

within his narrow compass. Typical is his extremely brief discussion (pp. 58–59) of the phenomenon of nudity in Greek athletics. But while I commend the way he covers the current thinking on this provocative subject in so limited a space, curious readers seeking specifics will want more guidance than they receive from his suggested further readings on this topic (pp. 171–72). This is a not infrequent drawback of *Sports in Ancient Times*, and it calls into question the editorial decision not to include endnotes or footnotes in the volume.

Crowther's fair and balanced scholarship is admirable, and he usually avoids the unsupportable and ultimately subjective assertions that often infiltrate books about sports history. In the case of Greek sports, for example, sports scholars often claim that either the *stade*—an ancient footrace one stadium (six hundred Greek feet) long—or the *pankration*—a contest blending boxing and wrestling—was historically the most prestigious Olympic event, which in both cases is disputable. So it is disappointing to see Crowther do something similar when he writes, "The most honorable way to win [in Greek sports] was to win 'without dust' (*akoniti*), when an outstanding athlete did not actually compete in an event, because his opponents withdrew" (p. 53), though I rush to point out this kind of claim is a rare exception in *Sports in Ancient Times*.

The primary shortcoming of this volume is its lack of illustrations, of which there are only 37, all in black and white. So much of the evidence for ancient sports is visual, and much of it should be viewed in color, especially in the case of tomb paintings, Greek black- and red-figure vases, and Roman mosaics. By comparison, Stephen G. Miller's exemplary textbook

Ancient Greek Athletics (2004) features 291 beautiful illustrations, most in color, and sells for less than Crowther's volume. Today's students have been largely educated in classrooms that feature a balance of images and text, a development that inevitably has influenced the textbook industry. To many contemporary students, I fear, this volume will appear drab and old-fashioned.

Despite these criticisms, I can strongly recommend this superlatively researched and pellucidly written book, though readers may need to supplement its reading with visual evidence presented on Web sites or in textbooks such as Miller's, or even E. Norman Gardiner's *Athletics of the Ancient World* (1930), which despite its obvious ideological flaws (its Victorian concepts of amateurism and elitism) and anachronisms is richly illustrated with 214 black-and-white images. It is my sincere hope that future editions address this defect to help Crowther's work gain the wide readership it richly deserves.

—David M. Christenson, *University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ*

Playing Outdoors: Spaces and Places, Risk and Challenge

Helen Tovey

Maidenhead, UK: Open University Press, 2007. Illustrations, bibliographical references, index. 176 pp. \$49.95 paper. ISBN: 9780335216413.

A few months back, I visited the Play Trail at Moors Valley Country Park in Hampshire, England. The trail is a roughly circular woodland walk that takes in some unique and charming artist-designed

wooden play structures, each engaging in a different way with the natural surroundings. It is immensely popular with both families and groups. A preschool class was following the walk at the same time I was. So I had a good opportunity to see what the children and their caretakers made of it.

It was a depressing experience. The children were allowed about five minutes at each structure before being herded on to the next one. They barely had time even to become familiar with a structure, let alone explore it; there was certainly nothing adventuresome or imaginative in their “playing” with the structure. At one point, the entire class lined up for a two-second ride astride a wooden pixie, each child held securely in place by a worker. The adults who brought them could have done with reading *Playing Outdoors*. Aimed squarely at early-years practitioners, Helen Tovey’s book neatly and thoughtfully brings together insights from theory, history, and current play practice in a lucid exploration of outdoor play and its potential for supporting young children’s learning and growth.

The book ranges from debates about meanings and philosophy through design of spaces to interventions and relationships. It starts in exactly the right place: the loss of childhood freedom and its potential consequences. The style throughout is discursive and reflective, with well-chosen anecdotes, inspiring quotes, ample references, and a welcome refusal to oversimplify through checklists or one-size-fits-all prescriptions. Dozens of black-and-white photos illustrate the discussions and underscore the underlying vision of children as competent and keen to get to grips with the world around them.

