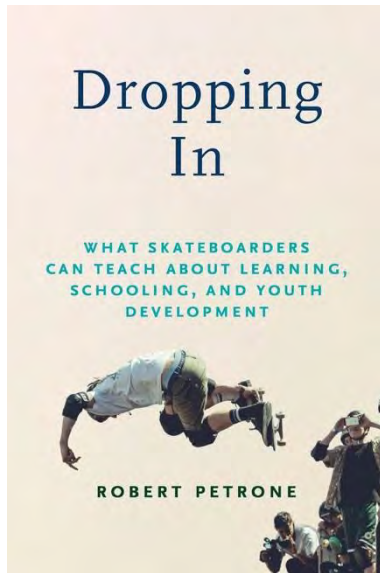


## Journal of Folklore and Education Reviews

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*Dropping In: What Skateboarders Can Teach Us About Learning, Schooling, and Youth Development*, by Robert Petrone (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2023, 272 pp.)

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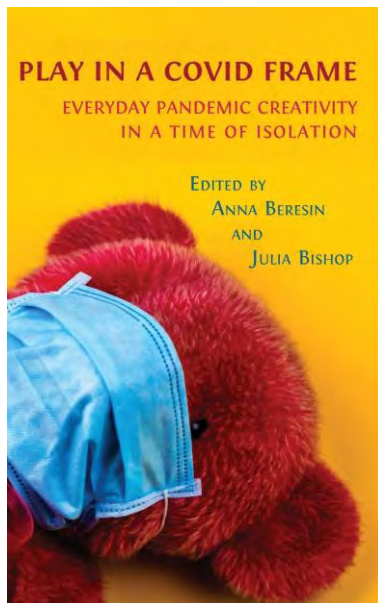
*Dropping In* is a comprehensive academic exploration of the life and learning processes of skateboarders. Robert Petrone, a former English teacher with admittedly little interest in skateboarding at the start of the book, dedicated three years to researching, observing, and analyzing a group of five skateboarders at a local skatepark. His aim was to examine how individuals labeled as "poor students" or "at risk" engage in learning outside the traditional academic environments.

Petrone begins the book by outlining the framework of his research, including the methodologies and ideas he plans to explore in subsequent chapters. He focuses on observing individuals in the skatepark who fit traditional at-risk criteria and looks for academic learning patterns within this unconventional setting. Central to his analysis is the concept of Learning by Observing and Pitching In (LOPI), which he demonstrates can be seen in the behaviors and interactions within the skatepark. Petrone meticulously details his observational methods, including his attire, participant selection, and the location of the study, ensuring clarity and transparency in his research process.

The narrative expands in Chapter Four, leading into Part Two, where Petrone shifts his writing style to include more dialogue and interviews, subtly moving away from a more academic tone established earlier. This change enriches the readers' engagement as they are introduced to the five participants. The detailed examination of these individuals includes how they skateboard, learn, teach, dress, speak, and interact socially within the skatepark.

While Petrone's academic writing style can be challenging to navigate at times, the book's core message is compelling, particularly for educators working with students who have a passion for skateboarding. He effectively presents the lifestyle and characteristics of skateboarders from an outsider's perspective, offering an analytical view that highlights the educational potential within this subculture. The research participants, who struggled in traditional school settings, exemplify how understanding an individual's learning style, passions, and personal context can lead to more effective differentiation in the classroom.

As someone who grew up skateboarding, I appreciate how Petrone captures the essence of this world and systematically presents it to foster understanding. Petrone also draws interesting conclusions and suggestions for a reframing of the pedagogy based on observations from the skatepark. *Dropping In* is a valuable contribution to educational literature, demonstrating that meaningful learning can occur in diverse and unexpected environments, while also drawing inspiration into the overall repositioning of the framework of pedagogy.



*Play in a Covid Frame: Everyday Pandemic Creativity in a Time of Isolation*, by Anna Beresin and Julia Bishop, eds

(Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2023, x + 486 pp. List of Illustrations and Recordings, Introduction, Conclusion, Author Biographies, Postscript, Acknowledgements, Index)

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Anna Beresin and Julia Bishop's collected work *Play in a Covid Frame: Everyday Pandemic Creativity in a Time of Isolation* exemplifies what makes folklore and cultural ethnography so powerful: the beautiful hardships of the human condition. This amalgamation of essays explores the concept of "play" during the worldwide Covid-19 pandemic. Every human being experienced loss in some form during this complex time—the loss of a loved one, the loss of time, the loss of connectivity, or possibly the loss of control. *Play in a Covid Frame* explores how participation in play helps both children and adults cope with a world that feels truly out of reach by grounding them in a space of comfort, regained autonomy, and the brilliance that is to be silly. Composed by 38 folklorists, ethnographers, and researchers, the essays are organized into three separate segments: Landscapes, Portraits, and Shifting Frames, with the common anatomical thread of ethnographic research. One of my favorite aspects of the composition was the plethora of diverse cultures, economic backgrounds, and social standings represented, including researchers, families, and communities from 12 countries. While the incorporation of non-English-speaking and underrepresented communities would have given us a more honest scope of the world at large, I appreciated the awareness of the work's shortcomings that Beresin and Bishop acknowledge.

