



**Book Review**

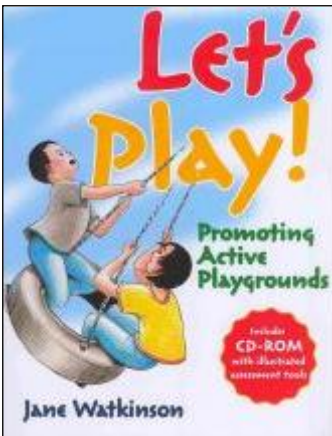
*Let's Play! Promoting Active Playgrounds, (2009)*

**By Jane Watkinson**

[Human Kinetics](#)

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Play matters! Playground play is very popular with children during and after school. However, for some reason, not all children have the opportunity to play on a playground or do not participate in playground play. In “*Let’s Play! Promoting Active Playgrounds*”, Jane Watkinson writes about the importance of providing children with a quality opportunity to play on playgrounds. A key feature of this book is that it is grounded in Watkinson’s nationally funded research in cooperation with the Let’s Play Program based at the University of Alberta. Together, she and her graduate students translate theoretical concepts into accessible strategies for parents and generalist teachers who may be less familiar

with how children develop their movement skills. Using the evaluation and analysis of the play of children ages 3 to 8 as well as their perceptions and understandings of playground play, a practical guide on assessing children’s movement skills on the playground was created, a first of its kind.

Chapter 1 shares with the reader an understanding of the physical and social value of play. While we often believe any child can just go to a playground and play, Watkinson explains how many children do not become involved with playground play. Through the research Watkinson conducted, the uniqueness of each child and his/her movement on the playground was observed. Reading this chapter will help one to understand the vitality of why children need to develop playground skills and she calls upon adults to become greater advocates in the development of playground play. Chapter 2 helps us understand the reasoning behind why children choose to either participate in playground play or disengage from it. Before children begin their play, they ask themselves whether they want to participate and whether they physically can. They look at what their peers do

on the playground before deciding to partake and they may shy away from activity if they do not feel skilled enough. Explaining this, Watkinson offers several suggestions to encourage children's participation in playground play. Chapter 3 discusses the importance of assessment and how motor skills can be assessed during play on the playground using illustrated maps of playground skills. In Chapter 4, Watkinson and Nancy Cavaliere discuss a variety of ways to use and interpret both preschool and school aged maps of children of diverse backgrounds and abilities. These maps can be modified and printed from the accompanying CD-ROM, and if desired, a report card can be created easily following the assessment of playground play. A unique feature of the maps: if you would like to assess a specific child on his or her use of a specific piece of playground equipment, individualized playlists are included on the CD-ROM. The process on how to assess specific playground skills is explained in Chapter 5. After an assessment one may wonder what comes next. Just as with math skills, playground skills should be taught. Chapter 6 outlines the direct instruction model and explains how different levels of prompts can allow for quality playground instruction. Chapter 7 addresses effective teaching skills by providing several suggestions that allows practice opportunities for children, so that they can move up and around a playground proficiently and independently. However, proficiency in learning a skill is not enough for a child to feel comfortable to move around the playground. Chapter 8 addresses the learning environment and explains the difference between a performance climate and a mastery climate and encourages a positive learning environment. In the final chapter of the book, Watkinson and Sharon Baker explain the difference between play and games and provide details on how games such as tag can be modified and used to serve as a stepping stone between isolated playground play and organized games.

*"Let's Play"* is the first guide of its kind to help children become proficient and happy playground movers. Importantly, the voices of the children gathered through qualitative interviews are sprinkled throughout the text, adding to its authenticity. The addition of the CD-ROM provides an invaluable tool that can be used to enhance the overall well-being of young children. Watkinson's commitment to the improvement of children's basic movement skills is obvious; as a professional with a similar interest, I find this book to be an amazing tool. It is an outstanding resource that should be widely available to parents and educators alike, so that all children can benefit!