



*“Children may be conceived of as producers of their own development, and may indeed influence the parenting they receive.”*

... Jacqueline V. Lerner, Michigan State University

## GOODNESS OF FIT

By Darlene Robinett, Founding Director

A very young child sits quietly in church, looking all around, swinging his legs and occasionally napping. Smiling and greeting the child later, adults remark to the mother about the child's good behavior, and she gives him an extra hug. Close by, another very young child wiggles, squirms, and bounces, sends two hymnals crashing to the floor, hits his head and howls in pain. Adults around this child frown and may avoid speaking to him or his mother, and she quickly hauls him out the door. Children's inborn physical and psychological characteristics affect how they approach situations and how others react to them. The first child's calmer personality makes his adaptation to a particular environment easier, bringing instant favorable feedback from his parent and other adults. The very active and aggressive child finds it difficult to adapt to this restraining environment, bringing negative feedback. Social science research refers to the matching of a child's temperament with adults' expectations and values within a specific environment as "goodness of fit".

Children's unique personalities will influence how parents and other caretakers (including teachers) react to them. What frustrates one will encourage another. What is acceptable at home may not be acceptable in a school setting. Two issues that may become apparent when the child enters school are sleep patterns and distractibility. Some children may have erratic sleep patterns that fit well with their parents' flexible work schedules, while others have difficulty meeting demands of parent schedules and have to learn to adjust. The first group may have trouble when they enter school, while the second group may have already made an adjustment. Some children may not be easily distracted by various stimuli in their environment and so fit quite well in their busy large family, while others need a controlled environment in order to concentrate on a task. School may be the first time either of these groups find themselves out of sync with their environment. Parents and teachers may in turn react differently to these children, depending on their expectations and values in the different settings of home and school. Opportunities in both settings that match more closely a child's personality will bring positive performance on the part of the child. Goodness of fit is a basic phenomenon that drives perceptions of a child and will certainly be addressed in any teacher (principal, counselor) - parent conference.

Teacher- parent conferences with positive outcomes must take into consideration the differing perspectives of children and attempt to secure "goodness of fit" for the individual child to allow him or her to succeed academically. Michael Elmore ("Effective Parent Conferences", *Principal Leadership*, Feb 2008) suggests that any conference between school and parent include seven stages that allow for differing perspectives in seeking of solutions:

1. Respectful and relaxed introduction of participants
2. Presentation of reason for meeting in calm, reasonable manner, based in facts
3. Presentation of each participant's perspective without interruption with others carefully listening

4. Assurance of understanding by repetition of one another's positions
5. Agreement on choice of appropriate solution after discussing all suggested possibilities
6. Conclusion of meeting with signed agreement and some relaxed conversation
7. "Danger zone" to be avoided that allows rehashing and chance of misinterpretation

As the end of the school year approaches, school and parents will be considering achievement test results and other assessments of children's progress. Summer school, new placements for next year, special tutoring and other issues will be discussed in teacher-parent conferences. Allow time to think about children's unique qualities and "goodness of fit" in deciding their learning plans. PPP can help both parents and teachers look at child development and how all can work as a team.

## PPP CENTER UPDATE

by Janet Shepard, Director

Welcome to our first all electronic newsletter and to our new website. Please be patient with us as we continue to populate the new site. Please let your colleagues know about the free newsletters.

As we wind down on our conference exhibits and presentations, it is time to submit our proposals for next years' conferences. If you would like to showcase your work, but are hesitant to present by yourself, please let us know. We are happy to partner with our participating schools for state and national conference presentations.

Thanks to those of you who attended *Family Festival: A Parent Involvement Conference*. As always we learned, laughed, played, and celebrated together. The 2009 conference will be April 3 and 4 at Tan Tar A. Please consider submitting a presentation proposal.

Keep our spring and summer training sessions in mind if you have funds which need to be expended by July 1. We will be in Cape Girardeau, Kansas City, St. Louis and our training center between now and the middle of June. We can come to you as well. Please let us know how we can be of assistance to you as we continue *Working Together for our Children*.

