

**Nursery University**  
**Some reactions by Lisa Murphy, M.Ed.**  
**www.ooeygoeey.com**

Here is a link to the trailer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=42tFXB9TCP4>

Following are a few comments that I posted after my 2011 viewing of the film, **Nursery University**, which highlights the stressful and frantic process of various NYC families and their attempts to get their children into the “right” preschool/nursery school. That being said, I remind readers that I am well aware that the purpose of a film is to evoke an emotional response and that we, the viewers, have no way of knowing what ended up on the cutting room floor. So we watch, we react, we reflect and we continue working without getting too overly focused on the content of the film.

Having heard through the grapevine about the general topic of the film you know I needed to watch it. So I put it in the Netflix cue (Ha! Remember it was 2011 guys!) only to discover that I could download and watch it instantly so with my (at the time) ankle injury which required me to “sit still and rest,” I figured I’d watch the free download and see what the fuss was all about.

I was ready for the worst. Barf bucket was at the ready. But I need to tell you something, and maybe it’s because I’ve been following this stuff for so long, I didn’t see anything in the movie that surprised me. I am not saying ANY of it is right, I’m just saying none of it was “news” to me. Many years ago when this “we need to get into the right nursery school” nonsense first came to my attention, I read about a mother in NYC whose daughter didn’t get in to the “right” preschool and she ended up being quoted saying something like, “Well, her educational career is ruined. We might as well just move to the suburbs.” During workshops I point out that while yes, it is sad that the mom said it, it’s even sadder that she believed it.

So what were my reactions to the film?

First off, it bothered me immensely when the director of Epiphany School was talking to prospective parents and defined a “progressive” education as children getting to do whatever they want and whenever they want it, and went on to say that, “You don’t show up on your first day at Goldman Sachs expecting to get to do whatever you want!” At the time my ex-husband’s response was, “Yeah, but a strong, good progressive school will create folks who own the company, not the worker bees in it! Granted she might be pumping out rich and wealthy worker bees, but ultimately not the creative problem solvers that ultimately we need in our culture!” (still a valid point)

Secondly, if I had to go someplace it would have been either Mandell (She seemed pretty balanced, as did her staff), the co-op or the one (forget name) where the director said that all her teachers have that “twinkle” in their eyes because they love teaching so much. I appreciated that the film presented a few administrators and parents as having some sense of balance and perspective.

It upset me that Golinkoff and Hirsh-Pasek were only given 15 seconds to be the Voices of Reason at the beginning of the film. These women are BIG VOICES in our profession and are more than capable of providing the language and data that some people need when it comes to understanding the importance of a play-based early childhood experience. I would have liked them to have been more active in the film presenting both support (at times) and counter points as well.

It disturbed me when that one mother kept saying, “We were rejected” from such-and-such and “rejected” from so-and-so, when she was not in actuality “rejected” from anywhere. Not being picked in a lottery is not being “rejected.” That just really irked me.

I wondered if maybe we are all in the wrong job. And what we should really do is move en masse to NYC, set up shop as “admissions advisors,” and charge frantic parents \$4,000 for seven “navigation” and “strategy” meetings. At the time, my ex said it would be blood money. Fair enough, but it did cross my mind.

It concerned me when the one lady in the beginning of the film, defined “preschool” to mean pre-paring, not “pre” as in before-school (preschool). I think that set the tone for me. I realized that the whole film was going to using a definition of **preschool** as “pre-paring” and not having the opportunity to get her definition of what such preparing should entail, (or challenge one that might have been offered but cut or edited out of the movie) I was frustrated from the get-go and reminded of the importance of semantics, making sure we are all on the same page with the definitions of the lingo and buzz-words we throw around and, (what have I told all of you before???) he who owns the language owns the debate!

I wondered out loud if there really are no other preschool/nursery school choices for the families in the NYC area. And if so, why isn’t someone going in and making a fortune by opening programs to serve these supposed thousands of children who have no place to go and parents who have money to spend? Or is it that “certain schools” are the ones that all are vying for and even if there were schools with openings elsewhere, there would still be a mad race to get in to the “good” (read: status boosting and prestigious) ones? Which continues to prove that a lot of this madness is about status; and not necessarily quality of the program. And it left me with some unanswered questions!

I didn’t see one parent ask about the style or philosophy of any of the schools. There was an implication (at the least the film was cut to make it appear this way) that quality of program could be assumed based on name alone.

And to wrap it up, when it was all said and done, the scene that bothered me the most and shook me to my core was when Juliana’s parents (upper east side) were filling out all of the applications and the dad read the question out loud, “What qualities do you think characterize a good educational program?” and his response was, “So what do we write?”

They don’t even know what they want.  
But they know what sticker they want on their car.

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