

3 Ongoing Trends in Early Childhood Education and How They Impact You

By [Kendall Bird](#) on 12/16/2013 [0](#)



Human beings [love trends](#). Whether they're based on food, fashion, pets or cars, we look for things that will connect us with others. Whether we like it or not, we've all jumped on a bandwagon a time or two.

In the world of education, there are all kinds of trends. For example, two of the most popular current issues in [early childhood education](#) (ECE) are [universal pre-k](#) and [technology in the classroom](#). But there are many others.

As a potential college student and someone who might be employed in the field of education someday, three long-standing issues that you'll undoubtedly face are: the achievement gap, early literacy and Reggio Emilia programs.

After all, your future career in education will be impacted by the changes being put into place today. So don't let yourself get behind on the trends, find out what they mean and how they will impact you.

Here's what's new with three of the biggest trends in ECE.

Achievement gap

The [achievement gap](#) in education occurs when one group of students outperforms another student group and the difference in those average scores is statistically significant, according to the [U.S. Department of Education](#).

The achievement gap is generally measured in the differences between grade-point averages, standardized test scores, dropout rates and rates of college enrollment and completion among different socioeconomic groups.

In 2002, then President George Bush passed into law the [No Child Left Behind \(NCLB\) Act](#), which sought to improve the academic performance of disadvantaged students. From the moment it was passed, NCLB was met with wide-ranging criticism.

Detractors argued that, among other things, NCLB focused too heavily on test results in reading and math, while ignoring subjects like art, science, social studies and physical education.

They also argued that teachers fearing termination for poor test scores, would simply teach students how to “pass the test” rather than focus on a well-rounded curriculum. Critics also cited government funding delays as proof of the unrealistic nature of NCLB.

New developments with the achievement gap:

Fast forward to 2011, President Barack Obama announced that states can apply for permission to implement their own initiatives to close achievement gaps and improve the quality of instruction in classrooms.

Essentially, this provided a level of [relief](#) from the nationwide one-size-fits-all NCLB law. As of [November 2013](#), 42 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico, have been granted “flexibility” to implement their own NCLB initiatives. Those interested can register to receive updates to the law [here](#).



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Early literacy

A child's first exposure to books, stories and writing begins in [the first three years of life](#). If "literacy" refers to a person's ability to read and write, "early literacy" is what children know before they can read and write. Specifically, that means concepts like letter knowledge, sounds of words, vocabulary development, print awareness and the ability to tell a story.

As an early childhood teacher, you can impact a child's future by teaching him or her to become a great reader.

It is said that [children who are solid readers](#) perform better in school, have a healthy self-image and become lifelong learners. Although it isn't necessarily an act or a law, early literacy is critical to [healthy brain development](#). In fact, more than 90 percent of [brain development](#) occurs between birth to age 5.

To begin early literacy in your classroom, start by reading a book to your class and demonstrating how words flow from left to right. Reinforcing letter knowledge and the sounds of small words also contributes to early literacy. These are all tactics of [preparing new young readers](#) and writers.

New developments in early literacy:

Early literacy programs are popping up across the country—for example; a [public library in Kansas](#) has introduced an [early literacy station](#) that is for children ages 2-8. These early literacy stations provide more than 60 educational programs that display engaging graphics and content to help children learn to read at an early age.

In fact, libraries like Pioneer Library in Oklahoma are adopting early literacy programs like their [Growing Like a Read \(GLAR\)](#) practice. The new practice incorporates early literacy approaches with the [Every Child Ready to Read](#) program.

Reggio Emilia approach

When a child begins going to school for the first time, the parents know it means less day-to-day involvement with their child and more teacher-structured lessons.

Basically, it means more work and less play. But with the [Reggio Emilia approach](#) to teaching, parents can be more involved.

Although it was developed in the 1940s, the Reggio Emilia approach to learning is unique in that it is built on concepts of community and free inquiry as primary values for improving learning in children. It also shares some of the values of the more widely known [Waldorf](#) and [Montessori](#) schools. Some of the core values for Reggio Emilia include:

- Students are allowed to follow their own interests
- Students' learning environment is tailored to what they are learning at the time
- Input from parents and students is encouraged and acted upon immediately
- The school makes learning visible by building student work portfolios

The need for Reggio Emilia schools comes from both parents and teachers who applaud the student-directed learning approach. Companies such as Google have recently integrated the [philosophy](#) at their onsite preschool in Google headquarters in Silicon Valley.

This approach to teaching may be a new idea to you, but don't hesitate to get involved and begin volunteering at a local [Reggio Emilia school near you](#). Or when it comes time to search for opportunities to student teach, find out if teaching at this type of school is accepted for your college credits.

New developments in Reggio Emilia:

New [Reggio Emilia schools](#) have been starting up around the country. In fact, one Chicago-area school has approximately 16 students—ages six weeks to 12 years—currently enrolled. South Florida's [Shelton Schools](#) is another set of schools adopting the approach.

Are you prepared?

Understanding the current implications of these ongoing trends in ECE will help future teachers develop successful careers and productive classrooms. These trends will continue to develop and evolve over time so be sure you keep them top of mind.

Learn more about your options in the field of education by visiting the [School of Education](#) website. And stay up to date with the latest issues and trends in education by bookmarking these [early childhood resources](#).