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<p>“We have a tendency in this country to put everybody into a formula—throw them all into the same box and have these expectations that they’re all going to do the same thing at the same time,” stated Jane Healy, in an interview for BAM Radio Network, but “one size fits all” does not apply to children.</p>	
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<p>Whether we’re talking about academics or athletics, the idea that earlier is better has infiltrated American society and education. As a result, there’s been a pushdown in curriculum, and children are expected to read as babies and to play like Beckham years before their eye-foot coordination allows them to successfully connect foot to ball.</p>	
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<p>Being a passive receptacle and being required to perform in ways for which they’re not developmentally ready creates children who come to resist—and even detest—“education.” Learning that is joyful, on the other hand, creates a love of learning that an individual will retain for a lifetime.</p>	

4. Bubble Wrapping Not Required **20**

To say that we've become "risk-averse" where children are concerned is to be laughably understated. And it's not just parents; teachers and school administrators, perhaps in reaction to parents' concerns and certainly in reaction to the fear of litigation, are removing swing sets and even tag from their playgrounds. But is a life without risk really best for children?

5. When Did a Hug Become a Bad Thing? **25**

America has always been a low-touch society, but when teacher education programs begin advising its students to put up a high-five when a kid requests a hug, and teachers' unions instruct educators to refrain from touching kids at all, it's time to take a step back and reassess our priorities.

6. Teaching Girls They're More Than a Pretty Face **29**

Nearly half of all three- to six-year-old girls worry about being fat, the sexualization of children has led to eating disorders in those as young as six, and children rank body image among their highest concerns! Teachers can help combat these attitudes by helping young girls grasp that they are more than how they look—and they can start with how they talk to girls.

7. Doing Away With the "Baby Stuff" **33**

When a school chief in Maryland declared that it was time to do away with the "baby stuff" in preschool, he was referring to naptime. My first thoughts were, *When did preschoolers cease to be babies in the lifespan of the average human being?* and, *When did scientific findings change with regard to the human need for sleep?* The pressure for young students to spend more time on "academics" has become so great that basic human needs are being ignored and unmet.

8. "But Competition Is Human Nature" **37**

Is competition human nature, or is it learned behavior? Is the world a "dog-eat-dog" place? Is it a place that requires us to prepare our children to do battle, rather than belong, to clash, rather than collaborate, and to see everyone else as foe, not friend? Early childhood and elementary education professionals are in a unique position to encourage and foster cooperation among children—and there are a great many reasons why they should want to do so.

9. Terrorist Tots? 42

In the wake of the Sandy Hook shooting and other such incidents, school safety, understandably, is a concern. But does school safety necessitate the suspension of 2 six-year-old boys playing cops and robbers during recess and using their fingers to make imaginary guns or the suspension of a five-year-old kindergartner who told another girl she was going to shoot her with her pink Hello Kitty toy gun that discharges bubbles? Overkill, anyone?

Part II. Understanding the Mind/Body Connection

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When the Texas State School Board was voting whether or not to make daily physical education (PE) part of the curriculum, one member pronounced, “If we have daily PE the kids will be healthy but dumb!” Such is the legacy of philosopher Rene Descartes, whose declaration, “I think, therefore I am,” was the beginning of mind/body dualism—the belief that the mind and body are separate entities.

11. Why Does Sitting Still Equal Learning? 52

Educators have long maintained that learning best occurs while children are seated (and quiet, of course). But brain research has shown that sitting increases fatigue and reduces concentration—and that movement activates the brain much more so than doing seatwork. Whether giving kids “brain breaks” or allowing them to sit on exercise balls or stand at tables in class, some teachers are beginning to rethink the theory that sitting still equals learning.

12. In Defense of Active Learning 56

It may no longer be acceptable to run, jump, and dance in the early childhood classroom simply for the joy and the physical, social, and emotional benefits of it (sad but true), but what if movement has cognitive benefits? What if it can be used to help children meet standards? What if physically experiencing concepts helps children learn better?

13. “Play” Is Not a Four-Letter Word 60

Educators all across the country tell me that children don’t know how to play anymore. Why? Because they’re given so few

opportunities for free play. They're too busy being scheduled and supervised and "schooled"—all of which are considered more important than something as "frivolous" as play.

14. The Body Matters, Too **65**

Should the physical fitness of children be the concern of teaching professionals? Or is it a matter for the family, and the family alone, to worry about? First Lady Michelle Obama believes it's the former. And, given the alarming facts surrounding the childhood obesity crisis, I have to agree with her.

