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Spring 2004
College of Education
Delta State University
Cleveland, MS  38733
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Spring 2004
College of Education
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Cleveland, MS  38733
May 19, 2004

Dear Colleagues,

We are most appreciative of the positive comments received from many of you in response to the first edition of The Delta Education Journal. We hope that this second issue is worthy of the same response. We also hope that you will consider submitting an article for the Fall 2004 issue.

You will note that the articles in this semester’s publication cover a wide range of topics including active learning, writing, and technology. They are also illustrative of the collaborative nature of this publication.

Please let us know if you need additional copies of this edition of the Delta Education Journal. If you have questions or comments please contact me at 662-846-4400 or e-mail lhouse@deltastate.edu.

Sincerely,

Lynn J. House, Ph.D.
Dean
College of Education
Teaching psychology using technology: An investigation of student performance, attendance, and satisfaction

Scott Alan Hutchens, Ph.D.

The usability of technology has put a new spin on education, redefining the role of educators and reshaping classroom learning experiences. A major movement today is the integration of technology into the classroom. Many universities, colleges, and community colleges are investing great amounts of money, effort, and training in developing innovative ways of using technology to increase student performance, learning, and satisfaction. This has resulted in the creation of multimedia classroom presentations, web-enhanced courses, online courses, and distance learning.

Research investigating the effectiveness of technology-assisted instruction has resulted in mixed findings. Some studies have found that integrating technology into the classroom creates a rich, effective, and efficient learning environment which improves student performance and learning (see Cronin, Meadows, & Sinatra, 1990; Funkhouser, 1993; George & Sleeth, 1996; Luna & McKenzie, 1997; Sammons, 1995; Sherry, Jesse, & Billig, 2002; Traynor, 2003; Zack, 1995). However, some studies have not shown a benefit in student performance and learning as a result of technology integration (see Avila, Biner, Bink, & Dean, 1995; Branton & Lee, 2003; Garrett, 1995; Guy & Frisby, 1992). In light of this mixed data, it is clearly evident that more research should be conducted to determine appropriate and effective uses of technology in education.

When considering faculty workload, converting courses to multimedia presentations (e.g., PowerPoint) and web-enhanced courses (e.g., WebCT or BlackBoard.com) takes considerable time and effort. However, do these significant changes lead to improved student performance, learning, and satisfaction? That is, do students really benefit from a technology-rich learning environment (e.g., multimedia classroom presentations, digital photographs, digital video clips, downloadable PowerPoint outlines, online PowerPoint presentations, interactive
online simulations & demonstrations, and Internet links) rather than seeing notes one time on the chalkboard in a traditional lecture?

The following study compared student performance, attendance, and satisfaction in General Psychology courses which were either technology-assisted using PowerPoint and WebCT or taught the traditional way using only a chalkboard. It may be the case that student performance will be better in the technology-assisted condition due to the rich learning environment. However, student performance in the traditional condition may be better due to the activity of generating notes (i.e., the generation effect). Possible gender differences were also investigated.

**Method**

**Participants**

Participants were 417 General Psychology (PSY 101) students (261 females and 156 males) from Delta State University. A total of 215 students were in technology-assisted courses and a total of 202 students were in traditional chalkboard-taught courses. Since all Delta State University students are required to take General Psychology as a general education requirement, the participants consisted of students from various majors. Thus, even though the sample was not truly random, it was reasonably representative of Delta State University students.

**Materials**

Ten General Psychology courses consisting of approximately 40 students each were studied. Five courses were technology-assisted and five were traditionally-taught. All of the courses met on a Monday/Wednesday/Friday mornings (i.e., 9:00 am & 10:00 am) schedule consisting of 50 minute sessions. The maximum allowed absences for each course was 11 class meetings. Also, all ten courses were taught by the same professor using the same lecture material. The only difference was in how the material was presented.

In the technology-assisted courses, the PowerPoint presentations were organized in the same manner as the chalkboard lectures in the traditional courses. However, the PowerPoint presentations also contained digital photographs, tables,
diagrams, movie clips, charts, and hyperlinks. Also, in the technology-assisted condition, before lessons were presented, students were able to downloaded PowerPoint lecture outlines from WebCT with the course material via Microsoft PowerPoint with a lap-top and digital projector. Thus, students in the technology-assisted course were provided with complete lecture notes before receiving the lecture. This was done so that students could spend more time listening and comprehending the material rather than racing to write the notes before the next slide appeared. Students also used WebCT to check grades, review PowerPoint shows, access a wealth of information from various Internet links, participate in interactive demonstrations and simulations, and communicate with each other and the professor via electronic discussion boards and e-mail.

In the traditional condition, the professor simply lectured and wrote notes on the chalkboard. Students in both course type conditions were given the same objective tests (i.e., four multiple-choice tests consisting of 50 questions each). Other subjective course work and assignments were excluded from analysis.

Design & Procedure

The design consisted of a 2 (course type: traditional/technology-assisted) X 2 (gender) between-participants design. The dependent variables were student performance (i.e., final grade averages) and attendance (i.e., number of days absent). Thus, student performance and attendance were measured as functions of course type and gender. College of Education teaching evaluations were also studied in order to gain quantitative and qualitative measures of student satisfaction. Teaching evaluations from General Psychology courses which were traditionally-taught were compared to those from technology-assisted courses. Students completed a 24-item questionnaire consisting of questions related to teacher performance, course content, and student satisfaction. Evaluation ratings were based on a 5-point scale in which “1” is a very negative rating and “5” is a very positive rating. The quantitative analysis was based on mean evaluations of the 24-item questionnaire obtained from students in traditional and technology-assisted courses.
Results

Student Performance

A 2 X 2 ANOVA yielded the following for student performance (i.e., final grade average): There were significant main effects for both course type (Traditional $M = 76\%$ & Technology-Assisted $M = 73\%$; $F (1, 413) = 6.28, p < .012$) and gender (Female $M = 76\%$; Male $M = 72\%$; $F (1, 413) = 8.90, p < .003$). The interaction between course type and gender was also significant, $F (1, 413) = 4.18, p < .041$ (see Table 1 for Tukey HSD post hoc comparisons).

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Course Type</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Traditional</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>6*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Technology-Assisted</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Difference (T-T)</td>
<td>6*</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .001

Student Attendance

A 2 X 2 ANOVA for student attendance (i.e., mean number of days absent) indicated that the main effects for both course type (Traditional $M = 5.3$ & Technology-Assisted $M = 5.6$; $F (1, 413) = .73, p = .392$) and gender (Female $M = 5.3$ & Male $M = 5.6$; $F (1, 413) = .86, p = .352$) were not significant. Also, the interaction between course type and gender was not significant, $F (1, 413) = .92, p = .336$. A Tukey HSD post hoc analysis did not indicate any significant differences between the means (see Table 2).
Table 2

*Mean Absent Days as a Function of Course Type and Gender*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course Type (F-M)</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Traditional</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>-.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology-Assisted</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$p = ns$

Student Satisfaction

Even though teaching evaluations were very high in both course type conditions (i.e., maximum rating is 5), a one-way ANOVA indicated significantly higher teaching evaluation scores in the technology-assisted courses ($M = 4.67$) than the traditional courses ($M = 4.52$), $F (1, 46) = 4.11, p < .048$. Also, qualitative data (i.e., student comments) obtained from the teaching evaluations indicated more positive comments in the technology-assisted courses than the traditional courses. Some student comments concerning technology used in class were as follows:

“(1) He is very informed and makes excellent use of the technology available to him as well as keeping it interesting. Using *PowerPoint* in conjunction with *WebCT* was a wonderful and extremely useful idea! (2) I really liked him using *PowerPoint* slides because if I got back to my dorm and didn’t understand something I could go to the website and figure it out. (3) I enjoyed the *WebCT* assignments. (4) The *PowerPoint* slides really helped me because I could concentrate more on him teaching than just taking notes. (5) I think a big strength to this class was using *PowerPoint* lectures. They helped me to understand the lectures better. The *WebCT* assignments were also helpful. (6) I liked being able to use *WebCT* because I got to look up how I was doing whenever I wanted to. (7) Availability of notes on *WebCT* was helpful. (8) I really enjoyed *WebCT* and *PowerPoint* notes. It made it easy to study and learn the material. (9) He used *PowerPoint* which made the class more interesting. (10) I found it easy to keep up with the lectures because of *PowerPoint*. (11) *PowerPoint* made things organized and easy to study. (12) I enjoyed the *PowerPoint* lectures which helped me to fully understand the material. Also the outlines for the
notes were given on WebCT, so I could look over the notes before class time.”

