



Sowers & Seeds

Published by the WELS Commissions on Youth Discipleship & Parish Schools to assist those in early childhood ministry.

You're On the Front Line!

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

When it comes to a congregation's ministry to families, both member and prospect, you, as an early childhood minister, are on the front line. Here's why:"



You are called to family ministry.

Though the words "family ministry" may not appear on any call document or job description, the calling to minister to families flows out of the holistic view of teaching and ministry. Because you are called to minister to children, it is impossible to ignore the family context from which these children come. When you enrolled the child, you enrolled the family.

You have access to families.

For sure, you have a lot of access to the children you teach and care for each day – perhaps even as much as their own families. You also have great access to these children's parents via before and after hours conversations, telephone and email contacts, parent-teacher consultations, church activities, weekly worship, and community events.

You are ideally positioned to make a meaningful, spiritual contribution.

Frequently a child will "spill the beans" about a problem at home or will behave in a dramatically different way that says to you, "Something is up." Many a parent has confided in his/her child's teacher about a troubling personal issue or dysfunctional behavior that is gripping the family. Frequently, you will be the first ministry staff member to find out. At such times, you must be ready and willing to lovingly, tactfully, "stick your nose" into the situation, finding out what's wrong, figuring out how to help or refer, and sharing comfort and guidance from God's Word.

You are on the front line! You are called to family ministry. You have access to families. You are ideally positioned to make a meaningful, spiritual contribution. Don't shy away from it, in fact be more proactive. By the power of the Holy Spirit, use your front line position to help families see, feel, and follow Jesus.

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Special Web Sites for Helping Special Needs Children

National Center on Educational Outcomes education.umn.edu/nceo

This particular website, supported by the National Center on Educational Outcomes, details what is being done in the area of assessing children with disabilities. The site includes a list of accommodations for children with disabilities and specific questions about those accommodations are answered. Educators need to be informed about modifications in order to help all students succeed. Teachers need to be familiar with the graduation requirements for children with disabilities and what alternative assessments are available for such students. This website supplies links to the different state departments of education where additional information is located.

Beach Center on Disability www.beachcenter.org

This website, run by the Beach Center on Disability at the University of Kansas, shares research, true stories, and group discussions about people living with a disability. By inviting people to share their stories, people can come to understand a disability and how it affects a person and a family. Links to magazine articles relating to disabilities are available on the website, making it easy for parents and educators to find information. Parents can also find links to parent organizations in their region. It is important for educators to be familiar with how a disability affects a family. Teachers need to be prepared to provide names of local organizations and support groups that would be beneficial for the parents to become involved with.

Tell Others About the Special Needs Family Network

Do you know parents who are frustrated in trying to find good Christian resources geared for their children with developmental disabilities? Do you know parents who'd like to talk to other parents who share their faith and understand their unique circumstances in life? Do you know parents who desire Christian encouragement and support from other parents who have experienced the same challenges they are experiencing? Then tell them about the Special Needs Family Network.

The Special Needs Family Network is a group of caring WELS Christian family members . . .

- who have children with developmental disabilities
- who desire to help other WELS Christian parents who feel alone in raising their children
- who are willing to share their time on the phone listening to your problems and concerns
- who will offer Christian support and encouragement to you
- who will pray for your children, for you, and for your family unit
- who will help you locate religious resources to help instruct your child better in spiritual matters
- who will try to help you locate other resources to help your child

Find out more about how the Special Needs Family Network can help you!

- Please call the toll-free number 1-866-550-9357 and ask for the coordinator of the Special Needs Family Network.
- Tell the coordinator you are interested in connecting with a parent mentor.
- The coordinator will give you the telephone number of a parent or family member whose situation is similar to yours.
- Full confidentiality will be preserved for you and your family.



Artwork reprinted by permission of Martha Perske from PERSKE:PENCIL PORTRAITS 1971-1990 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998)

The Dollars and Sense of a Brain-based Classroom

by Dr. Sharon Burow, Wisconsin Lutheran College – Milwaukee, WI

Reality programming such as *Extreme Makeover* for homes, people, and cars intrigue the American public as they vicariously live the dream of being given extensive cosmetic changes in an incredibly short time. Have you ever momentarily fantasized about a makeover of your early childhood classroom while drooling through resource catalogs? Additionally, marketing techniques brainwash us into believing... “If I just had _____, _____, and _____ it would really make a difference.” But the truth is, it isn’t the bells and whistles and pre-packaged curricula that truly engage young learners—it is you—believe that you are the one with the ability to utilize brain-based research and strategies.

The intent of this review is to pique your interest and encourage the reading of two inexpensive books that can lead to a subtle makeover without financial implications. What you learn will *extremely* impact those entrusted in your care. Furthermore, as professionals, it is vital to be able to substantiate developmentally (brain-based) appropriate practices in this era of accountability.

