

T.S. Eliot on Early Childhood Education

In the face of abysmal reading, writing, and math proficiency by elementary students, many Americans these days are pushing for universal early childhood education.

It's an odd position we're in when our education system has expanded itself so incredibly over the 20th century by arguing that it indeed can take kids from all manner of backgrounds and educate them. Indeed, that was one of the key arguments for creating compulsory public education in the 19th century. When it came to education, what the parents could not do or failed to do, the public schools would do. And that including socialization.

But as the traditional family accelerated its fragmentation and dissolution towards the end of the 20th century and into the 21st, schools are increasingly finding that they cannot overcome poor parenting. In response, the schools are asking for children at earlier and earlier ages. Some of this drive is masked by the desires of working parents to have the government pay for childcare at an early age. Nonetheless, the initial impetus for early childhood education was to be able to mold and socialize the children at an earlier age.

Way back in 1948, T.S. Eliot saw where the shifting of child-rearing responsibilities from parents to the state would go and gave us this warning in *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*:

“Instead of congratulating ourselves on our progress, whenever the school assumes another responsibility hitherto left to parents, we might do better to admit that we have arrived at a stage of civilization at which the family is irresponsible, or incompetent, or helpless; at which parents cannot be expected

to train their children properly; at which many parents cannot afford to feed them properly, and would not know how, even if they had the means; and that Education must step in and make the best of a bad job.”

That’s not a good thing. Furthermore, if today’s educators are saying that the parents must do more, we’re in real trouble. How do you reverse the cycle and get parents to not only retake responsibility for their children, but to also do it well?

(Image Credit: makinganddoing.blogspot.com)