



# Sowers & Seeds

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## Are We There Yet?

by Dr. Joel A. Nelson, Administrator — WELS Youth Discipleship

If you take a long trip this summer, especially if you have young children along, you have to be prepared. You need to pack something for the kids to do: read, maybe some games, some pillows, and also plenty of food. Food is a must because as soon as anyone starts to whine, “Are we there yet?” you can shove a bunch of crackers in their mouth.

Talking about long summer vacation journeys makes me think about another journey that seems to be taking way too long. It’s the trip to heaven. I don’t know about you, but there are a lot of times when I kind of whine, “Are we there yet?” I can’t wait to get to heaven. And just like on a long earthly trip, I can whine all I want about getting to heaven, but that’s not going to get me there any faster. I won’t get to heaven until God sees fit to end my earthly trip.

What helps in the mean time is that God has given me some really great things to do to occupy my time. And the things God gives me to do make me feel good, inside and out, and



give me tremendous purpose and focus:

- He gives me his Word to read, study, and follow.
- He gives me a church to attend to worship and praise him along with my brothers and sisters in Christ.
- He gives me Christian family and friends to enjoy, do things with, to love and be loved by them.
- He gives me all kinds of people to pray for and things to pray about.
- He gives me countless opportunities to serve: at home, in the church, in my community.
- He gives me many chances to share the Gospel with others.
- He allows me to work every day with other, wonderful Christians.

Whether the trip to heaven is still much longer for some of us, or ends today, we all know we are going to get there, and man will it be great! In the mean time, let’s occupy ourselves totally with the great things God has given us to do, including our ministry to his dear children and families.

# From Anticipation to Delight: Supporting Literacy Foundations

by Julie Stratil — Wisconsin Lutheran College ECE Intern

Right around the first year of a child's life, parents long to hear their little one's leap from cooing into audible words (speaking). Will they say mama or dada, an animal name or that of their favorite toy? Once the momentous first words are spoken, typically a natural avalanche of words ensues in-between the infamous "why" questions. In the natural progression of development, parents' focus quickly turns to their child's acquisition of reading and writing skills. And oh how parents are bombarded and guilted by media hype of "guaranteed to work" home-based reading programs as well as feeling pressure of purchasing a payload of grocery store reading/writing workbooks. Even educators may feel the pressure to march through a rigid and explicit series that compartmentalize the aforementioned literacy skills.

However, having the finesse to listen, speak, read, and write have stronger integrated connections than most people realize. In *Children's Language: Connecting Reading, Writing, and Talking* (Lindfors, 2008), the author discusses the natural development of listening, speaking, reading, and writing, as well as shares beneficial tips and techniques to aid children in their learning of language, through the scaffolding of authenticity, meaning-orientation, collaboration, apprenticeship, and individuality. Lindfors (2008) thoughtfully intertwines stories of her own teaching experience into her research to give the reader a firm foundation to such terminology.

## Authenticity

Authenticity is referred to as "genuine communication" (17). The chapter begins with the story of a little boy who encounters inauthentic text. The inauthentic preschool and kindergarten text's main purpose was to "teach a child to decode" (18). It lacked meaning, engagement, and was merely words on a page. The child's robotic voice spoke volumes. In contrast, this same little boy was given an engaging emergent reader. He was captivated by this second book and his zeal said it all.

So what was the difference between the two books? Authenticity. It is not only a crucial aspect of children's literature, but also necessary in early writing. Creating authentic reading and writing exercises for students motivates and engages the students to become invested in the process, instead of making literacy a chore. An example such as an echo, repetitive, or rhyming book integrated into a personal topic of interest to children serves as a text that empowers them and processes learning from short term to long term memory. Furthermore, through the use of

open-ended journal opportunities, children are eager to invest their time when they know that it is a safe and celebratory environment. Thus, it is essential for teachers to aid in parents' understanding of developmentally appropriate practices utilized in the classroom and also emphasize that these practices need to be reinforced and validated in the home setting.

