DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 445 811 PS 028 910

AUTHOR	Crombez, Mary Margaret, Ed.; Mangigian, Lisa, Ed.
TITLE	Offspring, 1999.
INSTITUTION	Michigan Council of Cooperative Nursery Schools, Dexter.
ISSN	ISSN-0472-6340
PUB DATE	1999-00-00
NOTE	58p.; For 1998 issues, see ED 427 878. Published twice a year. Photographs may not reproduce well.
AVAILABLE FROM	MCCN/Offspring, 8085 Huron River Drive, Dexter, MI 48130 (1-year subscription, $6; 2-year subscription, $10).
PUB TYPE	Collected Works - Serials (022)
JOURNAL CIT	Offspring; v41 n1-2 Spr-Fall 1999
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Child Rearing; Conflict Resolution; Moral Development; Parent Child Relationship; Parent School Relationship; Parent Teacher Cooperation; *Parents as Teachers; Periodicals; *Preschool Children; *Preschool Education; Preschool Teachers; Student Centered Curriculum
IDENTIFIERS	Character Development; Character Education; *Cooperative Preschools; Massages; Peace Education; Project Approach (Katz and Chard); Television Content Ratings

ABSTRACT

This document consists of the two 1999 issues of a magazine for parents, teachers, and others involved in cooperative nursery schools. The magazine is designed to provide a forum for views on dealing with young children, express a variety of ideas, promote the cooperative philosophy, and enhance the relationships of those involved in cooperative nursery schools. The Spring 1999 issue contains the following articles: (1) "Parents Do Matter! An Interview with Dr. Nicholas Abraham" (Lisa Mangigian); (2) "Adventures in Living" (Kate Cole); (3) "'What Do You Do?' Career Parenting in the 90s" (David Bard); (4) "Building Moral Foundations: Character Education for Children" (Karen L. Pace); (5) "Making Peace with Your Mother" (Lynn Sipher); and (6) "Understanding the TV Rating System" (Mary Margaret Crombez). The Fall 1999 issue contains the following articles: (1) "Is It My Turn to Work?" (Carole M. Grates); (2) "Pass the Peace, Please: Teaching Young Children To Live Peacefully" (Holly E. Brophy-Herb); (3) "Massage for Children: More than Just a Hug!" (Mary Margaret Crombez); (4) "Child Directed Learning: The Project Approach" (Mary Trepanier-Street, Lori Gregory, and Jennifer Bauer); (5) "Rewards of Co-oping: What's in It for You and Your Family" (Laura N. Sweet); (6) "Helping Hints for Nursery Parents" (Marjorie Kunz); and (7) "One Step Ahead: The First Years Last Forever."(KB)

Offspring, 1999

No. 1 Spring 1999

No. 2 Fall 1999

Michigan Council of Cooperative Nursery Schools

Offspring

A Publication of the
Michigan Council of Cooperative Nursery Schools
Spring, 1999 No. 1

Offspring is written for parents, teachers and others:

- To provide a forum for views on dealing with young children;
- To express a variety of ideas;
- To promote the co-op philosophy;
- To enhance our relationships with children and each other.

ISSN: 0472-6340

Michigan Council of Cooperative Nursery Schools
is a member of Parent Cooperative Preschools International.

Offspring Magazine is published twice yearly. Articles reflect opinions of the authors and not necessarily the editorial board and staff. Manuscripts are accepted for consideration. Subscription of this magazine is through membership in the **Michigan Council of Cooperative Nursery Schools** or through individual subscriptions. For subscription information, see inside back cover. **MCCN** does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national or ethnic origin.

Offspring Table of Contents

Vol.XXXXI, No.1

Parents Do Matter!
An Interview with Dr. Nicholas Abraham

Dr. Nicholas Abraham, long time educator and family therapist, will keynote during MCCN's 48th Annual Conference in East Lansing, MI, April 30 and May 1, 1999. Dr. Abraham brings with him his nationally known program, *ParentSmart.*

About the Author

Lisa Mangigian is an Offspring *editor and graduate student studying counseling. After participating in co-op with her two oldest children, she is enjoying her last year at Dexter Cooperative Nursery School.*

By Lisa Mangigian

As one of eight children, I saw the value of parent management firsthand.

Offspring: You recently started a company called *The Smart Source.* In addition to offering *Parent* and *Youth Smart* courses you also offer *ManagerSmart.* What connection do you see between parenting and management?

Abraham: I see great connections between the two functions. The *ParentSmart* perspective sees parenting as a management exercise as well as a loving exercise.

Offspring: When did you first understand the concept of parent management?

Abraham: As one of eight children, I saw the value of parent management firsthand. My mother was my first teacher. She managed a household of 10 and was a fine example of a CEO. At times she was a loving nurturer while at other times she was the bottom line decision-maker.

Offspring: Tell me more about your *ParentSmart* program.

Abraham: Consistency and uniformity are essential. *ParentSmart* is a systematic approach to parenting. We help families develop a sense of procedures to establish a family culture. This, of course, is not a new concept. However, this differs from the fly-by-the-seat-of-your-pants parenting I see too often. Many parents are not consistent with their discipline. You cannot manage anything based on mood, which is precisely how many of us run our households. Instead, we teach parents to use a managerial system that is fair, and impartial, yet based on the needs of the child. Developmentally appropriate expectations for children with any type of disability are also important. The key is to follow a system that separates us from our devotion. When a kid misbehaves, parents eventually explode, and we say and do things that we don't mean. We need to develop a system apart from our emotions.

Offspring: Dr. Abraham, that sounds easier than it is.

Abraham: It may not be easy to implement the *ParentSmart* system, but it is probably a lot more effective than what most parents are doing. I stress using calm times for big discussions. Have family meetings and handle discipline concerns when you are not in the heat of the moment. Kids are not

always going to obey. Test this method and if it has an 80% rate of effectiveness then give this a shot. I believe that each day we can start over, so the *ParentSmart* system is like a daily chart, and at the end of the day we can rip it up and start over. When yesterday's over, it's over.

Offspring: What, in your opinion, is the greatest challenge of parenting?

Abraham: The most difficult part of being a loving adult is that we want our children (or students) to love us. We need to be able to say "You don't have to love me, but you need to . . . get dressed, or wake up, or eat breakfast." Parents need to realize they are not going to have their love needs met by children.

Offspring: In your seminars you often ask parents to name their own behaviors they would like to change. What about dealing with our children's misbehavior?

Abraham: I believe parents must look at their own behavior before dealing with their children's misbehavior. If a child doesn't listen, it may be the parent's problem. The child has just been conditioned. Look at your own behaviors. If you are yelling then maybe that's why your child is yelling back at you. In my many years of counseling I have realized one key fact: A self-conversion process is essential. Many clients come wanting to change a loved one or wanting more satisfactory personal relationships. The first step is always to look at yourself honestly and learn to change from within.

Offspring: You clearly have a passion for parenting. How have you been able to develop this passion without having children of your own?

Abraham: I have a very expansive vision of parenting. I feel that I "parent" people when I encourage them to do their best. I actually experience "parenting" when I lead the *ParentSmart* seminars. From my perspective, anybody can help parent a child. School teachers and counselors, bus drivers, store owners, relatives, and neighbors can parent the children in their lives. I remember talking to my high school teachers and listening to their advice when I would

Cooperative nursery schools provide the parental supervision young children need.

have never sought it out from my parents at the time.

Offspring: What advice do you have to those parents who feel powerless?

Abraham: Find out what your children care about and use this knowledge to your parental advantage. Encourage good behavior by offering privileges. Sometimes simple pleasures such as planning a special meal or playing a family card game are what children value most. I'm certainly not advocating expensive gifts.

Offspring: *The Nurture Assumption*, suggests that parents have little influence on their children's lives. Judith Rich Harris, the author of the book, argues that children are influenced less by the nurturing their parents provide and more by their peer relationships and their personality. This nature vs. nurture debate has a long history. Can you comment on the influence of nurturing parenting in a child's life?

Abraham: I think, in some ways, she has been an iconoclast, in that peers and schools have tremendous power. She says parents have no influence, yet she urges them to pick the right peers and schools. Parents either matter or don't! Parents play a supervisory role and the problem is many kids are unsupervised. And, of course, our society experiences the negative effects of this lack of supervision and nurturing. Now we need to ask at 4 p.m., "Where are our teens and what are they doing?"

Offspring: Parents involved in cooperative nursery schools make a strong commitment to their children's early education. In your professional opinion, does this kind of parental involvement really matter in a child's life?

Abraham: Cooperative nursery schools provide the parental supervision young children need. Moreover, parents experience the camaraderie of working together. A co-op is a community. It can help parents from feeling isolated in their parenting roles. In my seminars one of the most significant aspects for many parents is the opportunity to share their parenting challenges with others. In a co-op, parents get a chance to see other children wail, whine, or wink at them. The parents build a shared sense of "We're in this together."

Offspring: Any closing insights?

Abraham: One of my favorite quotes is "Angels can fly because they take themselves so lightly." Let's laugh some more, enjoy this day. It will never come again.

Adventures in Living

I have always enjoyed adventures. Just hearing the word makes me think that something exciting will happen soon. My childhood, growing up on a farm, was filled with simple yet memorable adventures. My brothers and I used to love to drive with our Dad to take a load of beans to the big city. The treat was waking up at 4:30 a.m. and having Dad to ourselves. It was exciting to hear and smell all the big trucks pulling into the warehouse and watch what was being loaded and unloaded. It was an adventure — an unusual, exciting event with an element of risk.

About the Author

Kate Cole has taught at Troy co-op for 13 years. She is a member of the faculty at Macomb Community College and is the President of the Teacher's Association of the Greater Detroit Cooperative Nursery Council. An empty nest would best represent her latest parenting adventure since her youngest child entered college this past fall.

By Kate Cole

Parenting and teaching require a sprit of adventure. And whether you are just beginning your adventures or have many tales to tell, the following tools may be helpful to you.

A Flag

Adventures begin with a goal. Flags are symbols of independence and often represent the accomplishment of a goal. Our goal, as parents, is our children's independence, the definition of which changes with every year. First, we want our children to walk independently, feed themselves, talk and be independent of diapers. We want them to dress themselves and wave good-bye to mom and dad with a smile when they go off to school. Then we want them to learn to read and write independently, become problem solvers, and make friends of their own. And when they've completed their formal education, we want them to be financially independent.

Our goal, as parents, is our children's independence, the definition of which changes with every year.

A Magnifying Glass

The next tool is a magnifying glass. A magnifying glass can help us to remember to find excitement and joy in the smallest things. Children are particularly adept at noticing and appreciating minute details. As parents and teachers we must use our magnifying glasses to help enlarge teachable moments. For example, when you see a child help another or accomplish a task he couldn't do before, magnify that moment by letting the child know that the little things can be very big. Ian was in my young-fives class many years ago. We met four

mornings a week. During snack the children poured their own juice from a small pitcher. In late November, I wrote in my lesson plan book, Ian didn't spill his juice today. He was so proud! In the grand scheme of life, caring for others and having the tenacity to fail and try again are big values that are acquired when we are very small.

A Walking Stick

Walking sticks are essential for a good adventure and are a great source of support. When my son was not quite three, he had his own version of a walking stick. He took the cymbal from his Fisher Price marching band and tied a long string from it to his waist. Whenever we went up a hill he threw the cymbal ahead and walked up to it. I suspect he had a mental image of a mountain climber and it helped keep him on the path. Parents need all the walking sticks or supports they can get. Family and friends can offer support. And co-op nurseries are a wonderful source of family support. Support helps keep us on the path to our goals.

Food

Food is a critical ingredient for any adventure. It nourishes us forward, toward the goal. Food represents nurturing. It also represents the need for us to nurture ourselves. Experts advise that parents find time for themselves in their busy schedules. A parent in one of my classes had three children under the age of five. She took the expert's advice and decided to take a shower alone. After thinking she had finally succeeded she looked at the shower door and saw three noses pressed against the glass. Nurturing ourselves is not always a simple task, but food for the body and food for the spirit are essential.

