

Preface

In April 2013, I wrote a piece for *Huffington Post* called “What If Everybody Understood Child Development?” because I was fed up with the many ridiculous actions taken against children in the name of education or safety. What if all administrators, policymakers, educators, and parents really understood children—how they develop and what can be expected of them at certain stages? Surely children’s lives would be so much better! Surely their education would be greatly improved.

Writing the piece was a necessity for me. I was asking a question that had been gnawing at me for some time. What I expected was relief at putting the question out there. What I hoped was that educators, administrators, policymakers, and parents would take notice. What I hadn’t predicted was the response both the question and the piece would receive.

As of today, the post has been shared widely on social media, acquiring, among other things, more than 2,500 Facebook shares and 23,000 Facebook likes. Recently, it was moved from *Huff Post Education* to *Huff Post Impact*, where it received renewed interest that began a whole new round of sharing.

Along those same lines, not long ago I tweeted images comparing an “inactive” brain when someone is sitting quietly versus that of a quite vibrant brain following 20 minutes of walking. My tweet stated, “For those who think sitting = learning, take a look.” Within a few hours there had been over 150 retweets and favorites. To this day, the tweet is still receiving reactions.

The messages contained in my *Huff* piece and in my tweet clearly resonated, especially with teachers who want to see “their” opinions expressed, their thoughts and feelings validated, and who need support to advocate for what’s right for children!

Because the messages resonated so strongly, I was inspired to write this book. I wanted to offer teachers all of the above. Additionally, I wanted to help inform those teachers, administrators, policymakers, and parents who remain uncertain about what *is* developmentally appropriate for children in early childhood classrooms and through the elementary grades.

The need for a basic understanding of children and developmentally appropriate practice has never been greater, as

- the educational climate in this country continues to remove decisions from the hands of educators and to place decisions in the hands of those with little to no knowledge of either children or education.
- many young teachers entering the field have grown up, as have today's young students, with little opportunity to experience the benefits of play, risk-taking, active learning, and life without fear, technology, or academic accountability.
- society and the media continue to perpetuate myths ("earlier is better," "children must be protected from risk and mistakes," "we must 'give' children self-esteem") that harm childhood and result in far too many bad educational policies.

Traditionally, the necessary understanding of children and developmentally appropriate practice would come from textbooks and college courses. However, many preservice teachers still are not required to study child development prior to beginning their careers. Nor are administrators, parents, or policymakers required to be familiar with the basic tenets of child development. In today's society, with "overwhelmed" the new normal, even if those who work and live with kids were to realize the need for a better understanding of children, few have time to read a textbook—or perhaps even a traditional book—on the subject.

What If Everybody Understood Child Development? is not a "traditional" book. Consisting of 29 essays, all of which run approximately 900 to 1300 words in length, it meets the needs of today's busy readers who can easily and quickly read the pieces whenever time allows, in whatever order preferred.

The opinions expressed in these essays are based on my 35 years as an education consultant, but they're also supported by research,

anecdotal evidence, stories shared by teachers and parents, and the views of experts in the fields of education, child development, play research, the neurosciences, and more—most of whom I have interviewed in my role as a radio host on BAM Radio Network. I feel as though my years as an educator, together with the unique opportunities I’ve had to speak with hundreds of thought leaders, led me inevitably to this project.

In addition to the thoughts expressed, each essay concludes with what the executive producer at BAM Radio calls “actionable insights”—recommendations for what you, as a teacher, parent, or education advocate, can do to help bring about change. Each also offers a short list of resources, including links to online articles and the appropriate radio segments, for those wishing to learn more about the topic at hand.

It’s unlikely you’ll agree with all of the opinions expressed here. But whether or not you agree, it’s my hope that the straight talk in *What If Everybody Understood Child Development?* will inspire and motivate you to generate change—so children can begin to have the lives and education they deserve.