

Book Reviews

Access to Play for Children in Situations of Crisis: Synthesis of Research in Six Countries

Sudeshna Chatterjee (2017)

International Play Association, 51 pages

Available from <http://ipaworld.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/IPA-APC-Research-Synthesis-Report-A4.pdf>

The powerful role of play as catharsis, as medicine and as salve for life is profoundly evident in this text. Similar to Eisen's (1988) study that looked at Jewish children's play in ghettos during the Holocaust, this text draws attention to the fact that even though "a graveyard is no place for entertainment," children, across cultures and in all circumstances, will naturally engage in this activity as an authentic part of their existence.

The author and the several contributors to this report must be commended for the deep, rich and rigorous research presented. It provides readers with robust evidence of the complexity of children's play. This text demonstrates just how children do this as they maneuver and meander the rugged terrains of their daily lives. While there is no dearth of research focusing on children's play, the author of this text has filled a vast gap in the literature germane to children living in situations of crisis.

Not since Whiting's (1963) *Six Cultures* study has a text so profoundly addressed cultural interpretations and representations of play. Through cross-cultural descriptions and comparisons, readers are provided with deep insight into the role of play in helping children from Japan, Nepal, Turkey, Lebanon, India, and Thailand deal with their existence. While crisis in its multiple forms have often made headlines, when interest fades, and cameras are turned off, what happens in these spaces? How do people move on? This piece seeks to illuminate what the media has often not focused on: how children, as resilient beings, use play to escape the harsh realities of their daily lives.

The author of this text outlines her rationale for selecting the research settings. Deliberate attempt was made to conduct research in countries that experienced natural disasters, humanitarian crises and those that were considered to be in "everyday crisis." This is particularly welcomed because the deliberate focus on research in these countries illuminates the vast richness of what "research in other spaces can do." The six countries in this study lie outside of highly visible research contexts (Europe, North America and Australasia). If I may say so, as a researcher

from a region with minimal visibility in research, it is refreshing and empowering to see representations of countries culturally, economically and socially similar to mine reflected in this book. The research is more connectable and more relatable. I have no doubt that other readers will also appreciate this.

Finally, perhaps what is even more commendable is that this book is not only about presenting research but rather about providing readers with tools with which to apply the research. The accompanying toolkit for educators, administrators, and policy makers is like a helping hand, providing guidance to help them to not only develop play spaces, but also to enable them to understand the need to establish, secure environments in order to assist children from crisis situations (Casey, 2017).

As a researcher and a child advocate, I appreciate the depth of coverage of Sudeshna Chatterjee, as she draws attention to the importance of children's play. This book is timely. It will certainly be of tremendous interest to all stakeholders who provide care, coverage or treatment to children.

References

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Review by Zoyah Kinkead-Clark

Dr. Zoyah Kinkead-Clark is a lecturer and researcher in early childhood education at the University of the West Indies, Mona. She received her teaching diploma from Shortwood Teachers' College, her B.Sc. in Early Childhood Education from Temple University, and her Doctorate in Education from The University of Sheffield. Prior to lecturing at the tertiary level, she taught kindergarten for several years, both in Jamaica and the wider Caribbean. As a researcher, Dr. Kinkead-Clark is keenly interested in how children are shaped by their early experiences and how educators build on these in the classroom. Her current research is aimed at understanding how young children are shaped by their ecological experiences within the home and wider community and how educators can build on these in the early childhood classroom.

Author's Response by Sudeshna Chatterjee

I would like to thank the reviewer, Dr. Zoyah Kinkead-Clark, for a very constructive review of the Access to Play for Children in Situations of Crisis six-country research by the International Play Association: Promoting the Child's Right to Play. As a response to the review, I am offering some background to this work and some additional resources for the interested reader.

As an international membership-based association with members in 50 countries worldwide, the IPA's purpose is to protect, preserve and promote children's right to play as a fundamental human right. Since 2008, the IPA has worked on initiating an international process for securing the formal invitation (which they received in 2010) of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child for the drafting of a General Comment (GC) on Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Article 31 is commonly known as the "play" article, but given the challenges of defining play and its role (Burghardt, 2005), even the UNCRC—the most significant international document on childhood—does not make a differentiation between play, rest, leisure, and recreation in Article 31. In 2013, the IPA reached a significant milestone with the adoption of the GC (United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2013), which deepens our understanding of Article 31 as a whole, and of play as a child right. It also positions this neglected article more centrally within the fuller context of the UNCRC for the benefit of States Parties throughout the world and increases opportunities for its compliance.

However, within the General Comment, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child emphasized the lack of play rights of children in difficult circumstances including children in situations of conflict, humanitarian and natural disasters. The IPA shared the concern. In 2014, the IPA held a Special Workshop within its Triennial World Conference in Istanbul. I was invited to conceptualize and facilitate this workshop entitled "Access to Play in Crisis (APC)," where a group of 24 international experts from nine countries noted with great concern the lack of guidance, research and documentation that limit the ability to learn from the experience of others working on promoting the right to play for children in situations of crisis. Having identified such significant gaps in knowledge and understanding, in 2016, the IPA launched two international initiatives on APC:

- An international research project in India, Japan, Lebanon, Nepal, Thailand and Turkey to increase knowledge and understanding of children's play needs and to improve the practical application of the right to play in situations of crisis.
- A training and development project in Turkey and Lebanon to develop resources for training program managers and staff to support play opportunities for children in situations of crisis across the region.

I was appointed as the consulting Project Officer by the IPA to manage both APC projects in 2016-2017. I also designed and led the six-country research under review here. An eminent panel of international experts provided objective advice and feedback throughout the process. The APC projects were showcased in the IPA's 20th Triennial World Conference in Calgary in 2017, where a conference

resolution was passed to champion and advocate the recommendations identified in *Access to Play for Children in Situation of Crisis: Synthesis of Research in Six Countries*. This report is hopefully a first of a series of projects to be undertaken by the IPA and its different branches and members on this subject.

Readers can access the research report, toolkit, and project video report at the links provided below:

Access to Play for Children in Situations of Crisis: Synthesis of Research in Six Countries: <http://ipaworld.org/what-we-do/access-to-play-in-crisis/apc-research-project/>

Access to Play in Crisis Project Video Report:
<http://ipaworld.org/what-we-do/access-to-play-in-crisis/video-report/>

Access to Play for Children in Situations of Crisis: TOOLKIT:
<http://ipaworld.org/what-we-do/access-to-play-in-crisis/apc-training-project/>