A Flashlight

Flashlights brighten the dark so that we can see the important things. It's easy to get sidetracked or stumble over a bump in the road. Using a light can help us focus on the things that are right instead of what's wrong. For instance, one of my students began the year with a tiny attention span. She was here, there and everywhere. She would paint two splashes of color and be off to the playdough, squish it once and head over to the dress-up area. She could do more in five minutes than most people do in a day. Admittedly, I was concerned, until the day her Dad worked in the classroom. He watched his daughter dart

Nurturing ourselves is not always a simple task, but food for the body and food for the spirit are essential.

from here to there and laughed. He explained that his parents said he deserved such an active child because he was exactly like that when he was three. I got out my light; in what areas did this child shine? She was a loving, huggy bear who was the first to comfort another child. She would sit on a lap for three or more books. She had a talent for puzzles and concentration games in a small group. Did I need to worry? No. That's the tricky part of parenting and teaching: finding out where children shine. It's easy with some children. Others take some work and a bit of luck. One parent in my classroom was so frustrated with her little guy that all she could see was his negative behavior. I told her to write down five good things about her son each day and catch him doing something right and praise him. She was skeptical, but was soon amazed by the many good things about him. Gradually his behavior improved because his mom focused on his good qualities. Use your light to find the good in your children; it will make their gifts and skills shine.

A Rubber Chicken

This last item is the most important. You need a rubber chicken. Adventures in life require laughter, a lot of it. Laughter relaxes us, joins us together and renews us. I have an odd saying, and I'm not quite sure where it came from. It first appeared when my two children were under five. It was raining, they were bored so they alternated between being attached to me and harassing each other. I'm not sure what they were doing but I was so aggravated I shouted, "If you do not stop that I will scream like a chicken." They looked at me wide eyed and said "Do it!", so I did. The tension disappeared. We were happy. When things go wrong, and they will, if no one is hurt physically or emotionally, you have a choice: you can laugh or cry.

When we see life as an adventure we see possibilities, excitement, and joy in every day. When we use the proper tools, our adventures in living have marvelous outcomes including living life to its fullest.

"What Do You Do?" Career Parenting in the 90s

The mission of cooperative nursery schools respects and values the role of parents in the lives of their children. Many variations on family-focused child rearing are redefining the allocation of responsibilities of family life, including who works outside the home, who works at home, and who volunteers at nursery school once or twice per month. As a result, fathers, grandparents and even nannies are becoming familiar faces in many nursery school classrooms. As parents strive to meet their family's needs in the best way possible, schools need to work to create an environment of support for various family situations. Respecting and honoring families for their courageous choices to be available and invested in their children's lives is crucial to the cooperative nursery philosophy.

About the Author

David Bard is an at-home dad. He has two sons aged two and four. He and his wife value the consistency, love and support an at-home parent brings to the family. They proudly count themselves among the two million American families (according to At-Home Dad *magazine) for whom fathering has become a full-time profession.*

By David Bard

I was just too uncomfortable to utter the words "I stay home with my kids."

"So, what do you do for a living?"

This seemingly harmless question strikes fear into the hearts of stay-at-home Dads. The temperature in the room shoots up and beads of sweat form on our upper lip. If we hear the question amidst a circle of people mingling at a party we quickly excuse ourselves and run to the nearest restroom or food table. If we are the first questioned or we can't make a polite and expedient escape we go into a hyperstate of mental awareness. Our minds race for a way out of answering the question directly. We laugh nervously. "What do I do?" we ask, as if we needed some clarification. Like a rat trapped in a corner we get defensive. We don't know what to do next.

At first, the title of my previous profession leapt from my lips. After all, it was what I did. I wasn't lying. I was just too uncomfortable to utter the words "I stay home with my kids." It's curious how we all often bow to societal stereotypes paying mere lip service to our own values. We say our kids are the most important things in the world to us, and yet many of us just don't behave that way. Moreover, we don't reinforce these values in others when they do. So many things in life are a simple matter of perspective and perception. We create gray areas for black and white situations because bucking society's stereotypes and norms is too difficult.

Why the anxiety with the question "What do you do?" Why the subtle deceit? After I put my career on the shelf to raise my kids, I soon found out that this was not what I was supposed to do. I had walked into a cultural faux pas the size of Nebraska. Men aren't supposed to stay at home, period. I quickly learned that there's an unspoken asterisk next to our beliefs that our children come first. And that notation, that fine print, says, "after you've done your duty attaining the American Dream." The problem is, the dream is like an oasis, always slightly vague and just out of reach. Whether we like it or not, men and women alike still gauge a man by the paycheck he collects each week. Which means we still value monetary accomplishment above the family. We never say this, but we act it out each day, sometimes subtly and sometimes overtly, more often than not, indirectly with a look or an attitude. Perhaps the worst effect of all is the influence our words have on our children. They don't yet

5 Ways to Identify a Stay-at-Home Dad at a Party

- ☺ He doesn't get distracted by loud sudden outbursts.
- ☺ He doesn't rush to get a towel when someone spills the Cabernet on his or her shirt because he knows it's not coming out anyway.
- ☺ He may not watch it, but he knows when Jerry Springer comes on every day.
- ☺ He knows the price of a gallon of milk.
- ☺ He is sometimes heard quietly and subconsciously humming the Barney song.

understand the social hierarchies and nuances that control our behavior. So when they hear us claim that we do something other than raise them all day they naturally wonder where their place actually lies in our professional lives. We inadvertently teach them that parenting somehow isn't a "real job." So now I proudly proclaim, "I'm an at-home dad."

Unfortunately, my dedication to the value of regular, consistent parenting receives fairly negative responses from men and women alike. The similarities in the reactions to my choice to stay at home have been striking and the lack of contact disappointing. It has surprised me that my male friends have stopped making serious attempts at getting together. Women smile and then detach themselves from me and my children, not realizing that by dismissing Dads who stay at home they inadvertently communicate that raising children really doesn't count, perpetuating the stereotype that has plagued women throughout history.

Most men are in the dark about how rewarding raising children can be. Most of us don't see, or don't want to believe, how very replaceable we are at work. We like to think we're indispensable, but if we left tomorrow the company would go on just as it always has and just as it will after you leave. But your kids will remember your lessons forever. And don't forget that they will be the ones making decisions for you in your old age!

So the next time you ask the question, "What do you do for a living?" and the guy looks nervous, give him a break. If he says he's a stay at-home Dad, say something positive. After all, he shares your commitment to raising children.

So now I proudly proclaim, "I'm an at-home dad."

Resources for Dads

Compiled by the editors

At-Home Dad
(508) 685-7931
To subscribe send $15 to:
Peter Baylies
61 Brightwood Ave.
North Andover, MA 01845
E-mail: athomedad@aol.com
Web address: www.athomedad.com
Offers at-home dads a subscription to a quarterly newsletter and a network of other at-home dads. Organizes a conference for at-home dads and supplies playgroup information.

DAD-to-DAD
Dadtodad@aol.com
Contact Curtis Cooper
A national organization that helps at-home dads form playgroups.

Families and Work Institute
www.familiesandwork.org
Offers a wealth of information regarding parenting and work.

The Fatherhood Project/Families and Work Institute
(212) 465-2044
www.fatherhoodproject.org
An extension of the Families and Work Institute that explores fatherhood and examines the effect of paternal presence on families.

Fatherhood USA/SCETV
www.scetv.org/fatherhoodusa

Father-to-Father/FatherNet
(612) 626-1212
www.Cvfc.umn.edu/FatherNet

Fathers Resource Center
http://www.slowlane.com/frc
Connects fathers with other like-minded parents.

Full-Time Dads
FTDMAG@aol.com
www.Fathermag.com
Offers a magazine for fathers.

listserv@daddvshome.com
This is an e-mail list for at-home dads.
National Center for Fathering
(913) 384-4661

www.ncf.org
National Center on Fathers and Families
(215) 686-3910

www.ncoff.gse.upenn.edu
Offers a tremendous database of father and family-related information.

Publications:
Lansky, V. (1993). *101 Ways to be a special dad.* Chicago: Contemporary Books.

Fathermag.com, the online magazine for men with families.

Full-Time Dads: the magazine for caring fathers
FTDMAG@aol.com
www.fathersworld.com/fulltimedad

Publications from the Families and Work Institute:
Levine, J. & Pittinsky, T. (1998). *Working Fathers: New Strategies for Balancing Work and Family.* New York: Families and Work Institute.

Levine, J. (1995). *New Expectations: Community Strategies for Responsible Fatherhood.* New York: Families and Work Institute.

Levine, J. (1993). *Getting Men Involved: Strategies for Early Childhood Programs.* New York: Families and Work Institute.

(1998) Fatherhood USA — A two-part PBS documentary exploring fatherhood. The Fatherhood Project at the Families and Work Institute.

Orders can be placed via the web at www.fatherhoodproject.org or mail at: Publications, Families and Work Institute, 330 Seventh Ave. 14th Floor
New York, New York 10001

Nelson, K. (1998). *The Daddy Guide: Real-Life Advice and Tips from Over 250 Dads and Other Experts.* New York: Contemporary Books.

Building Moral Foundations: Character Education for Children

Everyone's talking about issues of character these days. Politicians, educators, business and religious leaders, parents and others are concerned that children are not being exposed to ethical principles and values critically important to healthy moral development. Many parents, teachers and others who work with young people describe children's behaviors as being more disrespectful, dishonest, apathetic, uncaring, aggressive and even more violent than children in past generations. A commitment to positive ideals seems rare.

But along with these concerns about children's character come a myriad of questions about moral development and character education. Whose job is it to teach children values? What values are appropriate to teach? Is the family the only place where character and values education is appropriate? At what age is it appropriate to begin teaching children about issues of character? What roles do parents, teachers, other adults and peers play in the development of children's character? What does moral development and character look like at different stages of a child's development, and what can adults realistically expect from children at various ages and stages?

About the Author

Karen Pace M.A., is an associate program leader for Children, Youth and Family Programs of Michigan State University Extension. She holds degrees in communications and family studies and has 15 years of experience in curriculum and program development. She conducts workshops across Michigan for people interested in helping to improve the ethical quality of children's lives.

By Karen L. Pace, M.A.

Children receive their first moral messages when they are loved, nurtured and cared for properly by their parents and other significant caregivers.

Moral Development is a Process

Children do not grow up in a vacuum. Many factors influence the development of children's character including family relationships, adult and peer role models, expectations and education about values, stages of thinking and reasoning, cultural factors, societal trends, the media and more. Most experts believe that moral development is a combination of maturity, socialization, education and life experiences. Cross-cultural studies have shown that children progress toward higher levels of moral thinking and reasoning as they get older and have opportunities to deepen their understanding of ethical issues. Research has also shown that there are core universal ethical principles particularly important to the development of moral thinking and action. Two such areas are justice and caring. An understanding and commitment to these are at the crux of moral development. Ethical principles and behaviors that support and give definition to these key concepts are respect, trustworthiness, responsibility, fairness, caring and citizenship. Several approaches to character education have used these and similar concepts to develop a framework for helping children learn about issues of character. Additionally, parents, teachers and others who work with children can nurture a commitment to ethical values and the development of positive character.

When does moral development begin?

When should parents begin to teach their children about issues of character? It's never too early to start! Moral development begins at birth — possibly before. Children receive their first moral messages when they are loved, nurtured and cared for properly by their parents and other significant caregivers. Babies come into the world neither completely moral nor immoral, good or bad. Contemporary philosophical and psychological literature recognizes that humans come into the world with strong egocentric tendencies (me focus) as well as a powerful propensity to develop empathy (other focus). These inborn tendencies look different at various ages and stages of development, and they are in constant dynamic interaction with the environment and contexts in which children grow up.

Developing Trust

Babies and young children are not capable of thinking and behaving in ways that reflect deep moral awareness. Infants and toddlers are primarily "me focused" and their behaviors reflect their intense needs for the basics of life. It is very difficult for humans to develop and learn anything if their basic physical needs are not met first. The journey toward healthy moral development begins when babies' and young children's nutritional

It's important for parents to remember that experiences in early childhood provide the foundation for later learning and development.

needs are met, as well as their needs for warmth, comfort, and feelings of love, safety and security.

