

readers to identify deeper levels of meaning and healing in the game. One comes to believe that just as the Nepali Yolmo can reconstitute their selves in more satisfying ways through visualization of their deities and just as Sinhalese Buddhists might recover souls devastated by sorcery through shamanic practice, so can chess players find solace and rejuvenation in the game's magical grid and ritualized combat.

I did find myself wishing the author had engaged the more structured and even quantitative studies of games and play now coming out of psychology, communication, sociology, and other disciplines. For example, there exists a rich, burgeoning literature on Internet and gaming addiction in venues like the journal *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, much of it mixing structured survey analysis with other forms of inquiry. Likewise, Desjarlais frequently speaks of addiction, and also of engagement, as matters of brain circuitry and neurochemistry. Yet his language remains suggestive at these points rather than systematic, despite a growing literature in neuroscience and other fields on precisely these topics.

This book will appeal most to humanists, especially anthropologists of a certain ilk, but also games-studies types housed in departments of philosophy, history, literature, education, and the like. Desjarlais can be indirect in his analysis. For example, each chapter's opening epigram and closing player profile are not explained. Rather, they are deliberately left to linger in readers' minds. Readers, like the chess players Desjarlais profiles, are pushed to guess the meaning of their author-opponent's moves. I would think

readers would delight in this book's at times magical, almost mystical treatment of chess. Scientists, too, if they are patient, will find many a hypothesis to test in this overflowing work.

*Counterplay*, then, is perhaps two (or many) books in one: a thoughtful and invariably interesting analysis of chess from a largely psychological-anthropological perspective, but equally a personal memoir. Some of Sveshnikov's regular geometry remains in the analytical bits. But in the end, an authorial style more Taimonovian dominates and encompasses both the regular analytical and the somewhat irregular personal parts in its diverse mesh of shifting strategies.

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—Jeffrey G. Snodgrass, *Colorado State University, Ft. Collins, CO*

### **The Trouble with Play**

*Susan Grieshaber and Felicity McArdle*  
Maidenhead, England: Open University Press, 2010. References, indices, illustrations. 144 pp. \$96.00 cloth. ISBN: 9780335237906

While readers might assume *The Trouble with Play* presents an analysis of the siege on play in schools, authors Susan Grieshaber and Felicity McArdle, in fact, offer a perspective on play that departs radically from the assumed truths of early-childhood education. Early-childhood educators, influenced by developmental theory dating back to Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Friedrich Froebel, believe that play is natural, holistic, and innocent. The authors argue, instead, that play is not always inno-

cent, fun, and natural, and they assert that it often involves social injustices.

Specifically, the book challenges six valued beliefs about play: that play is natural, that it is about development and learning, that it is normal, that it is fun, that it is innocent, and that it is a universal right. The first six chapters explore these beliefs. Chapter 1 provides an overview of these ideas and questions normative, conventional models of child care. Chapter 2 deconstructs the binary logic that separates play from work, fun from effort, and pleasure from pain, though the authors fail to cite Kathy Hirsch-Pasek's arguments supporting the benefits of unstructured play for children's learning or contrary viewpoints suggested by Nina Howe and Robert Pianta.

Clearly, the research is contradictory, and we need more empirical data before we can draw conclusions about play and work. I agree, however, with the authors' claim that the reliance on slogans and mantras about work and play and fun and work reinforce the divide, rather than disrupt the tensions between free play and academic activities within our institutions.

The next chapter questions the idea that play constitutes children's natural way of learning, claiming instead that play is often manufactured—especially in early-childhood settings like classrooms. Rousseau's *Émile* established this idea of the natural development of children. But *Émile* is a lengthy work of fiction. In real life, Rousseau placed his five children in a state foundling home. Today, early-childhood educators continue to view children's play as natural and innocent, even as educators often tightly control children's play. As someone who has collected

over forty-five hours of children's free play video data in several preschools and kindergarten classrooms, I have often seen what Brian Sutton-Smith and Greishaber and McArdle call the dark side of play, in which players frequently reject each other based on race, gender, social, economic, and cultural capital and on proficiency in English. Teachers often will not tolerate these types of free play, which are not pure, nor innocent, nor natural.

Chapter 4 detours to examine the use of art in early childhood, and the authors illustrate the taboos around the teaching of art through a case study of preservice teachers. This chapter reads differently from the rest of the book. I see the connection between play and creativity, but I question why the authors single out art, excluding other disciplines related to play curricula.

Play liberates children to reenact peer and adult worlds and to develop their own culture, but rules for play and players dominate early-childhood settings and are often socially unjust given the cultural and ethnic compositions in our schools today. Chapters 5 and 6 address rules and fairness of play. The authors use observational data in vignettes to prompt readers to reflect on issues dealing with rules and fairness in early-childhood settings. They describe how people in positions of power—teachers—dominate classrooms. Teachers ban toy guns, violent games, and superhero play, as well as control schedules for the type and time allocated for play. Power relations among children are also illustrated in play scenarios in which the authors describe children teasing, excluding, and marginalizing other players.

Next, Greishaber and McArdle use-

fully compare play curricula from four different countries: Hong Kong, Australia, Sweden, and England. I only wish they had analyzed the 2009 version of *Developmentally Appropriate Practice* (DAP) published by the National Association for the Education of Young Children in the United States. In my opinion and in the opinion of other researchers such as Gail Cannella, David Kushner, and Katy Gregg, DAP sanctions a cognitive-developmental approach to play, learning, and development and lacks specificity for supporting children with disabilities. Greishaber and McArdle's insights into the document would have been useful.

They conclude the book with a series of provocative questions meant to generate discussion and debate. "What if play is not fun?" they ask, and "What if some of the environmental regulatory practices were reversed" so that children are more in charge of play in classroom settings than teachers? I found their idea of introducing a standardized test of play skills for preschool and primary children in early-childhood settings and publishing the results in national publications to be a novel and effective way to advocate and raise the status of play.

Greishaber and McArdle call for the "recognition of complexities, contradictions, and a willingness to research and reflect on early childhood play practices" (p. 22). It is time we support a play-research agenda that breaks the theoretical boundaries and use complementary theories. Postfoundational and postmodern theories of play, similar to those described in *The Trouble with Play* offer knowledge that challenge certainty, order, and age-based stages of play. His-

torically, this developmental approach has influenced and characterized early childhood for centuries. Now Greishaber and McArdle's recommendations for reflection and dialogue about play could open new understandings and new play theories in our changed global circumstances.

*The Trouble with Play* would be an excellent supplementary text for both undergraduate and graduate courses connected to early-childhood development as well as for in-service teacher courses. Greishaber and McArdle helpfully conclude each chapter with reflective questions and additional references. Readers end with discussions about play and its relation to social justice. Teacher-education students are sometimes reluctant to accept the basic premise of social-justice education. Critical dialogue and the development of self-consciousness about the effects of dominant play discourses may help future teachers use this understanding to create spaces in which they think and act differently about the complexities of play and accept that not all play is natural, fun, innocent, and free.

As a whole, this book effectively illustrates children's interactions in play. Studying these play interactions allows researchers, teachers, and students to examine power relationships, cultural and social biases, and injustices. The authors clearly care about play in today's classrooms, and the book provides strong support for educators to learn diverse play theories of fields such as education, psychology, history, sociology, and anthropology.

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—Lynn Cohen, *Long Island University, Brookville, NY*