

Alliance for Childhood

Comments from individual signers of the Alliance's Call to Action on the Education of Young Children

“These points [in the Alliance Call to Action] are important for all children, but especially for those disadvantaged by inadequate living conditions, stressed parents, too much television, and violent neighborhoods. They, most of all, need a childhood of which they are being deprived.” —**Jane M. Healy, Ph.D.**, educational psychologist, lecturer, and author, Vail, CO

“Every citizen should be dismayed by the decreasing respect for play in early childhood. There is no dimension more essential to the development of curiosity, creativity, and health—no realm more important to the emergence of empathy, generosity, and the capacity for joy—than the regular opportunity for spontaneous play with human and nonhuman others throughout childhood. There is a direct relation between the decreasing opportunities for childhood play and the exploding devastation of earthly nature by an adult world increasingly impervious to the simple wonder of the real.” —**David Abram, Ph.D.**, author and President, Alliance for Wild Ethics, Santa Fe, NM

“Developmentally inappropriate early childhood education that is insensitive to individual learning styles is on the rise. Under such conditions, some children are stressed beyond their ability to cope, and others are labeled as psychiatrically disturbed because they cannot or will not adapt to age-inappropriate demands. And so it is no coincidence that we are witnessing an unprecedented increase in the number of young children being labeled and treated for psychiatric illnesses ranging from learning disabilities and attentional disorders to anxiety and depression.” —**Sharna Olfman, Ph.D.**, Professor of Psychology, Point Park University, Pittsburgh, PA

“The current pressure on early childhood programs to become increasingly academic actually dampens young children's natural curiosity and ability to learn. We need enthusiastic, well-educated teachers to work with young children in supportive environments where they are well compensated and respected.” —**Nancy Balaban, Ed.D.**, Infant and Parent Development and Early Intervention Program, Bank Street Graduate School of Education, New York City

“A remarkable marketplace of ideas, language, and logic flows through the preschool classroom in which play is respected as the natural way of life. ‘Let's pretend’ is the Socratic dialogue that enables young children and their teachers to build intimate communities where friendship and fantasy help nourish the growth of every child.” —**Vivian Gussin Paley**, teacher and author, *A Child's Work: The Importance of Fantasy Play*, Chicago

“Preschoolers belong at messy art tables, on the floor building block towers, and climbing jungle gyms—not at desks doing work sheets.” —**Betsy Flagler**, preschool teacher and parenting columnist for United Media, Davidson, NC

“Imaginative play lies at the heart of childhood. Out of it grows artistic, creative capacities, flexible, creative thinking, intuitive social awareness, and joy for life. Because structured activities as well as exposure to media and technology have taken over large portions of our children’s lives, children are losing their capacity to play. Losing an ability to play will have long-term negative effects not only on those children as they mature but on society as a whole. To cultivate imaginative play in children requires giving back the space in their life for them to develop it. It also requires exposing them to imaginative stories and putting in their environment adults whose activities children can freely imitate. This reorienting of childhood will have to be accomplished through conscious and deliberate action.” —**Natalie R. Adams**, Faculty Chair, Washington Waldorf School, Bethesda, MD

“Through play children learn how to share, take turns, cooperate, be flexible, learn self-control. They also can learn their fundamental skills such as numbers, colors, shapes, and letter recognition. They improve their expressive and receptive language skills, and become more creative and imaginative. We have been researching play for over 40 years and have found that play is motivating for young children to learn not only the cognitive skills but, more important, how to become a healthy, caring human being.” —**Dorothy G. Singer**, Senior Research Scientist, Child Study Center, Yale University

“In 1989 the United Nations adopted the treaty Convention on the Rights of the Child in which Article 31 states that the child has a right to leisure, play, and participation in cultural and artistic activities. From the most privileged to the most vulnerable but often resilient children, the right to play, expression, and recreation applies. Play is widely recognized by professionals in education and the human and cultural sciences as vitally important to children’s development and well-being. The power of play can help at-risk children fulfill their childhood dreams as adults, but only if we have families, schools, neighborhoods, and communities conducive to their right to play.” —**Jim Johnson**, Professor-in-Charge of Early Childhood Education, Pennsylvania State Univ., University Park, PA

“We know from 40 years of scientific research that young children learn best when lessons are embedded in rich play environments. Play = Learning. Play not only enhances learning, but also fosters creative thinking. In the Google generation, the future belongs not to those who memorize narrowly proscribed facts, but to those who creatively put facts together in new ways.” —**Kathy Hirsh-Pasek**, Professor of Psychology, Temple University, Philadelphia, PA

“Early childhood teachers have tested and confirmed the hypothesis: Play is a confounding variable that promotes learning. Their scientific findings and voices need to be heard.” —**Amelia Klein**, Associate Professor, Early Childhood Education, Wheelock College, Boston

“American scholars and researchers have used scientific methods to study children for over one hundred years. Programs that use theory and empirical studies to inform practice have traditionally used a play-based, constructivist approach that educates the whole child. This balanced approach includes music, art, and movement and is built on the

theories of John Dewey, Jean Piaget, and Urie Bronffebrenner. More current support is provided in publications such as *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs* (Bredenkamp & Copple, 1997) and *DEC Recommended Practices in Early Intervention/Early Childhood Special Education* (Sandall, McLean, & Smith, 2000). Ignoring this body of research predisposes children to methods that are not designed for young children and places them at risk. Immediate action is needed to return to child-centered education that allows children to develop naturally through play.”
—**Dorothy Justus Sluss, Ph.D.**, Associate Dean of Teacher Education and Professional Services, College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, VA

“We are not teaching our children *how* to think but rather *what* to think. As academics get pushed on younger and younger children, they lose the ability to internalize and think outside of the box. They need time to explore and discover on their own. Caring adults must provide that time. Decisions about how and what children should learn should not be made by people with political agendas or no real knowledge.” —**Candice Moratti**, teacher, Mission Montessori School, Scottsdale, AZ

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