time (Ayers, 2012; Jensvold, 2011).

Therefore, inviting families to participate in writing celebrations provides a supportive audience for children, informs families about the school writing curriculum, and helps build a connection between home and school literacy practices (McCallister, 2008). As children prepare for celebrations, they take time to reflect on their writing; often looking through all of their pieces to select their favorite for revising, publishing, and sharing.

Families serve an important role in writing celebrations because they are viewed by children as a non-threatening audience. As children test how their writing affects their families (i.e., their intended meaning), they are given the opportunity to gain confidence in their reading, writing, and speaking abilities. They begin to find their “voice” and become willing to take risks. Allowing the entire class to share reinforces that everyone's writing has value and improves students' interactive social competence (McCallister, 2008). Children who speak mul-

iple languages can serve as language and cultural brokers by providing translations across languages for their families and classmates. This opportunity allows them to both include family members who might not speak English, as well as providing opportunities for these students to share their linguistic and cultural resources with their families as well as their classmates.

Tips for Successful Writing Celebrations

While writing celebrations may vary in format, there are many key features that help create an event that is meaningful for teachers, children, and families. The following tips will help make families feel welcome during celebrations while celebrating young authors' successes throughout the writing process.

1. **Make families feel welcome.** Invite families to writing celebrations in a variety of ways. Use weekly newsletters, email, and class websites to keep families

informed. Phone calls and texts are always helpful. To create a more personal touch, have children make handmade invitations for families. (Figures 1 & 2) Provide comfortable chairs for parents, borrow from other classrooms or ask the school custodian's for help. Carpeted areas around the room provide opportunities for families and children to gather together on the floor.

2. **Consider family work schedules.** To accommodate family work schedules, plan the writing celebration early in the morning or in the evening (Parsons, 2005). *Author's Teas* are often held in the morning and involve children in the planning process by making invitations, selecting the sharing format, and preparing refreshments for the event. *Writing nights* are another event that is family-friendly and can serve as an educational tool for families to learn about their child's writing program. During a typical writing night, family members are invited to join their child in a writing workshop experience where the teacher leads the class in a mini-lesson and then the families join their child in writing during independent writing time. This is a good opportunity for families to learn more about the literacy instruction in the classroom, as well as an opportunity for teachers to learn about family literacy practices through writing.
3. **Make sure all children feel included.** It is important to arrange events so children without family guests (this can include extended family members, an older sibling or other adult in child's life) do not feel left out.

Figure 1

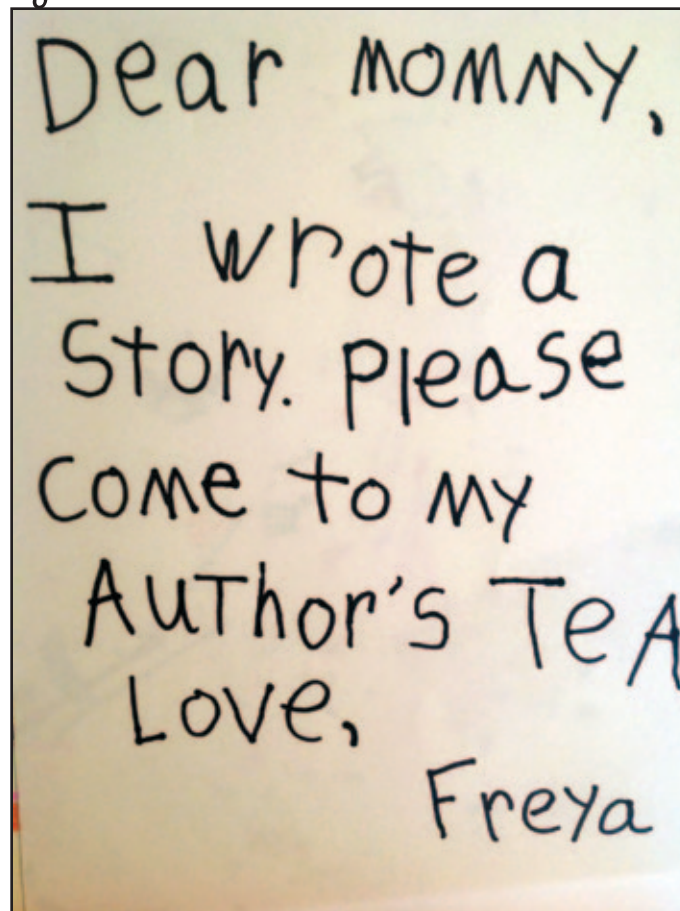
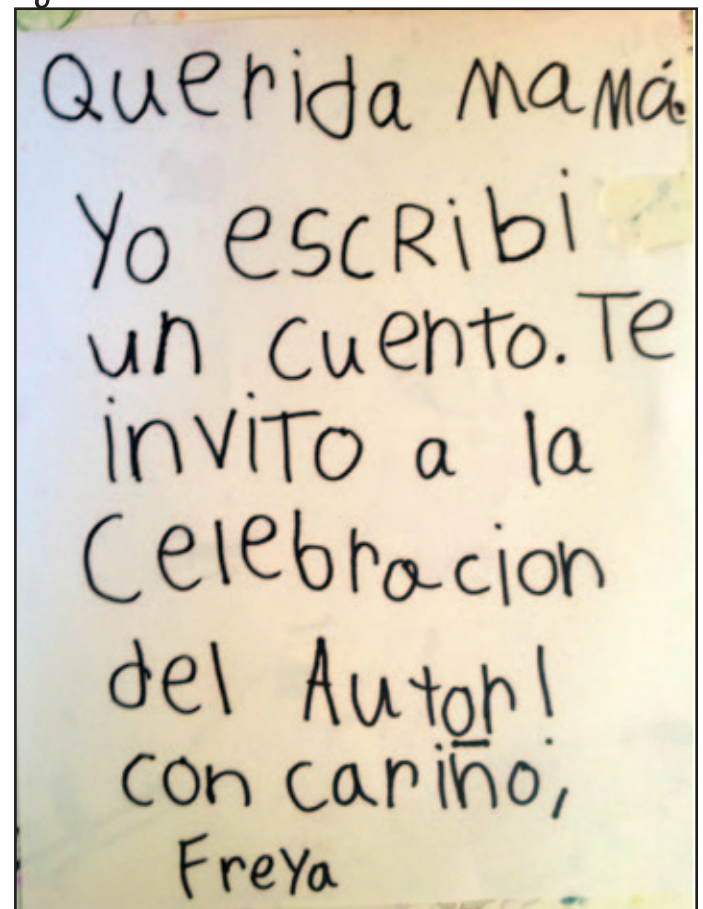


Figure 2



For example, small discussion groups can be led by 1-2 parents who interview children about their writing progress instead of pairing students only with personal family members for sharing (Ayers, 2012). Also, compliment sheets (including space for family members to record things they liked about each child's story) can be provided for the audience during a whole-group sharing celebration so all children can receive feedback regardless of whether or not their families can attend (Snowden, 2012). Finally, digital sharing

opportunities can be used to involve family members who would like to be involved from a distance.

4. **Encourage families to give feedback.** It is essential when teachers plan writing celebrations that they celebrate young authors, not solely the writing. By inviting family members to ask questions and give feedback during celebrations, children can focus on their writing growth over time instead of one perfect final piece. Two writing celebrations that invite feedback from families are “Meet and Greet”

and “Museum” celebrations. The “Meet and Greet” is modeled after book signings with professional authors. Children are invited to set up their desks with their most “famous” published pieces as well as rough drafts that led to their final pieces. Other children and family members visit each author and learn more about them during short one-on-one conversations (Jensvold, 2011). “Museum” celebrations begin with small groups of children and family members at each table. Each child shares their writing with the small group and then the group walks around the room to view other pieces. Comment sheets are available next to each piece of writing for children and guests to record compliments or questions (Parsons, 2005).

5. **Share beyond the walls.** In this digital era, there are endless opportunities for children to share and celebrate their writing with their families. In addition to classroom celebrations, all families can be invited to visit online writing galleries where students post their work using publishing software (e.g., Microsoft Publisher, Prezi) and iPad applications (e.g., StoryKit, Book Creator). Teachers can also display children's writing on classroom blogs or arrange synchronous online celebrations with families using Skype or other real-time Internet resources.
6. **Encourage linguistic diversity.** Inviting families into classrooms to share in their children's writing is also an opportunity for families to share their home languages and be engaged in the classroom. If the celebration



Photo by Elisabeth Nichols

Strong school/home partnerships ensure successful learning experiences.

includes opportunities for families to write, encourage families to write in their home languages. Provide translators or ask families who are bilingual to help translate for other families to create an inclusive community where all families can participate.

