



Volume I, No 1

THERE IS A PLACE ...

ABOUT THE PUBLICATION

It is almost a universally accepted premise that the first six years of a child's life will have a greater influence on him than any other time in his life, and yet formal education doesn't even start until that period is nearly ended.

Realizing the importance of these formative years, more and more parents are seeking practical suggestions which they can use in teaching their young children at home. They find that, even as dedicated parents, maintaining their inspiration for teaching is an ongoing process, and they actively seek ways to keep their children and themselves excited about learning.

Parents in the community of Stelle, Illinois have for years shared this interest in early childhood education. The community itself was developed to foster a commitment to human excellence, and its educational approach has evolved upon this foundation.

Years of research and many trials, with numerous errors and successes, have created a commonsense approach to stimulating growth in young children. This has resulted in a collection of specific suggestions which can be used by other parents in teaching their young children at home.

Parenting for Excellence is published in order to share the discoveries resulting from these many years of experience. It is dedicated to those parents who are committed to fostering human excellence—beginning with their children, and with themselves.

ERIC'S FAVORITE PLAYMATE

Eric Fisher lives in a wall, newly-developed town in the Midwest. His father is by trade a carpenter, and his mother works full time caring for Eric and his seven-year old brother, Peter.

Eighteen-month-old Eric spends most of his time with his best friend, Becky. They trace the shapes of countries in the sand at the park, and listen to Suzuki Violin while they play "catch." They work with bits,* and read word cards which describe the things they know through everyday experience. Even before Eric feels the crankiness which signals he's ready for something new to do, he looks to Becky for help in choosing his next activity.

Becky's a lot of fun—and why shouldn't she? She's dedicated to seeing that Eric gets the very best she can give him. She knows he deserves it. She's his mother.

EARLY STIMULATION

Becky and Eric have used Eric's precious early years to actively build their relationship. While new parents sometimes fear that teaching tiny children may rob them of their childhood, or make them feel less loved, parents such as Becky and Ken Fisher have found the reverse to be true. The world becomes a rich playground for the whole family to explore, and the love of learning grows as rapidly as the love between parent and child.

* This is one of the valuable, specialized learning tools which we learned about through the Better Baby Institute: The Institutes for the Achievement of Human Potential, 8801 Stenton Avenue, Philadelphia, PA 19118

Although there are parents such as this scattered throughout the world, there are few places which can be said to be characterized by them. The Fisher home, in Stelle, Illinois is one such place, and many examples of positive parenting can be drawn from the experiences of the people there.

In Stelle, parents know that children can read easily and well by age three, and write well by age four. They know it because they've seen children do it. Stelle parents have found that the earlier they start stimulating their children, the easier it is for the youngsters to learn.

Parents who give birth to children in Stelle stimulate them neurologically from infancy, and this early sensory stimulation fosters the children's characteristically early development

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR YOU?

What is a mother's day like when she's actively stimulating her child? How is the father involved? What do parents do when they have more than one child to teach?

The answers to these questions vary. A mother's day differs with each child. A father's involvement isn't the same in each family. Parents who are simultaneously teaching two young children have a very different routine from parents rearing their first baby. There is no replacement for the discrimination parents use in selecting what is best for their children. Each family will ultimately decide what works best in that home.

There are patterns, however. The uniqueness of each family seems to center around how the children learn, and how the parents respond to every child's individuality. In Stelle, all of the parents are teaching their youngsters to talk, to walk, to read, to write. They're teaching them about beauty, art, science, and how to share a toy; all covering the same kind of ground, all striving to do it in a way which optimizes the growth of their individual children.

For this reason, Parenting for Excellence will give examples of how parents work in many different homes. As it details a variety of approaches used in individual households, it will suggest activities which have been used successfully from household to household. This offers you, as readers, tested activities you may use in your homes, as well as images of the many ways others have used them.

ACTIVITIES YOU CAN START TODAY

Whatever the age of your child, there are many activities which you can start right away. A smart preliminary step is to start a journal in which you jot down the activities you are already using in teaching your child. Don't limit yourself to academics—any activity counts if your child learns something from it. Writing each activity down will increase your awareness of what you're doing right now, and can be a first step in helping you decide what to add. You'll be surprised at how much you're already doing, and even more surprised by how quickly you can enrich your present routine.

