



Connections

Practical Parent Education

Fall 2007

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Practical Parent Education

Working Together to
Strengthen
Today's Families

Bright From the Start

by Jill Stamm, Ph.D.

When a new parent hears the news media sound bite, “A child’s brain becomes 90% hard-wired during the first three years”, it can be puzzling and downright scary. What does that really mean? And most importantly, what is mom or dad or a caregiver supposed to do now that they have heard that news? Panic is a very predictable reaction, and the resulting sense of urgency then fuels the typical response of rushing out to buy gizmos with flashing lights and DVDs and fancy toys to stimulate the new baby. It was this combination of the true excitement of what scientists are figuring out about *how the infant brain actually develops* and the reality that parents need more help sorting out the hype of advertisers from the real science of early development that inspired me to write my book, ***Bright From The Start: The Simple Science-Backed Way To Nurture Your Child’s Developing Mind from Birth to Age 3.***

Parents want their children to succeed and in so many cases will do anything and everything possible to help that to happen. That commitment is what we as educators should be happy to see and should help to encourage throughout a child’s education. But, in that quest to do “the right thing,” many parents, and especially parents of very young infants and toddlers, set upon a path to search for some ‘magic pill’, the next Baby_____ (just fill in the blank) craze, or the next expensive program that will promise a high IQ. They approach the quest as if the magic is somewhere “out there,” when really the magic is within the relationship they can form with their new baby.

The magic they are searching for is in the consistent, predictable response patterns that can be established early in the parent or caregiver-child dyad. Raising a bright, responsive, happy child doesn’t have to be such a mystery. The magic is in what I refer to as the ABCs of Early LearningSM - Attention, Bonding and Communication. The things that really matter in order to wire up a brain effectively are within the reach of most families. Thanks to the advances in brain imaging technologies, neuroscientists can finally look inside the brain as it is working to begin to unlock some of the mysteries of memory formation and storage, of the links between emotion and learning, and of processes like learning to speak and learning to read. In their laboratories, neuroscientists are discovering that the quality of early care interactions matters and that the development of

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sound cognitive machinery is within the reach of most healthy newborns. The hope that neuroscience delivers to all of us is that we may one day have an accurate understanding of the elements that actually make the difference in wiring a brain for future successful learning ability. What I have been learning over the past 10 years is that many of those factors that do make the difference are already pretty clear!

Of these early brain ABCs, the most significant factor actually is the B for Bonding. That clear sense that there is at least one, predictable and loving caregiver that a child can count on to “be there” is at the center of the development of capable, healthy brain function. When a child can be sure of that established relationship, he/she can benefit by a resulting sense of security and, in turn, free-up cognitive energy to be better able to learn. There is a very important statement that I repeat often to pre-service teachers that I work with at Arizona State University where I am a faculty member: *Emotion*

Drives Attention, and Attention Drives Learning. We all recognize that to purposefully learn anything, we must first be paying attention. Once established, it is then the ability to focus our attention that facilitates the learning. So we must start by looking at the emotional well-being of the child. That feeling of knowing that somebody loves me, cares about me, helps me, attends to me, as an infant, is the beginning of a lifelong ability to trust others and to feel bonded and attached to another human. That kind of connection and emotional comfort and knowledge allows the infant to be able to pay attention to the surrounding world and to focus energy on learning how the world works. Tiny children who are without that sense of security are constantly monitoring their environment for possible threat or harm or unpredictable outcomes that are experienced as stress. Early stress patterns are the enemy of future learning success. The section of the book on Bonding contains the results of studies that show which areas of the brain are most vulnerable when sufficient love and attention are not given to very young babies. The on-going research studies on the effects of deprivation or increased and sustained high stress during infancy provide guidance for not only families, but also for policy makers who are charged with creating child welfare and assistance programs that will be sensitive to the need for very young children to be in healthy, high-quality care in order to protect their developing brains.



Next comes the A for Attention. Attention itself is beginning to be researched in depth now through neuroimaging. Scientists are busy correlating behavioral studies of attention with specific structures that are activated in the brain as the study subject is working. Two of the three areas of the brain that are recognized as critical to paying attention are actually forming as early as 14 months. Furthermore, the third aspect of attention appears to be mostly wired by age 7. Early successes in the development of the ability to pay attention are important! Researchers like Michael Posner, Ph.D. at the University of Oregon are working to determine if there are ways to improve the ability to attend and to stay focused by deliberately “exercising” those critical neural networks when children are young. In my book, I try to highlight some simple games and strategies that caregivers can use during the first three years to enhance the development of those systems right from the start. Book chapters that constitute what is known about attention systems include research on TV viewing by infants, as well as the need for face time, play time and down time.

