

# • CHILD'S PLAY •



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USA-TLA: Promoting Development Through Toys and Play

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## TLA Welcomes Anne Friederichs and Tammy Byington to Board

Two Midwesterners with laudable experience were elected to the TLA board last fall, “and we are delighted,” said Nina Hillery, USA-TLA President.

“Their energy, enthusiasm and in-depth experience with play and families will enrich their programs and the TLA outreach for years to come,” she added.

### FROM MISSOURI



**Tammy Byington**, a graduate of the University of Missouri Columbia, returns to the TLA board after a 10-year hiatus and is a welcome-back addition.

Her program, First Chance for Children – a/k/a Lend ‘N’ Learn – in Columbia, Mo., which she launched in 1999, has grown and

deepened largely because of her creativity, commitment and expertise. It was the first freestanding toy library in the state and has since been replicated in many other communities.

As Parent Education Coordinator, Byington brings 25 years of experience in early childcare and education to a largely rural education program that reaches to families and “kiddos” (her expression) in 20 school districts surrounding Boone County where Lend ‘N’ Learn “Central” is situated. Often the schools are heavily hispanic and require bilingual materials and instructors. Five Lend ‘N’ Learn staff are involved in training and monitoring of the program’s success.

“Lend ‘N’ Learn gives mini-grants to these schools for the training we provide,” said Byington. “Many of these parents don’t understand play. They have never played themselves.”

The diverse and nimble Lend ‘N’ Learn program also provides parent education services and crisis cribs/safe sleep programs to families with children, birth through three.

### FROM MINNESOTA



**Anne Friederichs** has been a children’s librarian with the Dakota County Library in Eagan, Minn., for more than 10 years.

Before, while active in the Minnesota Library Association, she helped bring the American Library Association’s “Every Child Ready to

Read” program to librarians working with children throughout Minnesota. Like Byington, Friederich’s focus at the Wescott Library is with younger children, ages birth to 3.

The Minnesota public libraries are leading the charge for provision of on-site play. Today 18 public libraries in the state have permanent play exhibitions brought about by a collaboration between the libraries, the Toy Museum program, and the state. This creative development has thrown a spotlight on Minnesota for making play a centerpiece of the public library.

Friederichs received her master’s degree from the University of Wisconsin, Madison, and her bachelor’s degree from the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities campus.

“We happily welcome these exceptional women onto the TLA board!” said Hillery. §

## Sue Kirschner Receives Highest Honor



Sue Kirschner, youth outreach manager for Cuyahoga County Public Library, is the most recent recipient of the Jane Donelson Outstanding Player Award. Given to her last fall, she was the 38<sup>th</sup> recipient of the award, first given in 1985.

The award is made on behalf of USA-TLA to someone (or institution) whose commitment and contribution to toy lending libraries and early childhood education through play are widely recognized and long-standing.

“We are honored to present this award,” said Donna Giannantonio, USA-TLA treasurer during the ceremony that took place at the new North Royalton Branch of the Ohio library. “In working with Sue over the years I have often wondered if she ever sleeps or rests her brain. She works tirelessly on behalf of her mission to keep play at the forefront of child development. She was responsible for toy loan throughout all of the 28 branches of Cuyahoga County Public Library. Before she got involved, only one branch of the library was loaning toys.

“Sue has enhanced the children’s collection of toys extensively. Safety is first in a number of play priorities when choosing toys for the public she serves. Her creative efforts to this end are boundless!”

The latest award winner joins a group of distinguished educators, librarians and play advocates from all over the country. Many, like Kirschner, are from Ohio. The Honorable Mayor John Coyne, an award recipient, made the funding possible for the first toy library in the Cuyahoga library system 30 years ago.

Kirschner joined the USA-TLA board in October 2009 and challenged the group to enhance the image of toy-lending in the open marketplace. She advised, stop talking about play value among ourselves. Rather take the message “to the street,” which she has for years.

Kirschner has been a commanding speaker on toys and literacy at numerous international conferences, including those sponsored by the American Library Association and USA-TLA.

She has made an even deeper contribution in her home state of Ohio. The Cuyahoga County library has been ranked #1 in the country for two consecutive years, 2011 and 2012.

Youth literacy kits are an outgrowth of Kirschner and her team’s creativity. Several of these creative learning tools have won national awards of excellence. §



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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](mailto:jqi@comcast.net).

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

## Rhoda Redleaf Earns Lifetime Achievement Award

The Family Defense Center of Chicago hosted its fifth annual awards gala last fall and honored USA-TLA founding board member Rhoda Redleaf with its Lifetime Achievement award.

Since 2005, the Family Defense Center has been advocating justice for families in child welfare and defending families that have been unfairly separated.