Recent research on brain development shows that critical neurological connections are established in infants' brains when they are touched, hugged, cuddled and talked to on a regular basis by loving adults. These connections help to "hard wire" the brain, allowing babies to form strong attachments that help them to develop trusting relationships with others. These attachments and trusting relationships between babies and parents (or other caring adults) are critical building blocks for cognitive, emotional and social development. Additionally, these factors contribute to healthy moral development in children. Research very clearly shows that the first three years of life provide "windows of opportunity" for the development of these important brain capacities. If critical brain connections are not made in these early years, it can be much more difficult (and in some cases impossible) for children to progress to higher levels of thinking and emotional development. It's important for parents to remember that experiences in early childhood provide the foundation for later learning and development.

Developing the Capacity to Care

The development of empathy, the capacity to understand and care about the needs and feelings of others, is an important building block of moral development. Some researchers have observed that even newborn babies have the capacity to experience empathy for others. When one baby is crying, it is likely that other babies in the room will start crying too! But, parents and caregivers should not expect babies or toddlers to exhibit genuine empathy and care for others. They should, however, be aware that adults are powerful role models. In fact, between one and two years of age, babies will spontaneously imitate nurturing behaviors they've observed or received by cuddling and comforting a doll or stuffed animal. Additionally, the language, tone of voice and actions adults' use with children have profound effects on how children learn to communicate and express their emotions. And being in touch with one's emotions and feelings is critical to moral development.

Eventually, children (and adults) need to learn to tune into moral emotions, such as anger at being treated unfairly or sadness at being called a hurtful name. In addition, they need to learn strategies for dealing with emotions in ways that are appropriate and healthy. The ways adults discuss and deal with their own feelings and emotions can guide children in this process. By sharing openly with children what makes the adult happy, sad or angry, children can begin to learn that other people have feelings, and that one's behaviors can have a positive or negative effect on

others. It's not at all appropriate to lay blame on children, particularly for things that they have no control over (like divorce, for example). But it is quite appropriate for toddlers and preschoolers to hear that, "Mommy gets tired of picking up your things. Please help clean up your toys." By about the age of four, preschoolers are able to begin to understand and appreciate that others have feelings. Learning to respond appropriately to the emotions of self and others is an important part of moral development.

Preschoolers are also at a stage of development where "good" and "bad" behaviors are based primarily on the promise of rewards or the fear of punishment. Children learn through the actions of adult authority figures (parents, teachers) that some behaviors bring pleasant rewards (e.g., smiles and positive words) and other behaviors bring negative consequences (e.g., scowls and harsh words). There is a constant tension between doing what is expected (and will be rewarded) and doing that which may seem overwhelmingly enticing and appealing to the preschooler (but may be punished). Children in the preschool years (and beyond!) need consistent, regular, gentle reminders of what's expected of them.

Learning about Respect

Adults can help young children learn language and behaviors that will help them create respectful relationships with people in the future. One way to do this is through the teaching and modeling of manners. Teaching children about manners and being polite goes beyond old-fashioned notions about charm and etiquette. It's about respect. When children (and adults) show courtesy and manners, they also show respect for other people. Rules of civil behavior are extremely important in the family, school, workplace and community. The courtesy shown to others builds a positive web of human relationships. These relationships

contribute significantly toward a healthy and positive moral climate in which to live. Adults show kids that *all* people deserve respect by being kind, helpful, patient, and polite to people they come into contact with everyday — inside and outside of their families. Young children can be taught the building blocks of manners such as saying "please" and "thank you." And when children learn to say "I'm sorry" as well as lend a helping hand to make up for something they've done wrong, they learn to be accountable for their actions and behaviors. Parents and other adults need to use these phrases routinely so children begin to understand the terms and how and why they're used.

Learning about Fairness

Between the ages of two and four, play and time with peers are two extremely important factors in children's moral development. Social relationships with peers provide opportunities for children to begin to learn about and experience issues of fairness, equality and reciprocity. Play activities allow preschoolers the opportunity to begin to understand the importance of sharing and playing by the rules. While these activities may seem trivial, they are essential. Learning to play with peers and work through problems helps build skills that are at the heart of moral issues of justice and fairness. Through play, children also learn social skills that are needed for later school success. Parents and caregivers can talk with children about the importance of taking turns, sharing, being fair, not hurting others and can help them think about how it feels to be treated fairly and unfairly by others.

Developing Moral Responsibility

Moral development and character building requires more than memorizing words and being told how to behave. Families, preschools, classrooms, youth clubs are all places where children learn and grow. These places can foster children's healthy development through the creation of caring, moral communities. A moral community is any group, large or small, that embraces core ethical values and uses consistent, clear language to communicate expectations about how children and adults ought to treat each other. It's a place where the rules are clear, fair and firm so that everyone feels a sense of trust, order and safety. A moral community encourages open communication and democratic problem solving among members. A moral community seeks out opportunities for members to be engaged in moral action, providing a contribution and service to the community. A moral community celebrates the diversity of its members and makes a concerted effort to understand and appreciate the similarities and differences of each person. A moral community fosters mutual respect and a caring atmosphere.

There are many ways for families to foster moral development in their children's lives. Cooperative nurseries are excellent forums for teaching about moral issues. Cooperative nursery philosophies acknowledge the significance of adult modeling and parent involvement in young children's lives.

Outside of school, families can learn to turn off the television! Years of research on the effects of violent television

"The development of good character cannot be separated from the basic purposes of education — to lead persons out of ignorance and helplessness so that they have the chance to lead positive, purposeful, productive lives."

J. Silber. (1993). "The Problem of Character Education," *Boston University School of Education Newsletter*, p. 3.

programming have confirmed that violent images in the media encourage some children to act more aggressively. Violence, as entertainment, permeates our society. By high school graduation the average child has watched more than 20,000 hours of television! Parents and daycare providers would do children a great service by limiting television and carefully monitoring television viewing. Once again, adults are role models for children. It is advantageous for families to value activities other than watching television, such as reading and spending time outdoors. Children's literature can provide wonderful opportunities to explore issues of character. Many stories have themes that focus on issues of friendship, caring, fairness and trust. By turning off the television parents and children can explore moral challenges by reading and discussing books together.

Our children face a number of challenges as they grow. By fostering healthy moral attitudes through our day-to-day interactions, we can positively influence their overall development. Cooperatives have historically embraced the ideals described herein. As our society becomes increasingly morally challenging, parent cooperative preschools offer parent support and early childhood expertise for fostering the development of children with character!

Resources

Books that build character: A guide to teaching your child moral values through stories. William Kilpatrick & Gregory & Suzanne M. Wolfe. Simon & Schuster: NY (1994).

References

Due to space limitations interested readers may obtain a complete copy of the references for this article by sending an e-mail request to the editor at: Mangigia@online.emich.edu.

You may also request the reference list by mail:
Offspring
4578 Gregory Road
Dexter, MI 48130

Making Peace with Your Mother

Think of one word to describe your relationship with your mother. Now, fast forward in time and imagine your daughter about the same age you are now. Imagine she feels about you the way you currently feel about your mother. If you are content with the word you chose and the feelings you imagined and believe you have an honest, open relationship and regular contact with your mother, then you may want to skip to the next article. However, many adult daughters find something other than the relationship described above.

About the Author

Lynn Sipher, ACSW, is a family therapist in private practice in Ann Arbor, MI providing services to individuals, couples, families and groups. She runs an annual group called, "Making Peace with Your Mother" based on the concepts in this article. As a mother of two adolescent daughters, she values the process and outcome of making peace with her mother.

By Lynn Sipher, ACSW

In order to improve your relationship with your mother, you must first be an emotional adult with your mother.

Many adult daughters experience a relationship that reflects themes of anger, dishonesty and criticism, withholding feelings, and barriers to open communication. They feel like victims in their relationship with their mother: as if they have no choice for how to respond and can only hope their mother will change. If these descriptions mirror your mother/daughter relationship, you are at risk for creating this pattern with your daughter, as she becomes an adult.

Many of us say, "No, that won't happen. I'm so different than my mother." Even if you are different and parent differently than your mother, it is important to consciously recognize the patterns you are establishing now in order to set a precedent for the future Our children are sponges. Of course, they absorb information about relationships by what they see, but they also learn about relationships through the feelings they pick up yet can't define. Our chil-

From a historical perspective, we can see that mothers have had it rough. Mothers a generation or two ago were given messages to accommodate, nurture and sacrifice their needs in order to focus on their children and husbands. Single mothers had the additional burden of providing financially and often survived on very little income. Women of color had to confront racism. Mothers were obligated to perform endless domestic functions without receiving recognition or value for working in this way. If mothers could not accomplish these almost impossible emotional, social and domestic demands, they felt like and were labeled "bad mothers."

Psychological literature at the time accused mothers of being cold, distant, overprotective, intrusive and a host of other negative attributes, as a way to explain their children's problems. This "mother-blaming" did not contribute to a mother's ability to accept the truth that she was doing the best she could. Mothers had no way to name the tremendous pressures put on them. They often carried the burden and guilt of not being good enough. Of course, this is why many feel that their mother let them down. Look at the unrealistic expectations we had of them! Although it may be painful to accept your mother's human limitations and imperfections, confronting those realities with yourself can ultimately create a better relationship.

dren pick up relational patterns, consciously and unconsciously, just like we did. By working on your relationship with your mother now, you set the stage for an open, honest and close relationship with your daughter in the future.

In order to improve your relationship with your mother, you must first be an emotional adult with your mother. Addressing difficult issues as an adult, with an adult's emotional capacity, can be useful. Unfortunately, some daughters find themselves fearful and anxious about trying an adult response with their mother. The support of husbands, partners or close friends can be valuable. As an emotional adult you should be able to take a stand on important issues without being defensive or combative. You should be able to relate, for example, when your feelings have been hurt or when you feel your mother is overstepping her bounds. In many cases, daughters become emotional adults by addressing a challenging issue in this way: "Mom, it bothers me when you tell me how to wear my hair," or "Mom, I know you mean well, but when you give me advice about what to feed my kids, I feel inadequate. I need to figure out this child-rearing for myself." Becoming an emotional adult can also be reflected in more subtle ways as well. For instance, leaving

For those daughters whose mothers were impaired by alcoholism, mental illness or were abusive in any way: having a close or connected relationship may not be a necessity. Some daughters choose to confront their mothers with the difficult and painful reality of their childhood, while others choose not to relate at all. It is important to note that without conscious decision-making a total cut-off in your relationship puts you and your daughter at risk for repeating history. Your daughter may learn that totally removing oneself from an emotionally conflicted relationship is how to resolve it. The underlying message of a cut-off is "I can never come to a sense of peace in a relationship in which I have been hurt or feel angry." Even if getting out of the relationship is a way to heal from it, the work of understanding yourself and your mother is still important to complete. Letting go of your anger at her and taking responsibility for your happiness now is what truly frees you from the emotional power of this relationship. A conscious process of decision-making provides a positive example to your daughter about how to resolve unhealthy relationships.

She is more than a MOTHER; she has a history filled with hopes, dreams, disappointments, regrets, and losses.

your house in its normal state before your mother comes over for a visit, or delaying a return phone call until it is convenient for you, or changing the subject of conversation to something more interesting to you. Becoming your more authentic self with your mother can help to create the emotional adult in you.

Recognizing your mother for the human being that she is can also help foster a better relationship with her. She is more than a MOTHER; she has a history filled with hopes, dreams, disappointments,

The following guidelines may help your mother/daughter relationship flourish rather than flounder!

Guidelines for Mothers
Advice is a pitfall
Never assume
Rescuing doesn't help (victimizes her)
Interference is worse than advice
Guilt hurts
"Well, in my day..."
Faking it undermines the relationship

Guidelines for Daughters
Take her off the pedestal
Don't interpret (ask what she means)
Don't carry expectations
Create boundaries
Guilt hurts
"Oh, Mother..."
Faking it undermines the relationship

Firman, J., & Firman, D. (1990). *Daughters & Mothers: Healing the Relationship.* New York: Continuum.

