

**Play and Development:
Evolutionary, Sociocultural, and
Functional Perspectives**

Artin Göncü and Suzanne Gaskins, eds.
Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers, 2006. Illustrated.
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9780805852615.

This edited volume is a compilation of papers presented at the 33rd Annual Meeting of the Jean Piaget Society. The inclusive chapters reflect the breadth and depth of play research and the researchers themselves. As a topic of scholarly inquiry, the study of play has been pursued through an interdisciplinary lens and different theoretical frameworks. This volume reflects that diversity.

The text, divided into an introduction and three sections, addresses and challenges the assumption that the phenomenon of play is a human cultural universal, one associated with developmental outcomes. In this light, the volume explores contemporary perspectives, developing a precise and species-fair definition of play and pretense, extending human and animal comparisons and current methodological approaches and measures.

The editors selected works from various vantage points that address and assess current research and constructs in play. These include evolutionary, sociocultural, and functional perspectives. Two common themes permeate all the chapters: that play involves social interaction and that play forms are the product of the interaction between genetic endowment and environmental factors. This interactionist perspective gives rise to several issues for further investigations into play. The first involves exploring the link between

the biological origins of children's motivations to play and how cultural context guides the specific play forms that emerge. Another is the attempt to distinguish play from other activities that result in developmental outcomes for some children. A third focuses on the cultural variation in and cultural constraints on play. Limitations in contemporary play research are also noted, such as the difficulty in pursuing interspecies comparison or balancing the developmental outcomes associated with human play with play as functionally adaptive for animals.

For example, Peter K. Smith provides a historical overview of evolutionary theory as it applies to play using four categories of play: rough and tumble play, exercise, object play, and pretend play. Using ethological terms such as cost, benefit, function, and life history, Smith suggests that the criteria employed to study and assess children's play have not been employed to study and assess animal play. He calls for longitudinal studies with animals and modifications to definitions of pretend play that would make human and animal comparisons possible. Robert W. Mitchell expands on Smith's point and addresses the need to devise more accurate and species-fair definitions of pretense in order to pursue comparisons between humans and animals. Anthony D. Pellegrini discusses rough and tumble play using the evolutionary framework of sex segregation. He reintroduces the concepts of cost and benefit that appear in Smith's chapter and discusses how the function of rough and tumble changes with age for humans. For example, in middle childhood rough and tumble play is linked to social affiliation, whereas in adolescence it functions to solidify dominance. Not only does this

chapter draw attention to how the same activity across species has different outcomes, it also acknowledges how biological predispositions for some play forms are shaped by children's experiences.

The chapters that interpret play through a sociocultural framework address the cultural variability of play. In separate chapters, Marc H. Bornstein and Angeline Lillard focus on the importance of acquiring meaning through social interaction, although each approaches the topic via a different route. Bornstein focuses upon the formative period of infancy to explore the developmental expression of play, whereas Lillard uses young children's daily interactions to examine the act of pretense that occurs when mother and child are play partners. She explores the bidirectional communication of "pretense" and how nonverbal cues are used to convey this reality through Vygotskian theory and theory of mind. In their chapter, Artin Göncü, Jyoti Jain, and Ute Tuermer explore the impact of socioeconomic status and culture on children's play. They compare the play of low-income African-American, European-American, and Turkish children to mainstream middle-income Western children and call for moving beyond deficit models to how social, economic, and cultural contexts are entwined in guiding children's expressions of play.

In their chapter, Suzanne Gaskins, Wendy Haight, and David F. Lancy suggest that play is neither critical for learning nor linked to developmental outcomes in all cultures. Drawing upon ethnographic work from Taiwan, the Kpelle in Liberia, and the Yucatan, the authors challenge the Western focus on pretend play and the rhetoric of play as progress. They argue

successfully that play is not necessarily linked to developmental outcomes in all cultures and that some children may acquire knowledge, skills, and abilities about their culture more from observation than from play.

The chapters that address the applied value of play vary in content although they share the element of self-expression. Paul L. Harris takes a Vygotskian approach to the relationship between imagination, creativity, and cognitive development. Marjorie Taylor and Anne M. Mannering focus upon a single creative use of children's imaginations—imaginary companions. Using preschool and Head Start participants, Ageliki Nicolopoulou explores the bidirectional nature of pretend play and children's storytelling. And Cindy Dell Clark addresses the therapeutic uses of play. In this work, children are viewed as active agents in devising their own ways of coping with serious illness through initiating pretend play with themselves and others in their social world. This last section differs from the others insofar as the cognitive processes of imagination and creativity do not allow for comparisons that can be drawn with other species.

A secondary intention of this book is a call for a more integrated approach, both conceptually and methodologically, to the study of play. The volume supports more observational studies steeped in the ethnological tradition of recording and coding observable behavior and also ethnographic studies that provide rich substantive material to produce thicker, emic descriptions (and, consequently, cultural meanings) of play.

Play and Development is a welcome addition to existing play literature. The book gives testimony to the interdisci-

plinary nature by which play is studied and interpreted, and it provokes thought about the future direction of play research. This work has taken on the serious task of advancing play research and has accomplished its goal, playfully.

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Play = Learning: How Play Motivates and Enhances Children's Cognitive and Social-Emotional Growth

Dorothy G. Singer, Roberta Michnick Golinkoff, and Kathy Hirsh-Pasek, eds.
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This book is a compilation of material from a conference on Play = Learning held at Yale University in June 2005. The majority of authors are well known in the fields of expertise that correspond to their chapter topics. The editors' purpose was to counter recent perspectives that focus on teacher strategies, parent-structured activities, and government policies and have served to minimize the role of play as the major medium for young children's learning.

The book has four sections. The first section addresses policy and practices that have challenged play as a medium of learning even in early childhood. Included here are a chapter by Edward F. Zigler and Sandra J. Bishop-Josef and one by Anthony D. Pellegrini and Robyn M. Holmes. The second section describes ways play facilitates

school readiness and mastery of academic standards and includes a chapter by James F. Christie and Kathleen A. Roskos; one by Laura E. Berk, Trisha D. Mann, and Amy T. Ogan; another by Harvey F. Bellin and Dorothy G. Singer; a fourth by Age-iki Nicolopoulou, Judith McDowell, and Carolyn Brockmeyer; and finally one by Herbert P. Ginsburg. The third section addresses the effects of television and other media as substitutes for play and promotes playful use of computer technology with a chapter by Deborah S. Weber and one by Mitchel Resnick. The fourth section suggests ways play can promote learning for children with special needs. The first of its three chapters is written by Wendy Haight, James Black, Teresa Ostler, and Kathryn Sheridan; the second by Melissa Allen Preissler; and the third—an epilogue that provides a summary of the books' major points—by Jerome L. Singer.

The chapter authors provide excellent data and cogent arguments for the importance of the role of play in promoting learning. In addition to the policy recommendations in the first section, most chapters also suggest policy implications. The chapters relating play to academic areas may be especially useful to readers who need to make a case for playful learning in schools. Although most of this information has been discussed elsewhere, these chapters are useful summaries of the extant research. The section addressing effects of media on play suggests creative aspects of technology play and opens up another dimension of potential action for policy or practice changes. While the final section addresses only two types of problems that play can possibly ameliorate—emotional trauma and autism—it makes