

and policy makers, comprise the final power punch of the book. They are multisystemic; that is, they propose mandates to multiple audiences and in the areas that support development. I am tempted to repeat or at least to summarize them here, but it is perhaps best that people read them for themselves and then take steps that, well, put them in play.

Ideally, the authors could have provided a bit more description of the process by which these highly synthesized premises were derived, although I fully agree with them. There is a twenty-two-page bibliography of source material written by many of today's top scholars and practitioners of play. On occasion these are specifically referred to in the text. However, because there are so many issues in play and child development that could benefit from whatever meta-analysis undergirded this study, I wish the authors had made its method more transparent, which would have been a major contribution in itself.

Certainly, I highly recommend this book. It articulates the beliefs of play specialists and scholars beautifully in an evidence-based context. Our task, after digesting it, is to make sure that it gets into the hands of those who really need to know and act on its premises—misled if well-meaning parents, educational policy makers, school administrators, and early-childhood caregivers and teachers. This work can play a big role in bringing them to their senses.

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### **Crisis in the Kindergarten: Why Children Need to Play in School**

*Edward Miller and Joan Almon*

College Park, MD: Alliance for Childhood, 2009. Charts, graphs, endnotes. 71 pp. \$12.50 paper. ISBN: 9780982375105

The Alliance for Childhood is an international, nonprofit advocacy group composed of leaders in education, health, and other fields who care fervently about the well-being and the suffering of our kids today. This new publication seeks to create greater awareness and outcry concerning the demise of play in early-childhood education. The coauthors—both well-known educators, writers, and champions of children—present recent research and identify play culprits in schools and society, and then follow with important and informed suggestions to try to get us back on track to restoring play to its rightful place in our nation's kindergartens and other early-childhood educational settings.

The book's publication is timely for current efforts to spread the news beyond academic circles about the serious, unfortunate disconnection between the theory and research on play and policy and practices concerning play. Although considerable evidence supports the vital importance of play during the early years of childhood as well as throughout life, pernicious antiplay policies and practices exist in schools and elsewhere in society that hurt both children and adults in many ways. Significantly, this new report from the Alliance for Childhood reinforces recent efforts by the Society for Research in Child Development (SRCD) and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). For example,

it convened the Wingspread Conference in 2007 to address the issue of linking research and practice. To integrate, disseminate, and use research findings about play to bring about positive change, NAEYC formed an Office of Applied Research with SRCD. As a companion reading to *Crisis in the Kindergarten*, I recommend *A Mandate for Playful Learning in Preschool: Presenting the Evidence* by Kathy Hirsh-Pasek, Roberta Michnick Golinkoff, Laura Berk, and Dorothy Singer (2009). These two books convincingly make a strong case that child's play (being so important in early development) is a necessary and critical ingredient in pedagogy for the young.

Why children need to play in school is addressed in a variety of ways in this slim, handsome volume. The book includes a foreword by David Elkind and an afterword by Vivian Gussin Paley. As well-known and respected scholars in early development and education, Elkind and Paley comment thoughtfully on the book and react vigorously to the crisis and offer complementary advice. Elkind urges us to find champions in the world of politics, the arts, and the media to spread the argument and win for our kids what is essentially a cultural-economic-political battle, while Paley pleads for play on more developmental-clinical grounds because she knows firsthand from her many years of teaching kindergarten that play is the natural learning tool that children use most. In between these wonderful book-ends, coauthors Edward Miller and Joan Almon write persuasively and provide their own responses to the question posed in the book's subtitle—both through reference to and discussion of selected relevant

literature and through presentation of new empirical findings.

Chapters 1, 3, 4, 5, and 6 discuss the negative transformation of kindergarten and interrelated topics (i.e., unrealistic standards, inordinate test preparation and testing, scripted teaching from canned curriculum, childhood obesity and aggression, and stressors in the classroom). Chapter 2 reports startling new quantitative findings on use of time and the availability of play materials in classrooms today and qualitative findings about the views of kindergarten teachers on the importance of play and creative activities. Later chapters make suggestions and give recommendations. This book will help lead us to a new and improved kindergarten—one that is playful, healthy, and educationally and developmentally enriching.

The results of the research reported in chapter 2 demand special attention. The coauthors take care to point out that the findings are suggestive but not definitive because of sampling limitations and the use of an observational technique "in preparation," begging the question of whether the research underwent peer review. The study involved research teams from U.C.L.A., Long Island University, and Sarah Lawrence College seeking to provide an accurate picture of how children spend their time in public kindergarten, what materials are available to them, and the beliefs and attitudes of their teachers and principals. The U.C.L.A. and Long Island University teams surveyed a total of 254 teachers in full-day kindergartens in Los Angeles and New York, while the Sarah Lawrence College team observed fourteen kindergarten classrooms in New York and interviewed teachers and princi-

pals. In brief, the study found that very little if any free play or choice time remains in kindergarten. A great deal of time is devoted to instruction in primary language and literacy but also in math; most kids also are subjected to testing or preparation for tests daily. Insufficient play materials are available, in particular sand, water, and exploration supplies. Teachers believe play is important, but many cannot articulate the relationship between play and learning and often conflate children's spontaneous free play and teacher-dominated, choice-time activities by calling the latter play. Teachers reported that barriers to play include lack of time, curricular goals that preclude play, and the disapproval of play in the classroom by administrators.