Making peace with your mother requires courage and emotional maturity. It takes strength to see your mother as a person and understand her experiences.

regrets, and losses. She, too, has feelings, needs and wants. Although it may be painful to accept your mother's human limitations and imperfections, confronting those realities within yourself can ultimately lead to improving your relationship. Learn what you can about her family history, important events and who she was when she was young. Find out about her relationship with your grandmother, both as a child and as an adult. Think about the messages your mother received about how to be a woman and a daughter. Daughters can learn so much about their own mother-daughter relationship by hearing about the previous generation. By becoming curious about our own mothers, we set the stage for our daughters to see us as we are. Our daughters will be better able to forgive our mistakes and flaws if we can come to understand that our mothers did the best they could, given their family history, and the social, political and economic conditions of their time. Believing your mother did the best she could, under the circumstances, will also help you realize that you are doing the best you can with your children.

Making peace with your mother requires courage and emotional maturity. It takes strength to see your mother as a person and understand her experiences. It means that you can't wait for your mother to change; rather, YOU must be different. Being an adult with your mother means taking risks, trying new behaviors or saying things you may not have said before. But the biggest challenge of all may be realizing that working on relationships is a lifelong process. Little steps eventually lead to change. And what may be gained through your work on your relationship with your mother is invaluable: a closer and more intimate relationship with your own daughter by the time she begins pondering her relationship with you.

Fostering the Mother/Daughter Connection: COMMUNICATION may be the key

These simple communication strategies may help resolve many relationship issues between mothers and daughters

Make "I", not "you" statements.

Use responsible, not passive, language.
choose" rather than "have to", "won't" rather than "can't"

Express preferences, hopes, desires — not "shoulds."

Allow for "ands" instead of "buts."

Create presence: curiosity, caring, understanding of the other.

Listen, deeply and carefully, to the words and to the person behind the words.

Be congruent and tell the truth.

Allow conflict, and remember the deepest values you have.

See the other person always.

Stay connected to your love.

Editors' Note: This material was presented at the1998 MCCN Conference by Barbara A. Bryan, Sheryl Pulley and Jo Hughes.

Making Peace with Your Mother Resources

Goodbye Mother, Hello Woman: Reweaving the Daughter Mother Relationship. Boynton, Marilyn & Dell, Mary.
I'm Still Your Mother. Adams, Jane.
In Her Image: The Unhealed Daughter's Search for her Mother. Carlson, Kathie.
In My Mother's House: A Daughter's Story. Chernin, Kim.
Mother Daughter Relationships Later in Life: Negating the Myth. Bromberg, E. M.
Mother Daughter Revolution. DeBold, Elizabeth; Malave, Idelisse; Wilson, Marie.
Our Mothers' Daughters. Arcana, Judith.

One Step Ahead

Understanding the TV Rating System

Editors' Note: This is the third article in a series designed to keep parents and educators *One Step Ahead* regarding early childhood education, research, and purposeful parenting.

About the Author

As an at-home mother of three (aged 4½, 2½, and 10 months) Mary Margaret Crombez uses the knowledge and information gleaned in her academic (Master's in Parent and Pre-School Education) and professional life (Early Childhood Educator) to try to make the most of early years with her family. She enjoys her involvement with Livonia Nursery Co-op as well as her role with Offspring *magazine.*

By Mary Margaret Crombez, M.Ed.

The ratings may exist on their own or be combined to further clarify the content of the television program.

Have you noticed the rating symbols on your television screen or in the print listings of TV viewing options? Are you aware of each of their meanings? The new television rating system went into effect in October of 1997, adding to the age guidelines instituted in January of 1997. The following should help you and your young ones determine the television industry's intended audience for any one program.

With this helpful information, you can then determine as a family what criteria you will use to decide on the appropriateness of a particular program.

The ratings may exist on their own or be combined to further clarify the content of the television program. For instance, a cartoon may have been produced with a young audience in mind warranting a TV-Y rating. But the addition of the FV rating (i e: TV-Y-FV) may be added to alert families that the content of the cartoon includes fantasy violence segments, such as a

TV-Y	appropriate for children of all ages
TV-Y-7	appropriate for children aged seven and up
TV-G	not necessarily designed for children but still generally suitable
TV-PG	designed for general audiences, parental guidance is advised
TV-14	material unsuitable for children under age 14
TV-M	mature audiences only
V	intense violence
S	intense sexual situations
L	strong, coarse language
D	intensely suggestive dialogue
FV	fantasy violence

Encourage your children to make choices about their television viewing.

piano falling on a small bird who survives and retaliates in some other similarly violent yet absurd way.

It is important to remember that these ratings are guidelines and that it is up to us as parents to help our children make appropriate decisions based on our own family values, our children's developing personality as well as our children's level of understanding. What is appropriate for one seven year old may not be appropriate for another. One three-year-old's fantasy fears may be quite different from another's. Parents know our children best. Become involved in your children's television viewing. Help your children explore their television viewing time in the same way you'd help them explore new toys or interactions with others. Encourage your children to make choices about their television viewing. By keeping these ratings and your own family principles in mind, your family can stay "one step ahead" and make television viewing purposeful, educational, and entertaining.

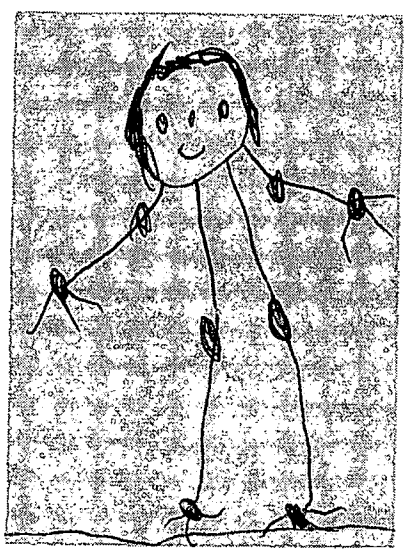
Instead of Watching Television . . .

- Color a picture
- Bake cookies
- Tell stories
- Take a walk
- Call a friend
- Look through photo albums
- Play a game
- Visit a park
- Build a house of blocks
- Play dress-up
- Make a fort with blankets
- Take a drive
- Start a family tree
- Play with a pet
- Start a journal
- Take a bubble bath
- Write a letter

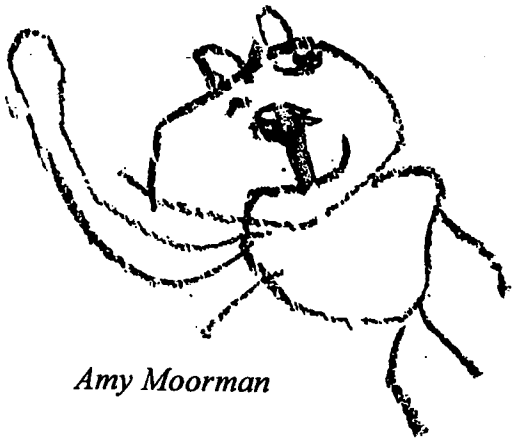
Individual subscriptions to *Offspring* are welcome: $6.00 for one year, $10.00 for two years; for subscriptions outside the United States, please pay in U.S. funds. Bulk rates are available upon request. Subscription to *Offspring* will be processed upon receipt of check or money order.

SUBSCRIBE: send name, address, zip code, and check made out to
MCCN/*Offspring*
1650 Rhonda
St. Joseph, MI 49085

TO SUBMIT MANUSCRIPTS OR PHOTOGRAPHS, send them to *Offspring* Magazine, c/o Becky Foster
1650 Rhonda, St. Joseph, MI 49085.
Include your name, address, zip code, and telephone number. Photographs should also contain a statement giving *Offspring* permission to use them from parents of any identifiable children.



Anahid Telfeyan



Amy Moorman

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS
The Offspring staff wishes to thank the following people for permission to use their photographs:

Cover
Linda Rice

Table of Contents
Mary Margaret Crombez

Inside Front Cover
Cindy Lectka

Parents Do Matter!
Nicholas Abraham
Kathy Snyder

Adventures in Living
Lisa Mangigian
Joseph Wikaryasz

"What Do You Do?"
Terri Eisenlord

Building Moral Foundations
Lisa Mangigian

Making Peace with Your Mother
Lisa Mangigian

One Step Ahead...
Lynne Horn

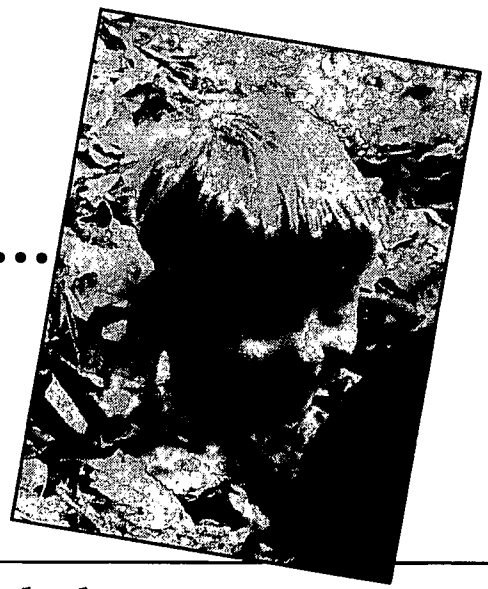
Back Cover
Lori Kilian
Lisa Mangigian
Mary Margaret Crombez

Offspring

A Publication of the
Michigan Council of Cooperative Nursery Schools

Fall, 1999 • No. 2

Offspring



Offspring is written for parents, teachers and others:

- To provide a forum for views on dealing with young children
- To express a variety of ideas
- To promote the co-op philosophy
- To enhance our relationships with children and each other

Michigan Council of Cooperative Nursery Schools is a member of Parent Cooperative Preschools International

ISSN: 0472-6340

Offspring Magazine is published twice yearly. Articles reflect opinions of the authors and not necessarily the editorial board and staff. Manuscripts are accepted for consideration. Subscription of this magazine is through membership in the **Michigan Council of Cooperative Nursery Schools** or through individual subscriptions. For subscription information, see inside back cover. **MCCN** does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national or ethnic origin.

Offspring

Table of Contents

Is It My Turn To Work?

By Carole M. Grates, M.A., M.Ed.

New "co-op" parents may experience many anxieties when they come to work for the first time. At the April 1998 MCCN Conference, parents and teachers shared their thoughts on the challenges on both sides of the desk – the teacher's side as well as the parent's side. This article is written as much to teachers as it is to the parents in their classrooms. The parent conferees were candid with their concerns as well as with their joys and gave many helpful suggestions to teachers on making the experience a more positive one for all.

Concerns

Parents expressed two types of concerns – from their point of view as a parent, and from their point of view as an assistant to the teacher. The biggest concern was how other parents would react to their child. We reflect so much from our own child that it is hard to separate our personality from theirs. At the same time, the working parent is preoccupied with comparing her child to the others: Is my child normal? They also feel the frustration of being too busy as an assistant to enjoy their own child.

The second concern: Can I do what the teacher wants? As parents, they wondered about how to handle the misbehavior of their own child. Should they interfere or let the teacher handle it?

Suggestions for Teachers from Parents

The parents suggested that teachers would be more supportive to parents by doing the following:

- Tell parents what to do
- Give parents permission to play
- Have written duty charts
- Don't assume too much – tell the parent what to do even if you think she knows
- Do an orientation before the school year starts and follow it up with a second orientation after everyone has worked once or twice
- Let parents do their job – don't always jump in
- Give hints on what to do as working parents in the newsletter
- Inform parents of children who may need special handling
- Give parents step by step directions to handle certain behavior problems

About the Author

Carole M. Grates, M.A., M.Ed., an Editorial Board Member of ***Offspring*** *and an Early Childhood Consultant for Primary Directions, is a former cooperative nursery teacher and the proud grandmother of two grandsons.*

Suggestions for Parents from Teachers

Teachers also had input to offer. They suggested that parents could be more helpful if they would step in and help keep things under control without being told. This would allow the teacher to complete whatever activities are going on. Teachers also want parents to be with the children. Join the circle time; get into the block area; join in the housekeeping play.

