

mind of the man behind the words. Meares brings the passion, curiosity, creativity, and compassion of a psychiatrist who has scaled the pinnacles of the healthy, creative mind, yet who has also spent decades working with the broken minds of some of the most troubled, character-disordered patients of all.

This book embodies the spirit of its own argument in multiple ways. It seems also as if the reader enters into conversation with Meares by becoming privy to a succession of his intellectual and cultural mentors and heroes. These include William James, Robert Hobson, Ferdinand de Saussure, Hughlings Jackson, William Shakespeare, Lev Vygotsky, and Wolf Singer. Meares designs each page to evoke a feeling and picture rather than to analyze a topic or defend an idea. Each chapter represents the “doubleness” of real-imaginary by demonstrating how uniquely human aspects of symbol, metaphor, and creativity emerge within the fertile, ambiguous spaces existing between this word and that one, self and other, inner and outer, private and public.

The book is written in nontechnical language. Every chapter is unique and serves as its own stand-alone verse circling a central image. A story about a waving game with Meares’s infant granddaughter becomes a teaching tale about perspective taking. Two ambiguous lines from a Shakespeare play launch the holistic potential of the human imagination. The book radiates out from the making of the individual’s mind to ever wider spheres of culture.

In multiple ways, the arc from early to later conversations between mother and child resembles the arc created here

between author and reader. The author writes as if the reader understands, by offering lovely metaphors and evocative images packed with meaning and associations. The writing is clear and minimalist; the imagery is compelling. Meanwhile, this stripped-down-to-its-barest-essence, minimalist quality is both the book’s strength as well as its weakness. During my first reading, the sparsely fleshed out allusions left my head spinning. I confess, this is exactly the feeling I get the first time I read a poem. The book, intended for a generalist audience, begs for a second reading, and even a third. Just as with poetry, there is more to appreciate with every pass. For, no matter what the occupation or background of the reader, with enough patience, eventually the reader does understand. Meares’s brilliance is well worth fleshing out every word and connecting every dot. Through the poet’s voice, the universe opens to its fullest capacity.

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**The Playdate: Parents, Children, and the New Expectations of Play**

*Tamara R. Mose*

New York, NY: New York University Press, 2016. Preface, acknowledgments, introduction, notes, and index. 192 pp. \$26.00 paper. ISBN: 9780479866298

“We should schedule a playdate!” In the world of modern parenting, these words have become more and more common.

So common in fact that businesses have evolved to create business cards for children and families to make scheduling playdates even easier.

In *The Playdate*, sociologist Tamara Mose explores the structure of this relatively recent social invention. Mose defines the playdate as: “an arranged meeting, organized and supervised by parents or care givers, between two or more children in order to play together at a specific time and place, for the most part at an indoor location” (p. 3). Across five chapters (and an introduction and conclusion), she details who structures playdates, why they have developed as they have, and why they have become so ubiquitous that even birthday parties are now “hyperplaydates.”

To study playdates, Mose conducted forty-one semistructured interviews. All but two of the adults had children themselves, and thirty-four of them were women; thirteen identified as people of color. *The Playdate* contains many explanations, which Mose deftly interweaves in the content of the chapters. For example, she says that “interviewees almost always had the same answers, that a playdate was something created out of fear for children’s safety and also the desire to meet people” (p. 36).

*The Playdate* is strong when Mose discusses play theory, especially in chapter 1, “From Play to Playdate: Moral Panic and Play Redefined.” Here she explains that playdates involve very little independence on the part of children—partly because they are arranged and organized—often separating the children’s interactions from that of real play. As she discusses in chapter 2, “My Place or Yours? Playdate Logis-

tics,” playdates mainly occur in private rather than public spaces (or, if in public, in pay-to-play areas clearly distinguished from the commons). Social class is, not surprisingly, a big part of the story here. Parents use playdates to identify with “people like us.” Even care givers get in on the action—nannies use playdates to distinguish their group memberships from those with other nannies (though never from those of other mothers).

Because Mose did all of her research in New York City, the reader wonders how common playdates are in other parts of the United States—not only because they so often seem to involve nannies but also the pay-to-play spaces like Moomah that she describes. If these commercialized playdates do exist elsewhere, are they primarily urban, marking an urban-suburban divide?

Given that *The Playdate* is a quick read, it could have been improved with more concrete examples. The book would also have benefited from richer descriptions, something beyond a few examples from Mose’s playdates with her own children. After observing a dozen or so playdates, particular types seem to emerge like the playdate gone wrong or the parents complaining about other parents to partners. Perhaps these types of playdate experiences might vary in relevant ways across social categories (i.e., upper middle-class families complain more about partners than others). Such information would be useful to the field, both analytically and theoretically.

Mose’s convincing conclusion that playdates are about building social capital across generations will, I hope, give parents who read *The Playdate* pause to reflect

before accepting a private playdate as the best way for children to socialize.

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**Teaching Kindergarten:  
Learner-Centered Classrooms  
for the 21st Century**

*Julie Diamond, Betsy Grob, and  
Fretta Reitzes, eds.*

New York, NY: Teachers College Press, 2015. Foreword, prologue, acknowledgments, introduction, children's book list, references, contributors, index. 176 pp. \$29.95 paper. ISBN: 9780807757116

At its heart, *Teaching Kindergarten: Learner-Centered Classrooms for the 21st Century* is a paean to the play-based, interest-driven kindergarten we know from the annals of progressive education. Its ostensible goal, though, is to resist the increasingly more familiar kindergarten, where a skills-based and overtly academic curriculum favors more time on the rug for minilessons and less time on it for building with blocks. But to label *Teaching Kindergarten* a mere apologia would be to give it short shrift. It is also an up-to-date and highly persuasive argument about why the trend toward all academics all the time is so unnecessary if later academic achievement is truly tied to what children learn in kindergarten. To this end, coeditors and longtime early-childhood educators and leaders Julie Diamond, Betsy Grob, and Fretta Reitzes offer a hefty collection of teachers' stories that demonstrate the advantages of learner-centered—progres-

sive—education for five-year-olds.

To this end, we must not be drawn to the book's subtitle over its main one. Yes, the book concerns learner-centered classrooms, but its collective strength lies in its primary appellation: *teaching* kindergarten. The critical idea is that, although progressive education may embody a belief system about how children learn best, it cannot be separated from an understanding of what teachers actually do in the classroom. The central question is: How is learner-centered teaching enacted?

Chapter 1, "Learner-Centered Teaching," by coeditor Julie Diamond, presents as fine an overview of the modern progressive educator's purview as any in teacher education today (full disclosure: I am very briefly cited). Diamond seamlessly aligns John Dewey's vision of teaching "to propel children's learning" (p. 14) with a commitment to culturally responsive teaching in a diverse world. She follows this with short introductions to key points of entry (with references to the ensuing chapters, where they are discussed in greater depth). Diamond has few good things to say about the Common Core and the accountability and standards movement, though she strongly favors rigorous, content-based curriculum, while holding teachers accountable for learning what, as she says, "*matters to them and to others*" (p. 28).

It goes without saying, of course, that topics frequently overlap in the individual chapters. Such is the nature of teaching five-year-olds. All sorts of things happen at once. Stakeholders, too, overlap. A special feature of this book is that many teacher roles are represented in it, often more than one in a chapter. We hear from head teachers, new teachers, staff developers, con-