## PPP SITE NEWS

by Vickie Dickneite, Resource Coordinator

**Monett Intermediate School** in southwest Missouri has been a PPP school for ten years. One of their biggest Family/School/Community partnerships and successes has been the annual "All Academic Fair." This is similar to a science fair with the exception that students can produce a project in any curriculum area—writing, art, math, social studies, science, etc. No prizes or recognition are awarded because they want every student to value participating and sharing their talents with others. This has become a fantastic way to share with parents and families the learning that has taken place during the school year. As well as school families, the entire community is invited each year. The families and the community love this activity. This year's All Academic Fair will take place in early May.

**Meramec Valley R-III School** addressed the importance of parent involvement to increase student success. Two staff members from each school building in the district participated in PPP Implementation Training. Since that time, many activities and valuable information have been shared with school, students, parents and the community. Some of the events where they involve parents and share information are: School Newsletters, Friday Folders, Ice Cream Socials, a Lending Library for parents containing books, tapes and magazines), Open House, Parent/Teacher Conferences and Parent Nights.

# UNDERSTANDING OUR CHILDREN

by Shelly Lock, Program Development Coordinator

We've heard it said many times: "Each of us is unique." We know we are all unique individuals, with different strengths, weaknesses, and personalities. Sometimes it is easier to appreciate those differences than others. Oftentimes, the child with the creative mind or lots of energy struggles to function within the parameters of our learning environments in both school and home. While this is frustrating at times, that tendency to think outside of the box can lead to great innovations and the high energy level can lead to increased productivity.

While people typically approach learning from the style they are strongest in and that which best matches their personality, they also develop learning strategies along the way that help them learn in other ways. Adults as well as children have their own style or ways of doing things. It can be extra challenging when a parent or teacher approaches learning from a different way than a child, if it is not recognized as just a difference in styles. The interactions we share between parent and child or teacher and child are effected by the individual characteristics, personalities, and learning styles. These interactions certainly affect the outcomes for the child. Getting to know our children, their personal strengths, and the ways they best learn can help us support their education. By observing the way our children catch onto things best or choose to go about a new challenge we can identify their strengths and use these as cues for how they can learn more easily and effectively.

Parents and educators can tune into learning strategies such as:

- Being a good listener, can hear things and remember them well (oral learner)
- Preferring to see things in writing, can remember things better after seeing them (visual learner)
- Having a need to move and do, try things hands on, communicating well with gestures and movement (kinesthetic learner)
- Good with language, including hearing, reading, writing, speaking (linguistic)
- Good with logic, patterns, categorizing (logical-mathematical)
- Good with designing, mazes, puzzles, putting ideas on paper (spatial)
- Functions well with music, rhythm, remembers tunes, hums to himself (musical)

These are just some learning styles, and even these styles vary greatly in different children and in different learning environments. Children with any of these strengths might prefer to learn independently, be self motivated, and best concentrate when alone. Others might prefer to learn with interactions from others, do better with stimulus around them, and feed off of other people's ideas. When teachers and parents tune into a child's learning preferences, they can better create a learning situation that fits the child. Opportunities to enhance other learning strategies for the child can also be provided. Realizing individual characteristics can help us all better relate to one another. Remember to appreciate the differences in each child and the learning styles that go with that child. Those differences can lead to great successes when fostered and praised instead of criticized!

# FACILITATION TIPS

by Janet Shepard, Director

Goodness of fit can apply to facilitators and group members. As a group facilitator you may not like every parent, teacher or community member who attends your PPP discussion groups. This is one of the reasons why we recommend working as a team when you facilitate groups. Teaming with a partner or co-facilitator gives you the opportunity to look to your co-facilitator to pick up when a participant's comments:

- leaves you speechless
- frustrates or angers you
- are intended to draw the group off the topic

- are hurtful or disrespectful to you or to another member of the group
- pose a question for which you or other group members don't have a suggestion or answer
- are dominating the group

You may also find it useful to have a co-facilitator:

- who is fluent in the first language of group members
- who lives in the community / neighborhood if you do not
- who is a parent volunteer if you are a teacher or who is a staff member if you are a parent volunteer
- who is female if you are male

For more suggestions on facilitating groups and working with challenging group members, please refer to your PPP Implementation Facilitator's Guide.

