

Invited Speakers

2022 Special Topic Meeting, *Learning through Play and Imagination: Expanding Perspectives*. April 1-2, 2022
| St. Louis, Missouri, USA.



JaNay Brown-Wood, Children's book author

JaNay Brown-Wood, Ph.D. is an award-winning children’s author, educator, and scholar. Her book Imani’s Moon won the NAESP Children’s Book of the Year Award, is a Northern CA ACL 2014 Distinguished Book, a “NYC Reads 365” pick for 2016 and 2017, and a RIF Multicultural Book pick for 2015. Her second book Grandma’s Tiny House: A Counting Story received a starred review from Publisher’s Weekly, is a Bank Street Books Best Book of 2018, and won the CELI Read Aloud Book Award through the University of Mississippi. She has published poems in Highlights for Kids and Highlights High Five and has a poem included in Thanku: Poems of Gratitude (Lerner/Millbrook, 2019). She has at least six forthcoming books including Shhh! The Baby’s Asleep (Charlesbridge, forthcoming 2021), Where in the Garden a four-book series (Peachtree, forthcoming 2021 and 2022), and more to come! She is represented by the fabulous Karen Grencik of Red Fox Literary.

Twitter: [@janaybrownwood](https://twitter.com/janaybrownwood)

[JaNay Brown-Wood's Website](#)



Gordon Burghardt, University of Tennessee

Gordon M. Burghardt is Alumni Distinguished Service Professor in the departments of Psychology and Ecology & Evolutionary Biology at the University of Tennessee. He received his Ph.D. in Biopsychology from the University of Chicago. His research focus is on comparative studies of behavioral development and play; encompassing theoretical, historical, definitional, comparative, experimental, neuroscience, and modeling questions. He is on the editorial board of numerous journals including *Ethology*, *Journal of Comparative Psychology*, *American Journal of Play*, and the *International Journal of Play*. He is a past president of the Animal Behavior Society and the Society for Behavioral Neuroscience and Comparative Psychology (APA Div. 6) and is the latter society's 2020 recipient of the D. O. Hebb award for his scientific contributions. He has edited or co-edited 7 books, including the *APA Handbook of Comparative Psychology* (2017). He is author of *The Genesis of Animal Play: Testing the Limits* (MIT Press, 2005).

Twitter: [@gburghar](https://twitter.com/gburghar)

[Gordon Burghardt's Faculty Page](#)



Helen Davis, Harvard University

Helen Davis is a Postdoctoral Fellow in the Department of Human Evolutionary Biology at Harvard University where she codirects the Cultural Foundations of Cognition research project. Davis's work uses theoretical perspectives of behavioral ecology and cultural evolution to better understand how, when, and from whom children learn. Davis has conducted her work among populations in the Bolivian Amazon and in the Kunene region of northern Namibia and southern Angola since 2008 and 2016, respectively. She is also the co-founder and CEO of One Pencil Project, a 501(c)(3) non-profit focused on long term funding for school construction and school supplies in both regions.

[Helen Davis' Website](#) [Helen Davis' Faculty Page](#)



Jill Katka, Louisville Zoo

Jill Katka began working with primates in 1996 as a graduate student earning a Master of Science degree in Animal Behavior at Georgia Institute of Technology in conjunction with Zoo Atlanta and Yerkes Primate Center. She is currently an Assistant Mammal Curator at the Louisville Zoo where she supervises areas of the zoo which include gorillas, orangutans, siamangs, and monkeys as well as other animals such as tigers and hippos.



Anne Lund, PBS Kids

Anne E. Lund, M.S. is the Senior Director of Curriculum and Content for PBS KIDS and the CPB-PBS Ready to Learn Grant Initiative. As part of the Learning & Research Team, Lund supports the PBS KIDS Content Team, as well as the broader PBS KIDS Department to ensure integration of curriculum across media platforms (video, games, activities, etc.). As curriculum point-person, she works closely with content producers and advisors to ensure that a show's content and curriculum accurately reflect the premise and learning objectives. Lund has spent years in children's media specializing in educational curriculum development and research. Before PBS KIDS, she worked with various media and research groups including Nick, Jr. and Sesame Workshop. She also served as Director of Research and Curriculum for the Disney, Jr. show "Little Einsteins". Lund received a B.A. in Psychobiology from Swarthmore College and an M.S. in Developmental Psychology from UMass, Amherst. She has experience as an elementary school teacher and preschool director.



Francesca Mezzenzana, Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society

Francesca Mezzenzana is an anthropologist working with the Runa of the Ecuadorian Amazon. She has a PhD in anthropology from the London School of Economics and is currently the Principal Investigator of a Volkswagen Foundation Freigeist Grant, based at the Rachel Carson Centre in Munich, that explores children's understanding of the natural world in different cultural settings. Francesca is particularly interested in indigenous practices of learning, child moral socialisation and human-nonhuman relationships. Her research was awarded funding by the UK Economic and Social Research Council, the European Research Council, the Musée du quai Branly and the National Geographic Society. She is currently writing her first book based on her research on children in the Ecuadorian Amazon.

