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Book Review: Qualitative Studies of Exploration in Childhood Education: Cultures of Play and Learning in Transition, Transitions in Childhood and Youth Series by M. Fleer et al.

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Qualitative Studies of Exploration in Childhood Education: Cultures of Play and Learning in Transition, Transitions in Childhood and Youth Series

Fleer, M., Hedegaard, M., Ødegaard, E. E., & Sørensen, H. V. (Eds.) (2021). Bloomsbury Academic. List of illustrations, list of contributors, preface, series editors' forward, acknowledgements, index. ISBN: HB – 798-1-3501-9942-2, ePDF - 798-1-3501-9943-9, eBook – 798-1-3501-9944-6.

Review by Dr. Ridhi Sethi, Assistant Professor, Department of Human Development and Childhood Studies, Lady Irwin College, University of Delhi.

Play is a vibrant activity in a young child's life. *Qualitative Studies of Exploration in childhood Education: Cultures of Play and Learning in Transition* focuses on the concept of 'exploration'. This concept looks for new positions in the cultural spaces children, families and teachers inhabit, and the many transitions experienced in the course of one's life. This is such a rare piece of work as it studies both culture and play together and also documents in detail the act of play in different settings.

This is a highly readable collection of chapters, each focussing on a research-based project. Combined, they offer an overview of the role of play and exploration framed by culture and transitions. The research studies are centred around two goals: facilitating children's play and promoting research on the practice of play. The theoretical concepts are readily accessible and well explained. This is an informative collection for practitioners, researchers and policymakers, and a useful resource for anyone who works in play-based settings.

This review outlines the manner in which chapters in the book use qualitative data to inform understandings of how culture affects children's development. With little research on how play and culture affect the wellbeing of children, this book fills the void. It uses data qualitatively and answers the *how and why about* play and transitions. The review also looks at how the book informs my work as a developmental psychologist, and some of the book's limitations or omissions.

The book is divided into two parts. Part I (chapters 1-5) focuses on macro transitions within and across educational cultures, while Part II (chapters 6-10) focuses on children's explorations during micro genetic transitions within activity settings.

The purpose of the book is to bring insight into how exploration takes place in different educational contexts and how it changes over time. In Chapter 1, Fleer, Hedegaard, Ødegaard and Sørensen open the chapter with a discussion on the process of exploration, which takes different forms in different cultures and in diverse situations. The chapter reiterates the point that children's lives are dynamic, as are systems of care and education. Chapter 2 is concerned with how children transition to school by looking at the Nordic approach of early childhood care and education. It discusses the realm of macro transitions. Using an example from Greenland, Hedegaard and Lyberth further elaborate on Hedegaard's wholeness model and reiterate the point that values for preschool education for practice are closely related to societal values in which we function. In chapter 3, Ødegaard discusses the process of co-exploration through institutional transitional events. Chapter 4 reports on the outcomes of an educational experiment with teachers in Chengdu, China that supports teachers transitioning into

new practices for play based settings. This chapter discusses the value of Confucianism which is ethics-based and in which individual identity is not defined by a child's capabilities and rights 'but by his/her responsibilities and obligation to others'(p.70). The authors raise the dichotomy of the societal expectation for playful learning and western educational ideas which are incompatible with Chinese tradition. The authors focus on the dualism set between play and learning in China which they believe to resolve using the theoretical frame of Hedegaard's wholistic approach. The chapter focuses the reader on the value of "collectivism" by Asian Countries and the applicability of the activity-based learning approach of the western countries which rests on the value of individualism and their amalgamation. In chapter 5 the author, Louise Bottcher, describes the challenges faced by an adult with disabilities in Denmark, as societal support diminishes when the child finishes school. The author has painted a complete picture by describing and highlighting the gaps in the social model of disability which adults face.

Part II begins with Chapter 6, in which the authors, Chawla-Duggan and Konantambigi, argue that explorations in micro transitions happen and are facilitated in pedagogic relationships. They highlight the significance of understanding linkage between fathers and child development using case studies of fathering from Mumbai, India and U.K. Authors Santos Da Costa and Amorim, in Chapter 7, explain locomotor exploration within an early childhood setting and analyze it through a cultural and historical lens. Chapter 8 describes how Finnish preprimary education differs from other countries, and in Chapter 9, Lipponen, Hilppo and Rajala use Vygotsky's sociocultural and cultural historical theories of human learning to present an ethnography on how children and adults explore an unpleasant and unexpected case of the death of a moth. In the concluding chapter, Chapter 10, Birkeland, Sørensen and He reiterate the role transitions play in childhood. "Transitions between qualitatively different institutions have a major influence on children because the child attends different institutional settings with different cultures, traditions, value and norms" (p.197)

This book helps a reader both structurally and contextually to look at the science of play and also the role it provides in the development of children. When we study the role of play in children's lives, we are constantly looking for instances where we can see images of our culture and context. Through this book one can look at different cultures with vivid description of the play process and the setting in which it is based. It also opens pathways to study acculturation that stems from children interacting with each other in different settings. However, in this book the result of acculturation is not described in detail though it links it to children's development. In today's world where many children are living in societies different of their own such as migrant or children displaced through conflict and disasters, the role of play is also therapeutic and a crucial expression of self. As children are the most important stakeholders in the process of play this book gives examples of children's expressions in the discussions but they are a few. This book could benefit from more narratives of children's play and expressions. Further, the book mentions the play experience with parents and teachers; however, the relationships between children and adults could also be explored in more detail.

This book is also inclusive and talks about the dialectical relationship between children with disabilities and their environment which is a stance apart from earlier dominant narratives in the area. This book brings together different geographies, cultures, settings and

their stories in one place and is a well written piece of research. Overall, a good read and a must recommendation for anyone working in the area of play.