



Sowers & Seeds

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What Are You Telling?

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

I have a file of little snippets of writings that I have gathered over the years. One such snippet is the following poem that, according to my sketchy notes, comes from an Amish cookbook:

You Tell On Yourself

You tell on yourself by the friends you seek
By the very manner in which you speak
By the way you employ your leisure time
By the use you make of dollar and dime.

You tell what you are by the way you walk
By the things of which you delight to talk
By the manner in which you bear defeat
By so simple a thing as how you eat.

You tell what you are by the things you wear
By the spirit in which your burden you bear
By the kinds of things at which you laugh
By the poems you write in an autograph.

By the books you choose from the well-filled shelf
In these ways and more you tell on yourself
So there is really no particle of sense
In an effort to keep up false pretense.

As summer ends and the early childhood ministry year gets into full swing, keep in mind that you tell on yourself. How you conduct yourself with your ministry's children, their parents, your colleagues, and others in the congregation and community is noticed and has a dramatic impact on how others will view you, your ministry, your congregation, and, most importantly, your Savior.

May the Lord, who has called you to serve him in early childhood ministry, give you the faith, energy, insight, and commitment to let who you are in Jesus shine brightly and lovingly through you all year long. There is nothing better to tell on yourself!





Sharing a Good AROMA with the Parents You Serve

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

The Winter 2007 issue of *Sower and Seeds* carried an article titled, “Some Have One... What’s Yours?” which challenged early childhood educators to reflect on how a personal mission statement could be incorporated into and influence the public early childhood ministry (ECM). The acronym **AROMA** (Affection, Respect, Order, Merriment, Affirmation) was given to picture the Christ-centered fragrance that permeates an ECM and focuses on God-pleasing and healthy exchanges with the children. A Christ-centered fragrance of God-pleasing, healthy exchange with ECM parents is also vital.

Just as the teacher relies on the parents to extend classroom curricular endeavors with their child, so too, it is imperative that our ECM have a mission statement making a parallel commitment to the parents/guardians. Specifically, how are we modeling and encouraging the spiritual, social-emotional, and educational partnership in our exchanges with parents?

It is disheartening to catch the tail-end of a conversation by a parent or principal excusing a teacher by saying, “but at least she’s really good with the children,” or teachers who are resigned to having minimal contact with parents because it is uncomfortable, unnecessary, or supposes parent disinterest. Christ did not limit his relationships; he sought out and modeled love and compassion for all of his sheep—the young and old, the wealthy and impoverished, the healthy and ill—all are in need of the Savior. As called servants of the Word we, too, must determine how to offer ourselves to each family, even if we are met time and again with rejection.

Ministry-driven early childhood educators set themselves apart with a faithful undertaking to embed a Christ-centered attitude and atmosphere, both within and outside of the classroom. What follows are reflective questions, statements and personal examples that apply the same **AROMA** that guided the student-centered mission statement. These same key fragrances can lead you to frame and initiate a family-centered mission statement that generates genuine engagement and is stamped with your personal signature.

Affection

How do you communicate interest and acknowledge parents in their daily walk? (Celebrate their joys and share their disappointments.) Do you seek families out at church or give a gratuitous “Hi” if you pass them in the hall? (Don’t sit with the faculty—move among your families [past, present, and FUTURE]). Do you tell them specifically how you appreciate their contribution to their child’s life by...? (Dig deep—there is something positive that they are doing. After all, they are bringing their most prized possession to a Christian setting.) Do you take the time to really listen and observe families? In Christian love can you give a hug or touch to let them know that you care and pray for them?

