

SARAH · LAWRENCE · COLLEGE

Child Development Institute

Annual Report

June 2007-September 2008

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Mission and Point of View

The Child Development Institute (CDI) was established in 1987. Our mission is centered on outreach that is directed by two complementary aims: 1) to represent and promote our views on child development and education to the world beyond the College, and 2) to provide meaningful educational experience, support, and intellectual challenges to educators and child development professionals in the Westchester/NYC area. These aims are achieved through our lectures and conferences, our professional development programs, the Learning Child Series, presentations at conferences by members of our working group, and research and publications. While our primary emphasis is on outreach beyond the Sarah Lawrence campus, most of our programs also benefit graduate students in the Art of Teaching and Child Development programs, undergraduate students, and Sarah Lawrence faculty. CDI can also serve as a resource for and participant in campus-wide conversations about a range of core issues such as educational pedagogy and frameworks for thinking about assessment methodologies that fully capture qualitative as well as quantitative aspects of learning.

In the past year, we continued to build our capacity for developing programs that directly serve the community, such as through our new play program and a blossoming speakers bureau. We have also worked to extend our outreach beyond the Westchester/NYC area, serving as a resource for parents, educators, and other professionals across the country. Our contribution to the understanding of crucial issues in child development and education has continued through small scale research studies and capacity-building efforts we hope will expand our reach in this area.

As stated on our Web site (www.slc.edu/cdi): In the perspective of progressive education with which we identify, the child is viewed as an individual in the social context, actively engaged in constructing knowledge through interactions with other people and the physical environment. We believe that the child's educational experience should encompass social, emotional, and imaginative aspects of life in concert with intellectual development. We emphasize that the individual child, as well as groups of children, should always be considered in the context of their environments—family, neighborhood, school, and culture. Further, we are concerned that schools and other institutions be developed as communities that attend to the interests and needs of children from diverse backgrounds.

Who We Are

We are a working group of seven: director, coordinator, faculty advisory group (four psychology faculty), and chairperson of the Professional Advisory Board. The four faculty members are also directors of programs: the Empowering Teachers program under CDI, the Early Childhood Center (ECC), the Art of Teaching graduate program, and the Child Development graduate program. We have two consultants who generously offer their expertise to CDI, along with an advisory board made up of professionals in education, social work, developmental psychology, and others with a strong interest in children and child development.

Web Site

Our Web site (www.slc.edu/cdi) is updated regularly. It includes notice of upcoming events and description of ongoing programs. We have added a form by which users can submit a request for information, and we continue to increase the usefulness of the site and make it more interactive.

Public Events

The Longfellow Lecture

The Longfellow Lecture is an annual event, initiated in the first year of CDI (1987) and funded by an endowment established by friends and family of Cynthia Longfellow (SLC '72). Over the years, we have had a series of distinguished speakers drawn from the fields of developmental psychology, education, and pediatrics. The lecture draws an audience of approximately 300, comprised primarily of educators and students in the Westchester area. The lecture is publicized on campus and in a mailing sent to our list of approximately 2,000 people.

The 2008 lecture, "The Impact of Abuse and Neglect on the Developing Child: Relationships, Resilience, and Vulnerability," was given by Bruce D. Perry, M.D., Ph.D. The Longfellow Lecture was very well received: stimulating, inspiring, and transforming. We had strong attendance in Reisinger; students and faculty alike responded to the lecture; and it tied in well with coursework, especially in Art of Teaching and Child Development graduate classes and undergraduate science and psychology courses. A well-attended and highly enjoyable dinner at the President's House followed the lecture and reception.

The Thomas H. Wright Lecture

In 1996, the Leon Lowenstein Foundation gave us a grant to launch a fund in child development honoring Thomas H. Wright, former member of the Sarah Lawrence College Board of Trustees. The Lowenstein Foundation provided additional funds in subsequent years. Following consultation, the decision was made to use the income from the fund to establish an annual lecture, the Thomas H. Wright Lecture. Since 1997, the lecture has been the keynote of the Empowering Teachers Summer Institute. Angela Calabrese Barton, Ph.D. presented the 2008 Wright Lecture, "Where da Heat Go: Social Justice, Agency, and Science." Dr. Calabrese Barton is a scholar and a teacher committed to working within and across the educational system – including public schools, community organizations, and science engineering communities – to help promote a more just world.

