

The new preschool is crushing kids ^[1]

Today's young children are working more, but they're learning less.

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Excerpted from the article

Step into an American preschool classroom today and you are likely to be bombarded with what we educators call a print-rich environment, every surface festooned with alphabet charts, bar graphs, word walls, instructional posters, classroom rules, calendars, schedules, and motivational platitudes—few of which a 4-year-old can “decode,” the contemporary word for what used to be known as reading.

Because so few adults can remember the pertinent details of their own preschool or kindergarten years, it can be hard to appreciate just how much the early-education landscape has been transformed over the past two decades. The changes are not restricted to the confusing pastiche on classroom walls. Pedagogy and curricula have changed too, most recently in response to the Common Core State Standards Initiative's kindergarten guidelines. Much greater portions of the day are now spent on what's called “seat work” (a term that probably doesn't need any exposition) and a form of tightly scripted teaching known as direct instruction, formerly used mainly in the older grades, in which a teacher carefully controls the content and pacing of what a child is supposed to learn.

One study, titled “Is Kindergarten the New First Grade?,” compared kindergarten teachers' attitudes nationwide in 1998 and 2010 and found that the percentage of teachers expecting children to know how to read by the end of the year had risen from 30 to 80 percent. The researchers also reported more time spent with workbooks and worksheets, and less time devoted to music and art. Kindergarten is indeed the new first grade, the authors concluded glumly. In turn, children who would once have used the kindergarten year as a gentle transition into school are in some cases being held back before they've had a chance to start. A study out of Mississippi found that in some counties, more than 10 percent of kindergartners weren't allowed to advance to first grade.

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