



Edited by Cait Goss  
CCPPNS Communications Chair

## A Message from CCPPNS President:

Thank you to everyone who came to the CCPPNS 2024 "Play is Enough" Convention. I'd like to especially congratulate PPP Marin on a job well-done. The quality and variety of speakers were fantastic, the vendors were informative and fun, and the progressive dinners were delicious and full of great ideas to implement at our schools. I had so much fun getting to know new friends and connecting with old ones. The work that goes into putting on a convention is tremendous, and I hope the members of PPP Marin recognize that their work paid off immensely for the benefit of schools, teachers, directors, families, and CHILDREN. I look forward to keeping the good work going in the future as we work to support schools, families, and children in California.

In appreciation,

-Rebecca, president CCPPNS

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you can expect:

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## Practicing Play

by:Michelle Semrad Barrera

I believe it was Teacher Tom who said “play is like love. I don't know how to define it, but I know it when I see it.”

I agree. Play, like love, is messy. It's risky. It moves us toward self actualization. In play, the player is empowered to ask and answer their own questions, propelled by their own intrinsic motivation. Play is thinking and thinking about thinking. It builds our metacognition muscles. It is learning. It is active experimentation. It is movement and action.

During times of intense growth young animals, including humans, must use their whole bodies to play and move through their world. Just as a freshly hatched butterfly must expand and stretch their wings before their first flight, so too must children have plentiful chances to stretch their own muscles. If a child is going to be able to climb, they must have ample chances to practice pulling themselves up. As with anything, play is a practice and in preschool we are supporting children in practicing play.

But what about us grown ups? Are we ourselves practiced enough in play?

In her talk, Belogovsky spoke of her own relationship to play and creativity, sharing a very resonant story of reconnecting to her creativity and playfulness during lockdown. During that time of severe isolation, she took the opportunity to be still and to sit with materials she had access to and to play. Belogovsky talked about how the process of playing brought up her relationship to feelings of always needing to be some sort of capital B, Best. She called her past patterns of perfectionism “chasing the best,” with a Best that had been defined by others and outward societal pressures and expectations.

This concept of “chasing the best” spoke to me, and we were encouraged to share with a partner.

I found myself reflecting on how my own chase shows up as trying to prove how smart I am and that I am worthy of love. My partner reflected on how the culture of the chase is motivated by the capitalist system that values profit and product over process and people.

Similar to Belogovsky, I took a breather when we all stayed home during lockdown. I got to spend a lot of time with myself, and in that time, I played.

I got some brushes and found some watercolors. I grabbed some paper and I played. I didn't know anything about painting. I didn't know what others told me later about how “watercolors are unforgiving.” No one told me to paint. I would have laughed at the suggestion if they had. I don't even know anybody who paints in water color. I even had a belief that I'm not good at visual art-making since childhood.

So when I began to play, there were no external pressures or expectations. And no internal ones either. I can't even quite explain how I ended up painting with watercolors. Maybe it was because there was so much freedom in not expecting anything to come from it. That elusive Best that had always felt necessary to achieve, the Best that wanted me to believe that ceasing to chase it would end in catastrophe, vanished. POOF!

The Best was gone. I had pressed pause on our chase. And I was reminded that this is why we play.

Everyday I am grateful to get to do the work I do with families. I get to be in the midst of play. I can come into the yard, my mind buzzing about some Best that I can't yet seem to let go of, worrying that I'm going to need to lean on my families a little more that day. Then the play begins.

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The first child walks into the yard and finds a stick. It's a long stick. They find some orange tape to add and POOF! The stick is now magical. They add purple tape and demonstrate how it now has teleportation powers as they jump from the shadows into the sunlight and then back again.

And POOF! The Best disappears.

They jump again, landing on the rug with the cityscape printed on it saying "I AM GIANT!" while they stomp onto a road the size of their own growing foot.

POOF! The Best is gone for now.

If we choose to accept Belogovsky's challenge to become advocates for play not just in early childhood but across the life-span, we must utilize our unique position as members of co-ops, as builders of communities of play, to create opportunities and environments for play with not just the children but also the adults in our schools. She reminded us that we also must hold space for the playfulness of our grown ups, to give opportunities to every adult to experience first-hand the value of play, so that we can work together to fuel the play revolution.

