
Book Reviews

Playful Intelligence: The Power of Living Lightly in a Serious World

Anthony T. DeBenedet

Solana Beach, CA: Santa Monica Press LLC, 2018. Introduction, notes, references, and index. 263 pp. \$16.95 paper.

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Children, to develop well, need lots of time and opportunity to play. In play children practice the social, emotional, intellectual, and physical skills required to survive and thrive. The play world, for children, is a simulation world, a safe place to practice new skills and aptitudes, because in play failure has no real-world consequences. (Sadly, we have in recent decades ever more deprived children of play, which perhaps helps explain the sharp rise in psychological problems among the young, but that is a different story.)

As we grow up, life necessarily becomes more serious. We need to spend less time in the play world, where results do not matter, and more in the serious world, where they do. When results matter, when success and failure have seri-

ous, real-world consequences, we are, by definition, no longer playing; but we can nevertheless bring a playful attitude to our activities. According to Anthony DeBenedet's remarkable new book, a playful attitude can reduce the stress and increase the joy we experience in our serious endeavors and, at the same time, increase our chances of success at these endeavors.

DeBenedet is a physician, who knows firsthand working in conditions where success and failure matter very much. Moreover, he has seen in his patients many different ways of dealing with serious, even terminal illnesses. He has had good reason to think deeply about how to lighten the load we bear in our serious lives. The key, he argues, is playful intelligence—playful, because even though we are not playing, we are bringing to bear some of the mental qualities of play; intelligence, because the capacity to bring these qualities to bear is a kind of intelligence, one that may be partly innate but can be augmented in all of us by conscious awareness, thought, and practice. Playful intelligence does not distract us from the serious problems of life, but helps us face these problems head on, with less fear or anger and greater effectiveness.

Perhaps because of his scientific and medical background, DeBenedet dissects playful intelligence into component parts and discusses each part separately in separate chapters. He admits, however, that the components are not truly separate but overlap and interact with one another in our minds and behavior.

One component he calls *imagination*, which includes the ability to reframe problems in ways that elicit feelings of adventure and challenge rather than dread and allow us to see previously hidden solutions; the ability to empathize even with our enemies, so we can reduce our anger and find ways to deal more effectively with them; and constructive daydreaming, in which we allow our subconscious minds to generate new ideas and insights. The second component, *sociability*, includes the capacity to keep an open mind about individuals rather than hold stereotyped assumptions about them and the capacity to listen to and learn from others humbly rather than act in a superior manner. The third component is *humor*, which, when used constructively, puts others at ease and improves relationships and which can help reduce pain and fear without denying them. The fourth component, *spontaneity*, includes the breaking of routines and a willingness sometimes to act (intelligently) on impulse. The fifth component is *wonder*, which is, essentially, the capacity to view events as might a young child who sees them for the first time, so we appreciate the beauty and potential even of a mundane world that has become almost invisible to us.

DeBenedet illustrates these aspects of playful intelligence with true stories about individuals who have faced problems or

even tragedies. Some stories involve famous people, including John F. Kennedy and Rachel Carson; others, people who have struggled to make businesses work; and still others, patients who have struggled with disease. The stories are heartwarming and in some cases heart wrenching. If, like me, you cry easily, be sure to have tissues at hand when you read these stories.

Much in this book can benefit everyone, so I recommend it to everyone. Well written, well documented, and well designed to hold the reader's attention, it can be read as a psychological discourse on the nature of human resilience, as a self-help book for becoming happier, or as a set of quite remarkable stories about people who have dealt effectively with adversity. I read it as all three.

—Peter Gray, *Boston College, Chestnut Hill, MA*

Doing Play Therapy: From Building the Relationship to Facilitating Change

Terry Kottman and Kristin K. Meany-Walen
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In *Doing Play Therapy: From Building the Relationship to Facilitating Change*, authors Terry Kottman and Kristin K. Meany-Walen illuminate, discuss, deconstruct, and confront the clinical aspects of play therapy. They take the reader on a