

book is not informed by those writings. He could have said much more about the diverse ways in which modern sports are now organized and about the specific challenges that these forms of organizations raise for players, coaches, and fans. It is worth remembering that Huizinga's strong critique of contemporary sport (as a turning of the play spirit into a quest for sterile excellence) also focused on what he called "false play," the sponsorship and control of play events by large political and economic organizations. Such organizations provide the settings (and often the terms) within which people develop selfhood, discover community, and comprehend ideas of moral worthiness. To be sure, people gather together (on the fields of sport and elsewhere) to construct the moments of their lives; but studies of athletic idealism must also emphasize the character, conduct, and even "virtue" of those social formations.

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### **Foundations of Playwork**

*Fraser Brown and Chris Taylor, eds.*  
Maidenhead, U.K.: Open University  
Press, 2008. References, figures, appen-  
dices, index. xxiv, 316 pp. \$49.00 paper.  
ISBN: 9780335222919

For the reader not familiar with the practice of playwork, a concept with roots in the adventure playground movement in Europe, *Foundations of Playwork* serves as a comprehensive introduction to the topic. The book consists of fifty-six brief chapters (no chapter is more than six

pages long), organized into ten parts. Discussions focus on the theoretical foundations of playwork and the implementation of the theory into practice, the practice of playwork in various countries (England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland), the roles and responsibilities of playworkers, the management of play settings, playwork and public policy, and issues related to conducting research on the topic of playwork. The essays also demonstrate how the practice of playwork can occur in a variety of contexts including playgrounds, hospitals, prisons, and even a Romanian orphanage for neglected, abused, and abandoned children.

I finished reading *Foundations of Playwork* and came to the appreciation that the book adds up to more than the sum of its parts. Each chapter addresses a fairly narrow topic, and the chapters are not necessarily sequentially linked. But, by the time a reader finishes all of the chapters (written by fifty different authors), he or she comes away with a comprehensive introduction to the theoretical principles underlying playwork, issues related to the playwork profession, and the ways in which playwork professionals affect the lives of children. It is as if the volume is a textbook on the subject of playwork without trying to be a textbook.

In terms of readability, the editors have done a good job at ensuring a fairly uniform style across the chapters. Some of the chapters are "drier" than others, but for the most part, they are reasonably well written. The editors have also included an annotated bibliography and a comprehensive list of references, each of which allows the interested reader to go beyond the content presented in the book.

The value of the book transcends

the particular topic of playwork. The editors write on the very first page that “It’s tempting to suggest that this book is for everyone. It is about children and play. . . . The editors feel confident that it will be of interest to anyone working or spending time with children. . . .” (p. 1). I would agree with their assessment. Although *Foundations of Playwork* focuses on the specific topic of playwork, I do believe it has value for the reader who has a more general interest in children’s play. The chapters that discuss the theoretical principles of playwork and the role of the playworker, for example, present ideas that should interest anyone who values children’s play and thinks about ways to foster and support play. There are a few topics that I found particularly intriguing, including the “theory of loose parts,” the idea that “play exists only at the edge of chaos,” and the Portchmouth Principle, which states that “it helps if someone, no matter how lightly, puts in our way the means of making use of what we find” (p. 9). I also found the idea that adults need to support the child’s play agenda to be a powerful theme that wove its way through many of the chapters. About this, the authors write: “Intervention is sometimes necessary but the child’s agenda has to be taken as the starting point for the playworkers’ interventions” (p. 10).

Although playwork has a strong tradition in the United Kingdom and other European countries, it has recently generated some interest in the United States. The Alliance for Childhood ([www.allianceforchildhood.org/playwork](http://www.allianceforchildhood.org/playwork)), for example, has begun to provide information and sponsor workshops for those interested in establishing the playwork practice and profession in the United States. *Foundations of Playwork* would be an excellent resource to support this effort.

One final note: the editors of the volume state that all royalties from the sale of the book go to Aid for Romanian Children, an organization that sponsors summer camps for disadvantaged children in Romania. Purchasing this book, then, not only provides readers with important information about the practice of playwork (and play in general), but also provides them the satisfaction of knowing that they have donated money to an organization dedicated to bringing play opportunities to children who might not otherwise have them.

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