



# From the Playroom

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## Expanding professional development

For young Primary Project programs the first few years are filled with new learning opportunities. Your school-based teams experience many "firsts." Similar to how we watch young children experience their "firsts." These learnings are filled with curiosity, excitement, and sometimes frustration. In the early years of program implementation you are building relationships with school staff, learning the process for screening, selection of students, becoming comfortable with newly learned child-led play skills, and figuring out data collection timelines. These are just a few of the activities – there is much more that is encountered along the way!

As the years pass a new challenge emerges. How do seasoned child associates and supervisors keep excited about their own professional development? How do we "keep fresh" and excited about the work that we do?

In this edition of *From the Playroom*, the main article focuses on expanding professional development by encouraging teams to be creative and look beyond the traditional methods of staff development. Looking for new ways to grow keeps us pushing, reaching, and stretching to keep our programs vibrant.



# Professional Development

We focus in this edition on creative ways to engage in professional development. 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, multiple opportunities exist throughout the year to participate in professional development. For those of you further away, our national trainers are available to travel to your location for Primary Project related workshops. Near or far, the importance of keeping fresh, growing professionally, and collaborating with others is vital in any helping profession. To remain aligned with program best practices, schools keep up with professional development using innovative ways to learn together beyond the typical workshop, training, or conference experience.



## In-house professional development ideas

Now is the time to plan professional development for the year ahead. If your school is located within a city or near a university, you may have many intriguing, readily accessible workshops available nearby. Some schools are in regions where community-based professional development workshops are limited or accessibility is a challenge. Over the years, schools and Primary Project teams have developed in-house professional development offerings that adapt easily to the Primary Project setting. These ideas include:

### **Literature-based professional development**

Select a book that is pertinent to child-led play or working with young children and provide a copy to each member of the team. If Primary Project funds are not available to purchase enough books, inquiring at your local library is an option. Everyone reads the book and then gathers for an extended discussion facilitated by the Primary Project team supervisor. A popular selection may be Garry Landreth's classic book *Play Therapy: The Art of the Relationship*. While 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). Other book choices may be *The Whole-Brain Child* by Daniel Siegel and Tina Payne Bryson or *Play: How it Shapes the Brain, Opens the Imagination, and Invigorates the Soul* by Dr. Stuart Brown.

# Professional Development

## **Video-based professional development**

Videos/DVDs are another source of professional development. Teams can gather to watch the video and connect key concepts to the work of Primary Project. There are DVDs available from Children's Institute including *The Intervention/Basic Skills* and *Possibilities of Play: Building Connections*. Another resource to consider is the Center for Play Therapy website. Under their "product" section are several DVDs on child-centered play including *Therapeutic Limit Setting* and *Understanding Play Behavior and Themes*.

## **Care to share?**

Training costs money and there may be times when the whole team is not able to attend together. When only one member of the Primary Project team attends a professional development workshop related to children or child-led play, that individual can return to the site and share what he/she has learned. Bringing together schools within the district or neighboring districts allows opportunity to network, share content from the training, and extend the learning.

## **Collegial circles**

It is not uncommon that only one child associate is in a building. This may be isolating as no one else in the building engages in the work they do. Child associates benefit from peer interactions to share best practices, and to hear how associates may handle different playroom experiences. 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." If Primary Project exists in your district across several buildings it may be beneficial to set a schedule where associates come together 3-4 times a year for this purpose.

No matter which professional development option your team chooses, the supervisor's role is to first review the content, determine its appropriateness for the group, and then guide and facilitate a discussion that relates to Primary Project and the skills used in the playroom. Don't forget to document your work dedicated to ongoing training!

We are never too old or know all that we need to know – we are continually learning all the time! Some of the professional development will mean "unlearning" and then learning new ways to work with children.

