

racism, or social class, or any of the corresponding literature about the subjects. The final chapter, also brief, addresses “Influence of Media” on the children’s play and concludes that there was relatively little of it here, perhaps because of the richness of the natural environment. The epilogue, “Wondering about the Future,” questions the school’s future as an alternative model and the authors’ own conviction of their methods. They imply that play itself involves wondering.

The authors seem worried about whether their book, *Playing for Keeps*, is about their alternative school or about play itself. These are ordinary, brilliant children in an extraordinary school yard. I wish that all of our public-school children could be so lucky to have real dirt to play in, to enjoy freedom of expression, and to be supervised by grown-ups who actually listen. Until they do, we need more books like this one.

—Anna R. Beresin, *University of the Arts, Philadelphia, PA*

Reclaiming Childhood: Freedom and Play in an Age of Fear

Helene Guldberg

New York: Routledge, 2009. Contents, afterword, bibliography, index. 205 pp. \$31.95 paper. ISBN: 9780415477239

Helene Guldberg grew up in Norway playing outside in all kinds of weather. With siblings and friends, she played happily unsupervised until called to the family’s evening meal. Her later experience as a

primary-school teacher, as well as her research as a Ph.D. candidate, underscored her commitment to the importance of unsupervised play in a child’s social, emotional, cognitive, and physical development. Guldberg urges parents to overcome the paralysis of the barrage of expert and media reports bemoaning the disastrous state of childhood today; she encourages readers not to take the doomsday findings and headlines at face value. She writes in her introduction: “Children need to be given space away from adults’ watchful eyes—in order to play, experiment, take risks (within a sensible framework provided by adults), test boundaries, have arguments, fight, and learn how to resolve conflicts.” In her concluding paragraphs, the author sensibly and clearly summarizes what many believe: “Adults need to allow children to grow and flourish, balancing sensible guidance with youthful independence.” She promotes an understanding of the methodology, validity of research, and the motive and objective of each source.

Guldberg states that reading between the lines is important—and it is. *Reclaiming Childhood* is at once an admonition and a plea to parents, suggesting we all calm down and take a step back from today’s safety-obsessed culture. The author’s underlying message is, as the philosophical comic-strip possum character Pogo said, “We have met the enemy, and he is us.”

Unfortunately, Guldberg, a managing editor of the radical website *spiked*, sets a polemical rather than academic tone. Guldberg quotes the mission of *spiked* as: “raising the horizons of humanity by waging a culture war of words against misan-

thropy, priggishness, prejudice, luddism, illiberalism and irrationalism in all their ancient and modern forms.” By her own proclamation, the author is an activist. And while stirring the pot of the status quo can motivate and catalyze change, Guldberg’s book is more about pushing buttons than advancing the field and study of play. To be fair, Guldberg cites the work of many scholars, stalwarts, and pioneers of play, quoting and referencing their works on almost every page; and her fifteen-page bibliography is a valuable resource for students. *Reclaiming Childhood* is the author’s ardent attempt to put a burr in the knickers of the British government and to enlist parents on both sides of the pond in her cause to loosen the government safety nets she believes entrap society. In other words, the book is politically motivated, and it neither intends nor accomplishes an advancement of the academic study of play.

Guldberg’s passion for her topic is clear. Unfortunately, her writing is clouded by rambling discourse and citations that, when used out of context, have a confusing and eroding effect. In her zeal to articulate and affirm her position, her conviction gets in the way. From her divergent discussion of traffic safety to the seemingly misplaced quotes from play scholars and reports, Guldberg’s book reads like a collection of points rather than a coherent text. For example, on page 9, Guldberg writes “Screen-based technologies and expensive toys are reportedly the culprits of all kinds of evil. U.S. child development expert David Elkind writes in *The Power of Play: How Imaginative, Spontaneous Activities Lead to Healthier and Happier Children* that ‘Children’s play—their inborn disposition for curiosity, imagination and

fantasy—is being silenced in the high-tech commercialized world we have created’ (Elkind 2007: ix).” However, Guldberg’s interpretation of this quote is contradictory. She continues, “The power of play is being destroyed by inexpensive toys available in enormous quantities and seemingly unlimited variety and sedentary screen play, argues Elkind.” Aside from the confusion of whether expensive or inexpensive toys are to blame, Guldberg immediately follows with, “Unhappy children, we are told, turn into unhappy, maladjusted and often badly behaved teenagers.” It is an odd coupling of points, one that suggests the author’s discrepant use of sources to support her argument.

