

COMMENTS

BY Elizabeth Goodenough, Ph.D.

Elizabeth Goodenough received an M.A.T. and Ph.D. from Harvard University and has taught at Harvard, Claremont McKenna, Sarah Lawrence College, and the University of Michigan: Residential College (RC); School of Education (SoE); and School of Information (SI). She established the Landscapes of Childhood Series at Wayne State University Press and is widely published in Childhood Studies. An assistant editor of *Michigan Quarterly Review* (MQR), she was elected to become a Fellow of the Society for Values in Higher Education (SVHE), and to serve on the Children's Literature Association's (ChLA) Phoenix Award Committee. Her pedagogy for the RC course, Growing Up Near the Great Lakes, was a finalist for the 2014 U-M Provost's Teaching Innovation Prize. She received the UROP Outstanding Research Award Honorable Mention in 2015 and the UROP Outstanding Research Mentor Award in 2016. Her work as Editor for *Secret Spaces of Childhood* sparked a national dialogue on play. She originated and helped develop the Michigan documentary film "Where do children Play?", edited the Companion Volume, *A Place for Play*, and has worked on outreach projects associated with the topic since 2008. *A Place for Play* will change the way families think about their neighborhoods, and it will encourage those who work with children to envision recess and leisure time in new ways.

"A Glimpse into A Little Patch of Earth Preschool (ALPoE)" hits a sweet spot of wise pedagogy respected for centuries. Among educators referenced in this brilliant little case study, I glimpse child-centered theorists Friedrich Frobel, Maria Montessori, John Dewey, Rudolph Steiner, Kurt Hahn, as well as influences from Reggio Emilia, the preschools of Italy. But the extraordinary charm of this short piece relies not just on an understanding of cultural practice (what school inspector Matthew Arnold in his 1869 *Culture and Anarchy* referred to as "the best which has been thought and said" about education) but in the vivid energies of learning through play evoked by the details of an ordinary day at a Santa Clarita play yard.

My immediate question regarding this perfect patch is: How can it be scaled up as a model translated through K-12 and even post-secondary education? Could heads of school greet elementary students, eighth graders or seniors at the drop off point, and enable that welcome to extend into the mutuality of class or homerooms? High school students, disaffected by their curriculum, need to feel and know that their time is not wasted or empty, destroyed by routine assignments. How can time spent outdoors, Finnish style, ease transitions and celebrate, not just mitigate, "interruptions?" Alas, and to the point of direct debate: How likely is it that a vibrant force field, such as described in this article, has a chance of surviving in today's kindergarten?

Where flow is experienced among intimate studios and assemblage zones, handmade objects or talents like singing become naturally respected opportunities to speak to the other. In *The Gift: Imagination and the Erotic Life of Property* (1983), Lewis Hyde examines an approach to the anthropology of play: gifts increase connections and inspire community by the principle of attraction, a binding dynamic that strengthens relationships. As peer support webs out, places like ALPoE enable private languages and improvised embodiment: a boy who becomes a bridge makes the slide more fun.

Finally I have to note McNiff-Hendzlik's use of active verbs: squeeze a hug, run, strum, toss, bark, noodle sword fight, bend down on knees, cuddle quietly. This language reflects the importance of physical movement to learning and the quest of children to create their own worlds. When they find places where they can "cozy up inside," they are discovering and inventing themselves, creating a fundamental phenomenon "essential to survival" according to sociobiologist E. O. Wilson in *Secret Spaces of Childhood* (2004). At every stage of development we need to incubate that process of becoming. The repetition of "tender" and "joy," terms so rare in education today, epitomizes the proper response to this vital growth. If only the practices at ALPoE could be shared more widely and attract local communities everywhere to commit to this type of hub of learning and hive of life.

References

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