

Diane Levin's review of

**THE MOST IMPORTANT YEAR:  
PRE-KINDERGARTEN & THE FUTURE OF OUR CHILDREN  
(How to Give All Children the Right Start)**

by

**SUZANNE BOUFFARD**

(New York: Bouffard, 2017)

*The Most Important Year* is a highly informative book that clearly reflects the principles and practices advocated by *Defending the Early Years*. Suzanne Bouffard shows us, in a wide range of meaningful and convincing ways, the importance of connecting teaching practice in public school Pre-K programs to how young children really think and learn. Using solid research evidence as well as engaging observational data, we also learn about the role quality Pre-K experiences can play in later social, emotional and academic competence and success.

But, sadly, while it won't be surprising for DEY followers, there is also much in the book that is both infuriating and heartbreaking. We learn that there are barely half as many Pre-K slots as there are children eligible for them. Equally important is the fact that, not all of the available slots provide the kind of appropriate practice that contributes to the long-term benefits quality programs can provide! We learn that parents, who don't have the skills, knowledge, or resources to know about, find, or get their children into high quality Pre-K placements, often end up with their children losing out. And even when parents recognize quality programs, it doesn't always work out. We follow one mother's extensive, time consuming attempts to find a quality program for her son, near her home, through the public school's lottery system.

One of the most satisfying aspects of the *The Most Important Year* is reading about how the Boston Public School System has set up its Pre-K program, and real data from a few of the classrooms. We learn what truly appropriate, child centered, play-based, carefully planned Pre-K is all about. And we see how early childhood coaches work with classroom teachers in truly individualized and collaborative ways to enhance practice. I have had the deep satisfaction of following a couple of these early childhood coaches around as they work with teachers and children—and the book does capture the special nature and value of this relationship.

For those of you interested in reflecting on and deepening your understanding of what children need and how we can work to create it for young children in public schools of today, I highly recommend reading this book.