



PPrimary
Project



Spring 2010

In This Issue:

Awareness & Appreciation 1
 Thank you Primary Project 2, 3
 The Cardinal Sings 3
 Communicating with Teachers 3, 4
 Ten Ways of Showing Appreciation to Teachers 5
 Spring is in the Air 6
 Bringing the Lessons Home 7, 8

From the Playroom

Awareness & Appreciation

May is both Teacher Appreciation Month and Children’s Mental Health Awareness Month. We think that the connection is more than coincidental. Teachers are the key adults in the early identification of children with emerging concerns and advocates for the most appropriate interventions. It is well documented that success in school is one of the protective factors of resilient children.

In this edition of *From the Playroom*, we show our appreciation to teachers. Please enjoy the reflections of Jim Michaels, a retired clinical consultant, as he shares the important role that Primary Project has played in his professional life. Read as Kathy Zanner, a Primary Project supervisor with the Amherst H. Wilder Foundation-Child Guidance Clinic in St. Paul, Minnesota, shares about their program in partnership with the St. Paul Public School District.

Take a moment this month to appreciate a teacher for their efforts in shaping children’s positive mental health and well-being.

“Often, when I am reading a good book, I stop and thank my teacher.”

—Anonymous



Thank You, Primary Project...

James Michael, Ph.D., a long time clinical consultant for Primary Project, shares his appreciation for Primary Project as he reflects back.

For over twenty years, I had the privilege of being a clinical consultant for Primary Project. Now that I am retired, I would like to share some thoughts, observations, and feelings about this fine program. When first asked to come on board, I considered it an honor. Primary Project and its creator, Emory Cowen, were nationally renowned, and I was fortunate to be a friend and colleague of Emory. How could I refuse such an offer? And, after all these years, I'm so glad I didn't.

Primary Project has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my professional career. I cherish the interactions and camaraderie with Primary Project staff at all levels, especially with the child associates, whose dedication and genuine concern for the children were self-evident. If I was ever asked to give an example of empathy, it would be "child associate."

These child associates were outstanding, a tribute to their personal qualities and to the excellent training, guidance, and supervision they received. They were always open to new ideas, ready to face new challenges, and eager to broaden their knowledge and sharpen their skills. They were non-professionals expertly fulfilling a role that was, to many, once thought to be only for "professionals," and provided at-risk children a sense of safety, security, and acceptance. Ours was a relationship of mutual comfort and respect.

I was also impressed with the schools' pupil personnel staff (social workers, school psychologists, etc.) in their unwavering support of Primary Project and, especially, the child associates, who, at times, experienced self-doubts regarding issues arising in the playroom. They were always sensitive to the nature of the child associate-teacher relationship and always ready to mediate and resolve any discomfort or problem. There were occasions when the teacher-to-associate message was, "I don't see any change in the child;" or "Fix her as fast as possible;" or "I'm not sure it's worth taking him out of class." For any child associate, such statements would be disconcerting.

Reassurance, support, and reasonable expectations were essential ingredients in establishing and maintaining high self-esteem and self-confidence for the child associate. In every school at which I consulted, these ingredients were always provided by the pupil personnel team.

Teachers were also important to the consultation process. Their knowledge and observations of the identified child provided valuable information in our attempts to formulate a more complete understanding of the child. I needed to remind myself that teachers, too, have feelings and often find themselves in stressful situations. Not only are they responsible for the child's academic progress, but are also subject to constant scrutiny by parents and school administrators. Now, with Primary Project in their school, they are asked to attend consultation sessions to discuss their students with an outside "expert." What should the teacher expect? Was I going to judge, evaluate, or be critical of her/him? Their anxieties, frustrations, and self-doubts, however were quickly assuaged by a very responsive and supportive Primary Project staff. I found most teachers to be insightful, caring, very supportive of the program, and grateful for the helpful feedback.

