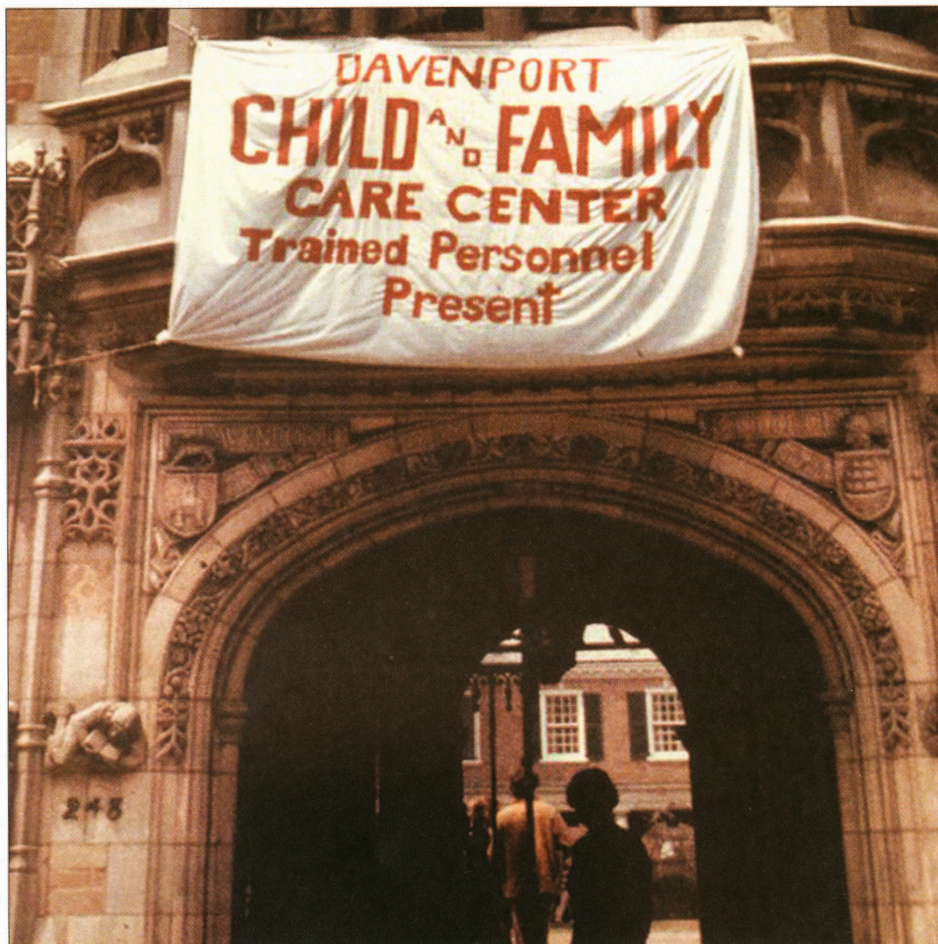


Quality Day Care: A Significant Legacy of the Class of '71

By Kurt Schmoke

ONE OF THE INDELIBLE IMAGES from the activities at Yale on May Day, 1970, was the large sign over the entryway to Davenport College, which read "Child and Family Care Center, Trained Personnel Present." Because of student and administrator interest and concern, a residential college served temporarily as a day care center for many including those who came to New Haven to protest the trial of the Black Panthers often accompanied by their very young children. To a great extent, that photo of the Davenport archway represented the desire of students, most of whom were members of the Class of 1971, to establish a child-care center permanently at the university. The Calvin Hill Day Care Center, the first Yale-affiliated day care center, was born through the efforts of our Class. Looking back now, we can see the enduring impact of the center.



Davenport arch with banner, spring 1970



Calvin Hill joins the 25th anniversary celebration of the daycare center that bears his name.

First, a reminder of how we got involved. Let me note from the outset that many of the details I'm relating come not from my memory but from an outstanding research paper for the Education Studies Program authored by Yale alumna, Hannah Perlman, coupled with contacts with the wonderful directors of the Center, Carla Horwitz and Susan Taddei.

