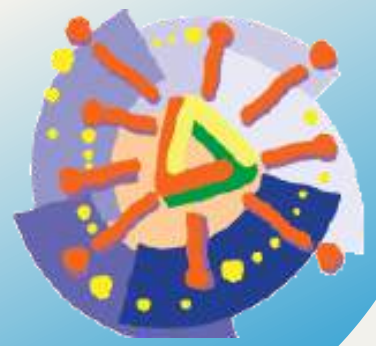


Wisconsin's 4K Connections Newsletter

May 2024



Welcome to the Spring 2024 Edition of Wisconsin's 4K Connections! As the school year winds down and summer approaches, we hope you'll take some time to relax and enjoy these last few weeks with your students.

Wisconsin's 4K Connections, a quarterly newsletter from the Wisconsin Early Childhood Collaborating Partners (WECCP), is here to support you throughout the year. Our goal is to provide you with relevant information and resources on 4K and the 4K community approach.

In this Spring edition, you'll find:

- End of the School Year Reflections from the Department of Public Instruction (DPI)
- Promising Practices Supporting Early Childhood Transitions in Wisconsin
- Fostering Access through Observation and Documentation
- WMELS Connections: Documentation: Sharing the Power of Play
- Benefits of Adult Play

WECCP MISSION

All children will be healthy, nurtured, safe, and successful.

WECCP Vision

Wisconsin communities, agencies, associations, and state government will work together as a system of high-quality, comprehensive early childhood services for all children and families.

We hope you find this edition informative and inspiring. As always, please don't hesitate to reach out to WECCP with any questions or feedback.



Wisconsin Early Childhood
Collaborating Partners



End of School Year-Reflections

As we begin to close out the 2023-2024 school year, it is a perfect time to reflect upon the year and how you embedded the use of [Developmentally Appropriate Practices](#) (DAP), specifically, play as an instructional strategy throughout the school year. Why is this reflection important? Because the research is clear, DAP and the use of play as a venue for learning result in positive outcomes for children and adults (for both social and emotional and academic outcomes). Taking time to reflect upon it now, will provide ideas to expand the use of DAP in the next school year.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) defines “developmentally appropriate practice” as “methods that promote each child’s optimal development and learning through a strengths-based, play-based approach to joyful, engaged learning” ([Defining DAP](#)). This definition aligns with DPI’s view about the best way to support early learners and is reflected in Dr. Jill Underly’s [opening remarks](#) during the DAP Statewide Summit (2021).

Yet, what does that mean for intentional planning, meeting early learning standards, and supporting all areas of development for young children? How do you know if implementation of DAP and play are resulting in positive outcomes? The resources below are provided to help you answer these (and other questions). They capture the complexity of play, the importance of intentional planning, characteristics associated with playful learning, and examples of activities that promote learning and alignment with various system requirements.



- [Project Zero-Pedagogy of Play](#)
 - Under the **For Educators** tab (found in the middle of the page) you will find specific tools and resources that support a pedagogy of play. Includes short articles, a playful learning planner, a [Playful Participatory Resource Guide](#) and other tools.
 - Under the **For Teacher Educators** tab (found in the middle of the page) you will find materials to introduce pre-service teachers to playful learning. Materials can also be used to advocate for play in the elementary grades and developing skills in documenting development through playful activities. Includes listings of resources and video segments for professional learning.
- [New York State Education Department \(NYSED\) Professional Development](#)
 - [NYSED Office of Early Learning Video Series](#) provides examples of purposeful, play-based instructional strategies.
 - Includes [Prekindergarten](#) and [Kindergarten](#) Video Training Guides with checklists and tipsheets for using play to support learning.
 - [NYSED Professional Learning Series](#) Video presentations related to DAP, academic rigor, culturally sustainable environments, and support learning in early childhood classrooms.

Please take some time to use the above resource to reflect upon your past year, and begin to plant the seeds for next year’s learning opportunities. Enjoy, be playful and continue learning!

Fostering Access and Participation Through Observation and Documentation

Fostering inclusive play environments where every child's unique abilities are celebrated is at the heart of our mission as early childhood educators. Through careful consideration and planning around access, participation, and support, it is possible for children of all abilities to joyfully learn social, pre-academic, physical, and emotional skills through play.

