On Wednesday evening, January 22, a retirement dinner was held for my friend and colleague (and boss!) Alan Hurlbert, better known as “Lanny”. It was called “a retirement celebration” but for those of us who have worked closely with Lanny, we did not feel like celebrating his leaving!

Lanny has served as NPUC Vice President for Education since 1996. He has been a great supporter and friend of early childhood education since it came under the umbrella of the Adventist education system. As many of you witnessed, Lanny gave positive verbal and physical support to both NPUC workshops (2011 and 2013), as well as the 2012 NAD Teachers’ Convention in Nashville, initially working out funding with local conferences to make these events FREE to the conference-employed directors and teachers who attended.

Dennis Plubell has been elected to fill the position of NPUC Vice President for Education. Dennis is no stranger to the North Pacific Union as he served as NPUC Associate Director of Education from 1997-2007. Since then he has served as Director of Secondary Education and Accreditation for the North American Division in Silver Spring, MD. Dennis and his wife Barbara (an elementary principal) have four adult children. We feel very blessed to have Dennis return to the Northwest!

The 14th NAD Adventist Ministries Convention was held January 12-15 in Monterey, CA. Held twice every five years, its purpose is to provide training and resourcing for over 700 denominational leaders. This was the FIRST time that EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION was represented at the convention. An attractive booth displayed ECEC information in the exhibit hall including a continuously running DVD, ECEC handouts and freebies. People from as far away as Bermuda and Guam visited the booth. Two seminars explaining The Business of the ECEC Ministry, were presented by Dr. Davenia Lea.
Rob Saxton is Oregon’s deputy superintendent of public instruction. Jada Rupley is the early learning system director within the state Department of Education. Together they wrote an op-ed in The Oregonian that was published online with this headline: Kindergarten test results a ‘sobering snapshot’.

What could possibly be sobering about test results from kindergartners? What kind of tests are they giving to kindergartners anyway? It turns out that every public school kindergartner in Oregon was given a kindergarten readiness test last September to see how many numbers, letters and sounds they knew. The Oregonian reported that kids on average entered kindergarten knowing 19 capital and lower-case letters and seven letter sounds of at least 100 possible correct answers.

Kindergarten readiness tests are nothing new. What is, is the ever-increasing focus on turning kindergarten, and now preschool, into academic environments with the aim of ensuring that children can read by the time they are in first grade. In fact, kindergarten is the new first grade when it comes to academics.

Saxton and Rupley wrote in their piece that the results of the testing of the kindergartners in Oregon “provide a sobering snapshot of the skills our children possess as they enter kindergarten.”

A working paper called “Is Kindergarten the New First Grade? The Changing Nature of Kindergarten in the Age of Accountability,” by Daphna Bassok and Anna Rorem of the University of Virginia’s EdPolicyWorks, a center on education policy and competitiveness, notes that kindergarten has been transformed over the last decade, with academic skill taking center stage.

For some kids, learning to read in kindergarten is just fine. For many others, it isn’t. They just aren’t ready. In years gone by, kids were given time to develop and learn to read in the early grades without being seen as failures. Even kids who took time learning how to read were able to excel.

Today kids aren’t given time and space to learn at their own speed. Writer Alfie Kohn wrote in this post about concerns he has about the new calls for universal early childhood education. Why? Because when people talk about “high-quality programs,” they often mean academic programs, meaning the academic focus is being pushed down to younger and younger kids.

Very few people are talking about the kind of education that would be offered — other than declaring it should be “high quality.” And that phrase is often interpreted to mean “high intensity”: an accelerated version of skills-based teaching that most early-childhood experts regard as terrible. Poor children, as usual, tend to get the worst of this……. The top-down, test-driven regimen of Bush’s “No Child Left Behind” and Obama’s “Race to the Top” initiatives in K-12 education is now in the process of being nationalized with those Common Core standards championed by the Times — an enterprise largely funded, and relentlessly promoted, by corporate groups. That same version of school reform, driven by an emphasis on global competitiveness and a determination to teach future workers as much as possible as soon as possible, would now be expanded to children who are barely out of diapers.