Over the years I built rapport with parents to make affection come alive by:

- offering to have the class sing at a sibling’s baptism;
- acknowledging family member birthdays (on answering machine);
- making a point to learn the first names of parents, siblings, and those who did the drop-off/pick-up—it is a good feeling to be recognized individually;

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- knowing where parents worked and learned something significant about the family;
- providing parents/grandparents who come as a helper with special tea, coffee, and/juices along with a little treat...and remember from a previous time what they liked. You show you care when you remember the little things and extend yourself. (I enjoyed playing detective and picking up on likes and dislikes.);
- playing music and having wisps of a pleasing fragrance (lavender, cinnamon) in the air for those coming into the classroom to ask questions before or after school;
- encouraging the family to come in, linger, and delight in our activities as well as a bit of “I care about you” chatter and a gentle touch;
- asking (on occasion) a parent helper to come early and get the children involved in activities so that I could go outside, stand by the curb, open the car door and greet the families as they dropped off their children; and especially introduce myself to those who were new to the school. (Set in motion a plan so that all of the teachers and aids can rotate through this enjoyable 10 minute time—be a community... not just the warm fuzzy toddler/preschool/5K teacher.);
- calling over the summer when a child was no longer in my class to demonstrate my care and interest in their family as a whole—a most worthwhile five minute call, especially to families who might be going through rocky times. This affirms that disagreements do not cause a withdrawal of affection. Such acts give affection true roots.

Respect

How do you honor and build up parents? How are mistakes and disagreements handled? Do you give them adequate time for responding? How might you support those who have dysfunctional tendencies? Is your energy spent degrading them in the teachers’ lounge/staff meetings, or are you being proactive so that they can feel empowered? How do you help them feel validated in the face of disagreement? (Never give up on a parent!)

Respect is a two-way endeavor. Over the years I have tried to attend to and be polite to parents by:

- listening, conversing, and writing professionally and warmly;
- being mindful of my non-verbal communication;
- making home visits meaningful and personal. I let parents know that regardless if I have had other siblings in

my classroom, and despite all teachers doing home visits, I am genuinely invested in this exchange. I look for common ground;

- giving parents decision-making power through surveys, calls, and face-to-face exchanges and sharing the how and why behind school routines and events;
- providing other options to parents unable to help in the classroom to feel more connected. (They made reminder calls for snacks, cut out felt pieces, worked on the children’s scrapbooks.);
- inviting exchanges—listening and asking.

Order

How are you providing integrity and mutual trust through communication patterns, promises, and management practices so that positivism is modeled at all levels of interactions? Are parents able to recognize the rhythm (time frame, expectations, courtesy, and habits) that permeate all interactions with you? Your planning is obvious yet parents note your flexibility. How can you provide for partnerships and seek input without chaos? How do you show that you are a steady helm?

Over the years parents were able to recognize my commitment and follow-through by:

- developing a thorough packet and plan that introduces scaffolding of curricularly appropriate practices;
- setting specific objectives and giving parents an outline for the home visit and conference (provide for feedback and time for parent generated questions);
- demonstrating consistency, frequency, and variety in communication (phone, e-mail, video, handwritten notes);
- creating a network of pairing novice families with experienced families;
- being proactive in managing the challenges of culture, education, language, logistics, and family make-up;
- keeping an orderly classroom (you may need to ask a parent volunteer to retrieve an item from a cabinet, drawer, or closet);
- striving to have an awareness and continuity with the endeavors of other staff;
- providing the reasoning when patterns need to be altered and being patient for those who have trouble adjusting.

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Merriment

How are you encouraging a contagious enthusiasm and liveliness for partnership? Are you modeling joy and laughter in the classroom and providing creative events to socialize with each other outside the confines of the classroom? How effective is your invitation to parents to join you in the classroom? What classroom traditions can you develop?

Over the years I have shared a sense of playfulness by:

- creating an atmosphere that includes daily laughter (silly songs, books, and actions);
- developing an end-of-the-year family sleepover in the school gym (incorporating demonstration and use of physical education equipment and activities from the school year);
- providing a sledding party with a winter picnic;
- bowling followed by lunch at my house;
- leading a Mom's Night Out (dinner, spa, scrap booking, aerobic or quilting class);
- having families create a game for a family carnival (inviting other classrooms);
- mapping out a May Day trip (taking a school bus to briefly visit and drop off decorated pots with start-up flowers at each family's home or to congregational shut-ins);
- inviting families of the previous and present class to enjoy vegetable soup and sing a-long (invite the class who planted the classroom garden and present class to harvest the corn, carrots, peppers, onions, parsley and have the children make soup, bread, and butter for their families);
- including (anonymous) humorous antidotes that happen in the classroom in the weekly newsletter.

