

# Perspectives of Play in Three Nations: A Comparative Study in Japan, the United States, and Sweden

**Satomi Izumi-Taylor**  
University of Memphis

**Ingrid Pramling Samuelsson**  
Göteborg University

**Cosby Steele Rogers**  
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

---

## Abstract

This reflective paper discusses findings about differences and similarities in perspectives on play among early childhood educators in Japan, the United States, and Sweden. Analysis of survey data collected from educators in those nations yielded six themes regarding the meanings and uses of play: (1) process of learning, (2) source of possibilities, (3) empowerment, (4) creativity, (5) child's work, and (6) fun activities. *Processes of learning*, *fun activities*, and *creativity* were the universal themes of play that emerged during analysis. Japanese and Swedish teachers related play to the theme *source of possibilities*, but American teachers did not. The theme *play as child's work* was represented in the American and Swedish teachers' notions of play but not in those of the Japanese teachers. The theme of play as *empowerment* differentiated Japanese teachers from the others. Japanese and Swedish teachers reported offering unstructured play to children, while their American counterparts did not. Two themes emerged in the participants' responses regarding adult play: *state of heart* (state of mind) and *positive feelings*. Although American and Japanese teachers associated playfulness with a "state of the heart/mind," their Swedish counterparts did not indicate such associations. Teachers from all three nations did, however, agree that playfulness involves and promotes positive feelings.

---

## Introduction

Research regarding play is complex, and culture is a key factor in determining how people in different nations view play. People with different cultural backgrounds tend to pay attention to different characteristics of the same phenomena (Azuma, 1986); because teachers' perspectives on play are influenced by their own cultures, these perspectives vary widely. Teachers' perceptions of play affect children's experiences in their classrooms. Thus, we felt, as scholars doing research in Japan, Sweden, and the United States, that comparing teachers' perceptions of play in those countries could provide insights that might expand the discourse about play in those countries and internationally. We also felt that our findings could prove useful to those who wish to design effective early childhood education programs.

We anticipate that our research on perspectives on play expressed by American, Japanese, and Swedish early childhood educators can provide a basis for reflection and understanding among the educators in these nations who, in spite of cultural differences, all recognize play as essential in children's development and learning (Izumi-Taylor, Rogers, & Pramling Samuelsson, 2007).

## Multiple Contexts of Our Research

### Official Perspectives on Play in Japan, the United States, and Sweden

The importance of play in Japanese early childhood education can be seen in the National Curriculum Standards for Kindergarten (NCSK) set forth by the Japanese government (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology, 2000), which state the following goal:

To comprehensively achieve the aims outlined in Chapter 2, through the instruction centered around play, based on the consideration that play as voluntary activity of children is an important aspect of learning which cultivates foundation of a balanced mind and body development. (p. i)

The NCSK also describe how play provides children with the “foundation for a zest for living” (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology, 2000, p. ii), and through the use of play, the NCSK list the following developmental skills to be nurtured in children—physical, emotional, social, and language. Because the Japanese view consideration of others to be important in their lives (Markus & Kitayama, 1991), one focus of Japanese early childhood education programs is on providing group-oriented environments where children learn to play harmoniously with others (Izumi-Taylor, 2008; Izumi Taylor, 2004). Japanese early childhood education is based on the idea that children construct their own knowledge through play by interacting with their environments, and that these environments are part of group-oriented and caring communities (Izumi-Taylor, 2008; Muto, 2004; Izumi Taylor, 2004).

Although no federal guidelines that correspond to the NCSK exist for early childhood education programs in the United States, play is considered by many in the field to be the best mode for children’s learning and development (Kieff & Casbergue, 2000; Rogers & Izumi Taylor, 1999). The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), in its third revision of the book on developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009), notes that “Play is an important vehicle for developing self-regulation as well as for promoting language, cognition, and social competence” (p. 14). The main tenets of DAP describe how children learn best through play. However, in recent years, the pressure to meet standards of learning for knowledge and skills has led many teachers and administrators to strive to enhance children’s performance on tests that demonstrate accountability (Astuto, 2007; Nourot, 2005; Van Hoorn, Nourt, Scales, & Alward, 2007). To meet high standards for knowledge and skills, the curriculum may be focused only on content rather than on the developmental learning needs of children. One result is often the elimination of play, recess, field trips, or physical education in favor of more “academic” activities.

