

# PLAYFUL MINDS, BRIGHT FUTURES: Harnessing the Magic of Play in Early Education



**ctaeyc** Connecticut Association for the  
Education of Young Children  
Annual Conference



September 20-21, 2024



Mystic Marriott  
Resort & Spa



## **2 Day Conference Overview**

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### **Friday, September 20**

|                    |   |
|--------------------|---|
| 7:30 am - 8:00 am  | Registration, Welcome & Continental Breakfast |
| 7:30 am - 4:00 pm  | Vendor Exhibits & Silent Auction Open         |
| 8:00 am - 12:00 pm | <b>Leadership Morning Session: Jill Bella</b> |
| 12:00 pm - 1:00 pm | Lunch- included with registration             |
| 1:00 pm - 4:00 pm  | <b>Leadership Afternoon Breakout Sessions</b> |

### **Saturday, September 21**

|                     |   |
|---------------------|---|
| 7:30 am - 8:00 am   | Registration & Continental Breakfast      |
| 7:30 am - 4:00 pm   | Vendor Exhibits & Silent Auction Open     |
| 8:00 am - 8:30 am   | Welcome from CTAEYC & Conference Sponsors |
| 8:30 am - 10:00 am  | <b>Keynote Address by Denita Dinger</b>   |
| 10:15 am - 11:45 am | Workshops                                 |
| 12:00 pm - 1:00 pm  | Lunch & Recognition Ceremony              |
| 1:15 pm - 2:45 pm   | Workshops                                 |
| 3:00 pm - 4:30pm    | Workshops                                 |

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CTAEYC provides a forum through which individuals can gather and discuss issues vital to those who work on behalf of children and families. Although CTAEYC encourages the exchange of diverse opinions, the ideas presented do not necessarily reflect any of CTAEYC's official positions. CTAEYC assumes no responsibility for any statement of fact or opinion presented at this conference, nor does acceptance of advertising or exhibits imply endorsement of any products or services by CTAEYC.

Photographs will be taken during the conference and may appear on the CTAEYC website.

CTAEYC does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national and ethnic origin in administration of its policies, scholarships and professional development opportunities.



# Information Overview

## Registration and Fees

- NAEYC/CTAEYC members receive a \$50 discount
- On-site registration will not be available
- Registration is available online only; see rates below
- **Scholarships are available!**

### Early Bird Rates: May - July 31, 2024

| Friday     |       | Saturday   |       | Register for Both Days! |       |
|------------|-------|------------|-------|-------------------------|-------|
| Member     | \$150 | Member     | \$150 | Member                  | \$265 |
| Non-Member | \$200 | Non-Member | \$200 | Non-Member              | \$365 |

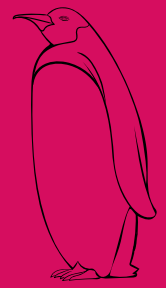
### Regular Rates: August 1 - September 8, 2024

| Friday     |       | Saturday   |       | Register for Both Days! |       |
|------------|-------|------------|-------|-------------------------|-------|
| Member     | \$200 | Member     | \$200 | Member                  | \$315 |
| Non-Member | \$250 | Non-Member | \$250 | Non-Member              | \$415 |

## Members Only Benefits

- Discounted registration
- Member Lounge
- Members only giveaways
- Members only 50th Anniversary Celebration (tickets for purchase)

Don't miss out. Join NAEYC now by clicking [here](#) and you'll not only get an immediate discount to the conference, but you'll also be eligible for these special member only benefits! Be sure to choose CTAEYC as your affiliate.



# Information Overview

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## Saturday Recognition Ceremony

CT Early Childhood Professional Recognition Ceremony will honor achievement in the field of early childhood to individuals, programs and institutions that have demonstrated their commitment to improving early childhood practice. Details forthcoming.

## Silent Auction

CTAEYC will hold its annual silent auction! Tickets will be on sale both days of the conference, with the drawings held on Saturday afternoon. Winners who are not present at the time of the drawing will be notified by CTAEYC and can pick up their item(s) at the CTAEYC office in Meriden within 30 days. Auction items include gift certificates, themed baskets, and small electronics... with a few surprises.

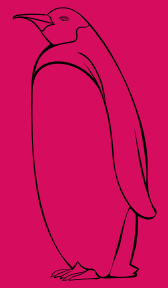
## Conference Registration

Conference registration will begin in May at <https://www.ctaeyc.org/conferences>

## Vendors and Sponsors

Vendors and sponsorship information can be accessed at <https://www.ctaeyc.org/conferences>

Connecticut Association for the Education of Young Children  
**Annual Conference 2024**



*50th Anniversary Celebration*

Join us for food and fun with fellow  
CTAIEYC members from across the state.