That doesn’t leave much time for play. But even to the extent we want to promote meaningful learning in young children, the methods are likely to be counterproductive, featuring an emphasis on the direct instruction of skills and rote rehearsal of facts. This is the legacy of behaviorism: Children are treated as passive receptacles of knowledge, with few opportunities to investigate topics and pose questions that they find intriguing. In place of discovery and exploration, tots are trained to sit still and listen, to memorize lists of letters, numbers, and colors. Their success or failure is relentlessly monitored and quantified, and they’re “reinforced” with stickers or praise for producing right answers and being compliant. This dreary version of early-childhood education isn’t just disrespectful of children; decades of research show it simply doesn’t work well — and may even be damaging.

Bassok, one of the authors of the research paper mentioned above, noted that while there are fun and engaging ways to teach young kids academic material, she worries that so much emphasis will be put on learning to read that other things, like play and social interactions, will be lost. It’s already been happening for years, and it appears to be getting worse. The end result will be kids who hate school even earlier than they do now.

Kids LIKE to play. Kids LEARN from play. Why it doesn’t make sense to just LET them play is beyond me.
GETTING TO KNOW YOU...

Melanie Lawson was born on the west side of the Cascade mountains and was raised on the dry, eastern side, in Pendleton, Oregon. She is a fourth generation teacher, having graduated from Walla Walla University with a degree in elementary education, and also receiving a Masters in curriculum and instruction, and holding endorsements in special and elementary education, psychology and religion.

Married twenty-one years to her high school sweetheart, Dinn, they have three daughters, Lexi, Cassidy and Destiny. Besides activities with her family, Melanie enjoys puzzles and nature.

Melanie has taught for twenty-one years, with the majority of that time being in a PK/K setting. For the past eight years she has been on the staff of Boise Valley Adventist School in Boise, Idaho. She states, “We combine PK and K, which creates a nice mentoring program with the older ones helping the younger ones--leading by example.”

With the assistance of Karen McCloskey, Melanie currently oversees fifteen students, ages 4-6 at Boise Valley Adventist School. Speaking of Karen’s valuable service, Melanie comments, “She is a retired teacher and brings a wealth of knowledge, ideas, and resources to the classroom. She is my sounding board and lifeline to maintaining my sanity.”

Speaking of her favorite moments and her goals of early childhood ministry at Boise Valley, Melanie continues, “I love the ‘light bulb’ moments. I am refreshed when a child finally grasps a concept and becomes excited about learning because of the success they experience. I also love the quirky things my students say which I keep recorded in a journal entitled KidTalk. They keep me smiling and make my job rewarding.

The purpose of my teaching is for each child to know Jesus and His unconditional love for them; to learn of His character traits and model them in their own lives. It is a privilege to work in God’s ministry and share His love with others. In my classroom, I believe:

- God should be the center of our class
- Learning is a lifelong adventure
- In facing each day with minds open to knowledge and hearts open to love
- In the freedom to wonder, to ask, to explore, and to create
- Success means doing our best, being our best, and feeling proud of our efforts
- Every child has special talents
- In the God-given value of each child

Informative fieldtrips, creative educational activities, developing friendships with our ‘big buddies’, and worshipping God through our curriculum are just a few of the highlights in our class. God’s presence and blessings are apparent in our school and I look forward to each year working in His mission field.”

February 27 is POLAR BEAR Day—A great day to study how and where polar bears live. It is also a day to talk about ways we can protect our environment and not be wasteful.

March 13 is POPCORN LOVERS Day—This day is celebrated on the second Thursday in March by those who love popcorn and love to share it with friends.

March 20 is “WON’T YOU BE MY NEIGHBOR” Day—In honor of Mr. Fred Rogers’ birthday. A day to explore ways to be a good friend and neighbor, and to promote random acts of kindness.
When asked, “What does THE PERFECT CENTER look like?” ...

...a seasoned, childcare supervisor responded, “It basically boils down to: Christ-centeredness, safety and cleanliness, child appropriateness, professional operational practices.”

She referred to an itemized checklist:

1. **The program maintains a valid license** (i.e. meeting a basic set of standards, that includes qualified teachers and director, correct teacher-child ratio, etc. as per state and conference/union regulations).

2. **The facility has regular health and safety inspections by civil authorities** (i.e. health and fire depts.) and a board-designated risk management officer, and displays compliance certificates in a public area at the entrance of the center.

3. **The program makes “formation of character” an everyday priority.** (Character growth activities are very obvious when observing teacher interaction with the children.)

4. **The daily curriculum is faith-based as well as research-based** with worship, Bible lessons, and prayer spread throughout the day’s schedule and incorporated into various types of learning experiences.