Ms. Redleaf's dedication extends not just to the Center but also to a long history of advancing quality early childhood education, especially for low-income children. It was Redleaf and her husband, Paul, who provided the initial funding that launched the Family Defense Center. Redleaf has been an early childhood teacher, a child-care center director, author of several books for child-development programs, and leader of efforts to start Head Start and many other early childhood programs in her home state of Minnesota.

She is a founder and serves on the board at the nationally recognized Think Small (previously called Resources for Child Caring), which renamed its

publishing arm Redleaf Press after her. She has long been active with the USA-TLA board providing creativity, support and intelligence over the 29 years of its existence.

"There is no one who deserves to be recognized more," said Diane Redleaf, founder and executive director of the Family Defense Center.

"Not only has my mom been a stalwart benefactor and supporter of the Family Defense Fund, she has been a lifelong advocate for children and a proponent of child development programs that support families." §



## Los Angeles Conference Will Take Off This Fall

Circle Monday, October 27, 2014, on your calendar and plan to spend the day in downtown Los Angeles learning about play strategies and quality toys.

The theme of this conference, co-hosted by Los Angeles Toy Loan and USA-TLA is *Play: What's Learning Got to Do With It?* and ties to the important issue of play and learning in the 21st century. Keynote and breakout sessions will consider the issue from many viewpoints.

The importance of play in growth and development, play within various cultures, and choosing the best and most appropriate toys are some of the topics being considered.

"Our target audience includes 'toyrarians,' students studying child development and parents," said Marcia Benitez, director of the Los Angeles County Toy



Marcia Blachman-Benitez,  
Program Director

Loan Program. L.A. has more than 50 toyrarians – a/k/a toy librarians – running its expansive program of toy-lending throughout the county.

"But of course anyone else interested in the program is welcome," she added. "Perhaps other educators and early childhood specialists, even librarians, will be intrigued."

The planning committee is working on providing CEUs for foster parent training and perhaps others in need of continuing education.

A highlight will be a tour of the large and impressive L.A. Toy Loan Center, the first in the country founded during the Great Depression. It houses and

circulates in its own van thousands of toys to toy libraries throughout the area. §



## The Value of Block Play

*Excerpted from a paper entitled "The Importance of Play, Particularly Constructive Play, in Public Library Programming," by Sue McCleaf Nespeca for the Association for Library Service to Children*

**W**hat are the advantages of block play for children? Here are just a few benefits. Block play: provides open-ended play; allows free expression; increases the use of fine and large motor skills; develops hand-eye coordination; provides possibilities for collaboration and teamwork (social skills); creates feelings of competence and self-confidence; allows negotiation and resolution of conflicts; provides many scenarios for problem-solving; produces gains in visual/spatial understanding; stimulates imagination and creativity; creates opportunities for dramatic play; increases language and vocabulary; fosters early literacy skills; and improves math and science skills. When building, children are engaging in dramatic play, exploratory play and constructive play.

### Constructive Play in Library Programming

#### Effects on Literacy

We often tend to think children are primarily learning mathematical skills while playing with blocks. However, numerous studies have shown the positive effects of block and brick play on early literacy. Skills and abilities developed through block play are essential for success in reading and writing.

One major effect is on language and vocabulary learning. Children are deciding what to build and selecting different sizes and shapes of blocks, while communicating with peers and adults. They often discuss their

plans for building, and are eager to describe what they have built. With librarian or adult help, new vocabulary can be increased. (Example: "I see you have built a ramp/incline.") Children also learn new words from one another while playing, or when looking at books on buildings or structures.

In addition, dramatic play often grows out of constructive play, which leads to increased oral language production while the child is role-playing. The value of oral language creation by children through dramatic play with blocks was documented by Isbell and Raines (1991). Their research study compared language production in two areas – a block center versus a housekeeping center (often considered an area that cultivates rich language). Their results found that the block center produced a greater amount of higher quality oral language than the housekeeping center. The children playing with blocks had greater verbal fluency (spoke more words), used more complete sentences, and generated more vocabulary diversity (total number of different words used). The researchers concluded that playing with blocks should be considered vital to the promotion of children's oral language development.

#### Maximizing the Impact on Early Literacy

How can we increase literacy experiences when children are playing with blocks or bricks? Specifically, librarians can add literacy props and appropriate books

*Continued on page 5*

## The Value of Block Play

*Continued from page 4*

to their program area. Neuman and Roskos (1990) recommend three criteria when selecting literacy props for inclusion in play settings: “authenticity, utility and appropriateness.” The props added should be items from the real world that have a function in daily life and that are appropriate for the age and stage of development.

### Add Books, Props, Pictures to Block Play

**W**hat items could be added in library programs when children are engaged in block or brick play to increase children’s literacy experiences? Informational books related to buildings, construction, architecture or house plans, or fiction books on related subjects or themes, can be displayed or briefly booktalked. Props can include paper of various sizes and colors, cardstock, post-it pads, colored pencils, markers, crayons, masking tape and scissors. Paper can be used to add architectural details such as doors and windows.