[Francesca Mezzenzana's Faculty Page](#)



Robert Mitchell, Eastern Kentucky University

Robert W. Mitchell, Ph.D., is Foundation Professor of Psychology and Animal Studies at Eastern Kentucky University, where he created the first Animal Studies undergraduate major in 2010. He has studied diverse species: dolphins, apes, monkeys, sea lions, dogs, and humans. His edited books examine deception, pretending, imagination, anthropomorphism, self-recognition, and spatial cognition in relation to animals and children. Other publications include a monograph on the history of psychological studies of great apes, as well as articles and book chapters on the psychology of animals, human-animal interaction, children's symbol use and psychological understanding, and diverse aspects of human sexuality. He serves as a managing editor for *Society & Animals* and is the editor of the University of Georgia *Animal Voices/Animal Worlds* book series.

[Robert Mitchell's Faculty Page](#)



Omowale Moses, MathTalk

Omowale Moses was born in Tanzania and is the former Executive Director and a founding member of the Young People's Project (YPP), a national non-profit organization that utilizes mathematics to prepare students to succeed in school and in life. YPP evolved out of the Algebra Project, which grew out of the Civil Rights activism of the Algebra Project's founder and MacArthur Genius Grant winner Bob Moses, Omo's father. During Omo's tenure at YPP, he raised over \$20,000,000 for programming and operations, was the Principal Investigator for the National Science Foundation grant, Games for Mathematical Understanding, and is the current Principal Investigator for the National Science Foundation grant, Activating Public Spaces for Early Math Learning. Omo grew up in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and attended the University of Pittsburgh and George Washington University, where he majored in mathematics and minored in creative writing. He received the Black Issues in Higher Education Sports-Scholar Award and the school's Creative Writing Award. Omo founded MathTalk in 2015. In 2019 he wrote and published the children's book *Sometimes We Do*. He is the father of two little ones, Johari and Kamara.

Twitter: [@mathtalkpbc](https://twitter.com/mathtalkpbc)

[Omowale Moses' Website](#)



Laura Shneidman, Pacific Lutheran University

Laura Shneidman, Ph.D., was trained as a developmental experimental psychologist at the University of Chicago. She formally held positions at CIDE and UNAM in Mexico City and is currently an Assistant Professor in the Department of Psychology at Pacific Lutheran University. Her research program focuses on language development, early social learning, and socioemotional development in environments where child-directed teaching is common (in the United States and Mexico City) as well as in places where child-structured interactions with children are less common (both in communities in the United States, and in Yucatec Maya communities in Mexico).

[Laura Shneidman's Faculty Page](#)



Bo Stjerne Thomsen, LEGO Foundation

Dr. Bo Stjerne Thomsen is the Vice-President and Chair of Learning through Play in the LEGO Foundation. The function of the Chair is to be the expert at the highest level to the executive leadership on how children and adults learn through play, and providing consultation at the bilateral, regional and multilateral levels to international partners, leaders and advocacy. He is a spokesperson representing the LEGO Foundation and the LEGO Brand Group at international fora's, and advising leadership teams across the LEGO entities, in order to attain the overall LEGO Brand Vision of Learning through Play.

Bo Stjerne spent 9 years building the research agenda and organizational expertise on children's development, play and learning, in order for the LEGO Foundation to be the leading authority on learning through play, and advising international NGO's, corporates and public partners on research implementation.

Twitter: [@BoStjerne](#)

[The LEGO Foundation's Website](#)



Meghan Talarowski, Studio Ludo

Meghan Talarowski is the founder and executive director of Studio Ludo, a non-profit dedicated to building better play through research, design, and advocacy. She has degrees in architecture and landscape architecture, over 15 years of experience in the design field, and is a certified playground safety inspector.

Her research focuses on how the design of play environments impacts physical health and social behavior, and has been presented at conferences worldwide, including the American Society for Landscape Architects, Child in the City, the International Play Association, US Play Coalition, and The Association for the Study of Play. Her current research project, the National Study of Playgrounds, is assessing play behavior in children and adults at 60 playgrounds in 10 major cities across the US.

Her work has been featured by The New York Times, The Atlantic, NPR, Medium, Next City, Landscape Architecture Magazine, and World Landscape Architecture Magazine.

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[Meghan Talarowski's Website](#)



Yalda Uhls, UCLA

Yalda T. Uhls, a former senior exec at MGM and Sony, left the movie world to study child development, earning a Ph.D. in Psychology at UCLA. Uhls expertise in how media content is created and the science of how media affect children informs her unique perspective. As a big believer in bridging research and practice, along with many years of translational work for lay audiences, Uhls recently founded [The Center for Scholars & Storytellers](#), an organization dedicated to bridging the work of child development researchers and youth content creators. Uhls is also an assistant [adjunct professor at UCLA](#) where she does [research](#) on how media affect the social behavior of tweens and teens and teaches a class on Digital Media and Human Development; she is an advisor for Common Sense Media, YouTube Kids and Family, Barbie and the Jacobs Foundations Learning and Science Exchange; and is the author of the parenting book [Media Moms & Digital Dads: A Fact not Fear Approach to Parenting in the Digital Age](#). She was honored with an SRCD award for Outstanding Doctoral Dissertation, The Mildred Madsen Award and UCLA's Dena Chertoff Service Award for her work with Psychology in Action, an organization that communicates psychological research beyond academia.

Research conducted by Dr. Uhls has been featured in [Time Magazine](#), the [NY Times](#), [USA Today](#), [NPR](#) and many others, and published in academic journals such as [Developmental Psychology](#) and [Computers in Human Behavior](#).

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[Yalda Uhls' Website](#)