Every child has the right to large amounts of time and space for play. Unfortunately, play access continues to shrink. For children of color and children living in poverty, play access is shrinking at an accelerated pace. When adults play, we get to experience first hand play's value. So I invite you to play and to join Belogovsky in the Play Revolution.

I wonder: How will you play?

Some Ways the Grown Ups Play in Our CCPPNS Community

- Nerf play (or rolled up newspapers)
- Playdoh & Pinot night
- Box City with Big Boxes
- Dungeons & Dragons & other Table Top Games
- Treasure Hunt with Play Challenges
- Ancestor Games: jacks, pickup sticks
- Dress Up
- Improv
- Gardening
- Sewing
- Art Making



Convention also offered workshops on self-care for educators and caregivers as well as opportunities to relax, reflect, and reset thanks to local vendors who's values align with CCPPNS and our mission.





Jamae (left) & Rebecca (right) at the 2024 Convention in Marin County, CA

## ABC: The Anti-Bias Corner

ABC: Anti-Bias Corner

Hello dear members of CCPNS! This is the inaugural epistle of what we hope will become a regular feature in our semiannual newsletter—the Anti-Bias Corner! And in this inaugural article, we would like to honor and celebrate Jamae Tasker! Jamae is director at the Sunset Co-op in San Francisco, and has served as VP North of CCPNS for the past year. Although she is stepping down from this board, she leaves a legacy that will long outlive her physical presence. Jamae worked tirelessly to bring Anti-bias work to the forefront of the consciousness of CCPNS. Among the many Anti-bias practices she brought to this group, some favorites stand out: she led workshops on how to recognize biased language in school materials and steps to remedy it when found; she brought opportunities to explore microaggressions and the lasting legacy they leave on people who experience them, along with the introduction to listening practices to help people offload the hurt; she coached us on how to best approach a situation where microaggressions occur—on how to call a person in constructively and how to take responsibility for one's own infraction; and she introduced us to a delightful and extensive library of children's books that celebrated inclusivity for ALL walks of children and families. Much of the Anti-bias work you will see coming from CCPNS is a result of her hard work and dedication to leave us a better organization than she found us, and we are grateful for the time she spent with us. Her warmth and humor, wisdom and camaraderie will be missed.

-Rebecca Nowlen

## Building Community through Play

An invitation to community play:

I AM Poems

This is a powerful creativity and community building prompt that provides space for folks to reflect on where they are at, what they are feeling, and what they believe in. It is an anti-bias activity in that it allows us to look into ourselves and share bits of us with one another, so that we might understand each other's experiences, needs, strengths, perspectives, and limitations better. Our board did this activity as a group to begin our meeting, and we encourage you to try with your community.

*Directions:*

Each person is invited to write a poem of 8-10 lines, each starting with "I am."

Then in small groups, take turns reading out each poem.

Continuing in small groups. Use lines/themes/pieces from each other's poems to write a collaborative piece to share.

Extended Reflection:

- What was this process like? what surprised you?
- What came up in the process?
- What did you learn?

Read about Jamae's ongoing Anti-Bias and Community Building work in CCPNS:

- [\*Using Inclusive Language, Co-op Chronicle Fall 2023\*](#) article by Cait Goss on Jamae's Workshop
- [\*Anti-Bias: A Process 2023 Workshop\*](#) article by Michelle Semrad Barrera on Jamae's workshop

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# The Powerful Role of Play to Promote Young Children's Optimal Learning, Development and Well-Being

Presented by Julie Nicholson, Ph.D., MBA

Notes by Michelle Semrad Barrera, Director/Teacher Woodland Parent Nursery School

In my second year as a co-op preschool teacher, I wrote a [blog about impulsivity](#). I wanted my families to understand that when their child knocked another child down or their child was the one who was knocked down, that it wasn't intentional and certainly didn't mean their child was a bully.

I have learned so much more about these impulsive acts as I've learned about our nervous system, I am still learning. Each child's nervous system and experiences are unique, so children teach me. And I continue to learn with and from my fellow educators. I was delighted by the number of sessions I attended at our CCPPNS Play is Enough convention that were about or referenced children's nervous systems.

I came in knowing that play is regulating and supports the development of self-regulation which is the ability to control impulsive behavior including emotional outbursts. I also came in advocating play, as Nicholson's presentation title makes clear, for children's overall well-being and as the optimal way children learn and develop. Yet, I hadn't integrated my knowing and advocacy in my own thinking.