**General Discussion**

Interestingly, the results indicated that students did not benefit from technology-assisted instruction. Student performance was actually three percentage points lower in the technology-assisted condition \(M = 73\%\) than the traditional condition \(M = 76\%\). Also, regardless of course type, females \(M = 76\%\) scored higher than males \(M = 72\%\). Post hoc comparisons of means in the significant interaction indicated that female student performance was significantly lower in the technology-assisted condition \(M = 73\%\) than the traditional condition \(M = 79\%\). Whereas, male student performance in the technology-assisted condition \(M = 72\%\) and traditional condition \(M = 73\%\) did not significantly differ. Also, post hoc comparisons indicated that the significant interaction was the result of females performing much better in the traditional condition \(M = 79\%\) than students in all other conditions. It is important to note that, while male students’ performance did not benefit from a technology-rich learning environment, female students’ performance actually decreased (see Table 1).

Intuitively, one would think that technology-assisted instruction would lead to increased learning and understanding due to organization, availability of information, and visual graphics. This clearly did not happen. One may conclude that technology-assisted instruction simply does not increase student performance or learning. However, one reason for lower student performance in the technology-assisted condition may be the practice of allowing students to download complete PowerPoint lecture notes for use in class. In principle, as mentioned earlier, this was done so that students could spend more time listening and comprehending the material rather than racing to write the notes before the next slide appeared. However, this lack of note-taking may have negated a powerful memory phenomenon known as the **generation effect**.

According to the generation effect, individuals demonstrate better memory for material they have generated themselves than for material they have merely read (Slamecka & Graf, 1978). The generation effect has also resulted in improved
memory when individuals must complete or modify material (Lutz, Briggs, & Cain, 2003). The generation effect is a robust finding in memory research. It has been demonstrated using words, numbers, and problem-solving tasks (see Slamecka & Graf, 1978; Jacoby, 1978; Gardiner & Rowley, 1984; Marsh, Edelman, & Bower, 2001). Interestingly, the generation effect does not occur when learning nonwords or nonsense-words (McElroy & Slamecka, 1982; Lutz, et al., 2003). Findings such as this suggest that semantic memory is the locus of the effect. Semantic memory refers to memory of the meaning of words and knowledge of the world. From a levels-of-processing approach of semantic memory (see Craik & Lockhart, 1972; & Craik & Lockhart, 1975), the generation effect is thought to be due to the deeper processing required of words that are generated as opposed to words that are read. The deeper information is processed at encoding, the better it is remembered due to enhanced access to the memory item in the learner’s memory representation (Lutz, et al., 2003). Another explanation of the generation effect is based on the inherent differences in the two tasks (i.e., generating and reading). This explanation assumes that arousal may be heightened during generation as compared to during reading (Jacoby, 1978). Regardless of the explanation, the generation effect is a powerful effect that facilitates memory for various types of information.

Thus, student performance may have been better in the traditional condition due to the generation activity of note-taking. That is, according to the generation effect the act of students taking notes leads to increased arousal and deeper processing of the information at encoding. This, in turn, resulted in better memory of the material and increased student performance in the traditional condition. Also, students in the technology-assisted condition may have had a false sense of confidence of knowing the material because they already had all of the main points of the lecture provided in their notes. In theory, this may cause students to pay less attention to the lecture and miss class more often. However, student attendance was measured and indicated that student attendance in the technology-assisted and traditional conditions did not differ significantly (see Table 2). The present study did not measure student attention level as a function of course type and gender.

Even though student performance did not benefit from a technology-rich learning environment, teaching evaluation data indicated that the use of technology
increased student satisfaction. Quantitative data from teaching evaluations indicated slightly, but significantly, higher ratings in the technology-assisted condition than the traditional condition (see Student Satisfaction in the Results section). Also, qualitative data from the teaching evaluations demonstrated more positive student comments in the technology-assisted condition than the traditional condition. In fact, the majority of the student comments in the technology-assisted condition specifically mentioned positive statements about the effective use of WebCT and PowerPoint in the course. From this finding, one may conclude that technology-assisted instruction may motivate students by increasing enjoyment and interest in the material, but such motivation may not necessarily lead to better student performance. It may be the case that while technology-assisted instruction increases organization and clarity of presentation, it may not increase students’ synthesis and reasoning (George & Sleeth, 1996).

A follow-up study, which is currently in progress, will investigate the effectiveness of providing students with partial lecture notes, rather complete notes in technology-assisted courses. That is, over half of the main points in the notes will be eliminated. The students will have to write (i.e., generate) these missing notes as they are given the information during lecture. The process of writing the majority of the notes should capitalize on the generation effect and lead to better memory of the lecture material due to increased arousal and deeper processing at encoding. The use of partial notes should also decrease the false sense of confidence of knowing the material that the students may have had when using complete notes. Preliminary data using partial notes in two technology-assisted General Psychology courses have already been collected and appear promising. Thus far, after two tests, student performance in these two partial-note courses is higher than student performance in the technology-assisted complete-note and traditionally-taught courses. In the follow-up study, other factors such as student attention, self-efficacy, and attitudes toward technology-assisted instruction will also investigated. An important comparison will be made between student performance in traditional and technology-assisted courses with instructor-provided complete and partial PowerPoint lecture notes. Furthermore, another study is currently underway as well. The effectiveness of technology-assisted instruction is being investigated in upper
level psychology courses (i.e., Learning & Cognition, Sensation & Perception, and Social Cognition). These course environments are very different from those of General Psychology courses: (1) the class sizes are much smaller; (2) the students are more interested and engaged in the material (i.e., psychology majors and minors); (3) the students have more knowledge of the course material and technology; and (4) the students are more serious and mature (i.e., juniors and seniors). Since General Psychology and upper level psychology course environments are so different, it is important to determine if upper level psychology students are more likely to benefit from a technology-rich learning environment.

In summary, research investigating the effectiveness of technology-assisted instruction has resulted in mixed results. Some studies have found that integrating technology into the classroom improves student performance and learning (see Cronin, Meadows, & Sinatra, 1990; Funkhouser, 1993; George & Sleeth, 1996; Luna & McKenzie, 1997; Sammons, 1995; Sherry, Jesse, & Billig, 2002; Traynor, 2003; Zack, 1995) while other studies have shown no benefit (see Avila, Biner, Bink, & Dean, 1995; Branton & Lee, 2003; Garrett, 1995; Guy & Frisby, 1992). In light of this rather mixed data, it is disturbing that “accrediting agencies are including the use of technology as an essential component of a well-rounded education” (Branton & Lee, 2003, p. 11). This leaves one to question “whether technology is being used to comply with standards or to improve learning” (Branton & Lee, p. 11). It is the author’s belief that educators should not use technology in the classroom just for the sake of using it. Instead, educators should strive to develop innovative teaching strategies that increase student learning and comprehension. If the use of technology can help achieve this goal, then it should be considered for implementation in the classroom. The author also strongly believes that technology can be an effective tool for conveying information and creating a rich learning environment. However, one must first learn how to use the “tool” appropriately. Thus, it is imperative that further research be conducted to determine the most appropriate and effective uses of technology in education.
References


Turning group theory into group practice: The role of the experiential component of a group counseling course

Laura Rogers Simpson, M.Ed. and Donna Smithers Starkey, M.Ed.

