

WORKSHOP OFFERINGS



December 9, 2025
University of Hartford

AGENDA | 8:45 am - 3:30 pm

8:00 am Registration
8:45 Opening Remarks
9:00 am Keynote
10:15 am - 11:45 pm Session 1
12:00-1:00 pm Lunch and Exhibitors
1:15 - 2:45 pm Session 2
3:00 pm Planning and Reflection
3:15 pm Closing Remarks and Raffle Prizes

Title: **How Play Grows Brain Best**

Presenter: Dr. Peg Oliveira, Director of the Gesell Program in Early Childhood at Yale

Intended Audience: Pk,K,1,2, Leadership

Understand the basics of brain development in the early school years and how play is a developmentally appropriate approach to supporting neural development in young children.

Title: **How to Begin Play-Based Learning with Staff**

Presenter: Emily Caviggia, Principal Killingly Public Schools

Intended Audience: PK,K,1 , School and District Leadership

Steps to take to initiate Play Based Learning in your classrooms.

Title: **From Play to Proficiency: Linking Playful Learning to Standards**

Presenter: Maggie Knies, Director of Educational Programming at Discovery Center

Intended Audience: K,1,2, School based Leadership

Importance of student engagement, building connections and how it all aligns with science standards, as well as cross cutting concepts.

Title: **Differentiating Play for All Learners**

Presenters: Elizabeth Gaffney, Preschool Coordinator Wallingford Public Schools and Rachel Papa, Early Childhood Educator Wallingford Public Schools

Intended Audience: PK, K, PK Leadership, School based Leadership

How to select materials and design provocations that foster creativity, problem-solving, and collaboration. How to create classroom spaces and routines that encourage exploration, choice, and discovery. How to scaffold children's learning through observation, open-ended questioning, and guided interactions during play.

Title: **Let's Play and the revised CT Early Learning and Development Standards (CT ELDS)**

Presenter: Dr. Michelle Levy, Connecticut Office of Early Childhood

Intended Audience: PK

Make connections between the OEC Let's Play materials and the revised CT ELDS. Gather and share strategies for facilitating play with learning goals in mind. Consider the continuum of adult engagement in child's play. Plan how to use the CT ELDS as a tool for differentiation.

Title: **Launching Play-Based Learning with Success**

Presenters: Kate Lund, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum & Instruction; Kristine Garofalo, Principal of Nayaug Elementary School; Brenda Gregorski, Director of Mathematics

Intended Audience: PK Leadership, School based Leadership, Central Office Leadership

Trace a replicable launch timeline from Glastonbury Public Schools' phased implementation from early research to district-wide rollout. Identify successful components of a successful launch, including model development, educator supports, consultant partnerships, and curriculum alignment. Anticipate common barriers and access practical strategies for building staff investment, addressing skepticism, and ensuring fidelity of implementation. Begin drafting a launch plan that incorporates best practices and contextual considerations for their own district or school.

Title: **Multi-lingual learners: The benefits of play-based learning**

Presenter: EA Aschenbrenner, Project Co-Director Executive Function and Play Based Learning

Intended Audience: K, 1, 2, School based Leadership, Central Office Leadership

How does play-based learning support academic outcomes/content standards and SEL with MLLs? . Learn play-based strategies to use in classrooms.

Title: **Play with a Purpose: Balancing Standards, DAP and Joyful Learning in Kindergarten**

Presenter: Irene Garneau, M.A., Supervisor Early Childhood West Hartford Public Schools

Intended Audience: PK,K,1

As school and district leaders, you can successfully weave authentic, meaningful, and playful learning experiences into the daily lives of kindergartners by empowering teachers and creating a supportive environment. The goal is to move beyond seeing play as a break from learning and instead, recognize it as the primary vehicle for it. Participants will explore DAP in kindergarten, purposeful play experiences aligned with academic standards and hear about how one district is making it happen!

Title: **Building Community at Circle Time: Practices, Routines, Supports and Songs that Promote Engaging Large Group Learning Experiences**

Presenter: Janine Chapdelaine, CREC Magnet Schools

Intended Audience: PK,K

Design predictable and inclusive Circle Time routines that foster consistency, connection, and community. • Identify and implement songs, chants, and movement activities that promote active participation, language development, and social-emotional learning. • Utilize visual supports (e.g., visual schedules) to enhance comprehension, increase engagement, and support diverse learners, including children with developmental delays or English language learners. • Apply strategies for scaffolding participation in Circle Time for children with varying levels of communication and self-regulation skills. • Reflect on current Circle Time practices and create an action plan to implement new routines, supports, or songs that build more inclusive and engaging group learning experiences.