In 1969 there were no Yale University-affiliated or university-operated child-care centers. That began to change after Yale fired a woman who worked in a college dining hall in the fall of '69 for missing work because she could not afford child care. A student protest ensued, and Yale was forced to rehire her. After investigating the matter, a number of students from the Class of '71 concluded that the problem was far larger than this individual employee. It appeared that other employees faced pressure because of the lack of affordable child care, and the students demanded that the university offer child care as a benefit to dining hall workers as well as members of a local union, which included maintenance workers and var-



'71 Classmates with Director Carla Horwitz



Play is children's work



Who could resist this appeal for support?

ious levels of technicians. The students noted at the time that their motivation was to ease the financial strain on low-income workers.

Mary Pearl, '72 and I (Kurt Schmoke, '71), both residents of Davenport College, co-founded the center and announced its creation before the university administration agreed to support it. We reached out for support in many directions. We thought that getting a prominent alumnus, who was much admired by people in the both the university and New Haven communities, would be a big boost to the efforts. Fortunately, Calvin Hill, a star Yale and National Football League player, agreed to lend his name to the center. His involvement attracted the attention of others in the university administration as well as alumni who had an interest in early childhood education. Coincidentally, Davenport was led by Dr. Seymour Lustman and his wife, Kitty Lustman, both of whom were quite involved with early childhood education. They along with the Provost Horace Taft, who was a former college Master, encouraged the students in this effort. However, project did not really take off until President Brewster and his leadership team connected the day care issue with the other social justice matters that were presented to the community shortly before and after May Day. Although the university resisted making the day care center a formal university entity, they agreed to match funds raised from other sources. They provided crucial free space in the basement of St. Thomas More House and later helped to convert a no longer used New Haven fire station to become home for the center, allowing the center to add a kindergarten to its programs.

THE CENTER OPENED WITH A BOARD OF DIRECTORS that included students, faculty and administrators. All involved in those early days agreed that priority for admission should be given to the children of the lowest income union workers at the university. The center adopted a policy of a sliding-scale tuition to promote affordability. Although it was hoped that the provision of child care would become an issue that union leaders and university officials would bargain over as an employee benefit, that never happened. However, the recognition of day care as an important and essential service for working families continued to grow. The Board of Directors worked very hard to honor the wishes of the co-founding students to have the center serve almost exclusively the children of the lowest income workers at the university.

However, as the years went by a number of factors brought about changes in direction. First, it was determined that it was not only dining hall workers who had age-eligible children

for day care. Administrative assistants and graduate students also faced unmet needs for such a service. Second, the board chose a former elementary school teacher, Carla Horwitz, as director of the center and she made clear that the focus also should be on a developmental curriculum with well-trained teachers. Third, the decision to become a high quality as well as an affordable early childhood development center, meant that financial stability had to become a priority issue for center management. A slow but steady shift was made from the priority of serving the lowest income union workers to creating a high-quality education program with a major focus on diversity, including a particular emphasis on economic diversity.

THE CURRICULUM THAT WAS INSTITUTED focuses on curiosity and individual creativity. When you visit the center, you might think that all you see is kids playing, but as the directors will tell you, play is really children’s work at the center. They have developed programs that are stimulating and have become a model for day care centers throughout the state of Connecticut and the nation. In addition to the kindergarten, a “young threes” program now exists.

The center has also become an integral part of the education experience for Yale undergraduates. Teacher training fellowships are offered, and many participate in student observations through three formal undergraduate courses in child development and early childhood education. A number of Yale students, including the current center director, have been inspired to pursue careers in education because of their experience working in or observing the work done at Calvin Hill. Like many early childhood programs, the Calvin Hill center is heavily dependent upon tuition, but it has been fortunate to receive grants from state government, foundations, and in-kind contributions from private companies.

In any given year, between 20 and 40 members of the Class of ‘71 make donations to the Calvin Hill Day Care Center. Our fondly remembered classmate, Bob Shapiro, adopted the center as his cause and helped raise significant funds for many years. Bill Porter has continued this effort. It is clear that many people continue to see the day care center as part of the social justice commitment that they promoted during their undergraduate years. They recognize the truth of what Ms. Perlman notes in her study that “high quality care positively impacts... children both cognitively and socio-emotionally. It also promotes positive outcomes in adulthood.” The Calvin Hill Day Care Center and Kitty Lustman Findling Kindergarten has contributed to improving the quality of life for families in the Yale and New Haven communities for the past fifty years. It is a tribute to the Class of 1971 for promoting the founding of the center and for contributing to its continuance. The children who are alumni of the center are now contributing to their communities in positive and meaningful ways. Let us hope that the work of the Calvin Hill center continues for many years to come.



Calvin Hill Daycare Center as it looks today