

Sarah Lawrence College Faculty part of “In Defense Of Childhood” City College Conference

New York, NY— Faculty, staff, and alumni affiliated with Sarah Lawrence College's Child Development Institute presented information and perspectives about early childhood learning at a conference at City College in Manhattan, "In Defense Of Childhood: Keeping the Joy of Learning Alive," attended by several hundred participants in March. Workshops and panels included:

“Keeping Play in the Classroom: Defending Childhood to Parents” a workshop, lead by Lorayne Carbon, Director of the Early Childhood Center, which explored different views of the merits and on the role and value of play in the classroom. The workshop asked the question, how can parents become “allies” in the fight to keep play firmly grounded in early childhood classrooms and other educational settings, when educators, school administrators, child development specialists, and even politicians cannot seem to agree about the value of play in educational settings.

“Prospect Center’s Descriptive Review of a Child: Knowing the Whole Child to Teach the Whole Child” A workshop, lead by Mary Hebron, the Associate Director, Art of Teaching Graduate Program, and Jerusha Beckerman, a graduate student in the Art of Teaching Graduate Program, to recognize the role descriptive inquiry – based on the careful observing and describing of children and their work using the lens of the five headings of the *Prospect Descriptive Review of the Child*, by Patricia F. Carini – to support each child as a person, thinker and learner. The workshop placed great emphasis on the value of the Prospect Descriptive Processes for teacher education.

“Teaching Toward Wholeness: The Aesthetic in Education,” an interactive workshop, lead by Kathleen Ruen, Art of Teaching Graduate Program Faculty member, based on an article by the same name published in Encounter Magazine. After a short philosophical presentation, participants worked in small groups to uncover how the forms of dance, theater, visual art, and music could inform their own pedagogy. At the conclusion, participants used art materials to create a piece of work that reflected their own tone of teaching.

“Drawing, Storytelling and Early Literacy,” a workshop, lead by Barbara Schecter, Director of the Child Development Graduate Program, and Sonna Schupak, a Teacher in the Early Childhood Center, focused on how drawing and storytelling contributes to children’s beginning awareness and exploration of reading and writing. They explained that those first pictures painted and drawn by very young children, connect to their literacy development. From pictures, words follow leading to increasingly competent and complex modes of self-expression. The workshop screened and discussed the film “From Pictures To Words”, made for The Learning Child Series, a collaboration of Sarah Lawrence College’s Child Development Institute and Jonathan Diamond Associates.

“When Learning Comes Naturally: Children and Teachers Exploring the Outside World” A workshop by Early Childhood Center Teachers, Susan Schwimmer and Hannah Sunshine, which featured screening of the film *When Learning Comes Naturally*, a documentary that raises awareness about the importance of connecting young people to their environment. The screening

was followed by discussion on the relationship between children and nature, school greening, gardens, sustainable communities, and ways to facilitate a lasting connection to the environment.

“Finland Phenomenon: What’s behind the top international ranking school system and what does it mean for U.S. school systems” A workshop lead by, Sara Wilford, Director of the Art of Teaching Graduate Program, Jan Drucker, Psychology Faculty at Sarah Lawrence College, and Indhira Blackwood, Director of the Child Development Institute, which focused on Finland's school system, which today is consistently ranked as the top international education system, which was not always the case. The workshop explored how Finland got there and how are they staying at the top. Through excerpts from the film: *The Finland Phenomenon: Inside the World’s Most Surprising School System*, the workshop explored some of the key features that define Finland’s approach to education, and how (or if) these elements and philosophies be modified and applied in the U.S. education system.

“Making the Case for Play,” Together, Margery Franklin, of the Childhood Development Institute, and Jan Drucker, Psychology Faculty at Sarah Lawrence College, lead a session addressed to parents, teachers, and administrators who find themselves wondering about and working to make the case for the importance of imaginative play in all aspects of young children’s development. The film “When a Child Pretends” was shown, followed by a facilitated discussion of the crucial role such play serves in and of itself and as preparation for later learning and growth.

“The Good Childhood’: An overview of Nordic Perspectives on Caring and Teaching,” This workshop, lead by Sara Wilford, Director of the Art of Teaching Graduate Program, Sarah Mathews, teacher in the Early Childhood Center, Therese Reksnes, a student in the Art of Teaching Graduate Program, discussed the fact that despite distinctions between the Nordic countries, all five nations are in agreement about basic concepts that constitute “the good childhood.” These may be characterized as Democracy (as a lived experience in schools), Egalitarianism, Cooperation, and Freedom. The workshop explored these ideas and their implications for teachers of young children based on the facilitators’ experiences at a recent symposium on Nordic approaches to early childhood.

“Play and the Natural World: Children and Animals,” A workshop lead by William Crain, Professor of Psychology at CCNY, and Lorayne Carbon, Director of the Early Childhood Center, which addressed the importance of involvement with nature for children’s development. It featured a video screening and discussion of the benefits of children’s involvement with animal care and the similarities between children’s and animals/ need to play.

The conference closing panel, included Sarah Lawrence Faculty member and Director of the Graduate Art of Teaching Program, Sara Wilford, who addressed “The Good Childhood/The Good School: Giving Our Children What They Deserve.” Wilford spoke on the global perspective.