

SARAH · LAWRENCE · COLLEGE

Child Development Institute  
Annual Report  
August 2013-August 2014



## Mission and Point of View

The Child Development Institute (CDI) was established in 1987 by a dedicated group of faculty. As an outreach arm of Sarah Lawrence College, CDI's mission is to promote a developmentally informed view of children, childhood, and education and to act as an internal resource on campus and in the community. CDI carries out its mission through public events, professional development programs, and outreach and collaborative projects.

In the progressive education perspective with which CDI identifies, the child is viewed as an individual in the social context, actively engaged in constructing knowledge through interactions with other people and the physical environment. CDI believes that the child's educational experience should encompass social, emotional, and imaginative aspects of life in concert with intellectual development and that schools and other institutions be developed as communities that attend to the interests and needs of children from diverse backgrounds. CDI emphasizes that the individual child, as well as groups of children, should always be considered in the context of their environments—family, neighborhood, school, and culture.

## Faces of CDI

The Child Development Institute staff consists of Indhira Blackwood, CDI Director, and Sandra Norton, CDI and Art of Teaching Administrative Assistant. CDI staff work closely with the CDI Faculty Advisory Group: Lorayne Carbon, Jan Drucker, Kim Ferguson, Barbara Schechter, and CDI Professional Advisory Board Chair, Abigail Canfield. CDI has three consultants who offer their expertise: Sara Wilford, Margery B. Franklin and Yvette Richardson; and an advisory board made up of Sarah Lawrence alumnae/i and professionals in education, social work, developmental psychology, media, and advocacy, as well as others with a strong interest in children and child development. Teachers from Sarah Lawrence College's Early Childhood Center, community adventure play experience facilitators, and volunteers are also key faces of CDI.

## Public Events

A series of public events sponsored by CDI each year brings the College community together with colleagues, experts, community partners, students at other institutions of higher education, and the public at large for lively presentations and discussions on a range of topics germane to children and childhood.

### Cynthia Longfellow Lecture

The Longfellow Lecture is an annual event, initiated in the first year of CDI (1987) and funded by an endowment established by friends and family of Cynthia Longfellow (SLC '72).

The 2014 lecture, "Building a Good Foundation" was presented by Dr. Lilian Katz on April 9, 2014 to over 270 faculty, staff, students, parents, and community members. Dr. Katz is Professor Emerita of Early Childhood Education at the University of Illinois (Urbana-Champaign) where she serves on the staff of the Clearinghouse on Early Education and Parenting. Dr. Katz is a Past President of the National Association for the Education of Young Children and the first President of the Illinois Association for the Education of Young Children. She is Editor of the first on-line peer reviewed trilingual early childhood journal, *Early Childhood Research & Practice*.

"What a rare and exceptional opportunity to meet a true early childhood legend. She and her messages are more relevant and critical now than ever before. Thank you from the bottom of my heart for an hour and a half of pure inspiration that will last a lifetime in our classrooms."

– 2014 Longfellow Lecture Attendee

### Thomas H. Wright Lecture

In 1996, the Leon Lowenstein Foundation gave a grant to launch a fund in child development honoring Thomas H. Wright, former member of the Sarah Lawrence College Board of Trustees. The Lowenstein Foundation

provided additional funds in subsequent years. Following consultation, the decision was made to use the income from the fund to establish an annual lecture, the Thomas H. Wright Lecture. Since 1997, the lecture has been the keynote of the Empowering Teachers program.

The 2014 Wright Lecture, "Asking Questions and Trusting What You're Told," was given by Dr. Paul Harris on July 14, 2014 to over 120 educators, faculty, staff, students, parents, and community members. Dr. Harris is a developmental psychologist with interests in cognition, emotion, and imagination. He holds the Victor S. Thomas Professorship of Education at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. He currently studies how young children learn about history, science, and religion on the basis of what trusted informants tell them. His latest book, published by Harvard University Press (May 2012) describes his research. *Trusting What You're Told: How Children Learn from Others* has received the Eleanor Maccoby Award from the American Psychological Association and the Book Award of the Cognitive Development Society.

*"The lecture was interesting and informative. It made me reflect more about children's questions and sparked my interest in the research being done on this topic."*

– 2014 Wright Lecture Attendee

## Professional Development Programs

Professional development programs are a core commitment for CDI. These programs provide meaningful educational experiences for participants; keep the CDI's thinking and practice energetic and informed; and serve as laboratories for exploring ideas. These programs for the first time also offered participants the opportunity to participate in the program, fulfill requirements, and obtain graduate credit.

