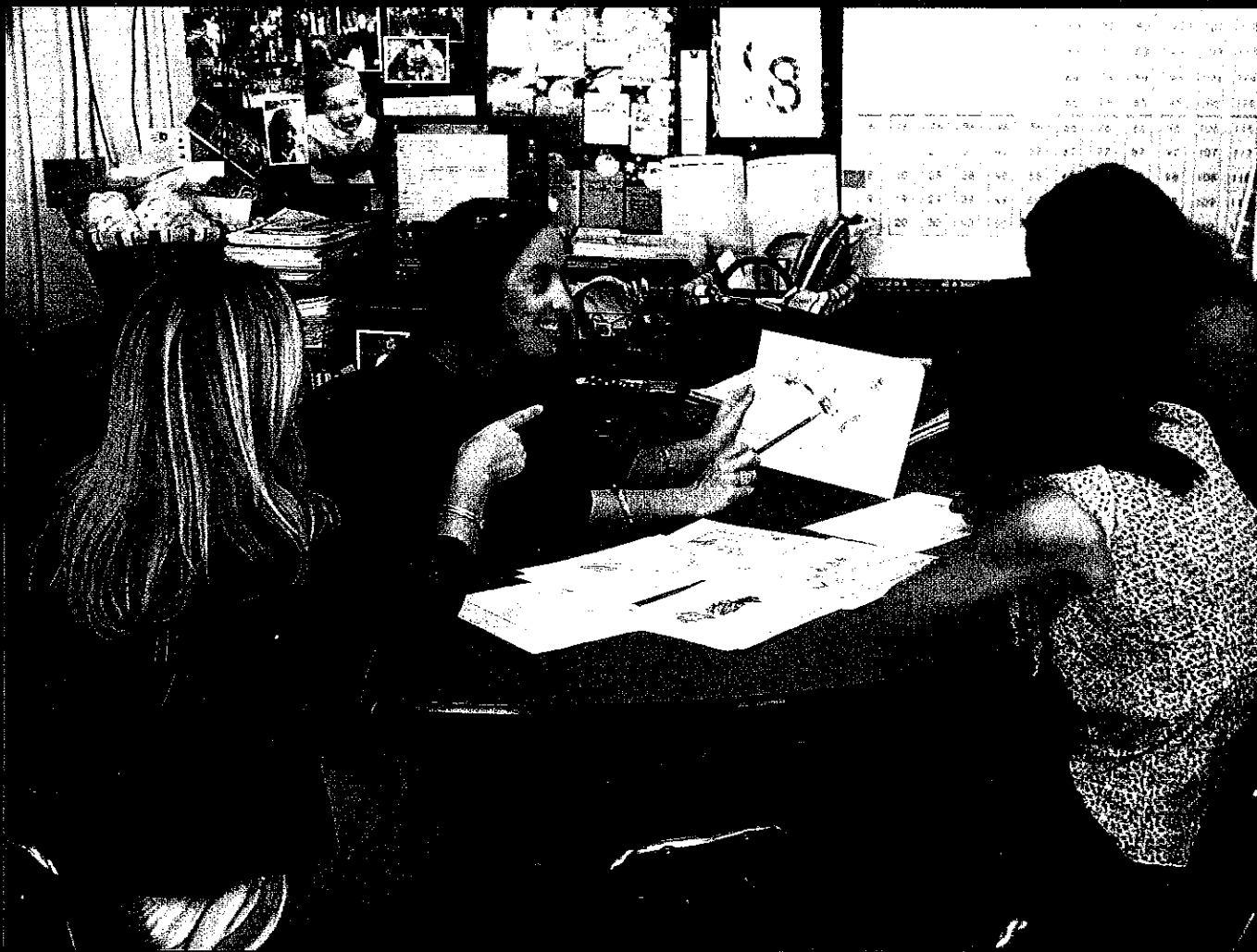


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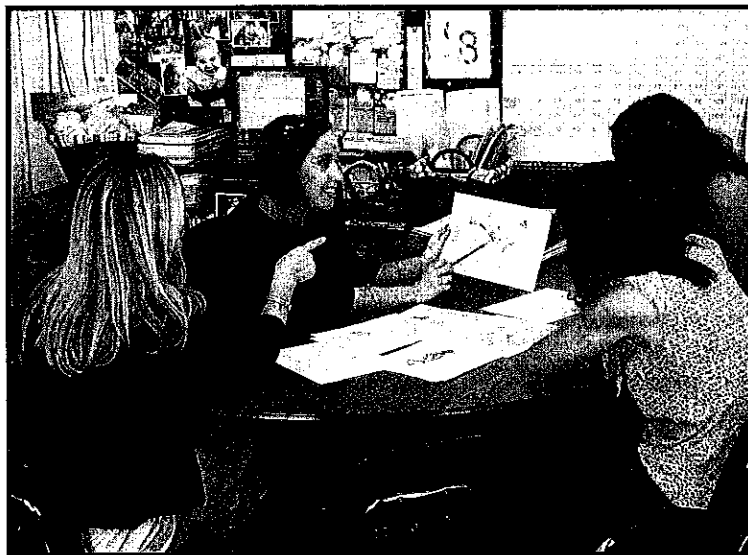


**Building Coalitions
Building Learning Communities**

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Building Coalitions
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The Delta Kappa Gamma Bulletin

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Prose manuscripts for the *Bulletin*, a refereed journal, are reviewed by the Editorial Board and the Society editorial staff. Selection is based on relevance of the

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*The Delta Kappa Gamma Society International
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ARTICLES

- 6 Success by Working Together: A County-wide Coalition to Recognize Outstanding Teachers
by Johna Lee Faulconer
- 10 Professional Learning Communities: Overcoming the Roadblocks
by Nan Lujan & Barbara Day
- 18 A Community Coalition Promotes Family Literacy with Story Celebrations
by M. Susan McWilliams
- 22 Innovative Cooperative Learning
by Lynn Romeo, Mary Brennan, Terri Rothman & Donna Mitchell
- 27 Baby TALK: A Community Builds a Trustworthy System to Support Parents of Young Children
by Claudia Quigg
- 32 How Can Elementary Teachers Collaborate More Effectively with Parents to Support Student Literacy Learning?
by Carol Yerger St. George

VIEWPOINTS

- 39 Cyberspace and Connectivity: The New Fabric of Life and Learning
by Sue L. Pettit
- 43 Building Connections through Studying Abroad
by Marianne Skardéus

INTERVIEW

- 49 From Isolation to Collaboration and Community: An Interview with Dr. Nancy Sulla
conducted by Dr. Judith R. Merz

-
- 4 CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS
5 EDITORIAL
54 LETTERS TO THE EDITOR
55 SUBMISSION GUIDELINES
56 SUBMISSION GRID

COVER ARTWORK: Michelle Fish

Call for Submissions