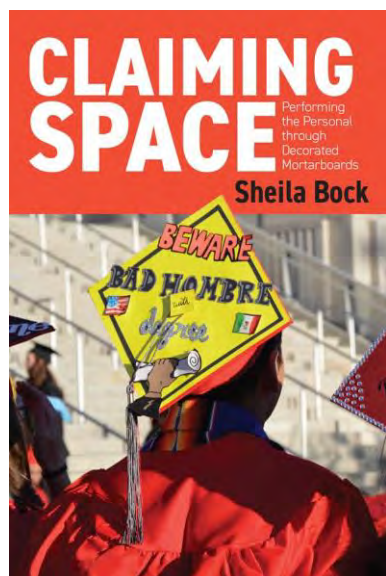
The first section unravels the changing landscapes that individuals both experienced and created through playing during the pandemic. From coronavirus chase games to poor mental states, the spaces affected by Covid-19 were reflected in the games we played. "Up, Down, Stop, Go, and Everything in Between: Promoting a Resident-Driven Play-Based Agenda during a Global Pandemic in Rochester, New York" illuminated the increased shutdowns in Rochester, paired with a lack of resources and an abundance of race-based violence that made play virtually impossible. This chapter illustrated how local organizations made playtime achievable by "distribut[ing] play kits, partn[ering] with the city to support Covid-friendly programming and infrastructure that prioritizes unstructured, resident driven play..." (62). To see individuals move mountains for

BIPOC families to seek solace through play reminds you that play is not just for children—it's for individuals seeking a sense of normalcy in a place of constant devaluing.

The Portraits section takes a snapshot of the physical forms of nuanced play that took place during the worldwide shutdown. There were multiple inclusions of fieldwork interviews with parents and guardians within this section that brought the humanity of the situation to life. Weaving together research in teddy bear challenges, the elevation of friendships, and images of the unique ways familial play was carried out illuminated the time capsule that this book truly is. “Digital Heroes of the Imagination: An Exploration of Disabled-Led Play in England during the Covid-19 Pandemic” spoke of the othering often apparent with disabled communities and the right to play. This piece of research highlighted the ableist system that play often falls into, and the “Digital Heroes of the Imagination” that shine a light on a brighter, more inclusive world. Upon reading *Landscapes* I hope to see more incorporation of the disabled communities’ experiences in play-based research, because it is long overdue.

Lastly, *Shifting Frames* displayed a cultural shift in both the way we play and the ways we think about play. The house float creations during “Yardi Gras” or the online forms that play evolved into were fascinating reads that pushed the boundaries of our definition of play, both in meaning and in participants. However, the emphasis on the seriousness of play as an activity that aids in community survival was what moved me most. Using the creativity and connectedness that play ultimately produces as a medium to get through difficult times is a revolutionary concept, whether you are 10 or 76.

“Brian Sutton-Smith called play ‘dialudic’...‘ludic’ (Latin for ‘play’) and ‘dialectic’, a process of attempting to find truth through conflict and disagreement” (441). This compilation of research-based essays, emotional explorations, and frozen moments in time further emphasized how play not only teaches you how to smile but also reminds you what’s worth smiling for. *Play in a Covid Frame* is an excellent representation of the future of play-based research, and I am excited to see its impact on works to come. All in all, whether a folklorist, cultural organizer, teacher, or parent, this book will speak to you, much like a child and their teddy bear.



*Claiming Space: Performing the Personal through Decorated Mortarboards*, by Sheila Bock

(Logan: Utah State University Press, 2023, 160 pp.)

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This interesting and relevant book by Sheila Bock is an in-depth look at how students use the decorating of mortarboards to communicate how they have negotiated their own identities within the realm of higher education. Juxtaposing the formality of the graduation ceremony and higher education in general, Bock shows how students take the “blank canvas” to show not only their

personal traits and experiences, but also their “sentiments of appreciation, pride, optimism, relief, uncertainty, or frustration” (5). Her research is couched in a performance-centered approach to material culture that borders on bodylore (although Bock does not use this term). She collected a copious amount of ethnographic data through interviews and surveys from graduating seniors from 26 universities around the country, including the University of Las Vegas, Boston University, The Ohio State University, and San Francisco State University. The vast number of students Bock documented allowed for diverse responses, which was key to the book’s central theme: Higher education is often based on Western European traditions that can clash with the eclectic lived experiences of modern students. Mortarboards then can become a way for students to express some of their frustrations to both the audience at the graduation and to a larger audience via social media. Thus, *Claiming Space* can be a valuable asset to educators looking to support students, especially minority students, as they negotiate their sense of self through the formality of education.

In Chapter 2, Bock sets up the performative element of mortarboards by including vignettes that outline how ten students used their decorations to communicate who they are in relation to the university and/or larger social narratives. The vignettes are referenced throughout the book and corroborate Bock’s points about how student lives contrast with traditional perceptions of university life. This is expanded on in Chapter 3 as Bock looks at Native American and Black students whose traditions have clashed with graduation guidelines and highlights a “presumption of assimilation” (71). For these students, the mortarboard becomes an even more important space to reclaim identity. Chapter 4 builds on this by looking at national debates about identity and how Latinx students use their mortarboards to claim a space within the Western European dominant culture. She brings in the #latinxgradcaps trend to show how students are using the ceremony to project their pride in their own identities. Chapter 5 looks at how students play with the linear structure of the graduation ceremony and Western culture in general. Bock looks at Queer identities to show how the timelines of many students often differ from the expectations of high school, college, job, marriage, and children. She also shows how mortarboards can often be playful, using SpongeBob SquarePants iconography to demonstrate fears about “adulting.” All this comes together to bring an understanding of mortarboards and students’ views about their education.

What impressed me is how Bock took something that could seemingly be viewed as a playful tradition and broke through the “triviality barrier” to show how much can be learned about students’ lived experiences through an ethnographic lens. I would recommend this book to educators as a way to think outside the pedagogical norms to discover ways students are negotiating the nuances of formal educational expectations with their sense of self.