According to the Swedish National Curriculum for Preschool (Ministry of Education and Sciences, 2006), play is a central concept in the Swedish curriculum that aims to nurture children as persons and learners. The current national curriculum states:

Play is important for the child’s development and learning. Conscious use of play to promote the development and learning of each individual child should be an omnipresent activity in the preschool. Play and enjoyment in learning in all its various forms stimulates the imagination, insight, communication, and the ability to co-operate and solve problems. Through creative and imaginary games, the child will get opportunities to express and work through their experiences and feelings. (p. 6)

## **Early Childhood Credentials in Japan, Sweden, and the United States**

In order to teach in early childhood settings in Japan, teachers need to have 2-year associate degrees in early childhood education. Japanese early childhood education college programs offer two kinds of degrees: one for working in child care centers and the other for working in programs that are the equivalent of U.S. preschools (that is, with children ages 3-5) (Izumi Taylor, 2004).

In Sweden, preschool teachers need to have a 3½-year university degree.

In the United States, policies may vary from state to state and setting to setting, but in general, teachers need to have bachelor’s degrees to teach in kindergartens and in many state-funded prekindergarten programs but not in child care centers. Child care teachers ages 18 years and older who hold high school diplomas can obtain the Child Development Associate credential that indicates

competencies in caring for young children.

## **Our Previous Studies of Teacher Perspectives on Play**

In spite of the current emphasis on the importance of play in early childhood settings (Van Hoorn, Nourot, Scales, & Alward, 2007), few studies have shown how teachers in different cultures view play. We base our reflections in this paper on a comparative study that grew out of our earlier work in Japan, the United States, and Sweden. The purpose of the research discussed here was to examine similarities and differences in the perceptions of play among early childhood educators in Japan, the United States, and Sweden.

Izumi Taylor and colleagues (2004) examined American and Japanese teachers' perceptions of play and found that teachers in both countries "used the rhetoric that is congruent with the current zeitgeist of developmentally appropriate early education" (p. 311) and that their perceptions of play were clearly related to their cultures. Those findings suggested that Japanese teachers offered children play in classroom environments that reflected an orientation to the needs of the group, while their American counterparts did not. Japanese teachers perceived children's play as reflecting "the power of living" ("the basic foundation of their feelings, desires, and attitudes") (Izumi Taylor et al., 2004, p. 315), while the American teachers tended to think of play as related to learning and development. The same study found that Japanese children engaged in more unstructured play than did their American counterparts.

When American and Japanese teachers responded to the inquiry "Tell me about play in your classroom," the majority of Japanese teachers described what their children did in the classroom as related to unstructured play. Unstructured play included children initiating play and having many choices as well as a long play period. Both American and Japanese teachers believed that the effects of play on children included cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development. When asked to describe their notions of adult play, teachers in both nations wrote that adults play for enjoyment. Japanese teachers further elaborated by defining playfulness as the state of one's heart (spirit, mind, lightheartedness), whereas their American counterparts tended to describe playfulness in terms of "fun feelings."

In a related Swedish study, Johansson and Pramling Samuelsson (2006) examined integration of play and learning as a whole into preschool programs. Teachers received inservice training about integrating play with learning when working with children. During analysis of subsequent interactions between teachers and children, the following three categories of interaction were noted: exploratory interactions, narrative interactions, and formal interactions. In the first two categories, play and learning were closely related to each other, although some differences were noted between the two. For example, exploratory interactions appear to include challenges to innovation and creativity, and narrative interactions have the tendency to build a joint effort between children and teachers. In the third category of interaction (formalistic), the interactions were typically driven by teachers trying to guide children to "a correct answer," a category in which play and learning were strongly separated. The Swedish teachers involved in the study held the following concepts of play and learning: (1) children will always learn when playing; (2) through play, children work on what they already learned in preschools; and (3) children can define the play aspect in learning and the learning aspect in play.

## **Comparing Teachers' Perspectives on Play in Three Cultures**

### **Conducting the Research**

The American and Japanese data were collected by the first author in 2004, and the Swedish data were gathered by the second author in 2007.

The participants in the 2004 study consisted of 40 teachers (one male and 39 females) from the southeastern and northeastern United States and 40 teachers (one male and 39 females) from the midwestern and southeastern parts of Japan. Participants in the 2007 study were 40 Swedish

teachers (two males and 38 females) from the Göteborg area in Sweden. The Japanese and American teachers taught children between the ages of 1 and 5 years. The Swedish teachers worked with children between 1 and 6 years of age. The respondent pools in all three countries were selected for convenience of access. Information was collected on teachers' educational background and years in the field, but those data were not used to disaggregate our findings for the comparative study.

We mailed participants a questionnaire, asking them to respond anonymously to five inquiries (Izumi Taylor et al., 2004, p. 313):

1. Tell me, what is play?
2. Tell me about play in your classroom.
3. Tell me, how do you think play affects students?
4. Tell me of your concept of adult play.
5. Tell me what playfulness is to you.

