



Sowers & Seeds

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

There's No Place Like Home

By Jim Brandt, Administrator for WELS Parish Schools

At the Commission on Parish Schools we encourage WELS principals, early childhood ministry (ECM) directors, and teachers to conduct home visits at the beginning of each school year. This encouragement is made in an attempt to honor the role of parents as primary educators of children. I firmly believe that parents are a child's first and best teachers. In a true Biblical sense, our teachers should view their roles as "parent assistants." If Christian teachers truly believe God has given parents the directive to "bring up their children in the training and instruction of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4), they should act in ways that honor the role of parents.

One very special way a teacher can honor parents is by taking the time to go to their homes to learn from them about the children he or she will be teaching. No one knows more about a child than his or her parent(s). As a teacher, one needs to give parents an opportunity to introduce their children, helping one to understand their unique gifts and challenges so that one can better serve as their classroom teacher.

It's so easy for a teacher to lose sight of this important goal in an effort to "orient" the parent and student to classroom/ECM expectations and routines, discipline plans, parent helper schedules, etc. It's also easy for parents to misunderstand the purpose of the home visit as "checking out home." (Teachers would do well to avoid "house tours" and refrain from making comments about the home, lest they reinforce such an impression.)



As a principal of an outreaching school in northern California, I regularly made home visits as part of our school outreach/enrollment process. These were key opportunities for me to demonstrate a sincere interest in developing strong relationships with parents, embracing them as partners in the education of their children. Many parents who were not members of our church expressed sincere gratitude for my willingness to visit them in their home. In fact, those visits often resulted in referrals to other parents (friends or coworkers they had told about my visit to their home).

I believe home visits are a key strategy for any school and ECM [full or part-time] that desires to be "more relational" with parents. I perceive many of today's young parents desire strong relationships with their child's teachers and school. Those relationships are important bridges for eventually bringing the Gospel into the homes of families in our communities.

In This Issue

Early Childhood and Developmental Assets.....	p. 2
Web Site Review.....	p. 3
Linking Parents to Each Other and the Cross.....	p. 3
Right From the Start.....	p. 4
Director as Advocate.....	p. 5
The Mouths of Babes.....	p. 5
Tips for Helping Children in Church.....	p. 6



Early Childhood and Developmental Assets

Taken from: www.search-institute.org (2005)

The significance of early childhood continues to capture heightened levels of governmental, public, parental, and professional attention. Many groups understand that school and life success requires positive early childhood development and a focus on early learning. Sustained interest in child care, development, and education has resulted in meaningful gains over the last decade.

Still, a number of issues that are vital to advancing the early childhood field remain. There is the need for a broader understanding of what aspects of development are really important and knowing what works. Policy makers, parents, and professionals are working to define the elements of child development in ways that establish measures of accountability and benchmarks of success. Many recognize the need for a holistic perspective on early childhood that takes more than just the child and primary caregiver(s) into account. While relationships between child and primary caregiver(s) will always be essential, there is an increased understanding that neighbors, organizations, institutions, and the larger community also have very important roles to play.

Search Institute's new Early Childhood Developmental Assets Framework (ECDAF) offers a response to these issues. The ECDAF combines knowledge of what fosters holistic early childhood

development with a practical approach that offers specific guidance to practitioners, parents, family members, neighbors, community workers, officials, and policy makers—all of whom are concerned with ensuring that all young children get a good start in life, make a smooth transition to school, and attain success as they grow older.

The ECDAF is derived and adapted from Search Institute's Developmental Assets youth framework. The past year and a half has been devoted to reviewing and summarizing the theory, research, and practice base of early childhood development, care, and education. The synthesis served as the rationale and justification for describing each asset category and defining every Developmental Asset in the ECDAF.



When the ECDAF is linked to the recently formulated *Developmental Assets framework for middle childhood* and the well-established *youth Developmental Assets framework*, a powerful, practical, and unified approach to the healthy growth and well-being of young people across the first two decades of life is available.

You can see the ECDAF at www.wels.net/jumpword/ecm. Look in "Non-WELS Early Childhood Resources," then in "Web Resources."

The Kind of Inspiration We Need

Having grown up in the Midwest, where it seems like there is a WELS school on every corner, and then moving to the south, where they are few and far between, this newsletter is a great way to feel connected to all the other WELS Early Childhood Centers. I do a lot of reading for information, but this comes to us from a Christian perspective and includes Christ in the articles and that's the kind of inspiration that we as teachers and parents need on a daily basis. I eagerly look forward to the next newsletter and also the opportunity to share it with other parents and teachers in my church and school.

