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Inside role play in early childhood education: researching young children's perspectives, by Sue Rogers and Julie Evans, Routledge, 2007, 140 pp., £22.99 (paperback), ISBN 0415404975

This is a multi-faceted book which manages to do many things. It looks at play in the Reception class in a way that teachers of this age range will immediately recognise. While children and their play are not idolised or idealised, the authors are at pains to ensure that the child's developmental needs are their starting point. These children are then placed in the context of our education system and the values that this system espouses. From the outset, the book brings in to focus the tensions and dilemmas of a play-based approach to early learning in a school context; this is addressed through a useful exploration of the way our society values different aspects of children's learning and the lack of real value placed on play, especially when it appears relatively unstructured and unrelated to the more traditional and higher profile elements such as phonics, reading, writing or maths.

The research and discussions encapsulated in this book are always firmly embedded in the context of a wide range of previous, relevant research from a variety of theorists and researchers. It is acknowledged that the evidence linking play and learning is not always perhaps what we believe it to be and that our often deeply-embedded beliefs about this issue have been shaped through the way previous work has been portrayed to us. This is at once a challenge and a gift to those of us who work in Initial Teacher Education and Continuing Professional Development.

The authors sought to research what play meant to children themselves as well as the Reception teachers. It explores the relationships between planned provision and children's responses to it. Thorny issues such as grouping, choices of themes, boisterous play and a range of constraints are tackled head on. Teachers will recognise the challenges faced and appreciate the honesty with which these are evaluated. The authors give the project teachers a voice to express their feelings about their provision and evaluate it in an informed manner, which will help others to do the same. The children's voices are also heard with similar frankness as they make clear what they think and feel about the role play experiences provided for them. These little-heard voices are sometimes hard for us as practitioners to hear, but the authors deal with this in a supportive and never judgemental way.

Their conclusions are all the more interesting because of the engagement and involvement of all parties; conclusions that recognise the pressure that the current educational agenda places on reception classes and yet seek to point a way forward that challenges us to develop a new pedagogy of play drawing not only on adult perspectives and agendas but also children's responses to and perspectives on existing provision. A pedagogy that attempts to prioritise children rather than curricula.

This book is destined to be a core text on many of our modules on both QTS and Early Childhood Studies degrees. It should also be on the shelves of our Reception teachers as essential ammunition in the drive to give our 4 and 5 year olds the experiences that they need in order to be able to develop as successful social beings.

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