(continued on page 3)



Ambassadors

Teachers are core members of the Primary Project team. It starts as they carefully observe and reflect on each child's social and emotional competencies in the classroom. Next, they complete the screening measures that help to identify which children will most likely benefit from Primary Project intervention. They often obtain parental permission, explaining the program so parents understand the importance of early school adjustment. Teachers can easily become the strongest ambassadors for the program.

Teachers work with the Primary Project team to juggle scheduling, complete on going evaluation tasks, and to continuously find opportunities to talk and share with Primary Project staff.

Primary Project staff are often impressed during our certification visits by teacher's knowledge and understanding of the goals and objectives of Primary Project. Teachers who can articulate the importance of the "special one-on-one playtime experience" and how it is foundational to academic success are greatly valued. Yes, teachers are fundamental in children's mental health and the support of early prevention programs.

Thank you!

Attendance by school administrators (principals, vice-principals, etc.) was always welcomed. It demonstrated their support and vote of confidence for the program. Such positive regard from the administration helped to keep the Primary Project staff's morale high.

To me, Primary Project was "family." Everyone I had the good fortune to work with—child associates, school personnel, and fellow consultants—gave me a sense of belonging. It was the highlight of my professional life. My decision to retire came with many mixed emotions. It is my hope that this very worthwhile program will never be retired.

I want to thank everyone involved with Primary Project for making my job so rewarding. I congratulate you for giving a multitude of children hope for a brighter and healthier life. It is heartwarming to know that Emory Cowen's creation continues to flourish, nurtured by the deep dedication of all Primary Project staff, particularly the child associates.

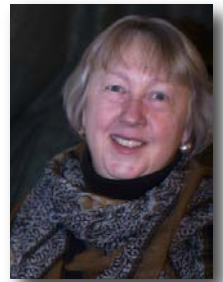
Communicating with Teachers: Developing Teacher Support

By Kathy Zanner, MS, LMFT, Child Guidance Clinic, Amherst H. Wilder Foundation, St. Paul, MN (Primary Project Mental Health Professional and Children's Therapist)

Fundamental to the success of Primary Project in our schools is the relationship the child associate builds with teachers and other school staff. This relationship begins the first moment the program and the child associate are introduced into the school and continues every day thereafter. During these times of decreasing budgets and increasing demands on teachers and schools, the challenge of working with teachers is a constant. The one thing we all know about relationships is that they take time and energy both in development and in maintenance. The constant in these turbulent times is finding that time and energy within school schedules for communication and relationships.

Our child associates have an added challenge in that they are not school district employees. Primary Project is funded and staffed by the Wilder Foundation within the St. Paul Public Schools. This means extra layers of consent, HIPAA (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act), and all the other required steps for sharing information and serving children. The relationship development between teachers and child associates can be likened to that of the child and child associate relationship within Primary Project. At first there can be hesitancy and uncertainty with a more trusting relationship developing over time. With Primary Project established for eight years in one of our schools, the child associate and long-time teachers are able to communicate quickly and effectively about appropriate referrals and ongoing concerns. Obviously with newer teachers, this takes more time and effort. As with most schools, we get mixed reactions from teachers as involvement in Primary Project involves evaluation measures and other additions to their workload. Hopefully they are able to see/hear the benefits in their students.

Our child associates have become creative in developing ways to foster relationships and keep teachers informed and involved. At the fall kick-off for
(continued on page 4)



The Cardinal Sings

Appreciation

When a theme is decided upon for the newsletter, I am often at a quandary regarding what to write. This time is no different. To the thesaurus I go... "be grateful for." Now that is something that resonates with me. Thankful. Glad about. Pleased about. Value. Welcome. These are words that speak to my heart.

My list could go on and on. What about you? My message is simple. Take five minutes. Sit alone and write your list. I just did. And it took me no more than five minutes. Now I will write a few notes to those that have a part in this. I use a pen, paper, and a stamp... and drop them in one of those "blue things" called a mailbox. I encourage you to do the same and share your appreciation.

Here's to passing on a smile and sharing your grateful heart...