Nicholson's presentation did this right from the beginning. Optimal well-being, learning, and development are achieved through play because it is regulating and supports the development of self-regulation.

I've been using a threat detection system model to understand what Nicholson introduced as the arousal staircase. The arousal staircase links our arousal state to areas of the brain. When we're calm we're in the thinking part of our brain, the cortex. When we experience

alarm, we're in the emotional center of our brain, the limbic system. If we're in a state of high arousal, in fear or even terror, we're in the survival center of our brain, the brainstem.

In my class, a two year-old, I'll call them, Two, and a new to peer play, three year-old, Three, both head towards items with wheels as soon as they enter the yard. Today Three ran to greet them at the gate as they saw Two entering. There's a good deal of conflict between these children over things with wheels and lots of opportunity for moving up and down the arousal staircase with co-regulation support, an adult sharing their regulated/calm state. Through conflict during play, they are developing problem-solving skills and regulation.

I'm already feeling delighted and honored to observe their development. Two headed for the bin of train tracks and began trying to fit two pieces together that didn't fit. Three was right behind them. Three said, "No, no, no not that one," and handed two a different piece of track. Two took it and tried fitting them together. It took some back and forth between Two and Three before together they got the piece in. They continued working together with shared focus to problem-solve and build the track.

Nicholson went on to describe situations that amplify our stress response or send us further up the arousal staircase. These include novelty/unfamiliarity, unpredictability, lack of control, feeling alone.

So let me come back to Two and Three. Three has only been at my school for two weeks, so both the people and the place are unfamiliar. Yet things with wheels, the thing Three self-selects to pursue in their play, are familiar.

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This is Child Self-Determined Play on the left side of the Play Based Learning Across a Continuum that Nicholson presented to us. Now, if I move to the right on the continuum into Adult Planned and Directed Play or off the continuum all together, I've just increased the unfamiliarity and the stress demands of the child, which can cause dysregulation or a challenge.

Three has quickly adapted to the structure/predictability of my school. Three knows that they will be able to determine their play, when they eat, when they use the restroom, and that I and other adults are there to help/care for them/collaborate until clean up time. After that it's time to go to the gate and sing goodbye. As a result of this predictable self-determination, Three is developing executive functioning and planning skills telling mom, "I'm going to ride a bike when I get to Rainbow School."

If I'm operating on the right and planning and directing play or lessons, then I'm increasing the unpredictability and stress demands because only I know the details. When we operate on the left side of the continuum, children have control within the safe boundaries and limits adults hold. On the right, the adults have more control and children have less, again increasing stress demands.

Finally, consider feeling alone, the fourth thing that can push a child further up the arousal ladder. Picture a circle time where children are asked to sit criss-cross applesauce, silent, eyes on me, the teacher. Now picture a play-based co-op preschool. Here's a child reaching for the hand of someone else's parent to show them the giant earthworm they just discovered or plopping down in the lap of someone else's grandma with a book.

Oh look, there's Three who's just been inside with me to pick the fox, not the turtle, ice pack for a boom they received from an excited, impulsive Two. Now Three says, "Set me down. Set me down." Three yells Two's name from across the yard and runs to join them and another child in a game of running and giggling and finding spaces to hide in or behind.

Moments of play. Moments of learning.

Working in the play-based co-op world, we get to be reminded daily of the immense creativity, curiosity, and wonder of children and the incredible power of their play and the possibilities it will lead to.



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## Board Updates

### Outgoing Board: 2023-2024

President: Rebecca Nowlen  
Treasurer: Beverly Slocum  
State Administrator: Eileen Lucas  
Membership Director: Anghelika Maddalena  
Communications Director: Michelle Semrad Barrera  
Convention Consultant: Barbara Crowley

#### **Northern California:**

Vice President: Jamae Tasker  
Secretary: Lindsey Pratz  
Finance: Megan Hoppes  
Advisor: Theresa Hentzel

#### **Southern California:**

Vice President: Carol Tatsumi  
Secretary: Sandra Rojas  
Finance: Odilia Gonzalez  
Advisor: Joyce Woodruff