Counselor education programs are charged with developing competent, skilled counselors capable of incorporating a variety of counseling methods (CACREP, 2001). While minimum standards for training and instruction are set forth by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs, the method of such is left to the discretion of the institution. Thus, counselor education programs must work creatively to transition counselor-trainees from academicians to practitioners. The use of experiential activity is one method through which such a transition may be accomplished (Anderson & Price, 2001).

The Development of Group Counselors

Pedagogy involving group theory poses its own unique challenges to the counselor educator. The traditional group theories, dynamics, and ethical standards provide for a knowledge base without providing specific skills to the emerging counselor (Furr & Barrett, 2000). Finding ways to bond this knowledge base to skills and then link it from cognition to practice is the challenge of the instructor. Research indicates that minimum training guidelines have been inadequate in scope (Markus & King, 2003). In fact, Gladding (1999) postulates that the recent focus on comprehensive training of group facilitators is in response to the need for competent and ethical practitioners in the counseling profession.

The Association for Specialists in Group Work developed its Professional Standards for the Training of Group Workers in order to establish a set of minimum competencies for facilitators (ASGW, 1991). These standards focus on both knowledge-based academic competencies and practice-based skill competencies. ASGW and CACREP require that student counselors receive a portion of their training as participants in a group (ASGW, 1991; CACREP, 2001). Additionally, CACREP requires students also to serve as group facilitators prior to completing a program of study in counseling (CACREP, 2001).
Education for a group leader may best be initiated through the participation in a group experience and the opportunity to view facilitation as a member. Current literature reinforces the relationship between group theory and group experience in the preparation of group leaders (Furr & Barrett, 2000). Yalom (1975) concludes that students develop greater insight into the potential group experiences of clients through group membership and a greater appreciation for the universality of the human experience.

This impact on the development of an effective group leader may best be illustrated with the following model:

Anderson and Price (2002) report that students who participate in group therapy experiences as group members claim experiential group activities are an “effective and necessary teaching method” (p.177). Additional research further investigated student response to group participation as a training tool and all students reported intense emotive responses to the group experience (Murphy, Leszcz,
Colings, Salvendy, 1996). These results provide support for the author’s contention that experiential group activities create opportunity for enlightenment, understanding, and integration of theory to practice not available in a traditional didactic learning environment. Additionally, instructors may consider that this effort may be best served if the experiential component is completed after the theoretical portion of the class in an attempt to provide the students with maximum benefit.

*Training Group for Counselors*

When initiating a group, it is the responsibility of the facilitator to establish general group goals. Often, these goals relate to the development of a safe and trusting environment where members may take risks in order to maximize the group experience (Corey, 2004). In the case of a training group experience within the context of a group counseling course, a number of instructional purposes are also considered. For the purposes of this exercise, the following goals serve as a suggested outline for such a group:

1. Gain familiarity of the roles and functions of a group.
2. Become aware of the importance of the need for structure within the group to maximize efficacy.
3. Develop an appreciation for the purpose and meaning of risk, anxiety, vulnerability, and ambiguity.
4. Learn to identify group goals and dynamics as they occur.
5. Illuminate personal strengths and challenges as a future facilitator.

*Activities for Experiential Component of Group*

This section will offer educators an array of activities intended to facilitate the process of developing and training group counselors. While any one of these activities may serve as a catalyst for moving a group to the working stage, the experiences presented are categorized by level of perceived risk assumed by the group. Similar to the work of Ward (1985), this approach views the group experience as progressive, and introduces activities beginning with individual thoughts, feelings and perceptions, moving into interaction between group members, and ending with fully developed collaborative participation among members.
Level I: Building Trust

This level of activity serves to begin the process of learning about group dynamics. The exercises provided are geared toward the development of initial trust and are primarily cognitively based. They require minimal risk and vulnerability on the part of the participant. Each experience allows individuals within the group to identify and share personal thoughts and feelings.

Level II: Assuming Risk

Activities in this section are devoted to the group assessment of risk and the facilitation of self-disclosure. This level of participation requires that group members participate on a more emotional level. It also involves interaction between group members.

Level III: Working Together

This level of activity requires group members to participate in an emotionally intimate fashion. Safety needs have been met and the exercises are geared towards the working stage of group development encompassing the whole group as a unit.

Level I

The Dinner Party

Purpose: The purpose of this activity is to begin to integrate an understanding of interpersonal dynamics with the reality of how individuals and placement affect the energy of a group.

Goals Addressed: 1, 2, 5

Materials Needed: 12 place cards for each group, 10 with names

Activity: Members are engaged in a discussion of the role of interpersonal dynamics in a group environment. Members should be encouraged to contrast previous group experiences which have been particularly dynamic with those that have not been as successful. The facilitator will make an analogy between groups in general and the group dynamics of a dinner party. Discussing the energy and
interests of attendees as well as the placement of individuals around the table, the group can focus on the power these factors bring to a group experience.

The facilitator will provide the group with 12 place cards. If the group is large, temporary subgroups may be created with each subgroup provided a set of cards. On the place cards, the facilitator will have written 10 names. One method of name selection is to consider public figures in popular culture or to consider notables from history. A sample list used in a recent exercise included President George W. Bush, Nelson Mandela, Madonna, Tiger Woods, and J.K. Rowling.

Although 12 place cards are provided, only 10 names are used leaving two of the cards blank. The facilitator should provide a version of the following instructions to the students:

Your task is to create the optimal group environment for a dinner party. Using the place cards provided, arrange the 10 named cards in such a way as to set the stage for the best possible interaction. As a group, determine which two additions would best fit the stage your group has set and place the new names accordingly. Use this time to process as a group how different personalities impact relating styles as you make your decisions.

During the activity, the facilitator should observe the interaction without unnecessary intervention. When the group reaches a consensus, allow the members to share what the process was like and how they arrived at the decisions they made.

Process: To meet the goal of increasing awareness of group dynamics, the process of this session involves allowing group members to use their own dynamics to make decisions about the fictional group. The facilitator becomes aware of ways in which the group is beginning to relate to one another as they establish this model group. The session provides opportunities for parallels between the fictional group and the actual one by opening an overt dialogue to the evident analogous process. As the group gleans this new knowledge about itself, it can move toward increased openness and risk.

Spooning (adapted from Williamson, 1993)

Purpose: To put group members at ease and encourage laughter as a bonding experience among members while illustrating the potential effects of embarrassment on interpersonal communication.
Goals Addressed: 2, 3

Materials Needed: One metal teaspoon and one paper towel per person.

Activity: After giving each member a spoon and a towel, ask the members to make sure the spoon is clean and dry. Next, each individual should wipe the bridge of their nose with the towel ensuring the area is free of moisture. While grasping the spoon on the handle, breathe into the concave portion of the bowl of the spoon. Finally, ask each member to hang the spoon from the end of the tip of their nose.

Process: As a group begins, members may feel unsure of themselves and self conscious about expressing themselves. This experience allows each group member to recognize feelings of awkwardness that may prohibit individuals from interacting with others. While highlighting this important issue, the members are allowed an opportunity to have fun and laugh resulting in a bonding experience with other group members. Facilitators must maintain awareness to ensure that no members are hurt or embarrassed by the actions of other group members. All members should participate in the activity at one time, thus eliminating the problem of specific members feeling as if all attention is focused on them. Discussion among members following the activity should focus on the feelings experienced during the activity. The facilitators should then lead the discussion into the potentially harmful effects of insecurity on interpersonal dynamics including withdrawal from others and social isolation.

Group Roles (adapted from Butler, 2001)

Purpose: The purpose of this activity is to clarify and recognize the various roles group members assume. It serves to raise the awareness of members regarding their own preferred roles and the subordinate styles they may have employed in previous experiences.

Goals Addressed: 1, 4, 5

Materials Needed: A container filled with group roles listed on cards.

Activity: The facilitator initiates a discussion of specific group roles based on those taught in the group theory course. Members should be challenged to consider the motivation behind particular roles and the purposes those roles may
serve in a variety of settings. The group should share how “outside” roles may play out in a group environment.