How do educators and caregivers know that children are learning through play? Within an ongoing assessment cycle is the critical element of observation, which can be used for both individual and small groups of children, and leads to an awareness of a child's skill development, interests, learning styles, and play. Through observation, adults can determine which modifications and adaptations may be needed to support all children to allow for joyful participation in play activities.

The educator's priority when observing a child is to be tuned in to the child through listening and watching closely to the child's actions, behaviors, and expressions as they play. Observation may also involve joining in children's conversations and play, which requires the adult to honor the child's play process while truly listening to and watching each child's experience.

High-quality documentation of observations in early learning classrooms is an intentional, systematic process of gathering, interpreting, and reflecting on children's learning. Documentation of observations not only assists educators in understanding and planning for a child, but it also tells an accurate story of each child's experiences and developmental progress.

"Observation alone is not enough. We have to understand the significance of what we see, hear and touch".

-John Dewey



Fostering Access and Participation Through Observation and Documentation (Continued)

There are multiple ways to document children’s learning, which may include [anecdotal notes](#), [running records](#), [play checklists](#), [photographs](#), [video recordings](#), [magic moments](#), [event samples](#), [socio-grams](#) and [learning stories](#), bulletin boards, and panels, among others.

Through observation and documentation, adults can collaboratively determine what, if any, adaptations may be necessary for individual children or groups of children to successfully participate in classroom experiences. These [adaptations](#) may include adapting the [environment](#), [materials](#), or [equipment](#), based on the child’s preferences and developmental ability.

Intentionally observing and documenting children’s ideas, thoughts, behaviors, activities, and stories leads adults to knowing and valuing each child’s abilities as an individual and within a community, allows for children’s learning to be visible to family and community members, and provides guidance for future planning, making it possible for children of all abilities to joyfully learn social, pre-academic, physical and emotional skills through play.



Resources:

- [DEC Recommended Practices](#)
 - [Making Adaptations to Meet a Variety of Needs](#)
 - [The Power of Documentation](#)
 - [A GUIDE TO... ADAPTATIONS](#)
-

Early Learning Technical Assistance Specialists are available to support teachers and teams in the use of evidence-based strategies that support high-quality inclusion, which includes assessment, observation, and documentation. Review the EL-TAI [Menu of Services](#) for all of the services that are offered. To request any of these services please complete the [Early Learning Technical Assistance Request](#).

Remember to sign up for the Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) Email List. If you are on this list you will get updates on state ECSE content and ECSE professional learning opportunities. Please share this with other colleagues. To join the ECSE email list, send an email message by putting subscribeecse@lists.dpi.wi.gov in the “To” field of the email. Send the email. You will receive a confirmation email.



Promising Practices Supporting Early Childhood Transitions in Wisconsin

In the fall of 2022, the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families (DCF) contracted with the Co-Create team of the University of Wisconsin-Madison Center for Community and Nonprofit Studies (the CommNS) on the Early Childhood Transitions Project. This project was funded by the Preschool Development Grant (PDG) and was successfully completed in December 2023. The goal of this project was to understand how communities can better support families as they go through transitions in the early years (prenatal through age 8).

Here's what they found helpful:

- **Making things easier by removing barriers:** This means offering free services or creating one-stop shops for information so families don't have to jump through hoops to get help.
- **Make seamless connections between services:** Schools, hospitals, and clinics can team up to create programs that help families navigate transitions.
- **Meet the health and learning needs of the child:** Help families understand what services are available to the unique needs of the child and family and how to get them.
- **Make programs and services linguistically and culturally responsive:** Every family's needs are different. Support should address those specific needs, whether it's extra help for a child with a disability or someone who speaks another language.
- **Affirm families' dignity, agency, and choice:** Respecting families' choices and backgrounds is key to building trust. This includes having staff who understand different cultures and offering translation services when needed.
- **Creating a community:** Feeling connected to other families can be a big help during transitions. Programs that encourage families to meet and share experiences can make a difference.
- **Taking care of basic needs:** Sometimes families face challenges like finding food or housing. Support services that address these basic needs can make it easier to manage other transitions.

