

• CHILD'S PLAY •



Fall 2012

USA-TLA: Promoting Development Through Toys and Play

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Play and Learning Strike an Important Chord at Conference

“Recess is being shortened and taken away in many schools. Not surprisingly, since the decline in recess, we’ve seen a rise in behavior problems and diagnosed learning disorders.

“We need to get children back outside where they can run, move and play so that they can concentrate back in the classroom...”

This is just a sampling of many important trends in education that will be explored at the USA-TLA and Cleveland Association for the Education of Young Children co-sponsored conference on Oct. 13, 2012, in Middleburg Hts., Ohio. The day-long program of workshops tackles a theme dear to many hearts, *Play... What’s Learning Got to Do With It?*

Designed for toy librarians, teachers, day care providers, librarians and parents, the program homes in on how we can optimize learning for the children in our lives.

“We are thrilled that faculty and staff from so many institutions of higher learning like Cleveland State, Kent State and Baldwin Wallace Universities and Cuyahoga Community College will stimulate ideas and offer great take-away value,” said Sue Kirschner, youth literacy and outreach supervisor at Cuyahoga County Public Library who galvanized many of the early childhood professionals to shape the comprehensive program.

“We are also tremendously pleased to convey that **graduate-level credit** and up to six hours of **Step Up to Quality credit** will be given to those who attend,” added USA-TLA Director Judith Iacuzzi. “We know that many educators and others will benefit by that assurance.”

In addition to Kirschner, leading the billing are staff from Cleveland State: Dr. Dinah Volk, early childhood professor, and Dr. Karl Wheatley, associate professor in early childhood. Together they will jumpstart activities with a fresh exploration of

the value of play in our lives.

USA-TLA “favorites” Nina Hillery and Rhoda Redleaf, both accomplished educators and authors, will tell what school readiness means today and how play can support the preparation.

Jackie Saggio, adjunct instructor at Kent State and Cuyahoga Community College, will limn the issue of playing outdoors without a playground as referenced above, and Tricia Twarogowski, youth services supervisor at Cuyahoga County Public Library, will show us new avenues to make story time more remarkable.

USA-TLA Director Martin Stone, who last year won Teacher of the Year from the JCC of Mid-Westchester and the Autism Science Foundation in New York, will share his considerable knowledge of working with kids with disabilities.

Breakfast, lunch, and handouts are included in the fee, which is less if you are a member of the CAEYC or USA-TLA and sign up by September 25. For further details, visit usatla.org and follow the link to the conference.



Why Do Brains Love Puzzles?

By Sally deVincentis, President, APTE, Inc.

In developing our newest iPhone app, Gumball Blast, we did a little research on the psychology of game playing to learn why people so enjoy solving puzzles and riddles. I thought you would be interested to know what our research turned up.

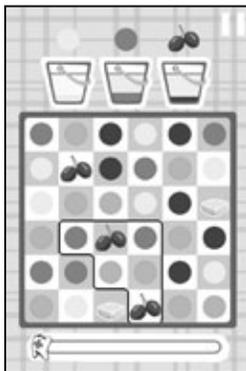
The best time to solve a puzzle is when you're happy. Sounds crazy, but neuroscientists at Northwestern University have found that people are more likely to solve puzzles with sudden insight when they are amused or in a good humor. Researchers came up with this theory by showing students a series of short videos and then asking them to solve puzzles. The students, who watched a video of Robin Williams doing his stand-up routine, solved more puzzles over all and significantly more by sudden insight than the students who watched serious or scary videos.

"What we think is happening," said Mark Beeman, a neuroscientist who conducted the study with Karuna Subramaniam, "is that humor, this positive mood, is lowering the brain's threshold for detecting weaker or more remote connections" to solve puzzles.

These findings are consistent with dozens of experiments that show how a positive mood leads to better creative thinking. It's as if a good mood opens the doors to your subconscious and lets your brain look around in hidden places. We call this insight or inspiration, as opposed to analytical or logical thinking.

The appeal to brainteasers is more than just getting a reward for finding the right answer. Activities like doing crosswords, playing solitaire and Sudoku keep your brain young and nimble. And now scientists have shown that this same activity inspires the mind to think in new, different and creative ways.

