

AfterSchool

The Official Publication of the National AfterSchool Association/naaweb.org | Spring 2018

Today

PLAYFUL LEARNING

**A WAY TO MAXIMIZE
AFTERSCHOOL TIME**

**THE VALUE OF
FREE PLAY IN
AFTERSCHOOL
PROGRAMS**

**THE DESIGN,
DEFINITION AND
PRACTICE OF PLAY**



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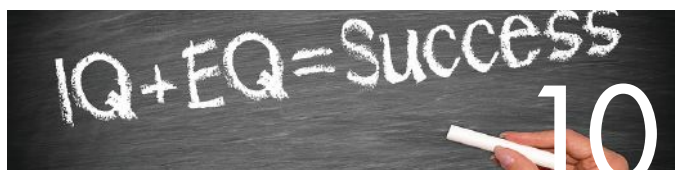
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what's inside

SPRING 2018



PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Playing Together in the Sandbox
A Guide to Coaching Using Emotional Intelligence



ISSUE

The Value of Free Play in Afterschool Programs



SPECIAL REPORT

Playful Learning
A Way to Maximize Afterschool Time



PROMISING PRACTICES

The Design, Definition and Practice of Play
Q&A with Laura Huerta Migus, Association of Children's Museums

DEPARTMENTS

Strengthening Your Program 8

**Adapting SEL Programs
to Your OST Program**

Program Profile 13

**Developing the 21st-Century Students
Through Play**

Sustainability 20

**The Power of PLAY to Build Bridges
and Break Barriers**

Health & Well-Being 22

Play and Exploration
Q&A with Jay Flores, Global STEM Ambassador,
Rockwell Automation

IN EVERY ISSUE

Board of Directors 2

President's Note 4

Stay Up-to-Date 4

News and Resources 5

Game Review 6

Voice in the Field 7

Tools You Can Use 18

True Story 24

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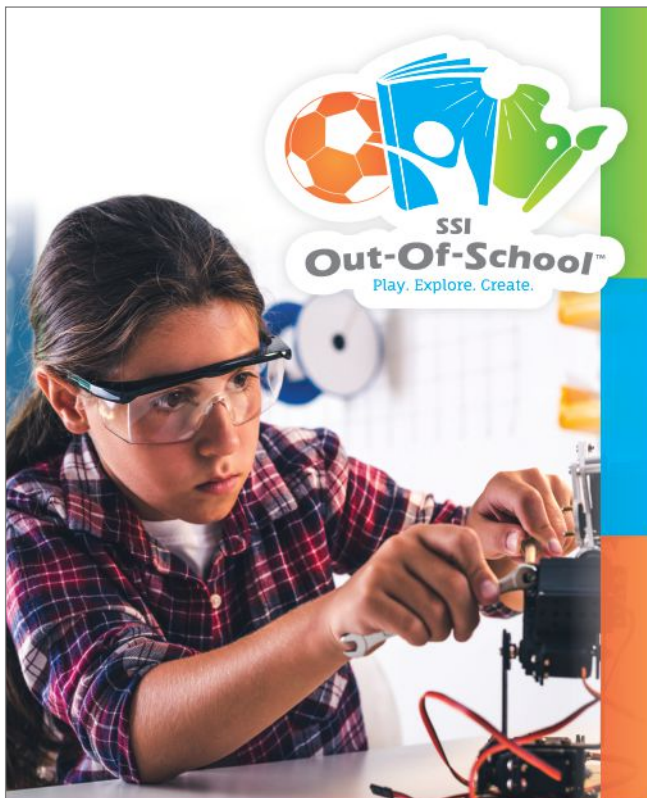


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GINA Warner

President & CEO,
National AfterSchool Association

Chances are, you've heard of Shonda Rhimes. She's the creator, head writer and executive producer of some of the hottest shows on primetime, *Grey's Anatomy* and *Scandal* among them.

What you might not know is that Rhimes is a huge advocate for the value of play. In her book *Year of Yes*, Rhimes reveals how she constructed her first Shondaland—the name of her television production company—as a child, playing in the pantry of her home. Rhimes described herself as an introverted, “unusual” kid who was more content to play in her own imagination than out in the world.

The world I created inside the small closet filled with canned goods and cereal was serious ... The big cans of yams ruled over the peas and green beans while the tiny citizens of Tomato Paste Land planned a revolution designed to overthrow the government.

Aside from this totally explaining everything on *Scandal* this season, it's a wonderful example of what happens when we adults give children the freedom to create and explore.

In these overscheduled and overstructured times, afterschool remains one of the places where children can enjoy the freedom to play. But we know these valuable play experiences can often be misunderstood by those not as versed in child and youth development.

Sadly, even some in our own field are placing diminishing value on play, creating what early childhood development expert Nancy Carlsson-Paige has labeled “play disparity”: a widening gap between poor and well-to-do families that could be exacerbated by the new academic regulations being imposed in pre-kindergarten programs.

I, for one, hope our field continues to appreciate and encourage play for children.

That's why in this issue of *Afterschool Today*, you will find support for the value of play from researchers and practitioners. You'll hear from colleagues on how they talk about play. And you'll find ideas for how to integrate more play into your program offerings.

Let's face it: The next Shonda Rhimes ... or Jeff Bezos ... or Steph Curry is counting on us! As one NAA Corporate Advisory Board member wisely reminds us in *Voice in the Field* (page 7), “Play raises geniuses.”