### **Play's the Thing: Facilitating Play for Young Children**

The Facilitating Play program was established in 2008 as an outgrowth of CDI's strong interest in promoting and strengthening children's play. With start-up funding from Community Playthings, this program has now served 154 professionals who are engaged with children's play, including early childhood teachers, social workers, therapists, children's museum educators, playground developers, parks department personnel, and graduate students in the Art of Teaching and Child Development programs. Sarah Lawrence College faculty and distinguished guest presenters facilitate the program each year.

The 2014 Facilitating Play program ran from June 22-26 and brought together 15 participants from diverse organizations. The program kicked off with a Community Adventure Play Experience (CAPE) at the Sarah Lawrence College Center for the Urban River at Beczak (CURB) in Yonkers, NY on the first day. The curriculum focused on a broad range of issues, including the developmental importance of play; observation and documentation of children's play; the role of environment in facilitating play; play in cultural contexts; play therapy; and play space design and advocacy. The participants' evaluations of the Facilitating Play program were very positive.

*"This program & these individuals completely exceeded and reinvented my sense of learning, my views of the educational field and what is possible!"*

– 2014 Facilitating Play Participant

### **Empowering Teachers**

The Empowering Teachers program was established in 1989 as a forum for professional development and support for teachers, administrators, and other professionals working with children in early childhood, elementary, and middle school settings. Sarah Lawrence College faculty and distinguished guest presenters facilitate the exploration of each year's central theme. The Empowering Teachers program typically opens with a keynote address, the Thomas H. Wright Lecture. The program has served as a resource and network for more than 365 beginning and experienced professionals from school districts in Westchester and adjacent

counties in New York, Connecticut, and New Jersey, as well as regions as far flung as Florida, Georgia, Michigan, California, Texas, Maine, and Venezuela.

The 2014 Empowering Teachers program was held from July 14-18 and attended by 15 participants. The program had a mix of teachers and administrators who work with children from infancy through middle childhood. Under the theme of *“Children’s Questions and their Centrality in Learning: An Endangered Species in Today’s Classrooms,”* educators explored the roles children’s questions play in their learning and how as educators they can make room for children’s creativity, imagination, and curiosity in the current school climate. Workshops provided participants the opportunity to discuss and reflect on children’s questions and learn ways to nurture children’s questions and keep them at the center of their learning experience. Participants had a chance to experiment, investigate, create, and problem-solve with squishy circuits and ball runs at the New York Hall of Science. The program concluded with guest speaker Elizabeth Phillips, Principal of PS. 321 in Brooklyn, discussing her school community’s efforts to advocate for change in education, particularly with high-stakes testing and teacher evaluations, and ways in which schools, teachers, administrators, and parents can come together to be voices and agents of change. The participants’ evaluations of the Empowering Teachers program were very positive.

*“I knew it would be informative. However, I did not expect to experience the level of camaraderie and shared learning that has taken place. I feel so nourished.”*

– 2014 Empowering Teachers Participant

A significant portion of the Empowering Teachers program continues to be funded through income from the Thomas H. Wright Fund (including the Wright Lecture and other faculty expenses), as well as through CDI endowment funds generously supplemented by donations from Mariela Cisneros (in 2003) and Mary Lynn Bianco (via The Marclad Foundation in 2006).

### **Teaching the Environment**

In collaboration with the Sarah Lawrence College Center for the Urban River at Beczak (CURB), CDI established and held its inaugural *Teaching the Environment* program, an intensive week-long professional development program with an environmental education focus. Through hands-on sessions, field experiences, dialogue, and readings, the program aimed to support participants’ integration of theory, research, and practice to further their understanding and articulation of educational content covered during the week, but also of their teaching practices.

The 2014 Teaching the Environment program was held from August 4 - 8 and attended by 12 participants. The program had a mix of educators who work with children from early childhood through high school. Set on the banks of the Hudson River in downtown Yonkers at CURB and Sarah Lawrence College campus, this year’s program theme was *“Discovering Urban Landscapes.”* The program included sessions on the significance of children being in nature starting from when they are very young and field trips to CURB, Greyston Community Gardens, Bronx Zoo, Botanical Gardens, and Science Barge sparked ideas and examples of activities that can be integrated into the curriculum. The program also included a social and environmental justice walk through downtown Yonkers highlighting the realities and challenges of balancing urban redevelopment with economic justice and environmental sustainability. Small break-out sessions and large group discussions provided opportunities for the teachers to process their experiences, brainstorm about how best to implement such activities in their own classrooms, and share ideas, concerns, and questions. The program concluded with keynote, *“Raising Sustainability Natives: K-12 Education’s Critical Role”* by Katie Ginsberg, Founder and Executive Director of Children’s Environmental Literacy Foundation (CELFL). Over 40 members of the local community came to hear Ms. Ginsberg speak about the education for sustainability framework and steps individuals and schools can take to integrate sustainability education into their curriculums and communities. The participants’ evaluations of the Teaching the Environment program were very positive.

