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To cite this article: Henry M. Wellman, Peter A. Ornstein, Amanda Woodward & David Uttal (2017) History of the Cognitive Development Society: The First 16 Years, Journal of Cognition and Development, 18:3, 392-397, DOI: [10.1080/15248372.2016.1276915](https://doi.org/10.1080/15248372.2016.1276915)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/15248372.2016.1276915>



Published online: 22 Feb 2017.




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History of the Cognitive Development Society: The First 16 Years

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Abstract

This article briefly outlines the history of the Cognitive Development Society (CDS) since its inception in 1999 through 2016. At its biennial meeting in October of 2015 CDS celebrated 16 years of contributions to the community of cognitive development researchers. This article continues that celebration.

The first issue of the *Journal of Cognition and Development* (*JCD*; 2000) contained an editorial from the editor, Philip Zelazo, about the launching of *JCD* and an accompanying letter from the Cognitive Development Society's (CDS) first president, J. Steven Reznick, about the formation of the society. That letter mentioned the inaugural meeting of the CDS that had been held in Chapel Hill, NC, in October 1999. This is fitting because since the society's inception, the two foundations of CDS—and two forces that continue to define its primary contributions to the field—have been the meetings and the journal. At its meeting in October of 2015, the society celebrated 16 years of significant contributions to the community of cognitive development researchers. At an initial plenary session, the history of CDS was briefly recounted, and most of the past and current CDS presidents (12 of 14) and the past and current editors of *JCD* (3 of 5) were on hand. In this article, we briefly outline the society's history since 1999 and fill in the story since the statements of Zelazo and Reznick in the inaugural issue of *JCD*. For still more information, see the CDS Web site: <http://cogdevsoc.org>.

Origins

During the 1990s, there was a considerable amount of informal discussion about how the traditional societies—Society for Research in Child Development, American Psychological Association, Association for Psychological Science, Psychonomics Society—did not fit the needs of cognitive developmentalists. As a result, in 1998, Steve Reznick and Peter Ornstein, while consulting informally with many others in the field, decided to found CDS as a society that could foster discussion and the exchange of ideas in the rapidly growing area of cognitive development. In an e-mail to colleagues dated November 4, 1998 (before there was a CDS Listserv to communicate such things), Ornstein and Reznick announced the formation of the CDS and the dates of the first meeting (October 8–9, 1999). Because such things as bylaws were

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tasks for the future, they noted, “[P]reliminary membership is open to anyone who indicates an interest in joining us in this venture.” Things proceeded quickly from there, and on three fronts.

On the first front, the society was formed, with Judy DeLoache, Robyn Fivush, Doug Frye, Peter Ornstein, Steve Reznick, and Phil Zelazo serving as members of the first CDS board. Jennifer Coffman soon joined the board as its first student member. The board planned the first meeting, with the active involvement of Lynne Baker-Ward and Beth Kurtz-Costes, along with several University of North Carolina graduate students. The board also worked to secure funding from National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, the University of North Carolina, and several publishers. The society was officially incorporated on September 10, 1999, in the state of North Carolina, with J. Steven Reznick as its first president. The original articles of incorporation can be seen via the history link on the CDS Web site, as can the entire e-mail announcing the formation of the society.

On the second front, the inaugural meeting of the society was held with 250 new members of the society in attendance—far more than had been anticipated, demonstrating clearly the need for such a gathering. Moreover, that first meeting was carefully crafted to include several of the features that characterize our meetings to this day: plenary speakers and symposia that have no competing parallel sessions, poster sessions in which ongoing work is presented, and ample opportunities for discussion. These features mean that all in attendance—as a community of scholars—are able to see and hear the same information, thus providing fodder for further discussion and opportunities for learning throughout the meeting. In addition, the poster sessions in which members are encouraged to present their current research—and not just their completed projects—are organized in a setting that facilitates in-depth discussion in a “gathering of friends” atmosphere. [Figure 1](#) shows the entire program for the first day of the 1999 meeting, and if you look closely enough, you can see that the plenary speakers at the first meeting were John Flavell, Nora Newcombe, Gilbert Gottlieb, and Annette Karmiloff-Smith. Moreover, if you check out the photographs available on the CDS Web site, you will see that these distinguished speakers used overhead transparencies

Over the years, the plenary format has evolved to include two speakers, one being a “near” colleague whose work is directly and substantially focused on some aspect of cognitive development and the other being a colleague who is somewhat further afield. There are also two plenary symposia. The first meeting was judged to be so successful that the board immediately began plans for the second meeting to be held two years later, in October of 2001, in Virginia Beach, VA. Since then, meetings have occurred regularly every two years.

