After months of organization and planning, the day finally arrived for the first, of what we hope to be many, conferences hosted by Eastern in the area of early childhood education. The event began on the eve of the conference as teachers from the CFDRC, along with faculty and staff from the CECE, met with other university laboratory schools and the keynote presenter for dinner and conversation.

The day of the conference began with Dr. Helm offering an inspiring address on the topic of supporting children’s brain developments and critical thinking skill through the Project Approach (a child-centered, inquiry-based approach to teaching/learning). Afterwards, over 122 attendees (teachers, directors, students from ECSU as well as other local colleges) from around the state broke into morning sessions, led by teachers from other institutions, faculty from CC, and teachers from the CFDRC.

Lunch included a poster session by students, in education as sociology, from ECSU. Students had an opportunity to attend and present at their first professional conference; an amazing experience for them as they enter the teaching job market.

The day ended with afternoon workshops. The one most anticipated was the session on Investigations led by teachers from the CFDRC. The conclusion was a tour of the CFDRC classrooms. Attendees took many photos of ideas they would like to incorporate back at their own centers and as guests departed, they asked “Will you do this again next year”?

A special thank to Julia Delapp; it was a pleasure collaborating with her and CECE!

On Friday, April 27th, the CFDRC and the CECE collaborated to cohost their first Investigations Conference. With support from the Office for Institutional Advancement and The Foundation at Eastern, the event was an amazing success.
As part of their early childhood education certification program, Eastern students, under the guidance of Dr. Jeffrey Trawick-Smith, visit the CFDRC, incorporating play centers.

Play centers, or dramatic play centers, are important to young children. They provide opportunities for children to experience pretend play; an important skill related to cognitive development. Pretend play affords children the opportunities to:

- **Language development:** Language associated with different roles (i.e., baker, restaurant worker) fosters vocabulary/oral language development.

- **Cooperate:** Taking turns playing different roles, children work together towards a common goal they create in the play center.

- **Engage in self-regulation:** The ability to manage feelings, emotions, and behaviors in socially acceptable ways (newer research supports this is tied into later achievement).

- **Symbolic play:** Pretending that a banana is a phone, for example, is an example of symbolic play. Children’s ability to use one object for another (symbolic) is also associated with later reading, as letters are ‘symbols’ for words and ideas.

- **Literacy and Numeracy:** Play centers are filled with opportunities for literacy development with things such as books, paper, and pencils, which are all available and used with a purpose. Children begin to see that writing serves a purpose to the baker who needs to write your order and that the tickets for the movies are $ because “the sign says so.”

For these reasons, and countless others, it is important for students in education to understand the intricacies of developing, implementing, and scaffolding (asking the just-right question) when designing play centers.

At the CFDRC, students have the opportunity to implement these centers, reflect upon their work, and revise as needed. The students visited Week 1, and returned Week 2, with modifications based on the initial implementations. This models good teaching; the practice of reflection and change.

The play centers they brought with them included: a Bakery, a Pizza Shop/Restaurant, a Hair Stylist Center, and a Puppet Theater. Each center provided rich experiences for children. Each group, of 4-6 children, had an opportunity to spend 30 minutes at each of the four centers. The students introduced their center with a poem, song, or book, explained the roles available, and then observed children at play, taking notes as needed.

This experience, along with the Science Fair, occurs each semester at the CFDRC. We are fortunate enough to have this available to our children while serving as a lab for the student teachers in training.
Going Global: Trip to Jamaica
Reflections by an Eastern Student Suzanne Slater

During Eastern Connecticut State University’s Spring Break eighteen students and two professors had the opportunity to spend a week in Jamaica. The students who went on this trip are learning and aspiring to be teachers. Some are studying Early Childhood Education, some Elementary Education, while others are studying Physical Education. This week long trip allowed students to learn about the beliefs, values, and culture of Jamaica and how they differ from the United States. Prior to going on the trip students were required to complete background research as well as numerous assignments to prepare for the cultural differences. We learned about being a tourist and more importantly how we should behave in accordance with their culture. While in Jamaica we immersed ourselves in the culture as much as possible by visiting local beaches, asking questions of the locals, and eating at traditional restaurants. We learned a lot just from talking and meeting the locals; everyone was very friendly and helpful. Since a majority of the travelers are striving to be teachers in the near future the focus of this trip was on the schools in Jamaica and really understanding the similarities and differences between their schools and ours. We were able to visit an Infant School, Bethel Primary School, Rusea’s Junior High School, St. James High School, Hopewell High School, and Sam Sharpe Teaching College. Each of these schools was very different from one another and offered unique opportunities to their students. In comparison to schools in the United States they were different, but also had some similarities. A major difference in relation to both culture and the schools was that prayer and music were both huge parts of everyone’s daily life. These were both a major focus as we traveled and also throughout the school day. A majority of our trip in Jamaica was spent at the Infant School and Bethal Primary School. At these schools we served as teaching aids in various classrooms, truly getting to know the needs and interests of the students in our classroom. Many of us were able to teach whole group lessons, which really made the cultural differences real for us. Truly being immersed in a culture is the best way to learn about the cultural differences that are present. This trip was a unique opportunity to learn and grow as future educators through hands on experiences, as well as really gaining respect and understanding a different culture.

