



A CHILD Primer for Parents

What is the history of Project CHILD?

Project CHILD began in 1988 as a research project at Florida State University. Dr. Sarah (Sally) Butzin, a lab school teacher and researcher at the university, wanted to create a better instructional system that would incorporate computers and hands-on active learning while maintaining high academic standards. She wanted to create joyful classrooms where students and teachers could look forward to coming to school each day. Her book **Joyful Classrooms**¹ provides a history of the research and in-depth overview of the CHILD instructional delivery system.

The Institute for School Innovation, a private non-profit organization, was founded in 1995 to help disseminate Project CHILD to reach more children. The Institute provides ongoing research and development to keep the CHILD materials up to date, and provides ongoing professional development for teachers and principals on effective practices for implementing Project CHILD. You can learn more at the Institute's web site, www.ifsi.org.

How is Project CHILD different from regular classrooms?

In regular classrooms, over 90% of a student's time is spent listening to the teacher and working alone². Most of the work is written work using textbooks and worksheets. Students stay at a desk and may not get up without permission from the teacher.

In Project CHILD, students still listen to the teacher, but they also work in small groups at learning stations, use computers every day, and get individual help from the teacher more frequently. They learn to move from station to station without having to ask the teacher.

In regular classrooms, there is one teacher for each grade who covers all the basic subjects. Students spend one year (180 school days) with that one teacher, and move to another grade and start over with another teacher each year.

¹ **Joyful Classrooms in an Age of Accountability: The Project CHILD Recipe for Success.** By Sarah M. Butzin. Phi Delta Kappa, 2005. ISBN 0-87367-542-8

² *Opportunities to Learn in America's Elementary Classrooms.* The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, **Science** magazine, March 30, 2007. (Vol. 315, No. 5820, pp. 1795-1796.)

Project CHILD is set up with clusters of three classrooms. A primary cluster consists of a kindergarten class, a first grade class, and a second grade class. An intermediate cluster consists of three classrooms for grades 3-5. One classroom in the cluster is for reading, one for writing, and one for math.

One of the cluster classrooms serves as the homeroom depending upon the student's grade level. The students start in their home room for instruction in that subject for 60-90 minutes, and then rotate to the other two classrooms for 60-90 minutes of instruction in the other subjects. Science and Social Studies are covered by the homeroom teacher, or integrated into the other subjects. Of course your child will still participate in the school's full curriculum if additional subjects are offered such as Physical Education, Music, and Art.

How is Project CHILD better than regular classrooms?

Numerous research studies for over 15 years have shown that Project CHILD students get higher test scores, have fewer discipline referrals, and do better in middle school.³ CHILD students enjoy coming to school because they can be active as well as successful.

In addition to learning basic academic skills, CHILD students learn other important skills needed throughout life. For example, CHILD students learn to set goals, to manage their time, to think and solve problems, to work collaboratively with peers, to be part of a team, to meet deadlines, to accept responsibility, and to follow through.

Why does my child have three teachers in Project CHILD?

Modern elementary educators now realize the benefits of specialization, given the higher standards that today's children must meet. By having three expert teachers for the core subjects of reading, writing, and mathematics, your child will have the benefit of teachers who are skillful and up-to-date with the latest research and teaching techniques for the 21st century. By concentrating on one core subject, CHILD teachers can offer more in-depth instruction, as well as teach to their strengths.

Most professions have long known the value of specialization. When your child is sick, you would seek the care of a pediatric specialist. If your child goes into sports, there are often expert coaches to work on different aspects of the game (offensive, defense, kicking, etc.) If you need an attorney, you would seek advice from an expert on tax law, real estate law, criminal law, etc. The CHILD model is in step with the modern professional world.

Why stay with the same teachers for three years?

When your child has a new teacher every year, precious learning time is lost at the beginning of each school year. It takes several weeks for the teacher to get to know your child and his/her special gifts and needs. Just as it makes more sense to stay with the same pediatrician who knows your child's medical history and special needs, it makes sense to have continuity of care in the classroom.

³ See www.ifsi.org for evaluation reports from the U.S. Department of Education, Florida Department of Education, Florida State University, Georgia Southern University, Florida TaxWatch, Evaluation Systems Design, EPPC Management, and more.

