



Sowers & Seeds

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

Have You Hugged a Dad Today?

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



When it comes to children, moms still shoulder most of the delivery duties (in more ways than one!). But more and more dads can be seen dropping their children at the day care door. Did you know that when a father drops his child off at your early childhood ministry (ECM), you have a golden opportunity to make his day and shape his direction?

Though improving dramatically from earlier perceptions about fathers, our society still wonders about the positive and proactive contribution fathers make to the development of their children. Too much of society's picture of fathers

comes from what are called "deficit perspectives" that suggest men are not very good fathers and not much use to their children. There is a paradox in our society: male and masculine roles associated with men are valued while paternal/father roles are devalued. Abundant and publicized examples of father absence, abandonment, or abuse hit fathers even harder. Add to this the way television portrays them – as punch lines and poster boys for incompetence and irrelevance – and you wonder how any father has the courage to rise in the morning. Sometimes the church even looks down on dads/men, because moms/women seem to do so much of the heavy lifting in a congregation. But then the guy comes walking through your ECM door, and you have a chance to make his fathering day.

Many research studies support the contention that fathers have a vast and positive influence on their children. Children with highly involved fathers are characterized by increased cognitive competence, increased empathy, less sex-stereotyped beliefs, less externalizing behaviors during the preschool years, less problematic and delinquent behaviors as they grow older, a greater degree of emotional stability, and more internal locus of control.

A father's authoritative parenting has been linked to his children's higher grades in school, more years of school completed, fewer conduct problems, less delinquency, less depression, greater self-esteem, higher life satisfaction, more positive social behavior, increased popularity, and larger support networks.

Fathers make a real difference by playing a multitude of roles in the lives of their children: economic provider,

(Continued on page 2 . . .)

In This Issue

First Impression, Lasting Impression.....	p. 2
Underrated and Overlooked.....	p. 3
Drop the Remote and Back Away From the Sony!.....	p. 4
Web Sites Review.....	p. 5
EduTech: A Great Opportunity.....	p. 5



First Impression, Lasting Impression

By Professor Cheryl Loomis – Martin Luther College, New Ulm, MN

No doubt you've heard the expression, "You only get one chance to make a first impression." More often than not I find this cliché to ring true. When exceptions occur, it's generally after spending time with a person or in a situation.

A good first impression is especially important when related to ministry. An early childhood ministry may be the means God uses to bring a family in touch with his saving Word. Early childhood educators and caregivers need to plan to make that first impression a positive experience.

Let's examine first impressions from the visitor's point of view. Often initial contacts are made by phone. Determine who gives out information about your program and decide how much information should be shared in that first phone conversation. Schedule an appointment for people to visit. Imagine the impression one leaves when trying to attend to a group of young children while conducting a visit. It's impossible to give full attention to the children in your care and the visitor. Nothing leaves a worse impression than someone who is not an attentive listener. This means scheduling times for a visit when you can talk in an uninterrupted manner. The more time we take to listen the more we understand a family's needs. Informal opportunities to witness and share your source of comfort and strength can present themselves at these times.

What impression does the facility make? As people enter the property, what is the first thing they notice? That point of entry also leaves an impression. How will people know your program is distinctly Christian? The attitude of staff and children also sends a message. Do you observe the "three foot rule" which states that people should be greeted by the time they are three feet away from you? Welcoming people is not just a job for the director. All teachers and staff should be encouraged to use this technique as well. And what about the children in your care? How have they been instructed to greet visitors? Use this opportunity as a learning experience. Role play introductions and encourage them to include visiting children in their work and play.

Starting a conversation and making small talk may be awkward for some. A few basic communication tips may be helpful. Be sure to introduce yourself. Use the other person's name during the conversation. Discussion about school and children will be a natural conversation opener. Asking general questions (Where do you work? How long have you lived in this area? How did you hear about our school?) can help steer the conversation.

Plan to make a good impression. Pray for success and work to create a welcoming attitude in your ministry.

("Have You Hugged a Dad Today?" . . . Continued from page 1)

caregiver and nurturer, moral teacher and role model, friend and playmate, monitor and disciplinarian, protector, advocate, provider of emotional and practical support to mothers, and provider of linkages to the extended family and the community. It has also been found that increased father involvement strengthens the relationship between marital partners, bringing great advantages to the children in the home. Suffice it to say, fathers are HUGE in the lives of their children, and many times they don't know it or worse yet, don't believe it.

Now that you have some additional data, what could you do to make the fathers you encounter through your ECM

feel better about themselves and their role as dad? What can you do to give these men the strokes they so desperately need and help them realize what a great, great blessing they are from God to their children? What could you think of to help dads realize that according to God's plan for families, they are vitally important, especially as spiritual models for their children?

