

Inspirationally Playful: People, Papers and Practices That Have Inspired Play Practitioners and Researchers

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Biographical note	Rosamund Portus is a research fellow at UWE Bristol, working in the field of the environmental humanities. Rosamund’s current research focuses on young people’s experiences of climate emergency, climate literature, and children’s nature connections. Rosamund also works as an artist and illustrator.
Word count (bio note)	42
Title of your contribution	Searching for Wonder: Discovering the Natural World through Play
Your contribution	<p>Perhaps one of the most famed environmentalists of the twentieth century is Rachel Carson who, in 1962, published her seminal book Silent Spring. Exposing the damaging effects of insecticides, Carson’s writing sparked an environmental movement which continues to this day (Murphy, 2005; Griswold, 2012). Yet, Carson’s interests were not confined to exposing environmental harm. Some years prior to the publication of <i>Silent Spring</i>, in 1956, Carson penned an article exploring how children relate to the natural world, later published as the book The Sense of Wonder: A Celebration of Nature for Parents and Children. This work considered the need for children to connect with the natural world through fun and adventure. In Carson’s world of play and imagination lichens become fairylands, rocks become diamonds, and the wind becomes a ‘many-chorused voice’.</p> <p>Carson’s work was inspired by a visit from her grandnephew, Roger. One summer, Carson and Roger roamed the woods and beaches which surrounded her house, discovering the magic and excitement of the natural world. Her book details these adventures, describing, for example, a game they played upon encountering a crop of young spruces: Carson and Roger imagined which creatures might use the different sizes of spruce for their Christmas trees, from squirrels, to woodchucks, to tiny bugs.</p> <p>The experiences shared by Carson have remained with me and, as a researcher of child-nature connections, influenced my work. Her writing is a powerful advocate for the role of play in developing children’s connection to the natural world: she calls for a world in which children exercise their imagination and cultivate their sense of wonder. This value of nature-based play as a conduit for children connecting with the natural world has been echoed by other writers since (see: White, 2004; Candiracci et al., 2022). Indeed, my own work to co-develop a nature toolkit for children is rooted in these principles of play and wonder, with a focus on imaginative discovery (Portus, Barnes, and Williams, 2023). In this time of environmental</p>

	crisis, the legacy of Carson is as important as ever. Children discovering the natural world through play and imagination will give them the tools and experiences to care for it as they grow older. As Carson writes, 'if facts are the seeds that later produce knowledge and wisdom, then the emotions and the impressions of the senses are the fertile soil in which the seeds must grow'.
Word count (contribution)	395
Reference/s (if any)	All references are embedded as hyperlinks.