So if your brain has been working hard on everyday problems, why not give it a break. Open the door to some fresh ideas with a little help from a good puzzler. And might I suggest checking out APTE's Gumball Blast on the Apple Store...a game guaranteed to put your brain in a good mood. Enjoy!



A TLA Tasty Treat

Free Gumball Blast app (good until 10/31).
Learn more at apte.com/mobile; or go directly to the Apple App Store for your free Gumball Blast app.



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Child's Play is a publication of the USA Toy Library Association, 2719 Broadway Avenue, Evanston IL 60201; 847-612-6966 (phone); 847-864-8473 (fax); <http://usatla.org>; jqi@comcast.net.

Articles, suggestions and letters are welcome. *Child's Play* newsletter is written, edited, designed and produced by Iacuzzi Associates.

Meet the Super Families!



SUPER FAMILY PLAY SETS

By Leslie Eslinger

I'd like to tackle a touchy topic in the world of early childhood education starting with a short list of questions.

- *Do the children you know like super heroes?*
- *Do you think most children can describe two or more characteristics of super heroes?*
- *Are you looking for ideas to expand themes for dramatic play beyond "playing house?"*
- *Would you like a high interest topic that can support literacy practices at home as well as in the classroom?*
- *Do you think it's important to foster problem solving, verbal expression, and divergent thinking?*

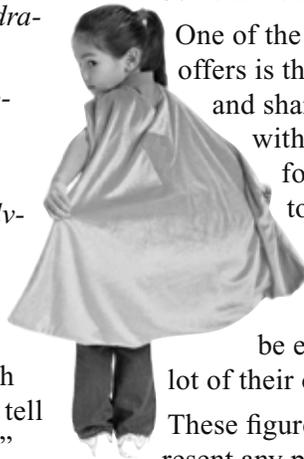
If you answered yes to three or more of the above questions, then read on.

We think it's time to welcome super hero play with open arms into the classroom. Believe me when I tell you that I was one of those teachers who said "no" to such boisterous play that often turned into aggressive play. But sometimes something comes along that inspires us to revisit a controversial topic. In this case, it was my first look at these Super Family Play Sets. Each Super Family is composed of four family members with the addition of a family car or a family pet. There are four families that represent a range of ethnic backgrounds. On one side, the family members are dressed like everyday people; when you turn them over, they're transformed into Super Family characters - ready for brave deeds and super rescues!

These figures, along with a cross-curricular early childhood program were developed by a small company based in Cambridge, England, that specializes in early childhood and special needs products. As soon as I saw them and read the curriculum, I was a believer. I believe that we can overcome all of our negative associations with super hero play and begin to fully embrace it as educationally sound and appropriate for the classroom. I think many educators thought that by encouraging such play they were endorsing the sale of

commercial super hero products. I'd like to think that we can safely bring these intentionally "generic" figures into our schools without that concern.

Just in case you're not swayed by my personal transformation, here are some convincing arguments that have been set forth by the author of the curriculum guide, *Come Alive Superheroes*.*



One of the unique qualities that this type of play offers is that it allows the child to be the "expert" and share a wealth of background information with the adult. When the child can bring former knowledge and experience to a topic, they're more likely to embrace the learning. Further, if you set the right tone and provide ample play props (note the super cape in pink), girls will be equally drawn to this theme and have a lot of their own background knowledge to offer.

These figures are intentionally designed not to represent any popular characters from the media so that children will create their own stories, their own tales of strength and heroism, and "own" the play.

The greatest benefit from this play will be achieved if both child and adult are actively involved. Super hero play will present many powerful "teachable moments." If adults are on hand and tuned in, they will swoop in (super hero talk for "be there at just the right time") and participate in active listening, reflective responding, and expanding of ideas.

Whether you add these sets to the toy library, your playroom at home or a classroom, they're sure to delight and inspire! So make room - when super families join the ranks among the other toys and block play props, they'll require lots of space. After all they do a lot of leaping from tall buildings!

Super Family Play Sets and props are available through Beckers School Supplies, www.ShopBecker.com, 800-523-1490.

