

Choosing the right kindergarten or pre-K

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*Please note: this hand-out is intended as a **supplement** to the presentation, not as a **substitute** for the presentation. This handout is NOT intended to be read separately from the presentation; it cannot “stand alone.” If you would like to get a sense of the presentation but did not have the opportunity to attend, please read my second book **Boys Adrift**, especially chapters 3 and 8; also my third book **Girls on the Edge**, especially chapters 1, 2, and 3; my book **The Collapse of Parenting**; and the 2017 update of my book **Why Gender Matters**. You can reach me at mrcad@verizon.net but please also send a copy to my personal email leonardsax@gmail.com (scroll to the end for my complete contact information).*

A short history of kindergarten

- Jean Jacques Rousseau: Young children “must not read, they must see”
- Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi: long walks, no lectures, few books
- Friedrich Froebel: the first *kindergarten*
- Elizabeth Palmer Peabody denounced “false kindergartens” which “cater to adults who want to see young children learn to read and write and study school subjects at an early age”
- Robert Fulghum, *Everything I Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten*: “Learn some and think some and draw and paint and sing and dance and play and work every day some”
- The consequences of introducing standardized tests in *early elementary school*

The acceleration of the early curriculum began with the publication of *A Nation at Risk* during the Reagan administration, 1983. In chapter 2 of my book *Boys Adrift*, I trace how this report had the unintended consequence of accelerating the early years.

For more about the history of Friedrich Froebel and his kindergarten, see Norman Brosterman, *Inventing Kindergarten* (New York: Harry Abrams, 1997).

Earlier is not better

What can we learn from Finland? They don’t begin formal education until age 7, but they beat us in the PISA.

For the various hypotheses about why Finland does so well, see Kevin Carey's article, "Finlandia" (scroll down to the references, below). To get a better understanding of why kids in Poland now outperform American kids on the PISA – by a wide margin – I recommend Amanda Ripley's book *The Smartest Kids in the World* (Simon & Schuster).

German *Waldkindergarten* is a good example of experiential learning. *Es gibt kein schlechtes Wetter, nur ungeeignete Kleidung*: "There's no such thing as bad weather, just unsuitable clothes."

I accompanied 3rd-graders in Zurich, Switzerland on a field trip. One boy was reprimanded because he FORGOT to bring his knife to school with him.

"The culture of safetyism": *If ANY child MIGHT get hurt, then NO child is allowed to do it*. End result of safetyism: kids who are fearful and anxious. For more on "the culture of safetyism" and what we might learn from German *Waldkindergarten*, please see my article for *Psychology Today*, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/sax-sex/201910/lessons-germany-children-climbing-trees>.

For more on the harm of the acceleration of the early curriculum, see Erika Christakis, "The new preschool is crushing kids: today's young children are working more, but they're learning less." *The Atlantic*, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2016/01/the-new-preschool-is-crushing-kids/419139/>.

I cited Philip Olterman's recent article, "Learning the ropes: why Germany is building risk into its playgrounds," <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/oct/24/why-germany-is-building-risk-into-its-playgrounds>.

Brain research: higher screen time in young kids is associated with "lower integrity of brain white matter" AND with lower vocabulary and diminished language skills. See John Hutton and colleagues, "Associations between screen-based media use and brain white matter integrity in preschool-aged children," *JAMA Pediatrics*, November 4 2019, <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapediatrics/article-abstract/2754101>.

For a discussion, as well as Dr. Hutton's quote "No screens before three," see *MIT Technology Review*, "Screen time might be physically changing kids' brains," November 4 2019, <https://www.technologyreview.com/f/614672/screen-time-might-be-physically-changing-kids-brains/>.

Comparing preschool kids with <30 minutes/day of screens with kids who had >2 hours/day of screens, the kids with >2 hours/day had five times increased risk of externalizing behaviors, such as temper tantrums, and SIX times increased risk of ADHD symptoms. See Tamana et al., "Screen-time is associated with inattention problems in preschoolers," 2019, <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0213995>.

The article by Melissa Bernstein, cofounder of Melissa and Doug, titled "How we're endangering our kids' imaginations," is online at <http://time.com/4544654/how-were-endangering-our-kids-imaginations/>.

The collapse of creativity (an excerpt from my book *The Collapse of*

***Parenting*):** Kyung-Hee Kim is an educational psychologist at the College of William and Mary

who has analyzed results from the Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking.¹ Kim finds that the creativity scores of American children have diminished steadily over the past two decades.

According to Dr. Kim, that means that American kids have become "less emotionally expressive, less energetic, less talkative and verbally expressive, less humorous, less imaginative, less unconventional, less lively and passionate, less perceptive, less apt to connect seemingly irrelevant things, less synthesizing, and less likely to see things from a different angle."²

You will find more information on this topic – the collapse of creativity – in chapter 4 of my book *The Collapse of Parenting*.

A short history of kindergarten: Most of the material about Friedrich Froebel and the history of *kindergarten* – which in its original usage was intended for children 3 to 6 years of age – comes from Norman Brosterman's book *Inventing Kindergarten* (Abrams, 1997).

The acceleration of the early curriculum began with the publication of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983. In chapter 2 of my book *Boys Adrift*, and separately in chapter 5 of my book *Girls on the*

Edge, I trace how this report had the unintended consequence of accelerating and narrowing the focus of the early years.

Screens:

The full text of the AAP guidelines for children 5 to 18 years of age, as published in the journal *Pediatrics*, is available at no charge at this link:

<http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/pediatrics/138/5/e20162592.full.pdf>.

The full text of the AAP guidelines for children from birth to 5 years of age is available at no charge at this link:

<http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/pediatrics/138/5/e20162591.full.pdf>.

Here's a link from the AAP to create a "family contract" for kids' use of media:

<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/media/Pages/default.aspx>.

Bottom line:

- 1) Turn off the screens
- 2) Prioritize the real world
- 3) Let kids take age-appropriate risks
- 4) Enroll your kid in American "kindergarten" at age 6 rather than age 5. Give your kid the gift of an extra year of childhood.

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Notes on creativity

- ¹ The Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking are one of the few well-validated tests of creativity. The tests have been normed for different age groups, from first grade through adulthood, and have also been validated across cultures. More information is available at <http://www.ststesting.com/ngifted.html>.
- ² I first encountered the work of Kyung-Hee Kim in Hanna Rosin's article for *The Atlantic* titled "The Overprotected Kid," March 19 2014, <http://www.theatlantic.com/features/archive/2014/03/hey-parents-leave-those-kids-alone/358631/>. The quote is taken from this article. You can read Professor Kim's presentation of her own work, with links to the full text of her scholarly papers, at her own web page, http://www.creativitypost.com/education/yes_there_is_a_creativity_crisis.