



Volume II, No 4

THOUGHTFUL EXPRESSION

JAMIE

Jamie Frothingham is a three-year-old boy with twinkling eyes and a captivating manner. He speaks very clearly and has a way of transforming an everyday question into a charming and courteous request. Pronouncing each word with the precision of an English teacher, his tiny voice beguiles, "May I have a drink of water, please?" Even when he adds on, "Thank you," for granting his request, it's easy to see he started exploring his charms at an early age.

AN EXTRA EFFORT

Jamie's precise and courteous use of language developed quite naturally. He just listened to his parents, Rob and Dianne. Both of them are clear and considerate in their speech, sometimes making an extra effort for Jamie's benefit. Since they knew that their infant son would learn about language by decoding and imitating their words, they decided to make the process easier for him.

MIMICRY

Rob listened very carefully to all of the coos and gurgles that Jamie made and imitated them as closely as possible. In childhood, Rob had delighted his infant sisters with his mimicry, and now he found it fun to do with Jamie.

Jamie adored it! It helped him to feel that he was really being heard. It also showed him that he could cause a response in another person. This was followed by his discovery that he could imitate the sounds his parents made. Once he recognized that, he had a head-start on learning to speak.

THE GIFT OF SPEECH

To help Jamie decode and imitate their words, Rob and Dianne spoke slightly more slowly to him than they might to an adult. This allowed Jamie to hear the precise pronunciation of each word. Rob and Dianne also enjoyed naming each new thing that Jamie saw so that he could easily expand his vocabulary.

Dianne responded to Jamie's needs by vocalizing what she thought he wanted, "You're really hungry right now." She reflected Jamie's feelings with comments such as, "You're feeling sad about not being able to visit Eric now."

This helped Jamie to learn the words he would soon use in expressing his desires and feelings. It gave him another tool to use in developing awareness of his emotions. As is healthy, he continues to express his emotions in non-verbal ways, but now he can also identify his feelings and communicate them to others. Learning to express feelings in ways that heighten

communication is vital for healthy development and is one of the keys to a fulfilling life.

COURTESY AS A LIFE STYLE

Healthy expression of feelings need not preclude consideration for others. Since children are not born with a sensitivity to the feelings of others, courteous behavior is learned.

Rob and Diane gave Jamie his first lessons in courtesy through language. They make it a point to consistently use “please,” “thank you,” and “you’re welcome” whenever they are speaking to each other. If they need to interrupt a conversation, they wait for a brief pause and say, “Excuse me.”

They talk to Jamie in a way that shows respect for his present level of knowledge, as well as for his great capacity to learn. They look for ways to break “adult” topics into terms and concepts which suit Jamie’s present level of experience. Within this framework of familiarity, they introduce new words and concepts which help Jamie to stretch and grow.

For example, while Rob was recently attending a conference on soil analysis, he telephoned to tell the family what he was doing. He reminded Jamie that plants need food in order to live. Then Rob explained that he was learning what food was needed in their soil in order to feed the plants. The information will take on a new dimension when Rob and Jamie actually get their hands in some dirt and add the necessary nutrients.

The dinner table offers another opportunity for sharing interests. Although Rob and Dianne generally involve Jamie in their conversations at dinner, they also talk with each other about the day’s events.

Sometimes Jamie indicates that he wants to be more involved in the conversation by asking, “What are you talking about?” Then Rob or Dianne give Jamie a brief overview of what’s being discussed. They know that Jamie simply wants to understand the things his parents

find so stimulating. That kind of consideration is something Jamie regards as a natural part of life.

Rob and Dianne realize that this doesn’t mean that Jamie will always follow their examples. They understand that Jamie is concerned first with seeing his own needs met. That’s completely normal. Growing up is a process of moving from egocentricity (me first) to sociocentricity (us together). It’s a lifelong process of becoming more mature.

The Frothinghams have found that Jamie does practice courtesy whenever it isn’t in conflict with his desires. At first these practices may be more imitative than altruistic, but over a period of time the courtesy is becoming internalized.

When cultural practices foster this basic consideration for others, children learn to choose their actions based on how they’d like to be treated. This creates a focus on the positive aspects of life. Since personality is intimately linked with the nature of a person’s thoughts, this step is invaluable to healthy development.

READING & WRITING

Dianne helps Jamie to apply his language skills to reading and writing. She and Jamie cut and paste pictures onto small (6" x 6") squares of posterboard. Then Jamie describes what he sees or tells a simple story. Dianne writes Jamie’s words on a page opposite each picture, writing no more than one sentence on a page. Then Jamie gets to see his own words written in a book—now that’s interesting reading! Sometimes he even exchanges books with other children who have dictated their own stories.