**—Deborah Johnson
Primary Project, National Director**

Primary Project, we often host a before school in-service to overview the program, introduce staff, and talk about benefits while having coffee and bagels. Typically a child associate meets individually with each teacher following this overview and talks about more specifics, typical referral children (by type), and introduces the assessment tools. A follow-up session occurs after the return of screening measures from Children’s Institute where teachers and child associates begin to identify appropriate referrals. Once the screening tools are completed by teachers, identification of the most appropriate referrals begins.

The teacher makes the call home to introduce the program to families and the child associate sends home information and consent. Then children are off to fun times within the playroom as child associates work their magic and nurture and support children. Child associates attempt to provide ongoing feedback to teachers as needed. Teachers receive feedback at session end – either in a short narrative format or verbally. Child associates also ask for session end comments on children as well as T-CRS (Teacher-Child Rating Scale) completion.

It’s important as part of our time with teachers to include information about why the Primary Project model seems to work and why it is purposefully different from the rest of the academic day. From my viewpoint, I see it providing a wonderful and much needed break for children during what has become a stressful and structured school day. Above all, it’s a break allowing them to do what comes naturally – PLAY! Don’t we all wish we could take such a break everyday? Above all, it works because children receive a weekly dose of unconditional regard – a supportive person who listens and nurtures and allows them to play. I liken this to putting seeds in my garden and the sun’s nurturing rays on those little seeds.

This is substantiated in those comments we receive from school staff about children. For example, this recent comment from a support staff person following a shy and withdrawn girl’s first session: “I’ve never seen a girl so excited to spend time with someone. She talked and talked (about her play time). You made her day.” Here are some comments from teachers about identified children at the end of a Primary Project series: “She has become more vocal in expressing her thoughts and ideas in the classroom.” “He has become more confident, a self starter and can focus on a task for a longer amount of time without asking for help. It has been great for him.” “She has become more confident in herself. She participates in discussions and activities and is becoming more of a leader with her peers. Her oral language skills continue to improve and become more complex.”

“One looks back with appreciation to the brilliant teachers, but with gratitude to those who touched our human feelings. The curriculum is so much necessary raw material, but warmth is the vital element for the growing plant and for the soul of the child.”

–Carl Jung

Primary Project Rubric Now Available

School improvement plans have long included various assessment tools that take a close look at improving student and program outcomes. Effective this spring, Primary Project has its own continuous program improvement tool: The Primary Project Rubric.

If you don't know where you are going, you might wind up someplace else.

–Yogi Berra

If you want to reach the right destination and implement your program with fidelity, this rubric will be of great benefit. All criteria focus on the core components of Primary Project and “best practices” guidelines. Teams can assess program practices, processes, and playroom environments along a four point scale on indicators that are identified as critical, essential, or elective. Join others who are committed to improving their programs by downloading your own copy of the rubric.

Download the Primary Project Rubric at:

www.childrensinstitute.net/programs/primary-project
(see resources)

Ten Ways of Showing Appreciation for Teachers

MacArthur Elementary School, Binghamton, New York – NYS Model School
Mareen Dahulich, Child Associate; Cristin Plourde, School Social Worker

1. September: Emergency survival kit – given to teachers with a special note, “Let’s get this year started together, we make a great team!”

Included in survival kit:

- o A pencil – to get things started
- o A penny – to use good sense
- o An eraser – to use because we all make mistakes
- o A slinky – a reminder to be flexible
- o Bubbles – take a deep breath and relax
- o A ball – for the kid in all of us
- o A Hershey Kiss – a reminder that you are loved

2. September: Child associates begin observations of children in the classroom – “eye ball” candy given to teachers with a note from the child associate saying, “I’m starting to watch the kids!”

3. October: Forms are given to teachers with a sharpened pencil and a friendly note – ribbons given out to whoever returns the forms the quickest (see example). (Since COMET is used in many schools, we would love to hear your ideas about how you show appreciation to teachers – last year, teachers started a friendly competition for 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place prizes such as Hershey candy bars.)

4. October: Child associate offers to read a story in the classroom to children while the teacher fills out the forms (this can be done whether the teacher uses paper or electronic measures).

