

Lecture Topic: “Pushed Too Far or Left Behind? Child Development and Curriculum Planning in Grades K-12”
Speaker: Dr. Linda Yonke
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Sponsor: Family Awareness Network of New Trier Township (FAN)
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This report was prepared from both my own notes and Dr. Yonke’s slides.

SUMMARY:

Dr. Linda Yonke became Superintendent of the New Trier High School District in July, 2006 after serving for 2 years as the Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction at New Trier. Dr. Yonke presented child development and curriculum issues chronologically, beginning with early childhood and continuing on through late high school. She reviewed the most significant developmental characteristics of each stage, and explained how parents and teachers can guide children as they progress through these stages. Dr. Yonke then contrasted gender differences, and closed with strategies for parents to help raise happy and successful children, stressing the importance of positive parent-school partnerships.

Dr. Yonke holds a PhD in Educational Organization and Leadership from the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign; an M.A. in Language and Literature from Governors State University; and a B.A. in History from Albion College. Before coming to New Trier, she served as Principal at York H.S. (Elmhurst), Lake Central H.S. (St. John’s, IN) and Kankakee H.S. (Kankakee), and also taught high school English for a decade, and 3 years of junior high school.

OUTLINE:

I. Childhood Roots of Adult Happiness

- A. Connectedness: Love and emotional safety with parents and at school.
- B. Play: The “work” of children.
- C. Practice: Opportunities to work at something.
- D. Mastery: Children need something to excel at.
- E. Recognition: From peers and school.

II. Early Childhood

- A. **Development:** Research shows that adults need to read to children.
Children understand more when read to than from reading themselves.
 - 1. Connection
 - 2. Speaking
 - 3. Reading
 - 4. Play

- B. **Parents and Schools:** Children should learn to play. Not all activity should be structured. Vocabulary is developed. Ask questions: “Why did that happen? What will happen next?” Guidance should be firm and consistent.
1. Play as dominant mode of learning.
 2. Self-created learning experiences.
 3. Talking, reading, questioning, predicting, inquiry, abstract thinking.
 4. Help develop self-control.

III. **Early Elementary**

- A. **Development:** Behavior needs limits and direction. Criticism should be constructive and positive. At this stage, girls are physical, confident, which tends to disappear later.
1. Rapid strides in thinking ability, curiosity.
 2. All-or-nothing thinking.
 3. Behavior controlled externally.
 4. Vulnerable to criticism.
 5. Androgynous.
- B. **Parents and Schools:** Assist child in seeing that things are somewhere in between “horrible” and “wonderful.” Note individual learning styles, use learning centers to accommodate individual differences.
1. Help with perspective.
 2. Model kindness, empathy.
 3. Read, play, explore, discover.
 4. No monetary rewards, no pay for grades.
 5. Individual, personal learning experiences.
 6. Respect for varied learning styles.

IV. **Middle Years – “Tweens”**

- A. **Development:** Girls mature much sooner than boys. Heightened peer pressure, self-awareness, self-consciousness. Dangers of peer pressure become evident.
1. Self-absorbed, self-conscious.
 2. Rapid physical growth.
 3. Conforming.
 4. Energetic.
 5. Emotional (trouble with thinking and feeling).
 6. A new focus on relationships, especially girls.
 7. Passionate, sometimes cruel.
- B. **Parents and Schools:** Helping others decreases self-absorption. May look older, but still need close supervision. Don’t overreact to kids’ issues. Important to let children discover and become who they are.
1. Model pro-social, altruistic behavior.
 2. Close supervision.
 3. Model emotional balance.
 4. Focus on talents and strengths – don’t use a deficit model.

5. Assign tasks with complex thinking, requiring longer attention span. Long term projects, greater independence.
6. Practice and mastery – satisfaction and pride.

V. Late Middle/Early High School

A. Development

1. Abstract, conceptual thinking.
2. Improved attention skills.
3. Able to draw inferences.
4. Know-it-alls, embarrassed by parents.
5. Under-developed judgment.
6. Beginning to individuate – can be painful for all.

B. Parents and Schools: Home is a refuge; hopefully, someone at school provides refuge as well. Child must learn that you can't have everything you want.

1. Welcome separation, but address safety and provide warm sanctuary.
2. Teach resiliency.
3. Continued close supervision.
4. Development of identity, empathy.
5. Global awareness – moving beyond the self.
6. Development of self-regulation, self-discipline.

VI. Late High School

A. Development

1. Complex, abstract thought.
2. Sustained effort.
3. Greater tolerance for frustration.
4. Like to “own” learning process.
5. Less self-absorbed.

B. Parents and Schools: Don't buy a child's way out of trouble. Child should begin advocating for his- or herself.

1. Allow for exploration of multiple interests.
2. Firm limits, responsibilities.
3. Deeper intellectual exploration of multiple subject areas.
4. Individual responsibility.
5. Do not avoid consequences.
6. Monitor, but recognize growing need for independence.

VII. Gender Differences

A. Girls: Elementary schools are created for girls. Important to stress that identity should be based on talents, skills and interests rather than looks and personality.

1. Earlier development of verbal skills.
2. Relationships are key.
3. Team rather than individual.
4. Challenges
 - a. Identity as woman
 - b. Confidence – many lose it during adolescence

- c. Sexism in the media – need to raise awareness

B. Boys

1. Highly active.
2. Less developed social/emotional intelligence.
3. Competitive.
4. Challenges
 - a. Dealing with emotion
 - b. Learning empathy
 - c. Managing activity
 - d. Developing verbal skills

VIII. “Millenials” – The Next Great Generation

- A. Anyone born since 1982 – the “E-Generation.” Adept at working in cooperative groups and teams. Adhere to parents values, not rebellious. What is their impact on culture and technology?
 1. Sheltered
 2. Confident
 3. Team-oriented
 4. Achieving
 5. Conventional
 6. Pressured to excel
 7. How can parents and schools help the Millenials?
- B. Effective parenting is a balance between control and affection. Ideally, the home situation should have both high control and high affection. If there is merely high control without affection, that strictness will result in rebellion.
 1. 3 styles: Authoritarian, Permissive and Authoritative. Authoritative is the most effective, resulting in secure, happy children.
 2. Important to cultivate good warmth – acceptance and understanding.
 3. Avoid bad warmth – over-involvement and intrusion.

IX. How Can Parents Help

- A. Take care of yourself, develop interests and balance.
- B. Read aloud, from infancy on. Develop vocabulary; get away from TV, even through high school.
- C. Meta-cognition/study skills – “thinking about thinking”
- D. Girls: Develop identity based on talents or interests, not appearance, popularity or sexuality.
- E. Boys: Recognize the need to be active, understand emotional needs; develop social intelligence.
- F. Help children discover strengths (not just remedy deficits).
- G. Know how your child learns best – learning inventory.
- H. Schedule regular family time – vacations, short trips, meals, carpooling. Summer as a fun extension of learning.
- I. Model empathy and use humor to keep balance and perspective (emotional/social intelligence).

- J. Connectedness: Love (emotional security); optimism and resiliency. Does your child have an adult at school that they can relate to?
- X. How to Develop Positive Relationships with the School**
- A. Won't be as many opportunities once they are in high school. Determine when to get involved; indifference or cruelty should never be tolerated. Remember that your child's version of events is not the only version. Good to talk to other parents.
1. Know your child's teachers.
 2. Balance the development of the child's independence and need for support or intervention.
 3. Listen to both sides before judging.
 4. Prepare for meetings, and approach positively.
 5. Judge issues/teachers independently.
 6. Promote self-advocacy – but monitor.

BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS FROM DR. LINDA YONKE

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