## Meaning-orientation

This is another building block of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. By incorporating shared reading and read-alouds into the classroom, teachers can engage students with literature that focus them on the meaning of rich written language instead of focusing on the individual sounds of the letters—reading becomes fluid and contextually appealing. Additionally, by exposing students to environmental print, charts, and class books, the students further connect the written language to the spoken words. Through invitations to help in the classroom, consistent and creatively designed informational notes or pamphlets, videotaping, brief telephone calls to the home, and a variety of other means of communication with parents, educators can help sustain the momentum of being invested in their child's literacy gains.

## Collaboration Through Apprenticeship

Two ways to engage students in reading, writing, speaking, and listening are to collaborate with the students and also to make them apprentices. Through adult-child collaboration, the students can become what they are "learning to be" (53). Collaboration supports children to be conversationalists even if they only know a few words. In that same way, adult-child partnership enables children to be readers and writers. Incorporating predictable books, with explicit illustrations, allow children to determine what will happen in the story using and utilizing the information they already know. In the writing situation, the adult can take dictation thus validating the child. Collaboration should include information in the child's zone of proximal development (53). The information should be slightly above the child's ability level.

Additionally, collaboration involves an "expert and a novice," which are an adult or fluent reader and writer, and the child (53). Finally, collaboration involves active engagement with the information the novice is learning. Within that partnership, the student becomes an apprentice by carefully watching and

Continued on page 5



## Time for Bed

by Dr. John Juern — licensed, Christian psychologist, Germantown, WI

For many parents and children, bedtime becomes a conflict of wills. Challenges like, “I don’t want to go to bed yet.”; “Do I have to go to bed already?” and “Why can’t I stay up a little longer?” are common. So how much sleep do children really need?

Generally, elementary-school-aged children need at least nine hours of sleep. Preschoolers need ten or more. More is always better. Children deprived of normal sleep for even one night will frequently become irritable and tired. Children deprived of normal sleep for several nights will show personality changes and learn more slowly.

Getting children into bed and then getting them to stay in bed can be a daunting chore. For families that struggle with a bedtime ordeal, the following suggestions may be helpful.

- Have the same bedtime routine at the same time every night. If children are permitted to stay up later on the weekend, it should not be more than an hour later. Any more than that, throws off the body’s natural sleep/awake pattern.
- Try to limit physical activities, soda, scary movies, or computer games right before the bedtime routine begins. They tend to be stimulating.
- A structured order for putting on pj’s, having an evening snack, story time, and prayer time will create

a comforting atmosphere of routine and predictability. Try to keep each activity within a consistent time frame night after night.

- This is an excellent time to read a Bible story, sing a hymn, make up special prayers, and perhaps review memory work.
- After the routine is over, tuck your child into bed--that gives a feeling of security. Give a final kiss, turn off the lights (except for perhaps a night-light), and leave the room.
- If your child comes out of the bedroom, walk him back into the room and put him in bed again. This is not the time for one more story or an “I forgot to tell you . . .”
- If your child is very upset and can’t relax, a brief back massage and soft words of assurance may be quite helpful. Soft relaxing music may also be comforting.
- If your child really reacts and becomes quite emotional, do not lie down with her. Lying down with your child to calm her will only reinforce her acting out behavior. To calm a troubled child, sit on a chair in the room but do not engage in conversation.

An evening that ends in calmness and structure, centered on prayer, brings about a restful night’s sleep. “I will lie down and sleep in peace, for you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety” (Psalm 4:8).

*More articles like this one can be found at [www.parentscrosslink.net](http://www.parentscrosslink.net).*

*Look in the “Special Articles Archive.”*

# Don't Cut the Children's Message!

Since 1987, New Life Evangelical Lutheran Church (Shoreview, MN) has had a children's lesson in every Sunday service, almost without exception. New Life pastor, Mark Cordes, explains why: "We worshiped three years in Snail Lake School before getting our own facility. The mix of nearly 50/50 WELS and adult confirmands made a children's lesson one of the most effective ways to reach children growing up with very little Bible training."

Families with other choices in churches around New Life joined the WELS congregation because their children liked what they called, "Kids Church." One mother informed Pastor Cordes that her little boy would sit his sisters down when they got home from church and re-teach the lesson but with strict requirements to, "Pay attention!"

Pastor Cordes expresses what his adult members feel about the special messages for children. "In these 20+ years of worship," he notes, "whenever we discuss elements of our services, the advice of elders and members is always, 'Cut other things if you must, but don't cut the children's lesson.'"