CDI Professional Development Programs

Empowering Teachers Program

Jan Drucker, Director

The Empowering Teachers program was established in 1989 as a forum for professional development and support for teachers, administrators, and other professionals working with children in early childhood, elementary, and middle school settings. For one week each July, we hold a Summer Institute centered on a current educational topic. Sarah Lawrence faculty and distinguished guest presenters facilitate the exploration of each year's central theme. The Summer Institute typically opens with a keynote address, the Thomas H. Wright Lecture. The program has served as a resource and network for almost 300 beginning and experienced professionals from school districts in Westchester and adjacent counties in New York, Connecticut, and New Jersey, as well as regions as far flung as Florida, Georgia, Michigan, California, and Venezuela.

Participants typically make a two-year commitment to the program: participation in weeklong annual institutes for two consecutive summers and follow-up sessions during the academic year. Meeting in small groups, participants examine the challenges facing children, families, and schools in today's society, while exploring opportunities for meaningful classroom practices.

The 2007 Summer Institute, the 19th summer of the program, was held July 9-13 and attended by 29 participants, evenly divided between those working in preschool settings and elementary and middle schools. The 2007 theme was "Children in Context: Supporting Meaningful Connections with the Environments of Classroom, Neighborhood and the Larger World." The keynote speaker and Thomas H. Wright lecturer was David Sobel, eminent environmental educator.

The 2008 Summer Institute, the 20th summer of the Empowering Teachers program, was held July 7-11 and attended by 24 participants, a good mix as usual. We feel that the decrease in attendance reflects the popularity of the July 4 holiday weekend as a vacation time. However, we also plan to begin publicity efforts earlier for the 2009 Institute. Numerous potential participants, especially those from outside the New York metropolitan area, commented that they would have enjoyed attending if they had known about the program when they were first making plans for the summer. The 2008 theme was "Teaching the World: Children, the Environment, and Social Justice." As in past years, the annual Wright Lecture functioned as the keynote address for the Summer Institute.

Starting the summer of 2008, we increased the nominal fee charged to participants to \$150 per year to help offset a fraction of the program costs. We offer financial assistance when needed, and we encourage participants to explore funding options that may be available through their employers. The bulk of the Empowering Teachers program continues to be funded through income from the Thomas H. Wright Fund (including the Wright Lecture and other faculty expenses), as well as through CDI endowment funds generously supplemented by donations from Mariela Cisneros (in 2003) and Mary Lynn Bianco (via The Marclad Foundation in 2006). Possibilities for additional funding are being investigated.

We continue to explore ways to involve more people in this valuable program and to maximize its reach. A delicate balance is required between including more participants and keeping the group at an optimal size, which seems to be about 30.

Play's the Thing: Facilitating Play for Young Children

Barbara Schecter and Rachel Grob

As an outgrowth of our strong interest in promoting and strengthening children's play, we have developed a new weeklong program about facilitating play for young children. We were most fortunate to receive a gift of \$10,000 from Community Playthings to help launch this pilot project. The program ran the week of June 16-20, 2008 and brought together 25 professionals who are engaged with children in play, including early childhood teachers, social workers, therapists, children's museum educators, playground developers, parks department personnel, and our own graduate students in the Art of Teaching and Child Development programs. The launch was highly successful. At a minimum, we plan to offer the weeklong program again. We are also exploring the possibility of an advanced certificate in play, which might be similar in design to the Public Health Genetics/Genomics Certificate Program.

As part of our ongoing research in play and the development of this new program, Barbara Schecter, Rachel Grob, and Cheryl French attended a playwork conference in London and met with a wide range of people engaged in the play and playwork world in the United Kingdom. We learned much through the London trip and found much to ponder as we move to develop our program further and look at play and playgrounds in the United States. Through visits to three different adventure playgrounds, we examined affordances for play, the gated and closed nature of the playgrounds, their primary focus on school-age children, and how community-based such playgrounds are there. Through our meetings, we noted some of the key controversies within the groups, including the role of adults in children's play, outcomes-oriented versus intrinsic-value views of play, and the place of playwork within academic qualifications and the hierarchy of professions in the United Kingdom. Barbara Schecter and Rachel Grob also each visited the Berkeley Adventure Playground and talked with the director to get a sense of how that playground differs from those in the UK.

As we continue to develop multiple offerings, like Empowering Teachers and Facilitating Play, plans are underway to coordinate our outreach efforts for greater transferability and efficiency (and lower postage costs). During the 2008-2009 academic year, we will look at where the groups overlap, where they differ, and how best to develop and promote the programs.

