

### **Safe and Fun Playgrounds: A Handbook**

*Heather M. Olsen, Susan D. Hudson, and  
Donna Thompson*

St. Paul, MN: Redleaf Press, 2016.  
Acknowledgments, introduction,  
references, and index. 176 pp. \$29.95  
paper. ISBN: 981605544601

*Safe and Fun Playgrounds* provides an easy-to-understand handbook to create, maintain, and supervise playgrounds. As founders of the National Programs for Playground Safety (NPPS), the authors present four principles of playground safety: supervision, age-appropriate design, proper surfacing, and good equipment maintenance (SAFE). The authors base their writing on eighty years of combined professional experience and extensive research. The handbook also includes a supervisory checklist, an Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessibility checklist, routine safety and inspection checklists, and state regulations.

The handbook's inclusion of a chapter on supervision is especially beneficial. Many times, texts on playground construction and safety focus merely on equipment and surfaces while ignoring the importance of playground supervision. Additionally, the authors' incorporation of an age-appropriate design framework allows playground providers an opportunity to offer play apparatus based on the needs and abilities of children rather than employing a one-size-fits-all approach. The inclusion of ADA considerations and materials for children with disabilities greatly adds to the depth of practitioners' understanding of the needs of children. In chapter 4, "Fall Surfaces," the authors

not only thoroughly describe the various materials available for protection against falls, they also explore in detail the relationship between material and the potential height of falls. Chapter 5, "Equipment Maintenance," focuses on the critical topic of playground maintenance with emphasis on ways to prevent major playground hazards. In the final chapter, the authors provide a systematic plan for designing a safe playground. The handbook concludes with an extremely useful glossary, especially for individuals new to the area of playground construction and safety.

In my years as a professor in recreation and leisure studies, I would have added *Safe and Fun Playgrounds: A Handbook* as required reading to my syllabi in several of the courses I taught, including those in recreation leadership and facility design and maintenance. Current and future recreation and parks administrators and staff should be well versed in the discussions of playground construction and safety laid out by the authors. Similarly, school administrators, staff at day care centers, nonprofit organizations, and anyone involved with playgrounds should have a working knowledge of the content of this handbook. Currently, I am helping build playgrounds in Haiti through a nonprofit organization, the International Childhood Enrichment Program (ICEP), and I will use *Safe and Fun Playgrounds: A Handbook* as a reference for ICEP playground construction and the supervision of children. Indeed, the project manager will translate applicable forms and checklists to Creole for the Haitian staff.

One of my few criticisms of the book is that the authors' overwhelming reliance on acronyms might distract profes-

sionals, practitioners, and students new to the area of playground construction and safety. When revising this handbook, the authors might want to spell out each organization, agency, and commission, in full at the beginning of each chapter. Also, although the authors do briefly mention “natural play areas” in their first chapter, they fail to discuss the ongoing debate regarding the negative impact that emphasizing playground safety may have on a child’s ability to engage in spontaneous creative play. Nevertheless, I highly recommend *Safe and Fun Playgrounds* for anyone involved in the creation and supervision of playgrounds.

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—David B. Jones, *University of Southern Maine, Portland, ME*

### **Knowledge Games: How Playing Games Can Solve Problems, Create Insight, and Make Change**

*Karen Schrier*

Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins  
University Press, 2016.

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Although the term “video games” no doubt still spurs, at least in some individuals, thoughts of “mindless entertainment” that is primarily “for kids,” the current scientific consensus holds that video games, in fact, can be incredibly powerful tools, with a wide range of applications beyond entertainment. Indeed, today there are already video games that train individu-

als to perform better such difficult and complex jobs such as endoscopic surgery; to rehabilitate medical patients who have visual, cognitive, and motor deficits; to teach children scholastic content; and to spur interest in solving major societal problems. And in retrospect, these various functions may not be surprising. After all, if video game developers could become adept at teaching players to “rescue a princess” or “find a hidden treasure” more effectively, it would stand to reason that they could also become adept at teaching players’ other skills or knowledge.

But Karen Schrier’s *Knowledge Games: How Playing Games Can Solve Problems, Create Insight, and Make Change* explores an emerging use for video games that might be much more unexpected. Namely, in knowledge games the goal is not to convey knowledge or teach skills to players. Instead, the goal is for the players to actually produce knowledge. Take for example, *Foldit*, a game discussed in detail in the book. In this game, players attempt to construct solutions for real-life, and currently unsolved, protein-folding problems. By harnessing the brainpower of a large player base, *Foldit* has been able to advance our understanding of protein folding more than a small group of researchers would have.

*Knowledge Games* explores the fact that the best knowledge games harness what can be thought of as three separate sources of power. The first, as discussed, is the power of video games to motivate achievement and spur interest in solving problems. The second is the power of crowds, or in this case “crowd sourcing,” to use groups of individuals to complete tasks that none of the individuals could