

## **Play = Learning: How Play Motivates and Enhances Children's Cognitive and Social-Emotional Growth**

*Dorothy G. Singer, Roberta Michnick Golinkoff, and Kathy Hirsh-Pasek, editors*

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This book is a compilation of material from a conference on Play = Learning, held at Yale University in June 2005. The majority of authors are well known in the fields of expertise that correspond to their chapter topics. The editors' purpose was to counter recent perspectives that focus on teacher strategies, parent-structured activities, and government policies and have served to minimize the role of play as the major medium for young children's learning.

The book has four sections. The first section addresses policy and practices that have challenged play as a medium of learning even in early childhood. Included here are a chapter by Edward F. Zigler and Sandra J. Bishop-Josef and one by Anthony D. Pellegrini and Robyn M. Holmes. The second section describes ways play facilitates school readiness and mastery of academic standards and includes a chapter by James F. Christie and Kathleen A. Roskos; one by Laura E. Berk, Trisha D. Mann, and Amy T. Ogan; another by Harvey F. Bellin and Dorothy G. Singer; a fourth by Ageliki Nicolopoulou, Judith McDowell, and Carolyn Brockmeyer; and finally one by Herbert P. Ginsburg. The third section addresses the effects of television and other media as substitutes for play and promotes playful use of computer technology with a chapter by Deborah S. Weber and one by Mitchel Resnick. The fourth section suggests ways play can promote learning for children with special needs. The first of its three chapters is written by Wendy Haight, James Black, Teresa Ostler, and Kathryn Sheridan; the second by Melissa Allen Preissler; and the third—an epilogue that provides a summary of the books' major points—by Jerome L. Singer.

The chapter authors provide excellent data and cogent arguments for the importance of the role of play in promoting learning. In addition to the policy recommendations in the first section, most chapters also suggest policy implications. The chapters relating play to academic areas may be especially useful to readers who need to make a case for playful learning in schools. Although most of this information has been discussed elsewhere, these chapters are useful summaries of the extant research. The section addressing effects of media on play suggests creative aspects of technology play and opens up another dimension of potential action for policy

or practice changes. While the final section addresses only two types of problems that play can possibly ameliorate—emotional trauma and autism—it makes the important point that play has value for therapy and learning of children with special needs.

Although the chapters are generally well written, the book as a whole reflects its origination in conference presentations. It is a compilation of a variety of viewpoints and bodies of research that are each valuable but do not build to an overall integrated stance. Although the epilogue provides some comparisons of chapter views, most of the integration must be done by the reader. That is, each chapter is a “fresh start” on a different topic related to play’s role in learning. As a whole the chapters provide a strong body of data; however, readers may find some chapters more relevant than others depending on their own concerns. Three chapters that are especially engaging are the ones by Ginsburg on “everyday math” learning through play, by Bellin and Singer on the “magic story car,” and by Resnick on playful ways for children to engage with technology.

Over the past twenty years, there have been numerous articles and books written on the topic of play as a medium for learning, and many of them have been used in teacher preparation classes, professional development sessions, and parent training workshops. All of them have made a case similar to the one made in this book by these authors, which is that play provides an important means of enhancing children’s learning. The policy advice provided in the book has also been stated on many occasions. Yet, at the present time, the impact of all of this well-researched information has had minimal influence on school decision-makers at local, state, and federal levels. In fact, the present educational climate has worked to exclude playful learning almost entirely from all levels of education, including early childhood. I hope policy makers will read this book, and others of its type, so that appreciation for play will enjoy a resurgence in the near future. However, until the evidence reported here and elsewhere is understood and appreciated by policy makers who require “evidence-based practice,” its impact will be confined to those in the evolving discipline of play studies. They will need to communicate the message that play equals learning to the broader society. This book gives them ample ammunition for that endeavor.

—Doris Bergen, *Miami University, Oxford, OH*