The Learning Child Series

We are currently raising funds for the fourth film in *The Learning Child Series*, which is produced for public television by Jonathan Diamond Associates in association with the Sarah Lawrence College Child Development Institute. We have secured four-fifths of the required funding, and we are concentrating in autumn 2008 on raising the remainder. Our experience with earlier programs in *The Learning Child Series* supports the view that public television is an excellent medium for communicating ideas of compelling importance to parents, educators, and the general public. The aim of this program, tentatively titled "Connecting with the World:

Children and the Environment,” and its accompanying printed guide is to show how educators and parents can further children’s understanding of their environments, and how meaningful interactions with the natural environment lead to caring about the world and its inhabitants now and in the future. This project builds on insights from the highly successful earlier films, including: the importance of relatively unstructured material – such as the outdoor environment – as a rich resource for play and imagination (“When a Child Pretends”); the necessity of developmentally appropriate exposure to thematic material over time (“From Pictures to Words”); and the subtle art that must be employed in order to talk effectively with children about ethics (“Values Go to School”). Our proposed fourth film will be a critical tool for raising awareness about the importance of connecting young people to their environment, and a substantive resource for parents and educators who live and work directly with children.

Descriptions of the programs appear on our Web site and on the producer’s Web site (www.thelearningchildseries.org), which also contains clips of each film and ordering information. We are working to increase our Web presence and draw fresh attention to these valuable resources by creating rich media elements for both sites.

The Learning Child Series enjoys a solid reputation among public television viewers and educators nationwide. Each of the three programs has aired on more than 150 stations across the United States, with rebroadcasting and DVD sales expanding that reach. The programs were produced for public television, with the intent of reaching the general public. They are also intended for educators. Our efforts to reach educators directly have had positive outcomes and we will continue to expand our outreach in this area.

During the past year we invested in several direct marketing mailings to broaden the reach of the series: to people who had previously purchased one or more of the films, to friends and educators connected to CDI, and to professionals with a particular interest in play. As a result, the producer reported a significant increase in traffic to *The Learning Child Series* Web site and new sales above and beyond the expense of the mailing to past purchasers.

A number of presentations of the existing films were made to educators in 2007-2008: Margery Franklin and Carol Hillman gave a screening and led a discussion for the Bank Street College Westchester alumni group. The programs were used in educational institutions such as Bank Street College, Westchester Community College, and our own Sarah Lawrence College courses. We also displayed material on *The Learning Child Series* at the annual conference of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) in November 2007, a highly visible venue attracting 20,000 or more participants. We will display again at the 2008 NAEYC conference and additional conferences in 2008-2009.

Outreach and Collaborative Projects

In accordance with our mission, CDI pursues a range of outreach initiatives and collaborative projects. These include:

New York Coalition for Play

New York Coalition for Play (NYC Play) coalesced in earnest during 2007-2008. We met regularly throughout the year, worked with our colleagues at CUNY in the development of playwork curricula, and laid the groundwork for future advocacy, action, and education by creating a governance structure and mission statement for the group. Rachel Grob is a member of the Coalition's steering committee, and Cheryl French, Barbara Schecter, Margery Franklin, and Jan Drucker all participate in various ways.

Westchester Library System

In collaboration with the Westchester Library System (WLS), CDI is working to build capacity as a resource for librarians, parents, child care providers, and educators. We have discussed a variety of ideas surrounding *The Learning Child Series* and plan to present a session about the importance of play at a fall meeting of approximately 50 WLS children's librarians. We are also planning to co-write an article for *School Library Journal* and/or another national journal and may expand our outreach to libraries and librarians through participation in local and national conferences.

Speakers Bureau

CDI has been conducting pilot work in preparation for a speakers bureau that would significantly increase our outreach capacity. As a starting point, such a mechanism would be useful for increasing publicity for and knowledge about *The Learning Child Series*. The speakers bureau would give SLC's communications office a concrete CDI product to highlight and showcase. It would also offer a very real way for CDI to formally enlist the expertise of a talented group of collaborators such as ECC teachers, alumnae/i, current graduate students, and members of the professional advisory board. We are considering, as a model, providing in-service training using the films, creating a guide, and then facilitating and coordinating a small group of "ambassadors" (including graduate students) who would go out to schools, parents groups, libraries, museums, faculty meetings, etc. for panel discussions, film presentations, staff development, and in-service training. We envision this as a way of reaching a wider audience in the community, being available with expertise to reach people with diverse interests in child development. Thanks in large part to our collaboration with the Westchester Library System and the success of the play program, the speakers bureau is already becoming a reality.