Title: **Content Comes Alive: Architecting Purposeful Play Across the Curriculum**

Presenter: Irene E. Parisi, M.Ed, Chief Academic Officer, Connecticut State Department of Education

Intended Audience: PK, K, 1, 2, PK Leadership, School based Leadership, Central Office Leadership, Content areas specialists (e.g. Arts, Physical Education, Core subjects)

Participants will engage in conversation on key themes of: Play as Content Vehicle, The DNA of Disciplinary (content-based) Play, From Standards to Stories, and The Chemistry of Content Integration.

Title: **Meeting Accreditation Standards Through Play and Joyful Learning**

Presenter: Natasha K. Robinson. CREC Resource Group

Intended Audience: PK,K

Understand the key principles of NAEYC's position on play-based learning. Identify strategies for supporting mature play that align with developmentally appropriate practice. Explore ways to balance

child-directed play with teacher-guided learning opportunities. Reflect on how play supports equity, inclusion, and meaningful learning outcomes for all children.

Title: Play, Protective Factors and Understanding What Happened to You: How intentional learning opportunities can support wellness

Presenters: Paige M. Bray, Ed.D, Director of Montessori Studies University of Hartford & Mimi Donegan, LSW

Intended Audience: Preschool-Age 8

In this interactive session you will hear the psychological and educational benefits of play that provide individual children, families and systems guidance on play as a direct link to protective factors. In the last 5 years our understanding of human interactions and experiences in systems such as social learning environments and schools have us asking, "What happened to us?" as humans across each generation. In the past several decades we have also seen an increasing awareness of the need for social emotional learning and mental health support. This coupled with critical information on brain development, the impacts of toxic stress and systemic inequities challenge our wellness. You will leave this session with facts, information and an action plan for using play towards wellness in your work and life.

Title: Play and Purpose - Global Montessori Perspective on Rights of the Child

Presenters: Paige M. Bray, Ed.D, Director of Montessori Studies University of Hartford & Courtney A. Reim, Ed.D., Managing Director at the Montessori Training Center Northeast

Intended Audience: Preschool-Age 8

Join us in a dynamic presentation exploring play that supports human development from global and cross-cultural perspectives. Human complexities allow for many entry points to play and a diversity of environments that support it. The positive outcomes of play for children- curiosity, nurturing relationships, creativity, critical thinking, self regulation, problem-solving and belonging- are also desirable traits in adults. In hopes we each can be advocates of the rights of children and facilitators of opportunities for every child, we share teacher professional development practices that support and encourage critical curiosity in the classroom. You will have ample time to workshop application of this information for the children and adults in your setting.

Title: Based in Play: How Children Learn Best (Film)

Presenter: Judy Cuthbertson, Seedlings Educators Collaborative

Intended Audience: PK, K, 1, 2, PK Leadership, School based Leadership, Central Office Leadership

Educators will walk away with an understanding of what play-based learning looks like at different developmental stages-preschool, grade one, three and five. The film will depict exemplary schools

across the state of Connecticut demonstrating how play, place and inquiry engages children and teachers in joyful learning.

Title: **The Intersection of Psychology and Play**

Presenter: Wendi Rodriguez, School Psychologist Wallingford Public Schools

Intended Audience: PK

Understanding the role of play in assessment. Understanding how play can be used to support the social emotional learning of young children.

Title: **Small Provocations, Big Math**

Presenters: Holly Duffy and Brenda Dzwil, Instructional Coaches Newington Public Schools

Intended Audience: K, 1, 2, School based Leadership, Central Office Leadership

Participants will gain an understanding of how play provocations in math can foster a deep understanding of key concepts while fostering a positive math identity. Participants will engage in a variety of provocations related to K-2 math standards.

Title: **What Would You Say?: Every Word Counts**

Presenter: Meaghan Hartmann, MS, CCC-SLP, LBA, BCBA

Intended Audience: PK

Discover practical, classroom-ready strategies to turn everyday moments into language-building opportunities for all children. Learn how to foster communication, vocabulary, and early literacy through simple interactions, play, and routines—while intentionally supporting diversity in language exposure, culture, and abilities—so that every word—and every minute—counts for every learner.

Title: **Developing Executive Functioning Skills Through Play-Based Learning: Practical Strategies for Educators**

Presenters: Brewster Kindergarten Teachers, Region 13

Intended Audience: Pk, K, 1

Learn practical classroom strategies that develop essential executive functioning skills—such as working memory, self-control, planning, and cognitive flexibility—through the power of play! This hands-on workshop provides practical, research-based techniques to integrate play-based learning into everyday routines.

Title: Provocations and Invitations that Lead to Learning

Presenters: Colleen Fitzpatrick, Chief Academic Officer and Stephanie Albino, Kindergarten Teacher, Middletown Public Schools

Intended Audience: K,1, School Based Leadership, Central Office Leadership

Gain an understanding of how key literacy standards can be developed, reinforced, applied and enhanced through intentional and purposeful play scenarios.