



**Universal PreK (UPK) Café:
Special Series Issue #2
Social and Emotional Development and Play
March 31, 2021**

Dear Friends,

The UPK Café special series focuses on recovery, reconnection, and resources to support school district recovery and implementation plans. This special series also provides private Universal Prekindergarten prequalified programs with knowledge and resources children enrolled in PreK education programs in post pandemic recovery. Social and emotional development and the importance of PLAY is highlighted in this issue. Though we cannot reverse time, as an early childhood educator you can continue to support each child's social and emotional developmental and growth through play. Fred Rogers said, "play is serious learning", and as early childhood educators, we embrace play as the foundation of our practice for each and every child (Rogers, 1995, p.47). **Play is the key to recovery and reconnection. So, let's get back to the basics of Play!**

Leveraging What You Already Know as an Early Educator

Early childhood educators recognize and understand the important connection between social emotional development and play in the development of children. All children differ in temperament, learning style, home environment, cultural background, needs and abilities. These differences are strengths that influence their development, learning and assurance within themselves to interact with adults, siblings, peers, familiar people, strangers, at home, in school, or other community settings.

Through play, children display a wide range of emotions and feelings that they can identify, talk about, recognize in others, and learn to manage appropriately.

Social and emotional skills (self-regulation, executive function skills) eventually lead children to being able to relate with others, develop trust, recognize, and respect individual similarities and differences, and separate own wishes and thoughts from those of others.

Children develop a sense of curiosity through play and problem solving. They take initiative and persist with efforts for increasingly longer periods of time. They demonstrate creativity through play, exploration, and problem solving, and they develop the ability to connect past learning to new situations. These dispositions and skills enable children to strengthen attentiveness, construct knowledge, and become agents of their own learning.

Vermont Early Learning Standards (VELS) Alignment [VELS Developing Self: Social and Emotional Development](#):

- **Element 1: Emotional and Self-Regulation; Goal 1:** Children express a range of emotions and regulate their emotional and social responses.
- **Element 2: Self-Awareness; Goal 1:** Children demonstrate an awareness of own personal characteristics, skills, and abilities.
- **Element 3: Relationships with Adults and Peers; Goal 1:** Children develop healthy positive relationships with adults and peers.

Stages of Play

Children’s primary approach to learning is through play. Modes of play vary from simple manipulation of objects to complex games with rules. Children use play to make sense of their world, and to develop social and cognitive competence, self-regulation, and physical capabilities. Dramatic play requires children to follow a “social script”; they need to take on a specific role and interact with others while following the “rules” associated with their role. Since inclusion in play is desirable, children are highly motivated to maintain their role and, therefore, improve their ability to inhibit impulses and play cooperatively with others. Research indicates that complex dramatic play has cognitive, linguistic, social, and emotional benefits for children in preschool through grade three.

1. **Solitary play** - Infants & Toddlers (under 2 years) no interaction with others.
2. **Parallel play** - Older Toddlers (2+years) playing beside a peer but not interacting.
3. **Associative play** - Young Preschoolers (3-4 years) engaging in play with peers for short periods of time without pre-planning. For example, playing dress-up in the house area of the classroom and taking on a role.
4. **Cooperative play** - Older Preschoolers (4 + years) engage in sustained play episodes (play that involves engagement, negotiation, and pre-planning) with peers. For example, pre-planning a play scenario and assigning roles, and staying “in character” throughout play.

[VELS Approaches to Learning](#); **Element 1: Play & Exploration; Goal 1:** Children engage in play to understand the world around them.

Play in the Learning Environment

NAEYC defines “developmentally appropriate practice” (DAP) as methods that promote each child’s optimal development and learning through a strengths-based, play-based approach to joyful, engaged learning. In early childhood education, the foundation of DAP is rooted in play. Pretend play, construction play, exploration play and physical play are types of play. Play in the learning environment is informed through observations, interests, and early learning standards. Using this information early childhood educators create DAP learning opportunities through child-directed play, guided play, direct instruction play or a combination.