Rachel Smith - Atonement Lutheran Church - Plano, TX



Web Site Review

By Professor Susan Haar
– Martin Luther College

No Child Left Behind www.nochildleftbehind.gov

The official government website for the *No Child Left Behind* laws contains more than simple information about the laws. The government intends that parents and teachers should be well-educated about *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) so that the program is successful. Therefore, the site includes a “teacher toolkit,” parent guide, resources for each state, and many other tools for making NCLB a success.

The *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) website is maintained by the U.S. Department of Education. An alphabetical index listing the topics included on the website makes it easy for educators to find what they are looking for. NCLB has become the focus of education in recent years; therefore, it is necessary that teachers are familiar with the specifics and know where to go to find information. This website is a valuable resource outlining the requirements of NCLB and what lies ahead in the future. All educators need to know about this website.

National Association for the Education of Young Children <http://www.naeyc.org>

This website, run by the *National Association for the Education of Young Children*, is a valuable resource for any early childhood professional. Besides including information about the organization and its beliefs and position statements, the website also contains magazine articles, the NAEYC online store, and links to other useful websites. Early childhood teachers would find this website useful in a variety of ways. Teachers can locate books on the online store, find articles for parent newsletters, and direct parents to this website. Information is available for a large audience - teachers, families, and early childhood students.

Council for Children with Behavioral Disorders www.ccbd.net

You do not have to be a member of the *Council for Children with Behavioral Disorders* to reap the benefits this site offers. There are many links to additional Web sites on behavior disorders. Since reputable specialists have scrutinized those websites one would feel the information contained is valid. One useful aspect of this website is that you are able to read past issues of the periodical, “Beyond Behavior.” This would be an excellent resource to use, especially if you have children in your classroom with challenging behaviors.

Linking Parents to Each Other and the Cross

This fall, a new print newsletter will be unveiled along with its companion website. Both will be called *Parents Crosslink*. Northwestern Publishing House (NPH), and the WELS Commissions of Youth Discipleship (CYD), Parish Schools (CPS), and Adult Discipleship (CAD) have partnered together on this exciting venture.

The print newsletter will be an eight page, two-color resources sold via individual and bulk subscriptions (see details below). WELS Sunday schools, Lutheran elementary schools, early childhood ministries, and congregations will be able to order *Parents Crosslink* for all their families.

The website, www.parentscrosslink.net, will expand on the print newsletter content and also provide a much larger array of resources, information, links, and interactive ways for parents to connect with each other via discussion boards, live chats, and Q&As.

Rates: 1-9 subscriptions/\$3.00 each, 10-24/\$2.75, 25-49/\$2.50, 50-99/\$2.25, 100+/\$2.00. If you’d like to subscribe to the print quarterly today or have additional questions, call Northwestern Publishing House (NPH) Subscription Services at 1-800-662-6093, ext. 8.





Right from the Start: Cultivating Family Partnerships

By Dr. Sharon Burow, Wisconsin Lutheran College



The classroom is almost ready, new materials begging to be implemented, and it appears that all is in place for another year of ministry. However, as you prepare to swing the doors open this fall, have you prepared for how to set the tone in your unique early childhood ministry? This article includes ideas that I and/or other WELS directors/teachers have identified as initial gestures for nurturing relationships that demonstrate, “We really do care here.” Additionally, the following introduction to your center, affirms that both you and the families view each other as equally important resources. When parents feel validated by you they are more likely to be receptive to your wisdom when concerns arise.

Toward the beginning of August send each family a “Can’t Wait to Play with You!” letter (sample can be found at www.wels.net/jumpword/ecm - look in the “Resources-Full-time Settings” then “Print” folder) that shares information for a special “Practice Night” that is held in the early evening, a few days before school starts. This gathering is an hour opportunity for the new families to watch their little one interact with you and/or classroom aides. Having this special evening reduces first day jitters for all family members and allows for a quicker separation on the first day of class. For many of the children, it may be their first time to

visit the classroom, meet staff, find the bathroom, see the special cubby with their name, and meet some of their future classmates. Since this is about team ministry, it is essential for the pastor and principal (if you have a Lutheran elementary school) to be on hand. They can help to welcome everyone and mingle with the families when you are having a “practice class” at the front of the room. This evening interaction also provides you with invaluable insights so that you can be proactive on the first day of class with children who may have shown signs of needing extra guidance or TLC during the “Practice Night.”

Regardless if you do home visits (suggestions for home visits can be found at www.wels.net/jumpword/ecm - look in the “Resources-Full-time Settings” then “Print” folder) which of course is ideal, incorporating a “Practice Night” event decreases the tension of “the unknown.” One insightful preschool teacher shared that although she does not regularly incorporate home visits, if there are families who have a preschooler with special needs, such as social or medical issues, or if she senses that the parents themselves are apprehensive, these families get one or two August home visits. This extra attention eases these families into a successful “Practice Night.” Such sensitivity of extending yourself, especially as a first impression of Christian education, is priceless.