## Emergent Themes

Our analysis of the teachers' responses revealed six themes related to play, which we identified as (1) *process of learning*, (2) *source of possibilities*, (3) *empowerment*, (4) *creativity*, (5) *children's work*, and (6) *fun activities*. The theme *play as a process of learning* was identified when a response referred to play as a means of obtaining knowledge or skills. *Play as a source of possibilities* was the theme applied when a teacher's responses had to do with children having possibilities to make choices and changes according to their own wishes and interactions with others. *Play as empowerment* was the theme when a response was related to giving children the fundamental power to deal with life (Izumi Taylor et al., 2004) and granting them their own volition. *Play as creativity* was characterized in comments referring to fostering originality or imagination through play. Responses reflected the theme of *children's work* if they were related to the notion that in their play worlds children construct meaning from their own experiences, feelings, and knowledge in order to understand their environments. *Play as fun activities* was considered to be the theme of responses relating to pleasure and feelings of joy during play. Finally, two themes regarding adults' play emerged, which we referred to as *state of heart (state of mind)* and *positive feelings*. State of heart is defined as "the heart unifying enjoyment, interest, fulfillment, and curiosity," or "lightheartedness, spirit, and mind" (Izumi Taylor et al., 2004, p. 316). A theme of *play associated with positive feelings* was assigned when a response included reference to feelings of happiness, satisfaction, joy, excitement, enjoyment, fun, or similar emotional states.

## Findings from the Surveys

### Play as a Process of Learning

Responses from 28 Swedish, 22 American, and 11 Japanese teachers indicated that they perceived play as a process of learning and developing. An American teacher noted, "Play is a means by which children explore and create an understanding about the world around them." A Swedish teacher wrote, "Through play, children create new experiences and learn from each other." A Japanese teacher commented, "Through play, children learn to interact with others, learn to make their play enjoyable, and learn to develop their power to make their lives easy to manage." However, none of the Japanese teachers related play to academic learning; their notions of play were focused on social and emotional development. One comment summed up this perspective: "Children play together and learn to be friends and to be a member of a group."

A number of respondents from all three contexts saw play as related to social development and learning. An American teacher referred to opportunities for developing social skills: "Play helps students feel good about themselves. I think it helps self-esteem because with play, they are always successful." Similarly, many Japanese teachers saw play as relating to social skills. One teacher wrote, "Play gives children the opportunity to learn to interact with others and to develop physical

skills so they know how to interact with others in a group. It also develops children's emotions and nurtures their curiosity, and, in turn, it leads to their knowledge." Swedish teachers tended to comment in terms of children's emotional development, referring to the fact that during play children can adapt their play to a level where they feel successful, or to cases when "(play) separates reality from fantasy."

The notion of play as a process of learning, expressed by a large number of the teachers in our study, corresponds to the widely held view that play is the best mode for children to learn (Elkind, 1986; Izumi-Taylor, 2006; Morrison, 2009; Izumi Taylor et al., 2004). In Sweden, play is considered to be an important process that relates to children's learning and education (Pramling Samuelsson, 2007). In the United States, according to Copple and Bredekamp (2009), play is a vital part of teaching. Kieff and Casbergue (2000) state that "play is certainly not the only way children learn, but it has been demonstrated repeatedly that it is an effective way of learning" (p. 18). From a Japanese perspective, Muto (2004) notes that "within the child's play, there is learning" (p. 17), and when children engage in meaningful and authentic play, their intellectual growth can be nurtured. However, in Japan "learning through play" means that children learn their social and emotional skills and that play does not have academic purposes (Izumi-Taylor, 2008; Izumi Taylor, 2004).

### **Play as a Source of Possibilities**

We found that many Swedish and Japanese respondents related play to what we called *sources of possibilities*, though the Americans did not. A number of Swedish responses reflected the notion that in play nothing is impossible. For example, one Swedish teacher remarked, "In play everything is possible. A chair can be changed into a boat on the open sea." A Japanese teacher commented, "Play provides children with possibilities to expand their will and opens up everything that play has to offer." Another Japanese educator extended this concept: "Play has a ripple effect of possibility since, through play, children can exchange their information, listen to different ideas, experience something new, understand themselves better, and find new hobbies and enjoy them."

Such a notion of play is congruent with that expressed in some professional literature. For example, Perlmutter and Burrell (1995) claim that play is "about possibilities" (p. 21). The Japanese educator Teshi (1999) also observes that play offers children many options to stimulate their inner willingness and energy to engage in activities. Though some Swedish studies have suggested negative potential of some forms of play (Johansson, 1999), there is at the same time a strong belief that play provides children with positive possibilities.