Communication, the third critical component of early learning, encompasses the development of both receptive and expressive language as well as pre-literacy skills. Through neuroimaging, educators are beginning to see the neural-signature of reading dysfunction, the inability to read fluently and easily. The work of Sally and Bennett Shaywitz of Yale that shows distinct differences in the ways that effective and ineffective readers use specific brain regions. Work is being done now to show that brain use can be changed and improved by remedial interventions. The games and strategies and approaches shared in my book encourage an early prevention approach to assure that brain areas essential to effective reading wire-up well to begin with. Rhyming books and simple games can go a long way to develop the brain’s ability to detect small differences in sounds, a skill that turns out to be critical to future success in reading. Current research on what is known about language acquisition and early literacy has led to concrete suggestions of how to encourage language development and how to stimulate thinking skills.

These ABCs of early learning; *Attention, Bonding and Communication*, serve as the cornerstones of healthy brain development. Nearly all of the research on early development clusters very nicely into these three large areas. Deliberate attention to these key areas, when carried out

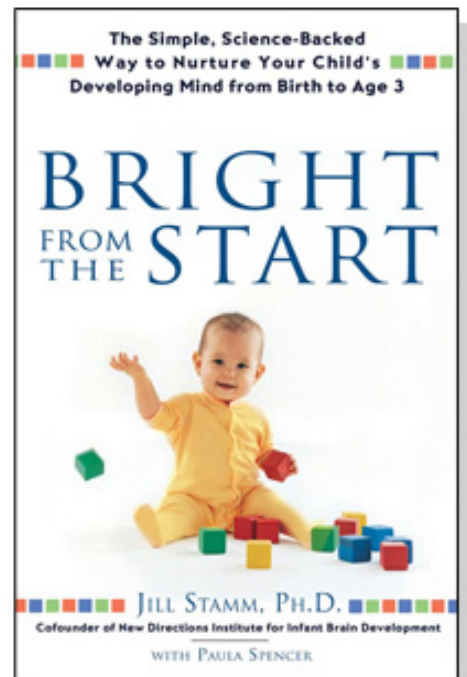
by consistent, predictable and loving caregiver(s), will help a child to achieve his or her maximum potential for learning and school readiness. At New Directions Institute for Infant Brain Development, a non-profit organization in Arizona, we have worked to clarify neuroscience concepts for parents and caregivers and have tried to focus on strategies for interactions ages birth to three years old. We give particular attention to the period of birth to one year old when so many of the critical brain structures are wiring up. I have created and patented a very helpful tool to guide parents and caregivers through that first year of a baby's life. It is called a Baby Brain Box™. You can learn more about this on www.babybrainbox.com.