5. October: Team meetings – child associate makes homemade breads and food for the meetings. Also, a thank you note with an “Extra” pack of gum (see example).

6. November: A note of thanks given to teachers for their support of Primary Project.

7. December: A note from little elves – “Thank you from behind the scenes...it takes all of us to have such a wonderful program and to be a model school”

8. January: Primary Project candy bar with a note, “We made it another year” (see example).

9. February: Candy hearts given to teachers thanking them for the love they give to our program.

10. March: “Green with envy” – A special note saying, “Other schools are green with envy of how supportive you are.” Green pens can be given as well.



Spring is in the Air!

For those of you that are currently using COMET for your data collection and evaluation needs, pre/post reports can be pulled with a few key strokes. You can see what kind of impact Primary Project has had on participating students as soon as the students end their time in the program.

For schools that are using paper measures and receive program evaluation, your data will be processed in the summer and available at the start of the 2010-2011 school year.

In planning for the upcoming year, you may want to consider moving to COMET, our web-based user-friendly system that collects and manages data. Using COMET allows you to have immediate access to results, so assessing your program and its effectiveness in meeting the needs of students can be reviewed right away.

Feel free to let us know your questions about the system and if you are interested in receiving a price estimate to switch to COMET. Electronic measures are the same cost as paper and don't have to be sent off to be processed.

For more information, contact:

Shelley Sanyshyn

(877) 888-7647, ext. 251

www.comet4children.com



Certified Schools... Florida Shines!

Freedom Shores Elementary
Boynton Beach, Florida

Greenacres Elementary
Greenacres, Florida

North Palm Beach Elementary
North Palm Beach, Florida

“When you teach your son,
you teach your son’s son.”

—The Talmud



Bringing the Lessons Home

Building positive parent-teacher relationships



During the first few years of life, children learn more and at a faster pace than at any other time. Your baby was born to learn, and as a parent, you are your child's first and most important teacher. In those early years, you help shape your child's future through the kinds of experiences you provide. As years pass, and our children enter their first formal school experiences, we realize we are about to make room for the second most important person in our child's life: our child's teacher.

A positive parent-teacher relationship is key to children's school success. When children realize that a positive relationship exists between their parent(s) and their teacher, it demonstrates that the child can also trust their teacher, because you do. A positive relationship makes the child feel like the important people in his/her life are working together.

Communication is vital to making this relationship work. Parents need information about how and what their child is learning and the teacher needs feedback from parents about the child's social and academic development. As parents, we can strengthen communication by:

- Finding the right time to speak with the teacher. In a class of 30 students, it is respectful to say to a teacher, "When do you have a few minutes?" This will ensure that you have the teacher's full attention and shows that you understand the multiple responsibilities that a teacher has during specific times of the school day. If you need more time, ask for a time that will work for both of you.
- Coming prepared to conferences. Just as when we go prepared to a doctor visit with a list of questions, it is important to organize your thoughts for parent/teacher conferences. This helps parents maximize their time with teachers, which is typically limited at conferences.
- Writing short notes. Whether you e-mail or send a note directly through the school, parents can build the connection between home and school.
- Asking what you can do to help. Ask the teacher for specific ways that you can help support your child's learning at home.

Your child spends many hours in a school setting over the years. Communication is the key factor in making all relationships work and this holds especially true for the parent-teacher relationship. Every year, we as parents have the opportunity to model this for our children, thereby showing that we support them in all aspects of learning—academically, socially, and emotionally.

Communication is the key factor in making all relationships work and this holds especially true for the parent-teacher relationship.

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

Trayendo las Lecciones al Hogar

Creando relaciones positivas entre padres y maestros



La comunicación es un factor clave para que la relación funcione y esto es especialmente cierto para la relación entre padres y maestros.