STAY UP-TO-DATE!



WEEKLY eNEWSLETTER

TOP CONTENT @ NAAWEB.ORG



WORKING WITH ADHD



WHAT QUESTIONS DID YOU ASK TODAY?



START WITH WHY?

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Read more about the people, products and programs featured in this issue of *AfterSchool Today*!

Animal Act
Akin
Bubble Talk

<http://smile.amazon.com/>

The Toy Association

<http://www.toyassociation.org>

The Genius of Play

<http://www.thegeniusofplay.org>

Emotional Intelligence 2.0

Travis Bradberry and Jean Greaves

<http://smile.amazon.com/>

Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can
Matter More Than IQ

Daniel Goleman

<http://smile.amazon.com/>

Prime Time Palm Beach County

<http://www.primetimepbcc.org/>

Purposeful PLAY

<http://playmke.com/>

Association of Children's Museums | ACM

<http://childrensmuseums.org/>

Minnesota Children's Museum

<https://mcm.org/>

The Power of Play: A Research
Summary on Play and Learning

<http://bit.ly/MCMPlay>

University of Iceland

<http://english.hi.is/>

http://english.hi.is/departments_of_sport

Rockwell Automation

<https://www.rockwellautomation.com/>

STEM Ambassador Jay Flores

<http://bit.ly/STEMJayFlores>

Learning Ridge

<http://www.learningridge.com/>

MORE: HELPFUL RESOURCES

FROM SPECIAL REPORT

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Urban Thinkscape

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Parkopolis

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Temple Infant & Child
Laboratory

<http://templeinfantlab.com/>

Child's Play, Learning &
Development Lab at the
University of Delaware

<http://www.childsplay.udel.edu/>

FROM STRENGTHENING YOUR PROGRAM

Navigating Social and
Emotional Learning from
the Inside Out

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The Wallace Foundation
Harvard Graduate School
of Education

<https://www.gse.harvard.edu/>

FROM TRUE STORY

U.S. Department of Education

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Mind/Shift: 15 Picture Books

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LISTEN ...

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View a trailer of *Listen*, the
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WHAT **AFTERSCHOOL**^{IS} PLAYING



ANIMAL ACT Singing! Acting! Dancing! This game has kids up and moving as they try to fit three acts on their performance playbill. It's not just about winning the game—it's also about building great life skills like confidence! Ages 5 and up.

Students at Clayton Kids Zone (Missouri) love Animal Act.

"It's super fun—like charades, but with so much more." —Travis, 11

"I can play easily, and I get it!" —Noah, 6

"Very silly, but good for all ages." —Amelia, 10

"I like it like tacos—and tacos are good." —Michael, 10

"I think it is easy and fun to play." —Caitlyn, 10

"It was good being able to act and have silly fun with friends." —Oliver, 9



AKIN On your mark ... Get set ... Match! In this fast and furious board game, kids pick one descriptive "quality" card and—using a cool "suction" piece—race to pick up two cards that are related, or "akin." For example, a "fluffy" quality card means you could suction up "cat" or "bath mat." The first person to grab two appropriate related cards wins the round. Ages 8 and up.

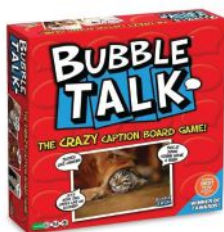
What do Kids' Country (California) fourth-graders like?

"I like the little sticky things. Those make it super fun to pick up the cards. I like that this game is different and challenging. It helps us learn new words, too." —Hailee

"I like that this game makes us think." —Brooke

"I like that this helps us learn new words and their meanings." —Elle

"I like that the different colors are like different levels. I don't like that for the most part, whoever starts the game is going to win." —Brianna



BUBBLE TALK The fast-paced Bubble Talk asks players to match hilarious captions with funny pictures. The game begins when each player draws seven random caption cards. The judge for that round draws a picture card; players must quickly try to match their funniest caption to the picture. The player who makes the judge laugh the most wins that round. Each round provides comical, clever, creative results, guaranteed to keep everyone laughing. Perfect for groups of three or as many as eight players. Ages 8 and up.

Why students in The Vineyard Columbus (Ohio) like Bubble Talk:

"OK! Mr. Kevin, I thought this game was going to be boring but I keep laughing!" —A ninth-grader

"We like this game and added some new rules ... If you play you are gonna lose!" —A seventh-grader

"This is lit. I like how I can use almost any card to win. I had to be creative with my choices, but it's funny to see others' responses!" —A 12th-grader



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BY CASSIE WESTRATE

PLAY IS NOT A LUXURY

IT'S GENIUS.



THE BENEFITS OF PLAY

1. Physical: Active play helps kids with balance, coordination, motor skills and spending natural energy, which promotes better eating and sleeping habits.

2. Emotional: During play, kids learn to cope with emotions like fear, frustration, anger and aggression in a situation they control, and practice empathy and understanding.

3. Social: Playing with others helps kids negotiate group dynamics, collaborate, compromise, deal

with others' feelings and share.

4. Cognitive: Children learn to think, read, remember, reason and pay attention through play.

5. Creative: By allowing imaginations to run wild during play, kids create new worlds and form unique ideas and solutions to challenges.

