



A New Report from the Alliance for Childhood

CRISIS IN THE KINDERGARTEN

Why Children Need to Play in School

By Edward Miller and Joan Almon

Kindergarten has changed radically in the past two decades. New research in Los Angeles and New York shows what is happening in today's full-day kindergartens:

- **2–3 hours per day of literacy and math instruction and testing**
- **Of that, 20–30 minutes per day of standardized testing and test preparation**
- **Less than 30 minutes per day—and often no time at all—for play or choice time**

These practices may produce higher scores in first and second grade, but at what cost? Long-term studies suggest that the early gains fade away by fourth grade and that by age 10 children in play-based kindergartens excel over others in reading, math, social and emotional learning, creativity, oral expression, industriousness, and imagination.

Developmentally inappropriate practices are putting young children's health and academic progress at risk. It is time for a change.

The full report, as well as an 8-page summary, can be found at www.allianceforchildhood.org in pdf format for downloading.

A print version of the full report is available for \$16 postpaid. Contact the Alliance for Childhood for more information.

Alliance for Childhood
P.O. Box 444
College Park, MD 20741
Tel/Fax 301.779.1033



CRISIS IN THE KINDERGARTEN: Why Children Need to Play in School

A new report from the Alliance for Childhood by **Edward Miller and Joan Almon** • available March 2009

TIME FOR PLAY in most kindergartens has dwindled to the vanishing point, replaced by lengthy lessons and standardized testing, according to results of three new studies commissioned by the Alliance for Childhood.

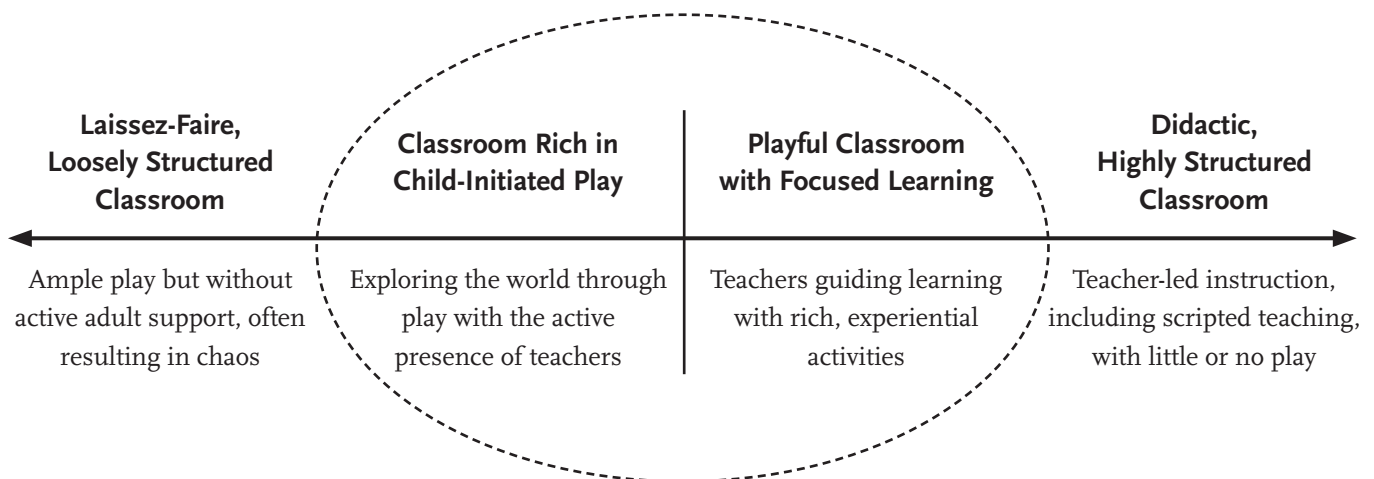
Researchers from U.C.L.A. and Long Island University found that, on a typical day, children in all-day kindergartens in Los Angeles and New York City spend four to six times as long in literacy and math instruction and taking or preparing for tests (about two to three hours per day) as in free play or “choice time” (30 minutes or less). A third research team, at Sarah Lawrence College in New York, found that most of the activities available to children during choice time (a popular euphemism for playtime) are in fact teacher-directed and involve little or no free play, imagination, or creativity.

Yet play and experiential learning have been shown to bring lasting benefits to children, while the effectiveness of didactic instruction and scripted teaching are not supported by valid long-term studies.

Children need kindergartens that emphasize child-initiated play and well-designed experiential learning rather than didactic instruction or its opposite, a laissez-faire approach where play disintegrates into chaos (see diagram below). *Crisis in the Kindergarten* draws on nine recent studies and reports to make the case for play-based kindergarten education.

The new Alliance for Childhood report presents evidence of rising rates of kindergarten retention and extreme behavioral difficulties. It critiques current kindergarten standards, scripted teaching, and standardized testing of young children, and makes recommendations to educators, policymakers, and parents for much-needed change.

THE KINDERGARTEN CONTINUUM



For full report and ordering information visit www.allianceforchildhood.org



Alliance for Childhood