

An Educator's Rights

by Nicki Eybel

What are my rights as an experienced early childhood educator? Well, first of all, thank you for asking.

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First, I have the right to be asked to be at the table. When school administrators are creating policies and defining learner outcomes, the teachers who are experienced and trained to work with our youngest students need to be asked about the specific needs of that population. Four and five year olds learn differently and express their knowledge differently than older students. The learning community of preschoolers is louder, more spontaneous, and busier than that of fourth graders. I can tell you what children are learning as they read the recipe and make playdough for the fourth time this month. If you have the time, I can thoroughly explain the seemingly random drawings (children's first writing) of family members and super heroes.



Nicki Eybel has been teaching preschoolers for over 20 years and has been an instructor of Early Childhood Education at various colleges for the past five years. She believes that Early Childhood Education is the most important work in our country

today. She built her foundation of best practices, steeped in child development and the democratic principles of John Dewey, at Bank Street College of Education.

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Second, I have the right to be deeply and respectfully listened to. I have the right to be recognized for my knowledge of education, specifically early childhood education. Preschoolers can be adorable, very active, and funny, but early educators take young children and their learning very seriously. We can describe in detail the learning taking place when children pound nails into tree stumps, hush the baby doll to sleep, and race up the climber. We know what young children mean when they stutter and sputter and earnestly predict that we might see mermaids at the zoo after we see the polar bears. I understand that my moments with preschoolers are all teachable moments.

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Third, I have the right to mentor other teachers in my school and in the community. Beginning teachers need to understand that kindergarteners are not short first graders and that preschoolers don't look anything like a kindergartener until the end of July. To watch a

veteran teacher work with large groups of squirrely preschoolers is like watching an NBA coach with the rookies. It looks impossible, perhaps organized by alchemy; but I can articulate what I am doing at any given moment, and articulate why. I have the right to share that expertise and my years of rich experience with teachers who are just beginning.

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Fourth, I have a right to be a lifelong learner. My professional development needs to be encouraged and supported. The foundation of developmentally appropriate practice doesn't change, but there are new ways to express our knowledge of how young children make meaning in their world. Technology, science, and culture all impact our teaching. Just like other professions, I need to keep up with the latest research to continue to improve my practice.

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Fifth, I have the right to be safe in the school. This means I have a right to

work for an employer that safeguards the health and safety of its employees, as well as the children and families it enrolls. A society's strength is revealed in how well it cares for its most vulnerable populations; this always includes young children.

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Sixth, I have a right to be paid a living wage along with benefits, so that I can prevent illness and sustain a healthy lifestyle. I need a salary that affords me ways to nurture both my physical and emotional health. Maybe I need to enroll in a yoga class, or a drawing class during the school year. Maybe I need enough financial security to travel on my days off.

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Seventh, I have the right to be respected as a learned and experienced teacher of young children. I deserve to be valued for what I know about the complexity of early childhood education and I deserve a chance to offer my talents to the community.

We all have rights. What are my rights as an experienced early childhood educator? They are many. And I am happy to have enumerated them here for you. One of my rights is to be able to articulate these to anyone who will listen. It is part of my role as an early educator to advocate for my rights and the rights of others in my field. This is part of what is being a professional entails.