

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Jennifer Pelton

E-mail: Jennifer@gesellinstitute.org

Voice: 203-777-3481 ext.718

Gesell Executive Director Speaks at Global Summit in D.C.

New Haven, CT (April 4, 2012) – Dr. Marcy Guddemi, Executive Director of Gesell Institute, attended the first established Global Summit on Childhood in Washington, D.C. The Summit held March 28-31, 2012, was presented by the Association for Childhood Education International (ACEI). Gesell Institute was a “contributing organization” who worked in partnership with Alliance for Childhood; Rutgers University Center for Children and Childhood Studies; and the Division of Early Childhood-Council for Exceptional Children. The goals of the Summit were to discuss and explore the current state of childhood, domestically and internationally, and to examine issues, challenges, best policies and procedures that promote, or negate, a positive childhood experience.

On Friday, March 30th Guddemi presented, alongside Kathy Fite from Texas State University – San Marcos who is also on the Advisory Council for Gesell Institute, “A Fresh Look at Child Development: Good News From Gesell Institute.” The presentation informed participants about the rich contributions of Dr. Arnold Gesell, the Institute’s namesake, to the study of child development and learning. Guddemi shared the results of the Institute’s most recent GDO Study, and a fresh perspective on how children develop.

The results of the study do not support the current push-down academic philosophy that exists in America’s schools, especially in Kindergarten. Guddemi stated, “When policy-makers and school leaders don’t have access to the latest research about how children learn, they can make mistakes that actually keep down the very test scores they are trying to enhance.” In fact, studies show that children feel like failures now as early as PreK, preschoolers are being expelled at 4 X higher rates than K-12 children, and social and problem-solving skills such as persistence, creativity, cooperation, and communication, which are all necessary in the adult job market, are not being fully developed. Media such as the *New York Times* and *USA Today* have noticed this trend too, and have recently published related articles.

Gesell Institute’s national study on children’s development was based on a culturally and geographically diverse nationwide sample of 1, 287 children, age 3-6 from 53 schools in 23 states. The study included children from both public and private schools. The purpose of the study was to update the Gesell Developmental Observation (GDO), a performance-based, criterion referenced assessment system for children 2 ½ - 9 that results in a developmental age, with new technical data so that it meets today’s APA, IDEA and Head Start standards and requirements. Developmental age is the age that best describes a child’s overt behavior and task performance on a developmental scale. It may be older than, equal to, or younger than a child’s chronological age.

“Children have sets of abilities that are definitively bound by their developmental level. These

--MORE--

developmental abilities of a child are *directly related* to their success at processing the information given to them and to perform the tasks asked of them,” stated Guddemi during the presentation. This means that if a child was asked by a teacher to draw a letter, the ability of succeeding at this request would depend upon the rudimentary stages of development that the child has previously progressed through.

The Institute’s study results are consistent with Dr. Arnold Gesell’s original research working with children of the same age in the 1940’s, and it also supports current brain research that indicates new knowledge is built upon previous knowledge as synapses are connected – in a metaphorical scaffolding effect. However, the unchanging pace of developmental growth in children is being ignored by the educational curriculum that is intended to support it. A child’s ability to draw a triangle is a precursor for learning letters, words and to master reading. “If this task can be performed at 5 ½ years of age, then it is pointless to try to speed up the pace of a child’s development by purposefully giving a 3- or 4-year old in Preschool or Kindergarten letter and number tasks instead of letting them play,” concluded Guddemi.

Good quality early childhood programs for age 3 to Grade 3 are essential because they provide the proper *experiences* and exploration which allows a child to access his or her greatest potential, relative to the developmental level they are at. These programs are not to help children learn more letters earlier or faster, but to learn to negotiate and problem solve with peers and engage in the work of making sense of their world alongside teachers who are experienced, patient and creative role models. Unfortunately, in an effort to close achievement gaps, both schools and parents endorse the “earlier is better myth,” believing that by “learning” academic skills earlier, developmental success will follow. Gesell’s recent data proves the opposite - **that developmental abilities must emerge before an academic curriculum has meaning for the child and that it stimulates a corresponding motivation to learn.** Gesell Institute, realizing this pressure that exists, has been encouraging schools to reshape their curriculums to incorporate more age appropriate activities.

A Technical Report exhibiting the validity evidence of the GDO Study now exists and a copy can be attained upon request. It contains the results of an online user survey, bias review, and focus group. It also shows the correlations between the tasks and strands by age band, the descriptive statistics for continuous items by age band, and the percentage of sample children in each performance level by age band.

Gesell Institute of Child Development is an independent non-profit organization that has been associated with how children grow and learn since 1950. The work of Arnold Gesell, PhD, MD, (1888-1961), founding Director of the Yale Child Study Center in 1911, had a profound influence on the field of child development. Based on Dr. Gesell’s pioneering work, Gesell Institute’s current programs and publications help parents and educators understand the ages and stages of childhood. Professional development and parent workshops cover a broad range of topics regarding child behavior, healthy growth, development, and positive learning outcomes. For additional information and resources, please visit www.gesellinstitute.org.

You can find Gesell Institute on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and YouTube.

#