### **Play as Empowerment**

*Play as empowerment* was mentioned by many of the Japanese participants but not by those from Sweden or the United States. "Empowering children for living" is a priority in Japanese early childhood education (Izumi-Taylor, 2006; Muto, 2004), and play is seen as one mode of developing the power to live (Izumi-Taylor, 2006; Izumi-Taylor, Rogers, & Pramling Samuelsson, 2007). At the governmental level, play is seen as empowering children to be competent citizens. The Japanese government's early childhood education guidelines (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, and Technology, 2000; Muto, 2004) state that early childhood educational settings must provide children with the opportunity to develop their "power to live through play."

Responses from the Japanese teachers echoed this idea. "The child's life itself is play, and children find out how to live through the process of playing," said one teacher. Another commented, "Play is a must and provides us with the power to live through optimism and initiative." This notion of empowerment was further expressed by a third teacher: "Empowering children can be accomplished through play, and thus children use such powers to cope with everyday life, such as sharing toys with others, conducting themselves as members of the group, and being away from their parents."

### **Play as Creativity**

Responses of teachers from all three nations referred to the relationship of play to children's

*creativity*. One American teacher's comment was straightforward: "Play promotes children's creativity." Swedish teachers' responses referred to both creativity and fantasy, which they valued as being of great importance for children's well-being and learning. One Swedish teacher said, "An allowing environment which challenges children's fantasy—the play becomes important." A Japanese teacher also alluded to creativity: "Play is the process in which children can think for themselves, can create their own ideas, and can fully use their imaginations." Another response from Japan related playfulness to creativity: "Playfulness provides a way of looking at things from different perspectives rather than thinking of a problem as being something very hard to work out, or it is a way of coming up with different solutions." Another Japanese teacher's comment connected creativity to empowerment: "Through play, children learn to interact with others, to develop their independence, to work with others harmoniously, and to use imagination. For these reasons, play empowers children how to live."

Some literature on play has also linked it to creativity (Barnes, 1998; Lieberman, 1977; Kogan, 1983; Pepler & Ross, 1981; Nakagawa, 1991; Izumi Taylor & Rogers, 2001; Izumi Taylor, Rogers, & Kaiser, 1999; Teshi, 1999). According to Vygotsky (1930/1990), children's play is an early form of creativity; play is creative when it remakes or reinvents past experiences into new realities rather than simply reproducing reality. Similarly, Perlmutter and Burrell (1995) note that "Playful people are risk takers whose thinking is open ended and whose minds are creative" (p. 21). The Japanese educators Nakagawa (1991) and Tatsumi (1990) have found that when children have freedom to play with their peers, they tend to be creative. These observations support Vygotsky's perspective that imagination is the internalization of children's play, that creativity exists when one's imagination combines, changes, and creates something new, and that imagination is the basis for any creative activity (Vygotsky, 1930/1990). According to Iverson (1982), the link between play and creativity is based on the ability to view things playfully. In the Swedish study by Johansson and Pramling Samuelsson (2006, 2007), it has been shown that some teachers became preoccupied with getting children to arrive at correct answers and that this preoccupation excluded all kinds of playfulness. By focusing on only correct answers, teachers may discourage playfulness in the classroom and often diminish creativity.

### **Play as Children's Work**

Significant numbers of American and Swedish teachers perceived *play as children's work*, but none of the Japanese teachers considered it in this way. Izumi Taylor et al. (2004) found that American teachers considered play to be children's work, whereas none of their Japanese counterparts described it in such a manner. Play as children's work was the most common view of Swedish teachers. Their comments included: "Children's play is like work for adults," and "When children play, they work hard." An American teacher noted, "Their work is their play. Play includes social interactions as well as completing center work."

The notion that play is children's work has been discussed in the professional literature; however, some researchers and advocates disagree with this idea (Anderson, 1998; Elkind, 1993, 2003; King, 1982; Holmes, 1999). For example, Elkind (1993) comments, "Play is not the child's work, and work is hardly child's play" (p. 29), adding that early childhood teachers should "resist the pressures to transform play into work—into academic instruction" (Elkind, 2003, p. 50). Moreover, kindergartners tend to see their work differently from their play. When children voluntarily select their activities for themselves, they consider it to be play, but when engaging in activities with teachers' instructions, they consider it as work (King, 1982; Holmes, 1999). Kieff and Casbergue (2000) caution that "play is different for different children" (p. 8), and early childhood classrooms need to balance play and work. Also, Frost, Wortham, and Reifel (2005) note that "children know the difference between play and work" (p. 73).