5. **All activities are developmentally and culturally appropriate** demonstrated by the use of hands-on manipulatives (not worksheets or other two-dimensional materials such as coloring books, computer screens, etc.).

6. **Teachers, caregivers and director are happy, organized, Christ-centered and friendly, and demonstrate professionalism.**

7. **Center administration and staff have a good rapport with the local conference and union educational leadership and participate in provided programs and professional development activities.**

8. **There is evidence of good communication habits and positive relationships,** 1) among all staff; 2) between parents, teachers, administration and local board; and 3) connecting the center and its church and/or school.

9. **The facility, outdoor play areas, and grounds are attractive, clean, in good repair and of appropriate size.**

10. **Pictures, posters, bulletin board displays, etc. of Jesus and Christian living are plainly visible in every room.**

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**Wonder what you can do to improve FIRST IMPRESSIONS of your center?**

Develop a **FRESH EYES committee** to give you “first impression” pointers. Choose people who do not work at or frequent your center, who are themselves visionary and professional, who you can trust to give you an honest opinion and constructive criticism.
At an early age, all children have the capacity and propensity to observe, explore, and discover the world around them. These are basic abilities for science learning that should be encouraged and supported in the earliest years of their lives. The National Science Teachers Association (NSTA) affirms that learning science and engineering practices in the early years can foster children’s curiosity and enjoyment in exploring the world around them and lay the foundation for a progression of science learning in K–12 settings and throughout their entire lives.

This statement focuses primarily on children from age 3 through preschool. NSTA recognizes, however, the importance of exploratory play and other forms of active engagement for younger children from birth to age 3.

Current research indicates that young children have the capacity for constructing conceptual learning and the ability to reason and inquire. Many adults tend to underestimate children’s capacity to learn science core ideas and practices in the early years and fail to provide the opportunities for them to foster science skills and build conceptual understanding. Also underestimated is the length of time that young children are able to focus on science explorations.

NSTA identifies the following key principles to guide the learning of science among young children.

- **Children have the capacity to engage in scientific practices and develop understanding at a conceptual level.**
  Current research shows that young children have the capacity for conceptual learning and the ability to use the skills of reasoning and inquiry. For example, their play with blocks, water, and sand shares some science-relevant characteristics. Young children also can learn to organize and communicate what they learn, and know the difference between concrete and abstract ideas. Adults who engage children in science inquiry through the process of asking questions, investigating, and constructing explanations can provide developmentally appropriate environments that take advantage of what children do as part of their everyday life prior to entering formal school settings. These skills and abilities can provide helpful starting points for developing scientific reasoning.

- **Adults play a central and important role in helping young children learn science.**
  Everyday life experiences can best contribute to science learning when an adult prepares the environment for science exploration, focuses children’s observations, and provides time to talk about what was done and seen. It is important that adults support children’s play and also direct their attention, structure their experiences, support their learning attempts, and regulate the complexity and difficulty of levels of information. It’s equally important for adults to look for signs from children and adjust the learning experiences to support their curiosity, learning, and understanding.

- **Young children need multiple and varied opportunities to engage in science exploration and discovery.**
  Young children develop science understanding best when given multiple opportunities to engage in science exploration. The range of experiences gives them the basis for seeing patterns, forming theories, considering alternate explanations, and building their knowledge. For example, engaging with natural environments in an outdoor learning center can provide opportunities for children to examine and duplicate the habitats of animals and insects, explore how things move, investigate the flow of water, recognize different textures that exist, make predictions about things they see, and test their knowledge.

- **Young children develop science skills and knowledge in both formal and informal settings.**
  Opportunities to explore, inquire, discover, and construct within the natural environment and with materials that are there need to be provided by knowledgeable adults in formal settings. This can also take place in informal settings, such as with cooking activities and outdoor play observing the environment.

- **Young children develop science skills and knowledge over time.**
  They need opportunities for sustained engagement with materials and conversations that focus on the same set of ideas over weeks, months, and years. For example, investigating the concept of light and shadows over several weeks indoors and out with a variety of materials and multiple activities will allow children to re-visit and re-engage over time, building on observations and predictions from day to day.
Young children develop science skills and learning by engaging in experiential learning.

