



From the Playroom

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The relevance of emotions...

Welcome to the winter edition of *From the Playroom*. If you are living where snow falls, you are familiar with the daily scene in early childhood classrooms that involves boots, mittens, hats, and snow pants. Transitions in and out of the school building, including recess, are wonderful opportunities to see the variety of children's fine motor skills, temperaments, and frustration tolerance.

Some children need their mittens to fit perfectly under the cuff of their jacket or they become quite upset, while other children are so excited to get outside that they don't seem to mind or notice that the right foot boot may be on their left foot. And of course, there is both the beauty of young children helping each other get ready, alongside the saddened tears when a favorite mitten is nowhere to be found and the line for the bus is already leaving.

Yes, emotions are a relevant part of every single experience for our young children and thus for the adults who care for them. The recent tragedy in Connecticut is a stark reminder of how important it is to help children and adults manage and cope with emotional experiences.

This edition of *From the Playroom* looks at relevancy, in terms of staying current with issues of children's social and emotional health. We also look at the relevant research efforts underway in Primary Project, relevant funding possibilities, and hear from front-line staff as to why this play-based program remains relevant in today's 21st century school settings.

Primary Project gives participating students the opportunity to take a break from the stressors in the classroom, giving a "soft-spot" for them to land so they can refocus and be ready to learn.

—Lynne Carnemolla, Child Associate
Birch Grove School, Tolland, CT



Primary Project is the best program our school offers to provide a service to children who may otherwise have gone unserved.

—Kathy Wags, School Psychologist
Suffield, CT



In society today, children are expected to do so much both in school and out of school—to have a pause for 30 minutes a week, a child is able to connect with a caring adult and learn valuable personal skills that translate directly to their lives and the classroom.

—Sydney Gozzi,
Suffield, CT Public Schools



Staying Relevant...



The theme of the New York State Primary Project conference this past October was "Relevance, Relationships, and Resiliency." These three words clearly resonate with Primary Project as the program celebrates its 55th anniversary this year. Child associates and school-based mental health professionals from across the nation gathered together at the Woodcliff Hotel and Spa in Rochester, NY.



Three separate events took place over the course of two days. New school teams participated in the two-day introductory training, followed by an evening reception to honor Children's Institute Legacy Society members. This also offered a wonderful opportunity to highlight our newest DVD, "Creating Connections."

The following morning the group was addressed by the keynote speaker, Rebekah Crofford, Associate Professor, Roberts Wesleyan College. Dr. Crofford spoke on the power of relationships in child development and resiliency.

Following her inspirational presentation, a variety of professional development workshops were featured. Workshops included information on program implementation, as well as managing transitions, using data to improve programs, parent engagement, and the importance of relationships in our lives. Workshop presenters included:

Mark Turner, Primary Project consultant, facilitator; Roshon Bradley, Principal, RCSD #57, Rochester, NY; Brian Brooks, Principal, Pal-Mac Primary School, Palmyra, NY; Andrew Lyle, Principal, Charter School for Applied Technology, Buffalo, NY; Deirdre Lupoli, School Social Worker, John L. Edwards Primary School and Liz Novine, Guidance Counselor, Montgomery C. Smith Intermediate School, both of Hudson, NY; Mary C. Michelfelder, Lake Placid Elementary School, Lake Placid, NY; Kathy Eisele, Social Worker, Westmoreland Elementary School, Westmoreland, NY; Mary Carol Dearing, Social Worker, Country Parkway Elementary School, Williamsville, NY; Marie Dionne, Charter School for Applied Technology, Buffalo, NY; Deborah Johnson, Director of National Services, Children's Institute; Shelley Sanyshyn, Clinical Associate, Children's Institute; and Patricia Emmanuel, SophiTec.



Relevance of Learning...

...about play and play therapy for supervisors in Primary Project

Rebekah Crofford, the keynote speaker for our October 2012 Primary Project national conference, reflects on the importance of teaching about play and, specifically, play therapy to future mental health professionals.

From the moment we are born we desire and are designed to be in relationships. Unfortunately, in a fast paced society preoccupied with accumulating more, we are less invested in relationships. This directly affects our children who grow up to be adult teachers, social workers, administrators, and parents. That is what is attractive about teaching play therapy at the graduate level at Roberts Wesleyan College. The field of play therapy puts a purposeful emphasis on relationship.

We know that play allows children to work on many things from cognitive skills to social and emotional skills. We also know that children who believe the adults around them are truly invested in them (i.e. attuned to them) improve their overall functioning. Social workers, teachers, school counselors, and others have a chance to be that person to a child.