The facilitator should pass around a container full of group roles with brief definitions (ex. “Harmonizer- peacemaker” or “Class clown - overly humorous”). Each member is instructed to select a role and reflect upon how that role fits with existing personality and experience while keeping the selection secret from the rest of the group. The facilitator will then explain that the activity will consist of the group discussing an assigned topic with each member interacting from the position of the role selected. Members are encouraged to be creative and to act and react from that assigned role. Following the activity, the group will process what it was like to interact from the selected roles.

Process: This activity offers an explicit link between theory and practice. Members are able to act out their interpretation of roles and receive feedback from others regarding the presence of such roles. This activity allows individuals to consider how they might relate to roles that are often perceived as negative. The session provides members with opportunities to discover subordinate roles that may be less clear than their dominant functions. The facilitator has the opportunity and obligation to generate moments of insight into role definition and group dynamics.

Level II

Fishbowl (adapted from Christian & Tubesing, 1997)

Purpose: To encourage participants to share personal concerns and fears.

Goals Addressed: 2, 3, 5

Materials Needed: One goldfish bowl, paper, pencil

Activity: The fish bowl should be placed in a chair while the chairs of the participants should be arranged in a circle surrounding the bowl. Members are asked to write examples of areas in their life in which they feel exposed, self-conscious or vulnerable. Beginning with the member that has a birthday closest to the first of the New Year, ask each participant to first express one concern about participating in a group experience. After every member has verbalized a concern, subsequent requests should focus on the ways members feel exposed or vulnerable in their personal lives which have been previously recoded. Members should be reminded
that they are to share at a level at which they feel comfortable. The facilitator may encourage members to share as many times as needed. After sharing, members place the paper with their written concern inside the fishbowl. The fishbowl is left in place throughout the group experience as a reminder that every individual has vulnerabilities that should be respected.

Process: The facilitator must remind members that it is natural to feel uncomfortable or awkward particularly in a new group where members do not know one another. As this experience involves personal risk, members may feel nervous. The facilitator must attend to every member with respect and encouragement. Members have an opportunity to become more aware of specific personal feelings and the feelings of other members. At the conclusion of the exercise, the facilitator should attend to every member and verify emotional safety. The facilitator may take this opportunity to link characteristics members may have in common. Encouraging discussion and helping group members with inter-member communication will enhance activity at the interpersonal level.

Peaks and Valleys (adapted from Christian & Tubesing, 1997)

Purpose: A non-linear look at the highs and lows in group members’ lives as an opportunity to reflect on the personal balance of positive and negative life experiences.

Goals Addressed: 2, 3

Materials Needed: Blank paper and writing utensils for each member.

Activity: Each member is asked to draw a picture of a mountain landscape with a peak and a valley in it. As the participants draw the mountain they are asked to reflect their own personal life journey and consider which experiences stand out as highs and lows. Near the top of the mountain, each member should list three experiences they consider the “top” in their life. Near the valley area, members should write down three experiences which they consider particularly difficult.

Process: The facilitator should invite members to share the experiences they have chosen as personal highs and lows. This exercise is intended to offer participants an opportunity to reflect on the positive and negative times of life and the relative balance between happy and difficult times. The facilitator may choose to
pair up group members if the level of trust does not feel conducive to having members share openly among members. The facilitator may ask members to share what they have learned from these life experiences. This exercise is used to demonstrate the issue that positive and negative experiences can contribute to building strength to cope with life stressors.

Hot Seat

Purpose: To allow group members an anonymous opportunity to disclose a secret and explore the effects of shame on interpersonal relationships.

Goals Addressed: 2, 3, 5

Materials Needed: Blank paper and writing utensils for each member and a bowl or basket.

Activity: Participants should be arranged in a circle with a “hot seat” at one end of the circle. Every group member is given a piece of paper and asked to write down a personal secret they have felt reluctant to disclose. Members should be reminded that the issues will not be linked to any individual and members will not be asked to disclose what they wrote. Members should challenge themselves to write any issue that has caused the individual to feel shame, embarrassment, fear of ridicule or judgment, or any emotion that contributes to feeling hesitant to disclose the event. Members should be instructed to fold the paper and place it in the basket where the responses can be well mixed. One at a time, members will sit in the “hot seat” and draw a response out of the basket and read it to the group. The individual reading the item will then be asked to respond to the following:

1. How do you feel at this moment?
2. How might this event cause shame?
3. What might you fear if faced with this situation?

Process: This activity is designed to promote empathy among members and encourage feedback between members. The facilitator must closely monitor the group to guard anonymity of the responses and promote an atmosphere of safety. The session has great potential to allow members with issues of shame to feel validated and comforted. Members are offered an opportunity for interpersonal vicarious learning. However, if any group members display inappropriate efforts to
determine the identities of the disclosures, they should be removed. As with any group, the facilitator should intervene and process any comments that may be critical or debilitating. As members in the “hot seat” respond to the questions, the other group members may be encouraged to provide supportive feedback to help alleviate any anxiety they may experience.

Level III
Emotional Statues (adapted from Queen, 1994)

Purpose: This activity serves as a mechanism to promote expression of feelings and stories among participants. Through facilitative efforts, it allows group members to move from thinking about feeling to a more intimate emoting style.

Goals Addressed: 2, 3, 4

Materials Needed: Easel pad or other large surface for writing, markers.

Activity: Begin the exercise by having students brainstorm a list of feeling words. Assist the members in ensuring that intense feelings are not excluded and duplication of feelings is minimized. Post this list where it is visible to the entire group. The facilitator should explain that, beginning with a volunteer, each person will be asked to select an emotion from which to create a statue. Provide a description of statues as a non-moving, physical representation of a moment in time. The following instructions should then be provided:

In turn, each of you will select one of the emotions you closely identify with. Thinking about a specific time you have experienced that emotion, create a frozen statue position that best depicts the intensity of the feeling you experienced. Remain in that position for a few moments to allow the group to gain an understanding of what you are trying to project. You will be told to “unfreeze” and can then join the group in the discussion of the feeling. Following this, you will be asked to share the story illustrated by your statue. Each of you will take a turn and feeling words will be crossed off of the list as they are used. We will process this experience at the close of the activity.

Process: This activity serves to challenge the group at an emotive level. The facilitator is challenged to create an atmosphere for acceptance of intense emotions. The understanding that feeling words describe concepts but do not describe individual experience is illuminated through this exercise. Members should leave the
activity enlightened as to the depth and intensity of emotional experiences held by fellow participants. The group has the opportunity to bond through shared experiences and through linking member stories.

Value Scenarios (adapted from Queen, 1994)

Purpose: This activity serves to encourage members to identify values that are of particular importance to them. Additionally, it allows group members an opportunity to gain insight into the value systems of others.

Materials Needed: None.

Goals Addressed: 2, 3, 4, 5

Activity: the facilitator will open a discussion about values with the focus on an exploration of the members’ personal values. Specific scenarios (such as the samples below) should be presented to encourage discussion among members about how to handle these issues. At the conclusion of interactions about the scenarios, members will be encouraged to describe life experiences that challenged their personal values. Group members are to be encouraged to respond to the descriptions offered by others. The facilitator must attend to each member’s safety needs and watch carefully to intervene if any participant becomes critical or hurtful towards a member that is sharing. Conclude with adequate time to process the activity.

Scenario 1: While shopping you observe a frustrated women harshly disciplining her 5 year old child in a manner that includes verbal criticism and slapping him multiple times on the legs. What do you do?

Scenario 2: You are taking a class in advanced statistics and are concerned it will be the only blemish on your 4.0 GPA in the program. A friend took it last semester and offers to give you copies of the homework and tests the professor uses each year. Do you accept?

Scenario 3: As you are purchasing your books for the semester at the bookstore, you observe a popular athlete on campus shoplifting. What do you do?

Process: Infusing values into this activity requires the group to get in touch with their own value structure and tendency towards judgment. The facilitator has the ability to assist the group in viewing values from multiple perspectives, thus encouraging dialogical thinking. The group can become aware of subgroups
occurring based on shared experiences and value systems. If the climate is safe enough, this exercise offers the opportunity for participants to experience personal awareness and empathy, tolerance and appreciation of others.

