

## Two New Books from Hawthorn Press:

*Free to Learn* by Lynne Oldfield

*The Genius of Play: Celebrating the Spirit of Childhood* by Sally Jenkinson

Reviewed by Stephen Spitalny

There have not been many books written from a 'Waldorf perspective' addressing the development and needs of young children. Hawthorn Press has recently published for their "early years series" two new books by Steiner school kindergarten teachers from England that help fill that gap.

Lynne Oldfield is a kindergarten teacher and directs the London Waldorf Early Childhood Teacher Training Course. She has written an excellent introduction and overview on the work of Waldorf early childhood education in *Free To Learn*. This book is filled with short essays and quotes from Waldorf kindergarten teachers around the world. Also included are many photos of children at play and at work. Lynne addresses many important themes including the importance of rhythm, learning through imitation, the care of the senses, and the development of play. Included in this book are a glimpse into the life and work of Rudolf Steiner, and an interesting history of Elizabeth Grunelius and the Waldorf kindergarten movement starting with the founding of the first Waldorf School. Interspersed throughout the book are short quotes from Rudolf Steiner and others that help to elucidate the themes addressed. *Free to Learn* will be a welcome addition to any parent library and a support for kindergarten teachers everywhere.

Sally Jenkinson is a former Waldorf kindergarten teacher and a founding member of the Alliance for Childhood. *The Genius of Play* offers in-depth research into the significance of play in the life of the young child. Many different aspects of play are addressed in this important book. To quote Friedrich Froebel (from the book); "Play is the highest expression of human development in childhood, for it alone is the free expression of what is in the child's soul. It is the purest and most spiritual product of the child and at the same time it is a type and copy of human life at all stages and in all relations. . .For to one who has insight into human nature, the trend of the future life of the child is revealed in his freely chosen play." Rudolf Steiner points out that freedom in play and movement as a young child lead to freedom of thought and action in the adult. The link is becoming more widely recognized, especially through the work of Stuart Brown who is quoted in this book as well. It is through play that the young child comes to grasp both the physical world and the social world.

In her introduction, Mary Jane Drummond says, "Sally Jenkinson presents a multi-dimensional rationale [for play]: she delineates the moral purposes of play, invoking the child's 'moral imagination', another telling phrase. She demonstrates both the emotional and social value of play, the child's work in the domains of empathy and solidarity; she documents the creativity and aesthetic of play. She generously illustrates the interpenetration of play and spoken language, in all its forms; she gives proper prominence to children as symbolists and surrealists, using the materials of their workaday world to represent the extraordinary conceptions of their imagination."

This book is filled with descriptions of children's play at various ages. Many well-known educators are quoted including Janusz Korczak, David Elkind, Erich Fromm, Bruno Bettelheim, Iona and Peter Opie, and Rudolf Steiner. Additionally, various imaginative and poetic references are used to elucidate the themes of play. A whole section of the book is dedicated to the impact of TV and screen media on play and child development in general. Especially valuable in this section are ideas of what to do instead of TV.

This wonderful book is valuable for early childhood educators and parents alike and is a welcome addition to my own bookshelf.

To close, I quote a Jewish tale from the section on "The truth of the imagination."

“Fairy Tale and Truth went together for a long journey. One day Truth said to Fairy Tale: “How come, whenever we are seen together, people receive you with open arms and leave me outside? What could we do about this?” At that moment Fairy Tale gave its clothes to Truth. And from that day on Truth walks on earth dressed in the clothes of Fairy Tale.”