Often students in the helping professions graduate without a keen understanding of children. Child development courses simply don't give them the skills to know how to "work" with this population. Many intervention courses focus primarily on adult populations and seldom differentiate the skills required for working with children. Play therapy is a course that assists them in learning how to apply theory to practice.

When students graduate they need the skills to form relationships with children and how to access their world. It is always profound to see students take their academic strength and incorporate the emotional intelligence required to reach children. Students learn how play is the language of children and experience more success in their work as a result of using the information learned. They often report immediate results in applying skills during their internships. This builds confidence as they continue to learn more about the world of children. Students leave the course with a new interest in play therapy and often pursue additional training and experiences to utilize these skills.

As time goes on the importance of play therapy will continue to grow and be utilized by many. It is a joy to be a part of work that is so meaningful and rewarding. The importance of relationship is highlighted and the benefits of that are passed on to children.

"It's not so much what children learn through play, but what they won't learn if we don't give them the chance to play. Many functional skills like literacy and arithmetic can be learned either through play or through instruction—the issue is the amount of stress on the child."

—S. Oliver, 2012

*—Rebekah Crofford, Ph.D., LCSW-R, RPT-S
Associate Professor: Roberts Wesleyan College*

Staying Relevant...

...through National Certification

Primary Project is an important program at Lake Placid, NY, Elementary School. Our Primary Project program is an integral part of Response to Intervention (RtI), serving as a Tier 2 Intervention. In 2012, the Primary Project program at our school was certified by Children's Institute for the second time. As I see it, certification has many benefits. First, certification validates program fidelity. Primary Project is an evidence-based program listed on the National Registry of Evidence-Based Programs and Practices (www.nrepp.samhsa.gov/). RtI requires the use of evidence-based practices. Primary Project national certification at Lake Placid Elementary School adds a stamp-of-approval to this valuable program. Secondly, the certification process is an excellent opportunity to conduct an in-house program review. Yes, completing the certification application takes time, but it is time well spent. Third, the teachers, administrators, and school board members remember a program that is nationally certified. Certification of Primary Project at Lake Placid Elementary School has helped maintain teacher support and district funding.

And finally, I admit, I love being able to tell questioning parents that the program I am inviting their child to join is evidence-based and nationally certified by Children's Institute.

This statement goes a long way in helping parents give permission for their child to participate in Primary Project at Lake Placid Elementary School.

*—Mary C. Michelfelder, LMHC, RPT-S, NCC, NCSC
School Counselor/Primary Project Supervisor*



Staying Professionally Relevant...

**"Tell me and I forget.
Show me and I remember.
Involve me and I understand."
– Chinese Proverb**

This proverb describes the approach for Primary Project trainings conducted by staff and consultants at Children's Institute. We believe in teaching to the multiple learning styles of our adult learners. Sure, trainings may include a lecture with presentations, but we also strive to actively involve participants in small group activities, role playing, art and play activities, and demonstrations. We value "active involvement" as we believe there is no better way to gain deeper understanding.



Staying relevant also means to ensure that what is taught and experienced demonstrates a clear connection to the context in which that knowledge is derived and applied. This is why we often talk about the strengths, opportunities, and challenges of implementing Primary Project in today's school structure. Professional development (whether it is face-to-face trainings, weekly supervision, consultation visits, or shared readings) influences and enhances the relational aspects of interacting with young children in the school setting.

While we do our share of Primary Project specific trainings, we also train teachers, Head Start programs, preschool directors, community paraprofessionals, and after school staff in a variety of social-emotional topics.

Bill Gates was quoted as saying, "No matter what you spend your time doing in life, you should never stop asking questions; never stop learning. If you never stop learning, you will never stop seeing the possibilities."

For more information, please refer to the flyer on the following page or visit www.childrens institute.net/training/social-and-emotional-learning.



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Teachers as emotional coaches

Time: Half day

We set the tone. We have the ability to escalate or de-escalate the situation. We can build or break a child's spirit. Come learn and reflect upon our role as the emotional coach.

Emotionally responsive language with children: The power of our words

Time: Half day

Explore the language of self-efficacy, where our words become powerful influences in building relationships with children, helping them to build a positive view of themselves. In this workshop, participants will learn why encouragement is better than praise and how to invite expression from young children.

Emotionally responsive language: The power of our words with adults

Time: Half day

Interacting with children, parents, and our colleagues is rewarding yet difficult work. This workshop takes a focused look on how the adults who care for children speak, listen, and communicate with one another. Participants will reflect on the power of emotionally responsive skills that can enhance our ability to build effective and respectful teams through intentional ways of communicating.

But wait, I'm not a therapist: Understanding children's mental health for the "non-mental health provider"

Time: Half day

All classrooms are now therapeutic. Learn about common issues in young children, how to support behavioral and emotional issues and how to ask for help with the more common mental health issues in children.