### **Play as Fun Activities**

Significant numbers of teachers in all three countries agreed that play is related to *fun activities*; that is, play is a source of enjoyment, joyfulness, happiness, or amusement. One American teacher noted, "Play is participating in activities you find enjoyable and fun." A Japanese teacher commented, "To play means that we pursue the joy and enjoyment we feel in our hearts." A Swedish teacher said, "Play is joyful to children since children are free to choose."

Other research also suggests that play is generally perceived to involve “fun activities”; from children’s perspectives, too, research suggests that play is fun when it is not planned, when it offers a choice, and when it affords the freedom to create, imagine, or construct something (Frost et al., 2005; Garza, Briley, & Reifel, 1985; Teshi, 1999). Likewise, Teshi (1999) observes that Japanese children should enjoy self-initiated play during early childhood years, and the NCSK clearly state that children need to enjoy their kindergarten lives, spending time together with teachers and peers engaged in fun play activities (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology, 2000).

## Responses Regarding Play in Classrooms

In response to the question “Tell me about play in your classroom,” 38 Japanese and 30 Swedish teachers indicated that they provided their charges with unstructured play, while American teachers did not report that they offer such play.

Swedish teachers appeared to focus on how they provide children with choices in their play. For example, one teacher in Sweden commented about unstructured play: “It is important for children to make their own choices and decide for themselves with whom they want to play and what they want to play, without any involvement by the teachers.”

When describing play in their classrooms, Japanese teachers mentioned children’s specific play activities. For example, one Japanese teacher commented:

The children in my classroom initiate play. They move around and find what they would like to play. I don’t tell them to play with this or that. Right now, they are interested in hunting bugs, collecting leaves and flowers, gathering nuts, and play with water outside.

All of the Japanese teachers explained what children did while at play in the classroom, while a majority of the American teachers mentioned their classroom play schedules rather than what children did. For example, an American teacher responded, “We have one full hour of play time at the beginning of the day.”

Only American teachers (13) reported that they used centers to offer play activities to children. None of their Japanese and Swedish counterparts mentioned centers.

The responses from Japanese teachers appear to confirm observations of Lee and Zusho (2002) who found that Japanese teachers are familiar with the NCSK set forth by the government and are provided with ample teaching manuals focusing on appropriate play activities. American teachers’ responses on this issue may be related to the fact that in their classrooms, play might be “set aside from work by providing a separate time” (Izumi Taylor et al., 2004, p. 317). In Sweden, children’s play activities in classrooms may have two purposes. One is children’s free play during which they make their own choices and engage their imaginations in role-play; teachers seldom become involved. In the curriculum (Ministry of Education and Sciences, 2006) and in practice, there also is a purposeful tendency toward integrating play and learning as a whole into the pedagogy (Pramling Samuelsson, 2006).

## Participants’ Comments on Adult Play

*Playfulness as a State of the Heart (State of Mind).* The relationship between play and one’s “state of mind” or “of heart” has been noted in Japan and the United States (Rogers & Izumi Taylor, 1999; Izumi Taylor et al., 2004). When describing playfulness in our study, 23 Japanese and 3 American teachers related it to “their hearts.” None of their Swedish counterparts did so. These Japanese and American teachers used such words as “lighthearted,” “mind,” and “spirit” to explain their concepts of playfulness. One Japanese teacher wrote, “Playfulness means that I find fun in doing something, and my heart finds everything I do to be enjoyable.” Another Japanese teacher said, “Playfulness means that my heart enjoys what life offers, and while playing, it is okay to be mischievous.” One of the American teachers commented, “Playfulness is pleasurable, refreshes, and renews the human spirit.”

*Playfulness as Positive Feelings.* More American (21) and Swedish (21) teachers described playfulness as being associated with one's positive feelings than did their Japanese counterparts (3). One Swedish teacher said, "To give one's best," in providing an example of positive feelings. Another said, "Humans need to play to feel good." An American teacher also related positive feelings to "laughing, having fun, and living carefree for the moment." Likewise, a Japanese teacher observed, "Playfulness means that you have the heart or the attitude to enjoy and be positive about your surroundings."