Members are encouraged to submit manuscripts for consideration by the *Bulletin* Editorial Board. *The Delta Kappa Gamma Bulletin* accepts Action Research, Qualitative Research, Quantitative Research, Annotated Bibliographies, Program Descriptions, Position Papers, Book Reviews, Viewpoints, Graphic Arts, Letters to the Editor, and Poetry for **print** issues (spring, fall) and **online** issues (summer, winter). Manuscripts should be focused, well organized, effectively developed, concise, and appropriate for Bulletin readers. The style should be direct, clear, readable and free from gender, political, patriotic or religious bias. For more detailed information, please refer to the Submission Guidelines on page 55 and the Submission Grid on page 56. Listed below are the suggested themes of upcoming issues.

Summer 2010 (76-4) Women Educators and Changing Times

(Postmark deadline is March 1, 2010)

Redefining Roles • Gender Roles • Career Change • Leadership Roles • Accountability
Responsibility • Ethics • Teacher Preparation • Certification • National Board Certification
Alternative pathways • Teacher-student Relationships • Respect • International Influences

Fall 2010 (77-1) Innovations

(Postmark deadline is June 1, 2010)

Physical & Emotional Environments • Sustainability • “Going Green” • Healthy Buildings
Security • Health Concerns in Schools • New Designs • International Structures/Infrastructures

Submit all materials to:

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Claudia Quigg

Baby TALK: A Community Builds a Trustworthy System to Support Parents of Young Children

BY CLAUDIA QUIGG

Baby TALK unites parents, schools and communities into a trustworthy community system to support and nurture their very young children. Baby TALK has developed a model to “cast a net” over a community to identify and screen every family with a baby in order to identify needs and connect families with resources. Relationships with partner agencies provide layers of program support. Communities outside Decatur, Illinois are using this model with success.

