



From the Playroom

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Professional development

Welcome to the fall edition of *From the Playroom*. We enter the new school year with renewed energy and excitement regarding continual improvement for both our programs and ourselves. If you live near Children's Institute in Rochester, New York, you have opportunities to participate in professional development occurring near you on an annual basis. Those who are not so local can look to our national trainers to come to their locations for Primary Project related workshops. Near or far, the importance of keeping fresh, growing professionally, and collaborating with others is vital to those in any helping profession.

Join us this edition as we focus on "Creative ways to engage in professional development." Because our nationally certified schools need to keep up with professional development requirements, many creative Primary Project teams have found innovative ways to learn together beyond the typical workshop, training, or conference experience.

Enjoy contributions from Primary Project team members as they "grow" more deeply around issues related to children, play, data, families, and personal achievement.

***"Educating the mind
without educating
the heart is no
education at all."***

—Aristotle

In-House Professional Development Ideas

Now is the time to plan professional development opportunities for the rest of the year. If your school is in a city or near a university, you probably have many intriguing, readily accessible workshops available nearby. At the Lake Placid Elementary School, however, community-based professional development workshops are scarce. Over the years, we have developed some creative in-house professional development offerings that adapt easily to any Primary Project program setting. These ideas include:

Literature-based professional development

Each year, the members of our Primary Project team select a book that is pertinent to child-led play or working with young children. We read the book and then gather for a one to two hour discussion, facilitated by the Primary Project team supervisor. Usually, we purchase enough copies of the book so that all team members have their own copy. Some years, when money was short, we obtained copies from local libraries. Early on, we started with Garry Landreth's classic book *Play Therapy: The Art of the Relationship*. Although Landreth's book is for children in counseling, it clearly outlines the relational nature, skills, and child-centered theoretical approach, which are also the underpinnings of the child-led play approach for children in Primary Project. Landreth and his colleagues have continued to provide books and professional development experiences that teach these skills to parents, teachers, and other child-serving professionals (like child associates). Since this particular book is expensive, we purchased one copy and selected pertinent chapters. Child associates read the selections at home or during breaks in the work day, such as when a child was absent. Most recently, we read *The Whole-Brain Child* by Daniel Siegle and Tina Payne Bryson. The information in this book supported a lively discussion of current neuroscience and the importance of relationships in child development.



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Video-based professional development

Some years, our team purchases a video specific to child-led play. As a professional development activity, the members of our Primary Project team gather to watch the video and review basic elements of child-led play. Logically, we started with the DVDs available from the Children's Institute, including *The Intervention/Basic Skills* and *Possibilities of Play: Building Connections*. We also purchased several DVDs from The Center for Play Therapy (CPT) including *Therapeutic Limit Setting* and *Understanding Play Behavior and Themes*. You might want to check out the Product section of the CPT website. There is a terrific selection of DVDs on child-centered play therapy and child-led play. Again, the role of the supervisor is to guide and facilitate the similarities and differences of the Primary Project program and therapy.

Care to share?

When one of the members of the Primary Project team at our school attends a professional development workshop related to children or child-led play, that person is always given the opportunity to share what he/she has learned. If the team member agrees, time is set aside at a monthly Primary Project team meeting for the person to present. This sharing can include an overview of the workshop, new information, notes taken, PowerPoints, etc. Most recently, with permission, the mental health professional on our team shared the PowerPoint from Dr. Rebekah Crofford, the keynote speaker at the Primary Project Conference last fall. PowerPoints from workshops are often available online and are easy to share. (Note: be sure to check for copyright restrictions before you share another professional's original work.)

*—Mary C. Michelfelder, LMHC, RPT-S, NCC, NCSC
Professional School Counselor, Lake Placid Elementary School*

Collegial Circles

Often times I hear child associates say, "I would like to get together with other child associates and hear their ideas," or, "I wonder how other child associates would handle that playroom experience?" Last year at Children's Institute we offered a series of three collegial circles to Rochester City School District child associates, facilitated by the Primary Project consultant for the district. Collegiality is defined as "solving problems with colleagues; working together to support one another with best practices, advice, and a shared understanding of the profession." In the Rochester City School District, most buildings have only one child associate providing Primary Project services, so it is possible there could be times that a child associate might feel a bit isolated or "cut off" from others in their professional group. Collegial circles have allowed small groups of child associates to come together to share resources and experiences, solve common problems, share opinions, and discuss common needs and questions. This model might easily be adapted in other districts to promote collaboration, draw on experiences, and learn from one another.

If you are geographically close enough to bring child associates together from your own districts or nearby districts, consider the concept of collegial circles. Below, Betsy Frarey, an experienced child associate in the Rochester City School District, shares what these circles meant to her professional learning.

The small group collegial circles for Primary Project child associates were an intimate and comfortable way to connect with each other and share our experiences. Participating in the circles built a feeling of togetherness that we need and appreciate, as we mostly work in separate school buildings. What a subtle way to provide social/emotional support for those of us directly working with students!

I especially enjoyed being in a group with a new child associate, whose energy was contagious. She was excited and curious, with an authentic desire to learn. I could share from my experiences as to how I might respond to a student's statement in the playroom, but also be pushed to think about my practice in a new way by her questions and ideas.

The groups were largely self-directed, but our consultant was there to facilitate, re-state, or summarize as needed. This model, of course, is faithful to the Primary Project program, in which support of autonomy and continuous improvement/self-reflection are integral.

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

Even the Trainers Need Training!