What if there is a bad teacher? Is my child stuck for three years?

While most teachers are excellent, there are unfortunately some who are not as skillful as others. Just as in other professions, there are various ranges of talent. If your child has a weak teacher in a regular classroom, all subject areas will be affected. If your child and the teacher have a personality conflict, your child will have no respite for the entire day.

In a Project CHILD cluster, however, your child will be with at least two other teachers throughout the day. Also, the other teachers on a CHILD cluster team are not tolerant of an inferior member. They will seek help from the administration to build the skills of the weak member, or have the weak member removed if necessary. The Institute for School Innovation also provides ongoing professional development and classroom observations to assure quality control and maintain high standards.

What is the purpose of the learning stations?

Learning stations provide a range of activities to help all children learn in the style that they learn best. Research and common sense tell us that people learn in different ways. For example, how would you learn something for the first time, such as how to operate a new technological gadget? Would you turn it on and start exploring? Would you get out the manual and follow the directions? Would you log on to your computer for an on-line tutorial? Would you phone a friend and get together for a hands-on tutorial? Or would you sign up for a class to learn from a teacher?

For many people, one of these methods will work best. For others, a combination of methods will work. The same is true for children learning to read, write, and understand mathematics. The learning stations provide all of these methods so that your child will learn more quickly and effectively.

What is a Passport and why is it necessary?

The CHILD Passport is a tool to guide your child in learning good work habits. The Passport also provides a running record of your child's daily work at school and the skills being learned. When you review the Reading Passport, Writing Passport, and Mathematics Passport at the end of each six weeks, you can discuss with your child the various activities and skills recorded at the learning stations.

The CHILD Passport helps your child set goals at the beginning of each unit, and then reflect on his or her learning. CHILD students also evaluate themselves frequently as a reminder to have good work habits and effective study skills.

As a parent, you can use the Passport to communicate with each CHILD teacher. There is an area for you to write comments to the teacher, and your signature alerts the teacher that you have reviewed the Passport with your child.

How is discipline maintained if students are allowed to move around in the classroom?

Project CHILD teachers maintain very strict discipline by teaching the students to accept responsibility and follow specific classroom procedures. There is a ten-day orientation at the beginning of each year where students learn how to move about the classroom in a responsible way. Students who do not follow the rules must work alone until they are ready to return to station work. This usually is a very short "time out," as students do not want to miss the engaging activities at the learning stations.

What about homework?

Homework is not a Project CHILD issue. Project CHILD teachers assign homework as specified in your school's homework policy. The cluster teachers try to coordinate homework assignments so as not to overload students on any given night. It is interesting to note that there is little research to show that homework has much benefit, especially for younger children.⁴ The best homework is to turn off the television and read, read, and read some more.

Why should I choose Project CHILD if the regular classroom was good enough for me?

The question to ask yourself is, "Do you want to prepare your child for your past, or for his or her future?" Today's children live in a high-tech global society, and will be competing for jobs that we can't even imagine today. The academic standards are much higher in this changing world. Furthermore, your child will be living in a more diverse society with people from varying cultures. Getting along with others and being an independent learner are skills as important as learning to read, write, and compute. These are the skills of the future that Project CHILD provides, along with building a solid foundation in the basic academic skills that your child will need for middle and high school success.

What if I don't like Project CHILD? Can I have my child transferred to a regular classroom?

You always have the option to remove your child if you are not satisfied. Most parents find that after allowing some time for adjustment to new routines, children thrive in Project CHILD. In over 15 years with tens of thousands of students in CHILD classrooms, only a handful has ever asked to leave. Many hundreds more are on waiting lists hoping to get in.

How can I get more information?

Contact the Institute for School Innovation or visit our web site. See contact information below.



Institute for School Innovation
Dr. Sally Butzin, Executive Director
1339 Mahan Drive
Tallahassee, FL 32308

850-671-3706

800-940-6985

www.ifs.org

staff@ifs.org

⁴ **The Homework Myth: Why Our Kids Get Too Much of a Bad Thing.** By Alfie Kohn. DeCapo Press, 2006.