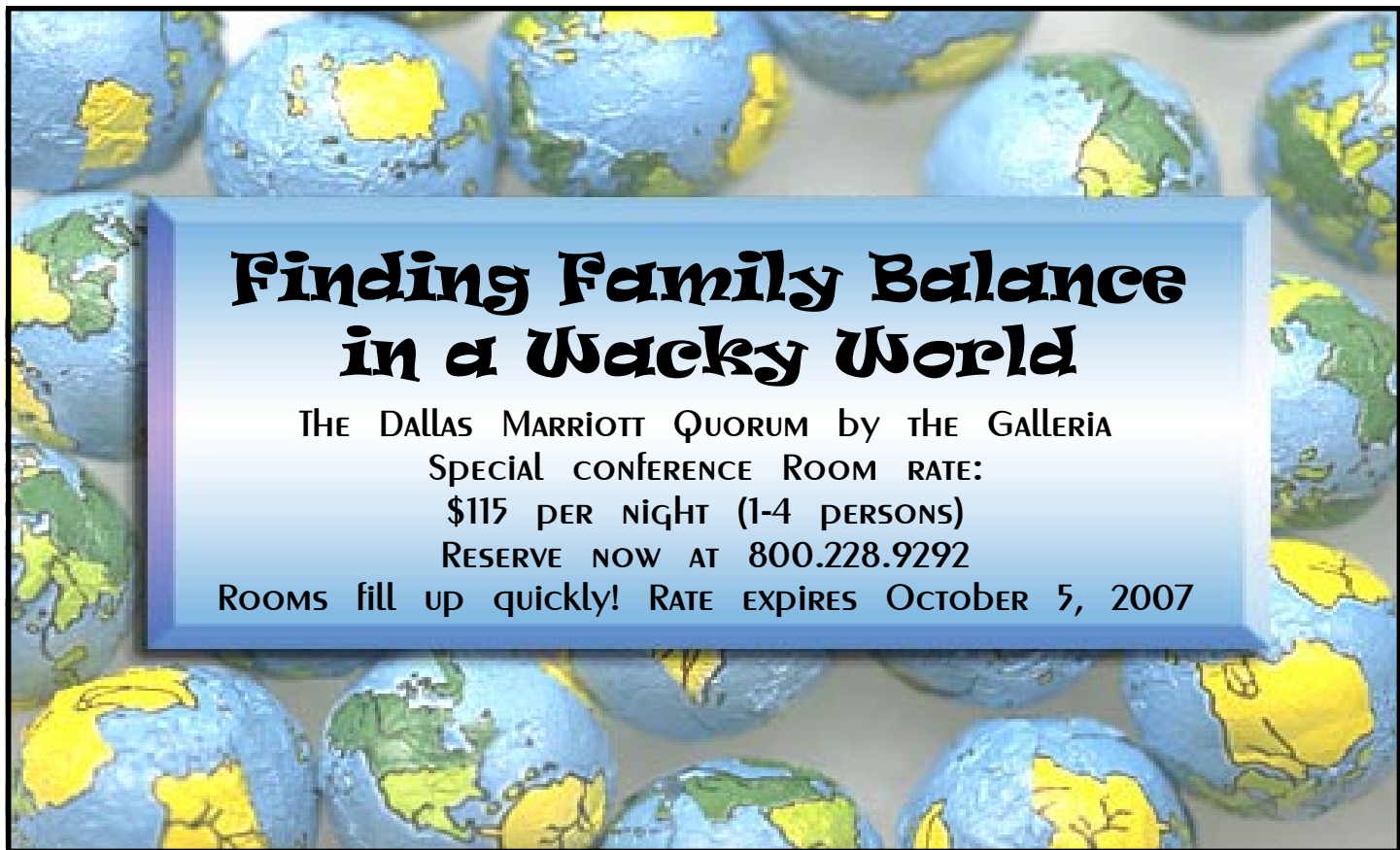
Because infant brain development has become a "hot topic" that has been on the covers of *Time* and *Newsweek* magazines and in the media more and more frequently, some state governments are shifting their education focus to include early care and education as a priority. A brand new audience is developing who will benefit by reading *Bright from the Start* to learn about what the science actually says. In Arizona, our newest and most receptive audience is now the business community. They have "tuned in" to the latest statistics recently updated by the Federal Reserve Bank on the cost/benefit analysis of making investments in early childhood. One dollar invested today yields a \$17 dollar return. This amazingly wise use of dollars is due to the savings to be realized by fewer remedial education costs, rehabilitative expenses, lack of productivity, and finally incarceration. Parents want and need to know how to protect and nurture their child's brain. They need to understand that school "readiness" at five years old is not about having *already developed* all of the specific academic skills of reading and math: it is about having an active and ready brain that is capable of learning anything! The importance of wiring up a healthy brain for success in school is gracefully summed up by Bill Post, CEO of Arizona's largest public utility Arizona Public Service:

"When our children are healthy, growing and learning, we in turn are healthier and more successful at work. And eventually, our children will join the work force, whether in Arizona or elsewhere... we must help build awareness of early childhood education so that everyone, including those who are less fortunate and without a family structure, have the ability to nurture and teach their children. We want all children to be successful."

The ideas mentioned here are elaborated upon in the book of course, and for details about both the science of early brain development and for other pertinent information on the wisdom of investing in early care and education, please visit our website, www.newdirectionsinstitute.org.

Bright From The Start, already nationally acclaimed by neuroscientists and pediatricians, is the first book by Dr. Jill Stamm, Professor of Learning at Arizona State University. She is also co-founder and Director of New Directions Institute for Infant Brain Development in Phoenix, Arizona, which trains over 7,000 professionals and parents annually. Jill is a sought-after national lecturer, and mother of two daughters, Jenny, who is multiply-handicapped and the motivation for Jill's work and book, and Kristin, who has her Ph.D. in Neuroscience from UCLA. You can contact Jill through www.newdirectionsinstitute.org and order her book at www.amazon.com. Other web contacts for the book are www.brightfromthestartthebook.com and www.barnesandnoble.com. Dr. Stamm will present a breakout session, *Bright From the Start*, at the Practical Parent Education National Conference on October 29, 2007.