In the 1980’s, educators became aware of the importance of the early years of life in supporting optimal human development (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). With this growing awareness, many schools realized they would need to collaborate with communities to nurture young children.

Decatur, Illinois is a mid-sized Midwestern city with a large proportion of low-income families; 67% of school children receive free or reduced hot lunch. In 1986, representatives of the school district, public library, public health department, two community hospitals, and an adult literacy program met to consider ways to provide greater support to parents during the

first three years of their children’s lives. To do so, they knew professionals working in education, health care and social services would need

THE AUTHOR

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to build trusting relationships with parents in the early years of children's lives. This group developed Baby TALK, a program model for supporting parents and encouraging early literacy. Professional early childhood parent educators began visiting parents of newborns at local hospital obstetric units, learning about families' needs, encouraging them in the nurture of their babies, and supplying the parents with information about child development and books to start their babies' home libraries.



Figure 1: A Baby TALK Teacher shares a book with a new mother in her hospital obstetric room.

Baby TALK soon established a mission which would drive the effort: **to positively impact child development and nurture healthy parent-child relationships during the critical early years.**

This modest beginning evolved into a system through which every family giving birth in Decatur is met and supported based on individual needs. Baby TALK has something to offer parents from every demographic, from parents with advanced degrees to parents who have not yet graduated from high school, and also offers a number of programs which blend families from different cultures. Baby TALK has identified that this community-wide approach makes a difference for school readiness as well as promotes healthy parent-child relationships (Baby TALK Curriculum, 2009).

Critical Concepts

Over 23 years of working with families, Baby TALK has developed a comprehensive curriculum for use in a variety of program settings and with diverse populations. This curriculum is based on Baby TALK's Mission and is informed by a body of ideas forming the program's "**Critical Concepts:**"

- **"Tell me about your baby."** Establishing parents as "experts" and honoring all they already know about their children.
- **"Going where families are."** Designing programs to meet families at locations convenient to their needs.
- **"Coming alongside."** Joining families' systems rather than asking them to join the separate systems of the many agencies that serve them.
- **"Building relationships."** Approaching with empathy—on every level—opens doors. Putting professionals' agendas aside in favor of addressing parents' issues.
- **"Collaboration."** Sharing resources with community partners to facilitate best results for children.
- **"Systems building."** Organizations strategizing to bring their services together for families in a way that serves them seamlessly and efficiently.
- **"Parallel process."** Recognizing that the ethics and strategies for supporting families also facilitate our work with professional collaborators.
- **"Facing difficult issues."** Being willing to have hard conversations with parents and with colleagues.
- **"Becoming ever better."** Using reflective practice for professionals who work with families to hone their skills for greater effectiveness.

The Trustworthy System

Child developmentalist Erik Erikson (1963) defined a child's first critical task as learning trust versus mistrust. Baby TALK maintains that during the period in which parents are raising their

infants, parents are also learning about whether or not they can trust the system of care which supports them. Many parallel processes support what the program identifies as the "Trustworthy System of Care" (Baby TALK Professional Curriculum, 2009). The same methods that enable parents to nurture their children can be used effectively in professionals' encounters with parents and in professionals' work with each other.

The last decade has demonstrated that communities outside Decatur can foster this dynamic by using a similar approach. While needs and opportunities may be different in every community, the following "Twelve Words" establish an effective mechanism for reaching young families:

Build a system. Identify others interested in serving young families in your community. Learn about their assets and services, and discover opportunities to assist one another in meeting goals for families. Establish a system of communication for ongoing support of families.

Screen every family. "Cast a Net" over your targeted population in order to identify who is raising children and learn about families. Screening may include outreach to hospitals, clinics or other community locations where parents and children may access services.

Identify the need. Use this screening to identify which families may face the greatest challenges in raising their children, particularly as those challenges relate to parents' age, education, or lack of family support. Identify which families are already being served by other agencies, and which ones have needs that can be addressed either through the program or other community resources. Make appropriate referrals immediately to demonstrate respect for families.