ART AS EXPRESSION

Expression need not be limited to words. Dianne is helping Jamie to express himself through the medium of art. She uses Let Out the Sunshine, by Regina M. Barnett, as an idea source for art activities. This book suggests Montessori art projects for young children, and describes how to introduce specific activities in a step-by-step approach.

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Basic

Principles

THE RELATION BETWEEN *INDIVIDUALITY* AND DEVELOPMENT

“.. babies from the start go about the achievement of growth in such different ways. Each baby has a style, and the management of energy is probably at the heart of that style.”

Jerome Bruner in the foreword to
Infants and Mothers: Differences in Development
by Berry Brazelton

Children develop through generally orderly sequences of skills. For example, in learning to use their hands skillfully, newborns first grasp an object as a reflex action. Later they learn to let go of an object, first by accident, then on purpose. Next they become able to grasp an object at will using just the palm and four fingers of one hand. Then comes grasping with thumb and fingers of one hand, then both hands at once, then picking up objects with thumb and one finger, and on and on and on from there. Unless parents know what to look for, they might not notice some of the steps in this—or any other—developmental sequence, but the steps are usually worked through sequentially, in some form, by each child.

Children acquire these skills in different ways and at different rates. On the well-known Bayley Scales of Infant Development, for instance, 6.4 months is given as the average age at which normal babies learn to roll from back to stomach. Actually, babies normally acquire the rolling-over skill at any time from their fourth to tenth month—a six-month age range. And the particular ways they discover how to roll over may vary as widely as their ages.

One reason children learn differently is that each from birth is an individual with unique ways of responding to life's experiences. Anyone who's been around many newborns is well aware that each arrives with definite individual characteristics. Some perfectly healthy newborns sleep no more than a total of 10 to 12 hours in any 24-hour period, while others sleep 18 or more. Some are quiet, still, and cry very little, while others are almost constantly moving and making noises. Some respond to anything unfamiliar by pulling within themselves, watching and listening, and absorbing the new before they decide to interact with it. Others immediately reach out toward anything new to touch, taste, test, and manipulate it. Studies at Harvard have even shown that each infant has an entirely individual pattern of sucking, right from the start.

Another reason babies learn differently is that each a set of events different from anyone else's set. A fetus may be carried by a woman who experiences much stress or anxiety during her pregnancy, her body producing a large number of adrenal steroids that pass through the placenta inducing a similar state of anxiety in her unborn child. Another fetus is carried by a serene, relaxed mother, whose state of mind and body is also experienced by her child. One infant is born to parents who take their child with them everywhere they go, from the grocery store to weddings or black-tie dinner-dances. Another baby has parents who keep their child home most of the time, a walk around the block or a trip to see grandparents being big events. A third may have parents who are frequently gone from home and leave their child in someone else's care.

These babies, even during their first few months of life, are acquiring very different senses of the world and their place in it.

Charts of normal development can be very useful to parents when used properly. “Baby experts” have encountered many mothers who seemed anxious about their children’s growth. Reasoning that anxious mothers actually slow down their children’s growth by spreading their anxiety to their children, these experts have filled pages and pages of print with reassurances to mothers about the unimportance of any particular milestone of growth. “Don’t worry if your child isn’t walking alone at the average age of 11.7 months; many perfectly normal children don’t walk alone until 17 months, Children will walk when they get ready; don’t push them.” That’s pretty sensible advice, of course, as far as it goes. Parents really can slow down a child by being anxious. But feeling anxious and waiting passively for readiness are only two of the responses parents can have to the information on developmental charts. They may also learn from the charts just what steps their child is growing toward so they can facilitate those steps.

One proper use of developmental charts is to observe how a child is learning in relation to the norm and to genuinely respect that child’s individual pattern of growth. Respecting the child’s pattern, or “management of energy,” is the heart of the relationship between parent and child. Children are extremely sensitive to their parents’ attitudes toward them. In his *Infants and Mothers*, pediatrician/professor/researcher Berry Brazelton describes a rather passive 12-month-old, Laura, who is taking her time about learning to walk. Her father enjoys playing with Laura, and she gladly holds his hand and walks with him, sensing his easy enjoyment of her. Her mother feels anxious that Laura hasn’t learned to walk yet, and Laura refuses to hold her mother’s hand to practice walking, sensing the activity as more of a task for her mother than the relaxed mutual play Laura is more naturally attuned to. Ironically, if Laura’s mother could relax and just spend time having stimulating fun with her daughter at the stage of development she’s currently experiencing, Laura would be freer and more motivated to move toward the next stage.

A second proper use of developmental charts is to teach to them — to give children the specific experiences they need in order to acquire more easily and fully the skills coming up next for them. For example, a mother may learn that one of the tasks usually accomplished within the child’s first year of life is to acquire a sense of object permanence—knowing that when a toy rolls out of sight it still exists and can be found. To help her child grasp this concept, she may increase the number of times she plays “peek-a-boo” with her baby, then may vary the game by using a handkerchief and dramatic flourish to make objects disappear and reappear. She won’t be pushing or feeling anxious about when the skill develops; she’ll just give her child lots of appropriate, appealing practice and let the child determine how much practice is enough.