And on the third front, within the same rapid time frame, the *JCD* was established. The first issue of *JCD* indicated clearly its origins in the journal *Cognitive Development*, edited by Janet Astington. Indeed, in a very real sense, *Cognitive Development* begat *JCD*. By 1998, Ablex, the publisher of *Cognitive Development*, had become so unable to sustain operations that the entire editorial board decided to depart en masse to find a different publisher. The timing was right because the editorial board’s frustrations coincided with the initial efforts to organize the society and with Lawrence (Larry) Erlbaum’s willingness to help support both activities. At the Society for Research in Child Development (SRCD) meeting in April 1999, Larry met with a group composed of a subset of who was to become the CDS board and a subset of the editorial team and expressed enthusiasm for the establishment of a journal. At the same time, Ablex decided to sell the rights to *Cognitive Development* to an entirely different publisher, Elsevier, so the new journal published by Lawrence Erlbaum Associates was launched under the name of the *Journal of Cognition and Development*. But the continuity with the old journal was

apparent, as Phil Zelazo became the initial editor of *JCD*, Janet Astington became the consulting editor, and essentially the entire prior editorial board of *Cognitive Development* became the first editorial board of *JCD*.

Importantly, at that same 1999 SRCD meeting, Erlbaum indicated his support—both emotional and financial—for the society. The initial CDS board, once formally established in the summer of 1999, adopted *JCD* as its official journal. In return, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates published the journal, collected CDS dues, and handled the financing of CDS and *JCD*. In the process, Erlbaum provided funds to aid the society at a time when publishing the journal had yet to begin, as well as during its early years when undoubtedly *JCD* was published at a loss.

So to recap: In 1999, from spring to October, CDS was established, held its first meeting, and had its official journal. Under Zelazo's editorship, the journal moved forward rapidly, with the first issue of *JCD* appearing early in 2000 and the first year encompassing a full volume of four issues.

Development

The study of development focuses both on origins and developmental unfolding, and so does our history. Figure 2 shows both the location of and the attendance at CDS meetings since 1999. The sites of the meetings listed in Figure 2 were chosen by the then-current CDS presidents, who were, in turn: Steve Reznick (2001), Patricia Bauer (2003), Susan Goldin-Meadow (2005), Susan Gelman (2007), Henry Wellman (2009), Nora Newcombe (2011), Judy DeLoache (2013), and Amanda Woodward (2015). David Uttal, the current CDS president, has chosen Portland, OR, for the 2017 meeting. Not only has attendance grown over the years, but so have submissions and presentations. To illustrate with one example, Figure 3 shows the increasing numbers

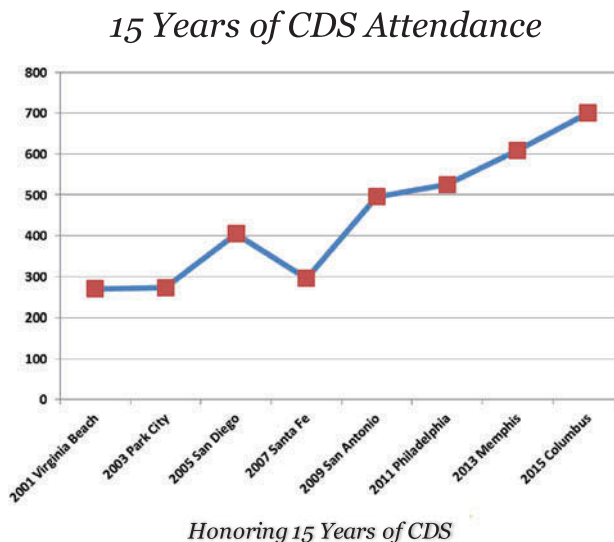


Figure 2. 15 years of CDS attendance.

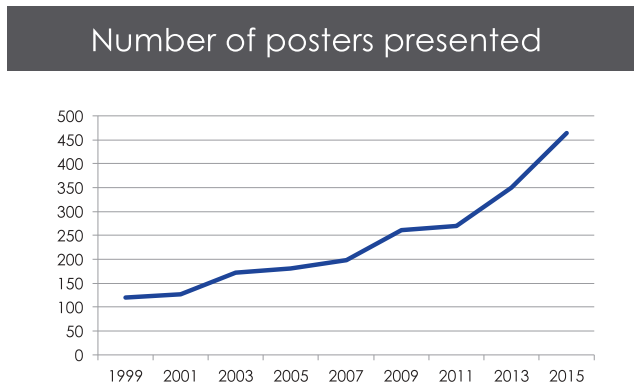


Figure 3. Number of posters presented.

of posters presented at the meetings. Nonetheless, CDS still manages to retain its feeling of a small, comfortable meeting.