Suzanne Slater is an Eastern student in Early Childhood Education. She has been a student worker at the Child and Family Development Resource Center for three and a half years and will go on to student teaching in the Fall.
Along with the fun of getting dirty, gardening helps children learn valuable lessons about patience as they wait for vegetables and/or flowers to grow, responsibility as they see how vital their care is to the garden, and even loss when flowers die at the end of a season.

**Benefits of Gardening**

With spring upon us, why not get children started with some gardening? Gardening offers children opportunities for exploration. Think of all the senses that are involved in gardening:

- **Sense of touch:** touching the rough seeds, feeling the dry dirt, experiencing cold, wet mud, handling the soft fuzz of a green bean or the smooth skin of a melon, water spraying as they nourish the plants
- **Sense of smell:** smelling the flowers, herbs and vegetables
- **Sense of taste:** enjoying a crisp bite of a carrot or a warm tomato from the sun
- **Sense of hearing:** listening to the sounds of nature which otherwise can go unrecognized due to our busy lives
- **Sense of sight:** seeing new plants growing, watching them change over time

Other experiences include:

- **Cognitive (scientific inquiry, mathematics, literacy):** children plan out the garden making decisions about space and where to place it, research about what grows best in our climate, measuring and recording growth, new language/vocabulary pertaining to gardening, a growing understanding that living things have specific needs in order to thrive and grow, raises questions about earth, bugs, insects, etc. with potential to explore even further!
- **Personal-social:** working together, sharing responsibility, sharing the fruits of our labor, increased sense of confidence as they grow something tangible, edible, and nourishing.
- **Environmental:** increased appreciation for nature, develop an understanding of how nature can nourish us, developing an understanding of where food really comes from.
- **Health:** eating and tasting a variety of healthy foods.

Teacher: Cynthia DeJesus
The Child and Family Center hosted a Family Fun Night - Move With Your Child event on April 23rd.

The evening began with Dr. Darren Robert presenting a powerful twenty minute presentation, focusing upon the importance of moving with young children. Darren “triple dog dared” family members to learn how to play again by providing movement experiences which help children develop fundamental motor skills. Preschoolers are naturally active and require time to learn and develop basic motor skills. Informing family members of the importance of physical activity, as well as teaching them to serve as role models, can influence a child’s love to move and be active for a lifetime.

After the presentation, family members, children and staff participated in movement activities using throwing, catching, jumping and rolling skills. Participants also moved using different speeds, pathways, levels and body parts. Some of the activities included: balancing bean bags between body parts with a partner, traveling through a hula hoop and tossing balls into the air using a blanket.

The event concluded by enjoying healthy yogurt and fruit parfaits, bananas and a refreshing cup of water. The healthy snack was provided by the Center’s Parent Teacher Organization. It was a “FUN” evening for all those who attended.

A special thank you is extended to CFDRC Staff and Eastern Physical Education Students, Mackenzie MacLeod and Rachel Hanrahan, for assisting with this Family Fun Night. In closing, The National Association for Sport and Physical Education recommends the following physical activity guidelines for preschool children:

- Preschoolers should accumulate at least 60 minutes daily of structured physical activity.
- Preschoolers should engage in at least 60 minutes and up to several hours of daily, unstructured, physical activity and should not be sedentary for more than 60 minutes at a time except when sleeping.
- Preschoolers should develop competence in movement skills that are building blocks for more complex movement tasks.

Structured physical experiences are initially directed at having a child explore a variety of movement skills which include a large variety of safe objects for a child to roll, kick, throw or catch. Three and four year old children should be encouraged to explore a variety of movement skills rather than achieve a high level of movement competence in any one skill. Unstructured physical activity experiences refer to a child exploring large outdoor toys and equipment, such as tricycles, swings and playground apparatus. Other unstructured activities include opportunities for climbing, balancing, swinging, hanging or sliding. Both structured and unstructured experiences involve both indoor and outdoor settings.

Family members who serve as role models and are physically active can influence a child to explore and develop movement skills.

Please take the time to MOVE WITH YOUR CHILD!
New Investigation >>> Nature: Gardening

Thank you families! You all helped select this next investigation when you chose Nature among many other topics worthy of inquiry. During weekly staff meetings, teachers webbed Nature, just as with other investigations, and zoomed in on one specific area as nature in and of itself is so broad. They zoomed into GARDENING.

