

Brief History of the Dr. Erik Jackman Institute of Child Study, University of Toronto

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In 1925 Professor Edward Bott established the St. George's School for Child Study at the University of Toronto. The School eventually became known by its present name - the Institute of Child Study - and from its inception combined youthful enthusiasm, scientific zeal, and the optimistic belief that the human condition could be positively changed through the study of children. Although the Institute has changed over the years in response to various challenges, it has retained its core "child centredness". This value has been a protective factor and source of the Institute's resilience over the years.

As the first head of psychology at the University of Toronto and a prominent member of the Canadian Mental Hygiene Committee, Professor Bott had a central role in developing child study. Project grants awarded in 1924 by the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial Foundation and the Canadian National Mental Hygiene Committee enabled Bott to set up an interdisciplinary project administration board.

He hired Dr. William Blatz to direct the projects, which included implementing a longitudinal study of children's social adjustment in public school, setting up a laboratory nursery school, and creating a parent education program. The nursery and parent education programmes became the two major divisions of the School. (In a university, the term "school" refers to a group of scholars that share a point of view.)

The functionalist psychology which Bott and his young protégée Blatz ascribed to played a major role in shifting the focus from biological factors in human

development to environmental (educational) influences. 'Adjustment', the establishment of an optimal relationship with the physical and social environment, became the organizing concept for research at the School, and evolved into Blatz's 'Security Theory'.



In 1924, the Canadian Mental Hygiene Committee asked the Toronto Board of Education to authorize a series of studies examining the mental health of school children. The first Toronto project was a longitudinal study of children's adjustment in Regal Road Elementary School. The proposed project coincided with

longitudinal projects undertaken at Berkeley, Yale, Minnesota, and Iowa. The Toronto study looked at the ways children adjust to school life and the effectiveness of preventive interventions.

The nursery division, doubled in size from four to eight children between September and January. The parent education division grew rapidly from twenty to thirty mothers and eventually from two to six courses. Parents of children in the nursery school were expected to enroll in these courses. Although nursery schools had been in existence for a decade, the idea of someone other than a mother taking care of a young child was still considered radical. Blatz was quick to point out that



the Toronto nursery was not experimenting with these children. Rather, the children played and socialized, while researchers engaged in close but unobtrusive observation. The focus of the Toronto School was on studying normal children at home and in school, and the

Toronto projects flourished. In 1930 the Windy Ridge Day School came under Blatz's direction, and the Regal Road and Windy Ridge projects gave the St. George's School for Child Study an unprecedented base to advance its educational research.



The 1930s saw the School come into national and international prominence for its role in the early education of the Dionne Quintuplets and the School became an important contributor to Canada's war effort, helping to establish the war nurseries in England. By 1939, the School's work with children was recognized throughout the world. Wartime nurseries were also needed in Canada, and Blatz and his team were called upon as experts.

After the war, the St. George's School for Child Study became the source for legislation enabling nursery schools to be set up in Ontario. The parent education program had achieved such a reputation that professionals in education and social work began to look to the School for in-service opportunities.



In 1938, the Ontario Department of Education recommended the School be granted autonomy from the Department of Psychology. The School name was changed to the Institute of Child Study, a separate governing committee of the Academic Senate was established, and the budget was assumed by the University of Toronto's President's Office. In 1944, the Institute started offering its own graduate

degree, a one-year post-graduate program leading to the Graduate Diploma in Child Study.

The Institute became one of the most prominent points of interdisciplinary study within the university. In 1951 Sidney Smith, President of the University of Toronto, claimed the Institute had “helped to make the ideal of the university as a community of scholars a reality”. Few divisions within the university, he observed, had so many strong interdepartmental and interdisciplinary relationships.

In 1953 the original nursery division combined with Windy Ridge School to form the elementary school called the St. George’s School and later the Laboratory School. This consolidation enabled an expansion of programs, the development of an in-house journal, and an increased use of radio and television to share the Institute’s collective wisdom. It was during this period that Dr. Blatz became the Dr. Spock of Canada. His work was eventually recognized as a distinctly Canadian approach to understanding child development.