### Incoming Board: 2024-2025

President: Rebecca Nowlen  
Treasurer: Eileen Lucas  
State Administrator: Miranda Webster  
Membership Director: Anghelika Maddalena  
Communications Director: Cait Goss  
Convention Consultant: Barbara Crowley

#### **Northern California:**

Vice President: Theresa Hentzel  
Secretary: Michelle Semrad Barrera  
Finance: Megan Hoppes  
Advisor: Summer Marshall

#### **Southern California:**

Vice President: Jocelyn Roberts  
Secretary: Sandra Rojas  
Finance: Odilia Gonzalez  
Advisor: Joyce Woodruff

## Committee Chairs

Awards: Barbara Crowley  
Website: Eileen Lucas  
President Emeritus: Jocelyn Robertson  
Historian: OPEN  
Leadership/Training: Konne Ainsworth  
PCPI: Megan Hoppes  
Quilt: Eileen Lucas

## Scholarship for Ongoing Education for Co-op Teachers

At CCPNS, we are working on providing access to resources and supports that will help us to *grow our own* cooperative play-based teachers.

Thus we want to remind our membership schools that CCPNS has a scholarship program that provides funding for teachers or current members looking to become teachers within CCPNS. Scholarship funds would go towards those working towards acquiring the required early childhood development units.

Please reach out to your area's Advisor for more information!





## Play in the Spring Time

Inspired by the Seasons  
By: Cait Goss

"The land is the real teacher. All we need as students is mindfulness."

— Robin Wall Kimmerer, [Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants](#)

A question I often get when giving tours to potential families is "how do you make your curriculum?"

I answer with a practiced explanation about our child-led and emergent curriculum philosophies, that we look to the children's interests, strengths, and wonders to guide our learning. And I also add that we are guided by the seasons, by the inspirations of nature, often a forgotten but vital teacher in our current educational systems.

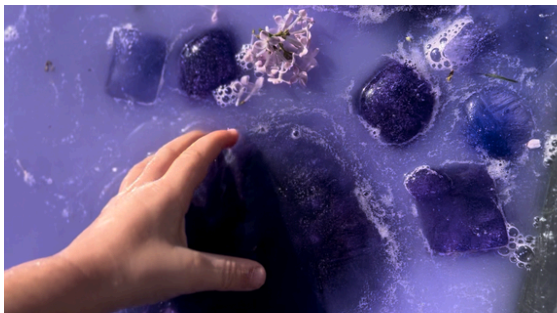
For me, living in extremely urban Los Angeles, it is easy to feel disconnected from nature. Living within our industrial systems that expects us to constantly go, go, go makes it even easier to lose connection with our natural rhythms.

But in spite of all that, I aim to bring as much nature into our learning space as possible. This season, we've been inspired by the early spring flowers, and LILACS have been our current nature study, inviting myriad explorations.

Here's some things we've been exploring that we invite you to try out!

### Lilac Fairy Potions

Making magic at the water table we added a bit of milk to our water (for opacity), then observed what happened when our purple ice cubes melted! We also added in Lilac blossoms.



## Lilac Play Doh

### Easy Salt Dough Recipe

Salt dough is a favorite easy, three ingredient recipe that children LOVE to help mix together and prepare for play. Making the dough itself is often the funnest part!

Ingredients:

- Flour
- Salt
- Water
- Purple Food Coloring (optional)

Materials:

- Mixing Bowl
- Spatula
- 1 and 1/2 measuring cups

How-To:

- Measure out 1 cup of Flour, 1/2 cup of salt, and half a cup of water into the mixing bowl.
- Add a few drops of food coloring.
- Mix together with spatula until you can work the dough with your hands and it doesn't stick too much.
- If dough is too sticky, add more flour bit by bit till it is able to be molded.

Lay out dough with loose parts, nature items, and clay making tools and invite learners to explore the dough and materials.

Salt dough can be left to dry or baked at a low temperature to harden.





## Upcoming Events

### **Northern Area Teacher/Director Luncheon:**

April 27th: 10-1 at Kiddie Kampus Cooperative in Alameda



### **Joint Planning Meeting with Executive Board:**

June 29: Zoom Option

### **Joint Area Board Meeting:**

October 12-13 (Tentatively) in Selma, CA



*Thank you for reading!*

Want to contribute to our next Co-op Chronicle?

Email: Communications Director Cait Goss at  
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