What May Parents Expect?

An effective cooperative teacher should plan to have both a pre-conference and exit conference with her working parents. Parents need to arrive at a pre-determined time, before the start of school to help set up the day and to get some direction in the pre-conference. This is the time for the teacher to explain activities and expectations. Teachers need to be very clear with the parents on what their duties will be.

The exit conference is as important as the pre-conference. This is the time for the parents to ask questions about how the teacher handled certain situations. Parents have an opportunity to receive encouragement on their work for the day also. They can also have a chance to discuss their own children and any concerns they may have.

Expect that your child will misbehave. Your attention is sometimes going to be on other children. At this egocentric stage of development, this is sometimes more than a preschooler can bear! It is usually best to let the teacher handle any behavior problems. Children usually respond better to her than they will to their parents in these situations.

The most important thing any parent can expect is respect and support from the teacher. These are critical to the success of the working relationship.

What May the Teacher Expect From the Parent?

With every right comes a responsibility. Parents have responsibilities to the teacher, also. The cooperative teacher should be able to expect the following from her working parents:

- That you arrive early to help set up the day and get directions in the pre-conference
- That you make arrangements for your other children or children in your carpool on that day
- That you work with the children and not spend your day gossiping with the other parents
- That you see what has to be done and do it without being told
- That you will stay long enough after the session to help clean up and participate in the exit conference
- That you won't gossip about the other children or families
- That you will respect her position as teacher

The Best Thing About Being a Helping Parent

Conference participants reflected on the best thing about being a "co-op" parent. The major thought was that just being there and watching how your own child learns, grows and develops interest was the most important thing. "Co-op" parents feel they know what is happening in their child's school life and where their child is developmentally compared with others of the same age: Seeing how wide this developmental range actually is helps parents to be more accepting of their own child's growth patterns.

Secondly, parents liked learning behavior management techniques from the teacher. They also liked learning what was developmentally appropriate for their child. They felt reassured as parents by the positive feedback teachers gave them.

Most importantly, the parents expressed that this is a special time with their own children.

"The most important thing any parent can expect is respect and support from the teacher. These are critical to the success of the working relationship."

Pass the Peace, Please:
Teaching Young Children to Live Peacefully

By Holly E. Brophy-Herb, Ph.D.

In the face of increasing violence in schools and communities, teaching children to live peacefully has become an important concern for parents. With the same diligence we teach children to be academically competent, so should we teach them to be socially competent. Parents play a key role in supporting children's social competence. Parent-child relationships, parenting practices and discipline strategies, parental modeling and teaching all contribute to social growth and development. This article outlines parenting strategies designed to foster children's social competence and to prepare children to live peacefully in a social world.

"...Peace is something that lives, grows, spreads and needs to be looked after."

~ Katherine Scholes, from Peace Begins with You

Families today are surrounded by violent images in news reports, movies, and television shows. In the United States a violent crime occurs every 17 seconds (FBI, 1991), and interpersonal violence is the leading cause of death among young adults ages 15 to 24 years (FBI, 1991). In the face of such shocking statistics, how can children be raised to live peacefully in a social world? With the same diligence we teach children to be academically competent, so should we teach them to be socially competent.

Social Competence

In order to live successfully in a social world, children must master a number of skills including the ability to recognize, interpret and respond to a variety of social situations (Hendrick, 1996) to achieve goals and maintain relationships (Rubin & Rose-Krasnor, 1992). Social competence is the term used to describe children with such skills (Kostelnik, Stein, Whiren & Soderman, 1998). Generally, socially competent children are described as responsible, independent, friendly, cooperative, goal-directed, and, self-controlled (Baumrind, 1970; 1995).

How can these skills be fostered in children? While this is a complex question, parents play a key role in helping children

About the Author

Holly Brophy-Herb, Ph.D. is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Family and Child Ecology at Michigan State University, and the Program Supervisor of the MSU Child Development Laboratories.

develop social competence. Parent-child relationships, parenting practices and discipline strategies, parental modeling and teaching all contribute to social growth and development.

Fostering Social Competence

Develop warm and loving relationships. The parent-child relationship is the first and one of the most important relationships a child will ever have. This early relationship is called "attachment," and, in many ways, it is the model on which the child will pattern future relationships. The roots of the attachment relationship begin even before the baby is born, and the relationship continues to grow in the early months of life (Ainsworth, 1979). Parents of securely attached infants are sensitive and responsive to infant cues, warm and affectionate (Ainsworth, 1979). In fact, attachment researchers liken parent-infant interactions to a dance in which both the parent and the baby respond to the other's behavioral cues (Ainsworth, 1979). This mutually fulfilling attachment relationship has important implications for the child's social development. For example, attachment research (Matas, Arend & Sroufe, 1978) tells us that children with secure attachments are better problem solvers, more persistent in tasks, and less easily frustrated.

Incorporate loving touch in family life. With billions of touch receptors in the skin, it is no wonder that children gather so much information through their sense of touch. They gather not only information about their physical world, but also information about their emotional world. Children need to receive positive and loving touch from their parents. Classic research studies (Spitz, 1945) tell us that without basic touch, children suffer severe consequences.

Infants and children respond to positive touch. For instance, research (Scholz, 1992) on the effects of touch have shown that infants who are massaged initiate more eye contact with their parents and interaction behaviors with their parents. When thinking about the mutual nature of the parent-infant relationship, it is easy to see that increased infant engagement with the parent may boost feelings of parental confidence and support the [illegible] of a loving relationship.

Massage and positive touch can be an emotional connection point between parents and older children too. Quiet times for shoulder or foot massages can not only ease muscle tension but also provide a time for conversation and emotional communication (McClure, 1989). When children feel valued and loved, they are more able to express love and acceptance of others. Parents who have been massaging children for years tell me massage time provides wonderful family time. Many times they tell me their children not only request massages but also lovingly offer to massage their parents: A positive pay-off both for parents and children!

Engage in positive, inductive discipline. Parenting characterized by warmth and affection, clear expectations about behavior, and firm but fair consequences to behavioral choices is associated with children's positive social behaviors (Eisenberg, Lennon & Roth, 1983). This is called authoritative discipline (Baumrind, 1978). Punitive discipline, on the other hand, is associated with less positive social behaviors, such as increased aggression. When parents help children understand why a behavior is inappropriate and what the consequences of that behavior are for the child and for others, children are exposed to a model of rational problem solving and concern for others (Eisenberg & Mussen, 1989). Such victim centered discipline, in which the feelings of the victim are discussed and the transgressor

"Parenting characterized by warmth and affection, clear expectations about behavior, and firm but fair consequences to behavioral choices is associated with children's positive social behaviors."

takes responsibility for aiding the victim, results in increased positive social behaviors (Hoffman, 1975). Providing these kinds of logical consequences, in which there is a rational connection between the behavioral act and the consequence, helps children realize that their behaviors impact others. Therefore, if one sibling hits another with a block, a logical consequence would be to have the aggressor hold an ice pack to the injured sibling's wound. This particular strategy is more effective in fostering children's thinking about their behaviors than techniques such as "time out."

"Peace is a state of behavior that flourishes through attention and nurturing."

Discuss and model peaceful living. When parents not only discuss with their children the importance of values such as gentleness, concern and a respect for others but also model these values in their daily lives, children more easily come to recognize these values and adopt them as their own. Classic studies of highly altruistic adults, such as individuals who risked their lives to aid Jewish citizens in Europe during World War II (London, 1970), revealed the importance of strong parental models of altruism, coupled with authoritarian discipline, and high expectations for children. Here we see that merely discussing the importance of values such as kindness is not enough to ensure that children adopt these values. From early on, children should observe and participate in their parents' modeling of social values.

Encourage kindness and responsibility. Parental modeling of values such as kindness and a sense of responsibility takes place both within the home and outside of the home. Children can be encouraged to act kindly when kindness is recognized and valued while aggressive acts are discouraged. Helping siblings to express their feelings in appropriate ways and problem solve takes time but is well worth the efforts as children eventually develop the skills to solve problems peacesfully. Verbally recognizing kind acts also builds children's attention to and appreciation for other's needs (Honig & Wittmer, 1991; Kostelnik, Stein, Whiren, & Soderman, 1998). Observational statements such as "You noticed Jai was having trouble with his shoe laces. It was really kind of you to help him tie them," build self esteem and positive social behaviors.

Children should also be encouraged to share a sense of responsibility as valuable members of their families and communities. At home, taking on responsibility for age-appropriate chores is associated with building a sense of social responsibility, altruism and nurturance toward others (Baumrind, 1971, 1988). Similarly, activities such as helping to care for a younger sibling (Whiting and Whiting, 1975) or teaching a skill to a younger sibling (Staub, 1979) encourage children's positive social behaviors. In the community, children should participate with their families in volunteer events such as community clean-ups or serving others at rescue shelters.

Value cooperation over competition. Consider common childhood games. How many have a clear "winner" and a clear "loser"? When children play competitive games, someone is frequently left with feelings of failure and rejection. Cooperative games, on the other hand, build social skills and foster a sense of teamwork, elements important to life-long successful professional and personal partnerships. Think about how much more pleasant and meaningful the game of musical chairs is when the rules are restructured so that as chairs are removed, children stay in the game and find a lap to sit on. Children joyfully problem solve as they figure out how to make sure everyone has a place to sit! A little imagination can be used to revise traditional childhood games or make up new ones. Many excellent resources for peaceful activities can also be found by educators such as Smith (1993).

Help children recognize feelings. A crucial skill related to the development of social competence is recognizing one's own feelings and knowing how to handle those feelings. Young children must learn to deal with very powerful emotions such as anger, grief, jealousy, joy and excitement. Children often respond to extreme emotions with aggression. This is normal, and children need the support of a loving parent to learn to identify their emotions and express their feelings in appropriate ways. As children learn to regulate their emotions, they become more able to respond appropriately to a variety of social situations.

Learning how to recognize the emotions of others is a related skill. With experience and teaching, children learn how to decode facial and vocal cues to ascertain the emotional state of the other person. Socially competent children learn how to use this information to guide their own behaviors (Hendrick, 1996). Parents can help children recognize their own emotions and the feelings of others by having "emotional conversations" (Greenspan, 1995) in which feeling words are introduced into the conversation. Helping children learn to verbalize feelings by making reflective comments, such as "You're angry because Juan took your toy," is important to children's skill development (Honig & Wittmer, 1991; Kostelnik, et al., 1998). Pointing out facial and vocal cues, such as "He's crying. I think he feels sad," also helps children develop good observation skills (Shure, 1992). Socially competent children tend to be good observers of self and others.

Help children think through their actions. Consider the following familiar scenario: Samantha is building a tower of blocks in the family room. Jake runs into the room and crashes into the tower, sending blocks flying. Samantha screams, "Stop! Look what you did!" as she picks up a block, prepared to throw it at her brother.

In the heat of the moment, Samantha's first reaction may be to throw the block at Jake. Samantha's parent can use this situation as a time to help Samantha reflect on her plans. Helping children think about alternative actions can decrease their aggressive acts and increase their social skills (Shure & Spivack, 1978). After commenting on Samantha's emotional state, the parent gently prompts Samantha to think of an action other than throwing the block. Such strategies are part of Shure's and Spivack's *I Can Problem Solve (ICPS)* program. Through guided dialogue, the adult helps the child think about all possible reactions to a situation and consider the consequences of each behavioral choice. The goal, of course, is for the child to eventually develop the skills to respond to any given situation after thinking about the situation rather than react in emotion.

Help children relax. Families today are busier than ever. Children, just like adults, need time to unwind. Strategies such as deep breathing, creative visualization, body stretches, massages or engaging in "quiet time" activities help release physical, mental and emotional tension. When children feel relaxed, they may be less easily frustrated. Parents often realize that children respond in very evident ways to holidays and other special events. At these times, children may be more aggressive and more easily frustrated. Yet, children also respond in very similar ways at other times in the year. Weeks packed with activities, classes and so on can contribute to children's stress levels. Parents who are keen observers will recognize when children need some relaxation time. More importantly, over time, children will learn to recognize their own need for relaxation for themselves.