When teachers choose to celebrate writing, it sends a strong message to children and families that they value writing and that writing is a skill the school values as well (McCallister, 2008). By inviting families to participate in these celebrations, literacy pathways are strengthened between home and school, and families and children both realize that everyone's stories are worth telling (Dearing et al., 2006; National Research Council, 2001).

Although teachers must guide children through the writing process and teach them important skills along the way, the top priority should be to ensure that enjoyment and writing coexist. Routman (2005) states "We are much more apt to do optimum work when we know our best efforts will be supported and celebrated and when we believe we can succeed" (p.18). Celebrations are a time for children to soak in the moment of accomplishment, not a time for judgment or assessment (Ayers, 2012). When teachers acknowledge

their children as young authors and invite families to be involved in the pure joy of sharing writing, everyone has reason to celebrate!

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Revisiting the Early Use of Technology: A Critical Shift from “How Young is Too Young?” to “How Much is ‘Just Right?’”

How young is too young? How much is just right? This article will give you insights into using technology appropriately with young children.

**C. Lorelle Lentz,
Kay Kyeong-Ju Seo,
and Bridget Gruner**

Introduction

The conversation about young children and their use of technology has dramatically changed over the past ten years in the early childhood education community and in the general public. It appears the debate has moved forward from the question posed by Vail (2001) in her article titled, “How Young Is Too Young? When It Comes to Computer Use, Reasonable People Disagree.” Cautions about technology use with our young children provide important guidance (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2011), but it is also evident that technology use with young children is expanding rapidly (Kaiser Foundation, 2010). Therefore, the more important question for educators to ask and answer should be, “How much technology use by young children is ‘just right?’” Much as Goldilocks went through trial and error finding the porridge, chair, and bed that was “just right,” it may be some time before the answer to this question is clearly agreed upon. Using knowledge about appropriate practices with young children will help guide the search for these important answers.

Reflecting the changing conversation, the National Association for Education of Young Children (NAEYC) has recently expanded the age range of their technology position paper to include children from birth (NAEYC, 2012). The previous position paper did not include advice about children younger than three, as technology use was not seen as relevant for that age group. However, current research shows that up to 70% of children ages

birth through two years old are using electronic media in their daily lives (Vandewater, Rideout, Wartella, Huang, Lee, & Shim, 2007). Therefore, early childhood professionals must use their expertise and knowledge about the healthy development of young children to create environments that support the integration of technology use in ways that are developmentally appropriate (Rosen & Jaruszewicz, 2009).

**Understand both
the positive and
negative effects of
technology.**

In order to support educators as they debate how much technology use is appropriate for young children, it is helpful to build an understanding of both positive characteristics of computer use as well as negative aspects currently described in the literature. Following is a review of research which considers both positive uses with young children and cautions about technology use to provide a balanced perspective on how technology can detract from learning and development as well as enhance them.

Positive Effects of Early Technology Use

Currently, a growing body of literature is providing examples of effective uses of technology to enhance children’s early learning in a variety of subjects. Computers were used successfully with preschool age children in emergent literacy (McKenney & Voogt, 2009; Saine, Lerkkanen, Ahonen, Tolvanen, & Lyytinen, 2011; Shamir, Korat, & Fellah, 2012) and geometry (Clements & Sarama, 2011) as well as for Internet searches (Spink, Danby, Mallan, & Butler, 2009). We discuss children’s use of technology related to emergent literacy, mathematical learning, touchpads and tablets, and computer gaming more in detail below to provide guidance on integrating technology into early childhood classrooms.

Emergent Literacy

The use of technology to teach emergent literacy has been supported through several studies. One study utilized computer-assisted instruction to empower at-risk readers from Finland to overcome reading problems and catch up to their peer group in the areas of comprehension, fluency, and spelling by the third grade (Saine, et al., 2011). More importantly, students only used the program 15 minutes a day over one school year to achieve these results. E-books are also being used to support emergent literacy. With young children at risk for reading disabilities, an educationally designed e-book was found to produce significant learning gains in the areas of phonological awareness, vocabulary, and concepts about print as compared with the control group (Shamir, et al., 2012).



Subjects & Predicates

Computers can be successfully used with preschool children to support emergent literacy.

Targeted at young children’s emergent literacy skills, the software *PictoPal* affords children the opportunity to begin producing authentic writings through a combination of clip art and print (McKenney & Voogt, 2009). After creating their writing artifact, the children are encouraged to re-enter the dramatic play areas of the preschool classroom and integrate their writing into their play with other children. *PictoPal* is a good example of a more open-ended use of technology that supports children’s writing in a social, play-based environment. As children observe the adults in their lives using different technologies, they become interested in learning more about those new technologies as did a classroom of second graders who saw their teacher listening to a podcast (Vasquez & Felderman, 2013). The teacher began to allow for time to listen to podcasts created by other children, and soon the children wanted to learn to create their own podcasts. Choosing topics, planning out the text of their talk, and delivering the audio broadcast all provided

rich language development as well as added motivation.

Mathematical Learning

The research-based math curriculum called *Building Blocks* (Clements & Sarama, 2011) has consistently been shown to improve math scores when compared to control and comparison groups. Of particular interest are gains of students from lower-economic backgrounds who made equal gains to those from higher-economic backgrounds. In addition, manipulation of geometric shapes by children on the computer was found to be equally or more effective than non-computer manipulatives in teaching geometric principles.

The use of virtual manipulatives can be a part of an interactive white-board experience (IWB) as described by Linder (2012) where a classroom of 4-year olds sits on the rug viewing a display of elephants all of differing colors, heights and shapes. After a discussion about multiple ways of counting the elephants, children are invited to come up to the board and create a set of elephants by placing

their finger on an elephant image and dragging it to a location, adding similar elephants until finished. Later in the lesson the children are given a chance to work in small groups with plastic animals, sorting and counting them for additional practice.

Touchpad and Tablets

The recent advance in computer technology of the touchpad and tablet-sized devices has opened up a new world of interactivity and technology for young children, even as young as two years old (Geist, 2012). Previously the keyboard and mouse had set up a barrier to the youngest children, but with the development of touch screen devices, exploration by toddlers and preschoolers has begun to be reported in the literature (Couse & Chen, 2010; Giest, 2012; Shifflet, Toledo, & Mattoon, 2012). Children ranging in ages 3-6 years old used tablet computers and a stylus to draw self-portraits. Researchers reported that children needed no more than an hour to learn to use this new medium for drawing, with some adult support as well as peer modeling (Couse & Chen, 2010). In another preschool classroom, the teacher reported that she introduced the tablet in a whole group setting, moving to a supervised small group setting until she was ready to allow them independent use of the tablets within her classroom (Shifflet, et al., 2012). It was reported that instead of isolated play with the tablets, children shared ideas and asked each other questions, even as they used their own individual tablet.

Computer Games, Virtual Worlds, and Play

While the academic learning described in the previous articles had elements of play, other technologies

have play as their central objective such as video games and virtual worlds. Marsh (2010) reported that children, ages 6-7, engaged in many different types of play when using technology: “fantasy play, socio-dramatic play, ritualized play, games with rules, and what might be called ‘rough and tumble’ play” (p. 30). She suggested that the online virtual world should allow children to play with issues of identity through the use of an avatar and the different roles they undertake in the virtual world. Through their play in the virtual world, children engaged in play that was similar to the way they played without technology such as engaging with peers, taking on new identities through pretending, and making up rules for the games they were inventing. While studies of children’s online virtual play are limited, there is evidence that this play is meaningful to children and may have similar benefits of social interaction and symbolic play when compared to offline play.

Create boundaries to avoid the over-use of technology.

In a small study involving two children ages 5 and 7, observations were conducted playing a variety of computer games on numerous occasions (Verenikina, Herrington, Peterson, & Mantei, 2010). It was observed that group play increased the complexity of the play and that children extended make-believe aspects of the play beyond time spent on the computer. Adult supervision and selection of games for qualities such as discovery-oriented paths, simple, clear screens, and a con-

nection to daily life, appeared to improve the level of interaction and growth the children received from the technology experience.

Issues and Problems with Early Technology Use

It is important to note that there are also areas of serious concern related to overuses of technology in young children’s lives such as computer addiction problems (Seo, Chun, Jwa & Choi, 2011), Internet safety issues (Dodge, Husain & Kuke, 2011), and risks for obesity (Epstein, Roemmich, Robinson, Paluch, Winiewicz, Fuerch, & Robinson, 2008). We discuss these issues more in detail below.

