

## Prioritizing Play Conference in Urbana-Champaign, IL

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### **Prioritizing Play Conference gathers international experts in child-directed play and welcomes local settings to learn essentials of play and Playwork practice**

Urbana-Champaign, IL - Local non-profit KOOP Adventure Play has been delivering public events and summer camp programs since 2015, and are launching a new Conference with the theme of 'Prioritizing Play'. The three- day event will focus on translating best practices in creating and staffing play environments for professionals across education, librarianship and public service. This comes less than a week after the Centers for Disease Control released new guidelines for recess provision in schools, and amidst rising concerns about Illinois children's rates of obesity and poor mental health which are both significantly higher than the national average.



“We believe play is a priority for children's well-being so we are adamant about creating a reality where children get to truly indulge and experience their childhood, allowing them to play freely,

discover and explore,” says Naomi Sukenik, co-founder of KOOP. Studies conducted from within education, public health and psychology have repeatedly demonstrated that opportunities to play help students pay attention in class, reduce bullying and improve social and emotional well-being. This Conference is the first of its kind to be held in Illinois, where recess is not yet mandated at the elementary school level.

“The time children today have dedicated to self-directed play is far less than any previous generation due to increased academic pressure at early ages, cutting recess times, more screen time and more extra-curricular activities. Play must be prioritized right now for this generation suffering from a play deficit.” says Kelsey Langley, co-founder & executive director of KOOP. A Keynote address will be given by Dr. Peter Gray, best-selling author of *Free to Learn: Why Unleashing the Instinct to Play Will Make Our Children Happier, More Self-Reliant, and Better Students for Life*. His work focuses on the role of play in human evolution and how children educate themselves, through play and exploration, when they are free to do so. A second Keynote is provided by Morgan Leichter-Saxby, author of *The New Adventure Playground Movement: How Communities across the USA are Returning Risk and Freedom to Childhood*. She is also co-founder of Pop-Up Adventure Play, a not-for-profit which provides training and support to play advocates around the world.

“We’re so happy to be a part of this event,” Morgan Leichter-Saxby said. “The workshops are all about helping participants rethink assumptions about children’s abilities and improve provision.” Topics covered during the conference include: Loose parts and play environments, risk-benefit assessments, rough and tumble play, building strong relationships with parents, and advocacy work. Conference organizers are also promising a ‘hands-on’ approach. “Everyone needs more chances to play,” said Morgan. “That includes parents, professionals, and conference delegates! It’s a great way to help us reconnect with those childhood instincts, and improve the environments and opportunities we offer children today.”

The Prioritizing Play Conference will be held in the Illini Union on 3rd-5th May. Participants are particularly welcomed from early years and elementary education, as well as after-school care, parks and recreation, museums and early intervention programs. Financial aid is available.

### **Registration**

Register by following this link:

<http://www.koopadventureplayground.com/prioritizing-play-conference>

Or by emailing [suzanna@popupadventureplay.org](mailto:suzanna@popupadventureplay.org). Early bird rate is \$350 until 2/28/18 at which point full registration costs \$450 for this 3 day conference featuring world-class speakers and professionals. More information on the website link.

### **Public Screening of ‘The Land’**

Join us Friday, May 4 at 7pm as we screen ‘The Land’. This evening event is open to the public, and included in ticket price of the conference. After the short documentary, named after an adventure playground in Wales, there will be a panel discussion including conference speakers.

Childcare provided for parents interested in viewing and discussing this impressive short film. Location to be announced via KOOP Adventure Play on Facebook + website.

### **About KOOP Adventure Play**

Founded in 2015, KOOP Adventure Play is dedicated providing adventurous play to children while also creating a regional hub for play and playwork in Central Illinois. KOOP strives to cultivate a culture that values and expands on play opportunities for children and youth. Based in Urbana- Champaign, KOOP has delivered after school programs, winter, spring and summer camps as well as many free pop up adventure play events all around the cities. By partnering with schools, early childhood centers, park districts, festivals and city governments, KOOP aims to prioritize child-led play in their community and beyond. KOOP engages with children based on the playwork philosophy used in adventure playgrounds in the UK. KOOP is one of under 10 playwork- based adventure playground organizations in the United States.

### **About Pop-Up Adventure Play**

Since 2010, Pop-Up Adventure Play has worked to translate the principles and practices of Playwork for application in schools, neighborhoods, museums, parks, and anywhere else that children can be found. We believe that children have the right to play as they please, and that a place that supports children's play benefits everyone. Operating primarily in the US and UK, we provide long-distance and in-person support all around the world.

### **About 'The Land' Adventure Playground Documentary**

Filmed in 2015, this documentary short by Erin Davis follows several children as they navigate and create an adventure playground. Showing free play with hammers, saws and fire, Erin Davis's work has been called "a must-see for anyone interested in play work, or play, period" (Amy Fusselman, author of *Savage Park*) and featured in publications such as the Atlantic, the New York Times, and on NPR.

### **About Adventure Playgrounds & Playwork**

The UK-based professional approach known as Playwork grew from the post-WW2 Adventure Playground movement. These are places stocked with recycled loose parts or scrap material. Trained staff, or Playworkers, work in low-interventionist ways to help children construct and experience physical, emotional and social risks in play at their own pace. Playworkers also support children's play in other locations such as hospitals, schools, public parks, and libraries.