This book's suggestions and recommendations are major strengths. Chapter 7 is entitled "The Playful Kindergarten: Ideas for Educators and Policymakers." Chapter 8 is called "Recommendations for Creating Effective and Healthy Kindergartens." Chapter 7 offers a conceptual scheme that integrates child-directed play and focused learning through play, defining and recommending twelve key types of play. The chapter also discusses tactics and strategies teachers can use to generate healthy, creative play at school and at home.

Aiming for a clearly superior alternative to the highly structured kindergartens that currently exist, the book emphasizes the need for programs to blend child initiation together with adult input. Like John Dewey, who wrote many years ago that play and work are educational, but not extreme play or "chaos," nor extreme work or "drudgery," this book gives a useful continuum from *laissez-faire*, loosely structured, "anything goes" kindergar-

tens to didactic, highly structured ones and warns that the range of kindergarten education should avoid these extremes. Instead, there should be learning through play and playful learning. Play is seen as the engine of learning and development, but in my words, we need high-quality gasoline.

The last chapter advocates for play and offers practical recommendations. It is followed by Paley's afterword and appendix A, "A Call to Action on the Education of Young Children," and appendix B, "Definitions." Endnotes, with extensive and recent references and resources organized by chapters, and information about the authors close this short but marvelous book.

Over the past twenty years, largely unnoticed by the general public, our gardens for children have been transformed into hothouses. Many of us in education have known this or, at least, have suspected this change but without seriously seeking to reform educational policy and practices. *Crisis in the Kindergarten* reports new findings and documents how serious the problem has become. As such, the book is a timely and, indeed, compelling call for action. The pendulum has swung too far toward an excessively restrictive and antiplay kindergarten. Our kids have been put in a kindergarten pressure cooker that contributes to the compression and ruination of childhood. Growing numbers of parents, teachers, and other concerned adults are becoming aware of the problem and are, we hope, ready for change. This book should help—but not just by swinging the pendulum in the opposite direction toward extreme play and child-centered programs. The book also gives guidance for a balanced approach to teaching and to

learning and playing in kindergarten and other early-childhood educational settings. Because it does so, I think we have a better chance to escape the vicious choice that has been forced on education between academics and play. At last, this book positions us for real progress.

Reading this book reinforces my belief that play can serve as a leading banner in a march we must join. We need to support the paradigm shift away from an undue emphasis on the goal of academic achievement for some to a proper focus on the goal of human development for all. As Miller and Almon remind us at one point in this book, the very survival of our third rock from the sun may depend in no small way on play and the adaptations and innovations spawned by play.

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**Play Therapy with Kids & Canines: Benefits for Children's Developmental and Psychosocial Health**

*Risë VanFleet*

Sarasota, FL: Professional Resource Press, 2008. Appendices, references. 138 pp. \$16.95 paper. ISBN: 9781568871127

I had extremely high hopes and many expectations when my wife and I purchased our first Labrador retriever puppy in 2006. Romantic notions of training our Lab pup to be an empathic and obedient play-therapy dog danced through my head. Cotton, as he was soon to be named, was neither obedient nor empathic upon arrival at our home. In fact, he was stubborn, excitable,

hyperactive, and occasionally naughty. There was a fleeting moment in those early days when my heart sank at the thought that Cotton might not be the therapy dog that I dreamed of.

Fast forward three years to the present day, and Cotton has just celebrated his third birthday. He is truly my best friend and simply one of the best dogs a person could have. In many ways, he is still a puppy with boundless energy and a deep-down-in-his-soul desire to play at any available moment. Cotton and I have attended several training classes together, and we are in the process of starting Canine Good Citizen training so that he can ultimately be my cotherapist in the playroom. Needless to say, life with Cotton has been quite an emotional, educational, and self-reflective journey thus far; however, as I read VanFleet's book, I found myself wishing that this book had been available years ago.

Risë VanFleet's *Play Therapy with Kids & Canines: Benefits for Children's Developmental and Psychosocial Health* is a well-researched, comprehensive, yet concise text for all of us who are interested in both animal-assisted therapy and play therapy. This monograph covers both the theoretical and practical elements of animal-assisted play therapy (AAPT) in a clear, coherent, and organized manner. The book begins with a brief statement on animal emotions and a scientific review of the importance of the human-animal bond. It is clear that this bond is at the very center of animal-assisted therapy, and VanFleet demonstrates through the review of several studies that animals are particularly useful in a wide range of settings including psychotherapy. Furthermore, the text moves to more specific