Computer Addiction

Related to young children’s computer use is the problem of computer addiction. Research conducted in Korea with 179 five-year old children looked at computer use in both home and school settings. It was found that the younger the child started using a computer, the longer they used the computer, playing mostly computer games, and having computer time that was less supervised created higher scores on the Internet Addiction Scale for Young Children (IASYC), designed to measure levels of computer habituation (Seo, et al., 2011). In addition, Seo and colleagues (2011) found children with the highest scores on IASYC had the lowest scores on the Socio-Emotional Development Evaluation Scale used to measure “independence from teachers, self-control, peer interaction, adaptation to kindergarten and incentives for accomplishment and curiosity” (p. 248). Conversely, children with the highest socio-emotional develop-

ment scores had the lowest scores on the ISAYC. Home computer use had a much stronger effect than did computer use in educational settings on habituation, but use in classrooms could still contribute to addiction. Therefore, early childhood educators must understand the risk of computer addiction and its effects on the emotional and social well-being of young children when deciding appropriate uses of technology with this age group.

Concerns have been raised that just as early childhood classrooms work to minimize stereotyping in off-line play, it is important to be aware of stereotypical images and gender-biased approaches to using technology with children (Kirmani, Davis, & Kalyanpur, 2009). Computer games can often have extreme images of masculine and feminine stereotypes, and educators may need to talk with children about these images or make sure they are limited in the classroom.

Internet Safety

Researchers observed children, ages 4-5 years, conducting surpris-

ingly sophisticated Web searches both with teacher assistance and independently (Spink, et al., 2009). Children were seen using a variety of cognitive skills related to seeking information on the Web such as judgments regarding the relevance of search results, collaboration with other children, and multi-tasking. This study reminds educators that young children may be more capable with technology than adults would imagine and that giving children opportunities to show these skills is an important aspect of a developmentally appropriate classroom.

As younger children’s use of the Internet increases, supervision and instruction is vital in order to minimize negative risks associated with Internet use. In a study where researchers conducted interviews and observed 37 children in grades kindergarten through second grade, using the Internet, 78% of the children reported that the Internet offered benefits, while only 42% said there were negative aspects to the Internet (Dodge, et al., 2011). Of particular concern was the fact that when describing “bad” things about

the Internet, no child mentioned that there might be dangers related to people, misinformation, or inappropriate photos. It appears young children have either not been taught about these problems or are too young to conceptualize them easily. Also, 75% of the children said they had used the Internet by themselves, without adult supervision, leaving them vulnerable to the problems mentioned previously. Clearly, while children may enjoy and even gain cognitively from Internet use, there are concerns about their unsupervised and naïve use of this medium. It is important that adults take responsibility to instruct, supervise, and protect young children from the dangers associated with Internet use.

Health Concerns

Young children’s health is of great importance to all who care for this age group, and the use of technology with young children has risks that must be considered. The use of TV and computer screen time has been linked to risks of obesity (Epstein, et al., 2008). In a study of children ages 4-7, conducted by Epstein and colleagues (2008), reducing TV and computer use was found to have a positive effect on lowering body mass index. In a study of over 2000 children, ages 6-20, spending more than two hours watching TV or using the computer was significantly associated with cardiovascular risk, even when adjusted for physical activity (Choi, & Kong, 2011). While it is difficult to measure activity levels of very young children, it has been hypothesized that large amounts of screen time for infants and toddlers may be contributing to a decline in activity levels for this age group (Cardon, Van Cauwenberghe, & De Bourdeaudhuij, 2011). Forgetting to take breaks, children’s bodies do not get



Nancy P. Alexander

Ensure that children work together or in parallel play when using new technologies.

the circulation they need as they immerse themselves in games for hours. Therefore it is important to limit time on the computer and make children get up and move during the breaks (Straker, Maslen, Burgess-Limerick, Johnson, & Dennerlein, 2010). In order to support healthy habits and development adults may need to help children limit their use of computers, TV, and other passive uses of technology.

In conclusion, it is important to realize that children’s well-being depends on adults making wise choices regarding early technology use. In making those decisions educators can use information gleaned from academic research on technology use and principles of developmentally appropriate practices for young children.

Guidelines for Appropriate Technology Use with Young Children

As the debate changes from choosing sides, either for or against the use of technology, to the more complex decision of how to use technology with young children, the research studies discussed above help inform these decisions. Based on our review on these studies, we present a set of guidelines for appropriate uses of technology, designed to protect children from the negative aspects of technology while allowing them to experience this important new aspect of modern life. In addition, vignettes are provided to illustrate how to practically apply the ideas for immediate use in early childhood classrooms.

Children Need to Move

Limiting the amount of time spent sitting in front of a TV or computer

screen is advised even if the time is spent learning academic skills or playing a game determined to be well-designed for children. It has been suggested that children work no longer than 30-60 minutes without a break (Straker, et al., 2010). Even less time may be appropriate for preschool and toddler age children before insisting on a break from sedentary or repetitive fine-motor movements. Also, it is important that breaks provide full body movements to contrast with constrained movements of time on the computer. Therefore, when children do take breaks, it is advised that they are active breaks such as running or dancing in order to encourage gross motor movement.

Technology can create environments that support healthy development.

A compounding problem of inactivity and computer use is the fact that children often ignore discomfort, especially when playing a game that is immersive and fun (Straker, et. al., 2010). This makes it even more imperative that adults monitor use, encourage breaks, and limit use. On the other hand, using new technologies where children can use gross motor movement to control input devices can provide a fun, physical outlet that includes technology and large motor movement.

One fun way to integrate technology with movement is to video-tape children’s activities such as outdoor play, dancing or physical challenges,

later sharing these movies with the children and celebrating the excitement of their physical movement and skill development. A digital portfolio of movement activities is also a valuable tool to share with parents who will also enjoy seeing their child’s progress and growth.

Ms. Smith is outside with her class of 3-year olds who are physically active and enjoying a beautifully sunny day. Using her camera on her mobile phone, she takes multiple pictures of the children as they play. She exclaims in excitement as she verbally labels the activities; “Susie is running” or “Marcus is climbing.” The children eagerly come over to see the pictures and then return to play. Later Ms. Smith downloads the pictures into PowerPoint, typing in the child’s name and activity. She prints the PowerPoint slides, creating a fun book for the children to “read” about different kinds of movement with themselves as stars of the book.

Children Need to Connect with Living Things

While computers provide increasingly important support for academic skills, children still need to interact with plants, animals, and the outdoor world to develop an understanding and appreciation for the larger natural world they live in (Louv, 2005). It is important to have plants and animals in the classroom, and to encourage children to spend time outdoors playing and exploring with their senses. To integrate technology into the natural world, budding scientists and intrepid explorers can begin to track the growth and habits of living things through digital photography, both in and outside the classroom. Blending traditional activities, such as a

nature walk, stopping to touch, look and smell nature, can be augmented with digital snapshots taken on the walk. Later a photo-book of the walk can be created as children add leaves, twigs, and real world artifacts to the digital record of the outing. Connections can be made between digital images found on the Internet and real life examples of plants and animals found in the classroom, or encountered on a field trip. Time-release videos of plants growing, or the use of wild-life videos of animal activity, are examples that can support the curriculum but do not replace real world experiences that can be provided in most early childhood classrooms.

After a field trip to the zoo, Mr. Tucker wants to extend the learning experience for his second graders by having them create a multi-media slide show using VoiceThread. Pairs of students work together to create a page devoted to one animal from the zoo, finding a picture to place in the slide or creating their own art work and scanning it into the computer. Creating a short script, they audio-tape a description of the animal and one interesting fact.

Children Need to be Social

It is important to evaluate the technology in light of its ability to provide social interaction and play opportunities. For example, one might expect Internet searches to be a solitary experience, but researchers found 4-5 year-old children interacting with each other socially as they constructed knowledge of how to conduct their searches. Some children were seen sharing websites they had found earlier in their searches, if the site seemed relevant to their neighbor (Spink, et al., 2009). Educators need to ensure that children work together

or in parallel play when using new technologies. Doing so can provide beneficial social interactions.

Ms. Walker is nervous about the suggestion that she let her mixed-aged preschool class use a set of three tablet computers, in part because she is concerned they will fight over them. She also wonders if they will be so engrossed in the technology that they will lose opportunities for social interaction with their peers. Instead she is pleasantly surprised that after an initial introduction with supervised use and exploration, children begin to engage in parallel play. Over time, sounds of laughter and discussion arise naturally among the tablet users.