6. Communication: Play lets kids exchange thoughts, information or messages by speech, signals, writing or actions.

"Many experts make a powerful argument for the critical role of play in child development," Yudina said, "yet it continues to be viewed primarily as a fun, but often unnecessary luxury by the general public."

Many schools limit play by reducing or eliminating recess, increasing homework and shifting the overall focus to academic instruction.

The result? Increased stress and anxiety—even among the youngest young people.

Out-of-school time programs are well-positioned to return play into young people's lives.

"An afterschool program can provide children with the

much-needed opportunity to unwind through play, discover their true interests, stimulate creativity by encouraging playful exploration and develop fundamental skills that will prepare them for success in careers and in life."

The Genius of Play is a one-stop source for the latest research on the value of play, expert advice and insight, and ideas for activities aligning with curriculum.

"If we support and encourage kids' natural inclination to learn and discover the world through play, we will help them grow up to be successful, responsible adults who are able to think creatively and solve whatever challenges life throws their way."

Play raises geniuses. [NAA](#)



The Toy Association is the not-for-profit association representing all businesses that design, produce, license, and deliver toys and youth entertainment products for kids of all ages. Its charitable arm, The Toy Foundation, has delivered brand-new toys—and lots of smiles—to millions of children in need.

ADAPTING SEL PROGRAMS TO YOUR OST PROGRAM



While the goals of social and emotional learning (SEL) and out-of-school time (OST) programming are well-aligned, relatively few OST programs focus primarily on developing SEL skills.

In the recent report *Navigating Social and Emotional Learning from*

the Inside Out, Stephanie Jones—a professor at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, and a team of researchers explore 25 evidence-based SEL programs to ensure that schools and OST programs can make informed decisions on adopting strategies that best suit their SEL goals, needs and

resources.

Programs are most effective, however, with the right foundation. In the report, the authors outline a set of principles and considerations to help guide your program and make choices that are appropriate for your program's context.

ALIGN SEL ADAPTATIONS WITH YOUR PROGRAM MISSION.

The report highlights four common principles underlying quality SEL and OST programs:

1. **Provide a safe and positive environment** for children and adults.
2. **Support the development** of high-quality relationships between children and adults.
3. **Are developmentally appropriate**, relevant and engaging for children.
4. **Provide opportunities** for direct skill building.

The report states that leaders must build on these core principles by considering what elements of SEL programs best match their mission and needs.

“When SEL adaptations for the OST context start from these dimensions of mission alignment,” writes Jones, “children are more likely to benefit.”

CONSIDER PROGRAM TENSIONS.

According to the report, organizations must grapple with five key tensions when adapting SEL programming for OST settings. Carefully consider each of these tensions to help guide your program in adopting program elements that best meet your needs.

1. **Expansion is difficult when forcing standardization.** To most effectively use programmatic ingredients, partners must think about how they can differentiate for the specific needs of their organizational context and student population.
2. **The benefits of consistency must be balanced with the need for programming to be additive.** Research suggests that consistency across contexts improves outcomes for children and youth, but repetition could also lead to student disengagement. Organizations must consider how to maintain consistency without becoming redundant.
3. **SEL programs must authentically support the mission of the OST organization.** Adaptations are most effective when they’re fully integrated into the mission and practices of an organization. Programs must choose ingredients from SEL programs that support their existing mission.
4. **In addition to mission, the pedagogical approach of SEL and OST programs should be both aligned and additive.** SEL programs vary in goals and pedagogical approaches. Organizations should look for SEL programs that match their existing pedagogical approach and can be easily integrated with—but also add to—what an OST program already offers.
5. **Organizations must consider the specific SEL needs and learning styles of their students.** Collecting data could help inform choices about the content and activity type your program adopts. Once you’re clear on student needs, choose SEL ingredients that best address target outcomes.

BUILD YOUR SEL PROGRAM.

After considering your mission, pedagogical approach, partner organizations and students’ needs, it should be possible to use the report to search for appropriate SEL building blocks—including structures, strategies, routines and activities. [NAA](#)

Commissioned by The Wallace Foundation, Navigating Social and Emotional Learning from the Inside Out looks inside and carefully analyzes evidence-based SEL programs to provide comprehensive details, transparent information and cross-program analyses about in-school and OST programs. To download the full report, visit <http://bit.ly/2p5pLA9>.



PLAYING TOGETHER IN THE SANDBOX:

A GUIDE TO COACHING USING EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE



Earlier in my career, I worked as an internal program auditor for a statewide youth-serving organization. While my position wasn't supervisory, I was responsible for other program directors' work regarding documentation, contract deliverables, goals, program satisfaction, legal statutes and more. It was tough work. After a few months, I sat down with my boss and vented: "These directors are not completing their work timely or doing it correctly." Directly and matter-of-fact, she asked: "So how are you going to get them to play in the sandbox with you?" adding, "They may like you, Patrick, but as you know, you don't have a stick (authority)—nor do you have any real carrots (incentives) to motivate them. What is your plan and what are you going to do?"

I was silent. I needed to figure out

something fast or I would neither be successful nor, possibly, employed much longer. My cognitive skills simply weren't enough. It took some time, but I eventually found the answer.

That began my journey into emotional intelligence.

