

came to social activities. Living far away from such new institutions as dance halls and movie theaters and restricted from attending them in any case, farm youth—so Riney-Kehrberg asserts—embraced intimacy as never before as a form of rebellion. Especially for girls, she says, “engaging in premarital sex was as great a statement of independence as a young female could make, asserting that her body was her own, to do with what she pleased. She was asserting that she did not belong to her parents” (p. 191). In the context of this time and place, engaging in premarital sex thus represented maturation and could hasten the decision to leave the community and build a life of one’s own, again especially for young females, who felt even more socially suppressed than males. The fissure between a youthful generation lured to the city and an older one that had staked its status on making a living off the land was apparent, Riney-Kehrberg implies, in the rise of premarital sex.

Riney-Kehrberg carefully notes that the hinterland did not empty out, however. Many children made the conscious decision to stay in agriculture, and she documents the orchestrated campaigns to “keep ’em on the farm” during the period. Popular magazines such as the *Nebraska Farmer*, she shows, underscored the control and independence farmers enjoyed by living off the land, as well as the healthy effects of working outdoors. As the twentieth century dawned, youngsters raised on farms were reminded of the sense of belonging and rootedness that staying at home offered. When we look back on the experience in old age, says Riney-Kehrberg, “It is in play, perhaps, that we feel the greatest nostalgic

pull for a past we have lost” (p. 231). As the book closes, she ruminates about the kids of that earlier day: “Unlike modern children, their play, for the most part, was free-form and unscripted, and parents and other adults interfered as little as possible. It was their own. In that way, it was, perhaps, far more physically dangerous than the play allowed to many modern American children” (p. 231). Her book is more about labor than play, but it is a valuable foundation for assessing historically the distinctions Americans make between child and adult, farm and city, work and recreation.

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### **To Play or Not to Play: Is It Really a Question?**

*Christine Jeandheur Ferguson and Ernest Dettore, Jr., editors.*  
Olney, MD: Association for Childhood Education International, 2007.  
References, diagrams, photographs, tables. 101 pp. \$18.50 paper. ISBN: 9780871731708.

When you read this slender volume, the wonderful compendium of play-dense information contained between its covers erases the question posed by its title. The book makes a good case for the rewards of play and the necessity for its inclusion in our lives, with a major emphasis on children and the contributions of play to their learning and well-being. The data provided documents the urgency with which we need to reverse social trends that decrease access to the many benefits of play.

The book's message comes down to the assertion that we are irrefutably surrounded by the "solid and foundational understanding of the many benefits of play" (p. 95), which its chapters particularize. Though I believe a broad audience, particularly parents, will enjoy and be stimulated by reading this book, its focus on children's education make it best suited for teachers and the libraries of preschool, elementary school, and special educational settings. Clear diagrams, carefully selected photographs and children's drawings, and a variety of tables for curricular and classroom use all enrich the text. The multiple authors provide concise, clearly written chapters, and the editors' excellent preface and epilogue provide an overarching context for the book's overall theme. The reliable scholarship of the contributors should advance the recognition that play belongs in the scientific and educational mainstream, instead of languishing in an unfunded research cul-de-sac or being confined to specially endowed schools. Collectively, the contributors make a strong, undeniable case that play should be an integral component of curricular planning for all young children. The book's guidelines for such play cover all children, including those with special needs.

I am steeped in the biology of play and neuroscience, so Doris Bergen's opening chapter, "Play and the Brain," brought me back to basics. It also sparked me to rethink the contributions of animal play to our understanding of human play behavior. In general, Berger was careful in her summaries not to overstep the current data. When brain imagers measure glucose consumption, for example, they are sometimes tempted to correlate these readings directly with behavior. The cur-

rent state of technology encourages this leap, but the data will not yet support it. In a welcome contrast, Bergen admits that the clinical indications that play sculpts the brain still await verification, although she implies they will soon become valid for the science of play behavior.

The diversity of topics in *To Play or Not to Play* also demonstrates how play contributes to cultural pluralism. In chapter 2, Tunde Szecsci and Debra A. Giambo provide clear examples that embed play as a major and necessary teacher of culture in a global context. In this third chapter, coeditor Ernest Dettore, Jr., dramatically reviews the current marginalization of preschooler play and the stark need for remedies. He provides a list of possibilities that should help determine every community's public education priorities. In chapter 4, "A Play-Based Curriculum to Promote Literacy Development," coeditor Christine Ferguson defines and explicates the value of sociodramatic play for literacy. She provides how-to's to introduce and maintain its vitality in educational settings and demonstrates how sociodramatic play helps develop social competence. Carol McNulty illustrates in chapter 5 the crucial and varied power of play in shaping multiple identities in our pluralistic culture. In chapter 6, Howard Booth, Linda Ehrlich and Elizabeth Deasy hone the argument that the loss of access to art and music constitutes a loss of imagination, which is based on play. In the seventh chapter, Sonia Mastrangelo and Isabel Killoran describe the lack of access often found in the lives of the special-needs children. Their account, sufficiently detailed, can inspire and guide the inclusion of play in the lives of these children for whom access requires independent educational programming.

Kathleen Burriss's excellent eighth chapter on outdoor play rounds out the volume by establishing the importance of contact with nature and its contribution to healthy development.

Each of the eight chapters can stand alone as a succinct essay valuable in itself. The compendium leaves the reader, whether play novice or specialist, with an enhanced zest for play advocacy. One cannot close this book without having acquired a better understanding of and greater respect for the importance and

value of play. The book provides clear guidelines for including play in numerous settings and cultures, even while expressing a sense of frustration and grief at the current disregard of play. It increases our motivation, as one of the contributors put it, to “. . . have a solemn responsibility to protect and promote play for the sake of our children” (p. 7).

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—Stuart Brown, *National Institute for Play, Carmel Calley, CA*