The research also showed that successful programs often have:

- **Funding:** This allows them to hire good staff and keep programs running smoothly.
- **Staffing:** Staff who are qualified, passionate about helping families, and come from diverse backgrounds are important.
- **Operations:** Using existing successful programs, having core services people can rely on, and being flexible to meet new challenges are all helpful.
- **Collaboration:** Partnering with other organizations allows everyone to share resources and better serve families.

The research is now available online! You can find it in the PDG Sandbox or at the links below:

- A short summary of the findings ([Executive Summary](#))
- Detailed reports on eight specific programs ([Eight Case Studies](#))



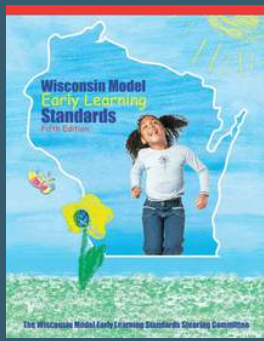
For the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families

December 2023



DCFP-ETD 01-23-0001





WMELS Connection

WMELS & Documentation: Sharing the Power of Play with Families and Communities

The Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards (WMELS) provide a foundation for high-quality early childhood education and are an excellent resource to support observations and documentation. But, how do we show families and communities that play is a powerful learning tool for 4K students? Documentation becomes the bridge, allowing us to capture the magic of play and connect it to the vital skills children develop.

WMELS: A Roadmap for Growth Through Play

The WMELS provide a clear roadmap for young children's development across five domains: health and physical, social-emotional, language and communication, approaches to learning, and cognitive and general knowledge. These domains are nurtured perfectly through play-based learning experiences.

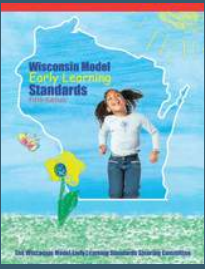
Sharing the Learning Journey

Documentation allows us to capture the learning journey of each child through play. This can involve photographs, videos, anecdotal notes, and even children's artwork inspired by play activities. By collecting and sharing these pieces with families and communities, we can:



- Showcase the "Why" Behind Play: Photos of children building block towers or sorting colors can be accompanied by captions explaining how these activities promote cognitive skills like spatial reasoning and problem-solving (WMELS domains).
- Celebrate Development: Videos of children collaborating during dramatic play can highlight the growth of communication, teamwork, and conflict resolution – all crucial social-emotional skills.
- Bridge the Gap Between Home and School: Sharing documentation with families allows them to see how everyday play experiences at home contribute to their child's learning journey.
- Build Trust and Partnerships: Sharing documentation with families creates transparency and trust between teachers and parents. Families feel more engaged in their child's education and can provide additional support based on documented learning goals.
- Advocate for Early Childhood Education: Effective documentation can be a powerful tool for advocating for the importance of early childhood education. By showcasing the depth of learning happening in classrooms, we can garner support for high-quality programming for young children.





WMELS Connection (continued)

Engaging Families and Communities:

Here are some strategies to share documentation effectively and showcase the power of play-based learning:

- Family Newsletters: Feature a "Learning Through Play" section highlighting documented play activities and their connection to the WMELS.
- Parent-Teacher Conferences: Incorporate documentation into conferences to demonstrate a child's progress in WMELS domains through play-based activities.
- Community Events: Host "Play and Learn" events where families can engage in play activities alongside their children. Document these experiences and share them on social media to showcase the learning happening during play.

Reflection Questions for Teachers:

- How can I tailor my documentation to be more accessible and engaging?
- What WMELS domains am I highlight through play-based documentation to showcase the learning happening in the classroom?
- How can I encourage families to share their own play-based learning experiences with their children at home?
- In what ways can I use documentation to advocate for the importance of play-based learning within the school community?
- How can I involve children in selecting and interpreting documentation to share with families, fostering their sense of agency and ownership over their learning?



Beyond the Standards: Building Partnerships

By sharing documentation, we build a bridge between teachers, families, and communities. We demonstrate the value of play-based learning and show how WMELS are not just standards, but a roadmap for fostering well-rounded, life-long learners. Together, we can create a vibrant learning environment where the joy of play fuels a love of learning in our young children.


