

ments” (p. 4) that so frequently appear in the mainstream news related to children and media these days. In addition, the thousands of references provide a useful listing of topics and people who have formally studied children’s media, in a form that you can scribble and take notes on—with a pencil. For this reason, the second edition of Singer and Singer’s *Handbook of Children and the Media* will stay within reach of my writing desk. I will probably think twice, however, before I take it onto an airplane.

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—Warren Buckleitner, *Children’s Technology Review*, Flemington, NJ

### **Playborhood: Turn Your Neighborhood into a Place for Play**

Mike Lanza

Menlo Park, CA: Free Play Press, 2012.  
 Figures, images, notes, index. 238 pages.  
 \$9.95 paper. ISBN: 9780984929818

My parents moved a lot. Between my fourth and fourteenth birthdays (mostly in the 1950s), I lived in eight different neighborhoods, in six different cities or villages. Yet, finding friends to play with, and exciting things to play at, never seemed a problem. All I had to do was go outside, and there they were. Kids were everywhere and could go everywhere. Every community had its own kids’ play culture. In one village, we spent huge amounts of time at pick-up baseball, kite building, and, in winter, skating down ice slides that we made on the steep hill behind the school. In another village, we played mostly on the

lake. We swam, fished, rowed, skated, and skied on it, all the time exploring it and the life within and around it. Adults almost never joined us in these activities or even knew what we were doing.

But the world is different now. For various reasons, most parents today do not allow their young children to play and explore freely outdoors, away from adults. Those kids who are allowed to do so, often have nobody to play with. So they go back inside to the more certain company of television and computers. This is a serious problem. As opportunities for free outdoor play have declined, children’s physical health, mental health, psychological resilience, and sense of personal control over their lives have also declined. What can be done to reverse all this? Mike Lanza’s *Playborhood* provides the best set of answers I have found yet to this vexing question.

When Mike and his wife started a family, a few years ago, they were determined to provide their kids—which now number three young boys—the opportunity to play freely outdoors with other kids. To do so, they turned their Menlo Park, California, neighborhood into a *playborhood*—a place for outdoor play. Step one was to create all sorts of interesting play opportunities in their own front yard. The *front* yard, not the back, because the front is the part of the yard that neighbors can see and feel most comfortable entering. They put a fountain there and a play river for kids to splash in and run toy boats down, a smooth concrete driveway for all kinds of hard-surfaced play, a basketball hoop, a large whiteboard and markers for drawing, a sandbox, a picnic table, and benches that serve also as weatherproof toy boxes. Big playthings that—for practical reasons

or because of town ordinances—could not go in the front went into the back yard. These included an in-ground trampoline, swing set, and two-story playhouse. The idea was that once neighborhood kids felt welcomed in the front yard, they would begin to explore the back yard too and to feel welcome there.

But just building this was not enough. Mike had to change the culture of the neighborhood—for both adults and kids. He had to convince parents that it was OK for their children to play outside on his lawn, even when none of the Lanzas was out there, and he also had to help kids *learn* how to play. His ultimate goal always was self-reliance for his kids and their friends, so they would invent their own games and completely control their own play. But, in a neighborhood with no existing play culture, how do you get that started? Not surprisingly, children who have never played independently outside and did not have models of others at play needed some help.

To get started, Mike and his family spent lots of time outside in their front yard. They ate meals at the picnic table next to the street, so neighbors would feel comfortable dropping by and lingering with them—and then play a bit as they lingered. At first, Mike himself spent as much time as he could spare outside playing with the kids or enabling their play. He even started a little summer camp for neighborhood kids, right there on the street, in which he taught traditional games as well as new ones that he and the children made up. He also went around knocking on doors to get to know neighbors, and he organized a scavenger hunt that required children to go door to door and find

things that helped everyone know their neighbors and begin to feel comfortable with one another. It was a lot of effort; but, according to Mike, it has paid off handsomely. His boys now play outdoors for hours every day with friends, a priceless experience that would not have occurred without this effort, and the whole neighborhood is a friendlier place than it was before. As the boys and their neighborhood friends grow older, Mike hopes that this start will lead them to venture ever farther from home and play and explore ever more independently of adults.

This book does not just document the Lanzas's approach to building a playborhood. It also devotes chapters to explaining how adults in seven other neighborhoods—ranging from a poor urban street in the South Bronx to an affluent suburban neighborhood in Palo Alto—have succeeded in creating safe, attractive, vibrant places for children to play freely. The methods in each place are different, designed to meet the unique needs and capitalize on the unique assets of the neighborhood. Each example is inspirational. The book also deals with the kinds of questions and negative thoughts that naturally arise in the modern mind: What about lawsuits if a child is hurt on your property? How do you deal with city ordinances that interfere with free play? How do you gain the support of neighbors who initially oppose your project? What about theft or vandalism of those fine playthings you've deliberately left in your front yard or in some public space? Such questions can stop people from developing a playborhood even before they start. But Mike explains why they should not.

This book is for everyone who cares

or should care about children's freedom to play. It is for parents, community planners, architects, and everyone concerned about the health and well-being of the next generation. It is in part a how-to book, but it is more than that. Mike Lanza has done his homework. He presents the logic and evidence behind the methods he describes, and he documents his claims appropriately. I especially recommend the book to academicians who study play. It describes the real-world problems that prevent or dissuade children from playing freely outdoors, and it presents proven solutions to those problems. The book is well written in prose that anyone can read but that will insult nobody's intelligence. *Playborhood*, I hope, is one sign that our culture is beginning to turn around from a culture of increasing privacy and isolation to one that once again values public spaces, community, and childhood play.

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—Peter Gray, *Boston College, Chestnut Hill, MA*

### **Glued to Games: How Video Games Draw Us In and Hold Us Spellbound**

*Scott Rigby and Richard M. Ryan*  
 Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2011.  
 Images, charts, tables, index. 186 pp.  
 \$34.95 paper. ISBN: 978-0313362248

Over the last few years, there has been great interest in the power of video games not just to entertain but to promote learning, health, social change, and art. Many believe that the deep source of this power is the ability of video games to attract and

motivate players (even up to the point of addiction, some claim). But what creates this power? Rigby and Ryan offer a psychological explanation—but one replete with social and political implications.

Video games, unlike books and movies, are not primarily about their content (e.g., their story). They are about interactions, the choices players make and the reactions the game takes to those choices. In video games, the content exists to motivate, facilitate, and give meaning to choices and interaction.

People have often turned to the idea of fun to explain the power of video games, but as the authors observe, the concept of fun seems pretty thin when considering what players actually do and endure. Players will keep going despite much challenge and frustration that—in the moment, at least—are not fun. They will leave the game only to engage with other fans—in review, critique, and analysis of their games. For example, when players of the massive multiplayer game *World of Warcraft* start “theory crafting,” they “are writing formulas, building spreadsheets, authoring fan fiction, and constantly sharing information” (p. 9). They are not just playing *in a* game, but *with* game and that kind of play goes way beyond a given game.

Rigby and Ryan offer a well-argued theory of video game engagement. They claim that video games capture us because they fulfill, in very powerful ways, specific and intrinsic human needs. These needs are competence, autonomy, and relatedness. Indeed, Rigby and Ryan argue that games that do not satisfy such needs well are not engaging or fun. Good games make us feel competent and give us a sense