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**Keynote Speaker
Dr. Sylvia Rimm**



Leading child psychologist, best-selling author and television parenting specialist Dr. Sylvia Rimm will present ***Growing Up Too Fast***, based upon her book of the same title. Dr. Rimm reveals the results of an unprecedented survey of America's pre-teens and helps parents deal with the troubling findings. Through instant messaging, cell phones, and email, today's middle schoolers hide their real lives from their parents. To find out what these youngsters are really up to, Dr. Rimm, author of the New York Times bestseller *See Jane Win*, conducted a survey of over 5,400 middle school kids and talked with over 300 students in focus groups. In *Growing Up Too Fast*, Dr. Rimm reveals the startling results of her research. While parents remember high school as the time when they encountered sex, drugs, body image issues, and other "teenage" problems, today's

kids face these pressures in middle school. Dr. Rimm will show how to lead today's new breed of adolescents to a bright and promising future.



Stand up and be recognized! It is once again time for the PPE award application process. On the following pages are complete instructions for nominating a program or an individual for one of these prestigious awards. Award nominations are **due October 22, 2007** and can be submitted by email to ppe@pisd.edu, by mail to: Practical Parent Education, Attn: Awards Committee, 1300 19th Street, Plano, Texas 75074, or by FAX to 469.752.2271. The awards will be presented at our National Conference on October 29, 2007.

Making a Difference for Families Award

2006 Winner:

**L.E.A.P. (Learning Experiences for Active Adults) Class
Tyler ISD/Title 1 Parenting/Head Start Program**

The Making a Difference for Families Award is designed to recognize Practical Parent Education programs that have initiated unique parenting-related services that are truly having a positive impact on families. The service must involve parents and incorporate PPE services and/or curriculum at some level. The winning program will receive a **\$1,000.00 stipend**. Applicants will be judged on the following criteria:

- The uniqueness of the program concept
- How the program meets a special need in the community
- How the program has incorporated the services and/or curriculum of PPE
- Expected outcomes of the program
- Program evaluation
- Long term plans for the program

Instructions

- Submit all required information
- A maximum of 6 attachments may be included
- Include the following information at the top of the application:
 - Name of program
 - Sponsoring organization (if applicable)
 - Size of community served
 - Program contact
 - Address
 - Telephone and FAX numbers
 - Contact email address
- Please answer the following questions, limiting responses to a 1/2 letter- sized page:
 1. Briefly describe your program and how it is unique.
 2. What special community needs are being met by this program?
 3. In what ways have you integrated the PPE program materials and/or services?
 4. What are the anticipated outcomes of the program?
 5. How will the outcomes be measured?
 6. What long term plans are in place for the continuation of the program?

The Joe Collins Parent Educator of the Year Award

This award, named in honor of one of PPE's founders, recognizes the work of a parent educator who goes that extra mile to provide outstanding services to the community he or she serves. These services must directly involve parents and must incorporate PPE services and/or curriculum at some level. This outstanding parent educator will receive a **\$500 PPE Gift Certificate** that may be used to purchase training, curriculum or any other product of PPE. The nominees will be judged on the following criteria:

- ☑ The commitment of the parent educator
- ☑ How the educator meets a special need in the community
- ☑ How the educator has incorporated the services and/or curriculum of PPE

Instructions

- ☑ Submit all required information
- ☑ A maximum of 2 attachments may be included
- ☑ Include the following information at the top of the application:
 - Name, affiliation, address and telephone number of Nominee
 - Number of years in Parent Education, number of years with PPE
 - Name and contact information of person submitting nomination (including email address)
- ☑ Please answer the following questions, limiting each response to a 1/2 letter-sized page:
 1. What are the Nominee's special contributions to or support of parent education in his/her community?
 2. What initiatives does the Nominee take to enhance his/her knowledge and skills in the field of parent education?
 3. Why do you think the Nominee deserves to be the *Joe Collins Parent Educator of the Year*?