Children Need Warm and Caring Interactions with Adults

The role of a caring adult cannot be overlooked for the social, cultural, and emotional benefits provided. When using a new technology, some children were observed sitting passively (Spink, et al., 2009) or playing in a way that produced little progress (Plowman & Stephen, 2005) without adult guidance. Therefore, it is important that early childhood educators value their role in encouraging appropriate use of technology, recognizing the use of technology with young children can be enhanced through skilled interactions between the teacher and student.

Relationships can be enhanced through the use of technology when caregiver and child work together to build something that is more substantial than either could have accomplished without each other, nor the support of the technology. For example, using VoiceThread, a Web-based technology that allows communication between individuals and groups at a distance, provided

an avenue for extended discussions between preschoolers and their teachers who were traveling in California (Fantozzi, 2012). When the teachers sent a photo taken of an elephant seal, with audio comments describing details about the seal, students recognized the teachers' voices with excitement and continued the conversation through dictated text messages and audio-taped questions.

Whether in an early childhood classroom or at home, adults need to monitor children's use of technology, particularly the Internet, as young children do not understand possible downsides to the Internet related to safety and the reliability of the information presented (Dodge, et al., 2011). Supervision of Internet use can be turned into a time of learning and attachment as the adult enters into play with the child during searches.

Using technology, especially TV or videos, as electronic babysitters is a popular parent convenience, but research shows that without quality adult interaction infants and toddlers do not benefit. Instead, adult interaction is an important factor in whether children under the age of three are able to learn from screen media such as TV and video (Richert, Robb, & Smith, 2011). Having the TV on in the background has been shown to inhibit adult-child interactions (Vandewater, et al., 2007). Instead of mindlessly using technology as background, caregivers should purposively interact with the child, keeping the relationship paramount. Extending the child's interactions with a new technology may be as simple as showing excitement as the child uses the tool, or it may include specific modeling or instructions so that the child can more fully explore the application.



Photo courtesy of Knollwood Preschool/Knollwood Community Church, Burke, Virginia

such as a water proof camera, that can be brought to the water table and integrated into these important sensory experiences. Another approach would be to encourage a multimodal use of technologies where young children combine the use of traditional paints, glue, and paper to which they add photos printed from the computer, to create a mixed medium piece of art.

This week in the art center, Ms. Thomas encourages her kindergarten students to create a self-portrait using a multimodal expression of mediums to include traditional paints, crayons, and pencils, while also giving students a choice to cut and paste photos from classroom snapshots of themselves into the portrait. Photos were printed in black and white, on inexpensive paper, to keep costs down while allowing for experimentation.

Children Need Symbolic Play

In response to the push for more academic learning at younger ages, advocates for play in childhood have become adamant about the importance of play to young children’s health and development (Miller & Almon, 2009). While providing positive opportunities of “play for the sake of play” (Verenikina, et al., 2010, p. 154), technology can be problematic to children’s play, with highly violent or commercialized content. When evaluating computer games, Verenikina, et al. (2011) suggest limiting use of games with overly constrained play and instead look for important qualities such as an orientation of discovery, multiple pathways and choices of symbol use, simple backgrounds and clear directions. Open-ended activities build play opportunities and a simple use of technology can facilitate a dramatic play, where children mimic

Provide breaks that consist of full body movements to contrast with the constrained movements of time spent on the computer.

Ms. Tan spends the day with her small group of toddlers, providing a warm and stable relationship of care throughout their day in the center. Many times a day, she holds a child in her lap as the child “reads” a book pointing to pictures and naming items. Recently Ms. Tan brought in an e-book displayed on her e-reader that had barnyard animal pictures in it, as well as the option to hear the corresponding animal sound. With the child in her lap, she lets the child explore the e-book, responding to the child’s interest in the option to hear the animal sounds. She doesn’t concern herself with finishing the book,

but stops when the child loses interest.

Children Need a Variety of Sensory Experiences

When integrating technology into young children’s lives, it important to remember young children, especially infants and toddlers, learn through their senses (Honig, 2007). Water, sand, paint, and clay are traditionally used in childhood in part due to their ability to stimulate the senses. Early childhood educators need to make sure children do not have to give up these vital sensory experiences. Look for technologies,

the adult behaviors they see around them, on cell phones, sending text messages, or using their imaginary laptops to conduct business.

While some computer games may provide appropriate play opportunities for young children, care must be taken in supervising this type of play, as there are risks of computer addiction associated with computer games. Specific reactions in children when asked to stop using the computer included physical symptoms such as headaches, spasms, and stomachaches as well as emotional reactions of crying, blushing, and pouting (Seo, et al., 2011). Recognizing that playing computer games can be addictive, educators must watch for similar withdrawal symptoms.

Over the past few weeks, Mr. James notices several children sending imaginary text-messages with the blocks, pretending to type with their thumbs. He hears them request to be sent a text, mimic a signal that they have received the text, and then “read” the text out loud. Using a digital camera he keeps nearby for documenting the children’s work, he captures this moment of imaginative play to share with his co-teacher and with the children’s parents at a later time.

Children Need Sleep and Rest

As most adults realize by now, technology is hard to turn off. Children need guidance and boundaries to avoid overuse of technology. They need an adult to limit the amount of technological stimulation, to allow for adequate sleep and rest. Be alert to signs of overuse and addiction as described previously. As an early childhood professional, you may be called upon to help inform parents of current findings about technology use, for example, advising against the

use of TV in the bedroom (American Association of Pediatrics, 2011). Be ready to help parents with the difficult tasks of reducing their children’s use of technology at home if necessary and become an advocate for the wise use of technology in the lives of young children.

In the weekly newsletter to parents, a section is devoted to parent education on a variety of topics. Ms. Swenson recently read an interesting study about signs of technology overuse and she decided to share those signs with parents to help them manage their children’s technology use at home. She also used the discussion about technology use as an opportunity to remind parents of the importance of sleep to their young children’s learning and development.

Always keep children’s developmental needs at the forefront.

Conclusions

It is time to accept that rapid advances and an explosion in technological innovations have changed the world of adults and are also changing the landscape of modern childhood. No longer is the question “*How young is too young for children to use technology?*” a relevant inquiry, as technology permeates our world. Instead, we put forth a more helpful question: “*How much technology use is ‘just right’ for young children when balancing both the positive and negative aspects of its use in their lives?*”

Pursuing this quest becomes serious work for early childhood educators to assure answers fit each stage of child development. It is of utmost importance that what is already known about young children’s healthy growth and development is applied to the use of new technological developments. Using these guidelines to highlight appropriate integration of technology can assist teachers in creating environments that support healthy development. As outlined in this paper, children need movement, a connection with living things, social learning, interactions with caring adults, sensory experiences, symbolic play, and time for sleep and rest even as technology becomes integrated into our daily lives. Assuring that these vital needs of childhood are not interrupted by technology takes careful thought.

By coupling current research findings with the guiding principles stated in this article, technology use can be adapted to assure that children’s developmental needs are always at the forefront. Making sure that young children are not expected to use technology as if they were “little adults” is important. Instead young children need to be supported in their use of new technologies to enhance their natural inclinations to learn about and explore their ever changing and exciting new world.

Remembering the children’s story of Goldilocks, as she tries out Papa Bear’s bed that is too hard, and Mama Bear’s bed that is too soft, and finally rests in Baby Bear’s bed that is “just right,” it is important for parents and educators of young children to help children find the “just right” use of technology in their young lives.

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at the University of Cincinnati. Her research interests include the early use of technology by children, parental decision-making regarding young children's exposure to technology and developing technology to foster emergent literacy. She has taught preschool through 3rd grade, tutored children with dyslexia, and designed software to support struggling readers.

Kay Kyeong-Ju Seo, Ph.D., is an Associate Professor of Instructional Design and Technology at the University of Cincinnati. Seo earned her Ph.D. in Instructional Technology from Utah State University. Her research interests revolve around promoting social cognitive development in 3D immersive virtual worlds, designing constructivist instructional approaches with online social media and integrating technology in K-12 and teacher education.

Bridget Gruner, is the Academic Support Coordinator at St. Agnes School in Ft. Wright, KY. Her research interests include technology use in teacher induction programs, the use of technology to support students with mild learning disabilities, and middle school literacy. She is a K-12 certified special education teacher and has served a variety of roles at the post-secondary level including adjunct faculty, supervisor, and teacher mentor.