Relatedly, membership in CDS has grown, and over the years, it has more than tripled. Moreover, while CDS has been growing, so has its journal. From its inception until now, subscriptions have dramatically increased, whereby thousands of institutions and individuals have access to *JCD*'s content; as such, online usage of the journal has also increased each year, with more than 35,000 downloads in 2015 according to the publisher's latest report. In 2010, under the editorship of Laura Namy, the "Tools of the Trade" section was established as a regular feature of the journal, and in 2015, *JCD* went from four to five issues per year. Accordingly, the journal's impact has grown, and the 5-year impact factor now regularly tops 2.0.

Over the years, the journal has been led by a small succession of editors: Phil Zelazo, Patricia Bauer, Laura Namy, Elaine Reese, Angeline Lillard, and (as of September 2016) Susan Graham.

CDS and *JCD* went through major transformations in 2006 when Larry Erlbaum retired and sold his press, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, to Psychology Press (now called Routledge) within Taylor & Francis. The contract for CDS and *JCD* was transferred intact to Taylor & Francis at that point, but the sale eventually required renegotiation of the contract and the relationship between the society and the publisher. Some of the previous arrangements with Lawrence Erlbaum Associates were now outdated, and others, crucial to the society's operation, were based on informal agreements with Larry Erlbaum himself and also on his legendary generosity. As such, it was necessary to formalize a new set of arrangements with Taylor & Francis, a task that was carried out by Henry Wellman (president) and Laura Namy (treasurer and also *JCD* editor) and signed into place in 2010. Those arrangements, with some appropriate amendments at certain points, shape the principal contract between CDS and Taylor & Francis to this day. This is important because following the model of the arrangements established initially with Larry Erlbaum, the publisher (a) publishes the journal, (b) owns the journal name, (c) collects the dues paid to CDS, (d) maintains the CDS members list, and (e) pays CDS its collected dues, as well as some revenue from journal subscriptions and some funds for the journal editorial operation within CDS.

The developmental trajectory of CDS is not, of course, defined only by its first 16 years. Several things were new at the 2015 meeting: 2015 was the first year the CDS meeting had American Sign Language interpreters, the first year with International Young Scholar Travel Awards, and the first year that CDS received National Science Foundation funding for Diversity Travel Awards. Before the 2015 meeting, however, the CDS worked hard to ensure diverse attendance at our meetings, sometimes self-funding Diversity Travel Awards and sometimes acquiring outside funding for that purpose from various sources.

Historically, CDS has been a very lean operation, run by unpaid presidents, board members, officers, and member volunteers. At any one time, the society has employed only a single paid part-time staff person, and the individual in this position always contributed generous volunteer hours as well. As we all know, development is about both stability and developmental change, and an illustration of stability amid change throughout the history of CDS can be seen in the fact that only two individuals have held this staff position. The first was Kristi Schonwald, our “founding” staff person, first hired in 2005, and the second was Megan Bloom who took over for Kristi in 2013. Megan announced her resignation in 2016, and the society has now contracted with Podium Conferences (a division of De Armond Management Services) to manage both the conference and the society. Hiring a professional management company will ensure the long-term stability of the society and should help contribute to its effectiveness.

Stability is also seen in the fact that some of our colleagues have held two official roles at the same time. Steve Reznick was the society’s founding president and also its founding secretary-treasurer. This might count for three official roles, except that in the original bylaws of CDS the secretary-treasurer was a single position that was separated into two separate positions in 2005. Patricia Bauer was CDS president from 2001 to 2003 and *JCD* editor from 2005 to 2008. Laura Namy served as treasurer from 2005 to 2009 and was *JCD* editor from 2008 to 2011. Serving as an officer and as the editor was especially helpful when both the journal and the society were in transition from Erlbaum to Taylor & Francis during 2008 to 2010.

Final thoughts

Of course, these cannot be final thoughts because the history of CDS continues to this day and will do so into the future. But this future depends on the past; developmental trajectories are anchored in specific features and events. Our trajectory began with effort, luck, and good timing. In his remarks at the special CDS history symposium in Columbus, OH, in 2015, Peter Ornstein began by talking of the Yiddish word *bashert*. *Bashert* is a term used to describe an event as being fated or predestined, such as finding one’s soulmate, but it is also applied to the seeming destiny of an auspicious event or happening. The founding of our society was clearly *bashert*, and given its remarkable developmental trajectory, we look forward to an equally interesting and healthy history report at CDS’s 25th birthday.