

# **STANDARDIZED TESTS AND FROEBEL'S ORIGINAL KINDERGARTEN MODEL**

## **William H. Jaynes (2006)**

### **Overview**

The original idea of kindergarten-as envisioned by its founder, Friedrich Froebel is one based upon moral education, play and family involvement. However, American educators have strayed from that initial ideal and rely too much on standardized tests at too early an age. There has been a general trend to undertake in kindergarten what used to be included in the first grade curriculum, and to do in preschool what previously had been done in kindergarten. Froebel envisioned kindergarten like a garden, as a place where children developed the personality, discipline, and social skills necessary to succeed in school. This article argues that educators should return to the Froebel rubric for educating our kindergarteners.

### **Froebel's Concepts of Kindergarten**

- Froebel believed that the reason some children are more successful in school is not due to intelligence, but to differences in self-discipline, virtue and maturity. Based upon this idea he proposed the idea of kindergarten as a tool to maximize student preparedness for school.
- He also believed that a strong bond between the teacher and the parent was essential for children to be educated effectively. He encouraged his teachers to visit the families of their pupils frequently to link a child's learning environments.
- Child development research since Froebel suggests that his broad, supportive, and foundational approach to kindergarten benefits a young child better than one focused on high-stakes testing.

### **Are We Relying Too Much on Standardized Assessments?**

- Currently all states have some standardized assessment of kindergarten students. Many states are also requiring students to take standardized test at younger ages. Consequently these states are systematically preparing their schoolchildren to excel on these exams at earlier ages.
- The greater emphasis on standardized tests also appears to have prompted several states to reduce or eliminate the time allotted for student recess. This is a big step away from Froebel's rubric of early education.
- Saying that teachers should avoid standardized tests in kindergarten does not mean that we should not test at any level, nor does it mean that kindergarten should reject cognitive functions. But there should instead be a balance based upon a child's age.

### **Conclusion – A Vision of the Future Kindergarten**

This article argues that contemporary kindergarten practices should once again follow Froebel's original model and in doing so would include:

1. The 'garden atmosphere' where children can learn and grow, that Froebel originally advocated, rather than an emphasis on standardized tests.
2. Educators should again teach moral education
3. Kindergartens should be places where play and recess is valued
4. Cognitive instruction should be developmentally appropriate in nature

America's kindergartens should once again embrace Froebel's model of education for young children. By emphasizing standardized testing and rigorous academics, pre-first grade has become an extension of subsequent elementary years. Following the four suggestions above will lead us in the right direction for kindergarten education.

Jeynes, W.H. (2006). Standardized tests and Froebel's original kindergarten model.  
*Teachers College Record*, 108 (10), 1937-1959.