15. Reading, Writing, 'Rithmetic . . . and Recess **70**

It's estimated that approximately 40 percent of the elementary schools in the United States have eliminated recess from the children's day—primarily because there are so many standards to be met and tests to be taken. It might be a reasonable choice if (a) standards and tests were all that mattered in a child's education, (b) children consisted of heads only, and (c) research didn't confirm that children can't afford *not* to have recess.

16. Why Kids Need "Gym" **75**

I hated "gym" when I was a kid. But life can be funny; despite that, I became a children's physical activity specialist—and ended up teaching physical education (PE) majors. Also, despite that, I believe that all schoolchildren—but most especially those in the earliest grades—should have PE class—preferably daily. And I'll tell you why.

**Part III. Understanding Developmentally
Appropriate Practice**

17. In Defense of Authentic Learning **82**

Rote learning has its place. However, unless a child is going to grow up to become a contestant on television game shows, memorizing facts will have little use in life once she or he has passed all of the tests school requires. On the other hand, authentic learning—the process of exploration and discovery, of acquiring knowledge, or knowing *how* to acquire it—will serve a child endlessly.

18. Who Should Lead the Learning? 86

Can students be trusted to lead their own learning, or must teachers continue to serve as the sage on the stage? If it's the former, what does it look like? How does a teacher learn to let go and become the guide on the side? Can he or she accept not being the "smartest person in the room?"

19. The Trouble With Testing 90

The mother of a five-year-old who had entered kindergarten excited about learning was understandably upset because regardless of how many times she was tested, her daughter couldn't read the required 130-word list. It wasn't the fact that her daughter couldn't master the words that troubled her; it was the fact that her daughter had become "exhausted and distraught" as a result of her school experiences—in kindergarten.

20. Failure Is an Option 95

So many of today's children are terrified of failing—of making a mistake. Their home and school experiences have taught them that "effortless perfection" is the goal, but motivation expert Carol Dweck says that children have been harmed by that idea. To counter this, she advises, "We have to teach children that mistakes are part of learning, and we have to show them that we value mistakes."

21. Should We Teach Handwriting in the Digital Age? 99

In recent years, one school district after another has determined that they should no longer require the teaching of cursive writing, preferring instead to focus on keyboarding in this technological age. As one writer proclaimed in an online discussion I began on the topic, "Will handwriting soon be as obsolete as hunting for food with a bow and arrow?" Or are there very valid reasons why we shouldn't abandon this tradition?

22. Just Say "No" to Keyboarding in Kindergarten 103

At what age should children be learning keyboarding skills? With some first-grade teachers assigning work meant to be word processed, it would seem that the answer is *in kindergarten*. But that's not what the experts say.

23. iPads or Play-Doh? 107

The topic of technology in early childhood classrooms, particularly those for the youngest children, has created quite a ruckus among educators—with no end in sight. On one side are those who firmly believe that if technology is going to be part of children’s lives, then they must begin experiencing and exploring it in their earliest years. On the other side are those who firmly believe that being without technology in the early years isn’t likely to harm children—but becoming enamored of it certainly *can* do harm.

24. The Homework Debate 112

Is homework necessary? If so, how much? An increasing amount of research and growing numbers of teachers believe it’s time to bury homework. So why is it still alive and well?

25. In Defense of the Arts 117

Unfortunately, as we’re all aware, the arts are not as valued in this country as they are in others. Being fluent in literacy, numeracy, and technology is seen as a way to make money, usually in business. Being fluent in the arts, dabbling in them in order to have the occasional outlet for self-expression, or simply appreciating them doesn’t typically lead to dollars. What worth, then, can the arts possibly have?

26. No More “Good Job!” 122

When children have been overly and falsely praised—for everything from “being nice” to reading—intrinsic motivation up and dies, and the long-term consequences of that can be dire. Still, teachers and parents continue to use praise as a way of motivating children—a practice that went from bad to worse as the last couple of decades ushered in the “self-esteem” movement.

27. Bribes and Threats Work, But . . . 126

The responses in an online forum in which a teacher asked, “Is it okay to bribe your students?” absolutely stunned me. While an overwhelming number of teachers objected to the word “bribe” (insisting that “reward” was a more appropriate term), they did indeed think it was a great idea because it helps “prepare kids for the real world.” Say what?

28. Time to Give Time-Out a Time-Out **130**

Like spanking, conventional application of time-out is now being challenged as overused, misused, harmful, and inappropriate. The experts say it's time to rethink the practice of time-out. But many parents and early childhood educators don't want to hear it.

29. "You're Outta Here!" **134**

The last word goes to preschool expulsions and zero-tolerance policies—two practices that really make you wonder if some of those “in charge” understand, or even *like*, children.