



The Most Important Year: Pre-Kindergarten and the Future of Our Children

Suzanne Bouffard

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An eye-opening look inside pre-K in America and what it will take to give all children the best start in school possible.

At the heart of this groundbreaking book are two urgent questions: What do our young children need in the earliest years of school, and how do we ensure that they all get it? Cutting-edge research has proven that early childhood education is crucial for all children to gain the academic and emotional skills they need to succeed later in life. Children who attend quality pre-K programs have a host of positive outcomes including better language, literacy, problem-solving and math skills down the line, and they have a leg up on what appears to be the most essential skill to develop at age four: strong self-control. But even with this overwhelming evidence, early childhood education is at a crossroads in America. We know that children can and do benefit, but we also know that too many of our littlest learners don't get that chance--millions of parents can't find spots for their children, or their preschoolers end up in poor quality programs.

With engrossing storytelling, journalist Suzanne Bouffard takes us inside some of the country's best pre-K classrooms to reveal the sometimes surprising ingredients that make them work--and to understand why some programs are doing the opposite of what is best for children. It also chronicles the stories of families and teachers from many backgrounds as they struggle to give their children a good start in school. This book is a call to arms when we are at a crucial moment, and perhaps on the verge of a missed opportunity: We now have the means and the will to have universal pre-kindergarten, but we are also in grave danger of not getting it right.

The Most Important Year: Pre-Kindergarten and the Future of Our Children Details

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Ashley says

This book could have been full of data. While there are statistics, there are personal stories that give this book heart. The stories push the author's thesis for having quality Pre-K programs. The stories are inclusive and goes inside the classroom, talking with teachers, coaches, school administrators and parents. The chapters breakdown how students are taught, how they are shaped by their community which can impact their learning ability and the competitive process of attaining a Pre-K education. Also, the effects that could occur such as the school-to-prison pipeline if they do not have access to their most important year.

Nari says

It's an utterly depressing book if you have a child in preschool. You'll end up questioning everything about it.

It is a good read for parents and teachers alike. Bouffard highlights many of the discrepancies between schools and the inequalities between what the children low-middle-affluent families experience at their schools.

Is there a simple solution for pre-k in the US? Not really. But bringing back play and getting rid of worksheets is a good first step.

Megan says

I learned so much about preschool education and how it affects people individually and society as a whole. I'm also terribly sad about how difficult it is for people to get access to quality preschool programs, though before reading this book I wouldn't have been able to define what a quality preschool program looks like.

Providing opportunity for cognitive development and learning is important. The burden falls on us to find solutions for providing quality education for everyone.

Anna says

Advanced copy won through a Goodreads giveaway.

Bouffard readily admits solving the preschool problem in this country won't be easy, but she does a wonderful job of actually showing us that it is possible. She leads us through multiple classrooms, explaining and allowing us to see what is truly beneficial to the children and families they serve, while also taking us behind the scenes to see what is involved in managing a successful preschool. No stone is left unturned as the political and financial aspects are frequently brought into play too.

While this book may end up being picked up more often by those involved in education, I would highly recommend it to parents. Not only as a way of knowing what to look for in a good preschool, but in a good school in general. It may not be what you think.

I also can't help but wish this would find its way onto the desks of many politicians and those involved in our education system. It might just prove, well, educational.

Mary says

Certainly preaching to the choir for those in the early childhood field, but a valuable resource for parents and caregivers of young children approaching preschool age. It's hard to know what to look for in a quality program when you don't have the background and experience in what this looks like vs classrooms of older learners. I'd love to share this with potential families entering our school. Of course wish there was a magic solution as to how to make high quality preschool available equitably across the nation and make the profession a sustainable career for more teachers, but as a glimpse into this topic it was worth a read.

Elyse says

{Advanced copy won through a Goodreads giveaway}

Very interesting and inspiring book. As a fairly new pre-kindergarten teacher I really enjoyed reading about some of the new best practices, especially because I am teaching in a center based program which means we aren't getting the extra resources and training that some of the top performing school district K1 programs are. Learning what is working best in larger programs allows me to bring in new ideas that will help my kids make it to kindergarten better prepared. My only wish was that the book came with a DVD showing some of those best practices and classrooms in action like Teach Like a Champion. Written descriptions can only go so far, and I found myself interested enough in some of the newer techniques (especially the Tools of the Mind the author writes about) that I ended up scouring YouTube to see some teachers using the approach.

Nathan says

I learned a lot

Engaging children in their own language (play) is the research-based , best way, to start our children off on the right foot. But it takes more than this knowledge and good teachers. We need to overhaul the structure of early childhood education for everyone. We need funding, understanding and the will to help "others" and not just "our own". The information in this book changed my views toward that direction.

