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## Book Reviews

### **The Sage Handbook of Outdoor Play and Learning**

*Tim Waller, Eva Ärlemalm-Hagsér, Ellen Beate Hansen Sandseter, Libby Lee-Hammond, Kristi Lekies, and Shirley Wyver, eds.*  
London: SAGE Publication, Ltd., 2017.

Acknowledgments, introduction, and index. 706 pp. \$175.00 cloth.

ISBN: 9781473926608.

This weighty book (more than three informative pounds) contains forty chapters on different aspects of outdoor play for young children. The outgrowth of ten years of discussions among members of the Outdoor Play and Learning Special Interest Group of the European Early Childhood Education Research Association, this is a follow up to *The Sage Handbook of Play and Learning in Early Childhood* (2014). The fifty-six early-childhood researchers who contributed to the book have written about twenty countries located in northern Europe (United Kingdom, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Austria, and Germany), the Mediterranean region (Greece and Turkey), Africa (Ethiopia and South Africa), Oceania (Australia and New Zealand), Asia (South Korea and Japan),

and the Americas (Canada, United States, Chile, and Columbia). The book is organized into six parts, each with a different focus. Each part features six to seven chapters examining the topic and research from a variety of countries.

Several concerns prompted publication of the work, including the increasing time children spend watching television and other screens, children's growing academic demands, adult's fears for child safety, and disappearing green space. Each have diminished opportunities for outdoor play in many countries, especially the USA and UK. Even walking to school has become a part of history in many countries. The book cites studies in the UK showing that 23 percent of children aged five to eleven years went to school on their own in 2011 compared to 86 percent in 1971. In Germany, 50 percent of seven-year-olds walk to school on their own compared to 5 percent of the same aged children in the UK. Considering the lines of school buses and cars blocking traffic at the end of the school day in my community, I suspect the number of walkers may be even lower in many parts of the United States. I worry that the erosion of

children's right to roam in general and the resulting lack of time spent in nature will damage children's important connections to the earth (see Richard Louv's "last child in the woods" hypothesis, E. O. Wilson's ideas on "biophilia," and Rachael Carson's *Silent Spring*). Although this handbook's chapters do not address the freedom parents should give their children to explore the outdoors, they do address ways in which early-childhood programs can use culturally appropriate means to enhance children's play and learning in the outdoors.

The first five chapters under part 1, "Theoretical Frameworks and Conceptual Approaches," have background material useful for the study of play in general, including classical and modern play theories; an examination of affordances (i.e., what one can do with the environment and available materials); the use of technology in toys; factors interfering with outdoor play in general and recess in particular; and the benefits of play for creativity, interest in science, intelligence, and, especially, executive function. These chapters include some overlap. The sixth chapter introduces the forest schools of the UK and their child-centered, all-season outdoor programs that include play and choice and focus on sustainable development.

Part 2 features six chapters on "Critical Reflections on Policy and Regulation." Four of these chapters illustrate rather similar concerns in four countries, the UK, Australia, Canada, and the USA. There, play familiar to earlier generations, sometimes influenced by current exaggerated fears of litigation, has been restricted to meet safety requirements that make them hazard free but that also destroy challenge. As a result, children either find ways to

misuse playgrounds or they do not want to use them at all. The authors seem to agree that some risk is beneficial for children to learn to challenge themselves. There is now a move in Britain toward building playgrounds "as safe as necessary, not as safe as possible" (p. 202). A chapter on South Korea discusses outdoor play restrictions resulting from a disconnection between indoor and outdoor space, Confucianism, and risk anxiety. On the other hand, a chapter on Latin America reports that young children in Brazil and Chile have a lot of free play outdoors although girls tend to have less time to play than boys because of domestic chores.

Part 3, which focuses on "Children's Engagement with Nature, Sustainability and Children's Geographies," contains six chapters on nature and forest kindergartens in Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden, Scotland, Germany, and Australia. These chapters discuss such issues as children's rights; developing communities of care; teaching for sustainability; rules based on trust; and practical issues such as toileting, use of natural objects for play, development of "storied narratives," and engaging children in decision making. These chapters also discuss the roles of adult mentors in such schools as well as teacher training programs that engage adults in outdoor experiences where they make drawings representing adult-child relationships, learn to "walk alongside" rather than lead, and learn sustainable methods (p. 284). The seventh chapter focuses on urban play spaces, including types of playgrounds (natural areas and the use of loose parts) that encourage different types of play and recommends a variety of research methods to better

determine play outcomes in various environments.

