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**KINDERGARTEN'S KILLER
CURRICULUM**

What to Know Before the First Day of School

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Kindergarten's Killer Curriculum
What to Know Before the First Day of School
By Erin Pannell, M.Ed, LPC, RPT.
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KILLER CURRICULUM:
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Names mentioned from case studies have been changed in order to protect confidentiality.

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For Megan

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INTRODUCTION

"Nature fits all her children with something to do." James Russell Lowell (1819-1891) A Fable for Critics.

Megan skipped beside me as we moved toward the elementary school. A swarm of children exited the yellow bus, crowding along side us as they hurried inside the building. Megan tugged at my arm as she tried to urge me along.

With the sun at our backs, our shadows stretched beyond us on the sidewalk, long and thin. The mirror image of Megan's shape and coal-black ponytail on the sidewalk swung back and forth as she hopped over cracks in the cement. Her book bag

-- stuffed with new school supplies -- rattled like a maraca with each step she took.

I had dreaded this day for five years. Tears kept jumping to my eyes no matter how hard I blinked them back. In my heart, it felt as if I was abandoning my child, giving her over to a bunch of strangers for 8 hours a day.

Megan -- tired of my slow pace -- rushed ahead of me. She flung the double doors open as if she was wheeling in an elephant.

"Mom!" she gasped. "Look at how shiny the floor is. Our floors never look this shiny at home."

I forced a smile while mentally batting away the images of children slipping on the waxed surface and breaking an arm. Glass hallways, slippery floors, big kids mixed with small ones posed danger at every turn.

The urge to snatch her into my arms and dart back to the safety of the car grew more plausible

with each second. I wanted to hide her and keep her five-years-old forever. I didn't want to leave her there with the crowded classrooms and throngs of people clogging the halls. What if her teacher lost her?

We followed the arrows pointing to her classroom. The teacher, Ms. Jones, greeted us at the door. My heart dropped. She looked like a hippie with long gray hair, blue jeans, and a peasant blouse. Not what I had expected. However, she gave us the ooey-gooey kindergarten-teacher smile.

Megan's hand slipped from my grasp as she made a beeline toward the hamster cage.

Ms. Jones' gaze followed Megan. "No tears there. She's off to a great start."

I swallowed the knot in my throat. "Fabulous. I'll just tell her good-bye." As I made my way toward Megan, I could have sworn I heard Ms. Jones chuckle.

Joining Megan at the hamster cage, I wrapped my arms around her thin shoulders and nuzzled her hair. "I'll see you after school."

She didn't return my hug, her eyes glued to the ball of fur running on its wheel. "Okay."

"You know I love you."

She squirmed from my hug and leaned closer to the cage. "Uh-huh."

"You have fun today, okay?"

"I already am." She tapped the cage with her fingertip. The furry hamster glanced up, and wiggled its pink nose at her. "You should probably go now, Mom."

Arrow to my heart. I left the classroom and burst into tears.

My daughter had started her first day of kindergarten.

CHAPTER ONE

CHANGING TIMES

"Books, the children of the brain." Jonathan Swift (1667-1745) Tale of a Tub Sect. I

Remember your kindergarten experience?

Depending on your age, you may or may not have attended kindergarten. Even today, in some states, districts are only mandated to offer kindergarten, yet children are not mandated to attend, begging the question, how important is kindergarten?

The mixed message leaves some parents confused about when to start their child's academic journey. But, don't let the mandates fool you. Kindergarten is no longer the Romper Room we saw 30 years ago.

If one were to compare kindergarten classrooms from the 1960's to 2003, one would see a drastic change in expectation, curriculum, and the stress placed on kindergarten students.

In The Past

Twenty years ago, a kindergartner spent the day learning social skills, playing games, taking naps, or mastering the task of coloring within the lines. They learned to raise their hands before going to the bathroom, not to hit when they were angry, and to share even though they "had it first."

Little time was spent learning letter shapes and sounds, and reading was saved for first grade. After all, if students learned all the basics in kindergarten, what would the first grade teachers be left to teach?

Games the children played centered on team-building exercises such as Red Rover, or London Bridge. They learned to give everyone a turn and were taught acceptance and fairness.

In the past, kindergarten activities were developmentally appropriate for children. The instruction given to our youngest learners focused on a "child's developmental, not chronological, age" (D'Ordine, 2002). Everyone at the kindergarten level was treated as kindergartners where age mattered little. Developmental tasks such as social skills and taking care of children's emotional needs took precedence over academics.

The kindergarten classrooms of the past focused on the whole child, keeping in mind that if a child wasn't emotionally sound, or if the child was developmentally delayed, they weren't prepared to learn. In short, they focused on taking care of heart first, the mind second.

Kindergarten Of Today

The kindergarten of today barely resembles the kindergarten of decades past. In fact, it resembles the first grade classrooms of the 1970s and 1980s. Math, Science, History, and Language

NOTES



Erin Pannell is a Licensed

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Her parenting articles have appeared in the United States, Canada and Australia. In addition to counseling, she conducts workshops and lectures for parents, educators and students.

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