

character, begin to show up in such forms as depression, anxiety, rebellion, and substance abuse at about age twelve or thirteen and grow larger after that.

If it were true that success in our society requires the training in the competitive kid capital that Friedman's respondents describe, then I would say that the parents are not crazy but that the society is. What a sad, pathological world it would be if success really depended more on beating others than on helping them and if material prizes were more valued than friends.

Still, even as I am judging, I commend Friedman for her nonjudgmental stance. She reports the views of these parents quite neutrally, with, if anything, more sympathy than judgment. It is a valuable study and an excellent, highly readable report. I recommend the book to anyone who wishes to understand the mental set of many modern parents, which leads them to turn what should be playtime into work time for their kids.

In addition to reporting the findings of Friedman's study, the book also includes an insightful chapter on the history of children's competitive activities in America. We learn here that such competitions were first developed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries primarily to keep poor, mostly immigrant children (especially boys) off the streets and teach them the values of cooperation, hard work, and respect for authority. With the Great Depression, however, funds for such activities dried up and, after that, adult-organized competitive activities became increasingly the province of children whose families could afford to pay for them. Interest in such activities among the middle and upper classes grew gradu-

ally at first, but exponentially beginning in the 1970s, and exploded after that. The families studied by Friedman are at the top of that explosion.

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

The Well-Played Game: A Player's Philosophy

Bernard De Koven

Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013.

Foreword, new preface, original preface, descriptions, appendix. 148 pp. \$24.95 cloth. ISBN: 9780262019170

For a while now, my search for the perfect reading to introduce new students to games involved defining games as objects, as constructed things. Games are created activities bound by rules that allow only particular actions by their players, who are all trying to get somewhere, to win or to score big, or otherwise to succeed. There are ways to define games, however, that do not focus on constraints and goals. Instead, they focus on the activity of play, the interaction between players and games and gaming communities, and all the stuff *around* games, not the stuff *of* games. Yet for some reason, I never let go of my tendency to categorize and label and objectify when first introducing games. And in failing to let go of these formal definitions, I may have been introducing games to my students as decontextualized objects that stand apart as inert things, waiting to be explored and prodded. But no. That is not what games are. They do not exist except in the enactment.

And then I read the new edition of

Bernie De Koven's *The Well-Played Game: A Player's Philosophy* and saw this line: "The only thing that makes a game real is that there are people playing it" (p. 57). I had heard about the first edition of this book and DeKoven's work from several well-respected games scholars, so I was expecting to find a typically academic work. Instead, I found no citations, few references to other scholars, and no presentation of research or thoughts about different play theories. De Koven does not mention Johan Huizinga's "magic circle," ludology, or even rule systems. He does not discuss affordances or play as human development, nor does he examine gaming culture and practice through the lens of French philosophers. None of that. I was put off at first. How could this book be so audacious, existing in a weird bubble where all these other works do not exist? How could this new edition not be revised to allow for digital games and all the new scholarship around them? And to top it off, it seems to be written as if you are just talking to the author. And yet . . . by the time I finished reading the first chapter, I knew *The Well-Played Game* is something extraordinary. The meanings found in this book are layered and deep and require multiple readings. This is a book to live with, live by, and live through for the rest of your life.

The book is laid out as one long conversation: each chapter extends the train of thought from previous chapters. First, De Koven takes time to explain precisely what a well-played game is: "Our success in the search for the well-played game can only be measured in terms of how well we have been able to play together," De Koven explains. "Either we achieve it together or

we don't achieve it at all. It is not measured by the score, it is not measured by the game, it is measured by those of us who are playing it" (p. 5). For De Koven, to be "well-played" depends on so much more than just being a system of rules. And most of the responsibility for finding what it is rests with the players, not the game.

After defining the well-played game, De Koven describes how to find it. He does this with exploratory, hypothetical situations that define the type of play community necessary for a well-played game to be discovered. DeKoven also recounts experiences he had while running play-centric workshops or spending time with kids and adults at play. Eventually, it becomes clear that the search for the well-played game is really the search for a stable, safe community of play. As he writes, "So the definition of playing well is the result of an ongoing process of negotiation and renegotiation. It changes as we do, sometimes drastically, sometimes subtly" (p. 41).

By writing about how games become well played and how we collectively search for them, De Koven is actually describing for us how to act as people, how to care about each other, and how to find commonalities that meet everyone's needs. Of utmost importance is maintaining individual freedoms (freedom to choose whether to participate, freedom to negotiate how the game starts, continues, and ends, etc.) within our search for a collective high. There is a sort of innocent optimism in his detailed logic. At times, *The Well-Played Game* feels like California in the 1970s: a little crunchy; a little "peace, love, and games, man." And I cannot help but think that there are all sorts of equity issues here. We do not all

live in a moment of agreement. We are not all able to find stable play communities. Not everyone can search for a well-played game. It is a privilege that some of us can, and it is our responsibility to ensure more of us can, too.

De Koven's new preface provides historical context for the book as he recounts his influences and the formation of the Games Preserve and the New Games Foundation. And while he describes his move to Silicon Valley and the rise of positive psychology after the first edition of the book was published almost forty years ago, he does not go into much detail about how these trends—especially the rise of digital games and digitally mediated ways to communicate—affect his ideas. Nor does he specify why the New Games Movement of the 1980s failed to gain traction. The new foreword by Eric Zimmerman, however, explains how the book was extremely prescient on many topics regarding newer trends in games and play. The best part of the new foreword is Zimmerman's description of *The Well-Played Game* as an antidote to our current tendency to instrumentalize games and play (e.g., for learning).

In the end, I suppose De Koven does not have to reference anyone or prove how his work is still relevant. He is the source material, and he talks honestly and logically through an extended thought process about play and what it means to capture and maintain moments of greatness. His is a search for excellence in all of us and for maximizing bliss for everyone as a collective. The never-ending search for a well-played game is really a never-ending search for how to be good to yourself and to others. That is pretty timeless, and it

may well be my new definition of gaming.

—Mark Chen, *Pepperdine University, Malibu, CA*

Understanding Young Children's Learning through Play: Building Playful Pedagogies

Pat Broadhead and Andy Burt

New York: Routledge, 2012. References, index, images. 170 pp. \$47.95 paper. ISBN: 9780415614283

Play, Learning, and Children's Development: Everyday Life in Families and Transition to School

Mariane Hedegaard and Marilyn Flear

New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013. References, index, images. 231 pp. \$99.00 cloth. ISBN: 9781107028647

Pat Broadhead and Andy Burt's *Understanding Young Children's Learning through Play* is an insightful analysis of open-ended, free-choice play in the Early Years Unit (part of the United Kingdom's Early Years Learning Framework curriculum) for children aged three through five at a primary school in York, England. The book consists of a series of vignettes that include interviews with staff members and the children's interpretations of events as they watched themselves on video. Book chapters focus on the role of adult involvement, what can be learned from risk and conflict, and the ways in which children progress from new child to master player.

Although the book discusses play throughout this early-childhood program,