

Much of the writings on children and their relationships with the adults, who direct and influence their lives, faithfully reproduce the adult-child power dynamic. Such writings thus fit well into the wider scholarship on inequality, its nature and scope. Not surprisingly, therefore, policy and programme dialogues on children and their relationships with adults, and institutions which adults run, also focus on addressing inequalities, in such a way that the children grow up to be clones of the adults, who already exist.

Writings on the world of play are few in number, possibly because there is a clear understanding that, in the world of play, the roles of children and adults are easily reversed. Children, if briefly, are able to choose from among options, make decisions and create for themselves, and everyone else, who participates in play, either a new world, or new ways of seeing the existing world.

Professor Shubhada Maitra from TISS and Professor Shekhar Seshadri from NIMHANS, in their edited volume under review, help us see how children experience, negotiate and survive the world that adults create for them. In doing this, they far surpass the fairly limited ambition, with which they began the book: 'Document, work with children using various forms of play and art; bring to centre-stage the numerous field-based innovations of working with children; Utilise the material thus generated for teaching-learning purpose.'

The 15-chapter book is divided into two rather clichéd titled parts, 'Grounds for Play' and 'Play on the Ground' and are further subdivided into five sections, more thoughtfully titled, which show how a trajectory from concepts to research design and methods to contexts and later applications evolve in a variety of settings.

Unsurprising perhaps is that the most difficult to read and assimilate passages in the book relate to the use of play and art in helping children survive and escape situations of abuse. The authors have chosen cases with a lot of care:

Sessions revealed that both sisters had been subjected to sexual abuse. Each child however reacted differently to the abuse. The younger experienced a lot of confusion, found it difficult to articulate many thoughts and feelings and therefore also suffered depression. The elder sister had better understanding of the traumatic experiences that she had been subjected to, expressing her emotions more in terms of anger.

Authors shared many cases, similar to this one, from the so-called safe settings, like family, home and school to demonstrate how children cope, respond and react to situations, which are unfamiliar. What makes the book stand out, is the care taken to not just share the specifics of what children have experienced, but also the processes by which children learn to trust, and the therapists are able to move from understanding a child's reality to helping them cope and in time move on. A case in point is this case:

The breakthrough happened in the fifth session, when she said she wanted to draw with crayons. She even asked me what to draw, and then finally drew her family. She drew very fast with tears flowing down her face. She just threw away the crayons when she finished and walked away. An hour later I visited her on the playground, where, as expected, her class was playing basketball and she was sitting on the sidelines, holding her knees to her chest. At this point I was also anxious, as I did not want her to go home without any closure to the session. She agreed to come back and shared her story via the drawing.

Based on their own experience and that of the range of experts, who have contributed to the volume, the authors bring out three principles which underline the importance of play: promote individual and community well-being that enhances quality of life for all; facilitate and promote the development of social connectivity that is extremely vital in the fast-paced and consumerist contemporary urban lifestyles; and instil environmental values fundamental to the development of the human-nature contact mandatory for mental health.

These principles, inferred by the authors, and the research and their choice of articles have the potential to be of value to the policy-maker and the wider policy-influencing community. In that, it relates to these two groups only in sporadic sections, points to a larger problem—that the research and practitioner community are far removed from the policy defining world. A fine book with the potential to become a great one. As a wise man once said, for want of a nail a war was lost.

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