**Visit our website at [www.childrensinstitute.net/training](http://www.childrensinstitute.net/training) for 2016-2017 training opportunities**

# Creating Spaces

The start of the school year brings lots of excitement! There is a buzz about teacher assignments, back to school shopping, purchasing new school supplies, and the list goes on. In Primary Project when child associates return to the school building, beginning to set up their playroom brings the same kind of enthusiasm. Creating our playroom spaces is very important. While the intervention allows for children to lead, we create playroom space to feel safe, comfortable, and inviting. We “structure” our space to include expressive toys and materials – there’s no right or wrong way to play with the toys. As you begin the new year here are some considerations to help as you prepare your play spaces:

- As you unpack boxes this year and prepare your rooms, reflect on the item and ask yourself “has it engaged children’s interest?” “Is it age appropriate for the children you serve?” If not, consider removing it from your playroom.
- You should have a wide range of toys that allow for imaginative/creative play and can allow for a wide range of emotions. For example, play-doh can be very calming, it can also allow children to squeeze, pinch, and punch to express feelings of anger or frustration.
- Generally, toys should include an assortment from three main categories: Aggressive (i.e. soft ball, cars, play-doh), real life/nurturing (kitchen set, dolls), and creative (sand, plain paper, markers). Having a balance from all of the categories is important.
- After your room is set up, get down on your knees (which is usually the same height as children you will see) and make sure items are within children’s reach. If they are not, make adjustments that are needed.

Once your playroom is set up you are ready to go! Best wishes for a year filled with imaginative play!



## 13 reasons to become certified...

- C** Children deserve quality implementation
- E** Excellence in programming
- R** Reflective process
- T** Team building at it’s best
- I** Includes parents, teachers & administrators
- F** Focus on program standards
- I** Improve communication
- C** Credibility
- A** Attention to positive outcomes for children
- T** Time to assess readiness
- I** Interest to your funding stakeholders
- O** Objective evaluation
- N** Never stop growing

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Rochester, NY
- Sodus Elementary School  
Sodus, NY
- Stuart M. Townsend Elementary School  
Lake Luzerne, NY
- Union East Elementary School  
Cheektowaga, NY
- Woodland Elementary School  
East Syracuse, NY
- West Carthage Elementary School

## Congratulations!

For more information on certification, contact Arlene Bobin toll free at (877) 888-7647, ext. 266.

# Bringing the Lessons Home

## Encouraging children's efforts

Walk through any elementary school and you'll hear, "good job," "great work," "wonderful!" These have become common praises for students' work and effort. While praising children can be fine, praise too often turns into "over-praising" and does not reflect what we noticed the child doing to receive the "good job." The trouble with praise, is that children begin to expect constant positive, verbal acknowledgment, rather than developing internal motivation and confidence in their developing abilities. Another challenge is that "good job" does not relay what was observed. If an adult wants to encourage a child who picked up all the markers and returned them to their rightful place, better than saying "good job" which is vague, an encouraging statement may be, "I noticed that you put the markers back where you found them, now the next person can easily find them!"



In Primary Project we encourage children's efforts that are meaningful, and describe what the child is doing. You might expect a Primary Project Child Associate to say to a child who is drawing, "You put a lot of thought into that picture. I see that you used lots of colors, and that you drew all over the page."

To improve our communication with young children, and to tap into their internal motivation, teachers or parents could try statements such as, "You asked two friends for help on your math problems – and you didn't give up!" Or, "I noticed that you are working on reading. You picked a book with a lot more words on each page." Encouraging (versus praising) requires that we are mindful and don't "good job" everything a child does, but rather we note what we observe regarding the efforts a child puts forth.

Adults support children's healthy social, emotional, and academic development through encouraging statements by giving better, specific information. This encouragement:

- Builds children's determination, confidence, and ability to persevere through problems
- Emphasizes effort, progress, and improvement – rather than just results
- Deemphasizes unhealthy competition between children; encouragement does not measure one child against the next regarding whose work is best!