One humbling thing for Pastor Cordes comes up fairly often when worshipers recall some lesson from a few years ago. "In spite of many hours of hard work on the adult sermons and only a few minutes on the children's sermons," Cordes says, "the simple lessons are the ones they remember most. But then, our Lord, the Master Teacher, always taught with

the simplicity of objects and parables."

Generally, Pastor Cordes tries to emphasize one of the readings not in the sermon itself. This is often the overall theme of the service. Some object is helpful, even if at times the best he can do is the picture on the NPH bulletin cover. Mrs. Cordes, an MLC-graduate, is a great resource and helpful critic. Pastor Cordes adds, "When our children were small, their toy box was a great resource, too!"



After doing this for several years, Pastor Cordes offers three simple ideas/cautions:

- 1) Don't ask too many rhetorical questions. The children will answer them!
- 2) Don't try to reach the adults through the children. That comes off contrived and even manipulative.
- 3) It helps to have the children sit with their backs to the congregation while the pastor / presenter sits on a chair closer to eye level, facing the children and the adults beyond them. Keeping the focus on the Word is the major goal.

You can listen to Pastor Cordes' children's lessons on the New Life Web site: [www.wels.us/newlife](http://www.wels.us/newlife). You can also contact WELS CYD ([cyd@sab.wels.net](mailto:cyd@sab.wels.net)) to obtain a list of other WELS churches doing similar things to better connect their dear children to the Good News of Jesus Christ.

## Out of the Mouths of Babes

One day a little girl was sitting and watching her mother do the dishes at the kitchen sink. She suddenly noticed that her mother had several strands of white hair sticking out in contrast on her brunette head.

She looked at her mother and inquisitively asked, "Why are some of your hairs white, Mum?"

Her mother replied, "Well, every time that you do something wrong and make me cry or unhappy, one of my hairs turns white."

The little girl thought about this revelation for a while and then said, "Mummy, how come ALL of grandma's hairs are white?"

# Ready or Not

by Professor Cheryl Loomis — Martin Luther College, New Ulm, MN

As late summer approaches, those involved in the world of education anticipate the beginning of a new school year. This anticipation of a new beginning might bring about mixed feelings. Children and adults alike can experience feelings of anxiousness and anticipation. Children might have anxiety about the new school setting whether the change is a new teacher or new classroom. Teachers, too, have their share of anxiety as they anticipate the varied needs a new group of children present. Parents are concerned that their child gets off to a good start. Consideration must be given as to what contributes to a smooth transition.

Ready or not? While the concept of readiness is difficult to define, most would agree that success in school is dependent on a match between a child's background and a teacher's expectations. Can your expectations be quantified (letters and numbers) or are they observable behaviors (attention span and social skills)? Of equal importance is how these expectations are communicated. Taking time to discuss these expectations with families in advance of the start of the school year can do much to alleviate anxiety and prevent misunderstanding.

What makes teachers view some children as more ready than others? How much does the age of the child color a teacher's view? What about the current practice of "red-shirting" kindergarteners? While there is no hard and fast rule that applies to every child, there is general consensus about factors that contribute to successful learning. These include physical well-being, socio-emotional maturity, lan-

guage skills, the ability to problem solve and think creatively, general knowledge about the world, and family support. When teachers highlight these factors with the families they serve, a partnership can begin. Many families are put at ease when they realize they have already done much to contribute to their child being "ready to learn."

So how can teachers ease that transition and help settle any fears or anxiety? Think toward the end goal and practice the procedures needed to get there. Teachers expect learning on demand, when it's time for singing, the teacher expects the children to join her. Children will need practice to internalize classroom standards and become self-motivated learners. This is time well spent in getting all children ready to learn.

A Teacher Survey on Importance of Readiness Skills lists the following basic skills that will contribute to a child's smooth transition to school: the child controls impulses and self-regulates, handles frustration well, performs basic self-help tasks, participates in group activities, and maintains focus during activities. Teachers can help children be ready by planning for opportunities early in the year so children can practice these skills. Every child is at a different point in his development of readiness skills. Teachers can ensure a positive learning experience when consideration is given to making a smooth transition for all. Ready or not? When all the adults involved in a child's life pay attention to these skills, each child will be ready to take that next step in education.