Gardner’s Theory of Multiple Intelligences (1983) maintains that each person has an innate ability to readily see patterns and relationships. Extensive studies relate that effectively designed and facilitated classroom settings provide opportunities to support each of nine identified intelligences to exercise the whole brain and to nurture self-confident critical thinkers. But look at the recent changes taking place in early childhood classrooms. More programs are aligning themselves to meet a traditional format that marches young children to a linguistic and logical, mathematical beat. There are decreasing spaces for children to explore and collect artifacts of nature, to be physically challenged, and the time to celebrate, create, construct, and converse about various mediums of art and music. Additionally, playtime has been minimized and has become an occasional filler. There is unrealistic pressure on early childhood educators to utilize whole-group teaching and overdose children on “canned and/or direct” instruction to quantitatively validate learning. Although there are a plethora of publications available with prescribed checklists and standards, the following unique



texts provide an overlay of neuroscience and education to support staff in measuring the growth of the whole child and providing rich evidence of learning.

Smart Start: Building Brain Power in the Early Years (P. Schiller, 1999, Beltsville, MD, Gryphon House) professionally extends awareness of research and strategies to optimize learning based on brain functioning and discriminative environmental and curricular changes within the early childhood classroom. Schiller was ahead of her time when she compiled twenty strategies and examples to rethink how we teach. Unlike many recent books on brain research, *Smart Start* is not cluttered with scientific jargon but simply anchors the reader with key findings on brain development as

a segue to thoughtful classroom planning for the early years and beyond.

Schiller also posits that when there is pressure to crank out worksheets, uniform craft projects, and a schedule that has an assembly line format, less learning takes place. A child’s lack of personal connection with lock-step activities at a whirlwind pace, releases hormones that reduce the ability to learn and retain. When children have the freedom to choose and linger in activities, endorphins assist in bridging and retaining learning. *Smart Start* provides abundant strategies for supporting the whole child through aspects of learning such as aroma stimuli, music, color, brain friendly scheduling, guidance, cross-lateral games, small muscle activities, hydration, and nutrition. Especially intriguing are the facets regarding practice, problem-solving, rethinking rewards, and the value of learning a second language.

50 Fun and Easy Brain-based Activities for Young Learners (E. Booth Church, 2002, New York, Scholastic) provides a seamless companion to the aforementioned book. While Schiller focused on strategies for enhancing brain connection, Church identifies areas of the brain that are exercised throughout the curriculum. The reader is also reminded that open-ended activities engage

(Continued on next page)



Leadership

by Sara Kurth

Martin Luther College Student in Early Childhood Education

Guidance. Direction. These are two words that the dictionaries use to define leadership. To me, however, leadership has come to encompass much more than just these two actions. I recently read a definition of leadership that I thought was much more fitting to the role of leadership in an early childhood center. According to Debra Ren-Etta Sullivan (an early childhood college professor), leadership is, “Changing, motivating, and elevating both the leaders and the followers in ways that improve society and create an environment that prepares children and adults to participate in the leadership process” (Gebretensae and Hnatiuk 10). We can see how this definition applies to early childhood education. As teachers of young, very impressionable children, we certainly help to shape society – even if it is not always evident to us; and our goal within developmentally appropriate curricula is to enable children to gain confidence, and in many ways, to become leaders themselves.

For me, being a leader means being passionate about achieving and maintaining a vision – and all that this entails. Within an early childhood center, this would mean successfully supporting children’s learning, and even more importantly their faith. Doing this includes the ability to listen, problem-solve, make decisions, and enforce decisions. It involves the capability to inspire, support, guide, collaborate, communicate, and take risks. Leadership requires one to be courageous, honest, intelligent, charismatic, decisive, confident, creative, and more. Above all, a leader must be willing to support his or her teammates and guide them in their shared vision.

In the role of an early childhood teacher, leadership also involves helping to make children into leaders. It means allowing them to develop their own independence and supporting them in developing their own initiative. While we certainly guide and provide support for our students, we allow them to develop their own styles of leadership within their world. We aim to empower children to become leaders themselves and to support them in this process.

(“The Dollars and Sense. . . “ continued from page 3)

multiple areas within both hemispheres of the brain, thus further increasing the brain’s capacity for learning. Just as specific exercises tone different areas of the body, so too, the 18 multi-sensory brain boosting skills enable children to acquire invaluable skills for learning success. Church then incorporates several skills within 50 open-ended activities and suggests varying the experiences to further stimulate thinking.

The information from both these resources can be readily incorporated into a staff in-service, so all teachers are thoughtfully planning and assessing from a brain-based perspective. Additionally, regularly highlighting strategies in newsletters and at parent and/or board of education meetings, sets the stage for professional dialogue about what is best for supporting young learners and what provides professional accountability.

Often what causes the oohs and aahs of extreme makeovers is superficial and soon the day-to-day routine of life sets in for the makeover recipients. But when novice and veteran educators are willing to stand tall and implement a brain-based makeover, we know that children will never be the same; we will have enabled twenty-first century youth to thrive in the complexity of a global community.

Additional Resources

Brierly, J. K. (1974). *Give me a child until he is seven: Brain studies and early childhood education*. Bristol, PA: Falmer Press.