In the book *Emotional Intelligence 2.0*, Dr. Jean Greaves describes emotional intelligence as the ability to recognize and understand emotions in yourself and others, and the ability to use this awareness to manage your behavior and relationships. The concept of emotional intelligence, or emotional quotient (EQ), isn't new. Hundreds of books have been written on the topic. EQ was popularized by Daniel Goleman in his 1995 book *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ*. Goleman

asserts that unlike IQ—an innate or fixed talent—EQ is learned and can be developed with effort and experience.

Numerous personal, professional and organizational benefits have been associated with high levels of EQ, including greater levels of mental health, leadership skills, job performance and staff retention. The four central EQ concepts—self-awareness, self-management, social awareness and relationship management—strongly overlap with social-emotional learning trends growing nationally across our education and afterschool systems.

Self-awareness is the ability to accurately recognize your emotions as they happen and understand your general tendencies when responding to different people in different situations. Those with higher self-awareance levels



PATRICK'S TOP 10 TIPS.

Before starting your work day, **note your body language** and self-talk.

Get to know yourself really well under stressful situations.

Know your hot buttons: Know who, when and what pushes them.

Take control of your self-talk. Breathe calmly when you feel yourself getting upset.

Seek feedback from a trusted co-worker or a person skilled in self-management.

Visualize in your mind what you want to happen and how you will make it happen.

Greet people by name, watch body language and always catch the mood of every group.

Step into others' shoes by seeing things from their perspective.

Build trust by showing empathy and compassion when you can.

Be vulnerable, open and curious to others' ideas, thoughts and feelings.

Patrick A. Freeland, certified coach, COA program endorser and graduate of Palm Beach Atlantic University, is the quality improvement manager at Prime Time Palm Beach County.

regularly assess their body language, process their emotions and manage their hot buttons. Self-management is your ability to use self-awareness to intentionally and positively direct your behavior.

Have you ever met someone who always appears to be in control, or always seems calm despite challenging situations? It takes skill to focus on the situation instead of how someone or something makes you feel. People with high self-management skills react appropriately to and preventively manage their emotions, and keep their feelings in check.

Social awareness is being able to recognize and understand the others' emotions. Have you ever begun an afterschool activity and felt the room's emotional climate wasn't good? Have you heard someone say something, yet the words didn't match up with the attitude or facial

expressions? These are classic examples of social awareness.

People with high social awareness skills can assess their environment and use the data they see and hear to effectively understand what is happening within it. Relationship management is where it all comes together—the ability to use your awareness of your emotions and those of others to successfully manage your interactions. Being mindful about how you feel and how others may feel is crucial to developing effective working and interpersonal relationships. It's funny how sometimes these soft skills are hardest to apply, especially in uncomfortable conversations and situations.

What does all this have to do with coaching or simply playing together in the sandbox? How can you begin to apply EQ interpersonally or as an afterschool professional? **NAA**



THE VALUE OF FREE PLAY IN AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAMS



THE CHARACTERISTICS OF PLAY

Defining play is a serious challenge for which neither academics nor people in the field have settled on a universal definition. This is probably due to play being a personal act, bringing unique meaning and feelings into people's lives. Most people remember their favorite playmates, whilst others may have preferred to play alone; almost everybody remembers their favorite game, teddy bear or doll. Yet if we look past the definition barrier and into what is important for children regarding play, we can agree on a lot.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PLAY AS A LEARNING PROCESS

It is extremely important for children to have the time and facilities for free play. This is where the magic happens: It is a place of unbelievably important learning. It is during free play that children really start to understand themselves and the world around them. They imitate real life and use play to process their own experiences, making it all the more meaningful. They learn incredibly important social skills such as communication and empathy, compassion and negotiation. They learn to choose between alternatives, to identify what works and what doesn't, and how to win and lose. They learn to use their initiative; they explore and invent. They learn about their own strengths and boundaries, and about different types of communication.

Through play, they learn invaluable social skills.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE GROWNUPS IN CHILDREN'S PLAY

It is vitally important for children to feel physically, emotionally and environmentally safe. Providing safety is the grown-up's role in every child's life. It is our responsibility to support that and give children the time and space they need for their well-being. It is also essential to recognize when they are in the "flow" of free play and not to interrupt them

constantly with less important matters. We need to be able to help children take the first steps into free play and understand when there is no need for the adult in the play anymore.

It is obviously crucial that the adults at afterschool programs keep an eye on children's play, so they can interrupt if needed. Things could go wrong—think fighting, bad manners, bad language, the children may require a mild correction, or you might want to interrupt for a conversation about the proceedings: "What is going on?" "Why?" "How does that make you feel?"

It is nonetheless imperative to realize when one should leave it to the children to figure stuff out, and I emphasize that they should fight and disagree; it is when they can't solve the disagreements that the adults should step in.

The facilities for free play can obviously play an important role, but believe me: Play will find its way without any play materials or special facilities. It is the natural way all over the world, to express, explore and invent.

Free play is unfortunately under threat these days, mostly due to our focus on protecting children from every conceivable danger. We cut down the trees on the playground, we don't build swimming pools with deep ends—let alone diving boards—and we don't allow our children to be alone to explore their surroundings. Furthermore, we fill children's lives with organized and scheduled activities to make them competitive, to give them advantage, to give them the absolute best.

This is obviously all in the belief that we are protecting and preparing our children for real life, but I think we need to let them play more. It is the ultimate preparation for real life. In times of unforeseen technological development, we really don't know what kind of future we are preparing them for. But be sure of this: They will always need empathy, compassion, communication and negotiation skills. They'll require the understanding of right and wrong, of how to win and how to lose.