Here are a few basics to include:

1) *Describe in Detail Everything in Your Child's World.* State the words which describe whatever your child is experiencing. Note that this is not an explanation of an abstraction but instead a detailed description of his immediate environment. For example, you might say reflectively, "you love the taste of that sweet, juicy, naval orange." Or, when on a drive, you might say upon seeing one, "Look out the window at the back-hoe operator digging the trench!" Describe everything in the house, the neighborhood, the community. Use lots of adjectives, remembering color and quantity, too. Older children (age three to six) who already have some of this basic input may prefer questions. You might enrich a shopping trip by asking such questions as, "Billy, which would you prefer, the romaine, the iceberg or the red lettuce?" You can also reinforce learning with requests and directions: "Would you put four of the blue china plates on the dinner table, please? Jennifer, would you hand me the two-cup, glass measuring cup?" This process is an ideal way to weave learning into the fabric of your child's daily life. When used in a relaxed way, it can become a fascinating childhood game, or an important way for your child to feel involved in your special "adult" activities.

2) *Flash Word Cards**

You can start teaching your child to read by spelling significant words on poster-board cards. His first important words will probably be "Mommy" and "Daddy," his own name, and several objects in the house. Let your child's interests determine the words

(continued on page 6)

* We recommend the 1980 edition of Glenn Doman's [How to Teach Your Baby to Read](#) for a more detailed description of teaching very young children to read.

Basic Principles

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EXPERIENCE AND DEVELOPMENT

PARENTS' CHOICE

The level of mental and physical development one achieves is a direct result of one's experience. The quantity, quality, and variety of one's experience determine the level of one's development.

Normal, healthy human brains, at birth, may vary in their capacity—in the quantity of experience they can record and store—but such variance is essentially irrelevant, since the portion of their mental capacity which human beings use is estimated to be ten percent or less! Although a very few top athletes and centenarians may appear to have approached the limits of human physical excellence as it is currently defined, brain research indicates that not even the most outstanding geniuses have come close to developing the full mental potential available to us all.

Let's look at some implications of this relation between experience and development. If two babies are born on the same day, one of them with genes for long legs and one of them with genes for short legs, we can predict that, if both babies have the same experiences as they grow, the child with the long legs will become the faster runner. That is, with a different genetic make-up and the same life experience, genetic make-up makes the difference in the level of achievement. If the babies' genetic inheritance were the same, though, and their experience were also the same, their level of achievement would be the same.

However, if the baby with genes for long legs experienced a dearth of stimulation (minimal physical contact; kept flat on his back in a bare room during most of his infancy; later restricted to infant seats, playpens, and strollers; overprotected; repressed; and overfed on nutritionless processed foods), while the baby with genes for short legs experienced a richness of stimulation (an abundance of physical contact; allowed plenty of time on his stomach in attractive surroundings; taught to swim as a baby; kept around his warm, interesting parents who continually provide him with new experiences; encouraged to explore and move; and allowed to choose his diet from a variety of wholesome fresh foods), we can securely predict that the child with shorter legs will become the faster runner. Richness of experience provides a higher level of development than does genetic advantage with poor experience,

A similar process holds true in the case of normal, healthy children born with differing mental capacity; the child given the fullest and best experience base will have the highest level of mental development. Genetic capacity comes into play in determining development only to the degree that the capacity is activated and exercised by experience.

Because this is true, the responsibility for deciding the functional level of a child's mental and physical development lies with that child's parents—those persons who provide his childhood experience. This means that we who are parents get to choose our child's level of development as surely as we get to choose our child's name.

We get to choose an amount, quality, and variety of experience which is either average, beyond average, or far beyond average; and, in so doing, we allow our child a level of development which is average, beyond, or far beyond. Or, to put it another way, by providing an average experience base for our child, we allow him to develop an average percent (perhaps 10% or less) of his potential; providing above average experience allows development of an above average percentage of potential; greatly increasing our child's experience base greatly increases the development of his potential.

The evidence for these conclusions is vast and already fills many scholarly volumes. Bits and pieces of the evidence are even found, increasingly, in mass-market periodicals and books written for parents. A study of the whole field is as stimulating as it is time-consuming. For those of us whose time is consumed by the children in question, but who desire the stimulation of this input, here is a sample of the evidence to consider. There is an orphanage in Tehran where infants receive minimal stimulation and contact with adults. Joan Beck, in *How to Raise a Brighter Child*, writes that by two, when children who live with their families are generally able to run, most of these institutionalized infants cannot even sit up. When Dr. Wayne Dennis provided sensory stimulation to children like these during a one-hour period each day, he found that they made four times their average gain in development! Inevitably, the question arises, "What effect would one extra hour of stimulation each day have on family-reared infants?"

One answer to that question has come from Dr. Genevieve Painter, who describes, in *Teach Your Baby*, a program in Illinois which gave normal babies one hour a day of special educational play in their own homes. It was found that

this small amount of enrichment daily, for a year, caused an average increase of 10 to 16 points of I.Q.! Then, of course, our minds take the next step: "I wonder what would happen if the babies were played with in the right ways for two hours a day, or three, ...?"