## Reflections on Findings from Japan, Sweden, and the United States

The notion of play as children's work was mentioned by both American and Swedish teachers in this study but not by their Japanese counterparts. Both American and Japanese teachers described how playfulness promotes one's state of heart or one's state of mind, but none of their Swedish counterparts mentioned this aspect of either adult or childhood playfulness. In general, the Japanese tend to relate the enrichment of hearts to their happy lives (Hoshino, 2002; Itoh, 2002), and it is not surprising to find that they perceive playfulness to be a state of the heart (state of mind) (Izumi Taylor et al., 2004). In a similar view, in the United States, this domain of the heart/mind is described by Levy (1977) who considers playfulness as contributing to the unification of body, mind, and spirit. Relating playfulness to one's heart/mind is not new; Froebel viewed play as important to children's development of spirituality (Brosterman, 1997). To carry this notion of playfulness further, Elkind (1987) remarks that playful attitudes unify the child's mental, physical, and socioemotional development.

Although teachers in all three nations noted that playfulness involves positive feelings, more American and Swedish teachers mentioned this than did their Japanese counterparts. Playfulness as positive feelings is further supported by Rogers and Izumi Taylor (1999) who articulate that playful people can turn difficult tasks into enjoyment with positive feelings. To promote playful contexts for children, Rogers and Izumi Taylor (1999) recommend that teachers model positive feelings through their playful attitudes; through varying degrees of playfulness, teachers can offer a variety of playful activities that nurture children's positive feelings. It seems likely that, to understand the importance of playfulness in education, adults also need to play in playful environments in which there exists freedom from external rules (Rogers, 2007).

In a global community, interpreting early childhood education in different countries can be accomplished by sharing educators' knowledge of children's play and their perspectives of how to educate children through the use of play (Roopnarine & Metindogan, 2006). Because of differences in contexts for play as well as in the composition of the players, it is helpful for educators to view play from different perspectives in order to "make sound decisions about classroom play" (Frost et al., 2005, p. 58). As global notions of play tend to include "vague general statements to justify the play-oriented curriculum and vague characterizations to describe play in early education" (DeVries, Zan, Hildebrandt, Edmiaston, & Sales, 2002, p. 6), an examination of American, Japanese, and Swedish teachers' perspectives on play can shed light on how the nature of play activities can be mediated by their own cultural influences on their understandings of play.

We believe that our comparison of teacher perspectives in three nations suggests some possible courses of action. First, because Japanese teachers' perceptions of play are very closely related to the NCSK set forth by the Japanese government (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology, 2000), teachers in the United States and Sweden might benefit from working with Japanese teachers to expand their knowledge of ways to implement play-related activities and promote a group orientation in classrooms.

Second, researchers and teachers not only need to understand play and its relation to children's learning but also to scrutinize play as a cultural phenomenon and try to create more knowledge about the general and cultural aspects of play. Our research can also inform teachers of the notion of "the playing learning child" (Pramling-Samuelsson & Asplund-Carlsson, 2008) and challenge them to understand that children cannot separate play and learning in the early years.

Scholars and practitioners in early childhood education have much to learn about play from colleagues

in different cultures; such knowledge could be valuable for multicultural communities (Pramling Samuelsson & Fleer, 2008). Comparing one's own with other perspectives on play, as we have attempted to do here, can be helpful in understanding ways to approach play in one's own setting, as well as in communities with diverse populations.

## References

Anderson, Myrdene. (1998). The meaning of play as a human experience. In Doris Pronin Fromberg & Doris Bergen (Eds.), *Play from birth to twelve and beyond: Contexts, perspectives, and meanings* (pp. 103-108). New York: Garland.

Astuto, Jennifer. (2007). Removing play in early childhood: Are we breaking the foundation for future civic engagement? *Play, Policy, and Practice Connections*, 10(2), 6.

Azuma, Hiroshi. (1986). Why study child development in Japan? In Harold Stevenson, Hiroshi Azuma, & Kenji Hakuta (Eds.), *Child development and education in Japan* (pp. 3-12). New York: W.H. Freeman.

Barnes, Donna. (1998). Play in historical contexts. In Doris Pronin Fromberg & Doris Bergen (Eds.), *Play from birth to twelve and beyond: Contexts, perspectives, and meanings* (pp. 5-13). New York: Garland.

Brosterman, Norman. (1997). *Inventing kindergarten*. New York: Abrams.

Copple, Carol, & Bredekamp, Sue (Eds.). (2009). *Developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood programs serving children from birth through age 8* (3rd ed.). Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children.

DeVries, Rheta; Zan, Betty; Hildebrandt, Carolyn; Edmiaston, Rebecca; & Sales, Christina. (2002). *Developing constructivist early childhood curriculum: Practical principles and activities*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Elkind, David. (1986). Formal education and early childhood education: An essential difference. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 67(9), 631-636.

Elkind, David. (1987). *Miseducation: Preschoolers at risk*. New York: Knopf.

Elkind, David. (1993). *Images of the young child: Collected essays on childhood and education*. Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Elkind, David. (2003). Thanks for the memory: The lasting values of true play. *Young Children*, 58(3), 46-50.

