

the Spatial, Geometric, Architectural (SPAGAR) Coding System, the authors present research findings pertaining to the spatial, geometric, and architectural activity of ninety preschoolers from five different urban schools. They provide extensive information in regard to each category contained in the SPAGAR and offer a simplified chart as a helpful reference to each of its thirteen code descriptors. The development of this coding system is of particular importance to educators, researchers, and parents as it provides specific guidelines for observing and examining children's mathematical and scientific behaviors during free block play.

The findings presented in this book highlight some important questions pertaining to young children's mathematical thinking and include some interesting outcomes regarding the impact of age, gender, and socioeconomic status on children's cognition and activities pertaining to space, geometry, and architecture. In addition, the authors provide insights into the implications of the research for those concerned with the education of young children. This is one of the most comprehensive works to date on the spatial, geometric, and architectural thinking of young children. Overall, this book significantly contributes to our understanding of the oftentimes overlooked mathematical abilities of our youngest learners.

—Jenifer Thornton, *University of Texas at San Antonio, TX*

Inside Role-Play in Early Childhood Education: Researching Young Children's Perspectives

Sue Rogers and Julie Evans

New York: Routledge, 2008. Photographs, drawings, glossary, references, index. 152 pp. \$43.95 paper. ISBN: 9780415404976

In their new book, Sue Rogers and Julie Evans focus on early education in the United Kingdom (UK) for the “muddle in the middle,” that is, they look at teaching and child-play theory in the reception class, which is what the British call the first class of primary school. (Rogers is a senior lecturer in education at the University of London, and Evans is a senior lecturer in sociology at the University College Plymouth St. Mark & St. John.) The book is based on their interesting research of kids’ “being four” in contrast to “becoming five.” They generate such research through observations and innovative interviews of teachers and young children to acquire perspectives on social pretense or role playing both indoors and outdoors at school. This book and its modest ethnographic research are timely and significant for readers in the United States, where kids go through preschool nowadays at three and four years of age and where academic models that denigrate play flourish under learning standards, accountability, and the rubric of “No Child Left Behind.”

Rogers and Evans position their research in the context of international discussions among early childhood education (ECE) professionals about whether and how teachers should be involved with children's play. They study role playing from the child's view because of their con-

cern that, even when play occurs, it is too structured (in the hopes of giving it sufficient academic coloring), which limits the social and affective benefits of role playing. They develop their case for the importance of social play for children through discussions of Lev Vygotsky's theories, Sara Smilansky's research on sociodramatic play, and Vivian Paley's teaching practices (involving the classroom rule "you can't say you can't play"). The authors also cover William Corsaro's concept of "peer culture" and Elizabeth Wood's distinction between the "interaction" and "framing" roles of teachers in play pedagogy in their effort to help the reader understand the balancing act required when teachers' goals and intentions meet children's needs and interests during play. Indeed, this is the central issue of the book.

The middle chapters report the study while continuing the thoughtful commentary of the first two chapters. Chapter 3 describes the ethnographic research: the background setting and sample, research philosophy, ethos and ethics, and the methods and procedures. A reception class in a rural primary school, one in a small town, and another in a city provided testimony from a total of six teachers and six teacher assistants and well over 100 preschoolers for the study (80 in the first term and 144 in the second term). During one full year, these three sites were visited one or two half days per week or seventy-one visits yielding the equivalent of ten days per classroom. This ethnography used multiple methods: in addition to classroom observations of teacher-child and child-child interactions and teacher interviews, the investigators talked with children about the students' drawings and photographs they took of the children at

play. The researchers also interviewed the subjects in small discussion groups to reduce the power differential between the adults and the children by having only one researcher with many children at each session. Children's voices are constantly kept at front and center, and we learn from the children themselves what they like and do not like about role playing and how they react when new children arrive to play.

Chapter 4 covers teachers' perspectives on role playing in the classroom. All teachers valued child-initiated role playing as instrumental for learning. All of them saw themselves as copartners in the children's development. They believed planning for role playing was different from planning for all other areas of the curriculum. It requires care and skill to set up role playing, but the effort is rewarding because this activity affords the children more freedom and creativity than other types of play. The teachers complained about a lack of space, which they saw as a major constraint on role playing. Interestingly, teachers did not report as much gender-stereotypical play as did the researchers, perhaps because the researchers were participant observers experiencing play with the children firsthand.

Rogers and Evans discuss children's perspectives on role playing in the next two chapters, where we see, for example, how children readily distinguish between fantasy and reality. Children viewed role playing as a means for being with friends, and they cared a lot about whom they played with. In chapter 6, Roger and Evans document the ways that imaginative play and related narrative scripts were generated with respect to role-playing themes and children's use of space and place. They also discuss the teaching dilemmas and ten-

sions concerning equity practices in a way that not only engages the reader but also contributes greatly to the book's usefulness for teacher education.

Rodgers and Evans close this fine addition to the play and education literature with several recommendations based on the results of their study. They suggest that ECE teachers provide extended, uninterrupted periods for role playing, that they listen to children's views about play choices and arrangements, and that they allow for more outdoor role playing. Rogers and Evans advance what they call "learner inclusive pedagogy," a fresh approach to play pedagogy for ECE that avoids overly prescriptive imaginative-play themes and includes more time and space, especially more teacher-children co-construction of the curriculum and schedule. Overall, they integrate the lessons of their research well and offer sound advice, but the questions they've raised over the pages of this wonderful book linger in the reader's mind.

—James E. Johnson, *The Pennsylvania State University, State College, PA*

Playing and Learning Outdoors: Making Provision for High-Quality Experiences in the Outdoor Environment

Jan White

New York: Routledge, 2008. Resources, photographs, 137 pp. \$24.95 paper. ISBN: 9780415412117

Drawing on more than twenty years of experience as an early childhood educator and consultant, Jan White has written a practical guide for providing creative

outdoor experiences for young children. Although the book can be read quickly, it provides an excellent reference on good practice that its readers will turn to again and again.

The introductory chapter begins with the assertion that outdoor play provides different experiences for children than indoor play and that all children need daily outdoor play. White's list of the benefits of outdoor play include: the freedom for children to be "their exuberant, physical, and noisy selves," opportunities for discovery, freedom to be messy, contact with living things, information for all the senses, and opportunities for children to challenge themselves. There is no discussion of playground equipment, but the author focuses on the provision of opportunities for play and exploration through the use of natural materials and the extension of the classroom into the outdoor environment. The recommendations in the book are based on ten core values for high-quality outdoor experiences. The first of these values is that children should be outdoors as often as they are indoors and that indoors and outdoors should be available simultaneously. The second core value holds that the most important outdoor activity is play. Other core values include (1) child initiative in meaningful experiences; (2) adult support; (3) inclusion of the outdoors in the curriculum; (4) flexibility, enabling children to choose, create, and change the play environment; (5) richness of experience; (6) time to develop ideas over a period of time; (7) challenge and risk within a framework of safety; and (8) children's inclusion and involvement in decisions affecting their play. Within these core values, the author identifies six major ingredients for a rich outdoor program. They address the provi-