

Reviewed by Andrea Brinnel
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Doris Fromberg, a Professor of Education at Hofstra University, cares deeply about educating preschoolers and kindergarteners. She focuses her writing on the provision of Ability-Based Learning Environments (ABLE Environments, adapted from “activity-based learning environments”) and the ability of adults working with young children to scaffold their learning to assist them in making meaningful connections. This is done in an effort to build children’s competencies across all areas of development. Fromberg demonstrates the importance of considering the “whole child” as important, and not merely to be separate developmental domains.

Fromberg writes with the classroom teacher in mind. Her chapters are ripe with real classroom examples (with research to support her recommendations). The book is divided into four parts that are rich with classroom-based activities, suggestions and the research on which all of these are based. Comment boxes and illustrations offer clear, concise, and easy to follow frameworks from “selecting great books” and “animal study activities” to “pathways in early mathematical development” (adapted from Clements and Samara, 2009,) and many others.

The book is divided into four parts: Part I, “The Setting,” includes chapters introducing what full-day pre-kindergarten and kindergarten look like observationally, as well as mini-“case studies” of different types of young learners; clear descriptions of how best to organize space to create opportunities for independence; the nature and crucial importance of relationships in the early childhood classroom; and the importance of hands-on learning and “3-dimensional experiences.” The teacher’s role in scaffolding learning (Vygotsky, 1978) is embedded throughout. Part II, “Content: Connecting Experiences with Dynamic-Themes” defines the concept of Dynamic-Themes as an framework for grouping activities and connecting experiences through both research and illustrative vignettes; dialectical activity; and multiculturalism, as well as egalitarianism are examined. Part III, “Learning Tools, Skills, and Ways to Represent Experiences”, focuses on specific sets of skills in music and the arts; literacy; technology and science; and mathematics. Part IV, “Planning, Assessment, and Community Connections”, provide the reader with an overview and examples of scheduling, including transitions; developmentally appropriate, integrated assessment (including executive functioning); purposes (and non-purposes) for assessment; and the importance of strategies to engage families and communities in young children’s learning. Fromberg also includes well organized endnotes that include helpful citations for related children’s books.

Pre-kindergarten classroom teachers and kindergarten classroom teachers are the primary audience for this book. Fromberg is able to take practice in the early childhood classroom and link it both meaningfully and clearly to research and best practice. The approach of presenting
research, not from a theoretical perspective, but from a meaningful, hands-on view, makes this book accessible to both public school and community based providers.

Additionally, this book does have utility value for the early childhood administrator, in particular, the elementary school principal, as a guide for what developmentally appropriate planning, instruction and assessment should look like. In the era of teacher accountability, it is imperative for administrators with limited background, training and/or certification in early childhood, to have resources where appropriate practice is clearly illustrated and is accompanied by supporting research.

This book is notably titled “The All-Day Kindergarten and Pre-k Curriculum.” Some mention was made of the issues that encompass the full-day versus half-day question, and when identified, the ideas were strong and clearly articulated.

Transition to the all-day schedule is like moving into a half-furnished house. Rather than doubling the number of kitchens or duplicating furnishings, you would have the space to spread out what you need and want. You might also decide that your former furnishings no longer match the architecture.

It was disappointing that no clearly delineated section devoted to the issue of full-day versus half-day programming for kindergarten and/or pre-kindergarten (although Fromberg does offer a brief list of considerations when moving from half-day to full-day programming). Had attention to this issue been elevated, this book could have been a useful tool for school-based staff and families making the case for the efficacy of full-day programming. Additionally, it would have been helpful for the author to illustrate the differences in learning/teaching approaches between full-day and half-day pre-kindergarten and kindergarten.

With this one criticism aside, Doris Fromberg offers a contribution to the field of early childhood by taking important research in the field and juxtaposing it with real examples of what should be happening in pre-school and kindergarten classrooms. Much of what Fromberg writes
about is equally applicable to early childhood classrooms regardless of the length of day.

References


About the Reviewer

Andrea Brinnel, Ed.D. is employed at the newly created state agency, The Connecticut Office of Early Childhood (OEC) She was previously employed at the Connecticut State Department of Education, as an early childhood consultant, responsible for the state supplementary Head Start Grant Program and “age 3 to grade 3” initiatives. She is also an adjunct Early Childhood Professor at Post University and was previously a special education administrator and a pre-kindergarten teacher in a public school setting.