

Bauerlein's book is a cautionary tale. It should be of particular value to those interested in play and its role in shaping the individual. If Bauerlein is correct, then we need to be sure that our children are exposed in our educational system to social interaction, transgenerational communication, and similar types of learning, instead of their just cruising the Internet and making friends on Facebook. The facts seem to suggest that much of traditional play and the instruments of play, like hands-on games and toys, are being replaced by digital systems. Consider the difference between playing a game of war outdoors with the neighborhood kids, in place of playing a game of *Halo* on the X-box. What is the difference between reading a great piece of children's literature such as T. H. White's *The Once and Future King* and simply skimming information off the Internet? What does playing with a scientific toy like a gyroscope, a kaleidoscope, or a top inform a child about the world versus a computer simulation or description of the same toy?

New media are clearly redefining the experiences of childhood and youth culture. Our technologies shape us. More than a generation ago, the German philosopher Martin Heidegger argued that any technology mediates human experience and selects certain characteristics for *amplification* and *reduction*. Which of our children's experiences are amplified by the new technologies and which are reduced? This is the critical question raised by Bauerlein, and it is one that concerns all of us interested in children and youth and the future of play.

—Eugene F. Provenzo, Jr., *University of Miami, Miami, FL*

Interactive Play for Children with Autism

Diana Seach

New York: Routledge, 2007. References, figures, 211 pp. \$39.95 paper. ISBN: 9780415333269

The growing numbers of children diagnosed with autism-spectrum disorders are drawing significant attention to identifying effective education and therapeutic interventions. Autism refers here to a broad definition that ranges from severe to mild forms of classic autism and Asperger syndrome, all of which share common features. Lorna Wing and Judith Gould identified these features (what they called a "triad of impairments" in reciprocal social interaction, communication, and imagination) that characterized autism in their 1979 article for the *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*. As I noted in *Play and Imagination in Children with Autism* (1999), these core challenges are inextricably linked to a child's capacity to develop spontaneous play across social and symbolic dimensions.

Diana Seach's *Interactive Play for Children with Autism* presents an approach that adds to the wide array of play interventions that are now available for children with autism. Drawing on her personal experience as an educator and family consultant, Seach describes an adult-child-oriented intervention that is aimed at professionals and parents of children representing diverse ages and abilities across the autism spectrum. The book is described as a comprehensive guide to establishing shared play experiences that assist in the development of communication, social understanding, and cognition. Seach further defines the interactive-play

approach as following a “developmental social-pragmatic model of intervention that bridges the gap between educational and therapeutic practices by emphasizing the growth of social communication through mediated learning” (p. xv).

The chapters are organized around several unifying themes. Chapter 1 begins with a discussion of the value of play as it influences children’s learning and development and offers therapeutic benefits. A model of interactive play is presented in chapter 2, which focuses on core competencies for children with autism: awareness of self and others, empathy, emotion, shared language, motivation, behavior, and flexibility. Seach builds on this model in chapters 3 to 6 by presenting a hierarchy in which an adult applies a variety of techniques to engage an autistic child in playful exchanges and experiences. Establishing connections is the cornerstone of the intervention that emphasizes fostering motivation and social engagement. The intervention progresses to enabling verbal and nonverbal modes of communication, creating meaning attributed to actions and experiences, and developing imagination through the creative process. The final chapters illustrate the application of the interactive-play approach. Chapter 7 describes Seach’s Smile Program by focusing on one family’s participation in the intervention, and chapter 8 gives examples of interactive-play techniques in schools.

While current play interventions designed for children with autism are highly diverse, Seach’s approach resonates with other well-known, adult-child-oriented intervention models that are regarded as naturalistic, child centered, developmentally based, relationship based and

respected for their intensive focus on social interaction, communication, and play. (See, for example, “Climbing the Symbolic Ladder in the DIR Model,” Stanley Greenspan and Serena Wieder’s 2003 article in *Autism: International Journal of Research and Practice*; and “The SECRETS Model” by Barry Prizant and colleagues in *Infants and Young Children*, 2003.) Developed and field tested over the years, these intervention models have become well established and have garnered wide appeal. One of the challenges that comes with initiating a more naturalistic and holistic intervention (as is the nature of interactive play) is making it accessible to parents and practitioners with diverse levels of knowledge and experience. Although Seach describes the model in meticulous detail with engaging vignettes, the book’s highly theoretical and academic orientation may be out of reach for less-skilled clinicians. Nevertheless, should a more practical and user friendly guide for beginners appear, this book would serve as an excellent foundation for introducing the conceptual basis of the interactive-play model.

Although this book is firmly grounded in a strong theoretical base that has links to empirical research, the efficacy of the interactive-play model (as applied to families in the Smile Program and to students in educational settings) has yet to be validated. This approach would lend itself well to rigorous and systematic research that combines quantitative and qualitative methodologies to demonstrate the benefits of interactive play as an effective and socially validated intervention model.

—Pamela Wolfberg, *San Francisco State University and Autism Institute on Peer Relations and Play, San Francisco, CA*