ECC Community Night

In October 2007, Lorayne Carbon organized an ECC Community Night about children and the environment. Rachel Grob moderated an inductive panel discussion with Bill Crain and Ed Miller. The structure worked well, with great participation from the audience (about 30-35 people, a mix of ECC staff and parents). Parents responded quite positively to the idea of continuing the discussion with future events and doing hands-on parent-child programs. The evening was an important step in further connecting the ECC and CDI, and a possible format/idea that other child care and parent groups might use.

Eastchester Child Development Center

The Eastchester Child Development Center (ECDC) moved into a new space in 2008 and is looking for a fresh start, a chance to build an innovative, creative program. There is a natural fit and long history between ECDC and Sarah Lawrence College. We are exploring ways in which we might develop a mutually beneficial relationship, especially with ECDC, CDI, and the ECC. Ideas include teacher mentoring, networking around shared ideas and values, assistance with in-service training, and the possibility of a longer-term partnership.

Hope to Action

During the past year, we began collaborating with Sarah Lawrence alumna Jennifer Caldwell around her nonprofit organization, Hope to Action, the nationwide movement of women for climate protection. A primary component of the organization is its “EcoAction Schools,” a resource showcasing environmental education and stewardship programs for K-8 schools nationwide. This collaboration has been particularly beneficial as we move toward making the fourth *Learning Child Series* film a reality. Thus far, we have together developed a survey being sent to some targeted educators; examined environmental education in K-8 classrooms; explored available resources; looked at how the Hope to Action site (www.hopetoaction.org) might be developed as a comprehensive resource for parents and educators; and met with educators and others at the forefront of environmental education in the California Bay Area. Ideas for expanding this collaboration into a partnership are currently under discussion.

KaBOOM!

KaBOOM! is a nonprofit organization that works with communities to bring play spaces within walking distance for all children. The organization promotes community building through playground projects—urban planning, play-based thinking, social justice, and connecting with local communities. They sent three people to CDI’s play program and have expressed interest in some sort of consultancy and/or playwork training for their people, as part of their partnership with Rockwell and the Imagination Playground. We are in conversation with their senior manager of research, evaluation, and training to determine what shape this collaboration might take.

Autism Awareness Events

In April 2008, CDI co-sponsored a series of events organized by two SLC undergraduate students who wanted to do something for Autism Awareness Month. The students organized three events:

- A panel with parents and professionals (Jan Drucker moderating), which included Son-Rise, FloorTime, and ABA perspectives
- A screening of *Autism Every Day*, followed by a discussion and Q&A with Lauren Thierry Watkins, director and Sarah Lawrence alumna
- A Walk for Autism

The panel and film were held in Titsworth and both had an intimate, absorbed audience. Panelists and audience members seemed interested, engaged, and respectful of their differences. Several audience members who attended the screening participated in a discussion afterward and openly shared their own experiences with autism.

Participation in Community Groups

Members of CDI also regularly attend meetings and contribute to the following community organizations, among others:

- B.E.P.T. Teacher Center Consortium (Bringing Educational Professionals Together)
- Child Care Council of Westchester
- Environmental Consortium of Hudson Valley Colleges and Universities
- New York Voices of Childhood
- OMEP-USNC (U.S. chapter of the World Organization for Early Childhood Education)
- SLC Sustainability Committee
- Westchester Children's Association

Research and Publications

Play Research Project

Jan Drucker and Barbara Schecter, Investigators
Margery Franklin, Consultant

The research phase has been concluded for the small scale, qualitative study designed to examine the current state of play opportunities in public school kindergarten programs in the greater NYC and Westchester area, with a focus on the extent and quality of imaginative play. Funded by a grant from The Alliance for Childhood,¹ the study was carried out by Jan Drucker and Barbara Schecter, with Margery Franklin as consultant and with student research assistants. A bifocal study, the project examines the nature of play as observed during “free choice” periods during the kindergarten day, and the attitudes and behaviors of teachers that can be seen as facilitating the extent and depth of play in their classrooms. Additionally, interviews with principals and teachers yield data about the demographics of the schools and districts, how kindergarten programs are mandated and/or planned, and what they think about the current status of play and other aspects of child life in kindergarten.

Preliminary observations were shared at the IPA/TASP joint conference in Rochester, NY, in April 2007 and presented at the annual NAEYC conference in Chicago in November 2007. The study was also one of three highlighted and discussed during a research meeting organized by the Alliance for Childhood on the Sarah Lawrence College campus in May 2008. When analysis has been completed, the work will be written up in a full report to the Alliance for Childhood and in various papers to be submitted for publication.

Assessment Research Project

Building on the Kindergarten Play Project and concerns about the current trends in education, we have begun looking at research related to progressive education and a range of outcomes. Under consideration is a plan to do a literature review and then map out ideas for a larger research project.

