
Book Reviews

Why Play? How to Make Play an Essential Part of Early Education

Rae Pica

New York, NY: Teachers College Press, 2024. Acknowledgments, introduction, conclusion, references, and index. 128 pp. \$31.95 paper. ISBN: 9780807786208

In *Why Play? How to Make Play an Essential Part of Early Education*, Rae Pica draws on more than four decades of experience in early childhood education to present a passionate and accessible guide to the essential role of play in child development. She opens with a broad overview of the value of play and examines how cultural and academic pressures have contributed to alarming trends in children's physical, emotional, and cognitive well-being. She points to issues such as reduced motor control, limited stamina, and increased anxiety and depression as evidence of the growing disconnection between what children need and what many early learning environments provide. She devotes the bulk of the book to exploring a wide range of types of play, each addressed in a dedicated chapter in which Pica offers practical strategies and insights to help early child-

hood educators more fully integrate play into their teaching practices.

These twelve, tightly organized chapters, covering free play, guided play, big body play, outdoor play, nature play, risky play, rough-and-tumble play, cooperative play, dramatic play, fine-motor play, construction play, and loose parts play, follow a consistent format. Pica begins each chapter with a concise overview of the featured type of play and its developmental significance. A putting-theory-into-practice section follows, which offers practical, activity-based suggestions for implementation. The chapter then concludes with a thoughtfully curated list of recommended resources and an especially valuable partnering-with-parents feature, designed to help educators effectively communicate the importance of play to families and care givers.

In one particularly helpful chapter, Pica opens by challenging a common misconception—even among some play advocates—that free play is inherently superior to any other type of play. She lays out the case for guided play, highlighting its unique benefits alongside those of other types of play. Drawing on

empirical research from prominent play scholars such as Kathy Hirsh-Pasek and Deena Weisberg, she positions guided play as a developmentally appropriate and evidence-based approach to supporting early learning and well-being. In another chapter, Pica highlights influential work by Ellen Beate Sandseter on the value of risky play in children's development. Pica emphasizes how exposure to manageable risks can promote confidence and physical competence, and she offers a suggested framework for designing activities that safely encourage these skills.

Why Play? is a well-written, practical guide that helps educators communicate the value of play in early childhood development to parents and care givers. Although it is ideal for early childhood professionals working with children ages three through six, many of the insights apply to older children as well. The book also offers value to parents, administrators, and other advocates of play looking for succinct, evidence-based support for play-based learning. Grounded in developmental science and pedagogy, the book's digestible format, accessible tone, and focus on practical strategies make it an especially strong resource for professional development, parent workshops, and early childhood teacher preparation programs.

—Melissa McInnis Brown, *Texas Woman's University, Denton, TX*

**The Virtue of Playfulness:
Why Happy People Are Playful**

Boomer Trujillo

New York: Routledge, 2024.

Acknowledgments, abbreviations

of Aristotle's works, introduction, conclusion, references, and index. 120 pp. \$48.74 hardcover. ISBN: 9781032717746

Is reading a book a playful experience? Even if curling up in a chair with a cat and a book with a provocative title seems not to be a typically playful activity, reading *The Virtue of Playfulness* certainly proves an extremely good use of one's leisure time. As the author Boomer Trujillo asserts, playful individuals regulate their leisure time to rest, to develop themselves, to engage with their communities, and to be happy. In this contented way, setting time aside to read an interesting book and then to write a review of it, is indeed a playful activity.

The author's main take away is that play prepares us for life, and that playfulness in general is not only a recognizable, global moral character trait, it is also a virtue to be developed. For the author, playfulness should be held in the same regard as courage, honesty, justice, wisdom, temperance, compassion, integrity, fortitude, perseverance, loyalty, and patience. And, just like these virtues, playfulness should be encouraged, developed with care, and deployed wisely. Therefore, a playful person is not flaky, unruly, or reckless. Rather, a playful person hones an ability to allocate precious leisure time to being playful.

The Virtue of Playfulness starts with a summary of what is to come in the book and a defense of the seriousness of playfulness which is—Trujillo claims—the way to sort the good from the bad in such a diverse sphere of life as leisure. The entire approach is neo-Aristotelian—from the outset, playfulness is determined to be