

Play in Creative Problem-solving for Planners and Architects

Kasprisin, Ron
Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2016

Book Review

Tags: creative pedagogy | learning theory | pedagogy of play

Reviewed by: Mary Stimming
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As the title indicates, this book is intended for those in the fields of urban planning and architecture. That said, with some translation, this slim volume is a helpful resource for those who seek to include more creative pedagogy in their theological and religious studies classrooms. I can imagine theology and religious studies professors using this book to inspire their own use of play in the classroom and to persuade skeptical colleagues of the value of play within the academy.

Author Ron Kasprisin defines and defends the role of play in teaching and learning with passion and precision. Rooting his concept of play in the pedagogical theories of Friedrich Froebel (founder of the German kindergarten movement), Kasprisin describes play as " self-activity, enjoyable, sensory, wondrous, and thoughtful" (4). Play is "experimental, flexible" (60), and dedicated to "creative problem-solving" that "requires openness . . . divergent thinking, and an appreciation for ambiguity and complexity" (62). He extols its power to unlock creativity thanks to how it "disables fear, failure, and creates voluntary intentions" (7).

Kaspirin's consideration of how play overcomes fear and unleashes creativity (in Chapter Two, "Object Learning through Symbolic Play" [35-38 in particular]) could stimulate new directions in how faculty promote critical thinking within students and how to encourage and absorb diverse perspectives within class discussions. Similarly, his exploration of how the studio environment nurtures play and its attendant creativity (Chapter 5, "Setting the Stage-Play Environment") offers fresh ways to create classrooms with a high tolerance for failure and consequent high innovation. Key throughout is Kasprisin's conviction that play offers a legitimate method of student-directed learning at all levels of education.

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The final four chapters (“How Do Designers Play,” “Object-learning with Play-tools/Skills,” “Object-learning Applications in Design and Planning,” and “Integration of Digital Technologies and Crafting Processes”) are the ones most closely written for those who teach students of urban planning and architecture. A careful reading of the Introduction, first three chapters (“Creative Problem-solving (CPS) for Design and Planning,” “Object-learning through Play: Object-learning, Constructivism, and Self-learning through Symbolic Play,” and “The Gifts of Friedrich Froebel”) and Chapter 5 (“Setting the Stage – Play Environment”) is likely to suffice for professors in other fields. In those chapters, Kasprisin lays out the qualities and functions of play and the value of creative problem-solving in education. His insistence that technological methods short-circuit creativity is of special interest to me. As one who resists the encroachment of technology at every level of education, I found his discussions of the limits of technology illuminating and affirming.

I was surprised that the theories of Maria Montessori were not mentioned as her theories of early childhood education have also taken strong hold in a segment of American education. Influenced by Froebel, Montessori embraced a similar ethic of sensory learning and offers a range of materials for children to engage that is wider than Froebel’s. If you are persuaded by the value of play, her thought will provide additional resources for consideration.

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