Frost, Joe L.; Wortham, Sue C.; & Reifel, Stuart. (2005). *Play and child development* (2nd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Garza, Margaret; Briely, Sandy; & Reifel, Stuart. (1985). Children's views of play. In Joe L. Frost, & Sylvia Sunderlin (Eds.), *When children play* (pp. 31-37). Wheaton, MD: Association for Childhood Education International.

Holmes, Robyn M. (1999). Kindergarten and college students' views of play and work at home and at school. In Stuart Reifel (Ed.), *Play and culture studies: Vol. 2. Play contexts revisited* (pp. 59-72). Stamford, CT: Ablex.

Hoshino, Toshiro. (2002, March 6). Shudan no kokoro to kojiri no kokoro [Hearts of groups and

hearts of individuals]. *Tokyo Shinbun*, p. 23.

Itoh, Hisako. (2002, March 10). Kagayaite ikiiki [Living fully]. *Tokyo Shinbun*, p. 23.

Iverson, Barbara K. (1982). Play, creativity, and schools today. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 63(10), 693-694.

Izumi Taylor, Satomi. (2004). Let it be: Japanese preschools rule the classroom. *Young Children*, 59(5), 20-25.

Izumi-Taylor, Satomi. (2006). Play of Japanese preschoolers in constructivist environments. *PlayRights*, 27(1), 24-29.

Izumi-Taylor, Satomi. (2008). Sunao (cooperative) children: How Japanese teachers nurture autonomy. *Young Children*, 63(3), 76-79.

Izumi Taylor, Satomi; Rogers, Cosby Steele; & Kaiser, Javid. (1999). A comparison of playfulness among American and Japanese preschoolers. In Stuart Reifel (Ed.), *Play and culture studies: Vol. 2. Play contexts revisited* (pp. 143-150). Stamford, CT: Ablex.

Izumi Taylor, Satomi, & Rogers, Cosby Steele. (2001). The relationship between playfulness and creativity of Japanese preschool children. *International Journal of Early Childhood*, 33(1), 43-49.

Izumi Taylor, Satomi; Rogers, Cosby Steele; Dodd, Arlene Theresa; Kandeda, Toshiko; Nagasaki, Iku; Watanabe, Yasuhiro; & Goshiki, Toru. (2004). The meaning of play: A cross-cultural study of American and Japanese teachers' perspectives on play. *Journal of Early Childhood Education*, 24(4), 311-321.

Izumi-Taylor, Satomi; Rogers, Cosby Steele; & Samulesson, Ingrid. (2007, April). *Teachers' perspectives on play in Japan, the U.S., and Sweden*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association for the Study of Play. Rochester, NY.

Johansson, Eva. (1999). Etik i små barns värld. [Ethics in young children's world]. Göteborg: Acta Universitatis Gothenburgensis.

Johansson, Eva, & Pramling Samuelsson, Ingrid. (2006). Lek och läroplan: Möten mellan barn och lärare i förskola och skola [Play and curriculum: Encounters between children and teachers in preschool and school]. Göteborg: Acta Unviersitatis Gothoburgensis.

Johansson, Eva, & Pramling Samuelsson, Ingrid. (2007). Play and learning—an integrated wholeness. In Rebecca New & Moncrieff Cochran (Eds.), *Early childhood education—An international encyclopedia* (Vol. 4, pp. 1270-1273). Westport, CT: Praeger.

Kieff, Judith E., & Casbergue, Renée M. (2000). *Playful learning and teaching: Integrating play into preschool and primary programs*. Needlham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

King, Nancy R. (1982). Work and play in the classroom. *Social Education*, 46(2), 110-113.

Kogan, Nathan. (1983). Stylistic variation in childhood and adolescence: Creativity, metaphor and cognitive styles. In John H. Flavell & Ellen M. Markman (Eds.), Paul H. Mussen (Series Ed.). *Handbook of child psychology: Vol. 3. Cognitive development* (pp. 630-706). New York: Wiley.

Lee, Shin-ying, & Zusho, Akane. (2002). Comparing Japanese and U.S. teachers' manuals: Implications for mathematics teaching and learning. In Gary DeCoker (Ed.), *National standards and school reform in Japan and the United States* (pp. 67-91). New York: Teachers College Press.

Levy, Joseph. (1977). *Play behavior*. New York: Wiley.

Lieberman, J. Nina. (1977). *Playfulness: Its relationship to imagination and creativity*. New York: Academic Press.

Markus, Hazel Rose, & Kitayama, Shibobu. (1991). Culture and the self: Implications for cognition, emotions, and motivation. *Psychological Review*, 98(2), 224-253.

