

He laments the decline of camaraderie play with neighborhood friends, giving kids fewer opportunities to develop skills in cooperation, rule making, and empathy. But the changes, he adds, are not wholly negative. There have been increased opportunities for girls to participate in sports. Kids have used new technologies to sustain communities and maintain privacy. And the purported evils of television and video games are overstated.

Children at Play will be the indispensable starting point for future discussions of the history of American children's play. I would suggest three areas for future exploration. One involves the connections between play and the nature of adult society, whether this involves the growing resistance to hierarchy and deference evident in children's play in the pre-Revolution decades or the nature of children's electronically mediated play in today's technology-dominated, competitive, future-oriented culture. A second area involves the connection between children's play and their psycho-social development, including the construction of their ethnic, gender, racial, regional, and religious identities. A third area for further exploration involves the inner world of children's play culture: What can we learn about children's fantasies and attitudes through studying their make-believe and play activities?

Chudacoff ends his book with a message that I hope many will heed. In a society obsessed with risk and giving children a head start, adults need to offer kids more independence to explore their environment, to create their own playthings, and to enjoy being young.

—Steven Mintz, *University of Houston, Houston, TX*

The Power of Play: How Spontaneous, Imaginative Activities Lead to Happier, Healthier Children

David Elkind

Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Lifelong Books, 2008. Notes, other references, index. 240 pp. \$24.00 cloth. ISBN: 9780738211107.

The real power of David Elkind's new book *The Power of Play* lies in the fact that it takes us inside the mind of one of the greatest developmental thinkers of our time. A disciple of Jean Piaget, Elkind was a key figure in the resurgence of the Swiss psychologist's work in America in the 1960s and 1970s. In the 1980s and 1990s, Elkind turned his explorations toward social critique, indicting our modern, fast-paced, technological society for pushing children out of childhood too quickly. The hurried-child syndrome is his legacy from that period. Now, in *The Power of Play*, Elkind brings these two facets of his work together—along with his experience as a Freudian-influenced clinician, a teacher, a father, and a grandfather—to give us a rich and varied perspective on the value of play for our postmodern era.

Taking a cue from Freud's prescription for a fulfilled life (to love and to work), Elkind adds a third element to this formula: to play. It is the balance of these three elements that makes for a harmonious life, Elkind believes, and all through the book he builds a case for how effective parents, as well as successful educators, manage to weave play, work, and love through their interactions with children. Guiding the reader through the development stages, Elkind explains how play should be the focus of early childhood, work the central

objective of middle childhood, and love the chief concern of adolescence, even as play needs to underpin them all.

In addition, when supporting play experiences in children, adults need to keep in mind the specific Piagetian stages of kids at different ages, as well as their individual differences within each stage. Thus Elkind is harshly critical (rightly, in my view) of many current societal products and practices for children. These include infant software, TV for tots, formal reading and math instruction for preschoolers, and a narrowly focused, test-based curriculum for school-aged children and adolescents. Virtually all infant software programs, according to Elkind, fail to recognize that babies do not possess critical-thinking capacities, and preschool reading and math programs ignore the fact that young children cannot conceive of letters or numbers as possessing “set like” characteristics until they reach what Piaget called the stage of concrete operations between five and seven years of age, at which point, for example, an *e* for them may be both a letter of the alphabet and a sound that can change depending upon its relationship to other letters. Elkind contrasts the childhood toys and activities of yesteryear—from blocks and model airplanes to sand play and simple dolls—with the toys and childhood pursuits of today, which leave nothing to the imagination and lead children passively to watch TV or play video games as they grow ever more obese.

Much of *The Power of Play* is taken up with describing different kinds of play experiences across ages and stages. These include the playful experimentation with hands, feet, and senses of the infant; the repetitive mastery play of the toddler who wants to go down the stairs

again and again; the innovative play of the slightly older child who has learned to go down the slide and now wants to walk up the slide; the kinship play of two three-year-olds who are complete strangers; the therapeutic play of the four-year-old who develops an imaginary companion to cope with stress; the rule-governed ball games, strength games, and chasing games of the eight-year-old; and the fort-building games of the ten- and eleven-year-old. Elkind describes these varieties of playful experience by citing clinical literature and children’s literature, by referring to his own clinical experiences (we learn for example, that he evaluated the original Bubble Boy), and by drawing upon his own rich experiences with his children, grandchildren, and grandnieces. For example, Elkind emphasizes the importance of using humor as a part of “light-hearted parenting,” and illustrates this by the story of how his two-year-old niece kept trying to feed their dog with bits of lunch. Elkind writes: “Using my roughest voice and making an ogre face, I said, ‘The ogre says don’t feed the dog.’ She made a funny face and stopped. When we visited her at Christmas, she made a stern face and said, in her own ogre voice, ‘The ogre says don’t feed the dog,’ and giggled” (p. 174).