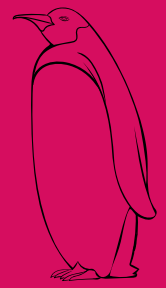
**Friday night, Sept. 20**  
**7:00-9:00p at**  
**Mystic Aquarium**

*Member Event, Tickets on sale soon*

We invite all NAEYC/CTAIEYC members to join us for this specially ticketed events at the Mystic Aquarium on Friday, September 20. Not yet a member? Be sure to purchase your membership prior to purchasing your conference registration to take advantage of not only specially discounted registration fees, but to also purchase a ticket to the 50th Anniversary Celebration.

Purchase or renew your membership at <https://www.naeyc.org/get-involved/membership/join>.

Connecticut Association for the Education of Young Children  
**Annual Conference 2024 - Sponsors**



*Thank you to our amazing Sponsors*



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*Additional sponsorship opportunities are available.  
go to the [CTAEYC Conference page](#) on our website  
for more information*

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Support for portions of this conference was made possible through funding from the Office of Early Childhood in collaboration with CSCU Lab School Investments Initiative using ARPA funds to sustain and support Early Childhood in Connecticut.



## **When Climate Change is Good:**

### **Improving the Organizational Climate in Early Care and Education Programs**

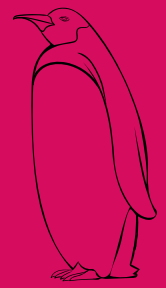
#### ***Leadership Day Keynote, presented by Dr. Jill Bella***

The headlines forecasting dire consequences from climate change are indeed ominous — rising sea levels, erratic weather patterns, and crop devastation from too little rain. Yet, in some cases climate change can be a good thing. In early care and education settings where conditions are stormy and unpredictable, improving the climate leads to job satisfaction, retention, and higher quality practices. Even in programs where the conditions are generally sunny and the work climate friendly and predictable, understanding what factors contribute to those positive conditions is important. This session looks at dimensions of organizational climate and describes how directors can use this information improve the quality of work life in early childhood programs.

- Recognize the difference between organizational culture and climate
- Identify the ten dimensions that contribute to a organization’s work climate
- Apply practical strategies for creating a great place to work
- Appreciate the unique and important role that directors play to help ensure success

Dr. Jill M. Bella, founder of Bella Mattina, provides training and consultation to local and state initiatives focused on leadership topics in early care and education. Early on Jill learned the value of appreciating every day from the start, so “bella mattina” which translates to “beautiful morning” in Italian and includes her namesake, seemed like a natural choice for her company name. She also understands the value of setting intentions each day. It is Jill’s mission to support leaders in early care and education settings so they are equipped with the tools to lead and to practice intentional leadership in early care and education.





**Inclusive Leadership and the Power of Shared Decision Making Improving the Organizational Climate in Early Care and Education Programs**  
*Presented by Dr. Jill Bella*

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***Afternoon Breakout; 1:00pm-4:00pm***

Facilitating shared decision-making among staff is dependent on having an inclusive leadership mindset. This session explores the role of the leader in sharing power, creating an environment that encourages shared decision-making, and demonstrating behaviors that facilitate the involvement of staff in making decisions. Participants will also learn about a decision-making framework and process, strategies for facilitating group dynamics, and methods for reaching consensus.

- Explore individual tendencies toward and strategies for sharing power
- Examine how an inclusive mindset influences a culture of shared decision-making
- List the components of the decision-making framework
- Explain how to determine who should be involved in making a decision
- Differentiate methods of decision-making
- Identify a method for reaching consensus

**Rethinking the Discipline Policy: Changing YOUR Behavior**  
*Presented by Denita Dinger*

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***Afternoon Breakout; 1:00pm-4:00pm***

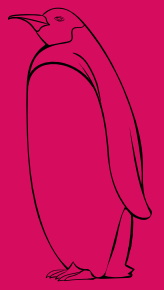
In this powerful session we will explore how creating a respectful environment can have a profound effect on the need for a discipline policy.

When adults change their own behavior, and put these simple concepts at the forefront:

- fostering,
- empowering,
- giving,
- modeling and
- meeting,

they will find their discipline policy becomes unnecessary. Thought-provoking and loaded with personal experiences, this session will inspire you to rethink your discipline policy and change your own behavior.





