

sus-nurture construct advances our understanding of childhood as an adaptation. The wide-ranging review of the literature from animal behavior, psychology, and anthropology as well as the cross-species, cross-cultural comparisons add richness to Konner's discussion. There is no doubt that those interested in any aspect of childhood, including play, will find rewarding reading.

—John Bock, *California State University, Fullerton, CA*

Playing to Learn: The Role of Play in the Early Years

Sandra Smidt

Routledge, New York, 2011. Contents, images, bibliography, index. 141 pp. \$31.95. paper. ISBN: 9780415558822

Playing to Learn: The Role of Play in the Early Years by Sandra Smidt, presents theory, research, and application about play with detailed, cross-cultural case studies. Smidt writes well and supplies many examples that will resonate with both students and practitioners. The author includes more theory than offered in many cursory textbooks of child development and early-childhood education, which are typically limited to the "big" theories minus details concerning sociocultural context in which these theories were created. While *Playing to Learn* presents the ideas of classic theorists, Smidt identifies important, yet not widely taught, theoretical concepts that help us better understand play.

The research Smidt cites includes some classic studies, but she also inte-

grates recent contributions of Tina Bruce, Corinne Hutt, Janet Moyles, and others. The work of these contemporary researchers provides the reader with an understanding of what children's play is and is not, as well as what play specifically means for children's growth and development.

Smidt draws on a range of authors for insights into how different cultures view children. For example, excerpts from Vivian Paley's writing exemplify the reflective teacher who truly listens to children. Readers will encounter familiar names across a range of disciplines (like Barbara Kingsolver and William Wordsworth), and the inclusion of these diverse viewpoints supports the notion that children's play is not limited to early-childhood education. Smidt makes clear that play not only influences today's children, but that it has done so throughout history and across cultures.

I envision using *Playing to Learn* in a 400-level capstone for early-childhood education majors. These students will have completed their required methods courses, in which they prepared thematic units, author studies, and other teaching tools, but most of them completed these assignments without making play the basis of the curriculum. This capstone course is the students' final step before student teaching. *Playing to Learn* will remind them that play has a critical role in early-childhood education. The sound research and vivid examples in Smidt's book will undoubtedly result in some students saying, "Yes, I've seen that!" My students in Maine, the least racially diverse state in the United States, also will appreciate Smidt's case studies of diverse groups, as these will heighten cultural sensitivity and appreciation. I

also believe this book will help students develop their philosophies of teaching young children—going beyond the superficial phrase, “children learn through play,” to a more robust statement about the critical role of play in their teaching.

Although I have focused primarily on the benefits of *Playing to Learn* for college students, practicing teachers will also find much to learn. Smidt begins with infancy in describing how play underlies the development of identity. Experienced teachers will find themselves recognizing many play scenarios. Smidt, however, helps readers understand more—the inherent capabilities, goals, and developmental potential of the child at play. New teachers will find the book helpful beyond their academic and continuing education courses in recognizing theory and research about play as valuable tools for informing and defending their curriculum choices. I believe that readers will develop a deeper understanding of the developmental milestones that children master through play. Smidt helpfully concludes each section with implications and suggestions for teachers. Readers leave *Playing to Learn*, therefore, with a clear purpose: this is what I need to do in my classroom.

In sum, readers of *Playing to Learn* will gain breadth—in recognizing play across cultures. They will also gain in understanding the tremendous value of play for the children they teach. Smidt provides an interesting and exciting read, putting new life into the topic of play through new ideas, a strong cross-cultural component, and clear applications. I finished the book with two desires: to implement Smidt’s recommendations in an early-childhood classroom and to seek

more information through readings, discussions, and conducting research with my students. Play studies has needed a book like *Playing to Learn*; its content and the engaging style in which it is written remind us that we are talking about play—freely chosen, intrinsically motivated, beneficial, and quite simply, a lot of fun.

—Mellisa A. Clawson, *University of Maine at Farmington, Farmington, ME*

Play as Engagement and Communication: Play & Culture Studies, Volume 10

Eva E. Nwokah, ed.

Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2010. Contents, tables, charts, references, bibliography, index. 223 pp. \$36.00 paper. ISBN: 9780761850830

In this, the tenth volume of the Play & Culture Studies series from TASP (The Association for the Study of Play), editor Eva Nwokah argues that the contributions of this volume all proclaim that play involves both engagement with another and communication through verbal or nonverbal means. This theme is very broad and covers almost any theoretical paper or research study on play. Most of the chapters in this volume are quite different from one another, are not well integrated, and do not build on one another. For example, there are no references to other chapters and seldom to the work of the other authors in any of the chapters. Some of the chapters are well written, innovative, and insightful, but the volume’s lack of coherence is a serious drawback.