Affirmation

Are you attentive and intentional in helping to nurture families? How do you help them tap their potential—to be responsible, to learn from mistakes? How do you support

their ability to enhance their child spiritually, socially-emotionally, physically, and cognitively? How do you demonstrate that you believe in their ability? Every family has strengths—spotlight them (use some of the words at the end of this article).

Over the years I affirmed parents by:

- creating a family library of books (religious and secular), magazines, pamphlets, videos, games and curricular resources that reinforce center/classroom values and philosophy, and share information on child development;
- holding family seminars on parenting topics chosen by the families;
- developing a quarterly book club focusing on parenting books (current issues/trends);
- making family packets of activities for parents to utilize to reinforce classroom religious and curricular teaching;
- finding unique ways to include all parents in some facet of classroom volunteerism (at school and through home-based prep of classroom materials) as vital to a quality classroom (personalize and acknowledge volunteers.);
- recognizing and incorporating the overlapping knowledge and expertise of family members as a significant resource to classroom studies (nurse, chiropractor, pet store manager, etc.);
- utilizing an end-of-the-year survey.

Brofenbrenner (1990) says that people don't develop all on their own, but that their development is affected by all the different systems they are a part of, and by the way those systems interact with each other (school family, church, and so on). Families have different needs. Just as we differentiate instruction when teaching, we must adjust our aromatic behaviors to best serve our diverse families. A family-centered aroma is infused with intent, decisiveness, vision, and comes from the heart. Sometimes we attend to those who need us the least—those with high self-efficacy—thus under serving those who may be too weak to even cry out to us. In the end, the apex of AROMA is aiding families in knowing who they are and whose they are.

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From the Mouths of Babes

3-year-old Jimmy to Sunday school teacher: "What did they have for dessert at the Last Supper?"

Little Jenny to mom during hymn: "What did Grace do that made her so amazing?"



Got a SLANT?

Help young children learn to take in information by carrying out the SLANT approach to learning taught at the KIPP (Knowledge is Power Program) schools in New York City and elsewhere:

Sit up — on the floor, at a table, in the book corner, on a lap — as you read to a child or a group of children.

Listen — avoid talking at the child, but rather engage each child in a dialog and a conversation with eye contact and physical proximity.

Ask questions — and listen to the answers. Children are never wrong. They answer out of their limited experience, so their replies are limited. Based on what they know, however, their answer is correct. Also, teach them to ask questions.

Nod — demonstrate how to listen to a child by paying attention to what they say to you. Show how you listen and nod when children in the classroom or family child care home speak to you and to each other.

Track the speaker with your eyes. Help children focus on the speaker, whether the teacher, another child, or another adult.



What to Do About Violent Video Games?

by P. James Wilcox — Christ the King Lutheran Church, Port Charlotte, FL

What follows was submitted in response to an article printed in the Spring 2007 issue of Sowers & Seeds titled, "Violent Video Games and Youth Aggression." The article cited the results of a 2002 study of 600 children. The study suggested that exposure to video game violence caused children to see the world as a more violent place, engage more often in arguments with authority figures, get involved in more physical fights, and do poorer in school. We share Mr. Wilcox's article to stimulate additional thought on the topic and not because Sowers & Seeds agrees with all of the content.

