



Primary English Teaching Association
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The word on play

Play is part of the curriculum whether educators recognise it or not, say the authors of PETA's latest book, *Play and Literacy in Children's Worlds*.

However, authors Bronwyn Beecher and Leonie Arthur (pictured) advocate more than recognition — they suggest that play can form an effective basis for powerful literacy learning.

To begin with, they say, play behaviours cross over the lines between educational settings and communities — revealing the many 'worlds' that children know. By valuing play, educators can learn much of the understandings and practices that children themselves value: in their homes; within their cultures; among their extended families and local communities; and as part of a range of other social groups.

"This sort of educator valuing is critical if we want to avoid messages that tell children there is only one kind of literacy — one way of learning it, one way of practising it", says Leonie.

Building on play is therefore an inclusive practice, putting educators in touch with the many literacies that children draw upon every day, whether they are communicating in their home language, viewing *South Park*, interpreting popular magazines and toy catalogues, accessing Internet sites or interacting with a hand-held electronic game.



"Families are the first teachers", says Bronwyn. "Educators can build partnerships with families through two-way communication, and gain access to important knowledge about each child."

She also notes that, in play, students' disposition to learning is direct and positive.

"In play, children are motivated, in control and free to risk and explore", she says. "The play environment actually serves as a scaffold to extend children's literacy learning."

The implication for educators is to follow children's interests, and to allow opportunities for investigations that allow extended engagement. Leonie notes that this is not a 'hands-off' role.

"It's sometimes appropriate to provide explicit demonstrations — drawing attention to print conventions, modelling spellings and pronunciations and so on. The key is to ensure that these things occur within experiences that are meaningful to the children, so that they can see a purpose for them."

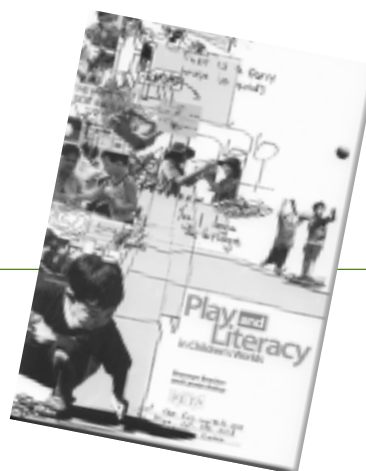
About the book

Play and Literacy in Children's Worlds

112 pp softcover

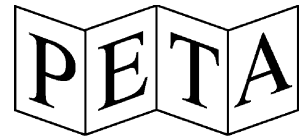
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