So many changes: The impact of separation, divorce, or military deployment on young children

Time: Half day

Children are living in ever-changing and unpredictable times. When change, loss, or grief enters a child's world they each cope differently. Using information that is simple and practical and drawn from the stories of children who have been on the front lines of change, we will explore what helps and what does not help.

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Relevant Research...

Primary Project research is up and running. Two schools have agreed to participate in a randomized control trial for Primary Project. This is no simple feat! Setting research such as this in motion takes time and patience, and the process cannot be put on a fast-forward track. We need to be methodical and supportive of the process. This spring the two schools will implement the program without randomization as they develop and refine their skills with children. Both schools have been eager to work with us.

Mary Anne Peabody, Director of Primary Project, and I will be involved in training, playroom set-up, and support for supervision.

We may be in touch with you requesting information... We appreciate your time in answering our questions. This will help us gather the information that you need in order to continue the program.

Why do you think Primary Project works? Send me an e-mail at djohnson@childrensinstitute.net and let me know what you think!

*—Deborah Johnson, Ed.D.
Director of National Services, Children's Institute*

Relevant Funding Ideas...

As economic conditions impact budgets, schools are looking for funding ideas for Primary Project. Districts have been creative about funding all or parts of the program with federal, state, or local dollars. Some schools have used federal grants such as the Safe Schools/Healthy Students grant to fund the program. Different states earmark funds for evidence-based programs that meet the social-emotional needs of students. Locally, community agencies such as behavioral health agencies, private foundations, or local businesses may invest in community schools to enhance the educational experience of students. Schools can collaborate with local groups that have a vested interest in seeing well-adjusted, knowledgeable children grow into future employees.

Many funders value that an evidence-based program such as Primary Project is being implemented with fidelity. The data that are regularly collected can be used to show how the program positively impacts outcomes for students. Programs can share data with parents, administration, school board, and the community. Continually showcasing your program at naturally occurring school events and presentations, keeps it in the forefront. More on the topic of sustainability will be featured in future issues of *From the Playroom*.

Bringing the Lessons Home

Relevant parenting skills

The skills used in Primary Project playrooms are relevant in everyday parenting. As parents, we try to understand the range of different feelings our children experience throughout the day. I feel fortunate to have learned “child led play,” the same technique used in Primary Project, and try to incorporate it into my own parenting style. As a parent, I know that I can’t use this way of interacting with my child all the time. However, I am mindful of when opportunities do present themselves to use these powerful skills.

When I acknowledge feelings (both comfortable and uncomfortable ones) I teach my child a vocabulary for not only his own emotions, but the emotions of others—an important aspect in learning the important skill of empathy. Additionally, encouraging my child when he shows effort on any task and being clear, brief, and consistent in my limit setting, have provided me with basic principles to build and strengthen our emotional relationship. I have discovered that if I apply these practices genuinely and consistently, the results have incredible possibilities. If you would like to also learn how to extend the skills of Primary Project into your parenting “toolbox” of strategies, please talk to your Primary Project team.

*—Lynn Smith, LMSW
Social Worker, Children’s Institute*



Please feel free to copy this page and share it with Primary Project parents.

Trayendo las Lecciones al Hogar

Destrezas relevantes para la crianza de los hijos

Las destrezas que se usan en los salones de juego del Primary Project son relevantes para la crianza de los niños cada día. Como padres, nosotros tratamos de entender el alcance de los diferentes sentimientos que nuestros niños experimentan durante el día. Me siento afortunada de haber aprendido el “juego dirigido por los niños,” la misma técnica usada en el Primary Project, y trato de incorporarla en mi propio estilo de crianza de los niños. Como madre, sé que puedo usar esta manera de interactuar con mi niño todo el tiempo. Sin embargo, estoy consciente de cuándo se presentan las oportunidades para usar estas destrezas poderosas.

Cuando reconozco los sentimientos (tanto los cómodos como los incómodos) le enseño a mi niño un vocabulario no solo para sus propias emociones sino también las emociones de otros—un aspecto importante del aprendizaje de la destreza importante de empatía. Además, alentando a mi niño cuando demuestra esfuerzo en cualquier tarea y siendo clara, breve y consecuente sentando los límites, me han provisto los principios básicos para crear y fortalecer nuestra relación emocional. He descubierto que si aplico estos principios genuina y consecuentemente, los resultados tienen posibilidades increíbles. Si usted desea aprender también cómo añadir estas destrezas del Primary Project a su “caja de herramientas” de estrategias para la crianza de los niños, por favor hable con su equipo del Primary Project.

—Lynn Smith, LMSW
Trabajadora Social, Children's Institute



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