

Armstrong, L.J. 2011. *Family Child Care Homes: Creative Spaces for Children to Learn*. St. Paul, MN: Redleaf. 216 pp. ISBN 9781605540757. \$49.95.

Armstrong, an experienced family child care professional, shows providers how to design inviting learning environments that meet the unique needs of family child care. This book is based on the author's observation that family child care environments have lost the feeling of "home" as they are increasingly set up as generic, mini child development centers. Armstrong highlights the advantages of offering care and education in a home. She presents strategies for creating indoor and outdoor spaces that capture the intimacy and warmth of home and invite children to explore and try out their ideas.

The author helps providers understand how the physical environment influences the behavior and mood of the children and adults who use it. She describes the basic elements of design and demonstrates how to use color, texture, lighting, and patterns to promote relaxation and calmness in some areas and excitement and active engagement in others.

Vivid color photographs of family child care settings visually communicate the practical suggestions for selecting, organizing, storing, and arranging materials and furniture and for setting up rich outdoor learning spaces in yards, patios, and porches. The author addresses the challenges of serving a range of ages and adapting to limited time, space, and money through topics such as avoiding clutter, setting up multiuse learning areas, and providing a quiet space when a child might need to be alone.

Shea, M. 2011. *Parallel Learning of Reading and Writing in Early Childhood*. New York: Routledge. 224 pp. ISBN 9780415882996. \$31.95.

According to author Mary Shea, young children write their way into reading. Two premises undergird her engaging book. First, educators need to rethink the assumption that children must learn to read before they can write. Second, learning to read and write cannot be reduced to a set of perceptual motor skills that can be taught and tested separately.

Shea provides a vivid picture of the way children, from birth, construct an understanding of how language works, and she presents an approach for supporting children's explorations with print starting in preschool. Delightful anecdotes illustrate how verbal interactions with adults help toddlers notice, describe, and make sense of experiences. The anecdotes show how children's natural inclination to figure out the function of print around them sets the stage for writing.

The author discusses the conditions for becoming literate. She shows how teachers can build on the literacy knowledge children bring from home and introduce skills like writing conventions and phonemic awareness in natural ways as children are ready to communicate through picture and print

messages. Writing samples and snapshots of teachers and children engaged in successful writing development activities in pre-K, kindergarten, and first grade classrooms convey a variety of teaching strategies. The book presents techniques for analyzing children's writing so teachers can meet individual children's needs, from guiding the earliest writers to recognizing and supporting advanced writers.

Zigler, E., W.S. Gilliam, & W.S. Barnett, eds. 2011. *The Pre-K Debates: Current Controversies and Issues*. Baltimore, MD: Brookes. 300 pp. ISBN 9781598571837. \$36.95.

More than 40 early childhood researchers and leaders debate the optimal direction for public preschool education and how to provide its essential components on a large scale. The authors share opposing points of view on key issues, including who should be served (all young children or only those from families with low incomes), who should serve them (teacher qualifications), what age to begin, where to be located (public school or a mix of settings), and what the focus should be. The essays support their writers' positions with succinct, up-to-date summaries of the research and discussions of political, educational, and social realities. Many present new perspectives for debate, a number of which have been ongoing for years, such as the debate about cognitive achievement versus focus on the whole child.

The issues addressed in this book are central to the early childhood profession, such as how to ensure quality and accountability, the meaning of effective teaching, and the impact of home visitation. The editors warn decision makers to heed the lessons of the past and not to oversell preschool as a panacea for all social and educational problems, as has happened with Head Start.

The book's unique format of examining an issue from all sides results in a comprehensive collection of options for helping educators reach informed decisions about making preschool universally available and maximally effective for all young children in the United States. This text can be used to inform and broaden discussions about early childhood education on university campuses and at professional meetings.

Titles are selected from the many new books received by NAEYC. Educator **Gail Perry** writes the brief annotations. The books are available from the publishers listed, your local bookstore, or online retailers.

New Books is available in an online archive at www.naeyc.org/yc/columns.

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