Durante los primeros años de vida, los niños aprenden más y más rápido que en ningún otro tiempo. Su bebé nació para aprender, y como padre o madre, usted es el primer y más importante maestro/a. En esos primeros años, usted ayuda a forjar el futuro de su niño/a a través de las experiencias que usted provee. Al pasar de los años, y nuestros niños entran a sus primeras experiencias escolares formales, nos damos cuenta que tenemos que hacer lugar para la segunda persona más importante en la vida de nuestro niño/a: la maestro de nuestro niño/a.

Una relación positiva entre los padres y maestros es clave para el éxito en la escuela de los niños. Cuando los niños se dan cuenta de que existe una relación positiva entre sus padres y maestros, esto demuestra que el niño puede confiar en su maestro/a, porque usted lo hace. Una relación positiva hace que el niño sienta que gente importante en su vida está trabajando junta.

La comunicación es vital para que la relación funcione. Los padres necesitan información acerca de lo que su niño/a está aprendiendo y el maestro necesita que los padres le hablen del desarrollo social y académico. Como padres podemos fortalecer la comunicación:

- Encontrando el momento apropiado para hablar con el maestro/a. En una clase con 30 estudiantes, es respetuoso decir al maestro/a, "¿Cuándo tendrá unos pocos minutos?" Esto asegurará que usted tendrá toda la atención del maestro/a y demuestra que usted entiende las responsabilidades múltiples que el maestro/a tiene durante momentos específicos durante el día escolar. Si usted necesita más tiempo, pida un tiempo que sea conveniente para ambos.
- Viniendo preparado/a a la conferencia. Al igual que usted se prepara para ir al médico con una lista de preguntas, es importante organizar sus pensamientos para la conferencia entre padre y maestro. Esto ayuda a los padres a sacar mayor provecho del tiempo con los maestros, que típicamente está limitado en las conferencias.
- Escribiendo notas cortas. Ya sea que usted mande un e-mail o una nota directamente a través de la escuela, los padres pueden crear una conexión entre el hogar y la escuela.
- Preguntando a la maestro/a lo que usted puede hacer para ayudar. Pregunte al maestro/a por maneras específicas como usted puede apoyar el aprendizaje de su niño en el hogar.

Su niño pasa muchas horas en la escuela por muchos años. La comunicación es un factor clave para que la relación funcione y esto es especialmente cierto para la relación entre padres y maestros. Cada año, nosotros como padres tenemos la oportunidad de modelar para nuestros niños, por lo tanto tenemos que demostrar que les apoyamos en todos los aspectos del aprendizaje—académica, social y emocionalmente.

Siéntase en libertad de copiar esta página y compartirla con los padres del Primary Project.



Dear Teachers...

You are the heart of our schools.
You challenge our children's minds, as well as their hearts.
You teach them how to read, write, do math, and a whole lot more.
We owe you our gratitude and our respect.
For you are our "Dear Teachers."

You talk to us parents as if we've known each other for a long time.
You make us feel very comfortable when we sit and talk with you.
You are there to talk to us about our children.
You give us your all.
For you are our "Dear Teachers."

You teach our children to respect one another, and to respect their things.
Our children talk about you when they are at home.
It is always, "My teacher said this and that," with a smile on their faces.
We as parents thank you for caring about our children.

For talking to our children.
For trying to understand our children.
We could not do it without you.
We applaud you, for you are our "Dear Teachers."

*—Lillian Jones
Child Associate
Syracuse, NY School District*



children's
institute

STRENGTHENING SOCIAL AND
EMOTIONAL HEALTH



274 N. Goodman Street, Suite D103
Rochester, New York 14607
(585) 295-1000 (phone)
(585) 295-1090 (fax)
(877) 888-7647 (toll free)

www.childrensinstitute.net

Children's Institute is affiliated with the University of Rochester

A PUBLICATION OF CHILDREN'S INSTITUTE, INC.
A NOT-FOR-PROFIT AGENCY

Editor: Mary Anne Peabody
Deputy Director of National Services
mpeabody@childrensinstitute.net

Design: Mary Maiolo
Senior Graphics Coordinator

To receive this newsletter, please send your e-mail address to
cwalker@childrensinstitute.net