

The Genius of Play - Celebrating the Spirit of Childhood by Sally Jenkinson, Hawthorne Press, U.K. 2001. 181 pp. \$19.95.

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Much of this reviewer's teaching for the last few years has been in the inner city where listlessness, passivity, disrespect, and lack of contact with the body are rampant. Savoring this deceptively provocative book while being "in the field" has launched further reflections on the essence of play, and the dangers of its deprivation.

The background for Ms. Jenkinson's persuasive stance comes from her long association with Waldorf Education, which is based on Rudolf Steiner's spiritual-scientific research. "When children relate what they learn to their own experience, they are interested and alive, and what they learn becomes their own. Waldorf schools are designed to foster this kind of learning."¹

Sally Jenkinson challenges the reader to re-examine the social, emotional, physical and spiritual value of play. This word "play" is not to be taken lightly; play is a child's way to learn to "work" things out. Ms. Jenkinson presents scrupulous evidence and poignant detail, juxtaposing psychological theories of childhood with current child advocacy research. Anecdotes from her classroom and children weave through astute professional observations. Eloquent photographs are interspersed throughout the book, as are interviews with elders who grew up in poverty and had to "make do" creating games, toys, and worlds of their own.

With a gentle yet convincing touch, Ms. Jenkinson reveals how critical these issues are. When a child has neither time nor space in which to play, when toys represent status, power, and control, a child's inner world is stunted. Dependence on television or video games deprives the child of the opportunity for visualization and discourages physical exercise. The future of society is determined by the quality of early play. This book provides insight into how to help.

In addition to a generous bibliography, there are five appendices including a Declaration from the International Association for the Child's Right to Play; proposals for change; television as a public health issue; statistics and suggestions for weaning a family from television. For those seeking more information, numerous resources, associations, and web sites are provided.

Noting the apathy, lack of imagination and boundaries, their inability to negotiate, one teacher assigned her children homework: go home and build a den! I won't spoil the ending for you here, but it's worth reading.

Ms. Jenkinson ends her book, "Nature in her wisdom gives the young a playful spirit. The genius of play helps children meet their futures; it prepares them for a changing world and engages them absolutely with the present. Let us honour childhood, and give our children a chance to play." (p. 141)

--Terry Boyarsky, Cleveland, Ohio

¹ Quoted from Henry Barnes, former Chairman of the Board, Association of Waldorf Schools of North America, originally appeared in the October, 1991 issue of Educational Leadership Magazine.