Initiative, inventiveness and exploration are surely what they need for the future. [NAA](#)

Steingerdur Kristjansdottir is an adjunct at the University of Iceland, Faculty of Health, Sport and Leisure. She is a proud mother of four adults and a grandmother to two girls. Other details: Teacher B.Ed, University of Iceland, 1996; MSc in Human Resource Management, University of Iceland, 2013; Professional guide, University of Iceland, 2014; former project manager for the Municipality of Reykjavik as Coordinator of the Leisure Times Centers (afterschool programs) for 6- to 9-year-old children of the Municipality of Reykjavik, 2002 – 2015.

DEVELOPING THE 21ST-CENTURY STUDENTS THROUGH PLAY

BY CHRISTINE JAVIER, ED.M., FOUNDER,
EDUCATIONAL CONSULTANT, LEARNING RIDGE

Never before has society made so much progress over the course of a single generation. Children live with democratization of information and the ubiquity of technology; they have all the tools they need to shape a grander vision of the future.

The big question is: How do we prepare the next generation for this hi-tech market?

For many decades, the education system praised, scolded, and graded students on how attentive they are and how effectively they are able to regurgitate information and facts. Students are expected to sit still for hours and listen to monologues intended to somehow prepare them for the future. Rarely do they interact with each other; rarely do they have the opportunity to experiment; rarely are they allowed to learn from their own mistakes.

This worked when knowledge was the currency of qualification, but how valuable is knowledge in a world where everything you want to know is just one click away? What is the currency for the job market of the future, where today's state-of-the-art will be outdated tomorrow?

We believe students need to learn to synthesize information, create new things and work toward a vision. We focus on giving students the opportunity to gain experience as early as possible and learn within a collaborative work environment similar to those they will encounter in the future. We found productive play is an effective tool in this endeavor.

Within this environment of play, students can understand—hands-on—how something works. They can take it apart and may sometimes need to explain it to their team partners. By doing so they not only develop an even deeper understanding, but also develop the skills to communicate abstract concepts. They can break it and learn to put it back together, without the fear of failure. Teachers also have an opportunity to work

Preparing students for a life of purpose has never been more exciting! Learning Ridge's research-based, play-focused afterschool program has helped shape young, creative minds as they tackle new challenges in this ever-changing, technologically savvy world.



THE BIG QUESTION IS: HOW DO WE PREPARE THE NEXT GENERATION FOR THIS HI-TECH MARKET?

with students at their own pace. Some students benefit from additional attention and constructive feedback; other students, with more aptitude, can be given more difficult challenges. With this hand-on approach, students can gauge their own proficiency. A student may ask: "If my motorized LEGO Race car does not drive, what have I done wrong? How can I fix it?" This immediate assessment toward a measurable goal allows students to gain self-driven proficiency without the need for grades.

Our Learning Ridge After School Programs, found throughout Metro Atlanta, work with students as early as 3 years old to build vital pre-STEM skills. Our 7-to-12-year-old students never cease to amaze us with their creations as they gradually learn programming and other 21st-century skills.

And maybe, just maybe, one day they will write us a postcard stamped from Mars. [NAA](http://naa.org)

A WAY TO MAXIMIZE AFTERSCHOOL TIME

Playful Learning

Children learn best when they are *active* and *engaged*. Don't we all? Yet today's schools—replete with high-stakes testing and lectures—use a “dispenser” model of education rather than celebrating hands-on learning activities that are *meaningful* and *socially interactive*. Playful learning embraces these principles by infusing the joy of play and child choice directly into learning experiences. Scientists are increasingly learning that *playful activities* that are active, engaging, meaningful and socially interactive can enhance learning.

Afterschool programs sit in the privileged position of both supplementing the school day with academic activities and allowing children to enjoy unstructured free-play time. Playful learning principles can enhance afterschool programs and bridge both goals under a common umbrella to support child development.

One playful approach to enhance learning is to guide and encourage children's discovery of new information. Even though adults have a learning goal in mind, once they set up the environment, kids are in charge. For example, well-designed exhibits at a children's museum create opportunities for reading or storytelling; within those activities, children drive the learning.

Adults can also adopt a playful learning approach by carefully watching as a child attempts to solve a problem and asking questions to prompt further innovation—be it building a taller tower or getting that pesky ball out of the thin tube with only a pipe cleaner. The Science Olympiad, for instance, prides itself on creating these kinds of activities to build science knowledge. In this case, adults act as coaches, not directors, supporting children's learning by asking questions and commenting on their discoveries.



Playing with puzzles
at our Urban
Thinkscape bus stop
in Philadelphia,
Pennsylvania. ©
Sahar Coston-Hardy
Photography

Our research finds that adults can playfully help children discover the “secrets of the shapes” or “what makes a triangle” a triangle. Researchers prompted children to become “detectives” and discover the secret: that triangles of all types have three sides and three corners. Amazingly, this prompting and coaching led to better learning than did a more direct-instruction approach, telling children that “triangles have three sides and three angles.”

Playful activities also help break up longer periods of formal instruction. How long can you sit through a meeting without your attention wandering? The average attention span lasts 10 to 15 minutes. Yet as we drop recess around the country, can we expect children to sit and pay attention all day at school—and then continue focusing on homework and more direct-instruction afterschool activities?