A psychologist named J. McVicker Hunt worked at the same Iranian orphanage visited years earlier by Wayne Dennis. As reported in an interview with Maya Pines in the September 1979, *Psychology Today*, Hunt provided different kinds of experiences for five different groups of these orphans, with the result that some of them scored higher than middle-class children on tests of development. Again, one feels constrained to ask, "What if the same sorts of stimulation were given by individual mothers to their own infants, rather than by caretakers with three or four children to focus on; what results would there be then?"

In the same interview, Dr. Hunt conservatively estimates that average middle-class children could have I.Q.'s 20 degrees higher if their parents were taught to use the techniques for developing intelligence which accepted research has already confirmed.

Around the end of the 19th Century, Dr. Maria Montessori, the first woman to receive a medical degree from an Italian university, accepted the job of directing a school for retarded children. In *The Montessori Method*, she gives an account of creating new educational tools for the retarded children's use, enabling them to pass school examinations which were the highest level of formal education achieved by the average Italian of that time.

The obvious question then came to her mind, "What's wrong with normal children?"

When she turned her talents to creating a learning environment for normal children, they soon began reading and writing at ages three and four. She hadn't planned to teach them those skills at those ages; it was what they naturally did within the stimulating conditions she provided for them. The questions raised by her work were intriguing. Why was it so easy for such young children to learn? What brain functions were at work here? How did this early learning relate to adult intelligence?

In their book *Give Your Child a Superior Mind*, Siegfried and Therese Engelmann refer to Catherine Morris Cox's Genetic Studies of Genius, biographies of 300 geniuses. In these studies, every single genius at the top end of the I.Q. scale received a great deal of early teaching. Every single one was surrounded by an extremely active environment—not one that waited for the child's "readiness," but one which invited that readiness by continual early interaction with physical reality and significant adults.

There are hundreds of stories about the early lives of geniuses—of individuals who came closer than most of us to fulfilling their potential as human beings. Collecting these tales reveals a fascinating pattern. Again and again we find early stimulation, a great deal of attention from an adult, vast amounts of input, and freedom to interact with more of the world than children are thought capable of. The pattern shows itself through all their lives.

Dr. Wilder Penfield, a neurosurgeon, was director for twenty-five years of the Montreal Neurological Institute of McGill University. In the July, 1964 issue of *Atlantic Monthly* (in "The Uncommitted Cortex"), he writes of the brain as being somewhat analogous to a computer, having to be fed input, or "programmed," in order to function to any purpose. Human brains are "programmed" by the input of sensory stimuli; the more appropriate sensory stimulation a brain receives, the greater will be the capacity of that brain to function intelligently. He states clearly that how and when and to what extent one's brain receives input largely determines the level of one's intelligence.

Further significant and exciting work has been done in Philadelphia during the last forty years at the Institutes for the Achievement of Human Potential. Longtime Director and now Chairman of the Institutes, Glenn Doman, has written in *How to Teach Your Baby to Read* and *Teach Your Baby Math* of the profound impact which early learning has on the development of intelligence in very young children.

Having successfully brought many brain-injured children from a state of severe malfunction to a state of average or above average physical and intellectual function, he and his staff have used their knowledge of how the brain works to devise techniques for dramatically increasing the development of normal babies. Those techniques are taught at the Institutes now in a week-long course for parents—who travel to Philadelphia from many foreign countries and all areas of the United States. In the course, Doman speaks of a new definition of average, and mentions I.Q.'s of 200—twice what is now called average—as being readily attainable for children of parents who learn the simple but specific techniques evolved by the Institutes and used there daily.

There is more already known; and research into childhood and development continues. We know all we need to know now, Though, to give our children the level of development we desire for them—average, above average, or far above. The information needed for giving them that gift has been found. The next step is for parents who realize the implications of this knowledge to reach out, and take it, and use it.

TO MOTHER IS TO TEACH

by Joanna Carnahan

TEACHING TIME

"Joanna? This is Marsha. I need help!"

Marsha and Bob (we'll call them) had come to Stelle about six months earlier with their two young children. Marsha had learned from Stelle about the importance of early education and had begun working with her children soon after moving here. She had seen gratifying results and was slowly overcoming her initial feeling of inadequacy about how to teach them, but she had run into a problem; her older child, Annie, had recently begun resisting Marsha's teaching attempts, changing the fun of their new relationship into a downspin of frustration.

We talked about several possible solutions before Marsha hung up, feeling only *slightly* less disheartened than when she had dialed. Several weeks later, at a session of the Mothers' Study Group, Marsha, with obvious confidence, told all of us about the solution she had found which had turned the situation around.