Parents who both respect and teach their children will, over time, see in their children’s development two results: a strengthening of individuality, and an advancement of many skills well beyond the norm. Reporting on Benjamin Bloom’s recent study of individuals who’ve excelled in their fields, Maya Pines cites several factors in early childhood that lead to such excellence. Chief among them are parents who are encouraging and early teaching that is warm, loving, makes lessons seem like games, and lavishes rewards. They are qualities any parents can adopt for fostering their children’s individual excellence. J.C.

TO MOTHER — OF FATHER — IS TO TEACH

by Joanna Carnahan

“LOOBY-LOO” AND RIGHT AND LEFT

Some of the ways we've been using to teach our children right from left may have been just confusing the process for them.

The classic example is using “right” to mean “yes.” Mother says, “This is your left hand, Bobby. Can you show me your left hand?” Bobby does, and Mother says, “Right!”

Less obviously, the games and songs frequently used to teach left and right are often ineffective. The old circle game “Looby-Loo” has children singing,

*“I put my right hand in;
I put my right hand out;
I give my right hand a shake, shake, shake,
And turn myself about.”*

So far so good; the children get to experience three movements associated with the right hand (in, out, shake). These movements, done at about the same time everyone is singing, “right hand,” do indeed give children a start on learning which hand is right. The only trouble is that the next step in the song involves using the very same movements with the left hand. If we had only one hand, “Looby Loo” might be a good-enough teaching tool, but our children's job is more than learning where their right hand is. They have to learn the left as well and then the difference between the two. Differentiating is the tricky part.

Telling right from left requires “muscle memory.” It's not just a mental concept; it's a body-knowing. To help the body get a sense of difference between right and left, we need to give the right side different experiences from the left.

That's easy enough to do by taking some liberties with “Looby Loo”—something like this, perhaps:

*“I point my left hand up;
I point my left hand down;
I use my left hand to pat the floor,
And then jump up and down.”*

Another way to improve “Looby Loo” as a right-left teaching tool is to not play it in a circle. If children are standing beside, behind, or in front of someone else, they can see that all right hands are on the same sides. Looking across at someone whose right hand appears to be on the opposite side from their own can make learning the difference more difficult at first.

Of course there are many more ways to teach right and left. One of the simplest is the Engelmanns' idea in Give Your Child a Superior Mind: start from infancy saying “right” or “left” every time you pick up your child's hand or foot, squeezing the right one and not squeezing the left. If you do this fairly consistently whenever you diaper or bathe your child, the body-knowing that, “My right side is my squeezing side,” can develop naturally and early.

Everyday activities can serve the same purpose. Just remember to say, “When you pour, you hold the pitcher with your right hand and the glass with your left hand.” Or, “You're holding the toothbrush with your right hand and squeezing the toothpaste with your left.” Or, “While you draw with your right hand, you can hold the paper still with your left.”

Another effective “game” for teaching right and left is described by Valerie Kovitz in her article on laterality training in the January, 1980, issue of Academic Therapy. It uses alliteration, rhythm, and differences in movement. Simply have children stand, their left side within arm's length of a wall. Show them how to lean against the wall on their left hand, bending the elbow, then how to push themselves back to upright standing before raising their right arm. When the movements are familiar, use some tune or rhythm to direct them repeatedly to, “Lean on the left; raise the right.” Then use the principles to make up your own games! □

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This does not imply that Jamie is taught a “correct” way for drawing or painting. Dianne shows Jamie how to use the materials and lets him experiment. She then reflects what she sees in Jamie’s pictures with responses such as, “What a beautiful blue you used here.” She avoids critical questions such as, “What is that?”

Together she and Jamie explore mixing colors, swishing paint brushes and painting pictures. They glue wood scraps into “sculptures” and make their own greeting cards. They work with cutting and pasting, crayons and colored pencils.

Dianne finds it helpful to have a collection of basic supplies to use for these educational projects: scissors,

glue, wood blocks, paper, pencils, puppets, paint brushes, and a paint box. She also suggests a tube of each of the following water colors: white and black for shading colors, and the primary colors, red, blue, and yellow for mixing.

These materials can be used for any-thing from color mixing to writing. With this foundation, Rob and Dianne can design an infinite number of activities to help Jamie express his natural exuberance for living. Whatever the materials or methods, their purpose is the same—to help a tiny child express his inner nature, and in the process develop understanding of the outer world. □

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PARENTING FOR EXCELLENCE — Volume II, No. 4 — April 1982

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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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