*“This was a really valuable experience. I appreciated the vast amount of ideas, programs and materials covered. The diversity of the group was also interesting and I gained a lot from hearing the different perspectives and issues.”*

– 2014 Teaching the Environment Participant

This program was partially funded through a grant from Community Playthings to support startup costs and scholarships for participants.

## Outreach and Collaborative Projects

In accordance with its mission, CDI pursues a range of outreach initiatives and collaborative projects.

### Community Adventure Play Experiences

Community adventure play experiences (CAPE) are created by children using “loose parts” –cardboard boxes, tires, fabric, plastic bottles, recyclables, wood, and other materials. Community adventure play experiences encourage children to use their imaginations, develop initiative, collaborate, and problem-solve using materials from their own communities.

CDI first collaborated on a CAPE with Groundwork Hudson Valley on September 11, 2010 at Yonkers Riverfest. This past year, Child Development Institute facilitated seven CAPEs for children in neighboring communities:

- **Hunts Point Alliance for Children** (Bronx, NY) – In September 2013, CDI collaborated with Hunts Point Alliance for Children to bring a CAPE to over 100 children in the Hunts Point neighborhood.
- **Philipse Manor Hall** (Yonkers, NY) – In October 2013, CDI collaborated with Philipse Manor Hall to bring a CAPE to 20 children and their families.
- **Sarah Lawrence College Winter CAPE** (Yonkers, NY) – In February 2014, CDI hosted its first winter CAPE for over 50 children and parents.
- **Sarah Lawrence College Mayfair** (Yonkers, NY) – In May 2014, CDI hosted a CAPE as part of Mayfair on campus for over 60 children.
- **Sarah Lawrence College Center for the Urban River at Beczak** (Yonkers, NY) – In June 2014, as part of CDI’s Facilitating Play for Young Children program, CDI staff and program participants brought a CAPE to 20 children and their families.
- **Iglesia Memorial de San Andres** (Yonkers, NY) – In July 2014, CDI facilitated two CAPEs for 32 children attending summer camp at Iglesia Memorial de San Andres.

CDI also hosted facilitator training sessions in the fall and spring for SLC students interested in facilitating CAPEs for children.

### Workshop and Speakers Bureau

In 2009, CDI formally launched a Workshop and Speakers Bureau and enlisted the expertise of the ECC teachers to expand its capacity to reach beyond the campus community to connect directly with groups committed to facilitating lifelong learning. Funding from the Marilyn M. Simpson Charitable Trust, the Wallace Global Fund, and a number of individual donors supported the Bureau’s launch. CDI’s programs are designed for educators, school administrators, children’s librarians, parents, community coalitions, and others who are involved in promoting children’s creativity and healthy development. CDI addresses a range of topics and issues around children, childhood, and education, including but not limited to play, early literacy, ethics, and children and nature.

During the past year, CDI conducted the following workshops:

- **White Plains Library** (White Plains, NY): In October 2013, CDI conducted a play workshop for parents and children as part of the White Plains Library's Parent/Child Connection program.
- **Riverfront Library** (Yonkers, NY): In April 2014, CDI facilitated a workshop for parents on navigating the common core at Riverfront Library.

Also, in collaboration with the Office of Community Partnerships and Art of Teaching Graduate Program, the Child Development Institute held a math and language arts tutoring workshop for 20 Sarah Lawrence College students and community partners (Iglesia Memorial de San Andres, Reading Buddies, Bronxville High School) who work with elementary school children.

### **Education Film Series**

Founded in 2011, the Child Development Institute and Art of Teaching education film series provides the campus and local communities the opportunity to discuss current films on education with SLC faculty, staff, and students.

- **56 UP** – In October 2013, over 50 individuals attended the screening and discussion of the film *56 UP*.
- **Loving Lampposts** – In November 2013, over 85 individuals attended the screening of *Loving Lampposts* and the discussion following the film with filmmaker Todd Drezner and SLC faculty member Lyde Sizer.
- **Listen** – In February 2014, 47 individuals attended the screening of *Listen* and the discussion following the film with filmmaker Ankur Singh.
- **Forty Years Later: Now Can We Talk?** – In March 2014, 55 individuals attended the screening of *Forty Years Later: Now Can We Talk?* and discussion following the film with filmmaker and Barnard faculty member Lee Anne Bell and Fern Khan, former Dean of Continuing Studies at Bank Street College of Education who was also involved in the film project.

