

## What are NAEYC study guides?

Study guides provide a glimpse of the content within NAEYC books by providing questions designed to guide discussions on different early childhood topics. Reflection questions included below are pulled directly from the book. Explore the concepts below and purchase *Serious Fun: How Guided Play Extends Children's Learning* today to continue the conversation.

## How do I use the study guides?

### CENTER DIRECTORS

Use study guides as a companion piece to your copy of *Serious Fun*, and include as a professional learning component to your staff meetings.

### TRAINERS

Use the reflection questions as training prompts to design your own workshops based on the content of *Serious Fun*.

### TEACHER EDUCATORS

Incorporate book content in your curriculum to enhance discussions and learning activities for teachers.

## CHAPTER 1

### Brain Science and Guided Play

#### Pre-chapter questions

Consider the definition of guided play presented, and think about why this strategy can be such a powerful learning tool. What is your reaction to the authors' ideas? How does guided play seem to enhance children's enjoyment of play and what they are learning as they experiment with materials and interact with others? Might it potentially interfere with children's agency? If so, what are some ways to more seamlessly balance free play and guided play?

#### Try This!

Consider how you can introduce new vocabulary words that are relevant to the context of the children's play. For example, if children are pretending to move chickens to the barn, explain that a henhouse is called a coop. Solicit their ideas about the similarities and differences between a coop and a barn.

Add specific information to what children say. For example, when a child says, "It's a barn," you can respond, "Yes, a barn is a building where animals live. The farmer stores food in the loft." While looking at a bird feeder together, you might say, "That red bird is a cardinal. It pokes its beak into the seeds."

As children act out their dramatic play scenes, notice how they use props and what they say. What skills are emerging? What additional props could you add to help them try out new skills or refine their play strategies?

Provide open-ended props (e.g., boxes, sponges, gloves, containers, tubes) and items that add complexity to play themes (e.g., clipboards for menus, play money for a store). As children begin to build and play, ask what props they need for their castle, boat, store, or house. They will surprise you with their insights and ideas

## CHAPTER 2

### Guiding: How an Intentional Teacher Meets Standards Through Play

#### Pre-chapter questions

As you read, consider your own thoughts and perhaps reservations about a more child-centered approach to teaching. Does the information shared by the author reaffirm your belief in and commitment to developmentally appropriate practice? What can you learn about achieving a balance of child-directed and teacher-guided learning in your program?

#### Try This!

As you prepare materials for children to explore and observe how children respond to them, ask yourself the following questions:

What specific purpose does each material serve?

What do you see children doing, talking about, comparing, and trying out? What does this tell you about what they might be thinking?

What opportunities do you see to add complexity, introduce vocabulary, or prompt higher-level thinking?

Think about ways to reinforce connections between the purpose of materials and activities, what children know and can do, active engagement, and age-appropriate assessment tools.

Notice how children respond to your gentle prompting and guiding. How do you see their engagement with materials and play partners change as you offer suggestions and guidance?

## CHAPTER 3

**Supporting Language Through Culturally Rich Dramatic Play****Pre-chapter questions**

What rich language practices and connections does this chapter suggest to you for the children in your own program? Use what you know and learn about their cultures and experiences to provide culturally relevant dramatic play opportunities. What growth in children's language, socialization, initiative taking, and problem solving might you see as a result?

**Try This!**

Listen to children's everyday talk to learn about the places they visit, the activities they enjoy, and the people who are part of their daily life adventures. In response, make a list of themes, current vocabulary words, and additional vocabulary that expands on children's experiences, knowledge, and ideas.

Explore your dramatic play area. Does it reflect all children's cultural backgrounds and abilities? Are objects labeled in their home languages and in English? Are basic props unusual, interesting, or engaging? Are materials labeled and organized for ease of use? What signs could be added to highlight the play theme (e.g., bakery, market, fire station, street sign)?

Create a Phase 1, 2, and 3 chart for your dramatic play area as the authors suggest. Follow the sequence to add initial props, enhanced materials in response to your systematic observation, and props added deliberately to promote interest and imagination.

## CHAPTER 4

**Connecting Art, Literacy, and Drama Through Storytelling****Pre-chapter questions**

Many times, playful learning occurs as children take off with an idea or concept you introduce and make it their own, leading to delightful, surprising discoveries and connections. As you read how exploration of a piece of fine art sparked the children's imaginations and creativity and led to their growth across many domains, think about the ways storytelling and acting encourage problem solving and critical thinking. While you may not always foresee the paths children's explorations will take, how can you respond as their ideas and actions unfold, and then embed learning in the experiences that result?

**Try This!**

Select an object of art, such as a drawing, painting, sculpture, collage, or mobile. Ask children, "What do you see?" Record their answers.

When children draw or paint, consider asking them to express a story, idea, or experience that connects to their creation. Video-record and transcribe the children's stories.

Provide time, space, and props for children to act out their stories. Ask children to describe what happened in the beginning, in the middle, and at the end of their stories.

Encourage responses to child-created artwork and stories by asking the other children, "What do you see?" "What do you feel?" or "What do you want to know more about?"

## CHAPTER 5

**Playful Math Instruction and Standards****Pre-chapter questions**

In the situations described in this chapter, children eagerly engage in sorting shoes, playing card and board games, and creating shapes with rope and then determining the number of sides and angles—perhaps even without being aware that they're learning math concepts and skills. But the teachers have intentionally planned these activities to help children achieve not only math standards but also social skills in enjoyable, developmentally appropriate ways that provide for individualization. How does this chapter expand or challenge your idea of play and what playful instruction can look like?