Who I Am

Purpose: This activity requires a member to get in touch with what makes them who they are including how that has been manifested through acceptance and rejection by others. In addition to raising each member’s awareness of the human experience, the activity should also serve as a catalyst for emotive expression related to feelings of inclusion and abandonment.

Goals Addressed: 3, 5

Materials Needed: None

Activity: The facilitator should begin the activity with a discussion of uniqueness. Addressing cultural and social forces, the group will be prompted to share what makes members who they are. Make the request that members share with the group some characteristics that make them unique and how that has helped and hindered them in their life experiences. To challenge members to explore significant life experiences, the following questions may be posed:

1. When has being you been difficult?
2. How were you received?
3. What impact did that make on you and your life?

Close with time to process the universal themes revealed in the session.

Process: This activity has great potential to quickly move the group to an emotional level. Most individuals have experienced rejection or criticism, and the opportunity to view other individual’s life experiences can promote insight while strengthening group cohesion. The facilitator must work to protect the safety of the vulnerable focus of attention while allowing members to join each other in the rawness of emotion. As with any group experience, care should be taken to manage group members desirous of repressing the group through untimely humor or superficial concerns.
Conclusion

Developing a group course requires creative pedagogy on the part of the counselor educator. Incorporating a specific, outcome-based, experiential component may begin to provide counselor trainees with the practice and skills necessary to function as competent group counselors.

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References


Rabbits and ‘Riting: How parents can help young children become writers

Gerry Carroll Sultan, Ed.D.

He sits on top of a stack of newsprint, chubby legs outstretched, a colored marker in each hand. “I’m writing about a rabbit,” he says cheerfully to no one in particular, “like Daddy.”

“That’s good. Tell me about your rabbit,” his mother responds.

“He has long ears.” Pause. More streaks of color. “He eats grass.”

Near the lopsided circles and bright-colored squiggles he has made, is a “stick” rabbit, with the word RABBIT block-printed beneath it. Daddy’s “writing.”

Adults may question writing as a preschool activity, but a typical three-year-old, supplied with paper and markers has no trouble viewing himself as a writer, takes joy in the process, and when asked, can “read” to the curious what he has written. Long before he goes to school, Donald Graves (1983) says that he will leave his mark on foggy windows and wet beaches. Even earlier, Vygotsky (1962) says that his gesturing arms were already writing in the air.

But will our three-year-old groan at the mere thought of writing by the time he is in the third grade, lose the pleasure he once felt when he thought of himself as a writer, and fall behind where he should be in producing written material?

The latest findings from the National Assessment of Educational Progress suggest that he might. Data indicates that at grade four 14% of the nation’s children were writing below basic level, 58% at basic, only 26% at the proficient level, and, worse still, only 2%, two in a hundred, were categorized as advanced (2002).

Growing concern by education and business communities, policy makers and the general public, that the quality of writing is not what it should be, has resulted in serious scrutiny. Established in September 2002 by the College Board, The National Commission on Writing in America’s Schools and Colleges recently released its report, The Neglected “R”: The Need for a Writing Revolution (April 2003). Among the challenging ideas in the report is that “in today’s schools, writing is a prisoner of time”(p.20). Citing data from NAEP, the Commission points out that 97% of elementary students report spending three hours a week or less on writing, or
approximately 15% of the time they spend watching television. Learning to write requires time; the list of skills and practices beyond grammar and mechanics needed for effective writing is long and not quickly acquired. Because of this, one of the recommendations that the Commission makes is that strategies must be developed for increasing the amount of time students spend writing. One strategy they suggest is for schools to make use of more out-of-school time for writing, beginning in early elementary education.

This suggestion mandates a link between home and school and brings us back to our three-year-old and the role of his parents in fostering his growth as a writer. Perhaps by design, perhaps intuitively, his parents have taken the first steps in helping their child learn to write well and love it. Remembering their walls and Graves’ foggy windows, they are fostering their child’s learning to write by providing him with all sorts of writing and drawing materials: washable markers; paints and brushes; finger paints; pencils and crayons designed for small hands; large sheets of paper; colored or shaped paper; pads; and sticky notes.

Parents should invite their child into the world of written language much as they invite him into the world of spoken language. They certainly would not inhibit a child’s acquisition of oral language by insisting that he learn the components correctly before encouraging him to use whole words. In fact, childish mispronunciations or partial words are not looked at as wrong, but as an “approximation of adult language” (p.60). At home children can begin to learn written language the same way. Those who are immersed in language experiences, reading and talking, playing with sounds and letters, develop a desire to learn the conventions of written language early. Their parents should invite them to try to use the sound-symbol correspondences they know (or think they know) when they begin to transfer thought to page, but just as when children are learning to talk, mistakes are not an issue (Calkins, 1994).

Parents who realize that drawing and marking are writing for a young child, give him an audience for his writing, initially through talk. Conversation about what he is writing is important. Vygotsky (1978) says: “The most significant moment in the course of intellectual development, which gives birth to the purely human forms of practical and abstract intelligence, occurs when speech and practical activity, two
previously completely independent lines of development, converge.... A child’s speech is as important as the role of action in attaining the goal....The more complex the action demanded by the situation, the greater the importance played by speech in the operation of the whole. Sometimes speech becomes of such vital importance that, if not permitted to use it, young children cannot accomplish the given task” (pp.24-26). When young children draw and write, they talk, perhaps softly to themselves or to someone nearby, or loudly, across the room, as a thought comes to mind. This talk contributes to their development as writers. Today’s writing authorities are convinced that the talk surrounding writing is vital for the writing to flourish in young children, but many also suggest that allowing children to talk is not always easy for adults. Parents may have to make a conscious effort not to interrupt their child at his merest pause, ask too many questions, or make such direct suggestions as to take control of his attempts at writing.

When they do initiate conversation about writing, parents can ask open ended questions and make brief positive comments to encourage the child to assign meaning to the marks he has made and to elaborate on the idea he began to formulate as he “wrote.” Questions about the writing should have no right or wrong answers and invite more than a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answer. “What is your rabbit doing?” is a better question than “Is your rabbit hiding in the grass?” The leading suggestion “Tell me about your rabbit” is even better.

To provide additional support, parents can point to parts of what the child has drawn/written and ask, “What is this part about?” Then to encourage expansion and development of the story contained in the writing, adult questioning might move toward questions that provide scaffolding, such as, “What else can your rabbit do?” or “After your rabbit eats grass, what will he do?” When a young child has not assigned meaning to his marks, the questioning helps him learn that texts convey messages and have meaning. If the child’s marks were nonrepresentational when he made them, he will be encouraged to invent meaning in response, but if he intentionally tried to convey meaning, he will be led to elaborate. The goal should always be to ensure that the child’s drawing and marking have meaning for him.

Adults need to listen to children. Donald Graves (1994) says that “through our active listening, children become our informants. Unless children speak about
what they know, we lose out on what they know and how they know it. Through our eyes and ears we learn from them: their stories, how they solve problems, what their wishes and dreams are, what works/doesn’t work. . .” (p.16). Carol Avery (2002) quotes Graves as being even more emphatic on the subject: “Shut up, listen, and learn” (p.139). Though Graves’ intended audience for these comments is teachers who need to learn from children about their abilities, it is sage advice for parents who want to help their children become effective writers. If from the very beginning of a child’s attempt to communicate through writing (marking, drawing), a thoughtful adult has interacted with him in conversation and really listened to what he says, the child learns that through his writing, he has engaged his audience; he has something of value to say. Moreover, it allows the child to retain ownership of his own writing.