Conclusions

Parents are children's first and most important teachers. Children learn life lessons each day from their parents by observing them in daily activities, talking with their parents, and emulating their parents. Just as Scholes stated, peace is a state of behavior that flourishes through attention and nurturing. By implementing parenting strategies designed to boost social development, parents can be instrumental in helping children develop the skills necessary to achieve social competence and live peacefully in a complex world.

For a list of references, please contact the Offspring coordinator at nrayer@ameritech.net.

"When parents not only discuss with their children the importance of values such as gentleness, concern and a respect for others but also model these values in their daily lives, children more easily come to recognize these values and adopt them as their own."

Massage For Children:
More Than Just A Hug!

By Mary Margaret Crombez, M.Ed.

Massage for children was a topic presented at MCCN's Annual Conference in 1998 & 1999. You may be surprised how much your touch can do for your child as well as yourself.

All parents recognize the influence touch has on their young children. Crying babies are readily soothed when cradled in their mother's or father's arms. Toddlers find respite and relief on their parent's lap after a busy play period. Preschoolers seek a fond embrace as they separate from mom or dad before nursery school begins and then again as they reunite after their exciting day. In each of these cases, parents know, both intuitively and intellectually, that their touch supports the development of a strong and meaningful bond with their child. The touch of a parent offers a security akin to nothing else. This kind of meaningful touch interaction influences a child for his or her entire lifetime. But touch can be much more than just a hug. We now know that touch provides far more than the obvious benefits of contact comfort. Research has substantiated that touch and massage can be integral to a child's overall development cognitively, physically, emotionally, and socially. Field & Kilmer et al (1997) found that massaged preschool children fall asleep quicker, have more restful nap periods, exhibit decreased activity levels and demonstrate better behavior ratings than their peers. So the next time you and your child hug, add a little rub. You'll be amazed by the outcomes of meaningful touch.

Touch and Cognitive Development

Remember the first time you felt your baby move inside of you? Your first awareness of your baby's movements occurred long after your baby experienced its first tactile sensations. Touch is the first sense to develop in the growing fetus. Although the other senses develop in-utero and are available for use at birth, the sense of touch is the most functional and finely tuned. This advanced develop-

About the Author

Mary Margaret Crombez, M.Ed., a co-op mom and ***Offspring*** *editor has also been a Certified Infant Massage Instructor since 1990 and was recently honored as Instructor of the Year (1998) by the International Association of Infant Massage – US Chapter.*

ment continues throughout the early years. It's no wonder that young children learn most about the world and organize the world through their touch experiences. We've all watched our young children learn something new at nursery school. Certainly, they use their sense of vision and hearing to orient to the new activity. But then the real discovery comes when they touch the objects, pat, press and rub them, explore them in every physical way possible. It is plainly clear that the impact of touch on early learning is paramount. In fact, this impact is so critical that Piaget (one of the most prominent early childhood learning theorists) labeled the first stage of a child's mental development the sensori-motor period. The words themselves signify the use of the senses (the foremost of which is touch) and movement. Children are pre-programmed to learn best through touch and movement. Researchers have discovered that premature infants who have been massaged perform better on tests of mental ability than infants who have not been massaged. Their advantage on these tests have continued through eight months of age (Field, 1986). Massage also promotes enhanced neurological functioning which in turn fosters improved brain-body communication (Epstein, 1981; Pearce, 1977; Reinis, 1980; Rice, 1977; Rorke, 1969). This evidence suggests that massaged children may actually process learning easier than children who have not been massaged. So massage for children is not only more than just a hug but an opportunity to enhance early learning.

Touch and Physical Development

In just about one year's time, babies progress from near helplessness to an astonishing physical independence. During the preschool years, a child's physical development becomes more refined and proficient. Preschool aged children are extremely mobile. They move their own bodies as well as everything they contact. Nursery school classrooms are designed for this motility. The activities are developed so that the children can move, turn, twist, wiggle, bounce, and actively manipulate not only their own bodies but the objects and materials throughout the classroom. Researchers have established that children learn best through movement. Studies have shown that children who have been massaged perform better on tests of motor skills than children who have not been massaged (Field, 1986). In addition, massage stimulates the circulatory system (Brown, 1984), increases respiration (Field & Henteleff et al, 1997), and strengthens gastrointestinal function (Scafidi, 1990; Uvnas-Moberg, 1987). Massage is more than just a hug. It facilitates improved organ function, encourages motor development and heightens physical proficiency.

Touch and Social-Emotional Development

As young children grow, their opportunities for relationships with others multiplies. Preschool children learn a tremendous amount from their social relationships with friends, teachers, and others in their world. But, their relationship with their parents will always be paramount. Massage extends the parent/child relationship. It offers parents and young children a few moments of meaningful sharing. It encourages communication in a respectful and meaningful way. It offers a few quiet moments to recap the day's experiences, discuss tomorrow, or simply be together. Developing this kind of trusting relationship helps to instill self-esteem, acceptance, and a sense of belonging. Massage encourages a connectedness between parent and child; it increases the parent-child bond. It is communication in its most fundamental, purposeful form.

Massage for the Whole Family

Massage is an ancient parenting practice that is resurfacing today as a result of its tremendous value to both parent and child. In fact, for centuries, parents throughout the world have massaged their children every day. Indeed, most cultures embrace some form of touch interaction in their daily caregiving routine. For instance, Indian children are massaged daily. Children in Ghanda, Africa are held, stroked or patted almost continuously throughout the day. Most early childhood educators will note that

"Massage is an ancient parenting practice that is resurfacing today as a result of its tremendous value to both parent and child."

the easiest way to get a young child's attention is to place one's hand on the child's shoulder. This simple act of touching helps the child focus and attend far better than the use of auditory or visual stimuli.

But the benefits of touch extend beyond the children in the family. Parents who practice massage with their children benefit from the experience as well. They report feeling relaxed and less stressed following a massage session with their child. These results are based not only on the parent's perception but also on the reduction of stress hormones in their bloodstream (Field & Henteleff et al, 1997; Schachner, 1997; Field, Hernandez-Reif, & LaGreca et al, 1997; Field, Hernandez-Reif, & Quintino et al 1997). Parents feel more connected and understanding of their child when they incorporate massage into their family life. So remember, the next time your child needs a hug, add a little rub. You'll both be glad you did!

Developing a Massage Routine for Your Family

Most parents rub and caress their children every day. In fact, many children request this kind of contact. How many times have you heard, "Mommy, can you rub my back?" Massage simply formalizes this style of parent/child interaction. A variety of massage methods and techniques exists, but the basic aspects of a massage routine remain the same regardless of the child's age or stage of development.

A massage routine should:

- Occur in a warm, comfortable environment
- Occur only with the child's permission (this promotes a sense of trust and security while respecting the child's space and opinion)
- Follow the child's cues (what body parts to massage, when to stop)
- Occur when you can relax and be present and available to your child.

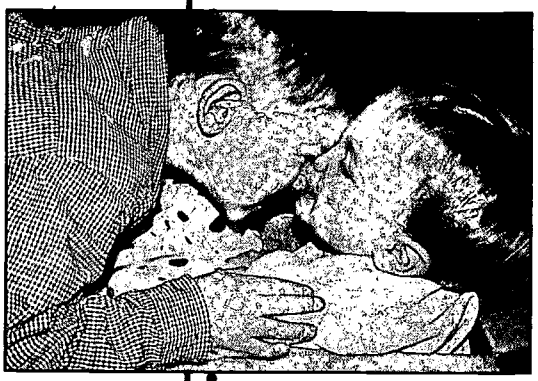
Massage can occur at anytime with little to no preparation. Pure vegetable or fruit oils may be used. Children can be massaged while lying down, sitting on their parent's lap, or in conjunction with some other activity they find enjoyable (such as reading a book). Some children appreciate a massage after a busy day at school. Very active children may be more receptive to a massage in the bathtub. A massage before bed may ease a child to sleep. Some children appreciate a quiet, reflective massage while others prefer a much more interactive approach. Massage can be done with or without clothing. Let children determine which feels the best to them, physically as well as emotionally. Respecting these individual differences allows your child to have power over his or her own body. This encourages a positive self-image and builds the confidence to say "NO".

Massage for Fun and Learning

For many young children, incorporating stories, music, rhymes and games into the massage routine enhances the event. Combining massage with language integrates the two sides of the brain. It fosters language development by pairing communication with tactile experiences. This practice integrates the child's highly developed mode of learning (movement and senses) with the still developing and ever expanding area of language. Generally three to five-year-olds are quite receptive to massage. However, there are some techniques that may help introduce a reluctant preschooler to the concept of massage or help your family begin to develop a massage routine. Suggest a "massage train". Have family members sit in a circle and massage one another's shoulders or back. After a few minutes, have everyone turn around for a trip back. Try simultaneous massage. Sit facing your child and have your child choose which body part to massage. Then massage that body part on your child while your child massages that body part on you. Correlate massage with your child's favorite activities. Ballerinas as well as hockey players receive massage. Its therapeutic value has influenced its growing presence in athletics as well as health maintenance activities. Remember that massage is more than just a hug, it's a gift that lasts a lifetime.

Massage Activites To Do With Your Child

Make massage even more interesting and educational with the following activities:



- ☺ Rub shapes on your child's back; see if she can guess the shape.
- ☺ Rub letters on your child's arm; see if he can identify the letter you've drawn simply through touch. If more help is needed expand the game by saying words that begin with that letter or end with that letter. Try just making the sound of the letter as you trace it on your child's arm.
- ☺ Rub the shape of a number on your child's legs, can she guess just from touch? Expand the game by adding rhythmic, soft taps that correspond with the number.
- ☺ Sing *"This is the way I rub your legs, rub your legs, rub your legs"* to the tune of "Here We Go Round the Mulberry Bush".
- ☺ When giving a back massage, *"Daddy's hands go back and forth"* works well with the tune "The Wheels on the Bus".

Books for Families

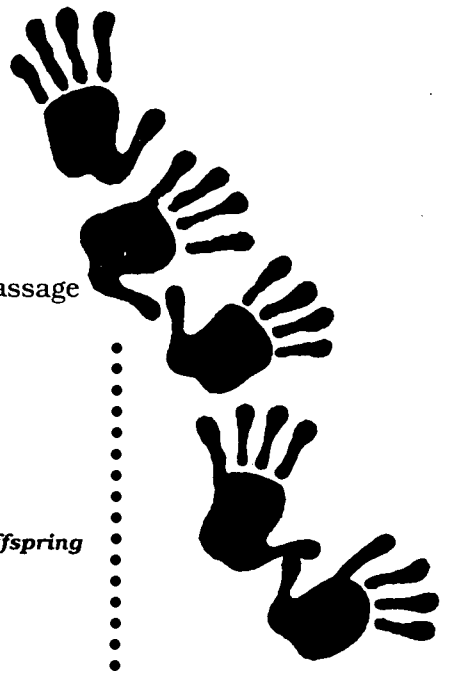
McClure, V.S. (1989). *Infant Massage: A Handbook for Loving Parents.* New York: Bantam.

Heller, S. (1997). *The Initial Touch.* New York: Hary Holt & Co.

