
Book Reviews

The Classrooms All Young Children Need: Lessons in Teaching from Vivian Paley

Patricia M. Cooper

Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009. References, index, notes. 248 pp. \$29.00 cloth. ISBN: 9780226115238

In *The Classrooms All Young Children Need: Lessons in Teaching from Vivian Paley*, Patricia M. Cooper presents a comprehensive and thoughtful analysis of the work of Vivian Paley, play advocate, early-childhood educator, and author. Through reflective practice, stories, and dialogue, Cooper captures the very essence of Paley's pedagogical approach. This approach centers on two overlapping principles: pedagogy of meaning, which is mainly curricular; and pedagogy of fairness, which is primarily relational. Cooper identifies the relevant developmental research supporting Paley's pedagogical ideals as well as their significant theoretical foundations. Paley's contributions to early-childhood education are highly regarded by many professionals—educational philosophers, psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists, play therapists, and teacher educators, among others. However, Cooper argues Paley's philosophy of education

and pedagogical methods are “underutilized in schools” and in the teacher-education community.

Cooper details the extensive debate that exists today about the “academicization” of the early-childhood classroom, in which a primary-school curriculum is being pushed down into preschool and kindergarten. Paley maintains that not only is this unfair pedagogy, but it undermines the potential of young children. Proponents of play assert that play-based education is disappearing and best practices in early-literacy instruction are being compromised. Yet, critics of Paley's idealistic view of play-based learning argue that this approach is unrealistic given current standards-based reform efforts and the federal mandates of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001. Cooper examines these phenomena and carefully considers the impact these curricular changes have on young children and the professional development of teachers, notably novices and less-experienced ones.

In the first part of the book, Cooper looks at Paley's play-based pedagogy, which includes fantasy play, storytelling, and story acting and its implications for a pedagogy of meaning. From a practical stance, pedagogy of meaning encourages teaching to stimulate young children's

imaginations and to nurture their exploration of things and ideas they find meaningful. Cooper aptly examines the theoretical underpinnings that are relevant to Paley's play-based approach, linking them to Lev S. Vygotsky's theory of the influence of play on development and to John Dewey's notion that the motivation of children "to inquire" promotes growth and development.

Regarding Paley's well-known storytelling curriculum, Cooper highlights numerous benefits this approach has on children's social, emotional, cognitive, linguistic, and literacy development. She contends that both storytelling and story acting are extensions of fantasy play that spawn young children's imaginative thinking, foster their social competence, and advance their literacy skills. Cooper provides a poignant synopsis of her own introduction to storytelling and story acting as an early-childhood teacher and its practical value in teaching children written language. To conclude, she contrasts the storytelling curriculum with the writing workshop and duly notes elements of the latter that may be problematic and potentially harmful to young children's developing skills as writers.

In part 2, Cooper describes Paley's pedagogy of fairness, a concept of fair teaching that involves the acceptance of differences among children in race, gender, development, and popularity. To begin, Cooper attests that a pedagogy of fairness must focus on the teacher's moral sense of purpose within the classroom. In addition, it requires the teacher to assess her own cultural beliefs and practices and to provide an atmosphere of trust for young children. This notion resonates with Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, Nel

Noddings's views of ethical and moral foundations of teaching, and Dewey's ideals of a fair and democratic classroom.

Cooper skillfully weaves excerpts and vignettes from three of Paley's works to capture the development of her ethnic identity as a fair teacher of children of color. Moreover, Cooper acknowledges the lessons that can be learned from Paley's pedagogy of fairness. These include valuing all children, reflecting on one's own racial beliefs, affirming race-based behavior, and learning from children of color and their families.

Lastly, Cooper offers compelling examples from several of Paley's works that address controversial issues in preschool and kindergarten such as exclusion based on gender, developmental differences, and popularity. Despite efforts in today's schools to provide an inclusive environment that justly and morally serves all children, Cooper argues these environments actually work to exclude children. Through her analysis of Paley's work, coupled with her own research and with current literature, Cooper depicts a myriad of reasons for the flourishing of social rejection in the early-childhood classroom. Research suggests that peer relationships may have a significant impact on the development and well-being of children. For example, some children lack social skills or fall outside the range of what other children consider normal. Unfortunately, these children are often rejected socially by other children and are typically ostracized by their peers. They frequently, tragically maintain this status through school. Thus, Cooper's account of a pedagogy of fairness sends a clear and resounding message to educators and practitioners alike: "Teaching to include is the first obligation of all teachers."

Given Cooper's analysis of Paley's work, a conflict continues between proponents of play-based learning and NCLB supporters of standards-based education. As Cooper sees it, sweeping educational reform, that include rigorous demands for skills-based instruction, high-stakes testing preparation, a reduction in playtime, and longer school days have replaced traditional early-childhood curricula. These controversial changes lead many early-childhood professionals to query: Based on what we know to be best practice, where is the balance between these two approaches? And, how can we continue to instill a joy of learning in our young charges while adequately preparing them to meet state requirements? *The Classrooms All Young Children Need* may hold answers to such questions.

The Classrooms All Young Children Need offers a thought-provoking and timely resource that will be valued by teachers, teacher-education communities, and individuals who are passionate about play and early-childhood education.

—Christine J. Ferguson, *Winthrop University, Rock Hill, SC*

Play Therapy for Preschool Children

Charles E. Schaefer, ed.

Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2009. References, photographs, tables, index. 333 pp. \$69.95 cloth. ISBN: 9781433805660

In *Play Therapy for Preschool Children*, Charles Schaefer again brings together a collection of mental-health practitioners

with expertise in areas of play therapy. A long-time advocate for play therapy, Schaefer specifically addresses working with this young population. When it comes to mental-health issues, early intervention is vital. Studies that Schaefer cites indicate that 50 percent of preschool children with serious internalizing and externalizing problems will take these issues with them into elementary school and beyond. This volume addresses many of these critical mental-health problems.

The book's four sections cover play-based prevention programs and play interventions for internalizing disorders, externalizing behaviors, and developmental disorders. Most chapters follow a format that includes the theory that informs the intervention, a clearly written overview of the specific protocol or programs, a case study, and a review of applicable research. Other chapters simply whet the reader's appetite for a topic. In any case, to apply many of the interventions suggested here, further training and supervision would be needed.

In the first chapter, Schaefer and Julie Blundon Nash provide a thoughtful context for play therapy with preschool children that includes psychopathology and developmental issues. A section on developing therapeutic relationships with preschool children seems especially helpful for those who may not be experienced in working with very young children. Schaefer titles his next chapter "Evidence Supporting the Benefit of Play for Mild to Moderate Behavior Problems of Preschool Children." In the current mental-health climate, the need to identify evidence-based interventions is critical. Schaefer organizes such research by problem, or diagnostic categories, including anxiety