The film series featured collaborations with many other groups on campus such as the Early Childhood Center, Child Development Graduate Program, Psychology Faculty, Sociology Faculty, and Graduate Studies.

### **Participation in Community Groups and Coalitions**

CDI faculty and staff regularly attend meetings and contribute to the following community organizations and coalitions, among others:

- Alliance for Childhood
- Child Care Council of Westchester
- Defending the Early Years
- Environmental Consortium of Hudson Valley Colleges and Universities
- North American Association for Environmental Education (NAAEE)
- New York Coalition for Play
- OMEP-USNC (U.S. chapter of the World Organization for Early Childhood Education)
- Progressive Education Network
- Teacher Institute of Lower Westchester
- U.S. Play Coalition
- Westchester Association for the Education of Young Children
- Yonkers Strive Together Partnership

## Special Collaborations

### **Janada L. Batchelor Foundation for Children (JBFC)**

In June 2013, CDI Faculty Advisory Group member Kim Ferguson visited the Janada L. Batchelor Foundation for Children (JBFC) in Tanzania and met with their teachers, conducted workshops, and facilitated a community adventure play experience for children. The workshops were well-received by the teachers who are already implementing some of the concepts shared in the workshops. In Fall 2013, CDI shared books, films, and other resources to help address the professional development needs expressed by the teachers at JBFC's Joseph and Mary School. CDI and JBFC are working on having the Principal and Assistant Principal of the Joseph and Mary School come to Sarah Lawrence College in the future for a two-week teacher empowerment program. The program would include hands-on workshops, seminars, observations, school visits and address topics such as progressive approaches to teaching math and science, integrating art into the curriculum, observing and documenting children, teaching children with special needs, and facilitating play for young children. In the interim, classes at Sarah Lawrence College's Early Childhood Center and the early childhood classes at the Joseph and Mary School were filmed this spring and shared in an exchange to learn more about each other's teaching environments and practices.

In June 2014, teachers from the respective schools had an opportunity to meet virtually through a video call to share their reactions, thoughts, and questions after seeing each other's classroom footage. Some of the topics/questions that came up and were discussed:

- How to facilitate and support the diverse and individual interests of children in a classroom
- Role and importance of art in the classroom
- How are children evaluated in the early childhood classrooms? How is the early childhood program as a whole evaluated?
- How to work with parents who may feel children are not learning in an early childhood classroom unless they are given homework and reading and writing the whole time?
- Learning through play and the significance of play
- Bringing the outdoors inside the classroom and taking the classroom outside

All involved were excited to start the dialogue and looking forward to continuing the conversation.

*"Our teachers walked away so excited and reenergized to make their classrooms better than ever and to get to know their students in a completely new light." – Chris Gates, JBFC Founder and Executive Director*

## Resources

### **The Learning Child Series**

*The Learning Child Series* was produced for public television by Jonathan Diamond Associates in collaboration with CDI. All four of the films (*When A Child Pretends*, *From Pictures to Words*, *Values Go to School*, and *When Learning Comes Naturally*) continue to reach the general public, and have aired on more than 150 stations across the United States, with re-broadcasting and DVD sales expanding that reach. The documentaries are often used in CDI's outreach with educators and parents.

### **Occasional Papers**

In 1998, CDI began a series of Occasional Papers, some written by members of the faculty advisory group and others by speakers at CDI events or other invitees. Some of the topics addressed in the occasional papers include teaching social responsibility, fostering children's curiosity in the classroom, connections between play and literacy, creating community in the classroom, guidelines for observing young children, and nurturing children's strengths.

## Support

CDI's programming and outreach would not be possible without the generous support of its donors and funders. As of May 31, 2014, CDI's endowment is approximately \$1,154,968 which is comprised of six endowment funds. The Marx Challenge and the Canfield Fund provide income for the operating budget. The Wright Fund and the Longfellow Fund provide income for two lecture programs. The Cisneros Fund supports the Empowering Teachers program. A final endowment fund (anonymous) provides for special projects.

## Looking Ahead

CDI is currently part of a Sarah Lawrence College working group of faculty and staff who are looking at ways in which the College can collectively provide deeper support to help meet the needs of Yonkers community. In the coming year, CDI will be exploring ways in which it can expand its work in Yonkers and serve as a resource for parents, children, and educators in Yonkers.

For additional information on upcoming events, programs, and resources, visit the Child Development Institute website at [www.slc.edu/cdi](http://www.slc.edu/cdi).