



**CENTER TO CLOSE
THE OPPORTUNITY GAP**
Identifying Best Practices to Ensure Student
Achievement in California's PK-12 Schools
CSU The California State University

CCOG Clearinghouse



Play in ECE

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CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY

CENTER TO CLOSE THE OPPORTUNITY GAP:

PLAY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

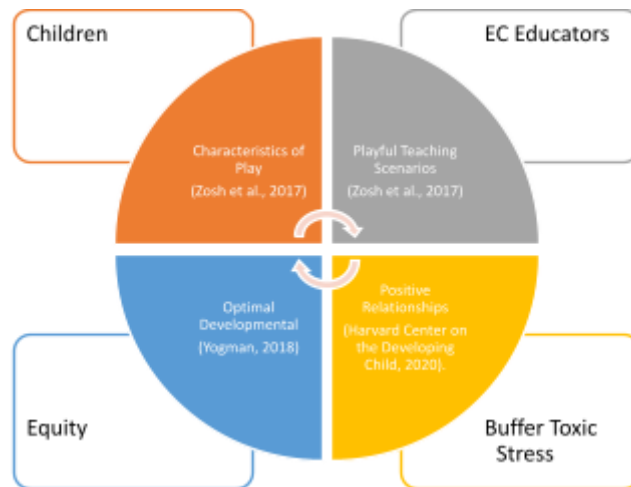
BACKGROUND:



Dr. Willa Rose Fynn is a recent graduate of Cal State University Long Beach's Educational Leadership Program. She began her career in education in 2009 as a NYC Teaching Fellow. As a special education teacher, she's had the privilege of working with children from a range of cultures, backgrounds, and abilities in Title I schools, special day classes, and co-teach settings. A self-described lifelong learner, Dr. Fynn credits her knowledge and expertise to the children she's worked with and encourages teachers in early childhood to turn to the experts (children!) to understand what children need and can do, beginning in preschool.

Dr. Fynn invites you to check out these resources, contribute resources, and advocate for play. Play should not be exclusive to recess, "Fun Fridays", or separate from academics. Dr. Fynn encourages teachers to use these resources to leverage play to promote best practices in early childhood education, to develop the unique skill sets required of early childhood educators, and to support families and caretakers as teachers in the home. Please share these resources with colleagues, administrators, families, and community members and organizations.

FRAMEWORK FOR PLAY IN URBAN ECE:



1. **Children intuitively play because it promotes optimal cognitive, academic, social emotional, and physical skills required over the course of a lifetime.**
2. **Early childhood educators create opportunities to foster positive relationships when they plan for/ design/ facilitate/ provide for teaching scenarios that are conducive to play.**
3. **Play and positive relationships buffer toxic stress, which can derail development in early childhood and lead to chronic health problems into adulthood**
4. **Play promotes equity in education. In urban school districts, many children living in poverty are Black or African American or Latinx. These children are statistically more likely to encounter adverse childhood experiences and as a result, prolonged toxic stress. Children living in poverty are more likely to have diminished opportunities for play because of policies intended to close the opportunity gap, taking away recess as a punishment, and having fewer safe spaces to play outside of school. When children and teachers are encouraged to play, needs are met.**

PLAYING TO LEARN: CHILDREN

EVIDENCE FOR PLAY AS A DEVELOPMENTAL PROCESS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD

[LEGO FOUNDATION](#)

[NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE EDUCATION OF YOUNG CHILDREN](#)

[HARVARD CENTER ON THE DEVELOPING CHILD](#)

[PROJECT ZERO](#)

[CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION](#)

LEARNING TO PLAY: ADULTS (TEACHERS, CARETAKERS, FAMILIES)

ADULT'S ROLE IN SUPPORTING PLAY TO FOSTER POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS

[CHARACTERISTICS OF PLAY](#)

[PLAYFUL TEACHING](#)

[TEACHER'S ROLE IN PLAY](#)

[PLAY AT HOME](#)

[ALISON GOPNIK ON WHAT ADULTS CAN LEARN FROM CHILDREN](#) (PODCAST)

PLAY TO BUFFER TOXIC STRESS:

[HARVARD CENTER ON THE DEVELOPING CHILD](#)

[POWER OF PLAY](#) (ARTICLE)

[CA SURGEON GENERAL NINA BURKE ON TOXIC STRESS AND CHILDREN](#)
(PODCAST)

[UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES \(ACES\)](#)

[FOSTERING POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS](#)

[LEARNING TO COPE THROUGH PLAY](#)

TEACHER SKILL SETS TO PROMOTE PLAY:

[IMPROVISATION](#) (BOOK)

[HUMOR](#)

[STORYTELLING](#)

[TALKING](#)

[DRAMA](#)

PLAY ACROSS SUBJECT AREAS:

[LANGUAGE & LITERACY](#)

[MATH](#)

[SCIENCE](#)

[SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL SKILLS](#)

[PHYSICAL SKILLS](#)

LEVERAGING PLAY TO PROMOTE EQUITY:

[WEST ED EQUITABLE EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT & LEARNING](#)

[ADVANCING EQUITY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION POSITION STATEMENT](#)

[CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS](#)

[DUAL LANGUAGE LEARNERS](#)

[URBAN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION](#)

[ADVANCING EQUITY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION](#)

[CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE PEDAGOGY](#)

[POSITIVE BEHAVIOR](#)

[ANTI-RACIST TEACHING & LEARNING](#)

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES/ EXPERTS

[BRAIN ARCHITECTURE](#)

[DEFENDING PLAY AS THE WAY CHILDREN LEARN](#)

[MORE PLAY AND FEWER SCRIPTED LESSONS](#)

