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The Journal of Developmental Processes

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Editorial:

Igniting the Spark: High Tech High and Beyond

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Often in these pages I write about a book, or a newspaper or magazine article that makes me think differently about children, or the intertwining of biology and culture, or the connection among all species in the natural world. I love doing that: the vast and deep sea of human experience captured in fiction or journalism so often reflects aspects of our scientific interest in developmental processes. This time, I want to tell you about two books that are steeped in science in a double-edged and unique way.

Perspectives of San Diego Bay: A Field Guide and San Diego Bay: A Story of Exploitation and Restoration are remarkable volumes. The cover of each proclaims the authors to be “the students of Gary and Jerri-Ann Jacobs High Tech High” (HTH). According to its website, “High Tech High began in 2000 as a single charter high school launched by a coalition of San Diego business leaders and educators,” and has since expanded.

The story of these books shows what happens when the spark of engagement and empowerment is brought to young people. The whole thing started, in a way, with Jane Goodall, the world-famous chimpanzee researcher. Years ago, Goodall founded Roots & Shoots, which, as she puts it in the field guide’s foreword, is a “conservation and humanitarian education program for youth.” The Roots & Shoots students at HTH, led by teachers Jay Vavra, Tom Fehrenbacher, and Rodrigo Buenviaje, took on the project of researching and writing the material for these two books.

Perspectives, the field guide, will inhabit my suitcase the next time I fly to southern California. Divided into sections on fauna, biodiversity, and biogeography, places and spaces, and summative analysis, it teems with information that brings the natural world of the region alive. In the best way, I got lost in the text, wandering from section to section, dipping in here and there. I found myself wanting to search the intertidal zone for burrowing anemones

and giant sea stars; to hear the long-billed curlew’s song; and to watch the interactions between the pelicans and the fishermen at Shelter Island (the humans benefit from the pelicans’ keen eye for locating fish in the water). I love that *Canis lupus familiaris* and *Homo sapiens* were included in the section on mammals! (I have to take issue, though, with “Humans are currently the only animals that walk completely upright.” Tell that to a penguin!)

Both books include reflections as well as data gathered by the students. San Diego’s Boat Channel moved Merlin Gunn-Cicero to write a paragraph including: “The wake of a boat occasionally breaks against the shore, disturbing the dull silence. I enjoy the break in the monotony for a moment, until the sky splits in half from the sound of the jet turbines screaming overhead. I can’t stay up here any longer; I’m dying to dunk my head below the surface of the water to chat with the fishes.” Me, I’d head for the Octopus Garden; the Boat Channel, I learned, is filled with octopus dens.

San Diego Bay opens with a discussion of Native American hunting and gathering, which made this anthropologist feel right at home. Humans arrived at this coastal area 8,000 to 12,000 years ago and made a good living from the sea. From this launching point, the book devotes most of its chapters to local resources, ranging from tuna to kelp additives to salt. Salt? Who knew a report on the impact of the salt industry on the San Diego region’s fauna could make good reading?

Both books are well illustrated, with photos, timelines, and the like. There’s science everywhere in these volumes. We learn what we can all do to work toward a cleaner, better environment in San Diego and elsewhere; on a different layer, the science of human dynamic process shines through. These books reveal what may happen when adults and children spark each other’s talents. Pay it forward!

This Issue

This issue begins with an article on the still-face experiment. In a fascinating departure from the usual focus on infants' response, Katherine Weinberg, Marjorie Beeghly, Karen L. Olson, and Ed Tronick report what happens when toddlers encounter a totally (if briefly) non-responsive mom and then reunite with a "normal" mom. Qualitative and quantitative data show that toddlers use a wider array of responses and reactions than infants do when trying to make sense of these situations. Attempts to initiate joint attention and repetitions of verbal utterances were frequent strategies by these 2½ year olds. Like adults, children struggle in creative ways to make meaning in a world that includes unexpected events.

In the JDP Forum, Stuart Shanker combines analysis of cutting-edge research in psychology and neurobiology with themes in the history of philosophy to explore the development of healthy minds in children. For Shanker, what's to be avoided is any assumption of linear relationship between where a child is *right now* and what she may become five years down the road. Developmental trajectories are not fixed, and well-tailored treatment methods may rechannel the course a child is on. The challenge is to conceptualize how to do the science, for example the science of ADHD and autism, without falling back on old nature/nurture-type dichotomies. Shanker offers concrete examples of how this approach may work.

