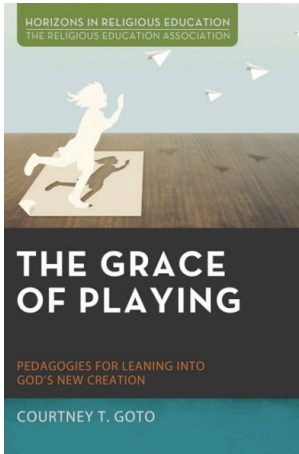


Reflective Teaching

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The Grace of Playing: Pedagogies for Learning into God's New Creation

Goto, Courtney T.
Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2016

Book Review

Tags: adult learning | pedagogy of play | theological education

Reviewed by: Brant Himes, *Azusa Pacific University*

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In *The Grace of Playing*, Courtney Goto offers a project in practical theology for Christian religious education that uses the notion of playing to better understand teaching and learning. Goto distinguishes her project from a formal practical theology of play, where play could be explored as a universal category of human existence. Instead, she works in the line of Paulo Freire's search to move beyond a traditional schooling model of education towards learning that is more integrated, experiential, and creative. Specifically, Goto reflects critically on the notion of revelatory experiencing through the language and pedagogies of playing. Her focus is on playing as it relates to adult learning, and her investigation demonstrates - both conceptually and through case studies - how playing cultivates faith formation.

Goto is an Assistant Professor of Religious Education at the Boston University School of Theology and a co-Director of the Center for Practical Theology. She writes as a third generation Japanese American United Methodist primarily for an audience of theorists, students, and practitioners who are liberal mainline Protestants. She invites Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and Charismatic Christians into the conversation as well, but notes that her advocacy of revelatory experiencing is to be understood in terms of the contextualized perspectives encountered in mainline Protestant churches. This is an important caveat. Theologically conservative readers will take issue with her concept of revelatory experiencing, whereby revelation happens in between persons as they relate to one another (as opposed to approaching Christian revelation as a totalizing meta-narrative). That Goto makes her theological liberalism so clear and defined, particularly in terms of her understanding of revelation, is a great service to readers.

The Grace of Playing investigates playing from social scientific, theological, and historical perspectives and offers two case studies for application. After a preface and introduction, Chapter 2 explores psychoanalytical and psychological concepts of playing, relying particularly on D. W. Winnicott to articulate sociologically what occurs in revelatory experiencing. In Chapter 3, Goto turns to theology to build a theory and constructive proposal of play by appropriating insights from Jürgen Moltmann's Theology of Play. Chapter 4 is a historical accounting of medieval practices of play, including the use of devotional dolls by fourteenth century nuns in the Rheinland, Germany and the practice of holy foolery by those in both Western and Eastern Church traditions. The final two chapters contain case studies of grace-filled play. The first describes the creation of a pretend garden at a Japanese American church for the purpose of congregational reconciliation, and the second briefly recounts a practice of playing with inmates in a juvenile detention center. To conclude, Goto demonstrates that the grace of playing leads a world in need towards God's new creation.

The Grace of Playing skillfully navigates insights from sociology, theology, and history to make a compelling case for the theological practice of play as a mediating, revelatory experience within Christian religious education. The book is readily accessible for students and practitioners, without neglecting the more technical needs of theorists. For the case studies, Goto deliberately refrains from providing much, if any, direct data; this effectively condenses the reading, but also leaves a sense of wanting to know more about how the grace of playing works itself into and through these unique settings. Overall, the book is a warm invitation for all to play in the fullness of God's grace.

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