## **How to Create a Culture of Playful Learning**

***Presented by Dr. Peg Oliveira, Diane Gozemba, Karen Gray***

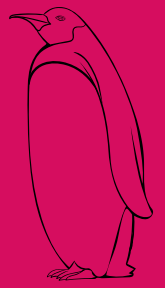
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### ***Afternoon Breakout: 1:00pm-4:00pm***

Participants will understand that play is an essential tool for learning. We will briefly review the research that supports play based learning and we will investigate what a playful learning experience looks like when it is succeeding in a classroom. We will explore the merits of a playful learning environment when it engages children, families, teachers and communities.

Intentions:

- Why do we need a pedagogy of play?
- Understanding the fundamentals of play
- Promoting Play internally and externally, educators and families



# Conference Agenda

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|                    |   |
|--------------------|---|
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| 12:00 am - 1:00 pm | Lunch                                     |
| 12:45 pm - 4:30 pm | Workshops                                 |

***\*\*Spanish translation will be provided for the Keynote Session as well as selected workshops as noted in the workshop descriptions***

## Workshop Information

I/T = Infant/Toddler

P = Preschool

K = Kindergarten/School age

FCC = Family Child Care

L&A = Leadership & Administration



## Meet Our Keynote

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### ***Denita Dinger***

Denita Dinger passionately empowers adults to listen to the children, and make changes to their practice that will, in turn, profoundly impact each child with "I can" confidence and empowerment. Since 2009, Denita's message has traveled the globe through presentations based on what children have taught her throughout her 24 years of working with children. (Sixteen of those years as a family child-care provider with an emphasis on preschool, and 8 years operating a child-led school for children ages 3-10 and a summer camp for children ages 7-15) Through all of her work with children, Denita believes in providing a truly open-ended, emotionally healthy environment that is ready to embrace THEIR ideas. She believes in fostering relationships, meeting needs, empowering autonomy and giving ownership to the children. The results have fueled her fire to empower others to do the same.



**Denita's presentations are heartfelt, humorous, relatable, valuable and most important, REAL.** She doesn't just toss out theory -- she is all about practice. She also understands when people struggle with listening to children and seeing the learning power of child-led play.

That struggle is something Denita knows well. Her practice with children used to be the complete opposite of what it is now. She caved to the pressures from parents and operated a rigid, heavily scheduled and adult-influenced program where the ideas of children were not respected. She knows, first-hand, how hard, but rewarding, the journey is from a teacher-controlled philosophy to a child-centered, child-led one.



# Empowering Children with TRUE Readiness

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*Keynote Session, presented by Denita Dinger*

In this eye-opening and IMPORTANT presentation, participants will clearly see the errors in the current “Kindergarten Readiness” mindset. The skills that hold the most value for children are not the skills most kindergarten assessment tools measure. Sadly, in the rush to force children to gain the skills erroneously needed to “check the boxes”, adults remove authentic opportunities that truly get bodies and brains “ready”.

This keynote has it all: the personal stories, the erroneous expectations, the data, the inspiring advocacy and most importantly: **WHAT WE CAN DO!!** Along with the descriptions of “TRUE readiness” are tips as to what adults need to **STOP** doing in order for those vital skills to develop.

All will leave empowered to stand up and be the voice children need them to be.



# Morning Sessions 10:15-11:45



## **S1: Maximizing Your Power of Influence**

Peggy Hoime P, K, FCC

A person who invests in the lives of children have the most powerful job on this planet. we will explore how you can increase the greatest power you have, the power of influence, to create durable change, touching the heart of a child and creating an environment where every child thrives.

## **S2: Filling Our Playbox: Collaborating on Play-Based Learning for Early Childhood Classrooms**

Peg Olivera P, K

In this workshop we consider a spectrum of play and the importance of free play as well as guided play in achieving explicit learning goals. Participants will leave with a “playbox” of ways to utilize play-based learning to meet ELDS.

## **S3: Aligning Play and Developmentally Appropriate Practice for an Inclusive ECE Experience**

Mary Stone, Jean Barresi, Sheri Lambert I/T, P, K, FCC, L&A

Equity, play, and Developmentally Appropriate Practices (DAP) are important concepts that support early childhood educators in creating learning environments that celebrate diversity, foster inclusion, and support the unique needs and potentials of every child. This approach promotes equitable access to high-quality education..