Change is at the heart of the dynamic-systems approach that animates both Shanker's and Erika Lunkheimer's work. Lunkheimer responds to Shanker, and recognizes the challenge of dynamic-system science when she remarks that "The child is a moving target." Lunkheimer urges this emerging field to embrace the study of normative as well as non-normative development, and discontinuous as well as stable processes. She suggests that the role of families and schools in developmental intervention should now come front and center.

The role of the family in developmental process is the heart of Susan Longtin and Sima Gerber's article, which centers on language learning in children diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Longtin and Gerber offer a detailed comparison of three parent-based programs that aim to increase the communicative and linguistic skills of ASD children. A model that gives primacy to social-emotional engagement (which provides the motivation to learn) and cognitive effort (which challenges a child's resources) is, the authors believe, key to evaluating parent-based programs. It also may aid the therapist's—especially the speech-language therapist's—own process in working to improve children's lives.

In the final article, we return to the realm of toddlers' behavior. Pnina S. Klein, Renat Laish-Mishali, and Nurit Jaegermann investigate whether mothers modify the ways they guide and teach their children about the world in clear relation to their children's temperament and sensory-processing behaviors. Among the findings with potentially significant implications is that children who have high neurological thresholds ("sensory seekers") receive quite different maternal behaviors than do children who are highly reactive to and uneasy around certain stimuli, even though these two groups of children tend to be highly active. As the authors point out, even mothers who are highly sensitive to their children's specific circumstances may be unaware of their own behavioral tendencies in this regard.

In a pair of essays, books of keen interest to *JDP* readers are critically examined. Ira Glovinsky takes issue with the ways *Bipolar Children: Cutting-Edge Controversy, Insights, and Research*, edited by Sharma Olfman, approaches the phenomenon of pediatric bipolar disorder. Glovinsky finds the book to be simplistic and riddled with misconceptions that may harm families who consult it for help.

The Dangerous Book for Boys and *The Daring Book for Girls* have become publishing phenomena in the last year. Dorothy Sluss explores the play activities offered to boys or girls included in, as well as left out of, these books, and asks to what degree the books are as gendered as their titles suggest. (Because the *JDP* is multi-species in orientation, we toyed with, but eventually dropped, the idea of sending Sluss a third book to review: the new *Dangerous Book for Dogs*. Stay tuned to see what animal comes next in the series.)

An Editorial Transition

I have made no secret of how much I love reading and writing. After a three-year term as *JDP* Editor, I'm stepping down in order to have more time to pursue writing about science for the public.

Of course, I'm committed to my "day job" at the College of William & Mary, teaching undergraduates who are as stimulating daily companions as the students of High Tech High must be—but that's the thing. Teaching in the university and talking with the public "out there" should be, I believe, seamless—one big holistic activity with the same end: to share and to exchange and to expand knowledge. It's a lot of fun and I always learn a great deal. Right now, I'm working to finish my book on animal-human relationships in evolutionary perspective, and I'm starting to publish some magazine articles too.

I want to express heartfelt thanks to everyone who has gotten the *JDP* off to such a good start: Dr. Stanley Greenspan, Dr. Serena Wieder and the staff in Bethesda at www.icdl.com; the *JDP* Board, with special thanks to Alan Fogel and Stuart Shanker; and my Associate Editor Dr. Ira Glovinsky. Personally, the day-to-day activities became immeasurably more efficient, professional, and fun because of my good fortune to work long-distance with copyeditor Jane Mild LaRoque, and here in Williamsburg, with William & Mary graduate students Megan Habas Siudzinski and Jennifer Camp.

It's my pleasure to announce that, by the time this issue reaches you, *JDP*'s new editor will be in place. Gail Melson is Professor Emerita in the Department of Child Development and Family Studies at Purdue University. Her book *Why the Wild Things Are: Animals in the Lives of Children* has deeply influenced my own understanding of the connections that form between children and animals, and the significance of those bonds for healthy child development.

The *JDP*'s next issue will be a unique King-Melson hybrid product! I have invited a number of authors to contribute to a special issue on serious challenges facing children around the world. I aimed to go beyond our typical focus on the US, Canada, and Western Europe. It's easy for me to say that every child's spark should be ignited; it's something else again to take a hard look at what some children face in order to get an education, stay healthy, or in certain cases, just survive in the first place (and of course, these same challenges do occur in the US, Canada, and Western Europe). Hardest of all can be to know how to help. Please look for the special issue, which Gail Melson will edit, in late 2008, and read about the work of some of the people who are making a difference.

What is the best way to welcome Gail Melson to the *JDP*? Greet her with your own difference-making behavior: your articles, your books for review, your ideas and your comments should now go to gmelson@purdue.edu. Gail, it's all yours!