In
Memory
of

Gladys Louise Grantham Irby
Elvin B. Pippert

By Dr Pamela Schiller

About the Authors

C. Lorelle Lentz, is a doctoral student in Instructional Design & Technology

Getting to Know Our 2014 SECA Presidential Candidates

We're delighted to have a wonderful group of individuals who have expressed their desire to continue their service to the profession by serving as President of the Southern Early Childhood Association. During the next few months, we'll share both their backgrounds and vision for SECA in many ways. We'll begin with a brief look at their personal and professional accomplishments in this issue of *Dimensions of Early Childhood*.

In April 2014, you'll find an article in the *SECA Reporter* that contains their responses to questions about their leadership styles and qualities.

In July 2014, the second issue of *Dimensions of Early Childhood* will feature an article outlining their vision for SECA and the opportunities and challenges facing the Association. Also that month, another issue of the *SECA Reporter* will highlight their responses to these questions:

- "I'm a college student. Why should I join SECA?"
- "I'm a teacher in an early childhood program. What benefits can I gain by joining SECA?"

To help you meet them "up close", we took the opportunity to video conversations with them during their interview process at our 65th annual conference that was held in January 2014 in Williamsburg, Virginia. Those videos are posted on the home page of the SECA website.

We're looking for every opportunity to help you as a SECA member to get to know the candidates. We hope you'll take the opportunity to research each candidate and then cast your vote for the person you think will best lead SECA into the future. You have three great choices!

Let's learn a little about each of the candidates. (*The candidates are listed in alphabetical order.*)



Carol Coleman-Montealegre of Florida

Carol is a native of New Orleans but spent her childhood in Honduras. After returning to the states, she attended Stuart Hall (secondary school) in Staunton, Virginia and received her bachelor's degree from the University of Southwestern Louisiana (now University of Louisiana in Lafayette). She met her husband, a native of Nicaragua, while in college and moved to Nicaragua after graduation where she taught at the Nicaraguan-American School. As her husband pursued his career with Bank of America, Carol, her two children and husband lived in several countries, finally settling in Miami in 1987 where they have remained in residence.

She worked as a preschool teacher and lead trainer for the Division of Early Childhood Programs of Miami-Dade Public Schools for fourteen years and earned her Master's Degree in Early Childhood Education from Nova Southeastern University.

After leaving the school system in 2000, she developed her own consulting company and served in a variety of consulting capacities in the field of early childhood education. She served as a Senior Consultant at the National Institute for Innovative Leadership in Miami, as Director of the Quality Counts Career Center operated by the Children's Forum in Florida, and as a consultant to the Miami Children's Museum Charter School, the YWCA of Greater Miami and Dade County, and the Catholic Charities' South Dade Child Care Center. She is also a certified teacher/trainer for the HighScope Educational Research Foundation and has traveled extensively throughout the US in that capacity.

Carol has served as President of the South Florida Association for Young Children (SFAYC), on the Board of the Florida Association for the Education of Young Children (FLAEYC) and as a Member-at-Large on the SECA Board of Directors (2008-2013). She is fluent in Spanish and was instrumental in working with the SECA Editorial Committee to develop the SECA publication, *Aula Infantil*, which includes articles authored by Carol. Her goal was to provide materials in the native language of many caregivers in the South Florida area (and other SECA states) to enhance their knowledge of early childhood best practices.

Carol states that her "passion is to move our great organization forward by serving membership, nurturing leadership and strengthening advocacy."



Linda Novak of North Carolina

Linda first entered a leadership position with SECA as a member of the West Virginia Association for Young Children (WVAYC), serving as President. She was a founding member of the West Virginia Child Care Centers United (WVCUU), which she served as President.

With a personal move to North Carolina, Linda assumed the position of Interim Division Chair, Public Service, at Fayetteville Technical Community College in Fayetteville, North Carolina, and initiated discussions about bringing SECA back to North Carolina. (*The North Carolina SECA affiliate was dissolved in the early 2000's.*) As a first step, she mentored a group of early childhood students from Fayetteville Technical Community College, applied for a SECA Student Grant, and brought them to their first SECA conference in Williamsburg, Virginia.

Linda began her early childhood professional career after earning a B.S. in Psychology with a specialization in Child and Developmental Psychology from the University of Pittsburgh. As a teacher of 2-5 year-olds at Tiny Town Day Nursery in Parkersburg, WV, she advanced to become director in 1983. She continued to progress through different professional positions, including Co-Director of a Preschool in Williamstown, WV, Director of the Children's Room at West Virginia University in Parkersburg and Instructor for the Child Development Specialist Apprenticeship Program through the U.S. Department of Labor. In 2009, she earned a Master's Degree in Early Childhood Education from Concordia University.

Her professional journey continued through positions as adjunct faculty at several colleges, Director of the Evergreen Child Development Center at Washington State Community College in Ohio and Director of the Early Learning Center at West Virginia University Parkersburg. She has developed and taught online courses and supervised practicum field placements.

She is a certified trainer for the West Virginia State Training and Registry System and has completed Level 1 and 2 ECERS training. She is also a member of the inaugural class of the President's Leadership Institute at Fayetteville Technical Community College and received the 2012-2013 Excellence in Teaching Award for Curriculum Programs at FTCC.

Her goal is *"to utilize my knowledge of early childhood education along with my organizational, managerial, and training talents to benefit the organization's members and employees."*



Elizabeth (Beth) Strader Parr of Georgia

A resident of Georgia for many years, Beth assumed a leadership role with the Georgia Association for Young Children (GAYC) and was elected as their representative to the SECA Board of Directors, serving in the positions of Chair of the Public Policy Commission of the SECA Board and as SECA's representative (ex-officio) on the NAEYC Affiliate Council.

Beth earned a BA in History and American Studies at St. Andrews Presbyterian College in North Carolina and later earned her Master's in Education including Educational Technology at the University of North Carolina, Greensboro. She began her career in early childhood education at Leonard St. Kindergarten in High Point, NC and served as the Children's Librarian at Roddenbery Memorial Library in Cairo, GA.

In 1982, she began her work with faith-based institutions, contributing significantly to the creation of programs and curricula for those institutions. She was the founding Director of the Mother's Morning Out Program at Porterfield United Methodist Church in Albany, GA and the Director of Children's Ministries at St. Luke United Methodist Church in Columbus, GA. Additionally, she served as a consultant for various church congregations in South Georgia as they developed children's ministries. The United Methodist Publishing House recognized Beth's expertise and utilized her as a writer and editor for various curricula to be utilized in the church's programs, including six volumes of the curriculum, *Bible Zone Live*, for preschool.

Her work in the field was not limited to faith-based institutions. Beth took a brief "break" to serve as the Education Specialist at the Coastal Heritage Society of Savannah, GA and was instrumental in helping to design the Savannah Children's Museum. She has served as a CDA instructor at Chatham Childcare Collaborative and Coastal Georgia Community College, as a technical assistance consultant for the NAEYC Accreditation Facilitation Project of GAYC, and a regional accreditation assessor for NAEYC.

She is a certified playground safety inspector, has attended workshops on puppetry and participated in the North Carolina Storytelling Festival. She has also served as a member of the Bishop's Initiative Task Force on Children and Poverty.

For her, being president means, *"the opportunity to lead SECA in embracing new ways of nurturing our membership while retaining the warmth for which we are known as we continue to advocate for the young children of the South."*

The 2014 SECA Exemplary Outdoor Classroom



Creating a Nature Inspired Outdoor Learning Environment on a Shoestring Budget

To honor our theme for the 2014 SECA Conference, Children's Play: Past, Present, and Future, SECA launched a search for exemplary outdoor classrooms in the Southern region. One overall winner was selected and winners at the state level also were designated.

Applications were reviewed based on the following criteria and, upon designation as a potential winner, on-site visits were made by members of the SECA Board of Directors to verify the application components.

Criteria 1: Natural modifications and innovations in at least five of the following areas: large motor, climbing/crawling space, building area, art area, music and movement area, garden area, storage, water, dirt digging, sand and wheeled toy area.

Criteria 2: Effective and appropriate monitoring of children in these areas by caregivers/teachers.

Criteria 3: The use of natural materials in the outdoor classroom.

Criteria 4: The use of materials specific to the region/community.

Criteria 5: Ease of maintenance of the outdoor classroom.

Criteria 6: Compliance with local/licensing regulations.