## **KINDERGARTEN TRANSITION**

by Janet Shepard, Director

Planning and implementing a kindergarten transition plan is all about helping kindergartners and their families feel that goodness of fit from the beginning of the kindergarten experience. That is more likely to happen if the children and their parents have:

- Visited the kindergarten classroom
- Met the classroom teachers and other staff including music, PE, and art teachers, counselor, and support staff
- Information on the daily schedule
- Awareness of expectations for children and their parents
- Prepared for school with consistent recommendations from the early childhood school, PAT, and the new school
- Received a visit in their home from the kindergarten teacher
- Had a summer school experience
- Met other kindergarten students and their families
- Been invited to school for family nights the year before the child begins school

You will find some great transition ideas from PPP schools on this handout.

## **HOME VISITING**

by Janet Shepard, Director

As I am writing this month's column, I am sitting at the PPP booth at the Parents As Teachers National Conference. I have met several educators who are not aware that PPP exists or that their school district is participating. That serves as a good reminder that every PPP parent involvement team should be connecting with their PAT educator. PAT educators can:

- Refer families who want to know, "What comes next?" after they have to exit from the PAT program
- Assist you with tips and techniques for home visiting
- Participate with you in kindergarten transition training and plan writing
- Accept referrals from you as you make home visits with families who have children ages birth – 3 or birth through 5 if your school offers the program for families with children ages 3 – 5
- Share information with families on their home visits about your PPP activities and encourage the participation of families
- Serve as a member of your advisory board

Remembering to share with one another can help all of us work more effectively and efficiently.

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PRACTICAL PARENTING PARTNERHIPS  
*Working Together for Our Children*

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## Loss of Sleep

by Darlene Robinett, Founding Director

If your child is having trouble at school, have you ever thought that she is not getting enough sleep? Did you know that lack of sleep is now recognized as a serious problem for our children, perhaps a leading cause of poor academic performance, emotional instability, and the growing number of obese children? Several major studies have revealed that elementary through high school students get an hour less sleep per night than they did 30 years ago. Even kindergartners get 30 minutes less sleep each night than they used to. Yet in National Sleep Foundation surveys, 90% of American parents still believe their children are getting enough sleep. Loss of sleep has greater impact on children than adults. With studies of children's brains through new technology, we have learned that brains are developing until at least age 21, and much of this developmental activity actually takes place while children are sleeping. Some scientists believe that sleep problems during these formative years can cause permanent damage to the brain, something that can't be slept off later. One study of 4th and 6th graders found that an hour's difference in sleep for three nights caused the performance gap to be bigger than the normal gap between a 4th and 6th grader. In other words, a sleepy 6th grader will perform like a 4th grader! Dr. Paul Suratt, University of Virginia, stated, "Sleep disorders can impair children's IQ's as much as lead exposure."

During sleep, the brain processes what is learned that day. Each sleep stage has an important role in making memories. Certain genes only become very active at night, one of them whose job is to strengthen neural connections. Memory finds a secure place at night and new associations are made that lead to new insights the next day. How often have we taken the advice, "just sleep on it," and were surprised to find we really did have better understanding and ideas about a problem when we awakened? Now we know why.

Perhaps even more fascinating is the different places memories are processed in the brain, depending on their emotional context. Negative memories are processed in one place (the amygdala), while positive and neutral memories are processed in another (the hippocampus). Because lack of sleep is harder on the hippocampus, people deprived of sleep tend to remember the unpleasant things but have trouble remembering any of the good things. How does that one hour of sleep loss affect our children's happiness? How much contributes to a build-up of anger and frustration? What might it mean for the behaviors of a whole class of sleep-deprived students? Sleep loss also affects metabolism. Hormones that regulate appetite, elevate stress, stimulate the body to make fat, and slow the breakdown of fat can not work like they should. The result is weight gain. One study showed that the odds of an adolescent being obese went up 80% for each hour of lost sleep. Although watching television is not particularly healthy, extensive study found that obese kids watched no more television than thin kids. The sleep studies show a much closer correlation. A healthy diet and physical activity are certainly good for children; but we may be doing much more for our children's overall physical and mental well-being, as well as increasing their ability to perform well in the classroom, by seeing that they get more sleep.

## Average Sleep Requirements

Age	Hours
5	11
6	10 3/4
7	10 1/2

8	10 1/4
9	10
10	9 3/4
11	9 1/2
12	9 1/4
13	9 1/4
14	9
15	8 3/4
16	8 1/2
17	8 1/4
18	8 1/4