Nope. Human learning does not work that way.

Breaking up longer periods of instruction helps children reset and return to the content refreshed and ready to learn. In fact, research suggests recess sharpens our attention when we go back to the classroom. Even short, physically active “brain breaks” improve on-task behavior and concentration. Classrooms and more structured afterschool programs might take breaks to play a five-minute GoNoodle interactive learning game, where students dance and sing along with a rap about patterning.

Children spend only 20 percent of their waking hours in school. The “other 80 percent” is often overlooked, yet our work takes children’s *out-of-school time* very seriously.

Under the banner of Learning Landscapes, we aim to infuse playful learning throughout communities. In Urban Thinkscape we revitalized a bus stop, building puzzles into walls so kids develop spatial and pre-math skills and providing a new twist on hopscotch, inviting children to exercise mental flexibility by matching patterns with each jump.

Our recent Parkopolis venture is a life-sized board game promoting STEM skills through fun activities. We even changed the dice, making one die with normal whole numbers and another with fractions. Children roll the dice to move $1\frac{1}{4}$ or $5\frac{3}{4}$ jumps around the game, drawing cards and playing pattern recognition and reasoning games. Data show kids who play the game use more math language, utilize more measurement skills and are more persistent in problem solving than during unstructured free play. Best of all, they had fun! How often do kids have fun while learning about fractions? These activities are just a sample of the many learning games that can be embedded into the grassy yards and concrete blacktops outside of a school, to be utilized as a fun way to learn during afterschool programs.

Playful learning should be voluntary, motivating and fun. The spirit of infusing playful learning into children’s lives outside the classroom can be applied in afterschool settings—and kids will reap the benefits. Embedding play in this context can help afterschool programs serve as a bridge between school and community, engaging students with active, engaging, meaningful, social forms of learning. [NAA](#)

Written by Rebecca Dore, Marcia Shirilla and Roberta Golinkoff, Child’s Play, Learning & Development Lab at the University of Delaware, and Jeremy Sawyer, Molly Schlesinger and Kathy Hirsh-Pasek, Temple University Infant and Child Lab.



Scientists are increasingly learning that playful activities that are **ACTIVE, ENGAGING, MEANINGFUL** and **SOCIALLY INTERACTIVE** can enhance learning.

THE DESIGN, DEFINITION AND PRACTICE OF PLAY

Q&A WITH LAURA HUERTA MIGUS, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, ASSOCIATION OF CHILDREN'S MUSEUMS (ACM)



WHY IS PLAY VALUABLE?

Play is the first learning way human beings engage with world. Just think about it: What do we do with babies? We make funny faces. We dance. We sing. We make messes. We play! Play is so critical to healthy child development that it is considered a human right by the United Nations. Play is a critical platform for positive emotional, cognitive and physical development. There is growing evidence that the lack of play in children's

lives is directly connected to increased levels of anxiety, depression and narcissism.

CITIES ARE BRINGING DESIGNS FROM CHILDREN'S MUSEUMS INTO OTHER SPACES, SUCH AS BUS STOPS AND PARKS. HOW HAVE YOU SEEN THIS PLAY OUT?

Our community, whose vision is a world that honors all children and respects the diverse ways in which they develop, is heartened to see these kinds of changes! Children's

museums have more than 100 years of experience in designing physical spaces to nurture play and children's positive development. Many are active players in today's efforts, lending their expertise to city planners and developers on how to best design playful public spaces. More importantly, I'd like to think that children's museums have helped create the expectation that public spaces should have child-friendly areas or practices—think fun labeling, child-sized seating, et cetera.

While we are happy to see this progression starting, we still have a long way to go!

HOW COULD OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME PROGRAMS BRING DESIGNS AND PRACTICES OF CHILDREN'S MUSEUMS INTO THEIR FRAMEWORK?

One of the most important practices that could be implemented in out-of-school time programs and physical spaces is embracing a *child-centered* design philosophy. Rather



than first thinking about meeting the expectations of adults and adult systems, especially around academics, start with what children love to do—which requires playful, rather than didactic, approaches.

Being intentional about giving children voice in programs and experiences is essential. Are children helping you design activities? Are there times and spaces to share and document what they're feeling? Do you know what part of your space they love or dislike? All of us—

children and adults—are much more motivated to engage and succeed when we feel empowered in a fun environment.

HOW DO WE DEFINE AND MEASURE PLAY?

This is such a tough question. There are multiple emerging definitions and conceptions of play from the academic community—all with different intended outcomes. From free play to guided play to imaginary play, it is a shockingly rich and complex area of research!

In terms of guidance, practitioners are best served by thinking intentionally about *what kind of play* best serves the needs of the children they work with and is appropriate for their programmatic goals.

The Minnesota Children's Museum has commissioned a variety of easy-to-access pieces. *The Power of Play: A Research Summary on Play and Learning* (<http://bit.ly/MCMPlay>) can help out-of-school time professionals navigate definitions and think about measurement. [NAA](#)

**"Play is
the first
learning
way human
beings
ENGAGE
WITH
WORLD."**



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FREE RESOURCES FOR AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAMS

S&S Worldwide has created a gold mine of free activity ideas for afterschool professionals. New ideas are added on a weekly basis and shared with the idea that each activity needs to be easy to implement. Most afterschool staff do not have the time or resources to create extensive lessons, so quick and engaging activities are key. S&S aligns these activities with educational standards, current trends, and themes.