To further partnership, during the third week of school include a special telephone call to each of the families. It is just a 2 to 3 minute conversation to share specific and quick POSITIVE tidbits about their child and field additional questions. If no one answers the telephone, leave the friendly message on their answering machine with your telephone number, should they have questions. Even though you may have face-to-face interactions with the adults at arrival or pick-up, the telephone call is that added extension of yourself. Furthermore, demonstrating such professionalism may encourage families to utilize the Christian elementary school and take interest in the congregation (if non-members). It also helps to legitimize the field of early childhood education.

Show & Tell

What interesting, exciting, and innovative things are you doing with the young children in your congregation/ECM and their parents to connect them better to your ministry, each other, and Jesus? Email us: cjd@sab.wels.net.



Director as Advocate

By Professor Cheryl Loomis, Martin Luther College

Let's Review

Ad.vo.cate n: one that argues for, recommends, or supports a cause or policy (Webster)

As part of your early childhood ministry (ECM) start up for the year, for current and especially new staff members (of any kind), review the following:

Think of a pioneer in the field of early childhood education. Maria Montessori is a familiar one. Was her sense of advocacy intentional? Perhaps not, but her actions were deliberate. She was interested in accommodating Italian children who needed a better learning environment. Her intent was not to create an international curriculum; yet she was an advocate for children (Sullivan). We see the effects of her work in early childhood philosophy and environments today.

professional and spiritual growth is another form of advocacy.

In actuality, advocacy is defined by action. Advocates have moved beyond thinking and discussing an idea or vision. They are people who are moved to action. An advocate is passionate about her cause and willing to do whatever it takes to accomplish it. This may involve a commitment of time or money. It may mean working alone or organizing people to realize a goal. A good advocate stays committed to her goal believing that it can become a reality.

Where do you find advocacy in your job description? Directors, too, are advocates. Your influence as one person affects many others. Directors support children and families along with the staff they serve. Directors advocate for children when they insist on providing a secure Christian environment for them. Directors advocate as they supervise curriculum appropriate for young children. Directors advocate for families as they communicate with them accepting families as they are. Directors advocate for staff making sure they have the materials they need to provide a high-quality education for young children. Providing support for your staff in

- ◆ The Christ-centered mission statement for your ECM – how the ECM is bringing Jesus to children and families
- ◆ How the ECM fits into the larger mission of the congregation
- ◆ How the ECM will nurture Christian relationships: teacher and parent, teacher and child, parent and child, child and child, family and congregation, family and pastor, pastor and staff, etc.
- ◆ What the staff will do together to remain a cohesive team modeling Christ to each other and all children and families served
- ◆ What staff members will do, individually and collectively, to remain personally close to Jesus and keep him the focus of their ministries



“Leaders don’t force people to follow; they invite them on a journey.”

~ Charles S. Lauer

It’s so easy for any ECM (full or part-time) to stray from its real mission: connecting families to Jesus. Make sure the main thing is always the main thing.



The Mouths of Babes

During an electrical storm little Ashley stood by the large bay window in her family’s dining room watching the storm with its impressive lightning. Each time the lightning flashed, Ashley would tilt her head upward and smile broadly. Her mother noticed Ashley by the window, and after a couple more lightning flashes and smiles asked, “Honey, what are you doing? Why do you keep smiling out the window?”

Ashley answered, “I am trying to look pretty. God keeps taking my picture.”



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Tips (6-10) for Helping Children in Church

Adapted from Cindy Bailey - "Shining Star" 1996, Issue 44

- ▶ For the worst of times, be ready with small boxes/containers of cereal or animal crackers. You can apologize to the janitor later. Be sure any crackly wrappers are opened in advance.
- ▶ Talk to your pastor about making the service a bit more kid friendly. Does the pastor ever offer a children's message? Could some children's Bible songs be sung? Would children ever be allowed to be greeters, etc?
- ▶ Take the time to explain what behaviors are expected. Keep it positive. Use more "do's" than "don'ts." Also work at home on things you'll want to have happen in church, i.e. whisper when you want to talk, respect the books, etc.
- ▶ The intensity of your frustration is directly proportional to the height of your expectations. Remember that your little one is just that, a little one. Many adults can't sit still and listen in church either.
- ▶ On the other hand, if it's time to throw in the wipes and go home, accept defeat. A kicking, screaming child makes everyone uncomfortable. If your church has no place for you to go to quiet your child down, then maybe have another crack at it next week, extending the time as much as you can.

** Summer 2005 issue: tips 1-5 / Next issue: tips 11-15*

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 Joel Nelson, Administrator WELS Commission on Youth Discipleship.**

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