

Some BASICS of the CHILD DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

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Introduction

This *fragment of the lecture* of Dan Solomon about the Child Development Project, contains information about principles and components.

The complete paper * describes effects on students' social and ethical attitudes and behaviors of a comprehensive elementary school program that was implemented in 12 elementary schools in six school districts in the United States over a four-year period, with an additional 12 schools serving as a comparison group. The program as a whole is designed to promote a sense of the school as a community, and includes *five* components:

- 1) a literature-based reading and language arts program centered around works that evoke empathy, interpersonal understanding, and ethical issues;
- 2) a collaborative approach to classroom learning;
- 3) an approach to classroom management and discipline that attempts to optimize student autonomy and self-determination;
- 4) the promotion of active parent involvement; and
- 5) schoolwide activities that are inclusive and non-competitive.

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Sense of Community as a Mediating Factor in Promoting Children's Social and Ethical Development

The Child Development Project (CDP) is an approach to school restructuring that seeks to revamp teaching, learning, school organisation, school climate, and teachers' work environments. Over the past seventeen years, in collaboration with parents, teachers, and principals in a number of schools, we have developed a program to change:

- (a) the *content and processes of classroom teaching*;
- (b) the ways in which the school involves *parents*; and
- (c) the *overall environment of the school* as it affects both students and staff. For children, the goal of CDP is to help schools become communities in which they feel cared for and learn to care in return - communities in which they are helped to develop the practical skills needed to function productively in society, and the ethical and intellectual understandings needed to function humanely and wisely. For teachers, the goal of CDP is to help schools become respectful and inclusive communities that support their continued learning and provide opportunities for them to collaborate with

one another and to contribute to decisions.

The CDP Program: The Content of Our Efforts to Change Schooling

The five components of the CDP program are derived from four, interrelated principles:

- (a) build warm, stable, supportive relationships;
 - (b) attend to the social and ethical dimensions of learning;
 - (c) honor intrinsic motivation; and
 - (d) teach in ways that support students' active construction of meaning.
- Three of the program components focus primarily on the classroom, one focuses on parent involvement, and one on the school wide environment.

Component 1. Literature-based reading and language arts.

The component of the program that focuses most directly on teaching for understanding and explicitly integrating social and ethical content into the curriculum is a literature-based reading and language arts program. The selection of books, the accompanying teachers' guides, and the supporting workshops are all designed to help teachers encourage children to think deeply about what they read, while helping them to develop greater empathy for and understanding of others, and an understanding of the humane values that need to govern our lives. Some of the selected books also describe the lives of people from varied cultures, ages, and circumstances as they deal with universal issues and concerns, helping children to empathize with people who are both similar and dissimilar to them, and to see the commonalties that underlie diversity.

The literature program uses "read-alouds" so that all students in the class have the shared experience of hearing good stories well told, and uses "partner reads" so that students have opportunities to build automaticity through reading with the support of a partner. Teachers lead their students in open-ended discussions of important issues evoked by the books, and provide structured opportunities for their students to have conversations about these with one another. Hearing and engaging with the new and different ideas expressed by one's fellow students is intended to create productive disequilibrium, thereby stimulating the continuing construction of meaning.

Component 2. Collaborative classroom learning.

Our approach to collaborative learning emphasizes:

- (a) the importance of challenging and meaningful learning tasks;
- (b) the benefits of collaborating on such tasks;

(c) the importance of learning to work with others in fair, caring, and responsible ways; and

(d) developing the skills involved in working in these ways.

Here we have not developed a specific curriculum as we did with our reading and language arts component; rather we focus on helping teachers learn the general principles by which collaborative learning activities foster students' social, ethical and intellectual development and help to make the classroom a caring community. We have developed 25 general lesson formats that can be used over and over in various academic areas, with approximately 10 sample activities to illustrate each format.

We consider two major types of experience to be essential for fostering children's academic and prosocial development: *peer collaboration* and *adult guidance*. Through their collaboration with equal-status peers, children learn the importance of attending to and supporting others, and negotiating compromises. Children can often achieve deeper understanding of a topic or activity through discussion, explanation, and working out disagreements within a group than they would by working individually. However, because peer interaction is seldom optimally collaborative, benevolent, or productive, the teachers carefully monitor groups as they work, watching for opportunities to help students to reach higher levels of collaboration, interpersonal understanding, or academic learning than they might have been able to reach unaided.

Component 3. Developmental discipline.

