



## education review // reseñas educativas

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Epstein, Ann S. (2009) *Me, You, Us: Social Emotional Learning in Preschool*. Ypsilanti, Michigan: Highscope Press.

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Reviewed by Alma Linda Benavidez  
University of Texas at Brownsville

For many years, educators and parents have known how important the area of social-emotional learning is for young children. Unfortunately, with all the attention that has been given to state mandated testing, this area of learning in early childhood has not received enough attention. In the book *Me, You, Us*, by Ann S. Epstein (2009), she brings to our attention how vital it is for children in preschool to be exposed to social-emotional learning. Her many years of experience in writing books and articles in early childhood has allowed this author to produce a book that is written in a clear, concise, and well-organized way. The combination of these components makes the book enjoyable and easy to read. Besides giving us many scenarios to back up her research, Epstein also lists strategies throughout the book that can be beneficial to the reader. Even though this book is targeted at teachers and early childhood practitioners, it also includes a chapter that gives recommendations to parents

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on dealing with the domain of social-emotional learning in their children's lives.

The book, *Me, You, Us*, begins with a foreword by Lilian G. Katz and an acknowledgement from the author. The book contains sixteen chapters divided into four parts. The first three parts of the book target the importance of social-emotional learning for the child. Part four of the book brings in the importance of social-emotional learning beyond the classroom, such as in the community and includes the chapter on how parents can support social-emotional learning at home. The purpose of this book is given by the author in chapter one. She states "Through a comprehensive approach, this book helps the thoughtful educator chart a path for placing social-emotional learning on an equal footing with academic subjects" (p. 3).

In part one of the book entitled "The Importance of Social-Emotional Learning," Epstein states that "Teachers today confront special challenges preparing preschoolers to face a complex and rapidly changing world" (p. 3). This information allows the reader to understand that Epstein sees the role of the teacher in today's world as being the person who is responsible for preparing young children not only in the academic domain, but also in the social-emotional domain. The author starts out by defining the terms social-learning and emotional learning separately. She tells us that "Social learning comprises the skills and strategies for interacting successfully with others, and emotional learning is the knowledge and skills needed to recognize and self-regulate feelings" (p. 4). In this first section of the book, Epstein also informs the reader that there is renewed interest in the field of social-emotional learning for the young child. To explain to the reader about the renewed interest in this domain, Epstein gives us some quotes from individuals who are leading figures in the United States in the area of educational research in early childhood. Says Jack Shonkoff, Director of the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, "Emotional well-being and social competence provides a strong foundation for emerging cognitive abilities. Together, they are the 'bricks and mortar' of the foundation of human development. The brain is a highly integrated organ. Social development and regulation of behavior is as much a part of development as cognitive learning." In the preceding information, the author is

informing us that individuals, such as Mr. Shonkoff, are also advocating for the integration of social-emotional learning in the field of early childhood.

In the Second Part of the book which is entitled “An Overview of Child Development and Teaching Practices,” Epstein talks about developing a positive self-identity, feeling empathy, developing a sense of competence, and recognizing and labeling emotions. Some of the information she gives the reader in this section pertains to helping the child make the transition from home to school. Epstein points out the following “Adults can help children develop a positive sense of who they are by supporting their transition from home to school, providing labels for the many characteristics that make up their identity, and establishing a classroom atmosphere in which all the children feel valued and respected” (p. 29). Here, the reader can see this author considers the transition from home to school to be of paramount importance in a child’s life. Furthermore, Epstein offers the reader several strategies in helping preschoolers make the transition from home to school a smooth one.

The Third Part of this book entitled “Social Development” consists of the following topics: developing a sense of community, engaging in cooperative play, developing a framework for moral behavior, resolving conflicts, creating and following rules, and creating and participating in a democracy. The topic that Epstein covers in greatest detail in this part of the book is entitled “resolving conflicts” (p. 111). Possibly, the author gives a great deal of attention to this topic because it is an area of concern for teachers. Epstein, unlike other authors, immediately gives the readers a positive start to an area that has so many negative connotations. To begin with, this author does not label the topic in this section what usually would be called “classroom management” which is an abstract term that does little to create a positive image in any teacher’s mind. Instead, she provides a label for the subject that brings to mind not the problems arising from conflicts, but rather, the solutions that will come from resolving the conflicts. In the very beginning of this section, Epstein starts off by telling us that we need to think twice before we punish children when we think they are misbehaving. She makes the following comment “To emphasize that children are not misbehaving but, rather,

making mistakes as they learn how to act appropriately in conflict situations, avoid words that are value-laden or describe children's behavior in negative terms" (p. 111). This information from the author gives the reader positive advice about the steps to take in conflict resolution. Throughout the chapter the author shows different scenarios in which children have conflicts and the teacher or caregivers act as guides to help the children solve whatever problem(s) they are having. In this section, Epstein also gives the reader a list of reading strategies that can be used for conflict resolution in an early childhood classroom.

In Part Four of this book entitled "Beyond the Classroom," the author covers the following topics: "preparing ourselves to be role models," "social-emotional learning at home," and "reaching out to our communities." In this section of the book, Epstein points out to us the importance of family in the lives of young children. One of the comments that she makes regarding parents is as follows: "In their eagerness to raise emotionally secure and socially competent children, parents may think they have to teach or instill a prescribed set of values or behaviors. Instead, their goals for their children can best be achieved by creating a home environment that is rich in opportunities to learn through personal exploration and positive interpersonal experiences" (Epstein, 2009, p. 153). By making this comment, the author is informing us that parents need to do their part in raising children who are socially and emotionally well adjusted. In this section of the book Epstein provides parents with a list of thirty parent workshops that is entitled *The Essential Parent Workshop Resource* by early childhood specialist and program director, Michelle Graves (Graves, 2000, as cited on p. 154). These workshops include topics such as "The Importance of Consistent Routines," which deals with helping parents understand how to support their child's social-emotional development at home (p. 154).

Overall, this was a well-written and well-documented book in which the author gives the reader many scenarios, strategies and straightforward information on how to educate preschoolers in the area of social-emotional learning. This book is an excellent source to guide all early childhood teachers, practitioners, and parents, in the area of social-emotional learning for preschoolers.

## About the Reviewer

Alma Linda Benavidez is an early childhood educator with fifteen years of experience. She is currently a doctoral student at the University of Texas and Texas Southmost College in Curriculum and Instruction with a specialization in Early Childhood Studies.

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Editors

Gene V Glass

[glass@edrev.info](mailto:glass@edrev.info)

Gustavo Fischman

[fischman@edrev.info](mailto:fischman@edrev.info)

Melissa Cast-Brede

[cast-brede@edrev.info](mailto:cast-brede@edrev.info)

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