Team-building STEAM challenges, inclusive craft projects for everyone, fun games that get children moving and even a theme planning tool—all can be found on the S&S Blog! Join 20,000 subscribers that get NEW and FREE activities each week, delivered right to their inbox. **Sign up at www.ssw.com/blog.**

“We’ve been helping thousands of customers plan activities for over 110 years,” said Hy Schwartz, Co-President of S&S. “We created our S&S blog to share hundreds of these useful activities for the afterschool community, to make your job easier.”



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The EZChildTrack logo is at the top left of the advertisement, featuring a stylized 'E' and 'Z' with a Wi-Fi symbol. Below it, the text 'EZChildTrack' is in a large, bold font, and 'CHILDCARE MANAGEMENT SOFTWARE' is in a smaller font. To the right of the logo is a photograph of a young girl with dark hair, wearing a red and white striped shirt, holding an open book and looking at it. The background of the advertisement is a gradient of blue and white.

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"We have been using EZChildTrack for over six years and our staff finds it very easy to use. We are very happy with the software, especially the technical support provided."

—Debi Embry, Brevard Public Schools, Florida, District Coordinator, School Age Child Care Programs

Learn more about EZChildTrack at www.ezchildtrack.com.

THE POWER OF PLAY TO BUILD BRIDGES AND BREAK BARRIERS

BY TIFFANY Y. MCDUFFIE, FOUNDER, PURPOSEFUL PLAY



M MAINTAIN ANNUAL FUNDING. DIVERSIFY THE SOURCES. SUPPORT SCHOOLS AND FAMILIES. EMPOWER KIDS. KEEP THEM SAFE. DELIVER QUALITY PROGRAMS. FIND GOOD TEAM MEMBERS. GET LEGISLATIVE SUPPORT. BUILD COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS. CONSIDER BUDGET CONSTRAINTS. INCREASE ENROLLMENT. REINFORCE ACADEMICS. TEACH LIFE SKILLS. DON'T FORGET TO PLAY.

Whew! Easy, right?

The multifaceted roles of youth-serving organizations can be rough terrain. Yet we must find innovative ways to help people understand that while PLAY is our work, it is indeed serious business.

Play has the power to create positive outcomes, change trajectories, and inspire and unite in a way little else can.

Youth-serving organizations are able to create impact because of the efforts and passion of the people working in them. When the efforts of the best and brightest are positioned to collaborate, versus compete, each organization has the opportunity to efficiently expand reach and influence the way key stakeholders value and contribute to our programs.

Pop Up PLAY Days™ have emerged as a valuable and creative way to propel

this sort of collaborative impact.

Pop Up PLAY Days are community events hosted at local youth-serving organizations, schools, community centers, popular festivals and sporting events. Each event is designed to position stakeholders as “game-changers,” igniting a movement that celebrates play, highlights the benefits of physical activity, and fights childhood obesity. The events get families active with a variety of themes: mini sports clinics, dance battles, nature fun, old-school games, interactive activities. Nothing creates more excitement than seeing the mayor or alderman hop in the jump rope, a grandmother laughing as she teaches a dance from “back in the day,” or the local team mascot turning flips, slapping high-fives with dad or leading a shooting challenge.

These events are a powerful platform—allowing programs to join forces and showcase their individual strengths, legislators to support their communities, businesses to align contributions with their missions, and community members to donate resources and time that help our organizations long after the play day has ended.

Getting all parties together takes work, but also provides rare opportunities for people to get to know one another and develop a sense of ownership in the community. The social capital gained is as much an asset as the required financial capital to keep our programs going and is more likely to lead to additional community action and continued involvement.

Pop Up PLAY Days break barriers, by providing unique opportunities for

"Play has the power to **CREATE POSITIVE OUTCOMES, CHANGE TRAJECTORIES, and INSPIRE AND UNITE** in a way little else can."



youth-serving organizations to grow and give back.

EXPANDING AND STRENGTHENING PROFESSIONAL NETWORKS.

Connecting organizations, families, legislators and business owners, during the special event and beyond.

EDUCATIONAL, PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND RESOURCES SHARING OPPORTUNITIES.

Spearheading knowledge-sharing of best practices and programmatic efficiencies and creating opportunities for cross-training and cross-promotion.

IMPACT OPPORTUNITIES.

Creating seamless ways for business owners and community members to plug back into the community organizations and make an impact by funding, donating or volunteering as Pop UP PLAY Ambassadors.

Pop Up PLAY Days build bridges, creating alignment among stakeholders

and highlighting their commitment to transforming the lives of youth today—and into the future.

KIDS AND FAMILIES: Have fun—together—and gain access to tools, resources and a one-stop shop for finding programming that helps to bring out the champion in every child.

YOUTH SERVING ORGANIZATIONS: Create an environment built on shared core values and resources, propel adult participation in a way that is fun and unforced, and create opportunities for every program involved.

LOCAL BUSINESSES: Showcase their brands, demonstrate their corporate values, and directly affect kids and families in a fun and memorable way.

LEGISLATORS AND HEALTH/ WELLNESS LEADERS: Demonstrate support of programs that provide safe access to recreation, which in turn

thwarts adverse behaviors during out-of-school times and reduces the rates of obesity.

When we give up our silos and play nice, together we cultivate positive change in areas such as social-emotional skills and youth development and physical health.

