

of the most valuable things you can possibly do for them” (p. 226).

—Howard P. Chudacoff, *Brown University, Providence, RI*

The Boy on the Beach: Building Community through Play

Vivian Gussin Paley

Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010. Preface, contents. 90 pp. \$17.00 cloth. ISBN: 9870226645032

The gently illustrated cover of this charming, succinct book matches the meditative, exploratory tone of the pages that follow. Vivian Gussin Paley, a highly experienced kindergarten teacher and authority on children’s play, explicitly eschews the rigorous, experimental methods of much of “play scholarship . . . [to] search for the meaning of play along more dramatic paths.” She painstakingly records vignettes of children’s solitary and socio-dramatic make-believe play, observed primarily in kindergartens with the direct or indirect involvement of teachers, and then reflects on the children’s play and the teachers’ responses. She develops many of her insights in conversations with her pen pal Yu-Ching Huang, a teacher from Taiwan, whose thoughtful responses contribute meaningfully to the book.

As the book’s subtitle, “Building Community through Play,” suggests, one of the author’s main interests concerns the social aspect of play. The author and her Taiwanese cohort never cease to be impressed by the ingenious ways young children manage to generate “creative

kindness.” The players invite each other to enter their limitless private make-believe worlds, but do not lose their own differentiated selves in the process; they respect each other’s distinct make-believe roles and creative inventions. Solitary play can also be considered social in this respect, because the playing child creates an imaginative community, balancing individual roles and interpersonal dramatic acts.

Paley has explored similar themes in books such as *The Boy Who Would Be a Helicopter* (1991) and *Bad Guys Don’t Have Birthdays* (1988), but in each new work she elaborates and builds on these themes and integrates them into captivating accounts of the specifics of children’s play. A small sample of excerpts from the book demonstrates how the author and her correspondent write in suggestive, thought-provoking ways. For example, Paley observes of her interchange with the boy playing on the beach: “He and I are here to create metaphor and find hidden meanings in the moment. . . . We are looking for the story that is ours alone to tell.” Huang in turn muses, “To me it is all about friendship. The children are trying to find out how the pictures and words in their minds become the path to a friend.” And in another letter Huang adds, “Children become a character who is not themselves to prove the necessity of their existence. . . . By proving they are necessary and useful in a story, they demonstrate that they have a reason to exist, to be here with others.” Paley reflects, “children . . . play in order to see what they already know and what they might wish to experience again in a different way. . . . When we are young we need the dramatic impulses of play to help us organize . . .

complex ideas, to put a face to them and watch characters play them out in familiar ways. . . . I play as I do to show myself what my ideas are . . . we want to be surprised but also reassured that we know the territory.” And Yu-Ching Huang writes of a girl who pretends first to be a bee, and then a butterfly: “She wants to practice her thoughts so she will understand better. She wants to see and hear her thoughts in action.” Rich reflections like these spur readers to think about the meaning and importance of pretend play.

The book’s emphasis on the centrality of make-believe play in early-childhood education is refreshing and important. The author alerts preschool teachers to the essential contributions of solitary and socio-dramatic play to children’s development and well-being. In her gentle way, she criticizes the current overattention paid to academic achievements and discipline at the cost of the vital socio-emotional development that free play encourages. She shows that there is no such thing as “bad play” and that there are no children who do not know how to play. She acquaints the reader with a model preschool teacher who “is determined to treat the children as actors, not as outlaws, and she will join them in performance.”

Since this book is not a dry, academic treatise, nor a précis of empirical scientific research, preschool teachers, parents and other caretakers of children, and writers for children will particularly benefit from it. But everyone will enjoy it and learn from it. Paley’s insatiable curiosity about children’s fantasy play means she is intrigued and fascinated afresh by every new encounter with children at such play. This passion is contagious. Paley’s sensitive

observations and lyrical writing charm and captivate, compelling us to follow her into the magical but meaningful world of children’s pretend play.

—Shlomo Ariel, *David Yellin Academic College of Education, Jerusalem, Israel*

**The Art of Roughhousing:
Good Old-Fashioned Horseplay
and Why Every Kid Needs It**

*Anthony T. DeBenedet and
Lawrence J. Cohen*

Philadelphia: Quirk Books, 2010. Preface, illustrations, notes, references. 190 pp. \$14.95 paper. ISBN: 9781594744877

**Big Body Play: Why Boisterous,
Vigorous, and Very Physical
Play Is Essential to Children’s
Development and Learning**

Frances M. Carlson

Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2011. Introduction, illustrations, appendices, references. 103 pp. \$20.00. ISBN: 9781928896715

Given the increasing concern with childhood obesity and child inactivity, it is not surprising that two relatively recent publications focus on the importance of active, physical play in young children. These works convey a strong message to embrace and encourage rough physical play that adults (parents and teachers) often want to stop. *Big Body Play* by Frances M. Carlson and *The Art of Roughhousing* (2010) by Anthony T. DeBenedet and Lawrence J.