Throughout the first part of the book, Elkind uses a friendly anecdotal voice to share his thoughts and experiences. Toward the end of the book, the voice becomes more academic, as Elkind writes about those progressive educators who employed play as a significant component of their schooling approaches, including John Dewey, Maria Montessori, and Rudolf Steiner. In addition, he reflects upon schooling practices that have traditionally worked against play. I was fascinated, for example, to learn that

steel magnate and philanthropist Andrew Carnegie created the Carnegie unit used in high schools, based on his belief that an hour provides an objective measure of labor as employed in his factories.

Elkind concludes by citing a number of studies linking play to academic achievement (most of these were two decades old; I would have liked to see some that were more current) and by providing a few playful activities for breaking the cycle of boredom that is all too prevalent in schools today (including a game called The Dumb Books Caper, where children try to find all the mistakes made in a typical school textbook!). All in all, readers will find this book a cornucopia of ideas about play, leading to new thoughts and questions. For example, I was wondering by the end of the book whether children have created lore incorporating elements of the high-tech world—is there an iPod jump rope rhyme out there? Whether you are an educator, parent, psychologist, therapist, sociologist, or museum professional, there is something in this book for you and much to be learned from an individual who has been a major advocate over the past half century for the developmental needs of all children.

—Thomas Armstrong, *author of The Human Odyssey: Navigating the Twelve Stages of Life (2007)*

Play and Child Development (Third Edition)

*Joe L. Frost, Sue C. Wortham, and
Stuart Reifel*

Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson/Merrill Prentice Hall, 2007. Photographs, diagrams, charts, maps. 460 pp. \$64.67 paper. ISBN: 9780131573123.

I must say that my first impression of the third edition of *Play and Child Development* was: They did it AGAIN! Frost, Wortham, and Reifel again impressed me with the depth and breadth of their understanding of play in this book with significant updates related to research and practice. As I finished each chapter, I was left with the same tranquil satisfaction as if I had eaten a fine full-course meal. This book can be used in any child development course, early childhood education introductory courses, or early childhood curriculum courses, in addition to courses focusing on play. This new edition reminds me of David Elkind's *The Hurried Child* (1981), for it cautions us against the current educational trend of minimizing play and neglecting to consider the whole child in our instruction. The authors provide historical, developmental, and clinical aspects of play and also address the social and political issues that are inherent to any discussion of play. The authors ask us to reflect upon the current educational environment, the empirical evidences related to play and development, and the many theoretical points of view regarding play.

One of the new additions to the book is the authors' deep concern about current issues such as the loss of recess and free play in schools. Despite the vast evidence of the contribution of play to childhood learning and development—from Jean Piaget's *Play, Dreams, and Imitation* (1932) to Singer, Golinkoff, and Hirsh-Pasek's *Play=Learning* (2006)—play has recently been shunted aside in early childhood programs in favor of more teacher-directed instruction in order to address early learning standards. Administrators, policy makers, and some teachers increasingly regard play as a waste of instructional time with no clear benefits

How Spontaneous, Imaginative Activities Lead to Happier, Healthier Children. ISBN: 0738210536. An important contribution to the literature about how children learn, *The Power of Play* suggests ways to restore play's respected place in children's lives, at home, at school, and in the larger community. In defense of unstructured "down time," it encourages parents to trust their instincts and resist the promise of the wide and dubious array of educational products on the market geared to youngsters. Back to top. Rent *The Power of Play* 1st edition (978-0738210537) today, or search our site for other textbooks by David Elkind. Every textbook comes with a 21-day "Any R lead to happier, healthier children by David Elkind, Ph. D. Da Capo Press: 2007. 240 pp. \$24. *The Power of Play - How spontaneous, imaginative activities* The *Power of Play* covers a deep range of resources for understanding how children build units of. literacy, math and science and recommends ways to construct the optimum learning conditions for discovery and experimentation.