

## BOOK REVIEWS

JEFFREY H. GOLDSTEIN (EDITOR).

*Toys, Play, and Child Development.*

Cambridge, England; New York, NY; Melbourne, Australia:

Cambridge University Press (1994).

189 pp., \$49.95 (hardcover). \$14.95 (paper).

ISBN 0-521-45062-4 & 45564-2.

I often dread reading edited books or the proceedings of symposia or conferences. Usually they are boring or very uneven at the best. This book was a very pleasant surprise in the areas of play and early childhood. It will stand the test of time on the book shelf because it contains both useful research findings and several significant understandings about the value and function of play. Generally speaking the readings offer a "no nonsense" approach regarding toys, play, and development that puts the extremes of media hype and "political correctness" firmly in their places.

This book is a collection of papers, mostly presented at a seminar in London, England, in October, 1992. The authors are well established North American and European experts on play. Their book covers a variety of important topics. Singer reviews the research on imaginative play and adaptive development and writes beautifully about the value of toys, play, and imagination. Pellegrine and Jones write about play, toys, development, and social environment, while Almquist looks at educational toys and creative toys. War toys and aggressive play are ably discussed by P. Smith and Wegener-Spöhring, both of whom try to allay the reader's fear with sound research and good judgment, noting that often aggression becomes a problem when adults get frightened and fail to comprehend the nature of "play."

Sex differences in toy play and the use of video games is explored by the editor of the book, J. Goldstein, who notes that findings in these areas will reflect both the sex and age of the observer and their various definitions of aggression. Differences in play tend to have a biological as well as social origin. Contrary to the belief of many parents and

educators, his findings suggest video games do not lead to poor school performance or excessive aggression but rather are "associated with improved cognitive skills, including attention, logical thinking, and hypothesis testing" (p. 129). I was glad to see an excellent chapter on play psychotherapy by D. Singer entitled "Play as healing." She gives a good practical introduction to her own eclectic style of play therapy, with fine illustrations from two cases.

The highlight of the book was Sutton-Smith's chapter, "Does play prepare the future?" I liked the fact that he didn't write "Does play prepare for the future." That would have been too pragmatic and educational. Sutton-Smith goes beyond that. He enters the world of dialectics and paradoxes. Play is meaning and existence. The kids have a right. They live and know play. The problems are the adults who "act-out" destructively (rather than live playfully and imaginatively) and the "serious" educators who reduce playtime and recess in our schools. Play stimulates vitality, exploration, and curiosity, and creates a life worth living.

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JAMES MOFFETT. *The Universal Schoolhouse: Spiritual awakenng through education.*  
*San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1994.*  
 367 pp., US\$25.00 (hard cover) ISBN 1-55542-607-7.

The quality of society and of individuals is really all one, so intimately do they influence each other. Both are evolving, co-evolving. How may the public education base affect culture and the individual consciousness it interacts with? (p. xv)

Since the 1960s, eminent American educator and school reformer James Moffett has written a number of books in which he identifies problems with the school system and provides practical recommendations. In his most recent book, *The Universal Schoolhouse*, he addresses not only educators but also the general public. In response to the current concern about the predicament of public education and the "fate of society," Moffett maintains that the solutions to these huge problems lie in the personal development of each citizen; he equates personal development unequivocally with spiritual growth. Moffett maintains that spiritual development must be the key to solving public problems because "no matter how collective the action, (solutions) depend on mature, enlightened individuals to call for and indeed insist on these solutions" (xvi).