For more information regarding massage instruction in your area contact:

The International Association
of Infant Massage
(800) 248-5432

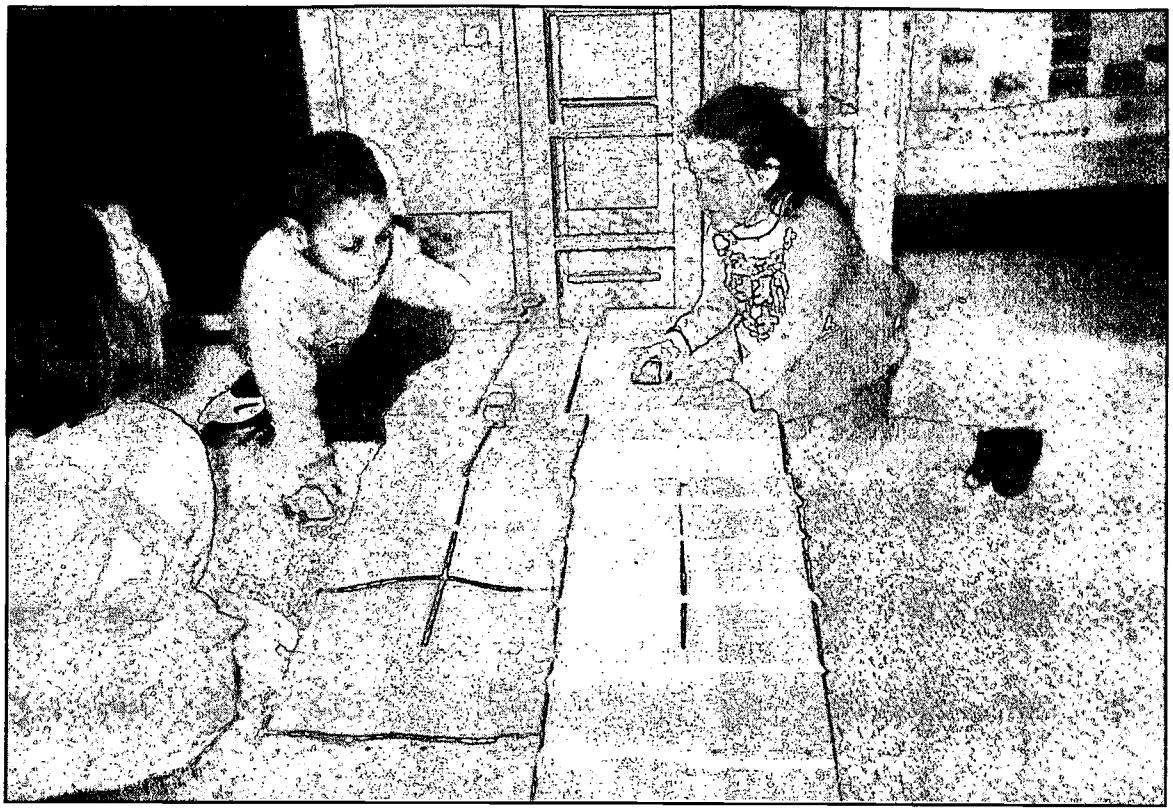
For a list of references, please contact the ***Offspring*** *coordinator at nrayer@ameritech.net.*



47

Child Directed Learning: The Project Approach

By Mary Trepanier-Street, Ed.D., Lori Gregory, Ph.D., and Jennifer Bauer



Preschool children show an unparalleled curiosity for learning. How can we, as teachers and parents, tap into their interests and explore concepts from their perspective? The Project Approach may be one answer.

Interest in project work as a component of the early childhood curriculum is gaining increased attention and support. Projects, stemming from the children's own interests, can actively engage preschoolers in developmentally appropriate investigations of a topic. This article will explain the project approach in the early childhood classroom.

What is a Project?

A project is an in-depth exploration of a topic over an extended period of days, weeks, or months depending on the children's age, their interests and the nature of the topic (Katz & Chard, 1989). Project work has the potential to incorporate all domains of development and each of the content areas of learning (ie: language arts, social studies, mathematics, science and the fine arts). Through exploration of a project topic children develop literacy skills, acquire math and science concepts, and practice social interaction skills. The time spent working on a project is determined by the continuing interest of the children. Some projects may last for a short time while others last several weeks. Some may seem to be over, but reappear at a later date.

A well-rounded early childhood curriculum includes a variety of elements. Project work and more formal teacher-directed activities can be complimentary components of an early childhood program. Many early childhood programs organize learning through the use of themes. Projects and themes are not synonymous. The major distinctions

About the Authors

Mary Trepanier-Street, Ed.D. is a Professor of Early Childhood and Director if University of Michigan-Dearborn Child Development Center. Lori Gregory, Ph.D., is an Assistant Professor and former Early Childhood Coordinator. Jennifer Bauer is a Pre-K/Kindergarten Teacher at the University of Michigan-Dearborn Child Development Center.

between the theme approach and the project approach revolve around the role of the teacher and the source of the topic. Themes are selected and developed by the teacher, based on what they think may be of interest to the children, as well as, what is suggested by published or school district curriculum guides. The teacher gathers the materials, carefully plans each lesson in the theme, and decides when the theme begins and ends. Project topics, however, begin, continue and end with the interest of the children. Meaningful, relevant projects lead to children's construction of knowledge; knowledge that is retained, not quickly forgotten. Projects motivate children to learn and require less extrinsic, teacher-directed motivation. Rewarding experiences in project work help to develop a positive disposition for learning (Katz & Chard,1989, 1993).

How do Projects Begin?

Projects are initiated by the interest of an individual child, a small group of children, the entire group, or the learning environment. The children decide what they already know, what they want to know, how they will explore, what materials they will need, and what individual members in the group will accomplish regarding the topic (Trepanier-Street, 1993). Since projects are a result of the children's interests, a sense of ownership over their learning develops. This personal investment provides intense intrinsic motivation to continue the work, engage in collaborative decision making with both their peers as well as the teacher, and fosters true pride in their efforts. Since projects are conceived by the children and stem from their real life experiences, the learning acquired is truly meaningful and relevant (Katz & Chard, 1989, 1993).

What is the Role of the Teacher?

Although projects are initiated and sustained by the children, the role of the teacher in project work is neither passive nor unimportant. It is the teacher who sets the initial environment, who provokes interest through open-ended questions or investigations of discrepant events, and who manages, organizes, and encourages the extension of the project.

Project work requires active teacher support. The teacher must be a keen observer of the children's active play, how and where they choose to spend their time, and how they interact with materials. Through observation and active listening, the teacher can begin to understand topics of interest to the children. Then the teacher can introduce an activity or set up the environment for the children to begin to investigate the project topic. During this initial investigation, the children and teacher discuss collaboratively what they want to do and what they want to know about the topic. Activity plans are not predetermined, but rather emerge through a collaborative process of children with each other and with the teacher. The project continues in the direction of the interest of the children. Many times this direction is not linear but rather leads in a course that could not be predicted from the starting point (Edwards, 1993; Hendrick, 1997).

As the project proceeds, the role of the teacher varies. The age and developmental level of the children dictates the teacher's presence as the investigations take form. With younger, less verbal children, the teacher needs to observe the children's actions, observe their surprise at discrepant events, and provide the sensory experiences to support their interest. The number of choices for activities for younger children may need to be limited. With older children, the teacher should facilitate their social and affective development through group discussions, joint decision making and peer conflict resolution. Older children should be encouraged to engage in critical thinking and problem solving and to represent their changing thinking about the topic through a variety of media.

As with other approaches, it can be useful and informative to document the children's progress during a project. The teacher may carefully collect and save children's work, transcribe children's language, and record the process of change in the children's understanding. Such documentation provides evidence to the children of the importance of their work (New, 1990; Rinaldi & Gandini, 1991).

"Through exploration of a project topic children develop literacy skills, acquire math and science concepts, and practice social interaction skills."

"Projects based on children's own interest can result in meaningful, relevant learning in young children."

What is the Role of the Peer in Project Work?

While some projects are individual projects, most projects involve small groups or the entire class. Through projects children learn to work collaboratively. The children plan each step in the project, listen to each other's ideas, evaluate those ideas, and then work together to accomplish the project's goals. They learn how to take turns, negotiate conflicts, engage in perspective taking, practice new social skills such as sharing and helping, and evaluate personal strengths and weaknesses (Greenberg, 1987). Through working with others, children have the opportunity to listen and observe the understandings and concepts of others, to compare their concepts and understandings, to reflect on potential similarities or discrepancies, and to modify, adapt or solidify their ideas and concepts (Dewey, 1900; Bodrova & Leong,1996). Consequently, group project work is a major source for social and cognitive growth.

What is the Role of Families in Project-Based Learning?

Classroom projects can build family, school and community relations. Families and the community are valuable resources. Utilizing these resources can contribute a diversity of knowledge and skills to a project, strengthen community relations with the school, contribute adult assistance, provide additional materials and equipment, and create a focus for families and children to work together, share time, and communicate with each other. Projects can become a source for conversations, discussions and at-home activities. Through project work children and their families can become aware of and value the community and its resources. In addition, the community may become more aware of and value the activities of the school.

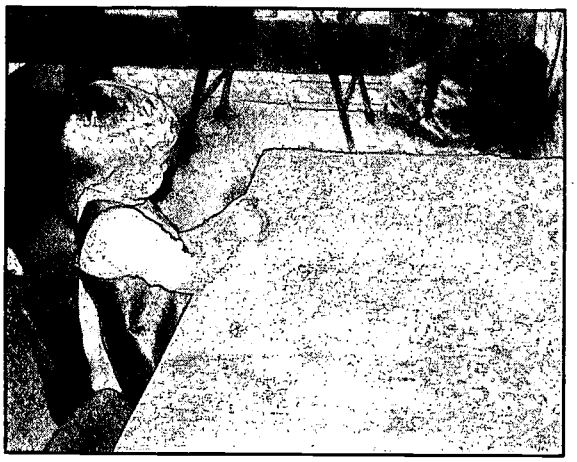
Summary

Projects, based on children's own interest, can result in meaningful, relevant learning for young children. This valuable approach can incorporate and be complementary to all content areas and components of the early childhood curriculum. Through projects the collaborative efforts of children, teachers, families and community members can result in significant learning experiences and supportive relationships. We challenge other early childhood educators to include this valuable approach to learning in their classrooms and to experience its many benefits.

For a list of references, please contact the ***Offspring*** *coordinator at nrayer@ameritech.net.*

What is a classroom example of Project Work?

The following is a photostory of a project in action at the University of Michigan Dearborn's Child Development Center. The children explored motion in various ways. They observed the differences in motion from painting on the wall to painting on the table to painting on the floor. Recording of movement in painting was explored through marble painting, and through walking, jumping and sliding with painted feet on paper.



One day when painting with spray bottles on white paper taped on the wall, children began noticing that the paint was running down the wall. Some of the children became fascinated with this occurrence and began talking about it throughout the activity. The children and the teacher began discussing and brainstorming why the paint was running down the paper. Their initial responses varied from how the spray bottles were used to the color of the paint used. This began the children's exploration of motion.

(see photo on page 12)

The block construction area also became a focus for movement explorations. To extend children's interest in movement, the teacher read a story about trains and how they moved. This led to the building of trains in the block area. Train building instigated playing with cars, and the building of roads, bridges and ramps. Prior to road building, the children and teacher planned their road designs on paper. Explorations with ramps and the speed of the cars, led to the children experimenting with speed bumps.

Movement was also visually recorded through a yarn toss game in which children, sitting a circle, took turns rolling a ball of yarn to different people in the circle. They then retraced the movement of the ball by following the course of the string.

In another activity, the path of moving objects were recorded by playing with a lazy susan. Children observed the variety of tracks made by their fingers placed in the sand on the rotating lazy susan. Paint was dropped on the top of the rotating lazy susan and children observed how the colors blended and mixed.

These activities led to a pendulum experiment, an adaptation of an activity described by George Forman (Forman, 1984). A plastic ketchup bottle filled with sand was hung from the ceiling by a string over a large tablecloth on the floor. Sitting around the cloth, a child pushed the open bottle to another child in the circle. The path of the bottle was traced by observing the visible patterns of the sand. As time went on, the children began trying to create different patterns by controlling the sway of the bottle.

Rewards of Co-oping:
What's In It For You and Your Family

So often parents approach their co-op time as an obligation that must be met, but there are many unexpected benefits that you may not have considered. As a parent with several years experience in co-oping, I've outlined some of the rewards my family has discovered along the way.

By Laura N. Sweet

At first reflection, some co-op parents may think of their assisting duties as an inconvenience they need to endure for the sake of their child's education. After all, time spent in the classroom is necessarily time that can't be spent elsewhere. And effort needs to be made to change schedules, arrange for sitters for younger siblings, and prepare snacks for the children.

