before accepting a private playdate as the best way for children to socialize.

—Hilary Levey Friedman, Brown University, Providence, RI

Teaching Kindergarten: Learner-Centered Classrooms for the 21st Century
Julie Diamond, Betsy Grob, and Fretta Reitzes, eds.

At its heart, Teaching Kindergarten: Learner-Centered Classrooms for the 21st Century is a paean to the play-based, interest-driven kindergarten we know from the annals of progressive education. Its ostensible goal, though, is to resist the increasingly more familiar kindergarten, where a skills-based and overtly academic curriculum favors more time on the rug for minilessons and less time on it for building with blocks. But to label Teaching Kindergarten a mere apologia would be to give it short shrift. It is also an up-to-date and highly persuasive argument about why the trend toward all academics all the time is so unnecessary if later academic achievement is truly tied to what children learn in kindergarten. To this end, coeditors and longtime early-childhood educators and leaders Julie Diamond, Betsy Grob, and Fretta Reitzes offer a hefty collection of teachers' stories that demonstrate the advantages of learner-centered—progressive—education for five-year-olds.

To this end, we must not be drawn to the book's subtitle over its main one. Yes, the book concerns learner-centered classrooms, but its collective strength lies in its primary appellation: teaching kindergarten. The critical idea is that, although progressive education may embody a belief system about how children learn best, it cannot be separated from an understanding of what teachers actually do in the classroom. The central question is: How is learner-centered teaching enacted?

Chapter 1, “Learner-Centered Teaching,” by coeditor Julie Diamond, presents as fine an overview of the modern progressive educator's purview as any in teacher education today (full disclosure: I am very briefly cited). Diamond seamlessly aligns John Dewey’s vision of teaching “to propel children’s learning” (p. 14) with a commitment to culturally responsive teaching in a diverse world. She follows this with short introductions to key points of entry (with references to the ensuing chapters, where they are discussed in greater depth). Diamond has few good things to say about the Common Core and the accountability and standards movement, though she strongly favors rigorous, content-based curriculum, while holding teachers accountable for learning what, as she says, “matters to them and to others” (p. 28).

It goes without saying, of course, that topics frequently overlap in the individual chapters. Such is the nature of teaching five-year-olds. All sorts of things happen at once. Stakeholders, too, overlap. A special feature of this book is that many teacher roles are represented in it, often more than one in a chapter. We hear from head teachers, new teachers, staff developers, con-
the school building, a long-standing mandate of the kindergarten social studies and science curricula. To start—and here's a much-missed idea in early-childhood education—D’Andrea allows the children plenty of concentrated time to observe it. Then, as they learn more about the things that live outside (including plants and trees), she helps turn their attention to how to preserve the environment, such as educating people about the importance of trees. Juliana Harris and Katie Vidal also take us outside the classroom door in chapter 7, “Getting Our Hands Dirty: Holding On to Our Beliefs.” They describe a yearlong project on gardens in the context of their resistance to a newly mandated, supersaturated literacy curriculum. As they explain: “We had made an impression on our principal that day, but we knew it was just a beginning. We decided to display evidence of children’s learning in our hallway, focusing on social development, writing, reading, math, and science” (p. 105).

Heading back indoors, we find the disappearance of robust block and dramatic play (emphasis on robust) may be the loss most lamented by early-childhood educators in their response to the academicization of the kindergarten curriculum. Six of the remaining nine chapters highlight their use of the child friendly project approach to teach content. All offer convincing evidence that five-year-olds can indeed learn a great deal when teachers are careful to include specific curricular and academic objectives inside their interest-driven explorations of a grand topic.

Chapter 3, “Children as Change-makers: Ecology in Action,” by Katherine Clunis D’Andrea, makes clear there is much teachers can do to enhance children’s relationship to the physical world outside
With regard to children’s interpersonal tensions and altercations, Aaron Neimark’s chapter 8, “The Chairs Are Theirs: Conflict Resolution in a Kindergarten Classroom,” describes his use of “problem-solving chairs” to give children a reliable format and structure in which to talk out their conflicts with each other. Neimark explains that he first scaffolds the technique through “fake problem solving” before turning the children loose. As he explains, the effort takes only a few seconds per problem. Given the kindergartners’ great interest in fair play, Neimark’s approach is a worthy idea.

Finally, Kelly D’Addona, Laura Morris, and Cynthia Paris’s “Courage in Kindergarten: Facing Our Wolves,” bring the chapters of teachers’ stories to a close. It artfully positions a new teacher, a cooperating teacher, and a teacher educator in looking back on how they responded to challenges (“wolves”) outside the classroom door, who in one way or other undermines progressive teaching. The authors do not merely complain, however, they succinctly encourage smart responses that enable teachers to go forward, while having the courage to learn at the same time.

The overall take away from this valuable book is the coeditors’ claim in their concluding remarks that becoming a good teacher is synonymous with developing a “teaching self.” Wisely, they note this takes time and is not done alone. Their book, and the many voices and perspectives it comprises, is testimony to the role good and effective company can play on this journey. The very good news is that, to cite Ruth Charney in the book’s preface, the portraits of teachers’ lives in this book go...
Family technique simply by following suggestions in the book. However, the authors also explain that one can find meaning in the distance between family members, their relative size, and the order in which they are drawn. Adults not trained in play therapy might misinterpret this meaning and respond defensively, which can harm the relationship and communication between adult and child.

At the same time, Schaefer and Cangelosi suggest techniques to enlist the aid of others, such as parents. Externalization Play describes the advantages of “putting something outside its original borders, especially to put a human function outside the human body” (p. 72). When a child perceives the problem as an inherent part of the self, it is much more difficult to make changes. Yet by using the narrative technique of externalization, a child can perceive the problem as separate from his or herself and even join forces with parents and other supportive adults to overcome behavioral problems.

In one variation, the authors discuss forming a piece of clay into a monster figure to represent the scary element of a child’s nightmare, which makes a child’s fears concrete and more manageable. Play therapists can use their own creativity to design additional variations such as having a child create his or her own anger out of clay. A child could then engage in play with the clay figure, taking care of it, and perhaps allowing the representation of anger to help tell the child, parents, and therapist what it needs to feel calmer.

A variety of play therapists will appreciate that the authors interweave many popular theoretical orientations through the techniques, including cogni-