

Rethinking Early Childhood Education

Ann Pelo

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The world of early childhood education has come a long way from the early days of preschool or prekindergarten, which initially operated almost like daycare (if daycare was defined as being a place where kids could play all day long with little educational direction). Today's educators and parents know that early childhood education can have a significant impact on children, helping better prepare them for elementary school and beyond, both socially and educationally.

In this new collection, a Rethinking Schools publication, editor Ann Pelo proposes that early childhood education can not only advance educational concepts, but it can become, as she puts it, "a political act." Early education can instill not just the basics of the alphabet and coloring in the lines, but deeper concepts including social justice and environmental concerns and solutions. Delving into this type of education would require a fundamental shift in the development of such programs. Rather than straightforward lesson curriculums, a more whole-life approach works best with younger children.

Pelo, an early childhood educator with a Masters degree in Child Development and Family Studies, is also a teacher mentor and has worked across the U.S. and abroad in that capacity. For this book, she has collected essays and studies from teachers, psychologists, education specialists, and political activists, which use both empirical and statistical evidence. Using techniques developed specifically for young children, Pelo and the other authors argue convincingly that early childhood education can tackle themes of multicultural acceptance, a foundation in ecology and an understanding of the earth, social and emotional issues including nontraditional families, death, and financial inequality, giving kids a framework to learn about and begin to understand the bigger world around them.

To succeed, families must be included, teachers need to be trained, respected, and fairly compensated, and children must still be allowed to play; as psychology professor Sharna Olfman notes, "Across socio-economic, ethnic, and cultural divides, play is a constant in childhood. It is a central feature in the lives of all young primates and most young mammals, underscoring its lengthy evolutionary history and adaptive value."

This book is an invaluable resource for educators and education policy makers, as well as parents concerned with the early childhood years. Pelo has assembled an impressive collection of voices and viewpoints, all of which provide an extensive overview of what early childhood education can really accomplish.

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