I think many of us know how to educate our own children, but when it comes to helping others, we aren't so eager.

Allison says

This book emphasizes a lot of what we already know regarding why pre-k is *so* important. I like that the author did not shy away from the truth that we get what we pay for. If we can't pay find additional money to fund pre-k for all, I'm ready to get rid of 12th grade as we know it.

While I have nothing to do with and have never taught early childhood, I appreciated how she went through some of the pedagogy and practices in general of high-quality pre-k classrooms. No matter the level, we can grow teachers to be more intentional by constantly asking them to articulate their teaching methods.

Bridget Vollmer says

I won this book in a GR giveaway in exchange for a honest review

I was so happy I won this book since my son will be starting Pre-K next year and I was interested in knowing what to look for in a quality Pre-K. While some of the information in the book didn't apply to my current living situation, overall I found this a very eye opening book and found that sometimes even the more expensive Pre-K programs may not be the best option for your child.

While this was book will definitely help someone in regards to what to look for in a quality school, at times I felt overwhelmed at all the options presented to a parent. There is so much pressure it seems to start kids early in a good education system and if not, one risks setting your child up for future failure.

Why can't we go back to simpler times??? I think I went to a year of preschool when I was little and my husband didn't go at all.

Anyways I really thought this was a well researched book and do recommend it to parents of young ones.

Nina says

Solid book overall for anyone in the early childhood space. The author focuses on the importance of pre-k, what the struggles/benefits are for parents and educators, and what still needs to be done. Author couples the research with stories from the field - really trying to paint the picture on pre-k in particular (very little on what happens and/or is needed in the years prior). Something that really bothered me structurally with the book is that the kindle version doesn't link to footnotes. I? kept wanting to see the sources for the authors assertions and it would basically turn into a scavenger hunt.

Jessica says

Advanced copy

I really wanted to love this book, but as a preschool teacher I found it to be lacking what I personally was looking for. Although many great ideas were shared, they were nothing I hadn't learned in grad school or

from coworkers.

The author's purpose was to raise awareness of what is missing in so many preschool classrooms across the country, and she did that flawlessly. Preschool is about so much more than many people realize.

Although I was disappointed, I do feel that this book would be extremely helpful to new and inexperienced early educators or parents wanting to educate themselves while choosing a preschool program.

Cat says

Well-written and timely, there is a need for preschool education in this country. At the same time, I'm very conflicted about putting children in classrooms so young! I was fortunate to have been able to stay home and raise my daughter way back in the 80's and early 90's. I laugh when I read books like this, not because I think they are absurd, or wrong, but they bring back memories of other moms I encountered when my daughter was in school yelling at me for thinking I was a teacher and who did I think I was teaching my daughter so much and making their kids look stupid! One, I didn't exactly tie my kid to a chair. Two, we just spent lots of time together, as did other moms with their kids, and the kids just learned cool stuff lots younger! Lol! Kids are sponges! Parents have always been teachers! If parents would be parents, the kids would be better off and it doesn't take a formal classroom setting to teach. Good ideas in the book tho'. Too many children are missing parents to even bond with these days, might as well provide a free daycare in a preschool setting and hope for the best.

Gelinette Rivera Ortiz says

Interesting read

I homeschooled my children but I also like to be informed and know that what I am doing is the correct thing to do. This book talks about how difficult and important is pre-k for those who are low income kids and even middle class parents and how messy the system is. Please read if you are looking to place your kid in the system. Be an active parent with your school and support the teachers and your child in this journey, it is crucial for your child and society that we as parents push for better schools for our children.

Allison says

Fascinating exploration of the importance of quality Pre-K education. A must-read for parents with children ages 2-5, and a still-relevant read for others, including educators of older children and adults.

Shelly says

This book does a good job of showing where some preschool programs are doing well (in-depth on how) and where some are doing things that are not good (with studies cited and experts interviewed on why these practices should be discouraged). It covers diversity, financial, and other issues that come into play with

preschools.

I do have a problem with the idea presented in the title that pre-K is the most important year. And there seems to be a huge amount of pressure to have kids in a great pre-K class not only when they are 4, but even for all 3 year olds. I get that some kids need extra support that schools can provide, but to imply that kids' lives are damaged forever if they miss out on pre-K or only go for one year seems excessive. One parent is mentioned in the book as sending their child to preschool for "only" 3 days a week, as if they are failing their child by not having them in pre-K 5 days a week. And that isn't even a parent living in poverty with a child who may need extra support or education as a result of a rough or disadvantaged home life. I am all for good quality universal pre-K for 4 year olds, but I don't think all kids need to be in school all day (even a good play based school) 5 days a week starting at 2 1/2 or 3 years old.