The Linda Johnston Parent Education Administrator of the Year Award

This award, named in honor of PPE's former longtime Executive Director, recognizes the efforts of a program administrator whose dedication to the importance of parent education is reflected in the outstanding way he or she manages an organization. The organization he or she administers must incorporate PPE services and/or curriculum at some level. This outstanding parent education administrator will receive a **\$500 PPE Gift Certificate** that may be used to purchase training, curriculum or any other product of PPE. The nominees will be judged on the following criteria:

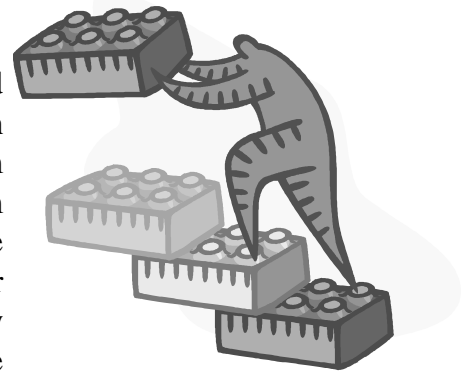
- ☑ The commitment of the parent education administrator to Parent Education
- ☑ How the administrator's leadership has strengthened the organization's role in Parent Education in the community
- ☑ How the administrator has incorporated the services and/or curriculum of PPE into his/her organization

Instructions

- ☑ Submit all required information
- ☑ A maximum of 2 attachments may be included
- ☑ Include the following information at the top of the application:
 - Name, affiliation, address and telephone number of Nominee
 - Number of years in Parent Education, number of years with PPE
 - Name and contact information of person submitting nomination (including email address)
- ☑ Please answer the following questions, limiting each response to a 1/2 letter-sized page:
 1. What responsibilities does the Nominee perform as an administrator of your program?
 2. What qualities make the Nominee an exemplary administrator?
 3. In what ways does the Nominee demonstrate a commitment to Parent Education?
 4. Why do you feel the Nominee deserves to be the *Linda Johnston Parent Education Administrator of the Year*?

A Practical Parent Education Success Story

All families respond better to programs in settings that are culturally and linguistically comfortable for them. Parents who did not like their years in school classrooms are not likely to want to sit in a room that resembles a classroom and listen to someone talk to them about parenting strategies. Parents from generational poverty may not trust any institutional setting. In order to get these parents involved in their children's school lives, Dr. Juliette Echániz, Coordinator of Hispanic Services for Practical Parent Education, creates a learning community



Do you have a **SUCCESS STORY** you'd like to share? Send your good news to ppe@pisd.edu and we may publish your story in a future edition of *Connections*.

with parents and adolescents who are referred here by the courts or by churches.

The introduction to this experience starts with two teams in a game of Double Twelve Dominos. The parents comprise one team and the adolescents make up the other team. Each team makes a list of the things that they would like to change about the other team. For example, the parents may say, "I want my child to get up in the morning without me having to nag him." The adolescents may say, "I want my parents to stop yelling at me so much." Juliette determines if the request is reasonable and/or legal.

They play their Double Twelve Domino game and the winning team gets to choose one item from their list that everyone agrees to do. For example, if the parents win and choose that their son or daughter will be in bed by 10:00 p.m., all of the adolescents must be in bed by 10:00 p.m.

If the kids win and they want their parents to stop yelling at them, they will discuss ways that they can communicate without yelling.

When they meet the next week, they discuss their successes and failures, and how the experience felt. This activity emphasizes that the program is to be designed by the families (both parents and adolescents) as they go along to meet their needs. It also lets them know that they can talk about any subject that they want. From this point on, parents and adolescents determine the topic for the next session.

One family came to Juliette through a court referral because the high school son was truant all of the time and he wanted to drop out of school. Parents would drop him off at school in the morning, but when they drove away, he would leave the campus. Throughout the sessions, the son expressed the things that were bothering him and the parents expressed their concerns. They all took a realistic look at the job opportunities for a high school dropout who had no training and real communication took place. They received support from the other families in the group.

This September, the family came back to visit Juliette and the son was carrying a bouquet of flowers. With some nudging from his mom, he gave Juliette an invitation to his graduation from ITT Institute and he said, "I have come to thank you. If it had not been for you, I would not be graduating this month."



Facilitation Tip!



