

right to play. The playwork perspective seems important to consider because adults often have their own agenda for a child's play. Children should enjoy the opportunity to play free from adulteration and to follow their own agenda.

The Cambridge Handbook of Play: Developmental and Disciplinary Perspectives is an impressive collection of works written by experts in the field. I highly recommend this book to anyone interested in the study of play.

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Let the Children Play: How More Play Will Save Our Schools and Help Children Thrive

Pasi Sahlberg and William Doyle
New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2019. Foreword, acknowledgments, appendix, notes, select bibliography, about the authors, and index. 445 pp. \$24.95 hardcover. ISBN: 9780190930967

This informative, inspiring book is coauthored by Pasi Sahlberg, a teacher and the Director General of Finland's Ministry of Education and Culture, and William Doyle, American author and television producer. When Doyle interviewed a panel of educators for a book he was writing on school improvement, one of them—Howard Gardner (known for multiple intelligences) —suggested he take a look at Finland, which led Doyle to Sahlberg's writings. During one of Sahlberg's New York trips, the two met and decided to collaborate. Sahlberg became visiting

professor at Harvard, and Doyle became Fulbright Scholar in Residence at the University of Eastern Finland and advisor to the Ministry of Education and Culture. These authors, both fathers, gained insights into the role of play (or lack of play) in their new countries, through their own work and their children's experiences. What they learned illuminates the role of play for the education and well-being of children; and their insights have important implications for U.S. educational reform.

Reflecting on his experience in America, Sahlberg noted with dismay the negative effects on play of the country's focus on standards, early academics, and testing. He shares his experience in checking out preschools for his three-year-old son. In each case, the preschool was concerned about whether his son knew his letters and numbers and was therefore ready for its academic program. Knowing that young children learn through play and unconcerned about academics for three-year-olds, he and his wife decided to keep their son at home. Sahlberg's experiences in Finland had convinced him that "the life of a child is to play... with academic concepts, math and language, science, objects, drama, books, music, the arts, nature, sports, risk, tools, imagination, experimentation, trial and failure, with guidance from adults and completely on their own" (p. 36). In the United States, Sahlberg found schools focused on testing, curricula mainly restricted to the subjects tested, and many hours, even full days, spent without recess. He calls the "death of recess" an "American tragedy" (p. 171). Even in schools with recess, many of these play periods are led by coaches who organize play, claiming children cannot be

trusted to play freely because they do not know how to play.

Sahlberg blames GERM, a term he coined to mean Global Education Reform Movement, for the demise of play in American schools. He claims international testing caused the United States, and some other nations, to panic that they are not the best and to focus on teaching to the test. Federal legislation enacted nearly twenty years ago, The No Child Left Behind Act and its successor, The Race to the Top, emphasize testing to the detriment of recess, art, music, and other subjects not being tested. Schools became more structured with less room for teacher discretion and little room for child initiative or fun. High poverty schools are among the worst affected. According to Sahlberg, England and Australia have also followed this pattern—with the adoption of national curricula and a focus on testing that results in decreased playful learning opportunities.

According to Sahlberg, Finnish education was strongly influenced by American educators and scholars who believed in teacher professionalism, cooperative learning, and learning through play. However, he argues, the U.S. educational system, controlled by politicians, abandoned many of these ideas and methods while Finnish schools, controlled by educators, found that they worked. Although American pediatricians continue to argue for the importance of play as a health issue, school policy makers, fearing negative school ratings, assume that play is not necessary.

Doyle's experiences in Finland demonstrated why its students are so successful. Children start formal schooling when they are seven. Until then, they develop confidence, creativity, and interpersonal

skills in programs that include storytelling, drama, the arts, music, crafts, risky outdoor play, hands-on experimentation, and pretend play. From early school through high school, recess occurs hourly: fifteen minutes of recess after every forty-five minutes of instruction. Children attend equitably financed neighborhood schools and generally walk to school. School days are not as long as those in the United States, classes number about twenty children per classroom (compared to thirty children per classroom in the United States), and after-school programs are creative and fun. Though Finnish teachers do not teach to the test, Finnish students rank near the top on the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) test. Doyle's seven-year-old son loved his school and declared, "Every child should have a school like this" (p. 237).

In recent years, various schools have been influenced by the Finnish experience. In the United States, Professor Debbie Rhea of Fort Worth in Texas, adapted Finnish ideas to a program she calls LiiNK (Let's Inspire Innovation in Kids) with four fifteen-minute free play recess breaks each day as well as an ethics program that focuses on interpersonal behavior. Started in two schools during 2013 and 2014, it included twenty public and private schools by the 2017–2018 school year. Control group comparisons showed increased on-task behavior and decreased misbehavior in LiiNK schools. In a Long Island, New York, school district with over half of its population economically disadvantaged, school superintendent Michael Hynes also read about Finnish successes. He doubled recess time to forty minutes a day, increased lunch time to

forty minutes, brought blocks and other play materials back into the classroom, cut homework, and instituted a seventy-five-minute play club each Friday morning. Evaluation is ongoing, but child and parent responses thus far have been very positive. Programs in several other countries influenced by the Finnish model, are “Anji Play” in China, as well as experimental programs in New Zealand, Scotland, Croatia, and Tokyo.

For those who already believed in the importance of play, or are convinced by reading this book, the last chapter, “Play in the Schools of Tomorrow” should be useful for taking action. It contains strategies for home, school, and community change makers; provides thoughtful warnings about too much digital play; and lists questions that parents and citizens should ask about school quality. The book concludes with insightful quotations from twenty-five play scholars on why play is important.

Let the Children Play is an interesting, motivating, and very important book. I recommend it highly for parents, teachers, administrators, planners, and school boards—in short, anyone who cares about children and wants schools to better serve them.

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Folk Illusions: Children, Folklore, and Sciences of Perception

K. Brandon Barker and Claiborne Rice
Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2019. Preface, acknowledgments,

accessing audiovisual material, appendix, bibliography, index of subjects, index of names, and index of folk illusions. 244 pp. \$35.00 paper. ISBN: 9780253041098

Some folklorists look at scientific research for concepts to help them understand the everyday, expressive (as opposed to instrumental) communication in the small groups they usually study. Neuroscience, cognitive science, and evolutionary psychology offer insights that bring biology back into the interdisciplinary mix used by folklorists. This well-researched and well-written book by K. Brandon Barker and Claiborne Rice provides a welcome addition to this growing body linking traditional folklore studies to current scientific research and to thinking about human behavior.

The specialty of children’s folklore studies has always had roots in developmental psychology, for obvious reasons. After all, Brian Sutton-Smith—so central to play studies and to children’s folklore studies—began his career in child psychology, but this science always served his interest in play and games. As Sutton-Smith expanded his repertoire of disciplines to include folklore, sociolinguistics, anthropology, and sociology, those who studied children’s folklore relied on his scholarly guidance to sustain the interdisciplinary project. His last book, *Play for Life* (2017), published posthumously, circled back to neuroscience and evolutionary psychology to make his final statement about the centrality of play in the lives of children and in the lives of those adults who never forgot how to play.

Barker and Rice have mastered of the body of scholarship about children’s folk-