"From Anticipation to Delight" . . . continued from page 2

observing what the adults (teacher/parents) are doing and then attempting to read or write independently.

## Individuality

Parents and educators need to remember that each child is a unique God-given treasure and learns at his or her own pace and modality. Because of their individuality, children's journey toward becoming a listener, speaker, writer and reader look differently. In that same way, children's efforts during that process need to be recognized and encouraged, recognizing that the end product is not perfect. They are emerging toward that end goal of becoming a fluent reader and writer. Literacy instruction needs to "begin with *who* the child is – a unique composite of experiences, relationships, prefer-

ences, connections, ideas, understandings, expressive ways, and so on" (80). Speaking and writing are opportunities for individualization. How can that be done without parent collaboration?

By supporting and enabling children to confidently hone the skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing, educators and parents can create a safe environment for personal expression and can celebrate the individual gains the child is making. By embracing children's unique personalities and characteristics throughout collaboration and apprenticeship, educators are able to connect reading, writing, speaking, and listening. The adults provide; the children do the rest. They simply delight in books.

## PART 2

# Early Childhood Ministry Standards: How Do You Measure Up?

The *Ten Self-Study Standards* for early childhood ministry (ECM) in the *WELS School Accreditation Handbook* are intended to serve as a benchmark of quality by which WELS ECM can measure themselves. Those standards reflect a Bible-based philosophy of education, reflect sound educational principles, and help ECM maintain high quality Christian education. The primary reason why an ECM proceeds through a process of school accreditation is to improve. Every WELS ECM strives to serve God and His people in the very best way possible. When an ECM evaluates itself based on the *Ten Self-Study Standards*, blessings for the school and congregation(s) will result. In the last issue of *Sowers & Seeds* we shared standards 1-5. In this issue, standards 6-10.

### STANDARD 6

#### *Curriculum*

Curriculum in the early childhood classroom is what happens throughout the day that contributes to the growth and development of the young child. The curriculum is not just the goals of the program and the planned activities, but also the daily schedule, the availability and use of materials, transitions between activities, and the way in which routine tasks of living are implemented. (44 individual criterion)

### STANDARD 7

#### *Staffing*

A significant determiner for a quality Early Childhood Ministry (ECM) comes from an enthusiastic and knowledgeable staff. Both the teaching and non-teaching personnel called/employed by the school (congregation) share in the

commitment to the teaching of Scripture and exemplify that value in the conduct of their duties and in their daily lives. They are encouraged and provided opportunities for extended training and professional growth. The teaching and support staff is adequate in number and diversity to provide for the educational needs of its students. (68 individual criterion)

### STANDARD 8

#### *Physical Environment*

The environment of the early childhood program reflects the philosophy and goals of the Early Childhood Ministry (ECM). A Christ-centered, child-oriented environment exists in which children are safe yet can be active. Physical environment is more than a physical facility. It consists of children, adults, classrooms, furnishings, equipment, materials, and activities. (22 individual criterion)

### STANDARD 9

#### *Health and Safety*

The ECM presents valid certification that it is in compliance with all legal requirements for the protection of health and safety of children in group settings. (51 individual criterion)

### STANDARD 10

#### *Nutrition and Food Service*

Meals and/or snacks are planned or obtained in accordance with the nutritional requirements as recommended by the Child Care Food Program of the United States Department of Agriculture in proportion to the amount of time the child is in the program each day. (11 individual criterion)

## Check This Out!

Interview data from 6,000 people asking about their childhoods, suggests that a lack of opportunities for unstructured, imaginative play can keep children from growing into happy, well-adjusted adults. "Free play," as scientists call it, is critical for becoming socially adept, coping with stress and building cognitive skills such as problem solving.

Read more here: <http://www.sciam.com/article.cfm?id=the-serious-need-for-play>

All Scripture quotations are taken from the HOLY BIBLE, New International Version © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. *Sowers & Seeds* is published four times a year by the WELS Commissions on Youth Discipleship & Parish Schools. Comments about this *Sowers & Seeds* and ideas for future issues can be directed to Dr. Joel A. Nelson, Administrator, WELS Commission on Youth Discipleship.

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