Are you presenting a class that focuses on ages and stages? Here is a fun way to break the ice while reinforcing the information presented! At the beginning of the session pass out a blank card and numbered envelope to each participant, with the envelopes numbered from one to the number of participants (say 16). Each person is to write a birthday card to a child for that year of his/her life focusing on the milestones for that year. (i.e. for 16 "you're learning to drive this year!"). At various points during the presentation draw a number and have the participant who wrote the card for that age read it to the group.

??? Frequently asked questions ???

Parent educator Cynthia Garrison M.S., CFLE, CAMS, answers questions frequently asked during her parenting sessions. If you have a question for Cynthia, send it to us at ppe@pisd.edu and look for answers in our future editions of *Connections*.

Question: I hear of parents who never struggle to get their children to do their homework after school. I find myself yelling at the children to do their homework and sometimes I find I am the one actually completing the homework for my child right before bedtime.
What can I do to get my children to do their homework after school and not fight with them to get it done?



Answer: This is actually a common concern for parents of children of all ages. There are several strategies to use to get your children to have more responsibility over their homework:

1. Turn off all electronic devices. This includes the TV, video games, and computer games. Research shows that if your child engages in such activities more than seven hours per week, it affects brain function. It is also a distraction to concentrating on work at hand. You might even want to make a rule that there is no TV or video games during the school week, only on weekends. Without the battle of turning these items off, your child will no longer have an excuse to avoid homework.
2. Find a space for your child to complete homework. It might be the kitchen table, living room floor, office desk or child's bedroom. For those children who need additional help with homework you might want to choose a place convenient for the person helping the child.
3. Homework space should have all tools necessary to complete homework such as paper, pencils, markers, rulers etc. This way the child is not up looking for supplies and making excuses.
4. Homework space should be free of distractions such as loud noises, music, other siblings etc. Depending on the child's learning style, soft music in the background may help the child to focus, but for others it might be more of a distraction. If your child insists on music, try it for a week. If homework and grades improve or stay the same, let them listen. If focus or grades decline, remove music.
5. Provide support for child. Your job as the parent is to assist in the homework environment, not do the work. If your child needs help to understand a concept, work it out with the child. You will start to notice if your child really needs help or is just trying to get you to do the work.
6. Insist on completion of work before other activities such as playing outside or with friends. Making this a consistent rule will tell your child, "Yes, you can play after work is finished."
7. Provide small breaks for child who has hours' worth of work. Some learning styles require short breaks of walking around or getting a drink. These breaks are necessary for focus.
8. Assign consequences for non-completion of work. There are natural consequences already in place (bad grades, failing tests). There may need to be other logical consequences which you would enforce, such consequences as limiting outside play or friend play.
9. Watch your child for stress. You know your child better than anyone and you can tell when behavior changes. If your child continues to struggle getting work completed after you have tried all the strategies above consistently, you may need to make other adjustments in the home environment.
10. Lastly, communicate with child's teacher. Let the teacher know if stress is an issue as well as struggles you have getting child to complete homework. The teacher might have some strategies you can try as well.



Practical Parent Education Training Schedules

Initial Parent Educator Training

Plano, Texas - October 17-19, 2007

Plano, Texas - February 5-7, 2008

Plano, Texas - May 6-8, 2008

Building Bright Futures - Parenting Children with Attention Deficits

Plano, Texas - April 16, 2008

Nurturing Families Through Divorce

Plano, Texas - April 15, 2008

Me, You & Everyone Else - Diversity Training

Plano, Texas - April 17, 2008

Parent Involvement: Moving Beyond Rhetoric

Kilgore, Texas - January 8, 2008

Plano, Texas - April 18, 2008

Registration forms can be found at www.practicalparent.org
To arrange training in your area, please call 800.687.2823



New Curriculum CD

PPE subscribers will receive their new curriculum CD in the mail in November. The CD will contain the entire PPE curriculum in English and Spanish as well as a complete set of *Parenting Quick Tips*. Two new modules have been added, *Defusing Family Disagreements* and *Are Our Children Growing Up Too Fast*. One new *Quick Tip* of particular interest might be the *Quick Tip* on *Cheese*, the new drug that is devastating many communities. If you have not yet renewed your PPE subscription, it's not too late! Simply email us at ppe@pisd.edu and we can send you the form!

PPE On the Road

PPE continues to grow across the nation. PPE Initial Parent Educator trainings have been held recently for the Oklahoma State Department of Health, the Clint Independent School District in El Paso, Texas, and the Charleston County School District in Charleston, South Carolina. We welcome these new subscribing programs!

PPE Connections

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