

Child Development Lab transferred to Merrill-Palmer

by Tom Sakely

Administration of the Child Development Laboratory (CDL), a service, training and research program of Wayne State University for more than a half century, has been transferred from the psychology department to Merrill-Palmer Institute.

The CDL had been a part of the psychology department since 1986, when it was transferred from the disbanded family and consumer resources department.

Currently, the unit provides day-time child care and learning opportunities for approximately 70 children ranging in age from 1-5 years. It serves university-affiliated families, parents who work in the area and children enrolled in a grant-funded school readiness program through the College of Education.

An additional summer program, called Summer in the City, is for 5-9 year olds. That program emphasizes field trips, crafts and art activities.

Many Wayne State undergraduate and graduate students enrolled in psychology and other disciplines train and conduct research at the CDL.

The administrative change will not significantly affect the mission of the unit and may result in increased opportunities for research, according to the institute and the psychology department.

"Merrill-Palmer is innately multi-disciplinary in nature," institute Director Rita Casey points out. "We hope to broaden use of the laboratory as a research site for faculty and students in a number of disciplines."

Hilary Ratner, associate chair of

the psychology department and a faculty member who has worked closely with the laboratory unit for

Ratner notes that observational and other activities assigned to WSU students who visit the CDL.



photo by Rick Bielaczyc

President Irvin D. Reid accepts gift drawings from Christopher Dale (left), 4, and Katrina Rydstedt, 5, during a recent visit to the Child Development Laboratory. Christopher and Katrina are enrolled at the CDL. At right is Rita Casey, director of the Merrill-Palmer Institute, and standing is Donald Coscina, chairman of the psychology department. Administration of the CDL has been transferred from psychology to the institute.

many years, says the administrative change "will allow a broader base of support than was previously possible."

She notes that an interdisciplinary group that will be appointed to oversee operations will include psychology faculty. "We view the transition as a positive development and a sign of the university's interest and involvement," she says.

Merrill-Palmer Institute reports to the vice president for research.

The CDL was founded in 1947 by the former home economics department as a half-day nursery school housed in a school building near campus. In addition to providing a needed community service, it afforded opportunities for college students to observe, study and teach young children.

The unit was moved to the child care area of the Knapp Building in the early 1980s when Merrill-Palmer, widely known for its child development and family programs, became part of the university.

are valuable learning experiences. For example, students can learn firsthand about how children play and interact, gender roles, language development and the like.

Students enrolled in occupational therapy and speech pathology programs are among those who have benefited from study at the CDL.

Both Ratner and Casey emphasize that the CDL, which is under the supervision of Interim Director Linda Chew, should not be confused with a day-care center.

"We go far beyond simple day-care," Casey says. "We stress child development as opposed to just custodial care. At the same time, the needs of the child are always central."

The institute will be able to provide some funds for deferred maintenance, such as new carpets and furniture. Other plans include increasing the visibility of the CDL, which Casey calls "one of WSU's hidden resources."