
Book Reviews

Introduction to Play

Jane Waters-Davies, ed.

London, UK: SAGE, 2022. List of figures and tables, about the editor, about the authors, acknowledgments, introduction, closing remarks, references, and index.

272 pp. \$36.00, paperback.

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Introduction to Play is an edited volume that comprises the work of scholars of child development and education, edited by an associate professor of early childhood education, Jane Waters-Davies. It provides a relational, contextual, and ecological guide to study play and play's inextricable link to children's holistic development. Chapters in the book share a commitment to a socio-constructivist take on child development, amplifying the argument that there exists an ongoing interaction between the interests and curiosities of children and the responses to these interests and curiosities by adults, interests and curiosities supported by providing play opportunities for children from their early months. Additionally, Waters-Davies holds, the institutions and

structures built on these conceptions serve to reinforce or block children's access to play opportunities. Although, from the beginning, she modestly welcomes her readers by announcing the "unashamedly introductory" nature of the book, actually the breadth of the topics it covers and its synthesis of the recent literature make it stand out.

The first two parts of the book—"What is Play?" and "Why is Play Important?"—are devoted to understanding play from both developmental and rights-based perspectives and to deconstructing the relationship between adults' perception of play and the support they provide for play opportunities. The next two parts—"Where Does Play Happen?" and "International Perspectives"—focus on play in relation to the macrosystems of play through an exploration of topics such as societal perception of the natural environment, play in the contexts of emergency situations, digital contexts of play, play in early years curriculum in the United Kingdom and beyond, and social and spatial aspects of inclusion in relation to play. The most prominent policy frameworks

(Welsh government play policy, The Well-Being of Future Generations Act) and national curriculum examples (Curriculum for Excellence) that the book draws from are based in the United Kingdom, which is the national context for Waters-Davies' experience as a teacher in London, as a professor in Wales, and as a member of the advisory panel of the Welsh government. These are globally relevant examples for readers interested in the demystification of the pillars and processes that lead to sustainable play provision at a national level (in chapter 11).

Waters-Davies reintroduces several concepts throughout the book in a way that situates each concept about play in context. This also allows the reader with a specific interest to know which chapter to go to, whereas the multidisciplinary reader reading from the beginning to end will encounter a multidimensional, ecological study of such concepts. For instance, the topic of adult intervention in play, is presented in "Types of Play" (chapter 3) in the form of adult tendency to worry about and interrupt children's rough-and-tumble play based on misunderstanding this type of play's physical and social meaning and benefits.

"Play, Learning, and Development" (chapter 5) illustrates play experiences that embody learning opportunities that might be put at stake when, say, a teacher draws a line to separate painting and playing, perhaps leading to a disruption of children's play with the paint (an activity that happens as children copy their peers who are doing so).

"Play, Early Language, and Communication" (chapter 6), draws on the act of adults asking questions about children's

pretend play rather than fully engaging in children's play and discusses play within the context of its affordances for exploring peer-peer interactions and pursuing meaningful adult-child communication opportunities (its author uses transcripts from her original work on playground huts published in 2011).

Reflection points and case studies based on everyday life and community settings provide opportunities for readers to understand and visualize play cues and behaviors that allow play to be recognized before it can be understood and supported.

In this sense, I personally took a special delight in the introduction of playwork theory early in the book (chapter 1) for I believe that it skillfully sets the tone for an understanding of a child-led and intrinsically motivated activity done for its own sake. I also found the insights and work of philosophers and educators who listened to children and tuned into their needs (chapter 4), some from within the contexts and times "where children were meant to be seen and not heard" (p. 43), especially thought provoking in the context of the highly controlled and regulated environments of the risk society in which we live (chapter 14). Seeing play through the lens of a risk society reveals the extent to which the sense of danger and how to guard against it pervade the lives of adults living and working with children and makes it difficult to focus on cultivating exploration, freedom, imagination, and creativity.

It is particularly important in the aftermath of the local and global economic, ecological, and health crises that professionals from multiple disciplines

concerned with children's lives dedicate a sustained effort to understanding and recognizing play and its central place in children's holistic development and well-being. Waters-Davies provides a guidebook for those who are interested in accomplishing this ambitious goal, not only for students of play and their professors, but for everybody who intends to advocate for play.

—Bengi Süllü, *City University of New York, New York, NY*

The Handbook of Developmentally Appropriate Toys

Doris Bergen, ed.

New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2021.
Foreword, preface, introduction, about the authors. 302 pp. \$75.00 paper.
ISBN: 9781475849202

This book is the result of a well-coordinated encyclopedic effort to overview and engage with the many forms and shapes that toys take (today and in the past) and with their possible effects on child development. The work of its numerous authors is well coordinated, applying similar structures and looking through similar lenses at a vast array of playful objects that sometimes exceed what we would traditionally call “toys.” The product of this effort is a sort of “Doomsday book” of toys that with very few exceptions lists the many different objects that children can engage playfully. From this perspective, Doris Bergen's book is a true handbook, both in style and content. The writing is simple and linear,

generally devoid of obscure academic jargon and oriented toward a wide audience of teachers and educators who might want to consult the book for practical matters, rather than for scientific inquiry. The authors skillfully combine both scientific research (especially in pedagogy and developmental psychology) and their extensive lived experience as educators.

The book is structured in chapters, each focusing (with the exception of the introductory and concluding ones) on a different kind of toy, about which the authors list possible types, recall its history, discuss its appropriateness for different ages and genders, note its adaptability for children with special needs, summarize the main research trends about it, and finally provide recommendations. For this reason, more than a book to be read from the first page to the last, the *Handbook of Developmentally Appropriate Toys* is a book to keep in one's library and to consult when designing a new educational activity or when information on a particular toy is needed.

The structure of the book itself offers an interesting contribution, as the very construction of its chapters presents a sort of typology of toys. There are chapters that define sets of toys based on what they represent (replicas of kitchen objects, of workshop and crafting tools, of vehicles, of people—that is, dolls and puppets), based on the actions they allow children to do (construction blocks, riding toys, climbing toys, throwing toys, musical toys, wearable toys—i.e., dress-up clothes), or based on the actions they do themselves (flying toys, such as airplanes, kites, and drones). Other sets are defined around cultural production types (Indigenous toys), or the types