For the past two years, SECA has sponsored a contest to showcase an exemplary outdoor classroom in the Southern region that demonstrates great outdoor spaces for young children. For the second year of the contest, we asked for submissions that demonstrated that *“great spaces could be developed on a shoestring budget..... developmentally appropriate spaces designed without significant budgets.”*

Our 2014 Exemplary Outdoor Classroom

We're pleased to introduce you to the winner of the **2014 SECA Exemplary Outdoor Classroom Contest: Agapeland Youth Enrichment Program (YEP)** in Marion, South Carolina, approximately 30 miles inland from Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. Through this article, we'll take you on a tour of the outdoor space and share information from their application. We hope that you'll gain some ideas and get creative with your outdoor space!



Agapeland receives recognition as the 2014 Exemplary Outdoor Classroom at the 65th annual SECA conference in Williamsburg, Virginia.



Large Motor

The large motor space is located in the center of the play area where children can play a variety of games. The space allows for cooperative games, as well as for open-ended play. Children not only build stronger bodies, but they also learn coordination, balance, spatial awareness, and social skills such as cooperation, trust and fair play.



Climbing/Crawling

The climbing/crawling spaces include the arch climber, the tunnel and the tire tower. The arch provides a safe place to climb over a sand surface and the tunnel is low to the ground. Next year, they plan to grow vines over the tunnel to enhance nature in the play space. The tire tower was constructed with donated tires.



Building Area/Dirt Digging/Sand

The building area is located next to the digging and construction areas. The building area contains small branches, tree discs, planks and play props. Children are free to construct their own play scenarios and can request any additional props that they need from the storage cabinet. The sand area is a small 1 to 2 person area contained within a large tire that is covered by an umbrella.



Garden Area

The space features two garden squares where the children can plant seeds and tend to the plants. They have child size rakes and hoes to use for this project. Any food that grows will be harvested and served to the children. One or two of the tire planters near the building area also serve as “dinosaur habitats”.





Music and Movement

This area includes many re-purposed and revived materials. #10 cans that previously were used in meal service became drums once they were sunk into the ground at different angles. A milk crate provides the “seat” for the drummer.

Two children’s xylophones that were in disrepair were attached to the fence and a log so that they could be repaired and reused. A small frame contains a triangle, bells and small cymbals. Pots and pans will be added to the fence later to provide additional percussion sounds.

Ribbons and scarves are available for movement and dance in the open area adjacent to the music area.

Art Area

A picnic table forms the base of the art area with a cloth tarp for shade, an art easel and a chalk board. Materials in this area include natural materials and loose parts such as seashells, pinecones, leafy branches, rocks, seeds, twigs and sand. Children are encouraged to use the natural materials in their artistic expressions, and writing and other forms of literacy expression are also encouraged in this area. Paints, paper and other materials are always available from the storage area.



Cozy & Dramatic Play Areas

The cozy area is an area where children can go for privacy, quiet, solitude, reading, etc. The dramatic play area/ reading area has a draw back curtain (a sheet over a rope), toadstool style log table & chairs, a mudpie kitchen and a mad-scientist laboratory.



Keeping Tabs!

The play space was originally a big open field. While there is now delineation of specific areas, there are no obstructions to impede visual supervision. If a teacher or observer stands in the center of the space, all areas are visible with a turn of the body or the head. Many areas offer shade, some offer a sense of privacy or seclusion, yet they are still visible to the adult.

Teachers are very involved with the children when they are outside. Although children have freedom to choose where and how they play, teachers offer guidance and supervision as needed, moving about the play area to make sure any space around corners or under a drape are monitored.

The Budget

This outdoor area was indeed developed on a “shoestring” budget and supported by a \$300 donation from the South Carolina Early Childhood Association District 2.

- Purchase of materials \$613.29 (bamboo reed fencing, paint, sand, landscape timbers)
- Free/donated materials (garden space guides timber, sand, plants tires, small items)
- Free consultation through South Carolina First Steps
- Labor \$460

Total cost of the project: \$1,073.29.....estimated donations at \$595.00

Conclusion

With a lot of personal initiative and commitment, the staff at Agapeland were able to develop an outstanding outdoor classroom for their program. They utilized local resources and creativity, rather than a big budget, to provide developmentally appropriate outdoor experiences for young children.

As Dr. Dan Wuori, Chief Program Officer of South Carolina First Steps to Readiness, said, *“Agapeland is an amazing example of how much good can be done on a budget - and a reminder that an appropriate outdoor environment for young children doesn't necessarily entail the purchase of a ten thousand dollar jungle gym. We're delighted to highlight them as a model.”*

Congratulations to Agapeland, their staff, families and children!



If you're interested in learning more about this program and playscape, contact:
Jasmine Collins or Janet Simmons
Agapeland Youth Enrichment Program
613 Dunlop Street
Marion, SC 29571
(843) 423-2077 or (843) 275-1444
Agape8@roadrunner.com or heaventj1@aol.com

COMING UP!

More Information About Our Other 2014 Winners

- In the summer 2014 *Dimensions of Early Childhood*, we'll feature the 2014 contest runner-up: The Child Development & Family Studies Center, Mississippi State University, Starkville, MS
- In the fall 2014 *Dimensions of Early Childhood*, we'll showcase the three programs that received an honorable mention for certain aspects of their program.

Georgia: Lifespan Montessori of Athens, Inc. (Athens)

Georgia: St. Martin's Episcopal School (Atlanta)

Louisiana: Child Development Center of the University of Louisiana/Monroe

The material in this article was submitted by Jasmine & Janet on behalf of Agapeland, and the article was prepared by Glenda Bean, Executive Director of SECA.

Outdoor Learning Supervision Is More Than Watching Children Play

Why is outdoor play so important for young children's learning? What are teachers' supervisory responsibilities when children play and learn outdoors?

**Heather Olsen,
Donna Thompson,
and Susan Hudson**

What a perfect day to be outside! It is warm, the sun is shining, and there is a light breeze. A few children are climbing on playground equipment. Some are digging in sand. A few laugh as they chase each other. Four children are standing together, looking around.

The two supervisors are sitting on a bench, drinking their morning coffee and planning their next science project. Inga, a 4-year-old, comes running and in a frightened voice says, "Pedro is hurt!"

Similar scenarios take place every day in early childhood programs around the world, and demonstrate why careful supervision is so important for early childhood professionals.

Early childhood programs strive to provide good-quality care and education as young children develop their physical, emotional, social, and intellectual skills. In order to provide children with positive, developmentally appropriate learning opportunities, educators ensure the safety and security of children, indoors and outdoors.

The outdoor learning environment is an important element of the total care and education of young children. Outdoor spaces can enhance curriculum, especially when teachers responsibly supervise children who are engaged in unstructured play. Supervision is far more than just assuring sufficient teacher/child ratios. The supervision practices explored in this article deal with two primary issues:

- preparation of the outdoor learning environment, and
- watchful guidance of young children by educators

Why Outdoor Play Is Important

Insights about children's play from Montessori (1966), Piaget (1962), Vygotsky (1978), and the Gesell Institute of Human Development (2010) have contributed to the early childhood literature that clearly indicates that children learn and develop through play.

Play typically happens inside and outside the classroom. The term *recess* has often been thought of as time spent without any real purpose (Clements, 2000). The values of outdoor play are far more than giving children a break, or allowing them to run off steam or get fresh air. Research has shown that

- outdoor play encourages children to communicate, to express their feelings, to discover and investigate the world around them (Guddemi, Jambor, & Moore, 1999), and that
- play is an important vehicle for developing self-regulation, language, cognition, and social competence (NAEYC, 2008).

The Alliance for Childhood (2010) is focusing its advocacy efforts on creative play, which is disappearing from childhood in the United States. Every child deserves a chance to grow and learn in play-based early childhood programs. Educators are pressured by factors such as preparing children for academic tests and the stress of meeting time limits due to the increase of shared space and structured programming.

Teachers play a central role in children's play (Wardle, 2008). Teachers spark children's curiosity and support healthy development so they can become lifelong

learners (Miller & Almon, 2009). The interactions between teachers and children are especially important in “today’s media-saturated world, where many children have not learned how to engage in rich play of their own making and need a teacher’s help creating it” (p. 53).

Children need to be involved with various kinds of play (motor/physical play, social play, constructive play, fantasy play, and games with rules) because play is “the most efficient, powerful, and productive way to learn the information [and skills] young children need” (Wardle, 2008).