[ERIKA CHRISTAKIS](#)

[DR. ROBERTA GOLINKOFF](#)

[DR. KATHY HIRSH-PASEK](#)

[DR. MICHAEL YOGMAN](#)

[CONTRIBUTE YOUR OWN IDEAS/ RESOURCES/ REFERENCES](#)

TEACHER PLANNIN/ REFLECTIVE TOOL
FOR PROMOTING PLAY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

INSTRUCTIONS/ GUIDE:

This is a reflective tool for early childhood educators to identify, describe, and promote play in learning across subject areas. There are no rules- this is a tool. This tool does not provide answers. Instead, it is intended to help early childhood educators recognize what's working, inform what teachers can look for to ensure children are accessing learning in a way that is developmentally appropriate, and encourages child agency. This tool is not intended to simplify the challenging task of supporting early learners but may be useful in making decisions about planning for play, observing play, participating in play, and making a case for play when preparing for an evaluation cycle with administrators or meeting with parents.

This tool was created using existing research that describes five characteristics of play in learning and 3 teaching approaches that are conducive to play (Zosh et al., 2017). Items 1-15 asks the early childhood educator to reflect on characteristics of play that appear when children (or an individual student) are learning across subject areas. Items 16-21 are intended to help early childhood educators identify whether or not the approach to instruction is conducive to play. Each description is intentional, and overtime may serve to recognize how early childhood educators can make any subject area, lesson, or activity, conducive to play. For more information please check out the list of resources:

This tool can be used in a collaborative setting, to assess what's working for a team of teachers, with a group of students, or to assess what works for an individual student. This tool is not intended to solve problems but is intended to spark curiosity and wonder about what children notice, what they're interested in, and how teachers can contribute to their inherent capacity for potential and growth. If you have questions, comments, or ideas, please contact: willarose.fynn@student.csulb.edu

SAMPLE FORM:

TEACHER NAME: FYNN

CLASS (OPTIONAL):

STUDENT (OPTIONAL):

DATE:

TIME:

SUBJECT AREA (OPTIONAL):

MATERIALS (OPTIONAL):

DURATION (OPTIONAL):

WHAT IS/ WAS MY PRIMARY ROLE?

- ☐ OBSERVER
- ☐ PARTICIPANT
- ☐ MODEL/ GUIDE
- ☐ FACILITATOR/ MEDIATOR
- ☐ OTHER:

WHAT IS/ WAS THE TEACHING SCENARIO/ APPROACH?

- ☐ CHILD LED PLAY: Students set their own goals and follow their interests. They are often very active while exploring, asking "what if" questions, re-inventing ideas, and creating new meanings.
- ☐ GUIDED PLAY: Teachers actively guide students' learning from within the activity. For example, teachers enrich/ extend learning by suggesting new themes, props, or plot twists to the current scenario. Teachers take on a high level of involvement when students have trouble starting or maintaining an activity.
- ☐ GAME: Teachers set goals aligned with student's learning needs and interests and scaffolds student's attempts through explicit instruction.
- ☐ DIRECT INSTRUCTION*: The context for learning provides structure and rules within the context of a game. Teachers' primary role is to support students in understanding and practicing the rules of a game (e.g. turn-taking).

*IF DIRECT INSTRUCTION, HOW MIGHT I INCORPORATE PLAY NEXT TIME?

CHARACTERISTIC OF PLAY: JOY

Students express joy in learning.

Never or Hardly Ever (1)	Once in awhile (2)	Sometimes (3)	Often (4)	Almost Always or Always (5)
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Students' frustration with a problem is followed by the joy of a breakthrough when it is finally solved.

Never or Hardly Ever (1)	Once in awhile (2)	Sometimes (3)	Often (4)	Almost Always or Always (5)
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

The power of surprise in an otherwise uninteresting situation brings joy to students.

Never or Hardly Ever (1)	Once in awhile (2)	Sometimes (3)	Often (4)	Almost Always or Always (5)
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

REFLECTION/ EVIDENCE (Words/ Sentences/ Pictures):

CHARACTERISTIC OF PLAY: MEANING

Students make connections to real life experiences.

Never or Hardly Ever (1)	Once in awhile (2)	Sometimes (3)	Often (4)	Almost Always or Always (5)
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
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Students make sense of new experiences by referencing what they already know.

Never or Hardly Ever (1)	Once in awhile (2)	Sometimes (3)	Often (4)	Almost Always or Always (5)
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Students deepen their understanding using a variety of media, symbols, and tools.

Never or Hardly Ever (1)	Once in awhile (2)	Sometimes (3)	Often (4)	Almost Always or Always (5)
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

REFLECTION/ EVIDENCE (Words/ Sentences/ Pictures):

CHARACTERISTIC OF PLAY: ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT

Students are so engaged in learning they are resistant to distraction.

Never or Hardly Ever (1)	Once in awhile (2)	Sometimes (3)	Often (4)	Almost Always or Always (5)
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Students are engaged in activities that require problem solving.

Never or Hardly Ever (1)	Once in awhile (2)	Sometimes (3)	Often (4)	Almost Always or Always (5)
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Students feel safe to make mistakes.

[illegible]

REFLECTION/ EVIDENCE (Words/ Sentences/ Pictures):

CHARACTERISTIC OF PLAY: SOCIAL INTERACTION

Students communicate their ideas by directly interacting with their peers.

[illegible]

Students act out scenarios based on real life experiences.

[illegible]

Students increase understanding by learning from each other.

Never or Hardly Ever (1)	Once in awhile (2)	Sometimes (3)	Often (4)	Almost Always or Always (5)	Not applicable (6)
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

REFLECTION/ EVIDENCE (Words/ Sentences/ Pictures):