You will note that gardening can also be somewhat broad… classes will surely go in different directions based on the interest of children. Each classroom will have their own raised garden bed on the back deck. There might be a flower garden, a salad garden, a sensory garden, a rainbow garden, a name garden (flowers which are also names of people)… the sky is the limit. Please continue to check in and see what type of garden your child’s class decides to plant.

Connections:

During Spring Break, we Skyped with Ariel, our practicum student, along with her dog, Obie, and horse, Silver. Ariel took pictures of both animals playing with balls and shared them with the children. We wrote a letter to Obie and Silver and asked them questions about balls. Maybe they will write back!

Patty Gardner

FAMILY SUGGESTION BOX

We want to hear from you! Please use the suggestion box (marked “Family Suggestions”) located at the front of the Center to place ideas, comments, and concerns, and we will do our best to address them. You do not have to put your name on it, but we would appreciate it if you do so that we can discuss the topic in detail at your convenience. Thanks and we look forward to hearing from you.
SAVE THE DATE
June 1, 2012
5:30-6:30

Please Save The Date for our annual Moving On celebration! At this event, we celebrate all of the children’s accomplishments this year.

Please make sure you sign up no later than May 21st in order to assure appropriate seating. Notices will be sent home next week about event details.

Thanks and we look forward to seeing you and your family.

Cooperative Play

A unique feature of our investigations Curriculum includes Cooperative Play. Cooperative play is a time set aside daily for children to engage in small group activities with a goal of working together towards a common goal. The groups of 3-4 children (arranged by teachers with much consideration based on the experience) collaborate over the course of a few days during which time they:

- Share/exchange ideas
- Use conversation to communicate ideas
- Get to form close bonds in small groups
- Share, compromise, and work on self-regulation
- Celebrate together in their accomplishments
- Solve problems
- Think critically

Below is an example of cooperation during Physical Education class. Here, Eastern P.E. students planned, and observed, first-hand the power of cooperative play. This will serve them well as teachers in the future.

During our last P.E. class, we participated in a cooperative game with our peers. Each child had the opportunity to pull a peer on a scooter in order to gather buckets and bring them back to the base. Once the pair collected all three buckets, the children worked together to make a tower.

Patty Gardner

Opportunities to engage in cooperative play are abundant throughout the day. Here, Ms. Patty’s students engage in cooperative play during P.E. class.

Advisory Committee

The CFDRC extends an invitation to CFDRC family members who would like to become a member of the Family Advisory Committee. The purpose of the Advisory Committee is to provide advice and counsel to the Director on operating policies and procedures as they relate to the Child and Family Development Resource Center.

The community acts as a channel for information and feedback between the CFDRC administration and families. This is not a formal decision-making body and does not have oversight or responsibility for the CFDRC budget.

The committee will meet on the first Friday of every month, beginning on April 6, 2012 from 9:00-10:00am at the Child and Family Development Resource Center.

I encourage you to join this committee. If you have questions or would like to join this committee please talk to Niloufar in person, call 860-465-5270, or email her at rezain@easternct.edu. Also, please feel free to make suggestions to the Director in the locked box located at the front of the Center by the Administration Desk, titled “Family Suggestions.”
**Discovery Bottles**

**Green Room's Book Nook**

Discovery Bottles are plastic bottles filled with various items to explore a scientific concept. You can use 1 liter, or 20 ounce, soda/water bottles. The mini water bottles also work well for little hands. Filler can be rice, sand, cut paper, gravel, salt, etc. Here are a few ideas for discovery bottles:

**Alphabet Bottle**
- Mini magnetic alphabet letters
- Filler
- Magnetic wand

**Wave Bottle**
- 5-7 drops of food coloring
- 1/2 full of water
- 1/4 full of oil (baby oil or cooking oil)

**Glitter Bottle**
- 2/3 full of water
- Glitter

As we prepare for our garden inquiry, here are a few titles:

*Sunflower House* by Eve Bunting

*A Fruit is a Suitcase for Seeds* by Jean Richards

*The Carrot Seed* by Ruth Krauss

*The Tiny Seed* by Eric Carle

*The Dandelion Seed* by Joseph Anthony

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Please note all children must be in their classrooms, ready to begin the day, at 9:00 a.m. daily. Please refer to the Family Handbook for detailed guidelines, as it will be enforced.

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**May 2012**

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**University Connections>>>**

- Fridays are Dress Down Days at the CFDRC. Staff have been wearing jeans and bringing in non-perishable food items and health & beauty items. Each month, we cart much needed items to the Covenant Soup Kitchen in town.
- Superintendent of School of Torrington is requesting to visit the CFDRC in order to get ideas for the early learning center that they will be building in the near future.
- Thank you to Bettina, who is an ECSU biology major. She keeps the fish at the CFDRC healthy and fed!
- Ella’s Nook continues to support early readers as they open the library weekly to children and families, offering further opportunities to read at home as well as provide information to families. Thanks Ella!