We get the opportunity to highlight our deep commitment to helping kids be better not only on athletic fields and courts, but also in their classrooms, communities and homes.

Pop Up PLAY Days create an infrastructure for cooperation, teamwork, and community-wide success that will resonate with children, parents, youth development organizations and community members alike.

The events remind us that we are all stakeholders.

And they help everyone to stop overdosing on technology, if only for a few hours, by bring back good old-fashioned fun.

PLAY: There's no app for that! **NAA**

PLAY AND EXPLORATION

**Q&A WITH JAY
FLORES, GLOBAL
STEM AMBASSADOR,
ROCKWELL
AUTOMATION**



BY CASSIE WESTRATE

**"Play can provide an opportunity for both
CREATIVE EXPLORATION and REAL-LIFE
APPLICATION. This combination is what turns on
the light bulb for youth!"**



WE KNOW YOU'RE PASSIONATE ABOUT STEM AND HEALTH AND WELLNESS. WHY ARE THESE SO IMPORTANT TO YOU?

My roles as Global STEM Ambassador and as an Obstacle Course Racing coach are both rooted in a passion for helping people overcome obstacles and solve problems that will make the world a better place.

People often look at the obstacles/challenges of life as things that impede our journey. I am of the mentality that “the obstacles are the way.” We must learn to stay committed to our vision and engineer a way to conquer the obstacles we encounter.

Once that mindset shift occurs, the obstacles become just another step along the journey, instead of a roadblock.

HOW DO YOU THINK PLAY FACTORS INTO LEARNING AND THE HEALTH AND WELL-BEING OF KIDS AND ADULTS?

Play allows for the exploration of a subject via multiple learning styles, which can lead to improved retention of the material.

A well-planned activity can touch visual, aural, verbal, physical and social learning styles. The variety maximizes the young peoples’ learning potential. Fear of failure and concern for constraints are also less prevalent during play. Therefore, young people are more likely to explore the topic in depth and are more willing to look for innovative approaches. Finally, it’s FUN!

HOW DO YOU THINK PLAY INSPIRES KIDS?

Play can provide an opportunity for both creative exploration and real-life application. This combination is what turns on the light bulb for youth! When young people can connect the dots between their passions and a real-life application/career, their interest transforms into commitment.

A creative mind that is committed to exploring their passion can change the world!

WHAT DID YOU DO AS A KID AFTERSCHOOL?

I participated in a general afterschool program.

My activities consisted of a recess, homework and some game time.

WHAT MAKES YOU HOPEFUL FOR THE FUTURE?

FIRST LEGO League gives me hope for the future. It’s more than robots! Youth have the opportunity to look at the world around them and come up with innovative solutions to relevant problems in their community.

They face a new challenge every year and have an opportunity to work in teams to solve complex problems. They learn that the world around them is moldable. They create a vision for what they want the world to look like and begin to reverse-engineer the solutions that will make it a better place! [NAA](#)

BLOCKING OUT TIME FOR BLOCKS

INCREASING STEM SKILLS THROUGH PLAYFUL LEARNING.

According to the U.S. Department of Education: School-age children spend less than seven hours a day in school—only 20 percent of their waking hours!

How do we use the other 80 percent to enhance the skills youth need to succeed in school and beyond?

Afterschool activities bursting with construction toys, like building blocks, offer playful learning experiences that promote better STEM skills.

Many activities programs could use are fun, engaging and meaningful, and enhance spatial and mathematical competencies:

1. PROVIDE BLOCKS AND PUZZLES. As children play with these toys they can think about spatial relations, such as putting the *square* block on *top* of the *rectangular* block or *rotating* the green block and situating it next to the orange block. Practicing these sorts of spatial skills can help facilitate STEM learning!

2. USE SPATIAL LANGUAGE—such as position, size and shape names—during play to help children reason about spatial relations and properties. For example: “The triangle is to the right of the square.” Counting and talking about numbers can help them understand basic math concepts. For example: “Let’s count the number of steps to this building. There are 10 steps.” Another way to promote spatial language is to read books that focus on spatial skills and number. Mind/Shift recommends 15 picture books for children that promote spatial skills development. <http://bit.ly/15PickBooks>

3. HOLD A SPECIAL DAY THAT CELEBRATES SPATIAL GAMES, such as dominos, dice games and cards. Consider

inviting families to join in the fun!

4. USE PLAYGROUNDS AND PUBLIC PARKS.

Design a scavenger hunt to promote children’s awareness. Use clues describing shapes, sizes and numbers. Invite children to draw a map of the neighborhood or practice spatial perspective-taking skills by plotting how houses and apartments look when standing in different locations.

5. REACH INTO LOCAL COMMUNITIES. The Learning Landscapes initiative is spatializing bus stops, supermarkets and sidewalk areas into imaginative, playful learning environments complete with puzzle walls and shape games. Make your communities and local funding agencies aware of the benefits of transforming public spaces into playful learning landscapes. Imagine the possibilities! <http://bit.ly/LearningLandscapes>
<http://urbanthinkscape.com>

The bottom line: Spatial learning is important and often ignored by school curricula. We can do something about that by enriching our afterschool programs with fun, engaging games and spatial conversations that promote STEM skills. **NAA**



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Visit heartofafterschool.org for tips, templates, graphics
and ideas for how to celebrate!