A child’s earliest writing should be respected, rather than praised. The way parents do this is to support it the way they do his earliest speech. When parents first realize that “wa-wa” is a request for something to drink, they don’t congratulate the child by complimenting him, they give him a drink of water. Parents can support their child’s writing by inviting him to do purposeful writing and then showing respect for what he produces. In *The Art of Teaching Writing*, Lucy Calkins (1994) tells wonderful stories about her own sons to illustrate this point. When her four-year-old wanted batteries for one of his toys, his mother told him she would try to remember, but that he could help by adding them to her shopping list, which he did. She “remembered” to purchase the batteries. At Christmas, she told both of her preschool sons that when they made their Christmas lists, they should hang them on the refrigerator near the phone, so if anyone called her to ask what they wanted, the lists would be right there. As very young children they learned that writing is worth doing and has power in the world when it is used for real purposes. Even if children are still at the stage of marking, some other suggestions for purposeful writing parents that can use to encourage real writing are for children to write/draw invitations to their own birthday party, write/draw thank you notes for gifts or other gestures, and write notes or letters to other family members or teachers, all of which should be mailed or delivered. Notes written by a parent and tucked into the child’s coat pocket or lunch box for him to find may encourage him to write notes of his
own for others to find; however, none of this writing should be required of young children. If it becomes a chore, the writing will seem more punitive than a pleasure.

When parents do wish to compliment children, the compliment should be grounded in true accomplishment, remembering that a small child is usually very realistic and honest. At Thanksgiving this year I received a wonderful handmade card from my three-and-a-half-year-old grandson. On the front was a colorful turkey made from the impression of his small fingers dipped in paint and pressed onto the paper. Inside were many randomly scattered markings. Some of the marks were fairly circular, but others were notably lopsided. Thinking to offer him high praise, I told him that I loved my Thanksgiving card with the turkey on the front, but I especially liked how he had written his name inside. Expecting a big smile and maybe a hug, I was surprised by his resounding, “No.” He followed up with an emphatic explanation, “I get tired when I write Dominic. I just write D-O-D-O-D-O!” He knew, as I did, that he had not written his name. Hoping to regain my credibility with him, I quickly commented about what nice D’s and O’s they were, and was rewarded with that smile and a hug. Adult praise of a child’s writing, as about other accomplishments, should never be dishonest or empty.

Another excellent practice for parents is to encourage their child to dictate stories; a picture the child has drawn or a fun-filled experience may provide a springboard. A parent prints the story as the child composes orally, and then invites him to “read” or retell the story while looking at the picture and the words. These stories make wonderful reading material, reading in which the child can participate on the most fundamental level. He is the author. Parents may discover that keeping these writings in a book to be enjoyed over and over becomes an incentive for the child to write additional stories to add to “his” book. It also provides a wonderful record of his growth as a writer. An added benefit of such early composing is that when a child becomes a writer, he becomes a better reader. Better readers become better writers (Sterling, 2004). In addition to his own “book,” a child should have many other books to read and explore alone and with older family members. True literacy comes with the development of the intertwined processes of speaking, listening, reading, and writing.
There are additional reasons for having children dictate stories, too. Handwriting requires fine control of small muscles and the precision of eye and hand working together. Writing stories independently requires knowledge of written language. These are skills that children develop over time, but if a child must wait until these skills are fully developed before beginning to compose, valuable positive attitudes about himself as a writer may be late in developing or may never develop.

Because tasks requiring fine-motor development and eye-hand coordination can be a frustrating experience for young children, parents can engage their child in activities that develop his hand muscles. Working with playdough, playing with Legos, and drawing and painting will prepare him for handwriting later (Bredekamp and Copple, 1997).

Fine-motor skills develop at varying rates and degrees in individual children, with the result that some children become facile sooner than others, and gender differences may occur as well, with girls typically developing fine-motor skills earlier than boys. Four-year-olds still learn best through large muscle activity and write with their whole hand, rather than their fingers (Wood, 1997). To reduce feelings of inadequacy and stress when a young child is learning to write, parents should not focus on performance. Only when their child expresses interest and becomes persistent about wanting to form letters or write his name rather than continue with his free markings, should parents offer help (Bredekamp and Copple, 1997). In the meanwhile, the child’s composing skills are growing through conversation and dictation.

Another important role for parents in helping their child learn to love writing is providing him with a model for the desired behavior. They can help their child learn early that writing is bigger than school assignments. It has importance on a personal level for reflection in journals or diaries; it has social value for communication with others through letters or email, lists and notes. Last, it has public value in the workplace and at school. A child who has already learned to value writing on a personal and social level through the practices of his parents before coming to school is much less likely to see learning to write well in school as a chore. After all, he may need to learn to write effectively for academic reasons, but he will already have personal reasons for wanting to be a good writer, too. A
bonus: the transition to academic writing is easier for children who have learned to do other kinds of writing (Sterling, 2004). Family journals are wonderful projects for modeling writing behavior. Each family member writes (or dictates) his perceptions of some common experience, and then the entries are shared orally after everyone has written. Almost any family experience can provide subject matter: a family vacation when the writing is sustained and ends or begins each day, a day trip to the zoo or the lake, or a family holiday. With the availability of technology, using family websites and email are options, too. This kind of collaborative writing introduces the young writer to voice and point of view from hearing different accounts of the same experience, without the labels, and teaches him that writing is not an activity that is done best in isolation. It is a social act.

Adults often cite writing near the top of their list when asked about things they fear. Sadly, a person who feels that he can’t write or fears even trying to write seldom becomes an adequate writer and virtually never becomes a successful one. Parents (and later teachers at school) must provide enough positive experiences early enough in a child’s development to prevent fear of writing from becoming one of his personal demons. Important behaviors for the parents who want their children to be good writers are to communicate a positive attitude about writing and to value its place in their life. Because learning to write is a complex task and hard work for most children, parental pressure about performance or a negative reaction to situations requiring writing can lead to a resistant attitude, plus a fear of writing, that follow a child for the rest of his life.

To learn to write well, a child needs to remain as positive about wanting to write, as eager to try it for himself, and as convinced that he can write as he was when he was three. Otherwise, he may become one of the statistics that no one, least of all his parents, wants him to be.
References


When something can be read without effort, great effort has gone into its writing.
-Enrique Jardiel Poncela
The influence of maturation on children’s learning

Cheryl Jackson.Cummins, Ed.D.

Many parents, as well as early childhood professionals, believe that there is a simple solution to a lack of readiness and that solution is time. They believe that as time passes, a child grows and develops physically and cognitively, therefore, he becomes ready to achieve. Many school admissions policies advocate that children should remain out of school for a year if they are not “ready” as measured by a school readiness test. The assumption that the passage of time will bring about readiness is similar to Froebel’s concept of unfolding (Wolfe, 2000). With the concept of unfolding, it is implied that development is determined by heredity and a biological clock. In other words, development is inevitable and certain and children will mature according to their genetic inheritance and their own maturational timetable. Maturation theories suggest an unfolding of characteristics and capabilities that leads to a more mature child (Puckett & Diffily, 2004). Froebel was clear in his belief that teachers and parents must be aware of a child’s development in order to teach and to provide the proper environment (Wolfe, 2000). The “unfolding” view also implies that maturation is predictable, patterned, and orderly. This view looks at the concept of developmental age to distinguish children’s developmental growth from chronological age. An illustration of this is that six-year-old Kellie may have a developmental age of five because she demonstrates the behavioral characteristics of a five-year-old rather than a six-year old. This maturationist view has become increasingly popular. Critics of early education are saying that children are being hurried to grow up too soon and too fast. Simply put, we should let children be children and allow them to enjoy childhood. On the opposite end of the continuum, other professionals and parents say that we have to educate children early to prepare them for the realities of our contemporary, technological society. The rationale here is that the brain and developmental processes keep pace with our changing culture (Morrison, 2004). The role of parents and teachers should be to provide a climate in which children can grow without interference to their innate timetable and development (Morrison, 2004).
A major principle of maturation theories is that growth and development proceed from the head downward and from the body outward. Variations in maturity among children occur due to several factors such as socioeconomic status, ethnic and cultural uniqueness, and accessibility to health care and prenatal care, enrichment and learning opportunities, parenting styles, learning styles, developmental challenges, or debilitating conditions. In essence, the issue here is that diversity in children does not imply deficiency. However, profound departure from the norm does suggest a need for further assessment (Puckett & Diffily, 2004). Basically, the maturation process establishes a general timetable for the beginnings of new capabilities and understandings. Maturation plays an important role in deciding the feasibility or appropriateness of specific tasks for young children (Kostelink, 2004).

