here. Even so, these are questions worth pondering, particularly at a time when inspired and imaginative actions are urgently needed to address the backward social momentum of the world.

—Emilie St-Hilaire, *Concordia University, Montreal, Canada*

Play Stories: Using Your Play Memories and Perspectives to Inform Teaching Practice

Katelyn Clark
St. Paul, MN: Redleaf Press, 2024.
Acknowledgments, introduction, appendix, references, and index. 128 pp.
$24.95 paper. ISBN: 9781605548166

Sharing play memories can light up family reunions, parties, and other social gatherings of people who know each other, quick start conversations between strangers attending various events, and promote new acquaintances and deepen friendships. In contrast to these personal functions, Katelyn Clark's *Play Stories: Using Your Play Memories and Perspectives to Inform Teaching Practice* targets professional functions that they can serve in the field of early childhood education; and she hits a bullseye. The book offers delightful and stimulating reading about the effect of reflecting on your own and others' play experiences has in forming beliefs, values, and attitudes concerning teaching, playing, and learning during the early years.

Given her extensive experiences observing and conversing with fellow early childhood educators, Clark learned there is much diversity in their personal play histories and educational and career backgrounds. What they have in common is the important relationship between play story identities and the decision to take a particular course of action in play-responsive teaching. She examines this central idea in four case studies of teachers in play-based classrooms, using observations, interviews, and focus group methods of data generation. In chapters 4 through 7, entitled "The Puzzler," "The Character," "The Explorer," and "The Maker," she captures the gestalt of each teacher's play personality. These chapters begin with a vignette—the child at play—to draw attention to the different styles of these four teachers in action doing play pedagogy.

Clark organizes *Play Stories* using an introduction, twelve chapters, an appendix, references, and an index. In one excellent feature, she offers sidebars throughout the text, and, at the end of each chapter, labelled "reflect**,"** questions or prompts to stimulate the reader's thinking (e.g., "how would *you* define play" or "it's harder than you think"), with space to write answers. Clark wants readers to interact while reading her book. She suggests reading it along with others, if possible. The writing exercises aim to have readers share play memories and thoughts, perhaps to commence their own play stories. The appendix provides play stories interview questions for preservice and in-service teachers. Areas cover family, space and materials, school, adult play, teacher history, and classroom (practicing teachers) or in the field (student teachers). For example, she proposes question eliciting memories under the space and materials area: "Can you walk me through your

childhood home?" "What would you be doing in those spaces?" This reviewer experienced a blast from the past!

Four figures that appear in the book help illustrate a progressive synthesis of interview and focus group effects on the teachers' evolving identities as play sensitive and responsive educators. Clark labels the first "development of a player," the second "intellectual play," the third "personal practical knowledge," and the caption of figure 4 "disrupting play stories." These four figures appear one at a time in chapters 8 through 11, which cover a discussion and explanation of the figures. Chapter 8 is titled "Who I Am: Developing a Player Identity"; Chapter 9 is titled "What I Know: Intellectualizing Play"; Chapter 10 is titled "Play Stories as Reflective Practice"; and Chapter 11 is titled "Disrupting Play Stories." A model of teachers' developing sense of self in play pedagogy emerges from their reflections and thoughts about the past, present, and future.

The four teachers of the case studies, the puzzler, the character, the explorer, and the maker, shared stories of childhood, adult, and teacher play, leading to figure 1 depicting an illustration of the first version of the model, answering the question: "Who am I as a player?" The model highlighted the importance of the past play preferences of teachers in relation to their current re-creating and role taking in teaching young children within play-based educational settings. Figure 2 adds to the model the teacher's "book knowledge" about play concepts (capital P play), along with teacher reflection skills and identifying areas for improvement as a play responsive teacher. Figure 3 targets teachers' self-assessments, reflections on the past, and identity building to further develop the model to make it more personal, holistic, and practical. Figure 4 finished the model, raising the question "who do I teach" to add to "who I am" and "what I know," to disrupt play stories and the development of personal and practical knowledge. She asserts that critical reflection about one's play pedagogy repertoire proves necessary to becoming a more fluid and inclusive teacher of play, one sensitive and responsive to all children.

The book can benefit readers in professions such as social work, child life, and playwork, and general readers who have interests in play studies and its uses in relation to professional development. The subtitle of Clark's book includes the word "perspectives" in addition to memories. She holds play perspectives important in any applied setting in which the role of the adult in children's play proves relevant. Perspectives are the result of formal training in a professional field that includes play scholarship and applications. She finds play stories and specific experiences leading to one's play identities necessary for professional development. These play identities in turn affect intentions and actions in various fields of application.

A child at play can be useful to play studies by triggering our thinking about memories, especially in relation to play applications, whether these applications are in pedagogies of play or in other practical fields such as play therapy and so forth. Play memories can include remembering specific play episodes but also the contexts and reflections about play in the past. We should be concerned about how much time individuals have spent going over

specific memories and how deeply they have done so, reflecting on their meaning to an evolving sense of self, and being aware of others. This book can help us build a more differentiated and integrated construction of play selves from personal lives, thereby enriching our understanding and employment of play theory and practices, by becoming more reflective and self-aware of play over the life span.

—James Ewald Johnson, *The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA*

Rethinking Weapon Play in Early Childhood

Samuel Broaden and Kisa Marx
New York: Routledge, 2024. Foreword, introduction, and acknowledgments. 108 pp. $32.99 paper. ISBN: 9781032649122

For as long as there have been children, many youngsters, particularly boys, have engaged in weapon play. Youth have fought mock battles with wooden swords and tiny bows for centuries. In the modern age, kids have played cops and robbers or war (and, indeed, the now politically incorrect cowboys and Indians) with guns that often looked fairly realistic until recent years. Now, guns tend to come with bright colors and exaggerated designs, so as to distinguish them better from real firearms and reduce the risk of accidental shootings by police officers mistaking them for real guns. But, particularly since the 1990s, weapon play has also become controversial.

Boys, in particular, appear to be drawn to weapon play, perhaps as an evolutionary adaptation to evolved male social roles (hunting as opposed to gathering). But such play is often frowned upon, either because of the beliefs that it reinforces gender norms or that it encourages violence in real life. These issues can be particularly salient in communities wracked by real-life gun violence.

So, with great interest, I turned to the new book *Rethinking Weapon Play in Early Childhood* by Samuel Broaden and Kisa Marx. This book looks at weapons play from an early childhood educator perspective, examining whether young children's centers should allow weapons play in their facilities. Overall, the authors take a fairly positive perspective on the idea, encouraging youthful autonomy and suggesting adults often get in the way given their own hang-ups. The book is quite short (108 pages from cover to cover) and a brisk read.

Overall, I found myself liking it and appreciating the authors' fresh perspective, despite some weaknesses I think may limit its audience. This is a tough issue because there just are not that many empirical studies on weapons play in childhood (I, in fact, coauthored one of the very few). The book is written in a very folksy, conversational style (indeed, the two authors quite literally converse back and forth in different points of the book), and they come across as charming, thoughtful individuals. I think the book will succeed in convincing many early childhood educators (who are overwhelmingly women) to rethink their natural aversion to weapons play (which, of course, may end up foisting female values onto many boys to whose motives the median female educator may not relate). But there are two issues that I think limit the book.