## **S4: The Value of Playful Process Art in Early Childhood Education**

Paula Gooslin, Sara Castle, Ali Zanardi, Traci Protz FCC, I/T, P, K

This workshop explores into the significance of incorporating playful process art into early childhood education, in line with NAEYC Early Learning Program Accreditation Standards 2 and 3. Attendees will uncover the advantages of process art for fostering young children's cognitive, social-emotional, and creative growth. (\*\*Spanish translation provided)

## **S5: Challenging Behaviors and Social Emotional Learning**

Monica Henry-Seifert, Monica Franzone FCC, I/T, P. K. L&A

Challenging behaviors and Social Emotional Intelligence for all children. We will share strategies to address challenges. (\*\*Spanish translation provided)

## **S6: The Golden Age of Play**

Jeanine Fitzgerald FCC, P, L&A

"When you waste your schoolboy days in indolence and play - in all probability you will not be successful in any business you engage in, and you will live and die in poverty and obscurity." Not much has changed in our thoughts since 1939 when this statement was first shared by John S.C. Abbott. This session will examine what we have learned since that time and verify why play is authentic and organic and a compelling force in the lives of our children. It is the activity that truly unifies the mind, body and spirit.

# Morning Sessions 10:15-11:45



## **S7: Data Collection in Play-Based Learning**

Meghan Perazella, Molly Yordon **FCC, I/T, P, K, L&A**

This learning will explore innovative strategies for integrating effective data collection into play-based learning environments. Participants will review the pivotal role data collection plays in maximizing developmental progress, master practical, easy-to-implement data collection methods, and gain experience using data to inform future instruction.

## **S8: Cultivating Connections: Nurturing Positive Relationships with Children**

Justina Balzar, Kelsey Ettinger **FCC, I/T, P, K, L&A**

In this workshop, participants will learn rapport-building strategies by creating a warm, welcoming, and collaborative environment that fosters trust, communication, and emotional regulation.

## **S9: "The Missed Needs in "Miss"behaviors"**

Denita Dinger **FCC, P, K, I/T, L&A**

Children communicate their needs in many ways. One such way is through their behavior. The problem is, society has erroneously categorized MANY behaviors children display as "BAD" or "NOT APPROPRIATE" when truly, there is no harm in them what-so-ever. When "misbehaviors" happen, adults tend to look at the child and wonder what is wrong with THEM, instead of looking at what YOU, the adult, MISSED: What needs did you miss? What did you miss when setting the environment? What did you miss when setting your expectations? How can you better meet the needs of this child? You will leave this presentation with the ability to see the core needs shining through children's behaviors, inspired to look at those behaviors in a totally different way as well as filled with inexpensive, simple ideas to set the environment in a way that meets the unique needs of children. (\*\*Spanish translation provided)



## **S10: Delivering Difficult Messages: Collaborative conversations with families when there are developmental concerns**

Niki Dial **FCC, P, K**

Early Childhood Education can't be sunshine and rainbows ALL of the time. Every so often you get a little storm cloud that pops up. The tricky part is when it looms over you as you mull over how to break this news to parents. Bad news stinks, but passing along the bad news to parents doesn't have to. Open communication is the vital key to a sound parent-teacher relationship and always bridges the gap between home and school. (\*\*Spanish translation provided)

## **S11: Block Play in the Early Childhood Environment**

Meaghan Fullerton **FCC, P, K**

This presentation empowers teachers to take back their blocks; to become experts at block play, efficiently manage their block play areas and use blocks as a real learning tool. (\*\*Spanish translation provided)

## **S12: Using Sound Business Practices to Improve Quality**

Linda Fecteau **FCC, L&A**

Participants will use the Business Administration Scale to assess their business needs. From there, we will work in small groups to create sound, usable action plans. These will help providers as they explore the accreditation process or just want to elevate their business skills. (\*\*Spanish translation provided)

## **S:13 Let's Play! Engaging Parents in Play at Home**

Mary Oster, Carol Carrozelli **FCC, I/T, P, K**

Let's Play! Engaging Parents in Play at Home

This informative, hands-on session will support educators in communicating to families the importance of play in child development and how they can support play at home. Participants will leave with resources and a plan of implementation for their program.

## **S14: Science through Play: Facilitating Inquiry During Play Experiences**

Sabrina Silverstein **FCC, I/T, P, K**

Come play and think about how science is present in our daily lives, at home and at school! Review tools to facilitate intentional inquiry and learn strategies to create caring and equitable learning communities through science and play.



