



NETWORKER



Summer 2009

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This Isn't Social Hour... or Is It?

Eric Jensen raises an interesting point in Teaching with the Brain in Mind, when he writes, "...elementary teachers invest time in developing student's social skills ... the practice is far less common in middle and high school" (Jensen, p. 100). I couldn't help but wonder why that is. Given that the prefrontal cortex, the area of the brain responsible for social cognition, does not mature until you are in your twenties (Jensen, p.97), wouldn't it make sense to structure middle and high school curriculum to include both formal and informal socialization?

Lev Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory of development supports this. Though it is based on younger children's development, given how long it takes the prefrontal cortex to mature completely, it seems applicable to adolescence as well. Informally applying Vygotsky's theory by allowing class discussions to 'go off track', or encouraging debate and group analysis of controversial topics would not only engage this age group, but would provide their instructors (and each other) with many opportunities to apply scaffolding, Vygotsky's term for "...the assistance a teacher or

peer offers a child ...to help a child 'reach' a new concept or skill by giving supporting information." (Garhart Mooney, p. 84). Playing devil's advocate, introducing perspectives they don't come to in their own discussions and letting them "run with it" would challenge them, fine tune their problem solving skills, and let their "flocking" behaviors; "... in which adolescents or teens form groups for social comfort, camaraderie, or protection" (Jensen, p.98); work for them rather than against them, as they often do in traditional secondary education models.

Given how little time and money are allotted for arts and physical education in public schools, it seems almost vulgar to suggest, but why stop at adjusting the curriculum to "informally" apply Vygotsky's theory? Taking advantage of adolescents' natural fixation on their peers and their relationships to formally present social skills wouldn't necessarily have to look like a taste of the finishing school's of yore. Etiquette is often what comes to mind when we think of social skills. Social skills encompass much more than that, and etiquette seems to have been cre-

By Dawn Richardson

ated almost explicitly as a way to bridge the gap between those who empathically put others at ease and respond appropriately, and those who cannot. They level the playing field. Children with spectrum disorders are explicitly instructed in non-verbal communication, such as reading facial expressions and body language. Wouldn't it make sense to instruct everyone in body language, intonation, conflict resolution, and even rudimentary counseling and mediation skills? The age old question, "When will I ever use this junk that I'm learning?" would practically answer itself.

Works Cited

Jensen, Eric. Teaching with the Brain in Mind: 2nd Edition. Alexandria: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2005.

Garhart Mooney, Carol. An Introduction to Dewey, Montessori, Erikson, Piaget & Vygotsky. St. Paul: Redleaf Press, 2000.

Pro-Active Group Management

Tricia Pawlik, VSACN

On April 2nd and 3rd I had the great privilege and opportunity to represent Vermont and attend the National After-school Association (NAA) convention in New Orleans. With over 2500 schoolage professionals in attendance, the convention had hundreds of workshops to choose from. I attended workshops on the new schoolage accreditation process through the COA (Council on Accreditation), how to manage quality in your program, learning how to be a more effective leader and running engaging summer programs. I also attended a pro-active group management workshop that gave great tips for those working on the front line with children. I'd like to share a brief synopsis of those tips in this issue of the Networker.



of schoolage children it is important to do the following:

***Create Structure:** Structure means the format of the different components of your program, the way you begin, what you do throughout, how you do all the transitions and how you end. It is also the process you use for planning each aspect of your program and how consistently you stick to your plan.

***Build rapport:** This is about establishing an unspoken appreciation between you and the children in your program. It is seeing the kids as unique individuals worthy of respect and it happens through your essential enjoyment with the work you do. Building a positive rapport allows for smooth program functioning and

more creativity and fun for everyone.

*** Rules and Consequences:** Establishing effective rules and knowing how to apply consequences to support your rules is a basic method for positive group management. Be sure to include kids in the creation of rules and make sure that if you have a rule you really need it. Applying consequences consistently and directly is key to effective group management.

*** Dealing with Anger:** Anger and conflict are a normal part of human life. These are also challenging feelings and situations for everyone. Teaching children to work with their anger and learn to resolve conflicts without violence is a valuable and will also make your program stronger.

Bottom line...have a plan, enjoy the kids and have fun!

Tricia Pawlik is Director of Youth and Family Programs, Greater Burlington YMCA

Building a positive rapport allows for smooth program functioning and more creativity and fun for everyone.

Social Networking Opportunities with VSACN

Make the Vermont School Age Care Network one of your **Facebook Causes!**
 Help us spread the word about quality school age care in Vermont!

The VSACN **Ning** page provides a forum for you to meet other afterschool providers, share ideas on a blog just for you and your colleagues, and hear news from the school age community in Vermont.

This is an online community, just for you. Join today!

Sue's News

Greetings!

I hope that you have been enjoying spring in your programs and you and the children in your care are discovering the wonders of new growth, both in your gardens and in their development.

Having now been with VSACN for four months, I am beginning to understand the potential for the organization and am looking forward to fulfilling it. School age care is an important part of our children's lives. It enriches them, keeps them safe and builds important social skills. It is also an important part of the economic recovery. Parents need to know their children will be cared for while they work, get training or look for work. Children need the consistent high quality care you provide, so that they can grow and flourish.

VSACN is ready to help you in this important work. We

recently created a plan for moving the organization forward and want to share the highlights with you. In the next 18-24 months we plan to:

- Survey you, our members, to hear your wishes for this organization regarding training, technical assistance and other services we can provide for you and begin to implement those ideas.
- Create better awareness among Vermonters about your work and its importance.
- Build the VSACN infrastructure to grow along with your interests and needs.

To begin the process, we have decided to become an affiliate of the National Afterschool Association (NAA). This means your membership will actually be with the NAA, along with a state membership with VSACN. This will provide our members with national benefits such as dis-

Sue Kamp, VSACN Coordinator

counts with vendors that support afterschool programs, insurance providers and professional development opportunities, and benefits through VSACN. We expect the affiliation process to be complete sometime this summer and will notify you when it is so that you can join NAA at that time. NAA membership is affordable (full membership is \$65, with associate and friends memberships at less expense) and we hope you will take advantage of it. When you do, we will follow up with you to ask what you would like us to add as member benefits in Vermont, so we can continue to serve you in the ways that mean the most to you.

Until that time, if you have any questions or comments for us, please be in touch with me.

Enjoy the summer!

VSACN is ready to help you with the important work of providing high quality care for children.



Save the Date!

Annual Afterschool Conference

Friday, October 23, 2009

Sheraton Burlington Hotel and Conference Center

Look for more information this summer regarding speakers and registration.

Vermont School Age Care Network
c/o Mary Johnson Children's Center
81 Water Street
Middlebury, VT 05753

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Trainers and Mentors Needed

VSACN is looking for trainers and mentors!

VSACN provides professional development workshops throughout the state for after-school professionals. These workshops aim to support staff with fresh ideas and ways to do their work in new and different ways. There are several curricula that new trainers can be oriented to. Additionally, if you have developed trainings that you would like to offer through VSACN, we would like to hear

about them. Trainers are paid a competitive stipend and we work to schedule workshops at your convenience.

We also need mentors who work directly with programs to assist them in building quality and working with the VT-STARS system. Mentors meet with their "mentee" program at least once and makes themselves available by phone and email to answer questions. New mentors are trained before they are paired with a program. A stipend and

mileage for site visits are provided as compensation.

For more information about these opportunities, please contact Sue Kamp, VSACN Coordinator at (802) 388-2853 or vsacn@mjcvt.org.