Could it be that men are frequently less engaged in the spiritual development of their homes and families because they have been led to believe – sometimes directly sometimes indirectly – that their contribution does not matter? As an ECM minister, give some thought to how you can help God's dads. Maybe it starts with simple hug!

Fathers, do not irritate and provoke your children to anger...but rear them tenderly in the training and discipline and the counsel and admonition of the Lord.

Ephesians 6:4 (Amplified Bible)

(If you'd like the references for the studies about fathers used for this article, email: joel.nelson@sab.wels.net.)

Underrated and Overlooked: Supporting Children With Play Problems

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

In this era of educational accountability, administration and the public are demanding tangible indicators that learning is taking place within the early childhood setting. The majority of three through six-year-old programs place number and letter identification, printing, and sound recognition as critical indicators of readiness to, “enter the system.” Think about your program, the focus of your parent-teacher conferences, and the first grade teacher’s expectations. Indeed much pressure is put upon the early childhood setting.

This article is not intended to debate curricular strands of accountability, but to challenge you to stand vanguard, honor children, and recognize responsibility for the provision and support of extensive play (center) opportunities within your curriculum. Some of the most vital facets for educational success lay in initiating young children to develop self-regulation, meta-cognition, confidence, the desire to explore the unknown, and celebration of the joy of learning.

WOW-how empowering! When children are facilitated in developmentally appropriate classroom centers within an environment that heralds such goals, little ones are being equipped to be successful lifelong learners.

Leading theorists such as Piaget, Vygotsky, and Montessori regard play’s critical role in a child’s learning and growth.

Additionally, the latest studies on brain research herald play opportunities as a prerequisite to success in the primary grades. However, apart from accountability issues, playtime is frequently minimized because it is perceived as an arena for inappropriate behavior and teacher frustration. It just appears easier to provide structured and lockstep curricula to sustain orderliness and “get on with learning.”

What is wrong? The majority of teachers know how to design a physical play environment with interesting activities and materials and recite the value of play. But the ability to support those struggling with learning through play is often lacking and thus play is frequently cancelled. There has been little consideration regarding a child’s ABILITY to play. We think play is something natural to children; or is it?



This personal concern for “achievement” at the early childhood level and the diminished time for play provided the impetus to research studies and materials that made the connection between children’s behavior, the inability to play, and play’s impact on schooling in general. Sharp (1993) coordinated a “play training program” developed by teachers and psychologists who spent more than five years video taping three through six year old children who were unable to play with ease and spontaneity. This comprehensive resource encourages and enables teachers to increase their own skills for responding to the unique needs of each child. Children grow cognitively, physically, socially, and emotionally and more ready to succeed in the primary grades as a result of teacher play facilitation.

On the WELS early childhood ministry Web page, you can learn more about play problems and how they affect children. You can also find aid in identifying play problems and six behaviors of concern, as well as how to facilitate play problem interaction. Steps are provided to support you as a teacher that will positively affect the play skills of children you teach. Go to www.wels.net/jumpword/ecm, then look in the “Early Childhood Resources Full-time Settings” folder and then under “Print Resources.”



Get Your Parents Linked Together

Link your parents to each other and the cross of Christ. Go to www.parentscrosslink.net. Check out this awesome Web site and subscribe to the *Parents Crosslink* quarterly newsletter. Individual and bulk subscriptions available.



Drop the Remote and Back AWay from the Sony!

Experts in child behavior point out that aggressive behavior in children has been irrefutably linked to exposure to violence on TV and in movies, video games, and other media? “Dozens of studies have shown this link. Probably hundreds,” says psychologist Jerome Singer, co-director of the Yale University Family Television Research and Consultation Center. “The size of the effect is almost as strong as the relationship between smoking and cancer” (TIME, December, 2003).

Very young children are watching loads of TV before they even reach kindergarten. In October 2003, the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation released the results of its survey of 1,065 parents with children 6 months to 6 years. A shocking finding was that 43% of the children ages 2 and under watched TV on a typical day and the 26% had a TV in their bedroom. The median amount of TV watched per day for this age group was two hours!

Perhaps this research (and other research out there) could be used by you to engage the families you serve in some evaluation and reflection. Perhaps this research data and the information from Dr. Burow’s article on play (especially the on-line resources) will move you to encourage parents to unplug TV and unwrap Twister (it’s making a comeback, you know!). Everyone would benefit from that.

Share God’s Word with Your Children

A Letter of Hope

by Randy K. Hunter

Learn more about the hope we have now and for eternity in a new *Forward in Christ* Bible study on the book of 1 Peter. This Bible study includes questions for personal study as well as tips on how parents can share this study with their young children.

Go to www.parentscrosslink.net, scroll down to the “Links” at the bottom of the page, and click on “Check out this ‘Forward in Christ’ Bible study for the whole family!”.

The next time you teach a Bible lesson or any kind of lesson...