**Try This!**

Plan a playful activity to extend children's understanding about early mathematics concepts (e.g., categorization, counting, cardinality, shape concepts). How will the activity support the learning goal? How will you adjust the demands of the task to be appropriate for different skill levels? How will you determine whether the activity was effective?

Make materials that lend themselves to math activities (e.g., card and board games, sorting activities) easily available to children. Observe what they do with them and try out strategies for encouraging engagement with the materials that will support math learning.

Give children a math activity to do in pairs (e.g., sorting materials, playing a card game, finding all the rectangles in the classroom). Observe children's social behaviors (e.g., negotiating the task, taking turns, winning or losing gracefully) and consider ways you can promote their social skills in the context of other math activities.

Observe children during free play and find ways to encourage math learning, such as asking them how many times they can bounce the ball when they are outside, which train is the longest, or how many more blocks one tower has than another one.

## CHAPTER 6

**Fostering Positive Experiences in the Math Center for African American Boys****Pre-chapter questions**

Young African American boys are often left behind in mathematics, an essential content area for future school success and careers. Fostering positive math outcomes for them, and for every child, requires self-reflection on your part. Do you hold high expectations for all the children you work with? How well do you understand the children's cultural contexts? What mathematical concepts and skills might individual children be ready to learn next? The goal is to make math activities, including those that invite independent exploration in the math center, a magnet for learners so that math is approachable and enjoyable yet sufficiently challenging. Keeping the idea of playful learning in mind, what materials and activities will be appealing to the children you work with and engage them in higher-order thinking and problem-solving experiences—and set them on a positive course for the future?

**Try This!**

Make a list of resources suggested in the chapter that promote engagement with mathematical concepts (e.g., tangrams, peg sorts, number cubes, design cards, jigsaw puzzles, puzzle boards, color tiles, counting cars and bears, materials for design copying and building, and board and card games). Choose three and jot down what children can learn as they manipulate the materials and play. How might you support and extend their learning?

Refresh your mathematics materials. Organize your setting with ample table space. Redesign the storage area for easy access with containers that are labeled and have photos of contents. What activities, games, and resources can you add? Think about whether children would benefit more from an introduction to new additions or from simply exploring materials on their own at first.

Use math talk to solve simple daily problems throughout the day. For example, "Some plates are missing muffins. How many more do we need?" or "How far do you think you are throwing the ball? I wonder how we could measure the distance."

**CHAPTER 7****What Can You Do with Bamboo?  
Preschoolers Explore a Nature Material****Pre-chapter questions**

The addition of an unusual material to this school’s playground inspired children to play in many different ways over the course of the school year. Notice how many transformations their play underwent and the different directions it took. How did the teachers facilitate this? In what other ways might learning have been scaffolded and deepened through teacher guidance? What new materials can you introduce to jumpstart rich learning through play? Think about ways you can build on children’s interests and enthusiasm to extend their learning into other areas of the curriculum.

**Try This!**

Prepare ample open-ended materials for children to explore and use in their play (e.g., cartons, empty plastic bottles, cardboard tubes, natural materials, unusual tools and containers, loose parts for tinkering and construction, and interesting collections). Invite families to contribute materials. Notice how children use the materials. What suggestions can you make to prompt additional ideas and help children look at things in a new way?

Ask children what materials they might need for the activities they’re engaging in. As they play, occasionally ask, “What else do you need?” Modify and add materials to extend children’s ideas and interest over time.

Evaluate the level of challenge present in children’s current play, and encourage more complex play. For example, add tools, provide a digital camera, and introduce books and photographs to reflect a topic or theme. What questions can you ask to prompt more complex experimentation with building, tinkering, or imaginative play?

What goals for scientific inquiry, mathematics, language, social and emotional development, creative expression, and physical development will be supported by materials and suggestions you provide?

**CHAPTER 8****Engaging and Enriching Play  
Is Rigorous Learning****Pre-chapter questions**

The authors of this chapter share their journey with a small group of teachers as the teachers grow to see the value of providing more time for child-directed approaches to learning. Notice how the teachers asked specific questions to draw children’s attention to new ideas. How did they encourage peer collaboration? How did they build on dual language learners’ experiences when they introduced and defined new vocabulary? Consider Ms. Hall’s decision to support the children’s interest rather than continue with her own plan. In such situations, what do you use to help you make a decision? Wherever you are in your own journey of observing, planning, and guiding in order to most effectively help all children learn, document how the children respond to different types of learning situations. How can you use this information to advocate for a more child-centered approach to teaching?

**Try This!**

I (Alexandra) responded to a child’s playdough pie by introducing the vocabulary words lattice, crust, dough, crunchy, and crusty. Think of a play scenario in which you introduced one or more vocabulary words to the players. I also made connection to my own experience baking pies with my mother. Think of a specific connection you have made to your own (or a child’s) experience when teaching new vocabulary. How does doing so enrich the experience?

Identify children’s interests by noticing books they choose, activities they describe, and topics that come up often. Introduce materials, activities, and informational books to extend and add to their knowledge. Group books by themes in the reading area. Include informational books in learning and play centers and help children use them to answer questions.

Ask thinking questions: “What can you tell me about your drawing?” or “How can you make your igloo get smaller at the top?” Questions like “How do/did you . . . ?” and “Why do you think . . . ?” encourage children to explain their thinking and ideas and form solutions to problems.