

# Talking Point

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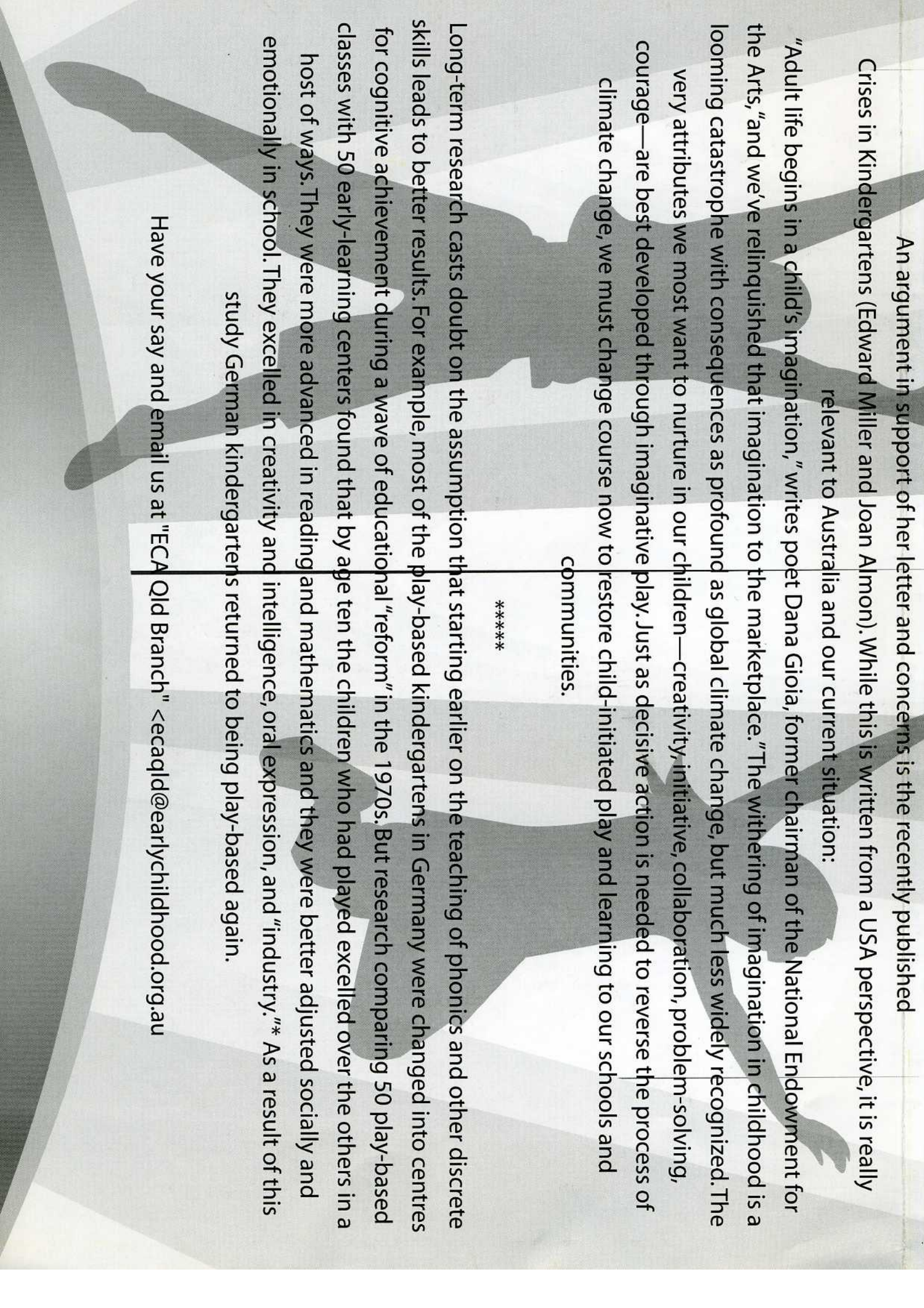
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## *Have we relinquished the children's imagination to the marketplace?*

This excerpt from a letter sent to ECA from a member certainly raises some issues to talk about. She writes about how Early Childhood in 'The Smart State' is going or perhaps is gone: Many of us are lamenting the lack of time to 'play' and the lack of value that is placed on this essential and fundamental 'tool/need' for children. Recent changes have spelt the end of traditional Early Childhood Education for children aged 4 to 5, with its richly resourced imaginative play and (sometimes messy) 'hands-on' sensory experiences, scaffolded by specialist teachers who knew how to support young children's growth and development.

Early Childhood Education has been replaced by Early Primary Preparation in school environments with whiteboards and worksheets, and bells to separate 'work' from 'play' time. Traditional Kindergartens and Preschools have been replaced throughout the State by (largely) commercial Child Care Centres and Prep, the 'cure-all' that was to raise Queensland's literacy and numeracy levels to the new heights required to live up to the name of 'The Smart State'.

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The background of the page features several overlapping silhouettes of children in various playful poses, such as jumping and running. The silhouettes are rendered in a light gray color against a white background.

An argument in support of her letter and concerns is the recently published Crises in Kindergartens (Edward Miller and Joan Almon). While this is written from a USA perspective, it is really relevant to Australia and our current situation:

"Adult life begins in a child's imagination," writes poet Dana Gioia, former chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts, "and we've relinquished that imagination to the marketplace." The withering of imagination in childhood is a looming catastrophe with consequences as profound as global climate change, but much less widely recognized. The very attributes we most want to nurture in our children—creativity, initiative, collaboration, problem-solving, courage—are best developed through imaginative play. Just as decisive action is needed to reverse the process of climate change, we must change course now to restore child-initiated play and learning to our schools and communities.

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Long-term research casts doubt on the assumption that starting earlier on the teaching of phonics and other discrete skills leads to better results. For example, most of the play-based kindergartens in Germany were changed into centres for cognitive achievement during a wave of educational "reform" in the 1970s. But research comparing 50 play-based classes with 50 early-learning centers found that by age ten the children who had played excelled over the others in a host of ways. They were more advanced in reading and mathematics and they were better adjusted socially and emotionally in school. They excelled in creativity and intelligence, oral expression, and "industry."\* As a result of this study German kindergartens returned to being play-based again.

Have your say and email us at "ECA Old Branch" <[ecaold@earlychildhood.org.au](mailto:ecaold@earlychildhood.org.au)