The rise of the Institute as a popular practical resource for parents and teachers obscured its shifting relationship to the academic and scientific community. The Institute was now situated on Walmer Road, on the geographic periphery of the university, and when Edward Bott retired as Chair of the Department of Psychology in 1956, the Institute’s isolation from the rest of the university became apparent. Psychology and psychiatry had matured in method and conceptualization since the Institute was founded, and competition for research funds was fierce.

Real change occurred in 1960 when Blatz retired. With no natural successor in place, the Institute fell into a state of disarray. When Blatz died in 1964, external funding that had helped defray the cost of running the Institute came to an end. The question of what to do with the Institute became the concern of the university, and its fate became part of a debate that lasted almost a decade. The once close partnership between the Institute and the Department of Psychology was now strained, as the Institute’s research was considered old fashioned and unscientific by the mainstream psychological community. A report of the Presidential Advisory Committee on the Role in the University of the Institute of Child Study (1969) observed that although the work of the Institute in education, parenting, and counseling was unique, it was outside the boundaries of mainstream research and scholarship.

Just as the Institute appeared on the brink of closure, two of its strengths came to the fore: care and community. In the fall of 1968 a student protest led to a private meeting with President Claude Bissell. The persuasive brief by a student, along with the support of accompanying students and staff, resulted in President Bissell leaving the question of the future of the Institute open to further study.

In 1970, he concluded that continued support was merited. Dr. Michael Grapko, the new Director of the Institute, added staff, acquired video equipment, and expanded the research library. Under his leadership, the Institute became part of the College of Education in 1971. By 1977, holders of the now two-year post-graduate Childhood Education Diploma qualified for an Ontario Teachers' Certificate.

For almost a decade the Institute offered the only two-year advanced elementary teacher preparation program in Canada. During this period, the separate mental health diploma also brought the Institute closer to the field of education by evolving into an MA-equivalent assessment-counseling program that produced most of Ontario's psycho-educational consultants.

In spite of these achievements, the Institute of Child Study found itself once again in crisis in 1979. The Institute's Laboratory School came under attack when the University's cash-strapped central administration recommended eliminating grades 3, 4, 5, and 6, and the laying off of eight teachers. The Institute's community was rallied into effective action, this time by parents, and the plan was withdrawn.

Wounded by a persistent lack of administrative understanding and academic appreciation, the Institute grew more isolated from the university. Internal factors mirrored this withdrawal and began to operate in less well-integrated ways. For almost a decade, the internal parts of the Institute separated into little islands, the physical plant was neglected and scholarship declined.

In 1989 new appointments began a renewal process to reverse these trends that created conditions that retained existing faculty and attracted new blood. A bequest administered by the Laidlaw Foundation intended to ensure the continued research presence of the Institute became The Dr. R.G.N. Laidlaw Research Centre. Following this the Diploma programs were converted into an MA in Child Study and Education that after two years of study leads to an Ontario Teaching Certificate.

As part of the amalgamation of the 1996 Ontario Institute for Studies in Education and the Faculty of Education the Institute joined the Department of Human Development and Applied Psychology. This Department (now called Applied Psychology and Human Development) helped expand the faculty base, research, and graduate school involvement of the Institute. In 2010 donations from Dr. Eric Jackman and Margaret and Wallace McCain in combination with a highly successful community wide capital campaign will enable the transformation of the Institute into a modern multi function facility. This building will join the present McCarthy House on Walmer Road with two additional properties on Spadina Road. In appreciation for these remarkable gifts the Institute was renamed the Dr. Eric Jackman Institute of Child Study and the connecting wing designated the Margaret and Wallace McCain Pavilion. These changes have brought challenges and opportunities that begin a new chapter in the history of child study at the University of Toronto.