Young children engage in science activities when an adult intentionally prepares the environment and the experiences to allow children to fully engage with materials. The activities allow children to question, explore, investigate, make meaning, and construct explanations and organize knowledge by manipulating materials.

NSTA recommends that teachers and other education providers who support children’s learning in any early childhood setting should

- recognize the value and importance of nurturing young children’s curiosity and provide experiences in the early years that focus on the content and practices of science with an understanding of how these experiences connect to the science content defined in the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) (NGSS Lead States 2013);
- understand that science experiences are already a part of what young children encounter every day through play and interactions with others, but that teachers and other education providers need to provide a learning environment that encourages children to ask questions, plan investigations, and record and discuss findings;
- tap into, guide, and focus children’s natural interests and abilities through carefully planned open-ended, inquiry-based explorations;
- provide numerous opportunities every day for young children to engage in science inquiry and learning by intentionally designing a rich, positive, and safe environment for exploration and discovery;
- emphasize the learning of science and engineering practices, including asking questions and defining problems; developing and using models; planning and carrying out investigations; analyzing and interpreting data; using mathematics and computational thinking; constructing explanations and designing solutions; engaging in argument from evidence; and obtaining, evaluating, and communicating information (NRC 2012, NGSS Lead States 2013);
- recognize that science provides a purposeful context for developing literacy skills and concepts, including speaking, listening, vocabulary development, and many others; and
- recognize that science provides a purposeful context for use of math skills and concepts.

NSTA recommends that teachers and other providers who support the learning of science in young children be given professional development experiences that

- engage them in learning science principles in an interactive, hands-on approach, enabling them to teach about science principles appropriately and knowledgeably;
- are ongoing and science-specific;
- help them understand how children learn science and engineering practices;
- inform them about a range of strategies for teaching science effectively; and
- include the use of mentors to provide ongoing support for educators for the application of new learning.

NSTA recommends that those in a position to provide financial, policy, and other support for early childhood education should

- provide appropriate resources for teachers and children;
- ensure a positive and safe environment for exploration and discovery;
- ensure teachers receive sustained science-specific professional development that includes how children learn and how to teach science;
- provide mentoring; and
- establish a coherent system of science standards, instruction, appropriate assessment, and curriculum.

Parents and other caregivers can nurture children’s natural curiosity about the world around them, creating a positive and safe environment at home for exploration and discovery.

These recommendations can be found in NSTA’s position statement, Parent Involvement in Science Learning (NSTA 2009), found at www.nsta.org.
Early Childhood Resources
(From Martha Ban, NAD Education’s Technical Support Director)

Internet 4 Classrooms (i4c), a free web portal designed to assist anyone who wants to find high-quality, free Internet resources to use in classroom instruction, developing project ideas, and reinforcing specific subject matter areas. http://www.internet4classrooms.com/prek.htm

Teacher Quick Source is a comprehensive resource tailored to meet educators’ specific needs and the needs of the children in their care. Early childhood teachers can find step-by-step activities, materials lists, and outcomes all in one convenient place. www.teacherquicksourcesource.com

Preschool Express is a FREE online educational activity resource for parents, teachers and grandparents of toddler and preschool children. http://www.preschoolexpress.com/

Early Childhood News is an online resource for teachers and parents of children from infants to age 8. Find articles on developmentally appropriate practices, child health, safety and behavior, and links to teacher resources and networking opportunities at www.EarlyChildhoodNews.com.

Digital Storytelling has the power to engage and motivate the learner. Young children can be involved in the making of a digital story by taking photos with a digital camera, acting out scenes, drawing pictures and scanning images, and narrating the story with their own words. When the students are involved in the creation of a digital story it becomes very meaningful to them and thus, a very effective teacher tool. For more information go to http://blogs.preknow.org/insideprek/technology/

“A VERY MOST IMPORTANT WORK”

When Ellen White was 86 years old she shared a burden on her heart with her friend and colleague, A. W. Spalding, “Oh how I wish that I could go out as I used to do, and stand before the people. I would teach them of the great importance of training their children for God.”

He assured her that she had taught them and now they could read it in her books. But she commented, “I am afraid they don’t read it and understand.”

She continued that the educating of parents to train their children was the “very most important work before us as a people.”

So you see, ECEC has a two-fold opportunity: to love and train little ones, but also: to help educate parents in their important role.

YOU have a powerful influence on BOTH generations!

Blessings in 2014 from me and mine to YOU and YOURS!  

Sue