

Nurturing Next Generation Innovators: Supporting young children's entry into the global community

Excerpted from a new book from Ellen Booth Church

“Education is not the learning of facts, but the training of the mind to think.” ~Horace Mann

Look around and you will see how the world is growing and changing at an increasingly rapid pace. **The classroom community is becoming a global community.** The children we are teaching now will need to know how to function in this ever-changing, ever-expanding global world.

Let's prepare children for the Global Community through play and research based activities that expand their thinking and opens their hearts!

A child's first years are a time of amazing growth and discovery. Young children are avid explorers seeking to understand the world and their place in it. They approach each new experience with wonder and experimentation.

- *How do we support children in their natural exploration?*
- *How do we support teachers in creating a classroom community of thinkers, communicators and problem-solvers?*

As Early Childhood educators we dedicate our hearts and minds to creating environments, programs and policy that addresses the needs of the children of what is being called the “Innovation Generation”. One of the ways we look at the future for children is to imagine that the only “constant” will be Change with a capital “C”. As you well know, everything changes. Think about all the changes that have happened in your own lifetime. Now imagine the young children of today. What will the world be like when they are your age or my age? What challenges and gifts will they have to deal with? What skills will they need? How do we prepare children for this future of change?

Studies say that we need to support children in developing into global thinkers, communicators, collaborators and problem-solvers. They need to be able to look at the world from different perspectives and be willing to explore without fear of failure. As Albert Einstein once said, “I never teach pupils, I only provide the conditions in which they can learn.”

Children who are prepared to deal with the world of work and education need to be able to take a broad view. What does this mean? It means being able to see many viewpoints and perspectives. It also means being able to listen to others and to share one's own ideas and perceptions.

Think about perspective and perception. There are two very interesting and important processes we can introduce to start preparing children for the wide world ahead. First, we present children with activities that invite them to take many different perspectives. Then, from those viewpoints, we encourage them to notice what they perceive. We choose themes which are meant to ask children to broaden their perspectives, to notice relationships, to investigate same and different, to use perception to develop inductive and deductive reasoning, and to evaluate their processes and thinking. That all might sound like big stuff for young children, but when it is presented with fun

songs, games, and activities, nothing is more natural!

How do we prepare children to thrive in the ever-changing global community? We teach them:

- *To observe and notice.*
- *To relate to their own needs and the needs of others.*
- *To work and play well with others.*
- *To recognize and even love change.*
- *To thrive in a changing world.*

How do we do prepare children for the unexpected, the changing dynamics of life?

- *We offer them hands-on experiences with real-world materials.*
- *We support them in using problem-solving and thinking skills.*
- *We encourage them to share their thinking with others.*
- *We listen to their ideas and ask questions to take them further.*
- *We create a supportive classroom community of equals.*

Life in the wide world ahead is not found on a workbook page. It is made of real objects and real problems. Children do not need to memorize facts, as was the case years ago in education systems. Now information is at their fingertips, and what is important is for children to know what to do with the information.

Daniel Pink, author of *A Whole New Mind: Why Right-Brainers Will Rule the Future*, suggests that our education system has evolved out of the Industrial Age of the nineteenth century, when there was a great need to memorize information and learn skills. He says that we have moved through the Information Age of the twentieth century and that we are now in the Conceptual Age, when creators, innovators, and “meaning makers” are needed to work with the challenges of this time. A key piece of functioning successfully is the ability to empathize with others’ viewpoints and to solve problems on the spot together. He says, “In short, we’ve progressed from a society of farmers to a society of factory workers to a society of knowledge workers. And now we’re progressing yet again—to a society of creators and empathizers, of pattern recognizers and meaning makers.”

On First 2000 Days, the website of the North Carolina Early Childhood Foundation, Harvard pediatrician Jack Shonkoff refers to the studies that show that the brain is one of the few organs that are not fully developed at birth by saying, “Brains are built, not born.” Shonkoff points out that the cells are there, but the wiring that forms the architecture is not. These connections are made through play-based activities and social interaction. He states, “Experiences and environments determine which connections get used more and, therefore, strengthened. Those that are used less will fade away. A child’s interactions with the world determine how these connections (wiring) are formed, providing either a strong or weak foundation for all future health and learning.”

Excerpted from “Nurturing Next Generation Innovators: Open Ended Activities to Support Global Thinking” by Ellen Booth Church (Gryphon House) ISBN: 9780876596685 <https://www.gryphonhouse.com/books/details/nurturing-next-generation-innovators>