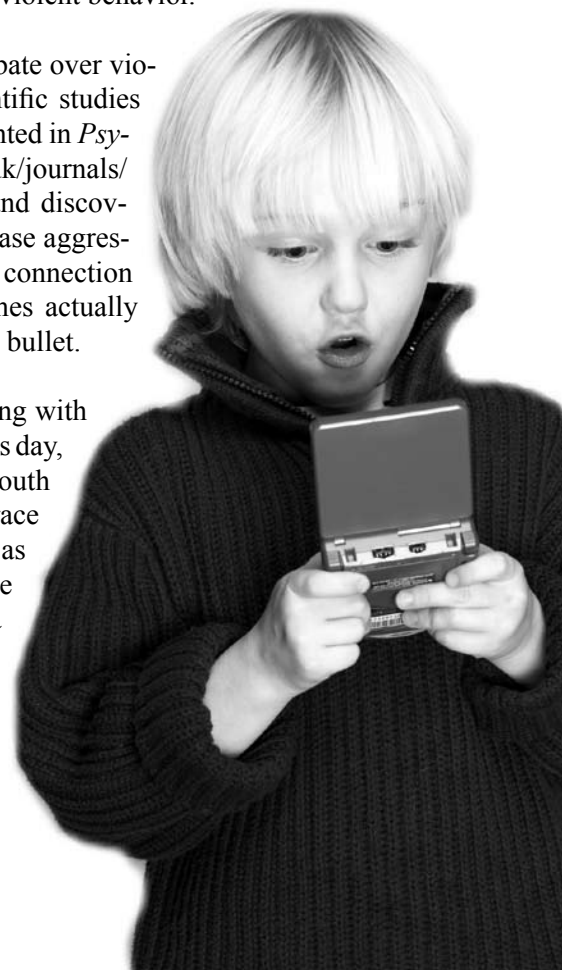
David was young when he killed his first Philistine. We remember the story well. David arrived at the battle and told Goliath exactly what was going to happen: God would hand him over; David would strike him down and then cut off his head. And that's what happened; David killed Goliath with a stone. And, as proof, David chopped off his head. This gruesome scene is written in 1 Samuel 17.

It doesn't take a very graphic depiction to know that was bloody and nasty. And, it really happened. In fact, it kept happening. In David's lifetime, he was almost never free from the specter of violence. It was part of his life. From the beginning of his reign until the end you read repeatedly about wars, murders and battles.

These days we're taken aback by violence. There seems to be a heightened sensitivity toward violent video games. Pushed by the agendas of political and social action groups, we hear more and more these days about how violent video games contribute to violence in children. The solution, of course, is to ban violent video games, lock our youth in closets so that they never see the cruelty of sin in the world, never become exposed to violence and never have to deal with their own violent behavior.

That's ridiculous, and irresponsible. No, the debate over violent entertainment will not be solved by scientific studies because they contradict themselves. A study printed in *Psychology, Crime & Law* (<http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/titles/1068316x.asp>) combined many reports and discovered that some claim violent video games increase aggression, others that violent video games have no connection to violence, and others that violent video games actually reduce aggression! So you see, there's no silver bullet.

In fact, there never will be because we're dealing with an area of Christian judgment. Just like in David's day, violence is all around us. It does us and our youth no good to hide from it and no good to embrace it and support it. God encourages us to, "Live as children of light...and find out what pleases the Lord" (Eph. 5:9,10). God hasn't established a guidebook that exhaustively illustrates what specific activities are sinful. He gives us freedom. So the better question is how can I use my Christian freedom to please the Lord and serve my neighbor? David did both by cutting off the head of a giant.





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Sharing a Good AROMA with the Parents you Serve . . . continued from page 4.

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Spotlight Words

alive, appreciative, approachable, authentic, capable, caring, cheerful, comfortable, competent, committed, confident, content, considerate, consistent, courageous, dependable, determined, effective, efficient, engaged, energized, fair, forgiving, friendly, fun, grateful, happy, helpful, hopeful, joyful, loving, nurturing, open, optimistic, passionate, patient, peaceful, professional, pleasant, responsible, sisterly, stimulated, supportive, thoughtful, sensitive, trustworthy, wholehearted

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WELS Commission on Youth Discipleship
2929 North Mayfair Road
Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53222-4398



Phone: 414-256-3274
E-mail: cyd@sab.wels.net
Web site: www.wels.net/youthdiscipleship