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## Book Review: Place, Pedagogy and Play: Participation, Design and Research with Children

Tim Thomas

James Madison University, thomastg@jmu.edu

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**Book review: Place, Pedagogy and Play: Participation, Design and Research with Children**

Khan, M., Bell, S., & Wood, J. (Eds.) (2021). Routledge. Forward, preface, index, 100 illustrations. ISBN: PB – 9780367086374, HB – 9780367086367, eBook – 9780429023477.

Review by Tim Thomas, Associate Professor, College of Education, James Madison University, Harrisonburg, VA, USA

Few will dispute the value of outdoor play in the lives of young children. However, the authors collected in *Place, Pedagogy and Play* note the benefits of play not only for individual learners, but benefits that emerge for whole communities by involving children in the design of play spaces. The international slate of authors published here present a continuum of ways that adults can involve the youngest elementary-grades learners in becoming connected to local landscapes.

Enscorning the idea of *pedagogy* in the book's title cements the topics of *place* and *play* fully within the realm of education. How might educators situate their instruction with play and the places in which play occurs to add value to the experience of young learners? Both play and pedagogy are pedestrian parts of the experience of young learners. For her part, in Chapter 7, Francis notes that the children in her classroom "felt no need to define either *play*, *fun* or *learning*, as these terms were considered well established within our classroom culture already" (p. 108). It is the intentional applications of play that can carry learners outdoors and connect their activity to larger lessons.

The book is divided into three sections that situate its major themes in a variety of combinations: "Place and play," "Place and pedagogy," and "Place and participation." Scholars and practitioners from a variety of disciplines contribute the 13 chapters. The ambitious organizing principle of the book is the graduated involvement of children with play spaces – from free play to weighing-in-on the design of cities and open spaces.

In the opening section "Place and play," authors catalogue the implementation of various outdoor play scenarios that enhance creativity and promote learning. In Chapter 3, Mishra, Bell and Mishra note that the benefits of outdoor play have been established in the literature, "from improved early childhood development to enhanced problem-solving abilities and better preparation for skilled adult actions" (p. 41). Similarly, these scholars point out the ways that educational researchers have tweaked children's play spaces, from types of equipment to types of paint markings on play surfaces – these among the many factors monitored to measure the effects of play on children's development (p. 41). However, it's in the opening chapter that Mozaffar lays out the foundational challenge that the book's accumulated authors attempt to answer. Because the "knowledge in relation to children's creativity is usually held by psychologists and educationists" (p. 11), unlocking the benefits to children and society of outdoor play requires the involvement of other disciplinary experts. Educators and landscape designers must collaborate to enhance the learning opportunities for young people.

The second section "Place and pedagogy" establishes specific steps that educators have taken to connect learners to the outdoors, and notes the effect on students' learning. Hamilton (Chapter 8) examines the benefits that outdoor learning injects into the performance of primary students, while Monsur (Chapter 6) studies the effect of exposure to daylight and quality of the view through classroom windows to learners' performance indoors. Architects of school buildings and landscape designers are primary protagonists in these chapters and set the stage for the book's final section that discusses children's potential as designers.

Authors in the third section "Place and participation" identify possibilities for lowering existing barriers to invite children to contribute to the design of familiar places. The authors acknowledge that children are "competent social agents" (p. 166) who can bring unique and valuable perspectives about the landscape, but who lack the experience and vernacular to converse about design. Beeson (Chapter 11) presents the chair project -- introducing design and material use into activity with students -- and

Jansson and Lerstrup (Chapter 12) describe child-led walking tours across familiar landscapes. Both projects show great promise as vehicles to acquaint children with landscape design.

An especially appealing aspect of *Place, Pedagogy and Play* is its origins. This book emerged from an academic conference held in Edinburgh during 2017. Conference organizers, some of them still graduate students at the time, assembled the contents of the book from the sessions offered at the meeting. The range of geographical settings from such a variety of scholars speaks to the robustness of the field. Authors' reference lists at the close of each chapter (and catalogued in the Index) offer a rich library of foundational and exploratory research in the field.

This collection will appeal to readers who desire to connect children with their natural environment. While the authors identify 4 major themes illuminated with this text – place, play, pedagogy, and participation – it's ultimately another pair of 'P's' – power and permission – that they unveil over the arc of the collected essays. As the authors note, in every setting there are adults who may choose to be intentional about engaging children with the outdoors. Whether the open question is about the playground design that best promotes children's creativity (Chapter 3) or the health of a quickly changing landscape with a shifting economy in China (Chapter 13), engagement with the outdoors can come in a number of forms for children. Power is obtained through participation in decision-making, and children's burgeoning agency to learn and to care for landscapes is rooted in invitations from adults.

As a book about place, *Place, Pedagogy and Play* presents a surprisingly limited number of maps, photographs, and illustrations that it might include to more vigorously bring to life the locations discussed in the chapters. While the book is not without visual elements – the photos and maps that are presented do appropriately highlight the text – additional visual tools could enhance the text further, providing images to bring the academic discussions to life. In an era when children's play is frequently consumed by free time spent indoors and plugged into a screen, it's crucial to get this message right. The authors provide a variety of ways forward for educators, planners, and families to guide young people in productive choices – good for them and good for society. The stakes are not small. Francis (Chapter 7) situates lessons in at a beach near her classroom “for Nature to exert her full effect on the young learners.” She notes that children 's humanity is linked to their play and to their being at the beach (p. 109).

For the educator who is interested in inviting children to learn outdoors, this book presents a variety of entry points to connect children's learning to the outdoors. From settings on school playgrounds (Chapter 1) to gardens (Chapter 4) to wild, unconstructed spaces (Francis in Chapter 7), these collected authors offer a range to consider for outdoor play and learning. These authors would say that the multi-disciplinary methods embodied in these essays are an essential approach for employing outdoor play to improve children's learning.

Through playful explorations of their localities, children test the figurative knobs and switches of the inner-workings of a neighborhood. Communities can benefit from children's unique and informed perspectives, but as authors note throughout this volume, adult gatekeepers must grant the permission and power for children to take part in decision-making. Collaborations across academic disciplines can enhance the range of a child's experiences – from an individual's daily schedule to the design of play spaces across whole cities: how to incorporate times and spaces to invigorate children's opportunities through outdoor play? Enhanced intention and invitations from adults will increase the possibilities for children's active learning within and beyond outdoor play.