## **S15: Can't We All Just Get Along?**

Tracy Cheney **FCC, I/T, P, L&A**

Participants will explore how temperament and personality play significant roles in interactions and relationships in the workplace, as well as personally by using the True Colors Personality Test. By better understanding not only others, but ourselves, conflict will begin to decrease.

## **S16: Ethical Dilemmas: Finding solutions in the Code of Ethical Conduct and Statement of Commitment**

Katharine Griffin **I/T, P, L&A**

The world of early childhood education can include challenging scenarios and conversations! In this session, participants will deepen their understanding of problem solving strategies aligned with the NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct and will apply these strategies through case scenarios.

## **S17: Weaving Math throughout the Preschool Day: Leveraging Center Time, Daily Routines, and Transitions**

Ilyse Wells **FCC, P**

Wondering how to intentionally integrate more math into your preschool curriculum? Participants will learn how to incorporate math concepts such as counting, sorting, patterning and graphing throughout their student's day using small group games, daily routines, songs, and more!





## **S18: Letting GO: Trusting the process of Outdoor Nature Play**

Diane Swanson **FCC, I/T, P, K, L&A**

When children have opportunities to authentically play in nature, they meet learning goals in a socially and emotionally healthy way. This workshop will introduce participants to the important benefits of child led, outdoor, nature play. Leave with ideas on how to bring nature-play into your classroom and your classroom into nature. (\*\*Spanish translation provided)

## **S19: Help! The Characters Escaped!**

Samantha Endres **FCC, P, K**

What would happen if the children jumped into a book and became one of the characters? Would they follow the same storyline or change the plot? What would happen if the characters escaped the book? Where would they go and what would they do?

## **S20: Let Go...and EMPOWER Children**

Denita Dinger **FCC, I/T, P, K, L&A**

This powerful workshop explores the fact that adults do way too much for children. Over-planned environments, adult-expectations that remove the open-ended potential from materials, preventing conflict and not allowing children the freedom to think of THEIR OWN ideas are just a few examples of what adults absolutely must let go. Participants will leave with a CLEAR understanding of not only the things they do that have removed valuable learning from children, but also exactly what that valuable learning is, and why it's so important. You will be inspired to LET GO.. AND EMPOWER CHILDREN. Participants will realize that, no matter how well-intentioned, what they are currently doing "for children" is actually stripping away valuable learning opportunities.

## **S21: Engaging Families: Building Strong Foundations**

Grace Halpern, Jola Borto **FCC, I/T, P, K, L&A**

Join ECCP® /ABH for the "Engaging Families: Building Strong Foundations" training which will support early childhood educators who are looking to strengthen their Family Engagement, build DEIA considerations into their engagement of families and consider reflective practices to grow supportive relationships. (\*\*Spanish translation provided)



## **S23: Compliant or Engaged?**

Jona Shook I/T, P, K, L&A

As adults we respond to our body's sensations. In the classroom, we prompt "quiet hands" and provide physical support to "teach" sitting. Are we teaching compliance or encouraging engagement? Together we will explore trauma informed and neuro-affirming practices in education.

## **S24: Unleashing the Power of Play and Picture Books in Early Childhood Education**

Francia Wisnewski, Maria Roxanna Amado FCC, I/T, P, K

When children have opportunities to authentically play in nature, they meet learning goals in a socially and emotionally healthy way. This workshop will introduce participants to the important benefits of child led, outdoor, nature play. Leave with ideas on how to bring nature-play into your classroom and your classroom into nature. (\*\*Spanish translation provided)

## **S25: Supporting Neurodivergent Children in the Preschool Classroom and Beyond**

Allison Ward, Heather Dinowitz P, K

Supporting neurodivergent children in the preschool classroom is crucial for their growth and development. By implementing inclusive practices and fostering a supportive environment, educators can make a significant impact on the lives of these children. This presentation aims to equip preschool educators with the knowledge and tools necessary to create a welcoming and inclusive space for all children, regardless of their neurological differences.

## **S26: Stories Matter! They Help with Coping and Healing**

Lisa Bond FCC, I/T, P, K L&A

Individual and family stories are important. These stories play a vital role for coping and healing for both children and adults. Come learn more about this timely topic.

## **S27: Help Kids Heal: The 4 Key Ingredients That Are Vital for Classroom Environments**

Anthony Toombs, Alicia Barnatchez FCC, I/T, P, K L&A

Help Kids Heal: This inspiring, interactive workshop helps individuals discover the power of optimism and how to use it to create safe, joyful, engaging environments where kids can heal, learn, and grow to their greatest potential.