Research indicates that when children play in print-enriched surroundings, they often learn to read play-related print.

If structures are displayed, children can label them, and also write their name on a card next to their construction. Adults can also take pictures of their buildings, have children write a story about it, or how they built it, thus encouraging writing skills, also an early literacy skill.

In storytime programs, children can recreate a character from the story or something that was mentioned in the book and then describe it to other children or adults. Even when children are helping to put blocks away they can return different sizes, shapes or types of blocks/bricks to storage containers that are labeled with a description. Research indicates that when children play in print-enriched surroundings, they often learn to read play-related print. (Neuman & Roskos, 1993).

Never should an adult say to any child, “I like your building!” Rather say, “What kinds of blocks do you like to use?”

What are some other ways librarians can add to the constructive play experience? First, as with art activities offered in libraries, librarians should emphasize the process rather than the product. Children should be allowed to be creative and feel good about their work. Never should an adult say to any child, “I like your building!” This sets up a competitive atmosphere by praising one child’s unique abilities. This also can put undue pressure on children to perform rather than enjoying the process itself.

Librarians can ask, “What kinds of blocks do you like to use?” or “Have you ever seen a building like the one you are making? Where? How is yours different?” Don’t ask “What is it?” or other questions that require only a one-word response (and could be offensive if the child thinks what they have made is evident). Instead ask, “Tell me about your building” or “What is happening here?” With this question, the child has more opportunities to use oral language, explaining what they are building and how they built it. It can also engage a child in storytelling!

Finally, models made by adults should not be displayed, nor should children be forced to copy a building project in a book or display. Remember – creative free expression is best! §



*Circles of blocks, Cleveland Museum of Art*

# What Do You Want To Be?

Leslie Silk Eslinger, Education and Product Development Specialist, Becker's School Supplies



We all know the typical responses from young children when asked this question, What do you want to be when you grow up? As preschool teachers and librarians, we've done our job well when we hear clear answers from children who are excited to engage in community helping and neighborhood jobs. Or excited about space exploration and dinosaur excavation. And of course firefighting, policing, space and archeology adventure! Ahh, the gift of youth. The sky's the limit. Imagination rules! Let's keep the excitement alive and open more career doors to explore.

Preschool teachers, parents or librarians all can begin to build collections of career props or expand existing collections. Here's one for starters called Young Professionals – an avenue that offers many dramatic play opportunities. Start with the appropriate “uniform” for working in a professional office.

For young children, we often use common representations of careers to help build basic understanding and vocabulary. Yes, we all know that “business casual” is in vogue, but for young children it's easier to associate a classic suit and tie or skirt and jacket with business careers.

We've all raided our closets and dug through bins at thrift stores to find men's jackets, ties, high heels, and other grown-up garb. At Becker's we decided to create our own “Young Professional Dress-Ups” for one very important reason. We wanted to reduce any possible safety or choking hazard presented by a traditional tie or women's scarf. In the set (pictured above), the tie and scarf are designed with Velcro to quickly break apart if pulled. Even the suits have been tested for compliance with all health and safety measures. So it's safe and easy for your play friend to don a jacket and grab her briefcase for a rigorous day at the office!

It's easy for children to dress the part but how do they play the part? With a good set of props, you can

introduce children to “play vocabulary” and some basic ideas related to the dramatic theme. For some themes, children come with a knowledge base. They know that firefighters put out fires, that doctors make people feel better, that astronauts fly in spaceships, etc. But do they know what happens in an office? Here are some suggestions to get you started.

Invite a business person or another type of professional to your classroom. Tell the children that you've invited a special guest to school to learn about the children's jobs. Prepare questions and interview the guest. Engage the children in the Q-and-A by asking what kinds of things they'd like to know. Try to keep them focused on job-related questions. Good Luck!

Try these for starters:

- What do you wear to work?
- What do you bring with you to work?
- Do you work with other people?
- Do you have recess? Do you get to take a nap?
- What do you keep on your desk?
- What is the favorite part of your job?

When the interview is over, invite children to draw pictures about what they learned. Send them along with a thank-you note to your special guest. Once children are introduced to the theme, set out props and let the dramatic play begin. You'll need phones, laptops or keyboards, headsets, etc. As great as it would be for the environment to set up a paperless office, you might need some very important-looking documents for children to peruse and some official-looking reports to collect in their briefcases.

Oh, one more thing – don't forget the coffee mug! §





# Toy Library Resources Order Form

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<b>Child's Play Newsletter</b> Included with Membership. An 8-page periodical full of news and information about toy libraries and related topics.		N/A	\$15.00 per copy
<b>USA Toy Library Association Operator's Manual</b> Everything you need to know about setting up and operating a toy library.		\$12.50	\$25.00
<b>Read It! Play It!</b> 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
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