* *Bromley, Helen, Come Alive Superheroes: Resource Pack, Yellow Door, Cambridge, UK, 2011.*

The Economics of a Pre-School Education Improve on Other Investments

(Extracted from an interview with Arthur Rolnick, respected spokesman and economist, whose research aims to spur long-term economic growth, published on behalf of the Minnesota Early Learning Foundation)

Every metro area in the United States has one – an economic development agency. The agency typically spends its time and money putting together bids to woo manufacturing plants or Fortune 500 headquarters. Sometimes, it supports tax initiatives to build luxury sports stadiums.

Although sometimes these efforts create jobs, often they come at the expense of jobs lost somewhere else. Or the promised “spillover benefits” never arrive. But a growing number of experts are advocating for another kind of economic development that is uniquely effective—early childhood education. The main questions are how best to design the program and how to build greater public support.

Art Rolnick, an economist and former research director at the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, thinks he has the answer. Over the next few years, people across the nation will be able to see the results for themselves.

Mark Sniderman, executive vice president and chief policy officer with the Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland, interviewed Rolnick via videoconference two years ago. An edited transcript follows.

The “Scholarship-Plus” Approach to Early Childhood Education

Sniderman: We’re here this morning to discuss early education. How did you first become interested in this topic?

Rolnick: My involvement was serendipity. A group of us used to meet about once a month for lunch here in downtown Minneapolis. About nine years ago we invited the executive director of an organization called Ready for K [kindergarten], which was advocating for early childhood education and development.

I listened to the talk. They presented what I thought was a fairly weak argument from an economic point of view. I felt that if they were going to really push this issue forward, they should look at the economics of investing in early childhood education. Policymakers need a way to rank a plethora of reasonable-sounding initiatives. They need a way to figure out how much to invest in each. And that’s where economics comes in.

I made that comment, and that was my mistake! Because the board of Ready for K, in particular the former gov-



ernor and mayor, started calling and asking if I would come on the board and write the background paper.

So I agreed to look into the economics of early childhood education.

Sniderman: What are the critical differences in the way the issues are framed and how you evaluate some of the choices that need to be made from the economist’s perspective?

Rolnick: We argued that early childhood development is economic development, and the research shows it’s economic development with a high public return – very high.

We looked at four well-known longitudinal studies. I’m going to talk about one in particular, the Perry preschool study. That was back in the early 1960s in Ypsilanti, Michigan. In this study 123 at-risk kids and their parents were enrolled and randomly divided into two groups. One group got a very high-quality early education program, including master’s-level teachers, small classroom size, and home visiting. So there was a program group and a control group. Reports were produced every 10 years and we now have a 40-year report, comparing the children who eventually became adults who were in the program, to the control group.

Rob and I asked a very simple question: What was the return on that investment? It hadn’t been quite asked that way before.

That’s what economists would normally ask about any proposed public investment. We know the cost of the two-year program; in today’s dollars it was \$22,000 per child. Now we need to know the benefits. Well, children that were in the program were less likely to be retained in the first grade, and that’s a significant saving. They were less likely to need special ed. That’s a significant saving. They were more likely to be literate by the sixth grade, graduate high school, get a job, pay taxes, stay off welfare. And the largest benefit of all, for the children who were in the program, the crime rate went down 50 percent relative to the control group.

Economists can put dollar values on all these benefits. And then we can back out the return on investment based on the benefits and the costs. We thought it would be high. We compared it to the stock market. The annual yield in the stock market, post-World War II, is about 5.8 percent, so we thought we would be doing well if we could beat 5.8 percent. We found that in the Perry preschool study, the annual rate of return, inflation-adjusted, was 16 percent—I don’t think you could find a better public investment.

Directors of USA-TLA Make Front-Page News (Again)

Sally deVincentis, Rhoda Redleaf and Elaine Adler, long-time board members of USA-TLA and active in the early childhood and toy lending arenas, have received new recognition for outstanding work.



DeVincentis, a founding member of the USA Toy Library Association, caught the attention of the press as a corporate pioneer who has adapted her businesses to accommodate changing markets over time. DeVincentis was one of a handful of individuals who brought Lekotek to the United States more than 30 years ago. A Swedish term meaning play libraries, Lekoteks foster learning environments for families with special needs. DeVincentis was featured recently in the local Evanston *Patch* newspaper for her outstanding and creative career.

