
Book Reviews

Infants & Toddlers at Play: Choosing the Right Stuff for Learning & Development

Mary Benson McMullen and Dylan Brody
Washington, DC: National Association
for the Education of Young Children,
2022. Introduction, final thoughts,
appendices, references, resources,
index, acknowledgments, and about the
authors, 139 pp. \$28.00 paper.
ISBN: 9781938113741

In *Infants & Toddlers at Play: Choosing the Right Stuff for Learning & Development*, Mary Benson McMullen and Dylan Brody address a significant, yet often overlooked, aspect of play by considering its function during the first thirty-six months of life. According to the authors, this book honors and supports current and future teachers who guide the learning, development, and well-being of children from birth to age three through play. The authors hope by describing and discussing play materials for very young children to invite more intentional selection of play materials and to initiate more clearly communicated advocacy regarding the importance of

play and playful interactions for infants and toddlers. They define toys as objects that children use in play and other play resources as any nontoy items that sustain play, such as art materials or furniture, or abstract assets, such as uninterrupted time and social exchanges.

The book is divided into four main parts. Part 1 provides foundational information regarding play materials to support very young children while parts 2 through 4 feature suggested play materials. The simple text, vivid photographs, and clearly organized format create a useful, reader friendly resource for educators, psychologists, therapists, and other professionals working directly with children younger than three years old.

The first part of the book contains four chapters that each answer a central question. Chapter 1 (who) identifies the strengths, needs, and motivations of the changing child during four categorical periods used throughout the book, which are color-coded to be easily located. The categories are young infants from birth to six months (labeled security seekers), mobile infants between six to eight

and twelve to fifteen months (labeled discovery seekers), toddlers between ten to fifteen and twenty-four months (labeled autonomy seekers), and those between eighteen to twenty-four and thirty-six months (labeled identity seekers). Chapter 2 (why) outlines the role of play and play materials for facilitating the three distinct but highly interrelated processes of growth and maturation, development, and learning. Chapter 3 (how) explains various methods for teaching and learning with infants and toddlers. Chapter 4 (what) describes play materials, the criteria for their selection, and the method for their presentation, which is by domain.

Parts 2, 3, and 4 each contain three chapters that suggest play materials for a different aspect of one domain—cognitive, social and emotional, and physical—followed by a brief essay titled “In Your Words” written by an infant and toddler professional. The authors note the possibility of overlap between ages or domains and encourage readers to be flexible and think creatively when considering the suitability of each play material included for individual children. The book concludes with the authors’ brief summary of key points and encouragement for further reflection along with two appendices—a table highlighting the characteristics of infants and toddlers during different stages and a list of children’s literature recommendations by domain.

Much like Martha B. Bronson’s *The Right Stuff for Children Birth to 8: Selecting Play Materials to Support Development* (1995), the authors here recommend play materials to engage and enhance the abilities of children during a specific life stage. Rather than be comprehensive, their pre-

sentation of a few purposefully selected examples of appropriate play materials is “meant to inspire ideas about similar materials that could be used in different ways with different age groups” (p. 23).

The insights the authors share and the recommendations they make have much to offer anyone who cares about very young children. McMullen and Brody offer a trustworthy array of play materials, activities, and practical suggestions to enhance the quality of play experiences and enable very young children to thrive. Each idea invites adults to engage thoughtfully and responsively the hearts and minds of infants and toddlers with play materials and playful interactions that nurture the whole child.

—Rebecca M. Giles, *University of South Alabama, Mobile, AL*

Radical Play: Revolutionizing Children’s Toys in 1960s and 1970s America

Rob Goldberg

Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2023. Acknowledgments, introduction, epilogue, abbreviations, notes, bibliography, and index. 294 pp. \$28.95, paper. ISBN: 9781478025115

This book provides fresh insight into an important era in the history of American material culture. In it, Rob Goldberg deftly uses the child-centered society of post-World War II and Vietnam War America as the context for three campaigns that aimed to revolutionize the toys young children played with. One group of reformers,