In late June, our Primary Project new project trainers gathered together to share best practices and look for ways to improve our training. The core values, objectives, and experiential activities were all discussed and reviewed to continually challenge and improve our way of ensuring customer satisfaction.



Pictured above, left to right:

Shelley Sanyshyn, Children's Institute
Deborah Johnson, Children's Institute
Sarah Gheen, Arkansas
Mary Anne Peabody, Children's Institute
Mary Michelfelder, Lake Placid, NY
Mary Carol Deering, Williamsville, NY
Lynn Smith, Children's Institute

*"Watch how I play if
you want to know what
I am feeling.
Listen—not only to words.
I 'say it through play'...
so listen and watch."
—Ruth Reardon*

Growing Professionally...Changes



Keeping with the theme of this edition, it is with bittersweet emotions that I pass the position of Director of Primary Project back to my mentor and friend, Debbie Johnson. My professional dream of teaching at the higher education level has come true. I have accepted a faculty position in Social and Behavioral Sciences at the University of Southern Maine at Lewiston-Auburn effective September 2013. This position offers the versatility to shape the lives of individuals who aspire to work in counseling and/or early childhood. As a firm believer that anyone who comes in contact with children can impact them therapeutically, I look forward to this new professional growth opportunity. Luckily, I am a "Primary Project lifer" – it is in my blood and I look forward to supporting a service learning model of Primary Project at my new position. Goodbyes come as a part of life and I try to embrace each one by reflecting on the lessons and relationships that have enriched my journey. I will continue to stay connected with all my dear Primary Project colleagues (who have become my extended family) and will continue to advocate for the importance of early identification, relational based interventions, and a world that understands the value of play.

Warmly, Mary Anne Peabody

Ready, Set, Practice, Adjust, Go!

These words represent just some of the steps involved when conducting research. Last year, we worked with two school districts to get Primary Project up and running, meeting new people, fostering new learning, and creating new opportunities. Also, this fall we will begin the Randomized Controlled Trial (RCT) at two elementary schools located south of Rochester. During the 2012 school year, we worked together to get build skills, establish relationships, and prepare everyone for the trial this year! Special thanks to everyone who has been part of the work and will continue to be involved during this school year. Stay tuned!

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

Bringing the Lessons Home

Helpful tips for the start of the school year

As parents, we are continually learning right alongside our children. With the start of the school year, it is normal to have questions such as, “what will my child learn this year?” and “what will the expectations be of him/her?” Below are a couple of helpful tips to keep in mind as the new year begins:

1. Remember that positive student achievement is linked to parent connection to the school community. Seek out opportunities to meet with your child’s teacher. Ongoing communication throughout the year is essential for staying in touch with your child’s progress.
2. Utilize school websites. Many districts’ websites have helpful links for parents that can be valuable tools to understanding curriculum, student expectations, school events, and ways that parents can become involved.

Another new school year also means our children are turning another year older and continuing to move along in their development (gross motor, fine motor, language, cognition, and social-emotional skills). While we wonder about each new developmental stage, it is important to know what to expect so that we are prepared to know how best to respond.

Here are some suggestions for learning about stages of development and recognizing where your child is in his/her development:

1. Check out some online resources that are available for parents of early school-age children. There are many webpages out there to explore, but we suggest:
www.pbs.org/parents
www.education.com/topic/developmental-milestones-ages-5-8
2. Consult with your child’s pediatrician. Ask any questions or voice whatever concerns you may have around your child’s development. Pediatricians are a great source of information.
3. Visit your local library. There are many parental resources and your librarian can point you where to start looking for useful books, magazines, videos, and more.

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



Trayendo las Lecciones al Hogar

Consejos para el comienzo del año escolar

Como padres, nosotros aprendemos continuamente junto con nuestros niños. Con el comienzo del año escolar, es normal tener preguntas tales como, "¿qué aprenderá mi niño/a este año? y ¿qué se espera de él/ella"? Abajo hay un par de consejos para recordar al comienzo del año:

1. Recuerde que el logro positivo del estudiante está enlazado con la conexión de los padres con la comunidad escolar. Busque las oportunidades para reunirse con el maestro/a de su niño/a. La comunicación que continúa durante el año es esencial para conocer el progreso de su niño/a.
2. Use los sitios web. Muchos de los sitios web de los distritos tienen enlaces útiles para los padres que pueden ser instrumentos valiosos para entender el currículo, lo que se espera de los estudiantes, eventos escolares y las maneras como los padres pueden participar.

Otro año escolar significa también que nuestros niños están siendo un año mayor y siguen desarrollándose (destrezas de movimientos gruesos, movimientos finos, lenguaje, cognición y social-emocional). Aunque nosotros nos preguntamos acerca de cada nueva etapa del desarrollo, es importante saber qué es lo que debemos esperar de manera que estemos preparados para saber cómo responder.

Aquí ofrecemos algunas sugerencias para aprender acerca de las etapas del desarrollo y reconocer dónde está su niño/a en su desarrollo:

1. Busque algunos de los recursos en línea disponibles para los padres de niños en los primeros años de edad escolar. Existen muchas páginas web para explorar, pero nosotros sugerimos:
www.pbs.org/parents
www.education.com/topic/developmental-milestones-ages-5-8
2. Consulte con el pediatra de su niño. Hágale preguntas o exprese cualquier preocupación que pueda tener respecto al desarrollo de su niño/a. Los pediatras son una gran fuente de información.
3. Visite su biblioteca local. Hay muchos recursos para los padres y su bibliotecario/a puede ayudarle a encontrar dónde empezar a buscar libros, revistas, videos y otros recursos útiles.

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



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