Resources

- [Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards](#)
- [Documenting: Reflections on Play - 4K Virtual Connection Call Notes](#)
- [The Power of Documentation in the Early Childhood Classroom](#)
- [Making Learning Visible](#)

BENEFITS OF ADULT PLAY

Throughout the 2023/2024 school year, Wisconsin Early Childhood Collaborating Partners has focused on the importance of play in early childhood environments. Rich discussions have centered around child's play. However, as the school year comes to a close, it is equally important to reflect upon adult play. Play is the key to lifelong learning for children and adults, and this article will highlight the benefits of four areas of adult play. As you read, reflect upon the ways each area is used in your learning environments. How you can participate in and share adult learning with families, colleagues, and community members in your schools and programs?

PLAY IN ADULT LEARNING



A study conducted by the University of Colorado, [The Process of Play in Learning in Higher Education: A Phenomenological Study](#), found many benefits to play in adult learning. One of the key findings of the study is that *play cultivates relational safety and a warm classroom environment*. When people play, they have joy and often smile and laugh. The joy and emotional tone create a warm environment in which people feel safe to interact and share in learning activities and interactions, deepening the adult learning experience.

PLAY FOR SELF-CARE

Play in its most simple definition, is doing something fun. It doesn't need to be complicated. Play connects to a person's authentic self, and whether it's engaging in a game, watching a play, sharing a laugh, or doing anything that feels authentically delightful, play is self-care. It increases feel good hormones. It decreases stress. And of course, let's not forget, it's fun.



BENEFITS OF ADULT PLAY (CONTINUED)

PLAYFUL ADULT-CHILD INTRODUCTIONS

When adults play together with children, they model positive relationships filled with joy. Furthermore, children use play to explore and make sense of the world around them. When adults have playful interactions with children, they enter the child's world. Through play, adults meet children in a space of social interaction where children feel seen and connected in a way that is meaningful to them. Adult-child playful interactions model social skills of seeing people's needs and meeting people in the emotional space they are in. This skill builds empathy, understanding, and positive relationship building skills.



PLAYFUL ADULT INTERACTIONS

One of the greatest needs of all people is human connection. Play is a low stake, low risk way to participate in social interaction. It also presents opportunities to discover things people have in common strengthening a shared feeling of connection and belonging. Playful interactions between adults increase morale in workplaces. Likewise, play can enhance a feeling of welcome when adult family members participate in early care and education environments with their children.



LEARN MORE ABOUT PLAY AT

- [Learning Through Play: Foundational Research on Teacher Professional Development](#)
- [National Institute for Play](#)
- Lego Foundation's: [Teacher RePlay](#)

Spring 4K Leadership Forum: Key Takeaways & Resources Available!

The Wisconsin's 4K Leadership Forum & Networking Event, held on April 23rd, 2024, was a great success! We'd like to share some key highlights and resources.

Key Topics Discussed:

- Act 20 Updates: Get the latest information on Act 20, including key components related to 4K programs. Find highlighted areas in the meeting slide deck (link below).
- Young Star 101 for School Districts: This session clarified eligibility for Child Care Counts funding for public school programs.
- Transitions Case Study Evaluation: Learn insights from the Transitions Case Study on successful transitions.
- Kindergarten Sturdy Bridge (KSB): Explore Wisconsin's KSB Team's work on creating a seamless learning experience from entry into 4K to kindergarten. West Bend's experience with KSB's five priority areas is also included.
- State Updates: Stay informed on various state initiatives impacting 4K education, including the Wisconsin Wayfinder, shortened school day bulletin for special education, and early childhood social and emotional learning resources.

Access the Meeting Notes & Resources:

- Meeting Notes Link: [[link to meeting notes](#)]
- Slide Deck Link: [[link to slide deck](#)]

We hope this information is helpful! If you have any questions, please reach out to Tiffany Swain at swaint@CESA5.org.

TENTATIVE DATE for the Fall 4K Leadership Event- October 22, 2024

End of the Year Survey

Help us plan for next year!

Wisconsin Early Childhood Collaborating Partners wants to support your 4K and 4KCA classrooms, programs, students, and communities both large and small throughout Wisconsin.

Please take a few moments to complete the [2024-2025 4K Planning Survey](#), and share your interests and needs for the coming year.



THANK YOU!