Developmental Discipline is an approach to classroom management that explicitly focuses on building caring, respectful relationships among all members of the classroom community, and that uses teaching and problem-solving approaches rather than rewards and punishments to promote student responsibility and competence. This component is the one most explicitly directed toward developing and maintaining a culture of *caring* in the classroom. The teacher works to create a classroom setting in which all members - teacher, students, and aides - are concerned about the welfare of the entire group and all its members. They share common assumptions and expectations about the importance of maintaining a supportive environment in the classroom and the responsibility that each member has to make meaningful contributions to the life and welfare of the group.

We encourage teachers to look at discipline as a way to help children develop social and ethical understanding and related skills, rather than as a way to control them.

For example, teachers involve children in shaping the norms of their classroom, helping them to understand that the norms are not arbitrary

standards set by powerful adults, but necessary standards for the common well-being. Teachers also help children develop collaborative approaches to resolving conflicts, guiding them to think about the values needed for humane life in a group. Playground disputes become opportunities for students to learn about the needs and perspectives of other students, and to practice skills of non-violent problem-solving. Further, teachers avoid extrinsic incentives (rewards as well as punishments) so that children will learn to be guided by a personal commitment to justice, kindness and responsibility rather than by a calculation of "what's in it for me?" Teachers focus on preventing problems by helping their students anticipate and plan for them; when problems or unacceptable behaviors occur, the teacher takes a "teaching" approach toward their resolution whenever possible. The teacher and students will try to determine the source of the problem, think about alternative solutions, and try to understand its actual or possible effects on others.

In addition to the three classroom components of the CDP program, two components go beyond the classroom.

Component 4. Parent involvement.

The program incorporates two avenues for parent involvement: *family participation* activities that are coordinated with the curriculum and are relevant to family interests and experiences, and *membership on a school "coordinating team"* consisting of parents and teachers who plan schoolwide activities.

A central aspect of our parent involvement effort is called *Homeside Activities* - a series of simple conversations and activities that invite children and parent or family friend to explore important issues that connect home and school life (For example, in "Family Folklore," an activity for fifth-graders, children ask questions to learn about their own family history) then they contribute to the classroom community by sharing some of these stories in class.

These activities are designed first and foremost to support warm and meaningful conversations between children and parents, the kind of conversations Nel Noddings (1994) calls "ordinary conversations," and to which she attributes considerable power for moral teaching. They are also designed with several additional goals in mind - to honor family traditions and culture; to provide parents with ways to talk with their children about school, thereby keeping them informed about some of the issues and events of their children's school lives; to help teachers know more about children's

home life and culture in order to better teach each child; and to provide parents with a comfortable way to help their children progress academically.

Component 5. Schoolwide activities.

The fifth program component is an approach to schoolwide activities that promotes *inclusion, non-competitiveness, and the values of a caring community*. When we first began working in schools we were surprised by the degree of competitiveness (child against child, classroom against classroom, and teacher against teacher) that pervades schoolwide activities in many schools, and so we began to work with teachers and parents to redesign these activities so as to be more clearly supportive of the ethical and intellectual values of the school and more conducive to building community. We now ask the parents and teachers on the school coordinating team to examine their traditional schoolwide activities to assure that the activities allow participation by all, avoid competition, and respect differences but lessen hierarchical divisions between older and younger students, staff members and students, and teachers and parents.

Since they are designed by the school coordinating teams, with our advice and guidance, the specifics of these activities have varied from school to school. Activities that have been developed and used in various schools include: a *Buddies Program* in which upper-grade students, in the spirit of care and responsibility, meet regularly with younger students to engage in a wide variety of activities such as reading, attending an assembly, going on a field trip, or playing a game; a schoolsponsored *science fair* which is organized cooperatively rather than competitively; "Grandperson's Day" - an opportunity for older family and community members to share their wisdom and experience the community's respect and appreciation; and "Family Read-Aloud" or "family Film" nights which bring parents and their children together to read or watch a film and engage in learning activities.

The remainder of this paper describes findings from a recent attempt to employ CDP in six varied school districts, and focuses on effects in the social/ethical realm. For descriptions of findings from an earlier phase of the project, see Battistich, Solomon, Watson, Solomon, and Schaps (1989); Solomon, Watson, Battistich, Schaps, and Delucchi (1992, 1996); Solomon, Watson, Delucchi, Schaps, and Battistich (1988); and Solomon, Watson, Schaps, Battistich, and Solomon (1990).

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