After she left Lekotek some 23 years ago, deVincentis founded a technology company called APTE, Inc., which develops educational products, while she was working toward a PhD. in special education/psychology at Northwestern University. "I enjoyed computers and felt they leveled the playing field for kids with disabilities," the Lekotek founder said.

Since APTE, Inc.'s beginning, however, deVincentis has seen the business model change. Whereas there used to be a demand for educational technology products, there's now a thirst for new technology altogether.

"Before," deVincentis says, "education allowed good teachers to be great teachers." Now, she says, "schools don't have time to buy products to stretch kids' imaginations, and teachers are too busy to teach."

DeVincentis' frustrations have led her to branch out, adding new divisions to her core enterprise: APTE Digital Development Studio educates government, businesses and corporations about technology issues, and APTE Media develops applications. Its latest project is an addictive app for the iPhone called Gumball Blast, the company's second app (after Schmixer), which deVincentis hopes will help her company stay relevant in the ever-evolving technological landscape.



Elaine Adler, also a long-time board member and toy library founder and supporter, was recently awarded the Lifetime Achievement Award by the Jewish Federation of Northern New Jersey.

"If you know Elaine Adler," said the press release, "you know about her extraordinary generosity and devotion to the global Jewish community, but especially the local Jewish community. The transformative Adler Family Innovation Fund provides funding for new and creative programs that are meant to solve problems critical to needs within northern New Jersey's Jewish community. Six grantees are already at work meeting those needs.

"Elaine is also supportive of programs outside the Jewish community. The Adlers recently made a \$2 million donation to Ramapo College for their new nursing school, which is being named the Adler Center for Nursing.

"Because she knew that children need to play with quality toys, Elaine provided the funding for the local Toy Lending Library in Paramus that now bears her name.

"The entire Adler family is passionate about the Adler Aphasia Center, which owes its creation to Elaine and her family's desire to meet the needs of people suffering from the aftereffects of traumatic brain injury, brain tumor, or left-brain stroke, a condition husband, Mike suffered from."



Rhoda Redleaf was recently recognized by her daughter, Diane, also an accomplished professional working on behalf of families. Attorney Diane Redleaf launched the nonprofit Family Defense Center in Chicago seven years ago and has helped keep intact families where parents have been wrongfully accused of neglect or abuse. As a result of her assistance and the work of her program, the Illinois welfare system has a record far better than it held just a decade ago, according to sources quoted in the Chicago Tribune in August 2012.

Asked why she chose this challenging legal path, the daughter recognized her mother, Rhoda. "She founded the Head Start Program in the Twin Cities in Minnesota, was a kindergarten teacher and trained day care staffers. Redleaf Press is named after her." Rhoda also started one of the first toy libraries in the United States in St. Paul (Toys'N'Things), and is a prolific author of books on play, recycling and early childhood designed to enthuse day care providers in their work.

These are all women of many talents and gifts; we are proud to be their associates and recognize their contributions in and around the toy-lending world.



TLA Director and Conference Chair Rhoda Redleaf (right) and Think Small Executive Director Barbara Yates



Conference attendees at work and play

"Let's Play It Up" Conference in Minnesota

A services, resource and early childhood advocacy agency, Think Small™ in St. Paul, Minn., hosted a USA-TLA national conference, Let's Play It Up! Libraries for Literacy, on May 4, 2012, at the agency's beautiful Little Canada site. Think Small also celebrated its renaming (from Resources for Child Caring) and 40th anniversary. Think Small has been connected to USA-TLA for a majority of those years,

starting with one of the first toy loans in the USA, Toys'N'Things. TLA directors who took the podium that day included Leslie Eslinger, Marty Stone, Sue Kirschner and Donna Giannantonio. One of many highlights was a peek at the collaborative program between the Minnesota children's museum and several public library branches where permanent exhibitions from the museum have been installed.



Speakers (l to r) Leslie Eslinger (Becker's School Supplies), Judy Iacuzzi (USA-TLA), Anne Friederichs (Dakota County Wescott Library) and Margo Bock (Saint Paul Sun Ray Library)



Marty Stone presiding over the registration desk.



Sue Kirschner and Donna Giannantonio (both Cuyahoga County Public Library) showed how toys work well with books and advance literacy.