Gardner, H. (1983). *Frames of mind: The theory of multiple intelligences*. New York: Basic Books.

Jensen, E. (1994). *Brain-based learning*. Del Mar, CA: Turning Point Publishing.

Sousa, D. (1995). *How the brain learns*. Reston, VA: The National Association of Secondary School Principals.



From the Mouths of Babes

Amber, my three-year-old, went with me on a hospital visit. At the hospital I picked up the phone from which you can request a patient’s room number. Amber asked me, “What are you doing?”

“I’m finding out where our friend is.”

After I hung up the phone, I took her by the hand and started heading for the elevators. She looked at me puzzled, “He’s in the elevator?”

Pastor Eric Vertein, St. Paul’s – Crandon, WI



Join the Discussion

Do you have any ideas, concerns, insights, comments, or questions to share about early childhood and Sunday school ministry, vacation Bible school ministry, moms and tots groups, “Cradle Roll” programs, or parenting young children? Do you have a funny story to tell about something involving your early childhood ministry or even your own children? If so, join the Early Childhood Chatter discussion board. Simply go to www.wels.net and type ECM into the jumpword box. Then click on the “Discussion Boards” folder and share.

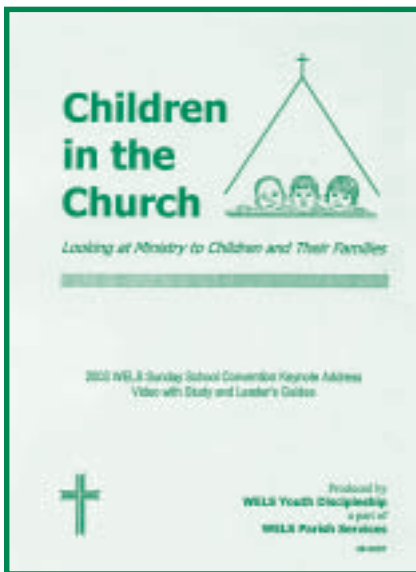
Kid Friendly Cities

Go to www.kidfriendlycities.org/2004/ and find out how *Population Connection* ranks cities in America in “kid friendliness.” *Population Connection’s* mission is to present the best available data on the social, economic, educational and physical environment in cities. The group notes that the report is not a “relocation guide,” but a “tool to help everyone in a community improve the quality of life for children in the area.” A city’s “spiritual environment” is not noted, but other data is very revealing.

Consider Ordering “Children in the Church”

38-3087 / \$21.25

This four part video and companion study guide, developed by WELS Commission on Youth Discipleship, encourages participants to seriously evaluate the ministry they are doing with the children in their congregations, and by extension, their families. The future of our congregations rests with our children, connecting these children and their families to Jesus, is what ministry is really all about.



The resource has four components:

- **Study Guide**
(copy masters for participants)
- **Leader’s Guide**
(for the person facilitating the study sessions)
- **Video** (of the 2003 Sunday School Conference keynote address)
- **Keynote Address** (in printed form)

To view the resource listed above, and/or to order, go to www.nph.net/welsproducts. Questions regarding the use of this resource may be directed to cyd@sab.wels.net or by calling 414-256-3274.

The Church’s Most Important Population: One Man’s Opinion

“Since I became a Christian two decades ago, I have always accepted the dominant notion: the most important ministry is that conducted among adults. But the overwhelming evidence we have seen of the huge impact in the lives of kids and the relatively limited changes in the lives of adults has completely revolutionized my view of ministry. I have concluded that children are the single most important population group for the Church to focus upon. Many churches may not go that far, but I do hope that they will at least consider the research findings and place a greater emphasis upon children. Such a shift in priorities could well bring about the spiritual renaissance that many church leaders have long been praying for.

*George Barna – Barna Update
(November 2003)*

“Research reveals that adult church leaders usually have serious involvement in church life and training when they are young. The statistics gathered among a national sample of pastors, church staff, and lay leaders showed that more than four out of five of those leaders had consistently been involved in the ministry to children for an extended period of years prior to age 13. One implication is that the individuals who will become the church’s leaders two decades from now are probably active in church programs [for children] today.”

*George Barna – Transforming Your Children
Into Spiritual Champions (2003)*

While WELS and CYD would not endorse everything George Barna says, you can review some interesting and applicable research at www.barna.org.



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Worshiping With Children

During three Sundays in August, 1999, Pastor Robert Balza, Sr. (Eternal Love Lutheran Church - Appleton, WI) met with parents to discuss the topic of worshiping with children. These open discussions with the pastor revolved around thirteen questions which he had prepared. There was a free exchange of information, ideas, and insights. "Worshiping With Children" is the result of those discussions, and represents the input of everyone involved. "Worshiping With Children" will help both parents and children participate in the worship experience with joy, and at the same time foster the order needed to enable all who attend worship services to hear the Gospel and experience God's presence. You can find Pastor Balza's resource at www.wels.net/youthdiscipleship. Look in the "Consultation and Resources" collection under "Early Childhood Ministry Resources."



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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