I valued the historical perspectives, as someone who has come to this topic

via happenstance and serendipity rather than a conventional professional or academic career path. Tovey is based at the Froebel College, Roehampton University, London, and her conceptual starting point is the nineteenth-century kindergarten developed by Friedrich Froebel. But she moves on: Maria Montessori, Margaret Macmillan, Susan Isaacs, and Lady Allen of Hurtwood are all surveyed, as are ideas from developmental psychology and environmentalism. The inclusion of Lady Allen—a passionate advocate for staffed adventure playgrounds in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s—is a welcome contribution from the discipline of playwork and its fundamental commitment to supporting the play process.

The thorny topic of risk is rightly given a chapter to itself. Tovey pleads for a more balanced approach, declaring “while it is easy to blame others . . . the key to developing more opportunities for risky play lies with those who work with young children” (p.111). She argues that many play settings lay the seeds for their own confusion when they adopt mission statements that talk unthinkingly of a “safe and secure environment.” Tovey echoes my own call, made in *No Fear: Growing Up in a Risk Averse Society* (2007), for a shift from a philosophy of protection to a philosophy of resilience. However, I’m not wild about that term *risky play*. As playwork academics, Wendy Russell and Stuart Lester have argued in *Play for a Change* (2008), uncertainty, unpredictability, and transgression run through children’s play like blood through their veins. Although Tovey doesn’t necessarily intend this, the phrase *risky play* can lead practitioners to think in terms of a distinctive type of play behavior. This line of thought fosters

unhelpful notions about offering doses of risky play—a road to more confusion and ill-informed adult intervention, not less.

Tovey's last two chapters gave me some pause. "What Do We Mean by Free Play Outdoors?" acknowledges that in the 1980s and 1990s free play in early-years settings suffered from too great an emphasis on freedom and not enough on content. Observational studies questioned the experiences offered, leading the term to be all but abandoned in favor of structured, directed, or well-planned play. Tovey reclaims free play by linking it to the vision of a rich, enabling environment in which adults support but do not dominate. The theme is continued in the final chapter, "Roles, Resources and Relationships Outdoors," in which Tovey sensitively explores how adults can enter into children's worlds in ways that do justice to the sophistication of their play.

As Brian Sutton-Smith has argued in *The Ambiguity of Play* (1997), there are fascinating contrasts between the different rhetorics that aim to reveal the mysteries of play. My own thinking on play is shaped as much by the United Kingdom's growing playwork movement as by the ideas of educationalists and child-development specialists. I have long felt that playworkers (whose discipline is handily characterized in Fraser Brown and Chris Taylor's new collection *Foundations of Playwork*, 2008)—and early-years professionals have much to gain from dialogue. I am pleased to see that Tovey agrees. While I would have welcomed greater exploration of such conversations, this is probably a subject for another time and perhaps a different audience.

Playing Outdoors is a rich, thought-provoking, well-written, and timely ad-

dition to the literature on play in early education. Not surprisingly, the book takes its cue from the ideas of the United Kingdom's early-years milieu. Britain can justifiably claim to be at the forefront of international debates in this discipline, and, moreover, the topics covered are of interest far beyond the book's home market. So readers in the United States and elsewhere should find much to engage them. Inevitably for a practitioner publication, it is more a survey of existing scholarship than an original contribution. However, it serves as a testimony to the benefits of infusing practice with theoretical and historical insights. I just hope those workers who route-marched their children around Moors Valley Country Park read it—and realize the error of their ways.

—Tim Gill, author of *No Fear: Growing up in a Risk Adverse Society*

Grand Theft Childhood: The Surprising Truth about Violent Video Games and What Parents Can Do

Lawrence Kutner and Cheryl K. Olson
New York: Simon & Schuster, 2008.
Notes, index. 260 pp. \$25.00 cloth. ISBN 9780743299510

The Ecology of Games: Connecting Youth, Games, and Learning

Katie Salen, editor
Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008.
Notes, glossary, index. 278 pp. \$16.00 paper. ISBN 9780262693646

Video games currently occupy the hot seat in the furor around the impact of media