The Decalog of Toys

From the Fall 2012 issue of the newsletter of the International Toy Library Association, www.itla-toylibraries.org

- Should be geared not to changing fashions, but to needs.
- Should not stimulate ideas of violence that make you accustomed to the violence that surrounds you.
- Should not teach you to see yourself as male or female but as a youngster who enjoys play.
- Should not be easily broken to prevent the habit of buying, throwing away and buying again.
- Should not be expensive because playing is a necessity, not a luxury.
- Should stimulate both mind and body.
- Should help you understand that play is fun but playing together is better.
- Should give pleasure, not teach roles.
- Should be bright, strong and easy to use.
- Should make you feel, while playing, that the toy is working for you and your enjoyment.

Written by William Garagnani, who, together with Giorgio Bartolucci, formed the first Italian toy library in Florence, Italy, in 1977.



Toy Library Resources Order Form

Item	Qty.	Member	Non-Member
Child's Play Newsletter Included with Membership. An 8-page periodical full of news and information about toy libraries and related topics.		N/A	\$15.00 per copy
USA Toy Library Association Operator's Manual Everything you need to know about setting up and operating a toy library.		\$12.50	\$25.00
Read It! Play It! by by Joanne and Stephanie Oppenheim An illustrated, 112-page book of fun activities that build literacy through reading and playing.		\$12.50	\$25.00
Read It! Play It! With Babies and Toddlers by by Joanne and Stephanie Oppenheim An illustrated , 103-page book that builds literacy with babies and toddlers. Now in English and Spanish. Please specify.		\$12.50	\$25.00
Hey Kids! Out the Door, Let's Explore by Rhoda Redleaf This 245-page masterwork includes twenty-seven nature, community and concept walks.		\$18.00	\$36.00
Theme Kits Made Easy by Leslie Silk Eslinger A 161-page book of clever ideas based on "teaching themes" (fairy tales, animals, city life, etc.) packaged as "kits." A great teaching tool for providers, parents and teachers.		\$20.00	\$40.00
The Power of Play A discussion about early childhood education with Dr. Michael K. Meyerhoff, The Epicenter Inc.		\$5.00	\$10.00

Sub-Total \$

To order, complete this form and return it with payment to:

\$7.50 Shipping & Handling (Within the USA) \$

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USA-TLA: Promoting Development Through Toys and Play



USA Toy Library Association
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India "Corporate" Catches the Online Toy-Lending Beat

From Chennai (formerly Madras)

Most parents will reluctantly take their kids to the toy store, but that's not where the test ends. They have to browse through tens of thousands of toys before they can get the perfect one for their child. "One cannot blame the way toys are categorized (sic) at a toy store. Every toy has multiple aspects to it," says Santhosh, co-owner of the Bambaram Toy Library. Started in June 2010, this online toy-lending library is based on the Theory of Multiple Intelligences proposed by Howard Gardner in 1983. "We had a simple mission; we wanted to make learning fun for kids," he adds.

The library does not stock eye candy like Barbie dolls, or remote control cars. Instead, mind games such as Monopoly®, Scrabble® and puzzles that will help sharpen a child's thought process are part of the inventory, Santhosh says.

Having served employees of popular corporate firms such as Mphasis and Cognizant, Bambaram opened its gates to the public six months ago. Essentially a

toy-lending library, this company also lets its members buy toys. Although the prime focus is on lending toys, Santhosh says, "If a kid gets too attached to the toy or the parents find it useful for their kid, we let our members buy it at a discounted price."

Selection of toys from several giant racks at a toy store is a problem, Santhosh says. "Managing a library online is easier and hassle-free for both our customers and us. It's an added advantage for people who do not wish to travel to a store after a long, tiring day. They can browse our website and get it delivered at their doorstep."

Cast Your Vote Now

Enclosed in this issue of *Child's Play* is a ballot for members of the USA-TLA Board of Directors. Directors are elected to a three-year term, 2012–2015.

You may vote for as many candidates as you like. Please fax the completed ballot back to USA-TLA headquarters at 847-864-8473 by October 31, 2012. Thanks!

If you've already received a copy of Child's Play, please pass this along to a friend or colleague. Thank you.