“Diverse Contexts and Inclusion in Children’s Outdoor Play Environments” is the theme of the seven chapters in part 4. Four of the chapters discuss the rights of all children to play (Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child), outdoor play of bilingual and multilingual children, gender issues in outdoor play in Turkey, and challenges in recruiting men to work in early-childhood programs. This section reminds the reader that children in poverty, girls, children with disabilities, institutionalized children, indigenous and minority children, and children in areas of disaster and conflict have the right to play. Also, research shows that there are advantages to being bilingual or multilingual, both for brain development and for play diversity; that, in gender-traditional cultures, there may be gender issues in outdoor play; and that it is easier to recruit men for outdoor programs than for predominately indoor programs. The other three chapters focus on indigenous communities in Australia and in the far north of Sweden, Norway, Finland, and Canada where early-childhood programs include community elders who educate the children about history, sense of place, and respect for the environment.

Part 5 features seven chapters on various “Methodologies for Researching Outdoor Play and Learning.” These chapters include examinations of the challenges and possibilities in using randomized control group designs, video as an analysis tool, “narrative journeys” and behavior mapping, time sampling in different contexts, creation of vignettes, case studies, and participatory research with young children.

Two of the chapters discuss case studies in more detail. In Chile, where not much outdoor space is available, a five-part program has developed outdoor learning and play spaces that include composting, vegetable and herb gardens, a story circle, and teamwork challenges. A single case analysis of Maori children’s trip to the bush in New Zealand shows how religious beliefs were incorporated into respect for the forest.

The book concludes with seven chapters focused on the “Links between Research and Practice.” These chapters explore research in the USA and Sweden about the relationship between children’s collections, interests, and executive functions; an analysis of complexities regarding international collaborations for outdoor education in Ethiopia; early-childhood education teacher’s views and strategies on outdoor play in South Africa; use of interviews, observations, and diaries to determine teachers’ views on outdoor play in Iceland; ethnographic analysis of two Norwegian nature kindergartens (on an island and in the forest) to study sense of place; and the use of “phenomenological hermeneutics” to interpret children’s play scenarios in the Norwegian forests. The last chapter provides a description of physical play in Japanese early-childhood programs, which are governed by three different regulatory agencies. Decreases in motor abilities of preschool children since 1986 have promoted hiring physical education instructors to institute formal exercise lessons in many preschool programs. However, the research shows that children become more fit with free play and without formal lessons—a powerful study with which to end the book. The book does not have a summary and draws

no final conclusions.

Most of the chapters by the American authors provide background but do not report on outdoor activities in U.S. early-childhood programs. However, the book is very informative on research and programs in many countries. It would be very useful for researchers studying outdoor play environments and for anyone establishing policies for early-childhood outdoor activities and designing nature-based early-childhood programs. The descriptions of outdoor play with indigenous populations in Scandinavia, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia should inspire early-childhood educators in the USA to develop outdoor programs relevant to the histories and cultures of its diverse population. Given the length of the book and its cost, readers, instead of buying it themselves, may wish to advocate its purchase by university, community, and early-childhood education program libraries. It is a valuable resource for policy makers, educators, and researchers.

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—Olga S. Jarrett, *Georgia State University, Atlanta, GA*

**Yo' Mama, Mary Mack, and Boudreaux and Thibodeaux: Louisiana Children's Folklore and Play**

*Jeanne Pitre Soileau*

Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2016. Foreword, acknowledgments, introduction, black-and-white photographs, appendices, and index. 193 pp. \$65.00 cloth. ISBN: 9781496810403

Jeanne Pitre Soileau's *Yo' Mama, Mary Mack, and Boudreaux and Thibodeaux: Louisiana Children's Folklore and Play* celebrates and explores African American children's expressive culture in South Louisiana. It also celebrates the author's more than forty years of fieldwork with African American children and the persistence of child lore. And it explores genres gleaned from the author's first-hand observations of African American children at play. The book covers "the last part of the 20th century and the first ten years of the 21st," which "began with the era of integration in South Louisiana and ends with the age of computers and the Internet" (p. 3).

In this compact book, Soileau works out a problem in children's folklore that Gary Fine calls Newell's Paradox. Following in the steps of pioneering children's folklorist, William Wells Newell, Soileau asks how children's folklore can be conservative and inventive at the same time. She finds the conservative in the structures of the lore and the inventive in the performed content of the expressions of childhood.

*Yo' Mama* reminds me of what the forest industry calls a "select cut." As opposed to a "clear cut," which take down all trees in an area, the select cut culls trees that are representative in form and function. For Soileau "the narrative interactions presented in the following chapters are extracted from my forty-four-year compilation of the games and rhymes of children—boys and girls—from ages three to eighteen. The materials comprise several genres of study: oral narratives and songs, jokes and tales, and teasing formulas gleaned from . . . mostly African American sources" (p. 5). For this work, the author