

Educator: Young Children Need Conversation, Not Preschool

Advocating for state-funded preschool is still a popular political move, as a potential candidate for the New Jersey governorship [demonstrated](#) earlier this week.

But if early childhood educator Erika Christakis is right, politicians may want to put a hold on the preschool push. Writing in the January/February issue of [The Atlantic](#), Christakis reinforces [the idea](#) that many preschool programs are [more detrimental](#) than helpful to young children:

“Preschool classrooms have become increasingly fraught spaces, with teachers cajoling their charges to finish their ‘work’ before they can go play. And yet, even as preschoolers are learning more pre-academic skills at earlier ages, I’ve heard many teachers say that they seem somehow—is it possible?—less inquisitive and less engaged than the kids of earlier generations. More children today seem to lack the language skills needed to retell a simple story or to use basic connecting words and prepositions. They can’t make a conceptual analogy between, say, the veins on a leaf and the veins in their own hands.”

As Christakis notes, preschool use has exploded as more mothers have entered the workforce and sought childcare for their little ones. These childcare centers have created an institutional environment in which children are taught according to a “checklist” of important academic concepts.

But this institutional style of instruction is not ideal for young children. What young children need instead, insists Christakis, is conversation, particularly conversation in which adults ask questions which encourage a child to think and ponder in order to give an answer.

What many parents fail to recognize is that while they may feel unqualified and inadequate to teach and train their children, they are often the very ones who can best engage their child in the open and trusting conversation that will dramatically enhance their education.

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