She had at first been grabbing teaching moments throughout the day, fitting them in between household jobs, hoping to find times when one child or the other was "doing nothing," at the same time that Marsha had some free moments. It was this *context* in which the teaching occurred that Marsha had changed.

She had decided, and had explained to Annie, that they would begin having a special time for working together each day. During that special period, Marsha didn't answer the phone, or do any housework, or let her thoughts wander to busyness. She focused fully on Annie, stimulating her with planned activities as well as following Annie's behavioral clues about new directions to take.

The difference in Annie's attitude seemed miraculous to Marsha. There were no more debates about whether Annie should stop what looked to Marsha like "doing nothing" in order to work on

specific projects her mother had squeezed out time for. That decision wasn't debatable any more; it was a given which the clock and Annie's increasing sense of regularity about her day now decided. Neither was there the uncertainty for Annie of whether Marsha might leave her in the middle of an activity when a phone call or household need took precedence. Annie knew she had her mother to herself for a certain period of time, so she felt more relaxed and at peace with the pattern of her day, and was, therefore, readier to learn.

Perhaps the biggest change, though, had been Marsha's. Her children's needs and requests were still woven constantly throughout her day, of course, but with a difference now. The chunk of the day which Marsha now gave consistently and freely for her children addressed more than their needs for her attention and for mental stimulation; it met her own need for freedom from the press of deciding five-to-ten times every hour; "Should I take some time out to focus on the children, or can I fit in another job while I answer their questions?" Her private guilts about never giving them quite enough of herself were taken care of. She had decided that their education was a primary locus for her and had allocated a primary segment of her day to it. Now she could say without guilt, "Yes, Annie, I'll come and show you how to undo the knot and then I have to go right back to the job I'm doing." She had given each child a large, concentrated period of undivided attention and teaching; she had clarified her priorities. That left her free to say yes to other parts of her life.

Marsha's solution has come to be a familiar one in Stelle. Many mothers here have arrived at a similar decision. It's a process we don't just wait for now; we anticipate and facilitate it.

We also recommend it.

If you try such an approach, we'd appreciate hearing how it works for you. Your sharing with us broadens the experience base from which we share with you.

you select. There is not a standardized size for word cards, but a rule of thumb is, the younger the child, the larger the cards. For example, an infant might do well with cards 22 by 6 inches in size. An older child might do best with cards 11 by 6 inches. A child who is already reading word cards may need much smaller cards to help in the transition to the smaller print of books. When possible, keep the word cards close to the objects they represent. When in the bathroom, pull out the cards which describe the things in the room. Quickly flash them as you say each word you are presenting. As you bathe your child, discuss the things in the room, the towel rack, the bathtub, the sink. Make a game of it. If you have fun with it, so will your youngster.

3) *Integrate Learning into the Household Routine.* You set aside a special time to work with your child—to focus only on his or her development. You also have certain routine tasks which have to be done daily for effective living. If these tasks are allowed to slide, not only does the disorder irritate you, but it prevents your child from developing his own love of work and order.

By using your routine activities as another educational tool, you can take care of the tasks at hand and turn your house into a laboratory, too. Then, rather than competing for your attention during this period, your child is eager to be involved and see the tasks completed. For example, when you're working in the kitchen, there are more than tastes and aromas to be discovered. Infants like to sit on the counter watching your activities as you describe what you're doing. Older babies enjoy sitting on the floor, perhaps to try their skill matching the right size lids to their proper pots. Young children enjoy helping with the cooking. (A step-chair is a must for a kitchen with a growing child.) If you're washing dishes, let your child drop in various objects which float and sink. "Ah, the sponge floats, the knife sinks. What happens to the bar of soap?" Be creative in involving your child in what you do. Not only will he feel respected, but he'll be learning basics too. More importantly, he'll learn what it means to help; when he's older, that's going to mean a great deal to you, and even more for his development.

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PARENTING FOR EXCELLENCE — Volume I, No. 1 — April 1981

Editor, Kelly Greenlee - Managing Editor, Mary Ann Voyles - Staff Writer, Joanna Carnahan

Parenting for Excellence is published ten times per year by The Stelle Group. Subscriptions are sold by the volume, with volumes beginning in January. Subscription rates are \$15 for one year, and queries about subscriptions and delivery should be sent to The Stelle Group, Administration Building, Stelle, Illinois 60919, or you may telephone: (815) 949-1111. Up to 250 words may be quoted if *Parenting for Excellence* is given credit and The Stelle Group's address is included.

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The Stelle Group
Administration Building
Stelle, Illinois 60919

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