Because play is so important to children’s development, teachers are responsible for facilitating safe, appropriate learning experiences.

as adults who are alert, are aware, know the play rules, and intervene when inappropriate behaviors occur (Thompson, Hudson, & Olsen, 2007). Among the many factors that constitute adequate supervision are awareness of the children’s developmental stages, identifying any hazards present in the environment, and recognition of the types of injury to which children may be susceptible (Saluja, et al., 2004).

Children grow and learn in a safe, engaging play environment.

Children require the opportunity to grow, learn, and have enjoyable experiences in a safe play environment. Professionals who supervise children’s outdoor play have three primary responsibilities, to

- *create an environment* that empowers children to independently pursue creative play,
- *enhance the quality* of the play experience by interacting with children, and
- *carefully observe* to assure that children play in appropriate and safe ways.

Early childhood educators have a legal and moral responsibility to keep children safe and provide them with a good-quality learning environment (National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC], 2005a).

Three responsibilities of early childhood educators who supervise children’s outdoor play

1. create an environment that empowers children to independently pursue creative play
2. enhance the quality of the play experience by interacting with children
3. carefully observe to assure that children play in appropriate and safe ways

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), the American Public Health Association (APHA), and the National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care (NRCHSCC) also recognize the importance of supervision. In their comprehensive health and safety standards they note

Children like to test their skills and abilities. This is particularly noticeable around playground equipment. Even if the highest safety standards for playground layout, design, and surfacing are met, serious injuries can happen if children are left unsupervised. (AAP, APHA, & NRCHSCC, 2002, p. 59)

Supervision is more than having an adult present and making sure the children are playing safely. Supervisors in good-quality programs are expected to enhance children’s development by offering developmentally appropriate materials and activities that engage children. Educators provide a space that empowers children to take ownership in their discoveries. These three factors are necessary to implement high-quality supervision practices:

1. Plan interesting, safe learning environments.

Questions to consider about outdoor play

- Why does supervision of young children matter?
- How can adults create dynamic outdoor learning environments to assure meaningful play experiences?
- What level of supervision is needed to ensure children’s safety?
- What adult behaviors are expected during supervision? What adult activities are not appropriate?
- How can adults interact with a child or small group and also supervise other children?

How Is Outdoor Play Best Supervised?

The term *supervision* can be found in any dictionary (e.g., to oversee, direct) (Morehead, Morehead, & Morehead, 1995). Supervision in the field of education has been defined

2. Actively supervise the children.
3. Develop and follow supervision policies.

Plan Interesting, Safe Learning Environments

With planning and thoughtful creativity, educators can design good-quality learning environments that are filled with learning opportunities. The best unstructured outdoor play environments are designed to allow children to explore, follow their curiosity, and express their physical being and body movements. Children choose to play in challenging, inspiring, and inviting spaces that appeal to them. Unique play spaces for children's informal learning often include

- natural areas
- objects to manipulate
- swings
- climbing units
- open grass
- pretend play settings
- water/sand spaces
- digging sites

All staff members, especially those who supervise children outdoors, should be part of the planning process to create the unstructured outdoor play environment. Observant supervisors have insights into how children move and behave when they explore. They understand how mixing active and passive areas can create conflict and unsafe behavior. Teachers' understandings about how children play on different pieces of equipment or use various manipulative objects can be very beneficial in setting up an effective outdoor environment.



Subjects & Predicates

Outdoor play encourages children to communicate, to express their feelings, and to investigate the world around them. It is an important vehicle for developing self-regulation, language, cognition, and social competence.

For instance, sand and water play are very common features in many programs. If sandboxes have less than an inch of sand and a limited number of tools (shovels, buckets, truck), children may have to wait a long time for a turn and their explorations with the sand will be limited. Spaces such as sandboxes should have plenty of materials and equipment. Sand and water are meant for groups of children to explore, manipulate, and create.

Supervisors can easily point out concerns in playground design as well, such as blind spots. For

instance, a large storybook cottage may appear cute on the blueprint, but may in fact be a hazardous situation in the making for children who can either hide in or behind the structure. Thus, experienced supervisors can bring a practical perspective that focuses on safety to any proposal.

Actively Supervise Children

Unstructured outdoor play areas make it impossible to predict every move children will make. In this article's opening scenario, two supervisors were present, but they were

not actively taking responsibility. Lack of supervision may well have resulted in a serious injury. Three practical components can result in appropriate supervision in an early childhood setting:

1. Identify each supervisors' responsibility
2. Be an active supervisor
3. Be prepared to respond to emergencies

Identify precise responsibilities of all supervisors.

Identify responsibilities

The first component of appropriate supervision is each supervisor's awareness of his or her responsibilities. Program expectations are to keep children safe and provide enriching environments for learning, but just exactly how is that done? The American Academy of Pediatrics standards for health and safety refer to supervision more than 20 times (AAP, APHA, & NTCHSCC, 2002). These guidelines include:

- "Children shall not be permitted to play without constant supervision in areas where there is any body of water, including swimming pools, built-in wading pools, tubs, pails, sinks or toilets, ponds, and irrigation ditches" (p. 112).
- "Children shall always be supervised when playing on playground equipment" (p. 222).
- "Parents expect that their child will be adequately

supervised and will not be exposed to hazardous play environments, yet will have the opportunity for free, creative play" (p. 351).

More detailed written supervision guidelines are still needed to clarify the specific responsibilities of educators who supervise young children.

Most injuries to young children are preventable (Rimsza, Schackner, Bowen, & Marshall, 2002) and happen when an adult is supposedly supervising them. A number of lawsuits against early childhood programs have raised questions about their supervision practices. This case was settled out of court.

Four supervisors were assigned to the play area with 18 children (age range from 15 months to 3 years). One supervisor went inside. A second adult was sitting on a picnic table. The third and fourth supervisors were standing together in a corner opposite from a playhouse. Five children were inside the playhouse, all of them out of direct sight. A child ran to the two supervisors to report that there was something wrong with another child. An adult found him underneath a plastic-ring-filled pool in the playhouse, not breathing.

Had the adults been interacting with the children and present in the playhouse, this incident would likely have never happened. To decrease the potential for accidents and inappropriate children's behaviors, early childhood programs need to identify precise responsibilities of staff who supervise children during unstructured play. The condition of the environment and the activities that are offered help determine these responsibilities.

Program leaders may find it helpful to identify three types of supervision (van der Smissen, 1990).

- **General supervision**—overseeing a group of young children involved in play. For instance, there may be several children playing in one large space with a variety of activities. Supervisors are dispersed throughout the area and actively watch their assigned territory.
- **Transitional supervision**—observing and overseeing children as they move between activities (van der Smissen, 1990). The supervisors' level of involvement in transitional supervision will vary depending on the ages of the children and the activity. For example, after a period of unstructured play (using general supervision techniques), supervisors implement transitional supervision techniques when they guide children to put away materials and equipment and move to the next activity.
- **Specific supervision**—constant and continuous monitoring of children, either one-on-one or in a small group. This type of supervision is common when the supervisor is giving instructions to children, the activity performed offers a greater challenge, or there is a need to guide a specific learning concept. In early childhood, this type of supervision is often referred to as *play facilitation* (Kontos, 1999).

Play facilitation or supervision?

Research on best practices shows that adults who actively facilitate play can extend the learning potential of the experience (Berk & Winsler 1995; Trawick-Smith, 1994). This teaching strategy is often called *intentional teaching* (Epstein, 2007). At the same time, interfering with and disrupting children’s play is not recommended when children are positively engaged (Miller, Fernie, & Kantor, 1992; Pellegrini & Galda, 1993).

Supervision is more than having an adult present.

In terms of a supervisor’s responsibility, very few people can do two jobs at once. If a person is teaching swimming in a pool, the teacher is focused on the learners, not the environment. A lifeguard is present to ensure that no participant spends too much time underwater. The

same thing happens in an outdoor play environment.

If early childhood teachers are expected to take an active role in play facilitation, then those individuals need to be designated prior to going outside. Thus, if three people have supervision (lifeguard) responsibilities, one may act as the play facilitator.

Attentively monitor children’s play

Active monitoring can ensure safety and help prevent injuries. Supervisors are constantly aware of the environment and continually scanning the play area so they can see more actions and behaviors. Scanning also enables a supervisor to give children “the eye” to prevent or stop inappropriate behavior and conflict. By being attentive when children are engaged in play, supervisors are readily available to intervene nonverbally or verbally.

Unsafe situations tend to arise when supervisors are engaged in one-to-one adult conversations or otherwise distracted. Active supervisors position themselves so they can

see the children. Supervisors agree beforehand as to who is responsible for what area. Again, a supervisor’s position can be likened to that of a lifeguard. Lifeguards are spread around a swimming pool with each person responsible for a different area, such as the slide, deep end, and shallow end.