But my family has enjoyed co-oping, and we've discovered some unexpected "rewards" along the way. If parents come into the classroom with the right attitude, and use the resources available to them, they'll find their participation in this stage of their child's education will pay off — in many ways.

A Positive Beginning

I became involved with a cooperative nursery school when I was looking for a "kinder, gentler" way to begin my son's education. Chris was not comfortable in new situations, and he had separation fears when I left him with anyone — even Grandma. I knew that my presence in the classroom on occasion would help give him the security and confidence he needed to stand on his own. It took time, but my patient participation worked; Chris went from being fearful at pre-school, to looking forward to his school days.

Even confident preschoolers enjoy having their parents or caregivers in the classroom. For those who are wary of being on their own, it's a comfort to have a parent

About the Author

Laura N. Sweet is a freelance writer and mother of three. She recently served as the Vice President for First Baptist Preschool of Midland.

nearby from time to time. Your days in the classroom will ease the transition from home to school for your child, making it a more natural step in the big job of growing up.

Your attitude in the classroom is also important; your child needs to see that you are looking forward to your time to co-op. It's a way of demonstrating the value you put on his or her education. Your positive attitude also assures your child that you enjoy spending time with him or her.

Positive parents are also encouraging to the teacher who needs the support of the co-op workers. Teachers know when someone really doesn't want to be there, and that can be a morale buster. A smile and a can-do spirit will make the difference between a good day at preschool or a difficult one.

The person who really benefits from your positive attitude is – You! Yes, life is hectic, and you probably have a million things to do. Working at preschool forces you to slow down and spend time in your child's world. Look at the beautiful faces around you. Watch the delight of a three-year old holding a hamster, or a four-year old who learns a complicated finger play. This is the "good stuff," the things that make this age group so enjoyable. Many things in your day may be more pressing, but none can be more important.

Watch Your Child With Others

One of the greatest benefits from working at your preschool is the chance to watch your child interact with others. Because each child has his or her own "inner" schedule of development, this will give you insight into many different areas, from appropriate behavior to kindergarten readiness.

Developmental differences can be observed and accepted. For example, the other four-year olds may be able to use scissors, but your daughter is all thumbs. Give her time. Or, if your son is a wiggle-worm during story time, you could practice sitting still together while you read to him at home.

More than one parent has believed their child was ready for kindergarten, only to watch him or her struggle with the expectations placed upon him. Two children, born in the same month and the same year, may be at different stages of development. Watching your child with others his or her age will help you determine when he is ready for school.

And you'll also see areas where your child shines! Your preschooler may amaze you by working all morning on a city of blocks, or putting together a floor-length puzzle. Your "shy" child may reach for another's hand when it's time to dance; your "rowdy" child may sit quietly with the classroom pet. By being in the classroom, you'll see facets of your child's personality you never saw before.

"Your days in the classroom will ease the transition from home to school for your child, making it a more natural step in the big job of growing up."

Get to Know Your Child's Teacher

Are you aware of the educational background of your child's teacher? Do you know the years of experience she's had working with young children? Your preschool teacher is a professional — an expert in the development and education of young children. Her experience, education and efforts to continually upgrade her skills not only make her a great teacher, but an important resource for parents.

This point was brought home to me when my three-year old began to stutter when she spoke. To me, it sounded as if she was struggling to verbalize her thought or question properly. My mother-in-law, however, was concerned that it might be the sign of a larger problem.

When I mentioned this to my child's teacher, she reassured me that stuttering was very typical for Meredith's age group. Her advice: slow down, be patient, and don't make a big deal about it. We followed that advice, and now Meredith is speaking quite smoothly in coherent sentences.

Cooperative nursery school teachers can help you know what is normal for your

"Working at preschool forces you to slow down and spend time in your child's world."

child's age group. They can also alert you to a possible problem. Their advice should be sought about kindergarten readiness. Remember: preschool teachers are not "in it for the money;" most are woefully underpaid. They teach because they love teaching, and they love young children.

Co-oping also gives parents the opportunity to work with the teacher, and observe how she interacts with the students. It gives more time to talk and ask questions, and to watch as the teacher deals with common problems. For this generation of parents, who often don't live near their own families, the preschool teacher's experience and training can be a great resource.

Leadership Roles

The cooperative preschool is unique in that it is a parent-run organization from start to finish. Unlike the public schools, where decisions sometimes seem to be made far-removed from the classroom, the parents and teachers of your preschool decide on the best course of action.

Think about taking a leadership position at your preschool. There are all kinds of jobs available, and there's probably one that you would find interesting and challenging. You'll not only be helping out, but you may find your job beneficial, both professionally and personally.

Some of our board members are at-home moms who don't often get to use skills they once used professionally. By volunteering to be the preschool treasurer, newsletter editor, health coordinator, etc., they can use their skills in a meaningful way. In fact, such volunteer work looks good on a resume when one decides to rejoin the work force.

We also have a number of working parents on our board who just want to be involved in their child's school. Some enjoy doing things that are different from their work duties. Planning a holiday party for young children, for example, can be a fun and creative "break" in the routine.

The greatest reward for taking a leadership role at your preschool will be the well-operated learning environment for your child that you will help to create. It's also a good way to demonstrate to your children the importance you put on their education.

A Unique Opportunity

A cooperative nursery school gives parents a unique opportunity in their child's education process – the chance to be personally involved in the classroom. For my family it's been an enjoyable time, exploring and experiencing new sights, sounds and activities together. The rewards are many, for both parent and child. Have a great year at preschool together!

Helping Hints for Nursery Parents

1. Arrive on time to set out equipment and supplies on your participation days.
2. Discuss morning plans with the teacher.
3. Be constantly alert to the safety of all children. Station yourself nearby when children are climbing, sliding, etc.
4. Count heads frequently.
5. Move slowly and avoid unnecessary movement. Sit and watch and listen when you can.
6. Help the children to help themselves. Give a minimum of help in speech and action. Avoid making models.
7. Give as few directions as possible. Show him as well as tell him. Then calmly help the child if he needs help in following the directions.
8. Go to the child to speak to her. Speak briefly and simply. Speak only when you have her attention. Sit or squat so you can face her on her level.
9. Speak on a child's level of understanding, but don't talk down.
10. When a conflict occurs: Try not to judge it for the children. You may not know all the facts. Don't be too eager to help. Many times children can settle their own conflicts and learn in the process.
11. Expect your child to act like a child, not a model. The days you work may not be his best days.
12. Remember you are here to help; keep conversation between adults at a minimum.
13. It helps to warn the children in advance of a change in activity.
14. Expect cooperation and you will usually get it.
15. Participating may mean being alert rather than physically rushing about.
16. Laugh with, never at a child.
17. Forget the terms, "big boy, good girl, bad or best," Definitions of these words often change. Be specific in praising behavior. "I like the way you..."
18. Put supplies away neatly and leave the room as you'd like to find it next time.
19. Allow a few minutes at the close of the session to sit down with the teacher and other participating parents to share the experiences and learnings of the day.
20. Look forward to your next opportunity to participate!

About the Author

Marjorie Kunz, M.A., began her cooperative nursery career as a co-op parent followed by teaching for 32 years. She has served MCCN for years as an advisor and an active editorial board member of ***Offspring****.*

Helping Hints for Nursery Parents

By Marjorie Kunz, M.A.

One Step Ahead: The First Years Last Forever

This regular feature is a series designed to keep parents and educators ***One Step Ahead*** *regarding early childhood education, research, and purposeful parenting.*

The *I Am Your Child* campaign (a public engagement campaign sponsored by the Reiner Foundation to increase public awareness of the importance of the first three years of life) has outlined a number of principles that promote healthy parent/child and pre-school staff/child interactions. The following guidelines (1997) have been published in a variety of its media releases (booklets, Internet site, video/TV show):

While caring for children, parents as well as preschool staff should...

- ❤ Be warm, loving and responsive
- ❤ Respond to the child's cues and clues
- ❤ Talk, read and sing to the child
- ❤ Establish routines and rituals
- ❤ Encourage safe exploration and play
- ❤ Make TV watching selective
- ❤ Discipline with love and understanding, use discipline as an opportunity to teach
- ❤ Recognize that each child is unique

Parents Should:

- ❤ Choose quality child care and stay involved
- ❤ Take care of yourself

For free videos, pamphlets and other materials contact: www.iamyourchild.org

Or try the Michigan Association for the Education of Young Children at www.MiAEYC.com

Offspring

Subscription Information:

Individual subscriptions to *Offspring* are welcome!

Cost: $6.00 – one year subscription
$10.00 – two year subscription

To Subscribe:
Please send name, address, zip code, and check or money order, made payable to:

MCCN/*Offspring*
8085 Huron River Drive
Dexter, MI 48130

For subscriptions outside the United States, please pay in U.S. funds. Bulk rates are available upon request. Subscription to *Offspring* will be processed upon receipt of check or money order.

To Submit Manuscripts or Photographs:
Please include your name, address, zip code, and phone number. Photographs should contain a statement giving *Offspring* permission to use the photo from parents of any identifiable children.

Send manuscripts and photographs to:

Offspring Magazine
c/o Trisha Rayer
8085 Huron River Drive
Dexter, MI 48130

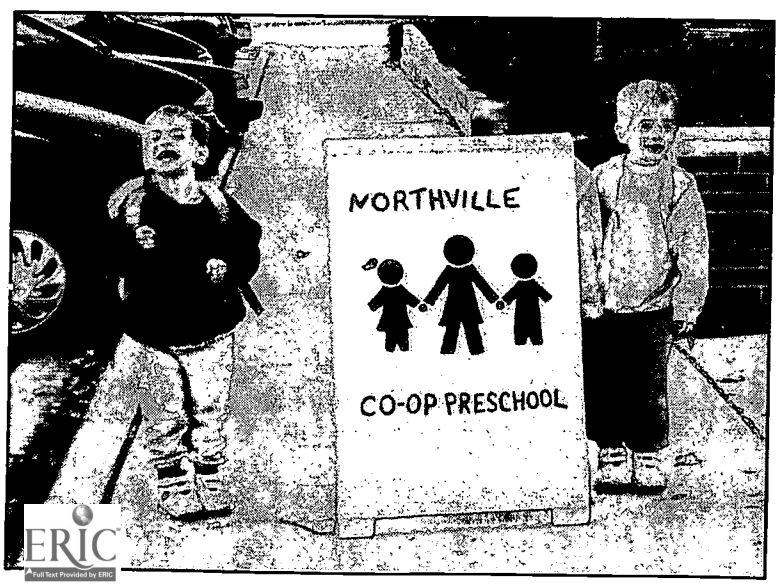


Photo Acknowledgments:

The *Offspring* staff wishes to thank the following people for permission to use their photographs:

Cover
Debbie Moorman

Inside Front Cover
Lori Aamoth

Table of Contents
Lisa Mangigian

Is It My Turn To Work?
Trisha Rayer, Mary Crombez

Pass the Peace, Please:
Teaching Young Children To Live Peacefully
Shelli Gary, Mary Crombez

Massage For Children: More Than Just a Hug!
Mary Crombez, Trisha Rayer, Lori Aamoth

Child Directed Learning: The Project Approach
University of Michigan – Dearborn Child Development Center

Rewards Of Co-oping:
What's In It For You and Your Family
Shelli Gary, Lisa Mangigian

One Step Ahead
Shelli Gary

Inside Back Cover
Judy Olsen-Hodges

Back Cover
Shelli Gary

Next issue...
Offspring celebrates 40 years!

U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
National Library of Education (NLE)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)

NOTICE

Reproduction Basis

☒ This document is covered by a signed "Reproduction Release (Blanket)" form (on file within the ERIC system), encompassing all or classes of documents from its source organization and, therefore, does not require a "Specific Document" Release form.

☐ This document is Federally-funded, or carries its own permission to reproduce, or is otherwise in the public domain and, therefore, may be reproduced by ERIC without a signed Reproduction Release form (either "Specific Document" or "Blanket").

EFF-089 (3/2000)