Arnold Gesell was a maturationist. In thirty-seven years as director of the Yale Clinic of Child Development, Gesell observed and recorded the changes in child growth and development from infancy through adolescence. Gesell’s work established norms or typical behaviors for children throughout childhood. His “gradients of growth” are categorized into ten major areas:

1. Motor characteristics
2. Personal hygiene
3. Emotional expression
4. Fears and dreams
5. Self and sex
6. Interpersonal relationships
7. Play and pastimes
8. School life
9. Ethical sense
10. Philosophical outlook

Gesell’s “growth gradients” can provide specific information for parents and teachers concerned about behavior for a given age (Henniger, 2002).

Implications for what we know about maturation theories include that through these “theories,” early childhood professionals can learn how children mature and what, within reason, may be expected of children across time. This understanding can be communicated to other significant adults in children’s lives. A further implication for teaching from maturation theories is that teachers can remediate or enrich with activities in response to children’s levels of functioning and
the comprehension required of certain activities. A final implication of maturation theories is that the school curriculum should be designed so that there is some flexibility in the grade placement of learning objectives. In other words, no single grade level has to include both the introduction and the mastery of certain knowledge or skills. Instead, these may be spread out across more than one grade. Certain milestones for children to accomplish may fit into the expectations for multiple grade levels (Kostelnik, 2004).

In conclusion, theories of maturation indicate an unfolding of children’s mental abilities in a schedule that simply cannot be hurried. Classrooms based on a maturation theory help children express themselves through play, through their senses, through drawing, dramatic play, and listening to literature. Such classrooms are against introducing anything (especially formal reading and writing) before the children have matured sufficiently and are ready for it. The result of this type of thinking is the debate about the appropriateness of pushing the primary school curriculum downward or extending the kindergarten philosophy upwards which continues unresolved still today.

Theories of maturation have had influence on early childhood education. One of the most significant developments in the past few years has been the emphasis on “developmentally appropriate” education of young children from birth through age eight by the National Association for the Education of Young Children. However, early childhood education is not immune to pressures for increased accountability in preparation for the national goal that “all children will start school ready to learn.” Taking maturity and developmental appropriateness into perspective, early childhood educators simply need to nurture the development of literacy abilities that have begun long before children enter kindergarten and will continue long after they leave. We should pick them up at their stage of literacy development and promote growth in their literacy abilities as best we can, without stress to the child but with appropriate challenges.
References


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*Age is no guarantee of maturity.*

-Lawana Blackwell
Increasing parental awareness of student aggression

Thomas Wayne Taylor, Ed.D.

According to Peterson (1999), 75% of all adolescents have been bullied while attending school. Most adults have memories of being bullied in some form while in school. Historically, adults have expected their children to deal with it the way they did. It was almost a “rite of passage” to adulthood. Enduring these moments of derision was to toughen the child for the life ahead as an adult. Often in the past, older siblings warned younger ones of what was ahead and tried to prepare them by teasing and rough housing. This was to get them ready to take on the bullies or anyone who would try to intimidate or abuse them. Fathers would teach their children how to fight back. These instructions may now cause more trouble for the child when the school takes action against the behaviors.

From experiences as a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist for the last 23 years, it is evident that each generation of parents must teach their children how to deal with peers who will harass them. What parents do not know are the changes that have taken place in the school systems regarding the policies concerning harassment or bullying.

Bullying is defined as any form of verbal or physical abuse with intent to harm or hurt. Another phrase often used to describe bullying behavior is “picked on.” In order for behavior to be labeled as bullying, the aggressor must be superior physically, psychologically, or in some other way. For example, if a student were not superior physically, or psychologically, but had a big brother or a gang that could exact punishment, this could be used to bully a victim (Bulach, 2003). While the understanding of bullying may be clear, most parents are not aware that harassment is being included in the targeted behaviors. Harassment can be defined as to disturb or irritate persistently, which may not be as severe as bullying, but the victim is being confronted. The belief of school administrators may be that harassing behavior will ultimately lead to more severe bullying.

School administration personnel are becoming more proactive in the intervention of students who have demonstrated aggressive behaviors. Since the
Columbine High School shootings, school policies reflect a zero tolerance for threats being made to students, teachers, or other school personnel. Are parents aware of what is expected of their children at school in the form of what they can say or do when interacting with other students? The answer is “probably not.”

Most school districts believe in, and are committed to, providing and maintaining a work-learning environment free from harassment. The school districts will not tolerate any form of harassment, threat, or ridicule made by an employee, student, or parent toward another student, teacher, or parent. The principals will take action that is necessary to protect the offended person. Such offenses can be classified as minor, intermediate, or major offenses with punishment ranging from detention, probation, work assignments for minor offenses, suspension from school for intermediate offenses, and recommendation for expulsion for major offenses. Schools will take punitive actions toward students and usually involve the parents in their disciplinary actions.

Much research and writing has evolved on the topic in recent years. New approaches and strategies have been developed. Karen Osterman in the *Phi Delta Kappan* (2003a, p.2) reports her findings from an analysis of over 150 research studies on the important implications for preventing student violence. The following are highlights of her findings:

1. The quality of student relationships with teachers had the most direct and significant effect on students’ involvement in learning.

2. Peer relationships had a very significant impact on students’ emotional health. Rejection by peers was devastating and particularly so for boys with a high need for affiliation. Boys who want to be accepted by other boys can not afford to complain or to seek adult assistance in dealing with their problems.

3. Many children in elementary school and secondary schools have no friends and are not part of any group. It is okay not to be popular, but if one is ostracized from the group, that is when the trouble begins.

4. Students who are rejected by their peers are also rejected by their teachers and by other adults in the school. This lack of support from anyone exacerbates the sense of emotional isolation.
5. Students who are rejected by teachers and peers become more and more isolated. Teachers avoid them or criticize them, and peers refuse to work with them in class or on projects.

Schools have taken on the task of intervening in these volatile behaviors on their school grounds. While punitive action is necessary as a consequence for inappropriate behavior, the strategies must include the total environment of the child as bully or victim. Osterman (2003b, p.2) suggests these strategies:

1. Establish the ground rules: Harassment and abuse in the classrooms and school are not acceptable. Tolerating harassment sends a message that it is okay. The rules need to be clear and enforced.

2. Promote a culture of tolerance and acceptance. Develop through word and action a culture of caring and respect.

3. Reach out to students who are a little different. Students need adult support. They need to feel that they belong and that the people care for them.

Research has shown that being emotionally connected to adults and the community is significant for young people to thrive in adverse conditions. In order to accomplish this task, many approaches include peer and adult mentoring. Many people underestimate the power of mentoring and making connections with kids – the two most important ingredients of a successful resiliency program (Jones, 2003). Communities have undertaken mentoring programs that are demonstrating positive results, and the research forthcoming will very likely demonstrate their effectiveness.

While these approaches are helpful, more needs to be done to help parents learn how to help their children when they have encountered harassing and bullying situations. The parents of bullies also need help with knowing how to alleviate the bullying behavior of their child. Parents need much more than consultation by the school when these situations arise. They need to be educated on the causes, cures, and prevention of harassing and bullying behaviors of children.

Research is reporting that being a bully relates to parenting styles. Students identified as bullies were 1.65 times more likely to come from homes with an authoritarian style of child rearing compared to a participatory style (Baldry, 2000). Responsiveness and supportive parenting have been associated with decreased levels
of bullying (Haynie, 2001). Father involvement in a child’s life also was associated with a small, but significant, decrease in likelihood of being bullied (Flouri, 2002).

These are just a few of the findings in the research that point to the need of parental awareness and training on harassment and bullying. Any program undertaken by the school should provide parent education and direction to receive help from trained professionals concerning this increased problem of school violence.