Unstructured outdoor play is not a time for supervisors to catch up on each other’s lives. Interactions with other adults and children should be brief and to the point. When supervisors talk with another person, they stop being an active supervisor.

In some situations, leaders must determine appropriate times for adults to facilitate play. Imagine that three classrooms with 15 children each are outdoors. All three classroom teachers are assigned to supervise the children. Then one teacher takes three children to work in the garden. The other 42 children are scattered throughout the large area with two teachers supervising, resulting in a non-compliant (and unsafe) teacher to child ratio (NAEYC, 2005b). Teachers and administrators who discuss expectations and needs for balancing unstructured and more intentional outdoor play would develop a better plan.

Prepare for emergencies

Unfortunately, even under the best circumstances, injuries do occur. Early childhood programs must be prepared to respond appropriately to emergency situations, including injuries, natural disasters, and the arrival of unknown or unauthorized adults. All staff must know the procedures to follow in case of an emergency. This emergency plan must be practiced frequently. Whether it is an injury, fire, tornado, earthquake, or hurricane drill, all supervisors, administrators, teachers, children,



Subjects & Predicates

Active supervisors are constantly aware of the environment and continually scanning the play area so they can see children’s actions and behaviors. By being attentive when children are engaged in play, supervisors can intervene at once, either nonverbally or verbally.

and families need to know what to do when an emergency occurs.

An effective emergency plan includes details on how supervisors alert administrators and emergency responders to an urgent situation. Adults must have access to a communication system, such as a walkie-talkie or a cell phone at all times, to be used for work-related situations only. The plan also includes procedures for notifying families.

All staff must have training in basic first aid procedures, which is typically a requirement for licensing. Administrators and specialists provide staff with frequent updates on the latest recommendations for handling emergencies, including tending to children who have specific medical needs such as asthma, diabetes, or allergies.

Proper documentation of emergency situations includes completing an injury report form accurately (see sidebar) and following the program's submission requirements. Documentation is vital for legal protection and can be helpful in spotting patterns of concern to be addressed.



Subjects & Predicates

Supervision policies must be specific to the program, play area, staff skills, and children's needs. Review them at least once a year.

Information to Report

Injury report forms should include

- facility information
- child information
- time and date of incident
- location of incident
- equipment/product involved
- cause of injury
- parts of body injured
- type of injury
- first aid given at the facility
- who was contacted and what time
- treatment provided by whom and how
- follow-up plan for care of child
- corrective action needed to prevent reoccurrence
- name of agency notified
- signatures of staff members and parents (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2009)

Develop and Follow Supervision Policies

Each early childhood program has different supervision needs, depending on the design and access to the outdoor play environment. The goal of preparing and implementing comprehensive, effective supervision policies is to enable children to have an enriching and safe play environment.

Most programs design outdoor play spaces to provide children with the opportunity to develop physically, socially, emotionally, and intellectually through exploration, interaction with others, and discovery. The supervision philosophy of informal play in this environment

would be to maximize the space so children can create meaning from the world around them.

Consistent, clear staff responsibilities must be identified. Supervision policies must be specific to the program, play area, staff skills, and children's needs. Review them at least once a year.

Provide Continuing Education for Staff

Annual staff development about outdoor play is a key ingredient for successful outdoor supervision. Topics to consider include:

- Updating the environment for educational value and safety

- Identifying and revising supervisors' responsibilities
- Reviewing the components of active supervision
- Practicing current emergency procedures

High-quality early childhood programs address supervision preparation in order to ensure consistency in staff interactions with children and their colleagues. Supervision skills should focus on accountability, alertness, flexibility, and attitude (Thompson, et al., 2007). For instance, sometimes a child does not want to participate in an activity and may prefer to just watch from the side. A well-prepared supervisor would suggest that the child become an assistant or a scorekeeper, or engage in a related project near where the other children are playing.

Annual staff development about outdoor play is essential.

During professional development sessions, staff can be encouraged to discuss outdoor activities and behaviors that are and are not appropriate for children. Review the most effective teaching strategies to assure children's safety and involvement. Supervisors act as a team to develop the basic rules for activities, games, and unstructured play. These rules will then be consistent among all staff members and should be clearly communicated to the children and any other caregivers (Hudson, Bruya, Olsen, Thompson, & Bruya, 2010).

Program records about supervision development include information such as the date and times, name and qualifications of the leader, content covered, and names of participants who attended (Gaskin & Batista, 2007). These sessions may qualify as continuing education hours for staff in some states and therefore should also be recorded in individual employee's files.

Supervision Matters

Early childhood professionals provide positive, enriching experiences for young children. To ensure high-quality supervision of children,

- *supervisors* plan developmentally appropriate spaces, give children ample time to explore with plenty of suitable materials and equipment, and facilitate engaging play
- *administrators* provide regular professional learning opportunities so staff are confident and competent supervisors
- *staff* work as a team to carry out their daily supervision responsibilities

An investment in staff supervision preparation, and developing and implementing a comprehensive supervision policy, is essential for all good early childhood programs.

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Notification to Members of a Dues Increase

Southern Early Childhood Association

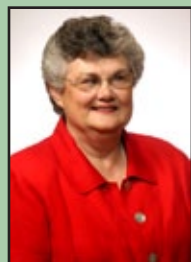


From the Executive Director

In July, the SECA Board of Directors voted to increase the annual SECA dues from \$20 to \$22 per year. **The dues increase will be effective beginning September 1, 2014.** This notification is being provided according to the By-laws of the Association. SECA By-laws: Article IV—Dues

Dues for each class of membership shall be determined by the Board of Directors. The membership shall be informed through their state affiliate boards and by written notice from the SECA office at least 6 months prior to any dues alteration. (SECA Policies and Procedures, page 7, <http://www.southernearlychildhood.org/upload/file/Leadership%20Page/Board%20Resources/Policies%20and%20Procedures%202013.pdf>)

- **Current SECA dues are \$20 per member/per year. On September 1, 2014, SECA dues will increase to \$22 per membership year.** State dues, as determined by individual state associations, are added to the SECA dues to determine yearly membership dues. States that include NAEYC membership in their dues structure (AL, FL, GA, KY, OK, TN, TX, VA & WV) add the cost of that membership to state and SECA dues to determine yearly membership dues.
- **This is the first SECA dues increase since 2004.**
- SECA dues include all individual member benefits as well as support to state affiliates.



The Janie L. Humphries Student Leadership Development Fund

At the July 2013 Summer Board Meeting of the SECA Board of Directors, a new initiative was born, the **Janie L. Humphries Student Leadership Development Fund**. This fund was created to support the development and leadership capacity of early childhood students as emerging leaders in our states and is in honor of Dr. Janie Humphries of Louisiana, SECA President 2010-2011, who has worked tirelessly to support student groups in her state and in the SECA region.

- The Fund will be capitalized by the proceeds of the Silent Auction at the annual SECA conference and memorial and designated donations that are made to the Association.
- State affiliates will be eligible to apply for \$250 per year to support student membership, the development of student chapters/groups in their states and to provide leadership development opportunities for those groups.

SECA is committed to supporting our next generation of professionals and to strengthening our voice as advocates for young children and their families. Application materials are now available to state affiliates on the SECA website. Contact Glenda Bean at gbean@southernearlychildhood.org for more information.

Consider donating to the fund....our field is only as strong as our next generation of leaders!

Dimensions of Early Childhood

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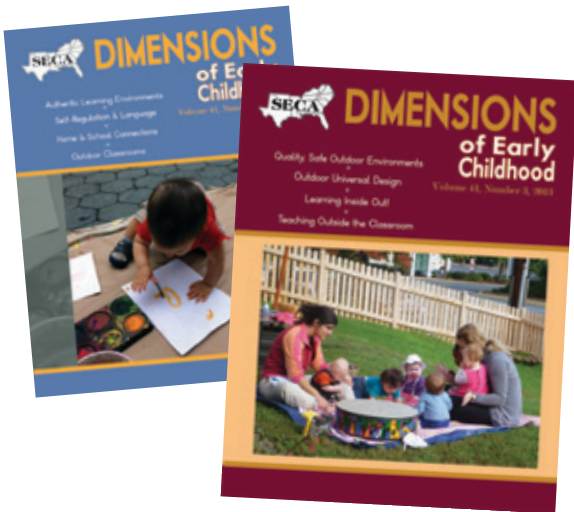
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