There are three basic learning modalities/styles. Usually, individuals are strongest in one, but some are strong in two or maybe even all three. In any group, all three learning modalities/styles will be present. Consider accommodating the three learning modalities (styles) in meaningful ways. Ask yourself the following questions:

FOR VISUAL LEARNERS:

Do I have some colorful pictures or objects that relate to the lesson? What can I draw or write on the blackboard, perhaps with colored chalk? Is my lesson presentation “colorful” enough so students can paint their own, clear picture of the lesson events in their minds? How can I position myself throughout the lesson in such a way that every student can easily see me and make eye contact with me? How can I use my own body movements to help tell the story?

FOR AUDITORY LEARNERS:

How will I provide “thinking noise” time for students? Will meaningful time be given for students to verbally participate in the lesson via answering questions, small group discussions, or even repeating words or phrases after me? How could I add a verbal rhythm to my lesson presentation, to the lesson discussion, etc?

FOR KINESTHETIC LEARNERS:

Will there be things in my lesson students can touch or manipulate? Will my lesson have periodic “breaks” built into it where students can move to a new area of the classroom, get together with fellow students, stand up, sit down, role play, physically imitate lesson characters or settings, sing action Bible songs, etc?



Web Sites Review

By Professor Susan Haar, Martin Luther College

Ideal Lives

www.ideallives.com

This information contained in this site was quite useful. The home page was filled with encouragement for parents of children with disabilities. The creators of the website are quick to point out that while many parents feel alone in their struggles, there are many people who go through the same thing on a daily basis. Parents need not feel alone. They can network online through a discussion forum. The site contains articles, topical guides, and information for referrals to professionals in your area of need, along with a free newsletter. You do need to join to be able to take full advantage of the site, but membership is free and definitely worth the few minutes it takes to register.

Cure Autism Now

www.cureautismnow.org

The *Cure Autism Now* website is filled with advocacy opportunities as well as the latest news about autism, its causes and effects. While a cause is still unknown, *Cure Autism Now* is an organization made up of parents, teachers, and doctors who are determined to find answers. There are many resources for learning about autism on this website. The definitions and explanations are easy-to-understand but communicate the need for finding a cause and a cure for autism. The creators of this site highlight the fact that every child is unique and has the right to have his different needs met. This website provided practical tips for living with and teaching children with autism. This site would be useful for both parents and educators.



Strong Roots for Tender Shoots

This Northwestern Publishing House (www.nph.net) produced early childhood ministry resource, offers an in-home parenting curriculum for nurturing children from baptism through age four. The packet contains seven age-appropriate books for children up to age four, two magnets, nine pamphlets that include such items as: suggested parenting skills, parenting tips, songs, and other activities. Included as an integral part is a Bible study for parents. On the NPH Web site you can also order individual components from the resource. Type “strong roots” into the search box.

Child’s Packet: 77-1029 / \$21.50 (includes ALL materials needed from birth to age 4)
Administrator’s Kit: 77-1033 / \$6.99

Building from the Ground Up

The 2nd Biennial WELS Youth Ministry Conference

Friday-Sunday, September 15-17, 2006 ——— Chaparral Suites Resort – Scottsdale, AZ

Sponsored by the WELS Commissions on Youth Discipleship, Adult Discipleship, and Parish Schools

Three Keynote presentations...

The Family Is Foundational ——— Parents Are Primary ——— Youth Matter

Sectional presentations and displays will provide ministry insights and resources for...

Families/Parenting, Early Childhood, Children and Teens, Catechism/Confirmation, Sunday School and Related Ministry, Special Needs Families, Vacation Bible School, Lutheran Boy and Girl Pioneers, Lutheran Camps. A special pre-conference workshop on the popular, “Faith Stepping Stones” program will also be given (fee is extra).

\$225.00/person includes two nights’ lodging, all meals, and all conference materials.

Watch for registration details coming in late spring 2006.

“Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labor in vain.” ~Psalm 127:1



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EduTech

EduTech: A Great Opportunity

EduTech 2006 (June 26-29, Oshkosh, Wisconsin) is an opportunity for educators of all types to learn about some of the innovative ways God has provided to us lately to teach and preach the good news of Jesus Christ. Martin Spriggs, WELS Chief Technology Officer, says, "I'm excited about this kind of forum that will promote and facilitate idea sharing — all centered around the common goal of being the best stewards we can be."

Keynote speaker, Dr. David Walsh, president of the National Institute on Media and the Family will discuss brain development, adolescence, the impact of media on children, and the factors that influence school performance, literacy, and violence prevention. Mr. David Warlick, director of the Landmark Project; "The Three Ts of Teaching" will share ideas to turn the classroom into a dynamic, exciting, and highly effective learning environment. Several other sectionals and break out groups will round out the event.

For more information, visit the EduTech 2006 website: www.wels.net/jumpword/edutech or call the CPS office at 414-256-3222.

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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