¹ The Alliance for Childhood is a nonprofit partnership of educators, health professionals, and researchers, founded in 1999. The Alliance's work is described in detail on its web site: www.allianceforchildhood.org.

Occasional Papers

In 1998, CDI began a series of Occasional Papers, some written by members of our group and others by speakers at our events or other invitees. As part of our efforts to increase outreach and build our Web site as a resource for professionals and parents, we have now made full-text versions of the papers available online. The printed papers are still available for purchase, and we have sold well over 1,500 copies. Several of the papers are also listed, with abstracts, in the ERIC database.

Forthcoming and Recent Publications

Carbon, Lorayne & Drucker, Jan. (2007). Treasure islands: The lifelong impact of outdoor play. In E. Goodenough (Ed.), *Where do the children play?: A study guide to the film* (pp. 173-175). Detroit: Wayne State University Press.

Franklin, Margery. (2008). Words in play: Children's use of language in pretend. In E. Goodenough (Ed.), *A place for play: A companion volume to the Michigan Television film Where Do the Children Play?* (pp. 27-31). National Institute for Play.

Grob, Rachel. (forthcoming). *Testing baby: The transformation of newborn screening, parenting and policymaking*. Rutgers University Press.

Grob, Rachel. (2008). Is my sick child healthy? Is my healthy child sick?: Changing parental experiences of cystic fibrosis in the age of expanded newborn screening. *Social Science & Medicine*, 67(7), 1056-1064.

Wilford, Sara. (December 2008). *Nurturing Young Children's Disposition to Learn*. Redleaf Press.

Presentations and Conference Attendance

CDI had a presence at the November 2007 annual conference of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC).

- Barbara Schecter presented preliminary findings of the Kindergarten Play Project, which she directed with Jan Drucker. Rachel Grob, Cheryl French, Barbara Schecter, and Margery Franklin attended meetings and workshops.
- CDI also displayed in the exhibit hall with materials about the Institute and its programs, including the Longfellow Lecture, Empowering Teachers Program, Occasional Papers, and *Learning Child Series*. Clips from the *Learning Child Series* were shown, and ordering information was made available. Also displayed: information on the Art of Teaching and Child Development graduate programs, and the Early Childhood Center.

CDI also had a presence at Out2Play, the SkillsActive 5th Annual Playwork Conference in London. Barbara Schecter, Rachel Grob, and Cheryl French attended workshops about play in

natural settings and on school playgrounds, as well as a keynote address by Tim Gill, author of *No Fear: Growing Up in a Risk-Averse Society*.

Lorayne Carbon

Zero to Three National Training Institute. Attended the annual conference “Imagining a Better Future.” Keynote speaker was Barbara Bowman.

Cheryl French

New York Zero to Three Conference. Attended the annual spring conference in New York City, “The Challenges of Working with Families in an Urban Environment,” with a keynote address by Lawrence Aber, Ph.D.

Rachel Grob

YWCA of White Plains. Facilitated a panel discussion for the symposium on “Gender, Race, Culture, and Ethnicity in Early Childhood Development.” Panelists included Liz Fernandez from the Anti-Defamation League; Nancy Gropper, a Bank Street educator who does early childhood training around cultural aspects; and other representatives from local child care centers and public school districts. About 50-60 people attended. The YWCA also purchased “Values Go to School” and is considering organizing a presentation by CDI around the film.

Sara Wilford

Ossining Children’s Center. Presentation to the board of directors on Developmentally Appropriate Practice.

Eliza Frost Children’s Center. Staff development presentation on the Reggio Emilia Approach.

Cultivating Sanctuary Through the Lifespan conference, Andrus Children’s Center. Workshop on “The Early Childhood Classroom as a Culture of Safety.”

Westchester Association for the Education of Young Children. Workshop on “Facing the Challenges of Teacher Supervision.”

Fundraising and Finances

Our fundraising efforts for the year were centered on raising \$240,000 for the fourth program in the *Learning Child Series*. Thus far, we have raised approximately \$190,000. We need to raise an additional \$50,000 to complete the project.

CDI has a total endowment of approximately \$1,400,000. This total is comprised of six endowment funds. The Marx Challenge and the Canfield Fund provide income for the operating budget. The Wright Fund and the Longfellow Fund provide income for two lecture programs. The Cisneros Fund supports the Empowering Teachers program. A final endowment fund (anonymous) provides for special projects.

Approximately 83 percent of the CDI budget is covered by endowment income.