Parents should be made aware of the early warning signals their children may be exhibiting. An information bulletin from the United States Department of Education (1999) cited the following as early warning signals that student violence could occur:

- Severe social withdrawal
- Excessive feelings of isolation and being alone
- Excessive feelings of rejection
- A victim of violence
- Feelings of being picked on and/or persecuted
- Poor or deteriorating performance
- Expressions of violence in writings or drawings
- Uncontrolled anger
- Pattern of impulsive and chronic hitting, intimidating, and bullying
- History of disciplinary problems; prejudicial attitudes and intolerance for differences
- Affiliation with gangs
- Access to, possession of, or use of firearms
- Threats of violence

We know a great deal more about the problems of our young people, but are we really responding to them from a family system or are we responding from the education system? This author would suggest we are too involved in trying to solve the problem from the education system without enough emphasis on the family. Any family therapist believes that attempts to correct problems without family involvement will not have lasting results. To have punitive strategies may only cause more problems for the school. Some professionals, including this author, are beginning to question the approaches being used and are wondering if they are contributing to more harassing and bullying behavior.

My child came home from school one day and said, “We have fights every day at school.” I tried to verify the remark to make sure it was not an exaggeration, and other students confirmed the report. The national media have reported these
behaviors with video taped evidence of its occurring. Harassing and bullying behavior continue in our schools, and we must examine the problem even closer because it is not going away. My suggestion is for parents to receive the education and training to help their children and let the focus of the solution be in the home.

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Active learning: Essential for the social and curious middle school student

Leslie Little Griffin, Ed.D. and Sondra Klementis Rakes, Ph.D.

Why consider the needs of middle school students in planning learning experiences?

Teachers of young adolescents are posed with a challenge when planning a curriculum that meets the needs of this socially active and intellectually curious target group of middle school students. Best practice prescribes active, contextual learning in the real world for young adolescents. In order to maximize such experiences, educators must first understand the characteristics of young adolescents and their implications for developmentally appropriate practices.

Intellectually, young adolescents are intensely curious about the world around them and seek to connect their immediate world to the world at large. The immediate world can provide the concrete experience that sets the stage for movement from concrete thought to abstract reasoning. A student’s observation concerning his immediate surroundings can serve as a springboard for questioning and making generalizations about the world at large. Also, students are often motivated to solve problems that directly affect them. Since these students have a strong willingness to learn what is useful, it is logical to provide them with learning experiences that link directly to their world – including the school and community beyond. Only then can they be expected to make real-world application of the reasoning and problem-solving skills they have learned (Kellough & Kellough, 2003; Charles & Charles, 2004).

Emotionally, young adolescents are vulnerable to naïve opinions. Therefore, they need to learn to question the status quo as they search for answers to problems they encounter daily (Kellough & Kellough, 2003). In activities, whether researching a more effective system for serving students in the school cafeteria or exploring a safety issue at a local intersection, students learn research skills that help them to be open-minded as they develop problem-solving skills. In doing so, they find their places as citizens of their schools and communities as well as the world beyond.
Socially, young adolescents are seeking affirmation from teachers, peers, and the members of the larger community. In particular, they need positive social interaction with peers. Therefore, there should be ample opportunities in each school day to work collaboratively with their peers. The premise is established in *This We Believe . . . And Now We Must Act* (National Middle School Association, 2001) that young adolescents can learn to make informed decisions by having decision-making power about the composition of small groups they work in. Manning and Bucher (2005) stress that students should work together to reach consensus on the guidelines for working in such groups and in selecting the content and projects on which they will work. These collaborative relationships also provide opportunities for students to develop their ethics and answer broad questions that do not have narrow answers (Kellough & Kellough, 2003). Interesting, authentic and active learning throughout the daily curriculum provides these opportunities.

Although cognitive development demands much of a teacher’s attention when planning curriculum experiences, the physical needs of young adolescents are of paramount concern. Physically, 10 to 15-year-olds are often restless or listless—both of which are addressed through planning for movement and activity throughout the school day. Therefore, simple activities that allow students to “walk and talk” provide much-needed physical and psychosocial outlets (Manning & Bucher, 2005).

*How do these characteristics influence planning for instruction?*

Middle school educators should keep this range of needs uppermost in their minds when planning. According to Wood and Jones (1996), the affective needs of middle school students demand “freedom of choice, appropriate peer interactions, instructional diversity, personal expression, and a broadened perspective” (p.292). Middle school classrooms should provide safe havens for exploration and ongoing dialogue with the community at large. Best practice also prescribes that students learn content utilizing an interdisciplinary approach. Learning activities should allow the teacher to combine and integrate content, the fine arts and the language arts through an approach that makes the learning experiences relevant for the students (Wood, 2005).
With the recognition that an active and dynamic middle school curriculum is responsive to the unique needs of middle school students comes the acknowledgment that teachers often have limited time and resources for developing such curriculum experiences. Therefore, the authors wish to suggest practical, “doable” learning activities that are flexible and generalizable. These recommended activities are possible in almost any environment and often lead educators to the realization that they have unlimited potential for planning active thinking and learning.

What kinds of activities are suitable for developing an engaging middle school curriculum?

The range of multi-disciplinary activities which follow are offered as examples of practical and time-efficient learning experiences that can easily be incorporated into the daily curriculum – with minimal cost and planning. Each can be readily referenced to benchmarks in the national standards of several disciplines, as well as state curriculum frameworks. Of special note to teachers is the need to select activities that clearly support benchmarks and related objectives in substantial ways. Otherwise, activities may be of limited value in the curriculum and fail to achieve the desired outcomes. Furthermore, these activities are responsive to students’ varying styles of learning and provide opportunity for developing multiple intelligences. Practitioners are encouraged to look within and beyond their worlds in exploring the unlimited possibilities for engaging students in active learning daily. May the search be as satisfying as the destination!

One Dozen Ideas . . . Just for Starters

1. Ask a local resident to describe the deeds of a local hero or heroine. In recording the response, be sure to identify the person’s reasoning for his or her choice.

2. Find five examples of tessellations in or surrounding local buildings. Sketch/describe these.
3. Pretend you are an archaeologist in the year 2500 discovering a building for the first time. You have no previous knowledge of its inhabitants. Develop and list five hypotheses about the long-ago occupants of 2004. Questions you might ask yourself: Who utilized this building? How did they communicate? Etc...

4. Find an example of the following simple machines in or outside of a building: lever; pulley; wheel and axle; inclined plane; wedge; screw.

5. Look out the window or step outside, and sketch the cloud formations that you see in the sky. Identify the cloud formations according to the following descriptors:

Cirrus clouds are thin, feathery clouds. They are high in the sky. They are so high that they are made up of ice particles. They are generally white or whitish in color.

Cumulus clouds look like puffs of cotton piled in a heap. They are commonly known as fair-weather clouds. They are usually nearer to the earth than are the cirrus clouds.

Stratus clouds are low, flat clouds. They are often dark and bring rain.

“Alto” means “high.” Altostratus clouds are higher than stratus clouds.

6. Tour the school building and surrounding area (or another building location), sketch any signs and symbols that you note. Discuss how color, shape, wording and pictures contribute to the impact of signs and symbols.

7. Take a five-minute walk and identify ten things that George Washington would not have seen or heard. Write a story describing how George Washington would have reacted to these phenomena.

8. Identify the directions of north, south, east and west. Stand and face each direction for five minutes and jot down what you observe. Provide a description of what you saw – in terms that would allow a blind person to “see.”

9. Estimate the number of steps between the floors of a building (or two points in a building). Check to see how close your estimate is to the actual number by “trekking and checking.”

10. Brainstorm a list of all the solid wastes that are disposed of in and around a building (after surveying/observing the area). Develop a waste management plan for disposal of the items.

11. Sketch a world map and mark an X on family “root” locations of five people that you have interviewed.
12. Do a sociological survey of cars driving by for five minutes. Create a graph noting different characteristics. For example, how many vans, trucks, males, females, single drivers? What generalizations can you derive from the survey? For example, is there evidence that this is an agricultural community?

Example:

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Generalizations:

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References


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