Encouragement is a useful strategy for parents. For the child, it can help motivate, support healthy risk-taking, and resilience – a nudge that lets him or her feel, "Keep on going, you can do this!" As parents, encouraging your child helps him or her achieve tiny steps toward independence. Instead of the child thinking, "This won't work," we send a message, "This is tough but, with effort, you are figuring it out!"

–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

## Estimular los esfuerzos de los niños

Camine por cualquier escuela primaria y usted oír, “¡bien hecho!,” “¡buen trabajo!,” “¡estupendo!” Estas han llegado a ser alabanzas comunes para el trabajo y esfuerzo de los estudiantes. Mientras que alabar a los niños puede ser bueno, alabar demasiado a menudo se convierte en “sobre alabar” y no refleja que nos dimos cuenta de lo que el niño(a) estaba haciendo para recibir el “buen trabajo.” El problema con alabar es que los niños comienzan a esperar constantemente reconocimiento verbal positivo más bien que desarrollar motivación interna y confianza en sus habilidades que están desarrollándose. Otro desafío es que “buen trabajo” no comunica lo que fue observado. Si un adulto quiere estimular a un niño(a) que recogió todas las crayolas y las puso en su lugar correcto, mejor que decir “buen trabajo” es una declaración que estimula que puede ser, “me di cuenta que pusiste las crayolas donde las habías encontrado, ahora la próxima persona las puede encontrar fácilmente.”



En el Proyecto Primario estimulamos los esfuerzos de los niños que tienen sentido y describimos lo que el niño(a) está haciendo. Usted puede esperar que un Asociado del Proyecto Primario de Niños diga a un niño(a) que está dibujando, “Pensaste mucho al hacer este dibujo. Veo que usaste muchos colores y que dibujaste en toda la página.”

Para mejorar nuestra comunicación con niños jóvenes y aprovechar su motivación interna, los maestros o padres pueden tratar de hacer declaraciones tales como, “Pediste a dos amigos ayuda para tus problemas en matemática – ¡y no te rendiste!” O, “me di cuenta que estás trabajando en leer más. Cogiste un libro con muchas más palabras en cada página.” Estimular (versus alabar) requiere que estemos atentos y no digamos “buen trabajo” por todo lo que un niño(a) hace, pero más bien que notemos lo que observamos en cuanto a los esfuerzos que el niño(a) está haciendo.

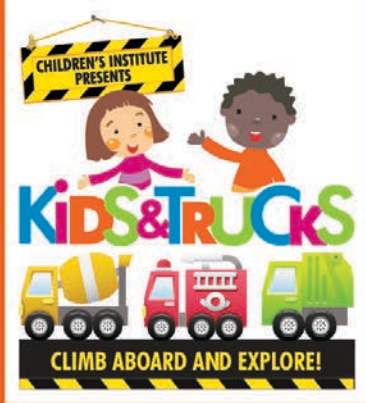
Los adultos apoyan el desarrollo social, emocional y académico saludable de los niños por declaraciones que estimulan al ofrecer información mejor y específica. Este estímulo:

- Edifica en los niños la determinación, confianza y capacidad de perseverar cuando tienen problemas
- Enfatiza el esfuerzo, progreso y mejora – más bien que solamente los resultados
- Pone menos énfasis en competencia poco saludable entre niños; el estímulo no mide a un niño(a) contra otro en cuanto a cuál trabajo es mejor!

Estimular es una estrategia buena para los padres. Para el niño(a), esto puede ayudar a motivar, apoya el asumir riesgos saludables, y le hace sentir, “¡Sigue adelante, tú puedes hacer esto!” Para los padres, el estimular a su niño(a) le ayuda a dar pasitos hacia la independencia. En vez de que el niño(a) piense, “Esto no va a trabajar,” enviamos un mensaje, “¡Esto es duro, pero, con esfuerzo, tú puedes resolverlo!”

–Lynn Smith, LMSW  
Trabajadora Social, Children’s Institute

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