- **Child- directed play** differs from “free play” in that there is a clear learning objective based on a child’s interests with the educator and child collaborating in the learning process. During child-directed play, educators scaffold learning objectives for the child.
- **Guided play** is most effective with preschoolers because children learn best when they are active participants in their own learning. Guided play is between free play and direct instruction utilizing child-directed interests and collaboration to promote learning. Scaffolding learning objectives during guided play is an opportune time to include social and executive functioning.
- **Direct instruction play** is when the educator takes on the lead role with an intentional learning goal. Though direct instruction is part of the learning environment, it may limit playful exploration, discovery, and learning if used exclusively.

Social and Emotional Development & Play

Social and emotional learning is the foundation of all developmental domains and intentional play is the pathway that supports learning. Due to the pandemic, public and private programs implemented social and emotional based curriculums with very positive outcomes for all children. Some PreK programs created outdoor learning opportunities that supported social and emotional development and well- being. These examples are ways that educators can have an impact on the social and emotional development of children post pandemic recovery. Check out the play resources below to support your teaching practice.

References & Resources

Bodrova, E. & Leong, D. (2012, January). [*Assessing and Scaffolding Make-Believe Play*](#). Young Children. NAEYC. This thoughtful article by leading Vygotsky researchers, Elena Bodrova and Deborah Leong, takes an evidence-based approach to observing, understanding, and facilitating play.

Brookes Inclusion Lab. (2021, Jan.26). [*10 Activities for Teaching Young Children About Emotions*](#). Brookes Publishing Co. Practical activities to support social and emotional development through play.

National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). (2020). [*DAP: Teaching to Enhance Each Child’s Development and Learning*](#). Referenced in this UPK Café.

Natural Start Alliance: North American Association for Environmental Education. (2021). [*Nature-Based Preschool Professional Practice Guidebook*](#). The first resource in the United States to provide guidance on the unique professional practices of nature-based early childhood education is now available! The *Guidebook* is an essential resource for anyone interested in nature-based early childhood education.

Skolnick Weidberg, D., Hirsh-Pasek, K., Michnick Golinkoff, R. (2013, June). [*Guided Play: Where Curricular Goals Meet a Playful Pedagogy*](#). The authors offer an alternative to direct instruction in preschool classrooms. They offer a guided play approach to delivering content. It lies between free play and direct instruction and offers a more developmentally appropriate focus on child-centered exploration.

The Strong Museum of Play. (2013). [Play at School](#). This article offers a great visual on cognitive, social, emotional, and physical developmental skills learned through play.

Websites/Webinars/Video Series

American Journal of Play. (2021). [American Journal of Play®](#) (online publication) is a forum for discussing the history, science, and culture of play. The website includes research publications and other resources. The current issue discusses the impact on play, both outdoors and indoors, due to the shifting regulations and safety concerns surrounding the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Brookes Publishing Co. [Unpacking the Pyramid Model: Friendship Skills and Strategies for Teaching Them](#). (virtual coffee chat). April 14, 2021 2:00 PM-3:00 PM Presenters include: Dr. Lori Meyer, University of Vermont.

Early Childhood Training and Technical Assistance System. (2021). [Resource Guide for Developing Integrated Strategies to Support the Social and Emotional Wellness of Children](#). (articles and videos). The COVID-19 pandemic has swiftly and substantially affected the social and emotional health of children, especially those experiencing multiple hardships.

Head Start/Early Learning & Knowledge Center. (2021). [Play Promotes Early Development: It's Time for Play!](#) (video series). Watch these videos to find out how children learn through play. Researchers talk about different types of play-based learning and share ways adults can encourage children to learn through play.

National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). (2021). [Search Topic: Play; Preschool](#). Evidence-based articles on prekindergarten aged children and play from leading experts from early childhood education profession.

If you have a resource you'd like to share on **UPK Café** or have been forwarded this issue and would like to be added to our mailing list, please contact Leslie at leslie.freedman@vermont.gov.

Thank you!