Ministry of Education and Sciences. (2006). *Curriculum for preschool*. Retrieved March 8, 2010, from <http://www.skolverket.se>

Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology. (2000). *The national curriculum standards for kindergarten*. Retrieved March 8, 2010, from <http://www.mext.go.jp>

Morrison, George S. (2009). *Early childhood education today* (11th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill.

Muto, Takashi. (Ed.). (2004). *Early childhood education handbook*. Tokyo, Japan: Yoshimi Kohsan.

Nakagawa, Kyoko. (1991). The Japanese and creativity. *Illinois Council for the Gifted Journal*, 10, 11-13.

Nourt, Patricia Monighan. (2005). Historical perspectives on early childhood education. In Jaipul P. Roopnarine, & James E. Johnson (Eds.), *Approaches to early childhood education* (4th ed., pp. 3-43). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill/Prentice Hall.

Pepler, Debra J, & Ross, Hildy S. (1981). The effect of play on convergent and divergent problem-solving. *Child Development*, 52(4), 1202-1210.

Perlmutter, Jane C., & Burrell, Louise. (1995). Learning through "play" as well as "work" in the primary grades. *Young Children*, 50(5), 14-21.

Pramling Samuelsson, Ingrid. (2007). A research-based approach to preschool pedagogy. *Play, Policy, and Practice Connections*, 5(2), 7-9.

Pramling Samuelsson, Ingrid. (2006). Teaching and learning in preschool and the first years of elementary school in Sweden. In Johanna Einarsdóttir & Judith T. Wagner (Eds.), *Nordic childhoods and early education: Philosophy, research, policy and practice in Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden*. Greenwich, CT: Information Age Publishing.

Pramling Samuelsson, Ingrid, & Asplund Carlsson, Maj. (2008). The playing learning child: Towards a pedagogy of early childhood. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 52(6), 623-641.

Pramling Samuelsson, Ingrid, & Fleer, Marilyn (Eds.). (2008). *Play and learning in early childhood settings: International perspectives*. New York: Springer Verlag.

Rogers, Cosby Steele. (2007). Playful andragogy. *Play, Policy, and Practice Connections*, 10(2), 1-2.

Rogers, Cosby Steele, & Izumi Taylor, Satomi. (1999). School play: Education for life. *Kindergarten Education: Theory, Research, and Practice*, 4(1), 1-19.

Roopnarine, Jaipul L., & Metindogan, Aysegul. (2006). Early childhood education research in cross-national perspective. In Bernard Spodek, & Olivia Saracho (Eds.), *Handbook of research on the education of young children* (2nd ed., pp. 555-571). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Tatsumi, Toshio. (1990). Sozoseini michita geijutsuo umidasu youji [Children who produce creative arts]. *Doyo*, 22, 6-8.

Teshi, Chizu. (1999). *Kodomo no tastutatsuto asobino himitsu* [Children's development and secrets of play]. Tokyo: Narutoshibou.

Van Hoorn, Judith; Nourot, Patricia Monighan; Scales, Barbara; & Alward, Keith Rodriguez. (2007). *Play at the center of the curriculum* (4th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Merrill/Prentice Hall.

Vygotsky, L. S. ([1930] 1990). Imagination and creativity in childhood. *Soviet Psychology*, 28(1), 84-96.

---

## Author Information

Satomi Izumi-Taylor is professor of early childhood education with the Department of Instruction and Curriculum Leadership at the University of Memphis.

Satomi Izumi-Taylor  
Professor of Early Childhood Education  
Dept. of Instruction and Curriculum Leadership  
University of Memphis  
Memphis, TN 38152  
Telephone: 901-678-5363  
Email: [sitaylor@memphis.edu](mailto:sitaylor@memphis.edu)

Ingrid Pramling Samuelsson is professor of early childhood education with the Department of Teacher Education with Göteborg University, Sweden.

Ingrid Pramling Samuelsson  
Professor  
Göteborg University  
Department of Education  
Child Studies  
Box 300 SE-405 30 Göteborg  
Sweden  
Email: [ingrid.pramling@ped.gu.se](mailto:ingrid.pramling@ped.gu.se)

Cosby Steele Rogers is professor emeritus with the Department of Human Development at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University.

Cosby Steele Rogers  
Email: [rogersco@vt.edu](mailto:rogersco@vt.edu)

---

**Early Childhood Research & Practice (ECRP) is a peer-reviewed electronic journal.**

ECRP Web Address: <http://ecrp.uiuc.edu>

ISSN 1524-5039

ECRP was established February 27, 1999.