

# Interview

## Diane E. Levin: Child's play as transformative work

### TWC Editor

[0.1] *Abstract*—An interview with Diane E. Levin, a professor of early childhood education and a renowned expert on media consumption by children.

[0.2] *Keywords*—Child development; Media industry; Video game

TWC Editor. 2009. Diane E. Levin: Child's play as transformative work. *Transformative Works and Cultures*, no. 2. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3983/twc.2009.0105>.

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## 1. Introduction

[1.1] TWC is delighted to present a special video interview with Diane E. Levin (<http://dianeelevin.com/>), a professor of early childhood education at Wheelock College in Boston, Massachusetts. Dr. Levin is a renowned expert on children and media consumption, and she has dedicated her career to helping parents, teachers, and scholars understand and mitigate the harmful effects of media violence, sexuality, and consumerism on child development. Her latest book is *So Sexy So Soon: The New Sexualized Childhood and What Parents Can Do to Protect Their Kids* (with Jean Kilbourne), and she has written or cowritten seven other books, including *From Conflict to Peace Building: Lessons for Early Childhood Programs Around the World* (with P. Connolly and J. Hayden); *Teaching Young Children in Violent Times: Building a Peaceable Classroom*; *Remote Control Childhood? Combating the Hazards of Media Culture*; and *The War Play Dilemma* (with N. Carlsson-Paige). She travels nationally and internationally to present her work, and she has been regularly featured in news outlets such as CNBC, CNN, *Good Morning America*, the *Today Show*, NBC's *Nightline*, National Public Radio's *All Things Considered* and *Talk of the Nation*, the BBC, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, *Time* magazine, the *New York Times*, *USA Today*, the *Boston Globe*, and the *Washington Post*.

[1.2] Among her numerous public and activist projects, Levin teaches a summer institute on media literacy and leads an annual service-learning program to Belfast entitled "How Early Childhood Programs Can Help Communities Affected by Conflict Heal: Lessons from Northern Ireland." She has consulted for the PBS Parents Web site and *PBS Families* magazine, has done work for the American Psychological Association

and *Consumer Reports* magazine, and cowrote "The SOFAR Guide for Helping Children and Youth Cope with the Deployment of a Parent in the Military Reserves" for Project SOFAR (<http://sofarusa.org/>). She has also testified before the U.S. Senate Commerce Committee and the Massachusetts Legislature on the harm caused by marketing to children. She is a founder and active member of the organizations Teachers Resisting Unhealthy Children's Entertainment (TRUCE) (<http://truceteachers.org/>), which prepares materials for parents on the media and consumerism in their children's lives, and Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood (CCFC) (<http://commercialfreechildhood.org/>), which advocates against the commercial exploitation of children.

[1.3] We hope that this interview will bridge the fields of game studies and child development, two areas with intersecting concerns but divergent traditions. In the video below, Levin speaks with Julie Levin Russo about the importance of play in childhood. She explains why computer and console activities aren't adequate to the cognitive processes that children use to understand their world, crippling their ability to build critical approaches to media in later life. While transformative uses of video games are often valorized, we need to recognize that transformation is a complex skill that begins with games in their most basic material form. Here, we discuss why an awareness of the specificities of children as viewers, users, and industry targets is crucial to fostering positive relationships to technology.

[1.4] Diane E. Levin is TWC staffer Julie Levin Russo's aunt, and we found it very gratifying to work together on this project.

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## 2. Interview



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