There are other instances where Guldberg’s eagerness to promote her political views leads her to misuse the sources. Chapter 7 quotes the Kaiser Family Foundation report *Generation M: Media in the Lives of 8- to 18-Year-Olds* to launch a conversation about the commercialization of childhood. The *Generation M* report’s much touted findings spotlight the increase of children’s media use, in large measure due to the prevalence of media multitasking. One would not know this from Guldberg’s discussion of the report, however. Instead she labels it a prime example of “a growing obsession on both sides of the Atlantic with what has been termed ‘the commercialization of childhood.’” This is a misreading of the tenor and thesis of the study.

While Guldberg offers reasonable criticism about the suffocating effects of helicopter parenting and the blurring of lines of a teacher’s professional task with the added responsibilities to arbitrate, counsel, and protect his or her students,

the author's suggestions for solving these problems are naive. She proposes a dramatic—and potentially dangerous—policy of parenting that does not account for the real dangers and pitfalls of life in today's world. In the "Bullying Bandwagon" chapter, she raises important issues including the overuse of the word *bully*, the expansion of its definition and the impact that immediate parental involvement may have on a child's ability to develop skills to manage conflict. However, life today is very different from the author's Norwegian childhood. Parents and teachers need to be aware of children's behaviors and contests and take action when appropriate. Dismissing a potentially damaging situation as a rite of passage is as irresponsible as is overreacting to every little flurry of playground unpleasantness.

Guldberg tries too hard and with too little subtlety to make her case. She offers a text that wanders and dilutes her arguments.

—Claire S. Green, *Parents' Choice Foundation, Timonium, MD*

The Oxford Handbook of the Development of Play

Anthony D. Pellegrini, ed.

New York: Oxford University Press, 2011. References, index, 377 pp. \$135.00 cloth. ISBN: 9780129539300

A first impression is that this is an elegantly organized and presented addition to the proliferating literature on children's play. Most of the authors of this edited volume have distinguished themselves as major contributors to the literature on children's

play. So, one might wonder, what's new? Do we need yet another beautiful book about play? If so, why this one?

For a rationale, the book's editor argues that play deserves more attention in the field of child development in particular. The interdisciplinary perspectives that deal with both human and animal play add to the luster of the subject. In addition to the editor's sections that open and conclude the book, there are five sections: "Definitions" (containing two chapters); "Theories" (seven chapters); "Methods" (two chapters); "Dimensions of Play" (twelve chapters); and "Education" (one chapter).

Each contributor provides a perspective about defining play in relation to his or her chapter's topic, highlighting the ongoing dilemma about the definitions of play. Gordon Burghardt's chapter, "Defining and Recognizing Play," uses powerful imagery to create a cogent, synoptic five-part definition that spans human and animal play. Along the way, he reviews articles in the first issue of the *American Journal of Play*. This is a powerful way to open the discourse because it clarifies a view of the complexity and interdisciplinary perspectives that both plague and enrich the nature of scholarship about play. Nevertheless, the book tilts toward the sociocognitive and psychological aspects of play with some attention to its locomotor aspects. Several authors sharpen the distinction between exploration as an attempt to find out about phenomena and play as an attempt to influence encounters with physical or social situations.

In a brief gem that closes the "Theories" section, Brian Sutton-Smith's "The Antipathies of Play" considers the role of the integrative nature of the brain during