Figure 2: Mother and child enjoy play time with a Baby TALK teacher prior to their pediatric appointment at the Macon County Health Department.

Deliver appropriate services. Families with multiple risk factors may enter a system of case management with purposeful, frequent encounters through home visits or other points within the system of care. Families with fewer risk factors may be served less intensively through group services offered through the community's various programs.

Community Programs

Baby TALK's reach has grown exponentially as a result of the community system that sponsors it. Collaborations with the following partners bring together services for families:

- Richland Community College--a Family Literacy program in which parents study English as a Second Language or earn their GED (Quigg & Mandernach, 1995).
- Decatur Public Library--Lapsits and Baby TALK Times at the library, serving families of every description (Gross, 1998, and Quigg, 2005). Baby TALK and Decatur Public Library developed a parent manual, *Babies & Books: A Joyous Beginning* (Quigg & Gross, 2008), to give to new parents within the context of newborn hospital visits.

- Decatur School District--an alternative middle/high school for pregnant and parenting teens.
- Decatur Memorial Hospital--an early intervention program of integrated therapy to children under three who have a disability or a delay.
- Macon County Health Department and the Community Health Improvement Center--education and encouragement to families served by the WIC program as well as families receiving regular pediatric care.
- St. Mary's Hospital and Decatur Memorial Hospital--work with pregnant women in the prenatal clinics of both hospitals in preparation for parenting and work with families of newborns on the obstetric units.
- Millikin University--interns in Early Childhood Education and Nursing who provide volunteer services as part of their curricula.
- The Millikin-Decatur Symphony Orchestra--an annual community Lullaby Concert where everyone (even the players) wears their pajamas.
- Central Christian Church--space for many of these programs to take place.

Key to the success of these and other programs is the mechanism of "Casting a Net" over the entire child-rearing population. By meeting every family at the hospital, the needs of families can be matched with the resources in the community, resulting in agencies successfully delivering their services, and more families finding the resources they need for success.

What Difference does it Make?

For many years Decatur School District used the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT) to measure incoming kindergartners' language readiness. Scores for children lagged behind national norms. Beginning in 1991, Baby TALK compared the PPVT scores of children whose families had received program services to children of families who had not. General trends in the communities using the program indicate that Baby TALK seems to positively impact the re-



Figure 3: This mother enjoys a book with her son at Baby TALK's family literacy program.

ceptive language skills of incoming kindergartners (Mandernach, 1994).

In 1992, this hopeful development led Baby TALK to redouble its efforts, working more intensively with low-income families who receive medical services at the health department or community health clinic. By this point, outreach efforts had saturated the community so that virtually all entering kindergartners who had been born in Decatur had been served by the program (Baby TALK Professional Curriculum, 2009).

Baby TALK beyond Decatur, Illinois

Some of Baby TALK's most significant work is now being replicated in communities outside Illinois. Some examples include:

- Tuscaloosa, Alabama was looking for a way to raise the academic achievement of children across the community. The University of Alabama Child Development program sent staff to Decatur to study the model, attend training and return home to establish a Baby TALK program in their own community. Educators now meet every family shortly after birth at local hospitals and spend time with parents and children at the public health department.
- Lafayette, Indiana, home of Purdue University, was challenged by a significant rise in child abuse. Community leaders recognized that they needed a coordinated system to "cast a net" to identify at-risk families. They chose Baby TALK as their organizing structure, and implemented visits to newborns' families at hospital obstetric units.

"Becoming Ever Better"

Baby TALK is committed to increasing effectiveness in professionals who work with parents of young children, having trained more than 2000 professionals since 1989. The Baby TALK Professional Association maintains connections with those professionals who also access updated materials and maintain current certifications. Monthly newsletters, an internet community, regional networks, and an annual meeting allow for the exchange of ideas, information and ongoing technical support.

Conclusion

Schools are eager to support parents in preparing children for school success. Within communi-

ties a variety of resources may assist parents in making the most of their children's early years, but often these programs struggle to reach targeted families. Baby TALK provides for a system which can "cast a net" to identify young families and deliver appropriate services. Such a system has been demonstrated to have a positive impact on child development.

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