

## **Web-Based Radio Show**


### **Learning Communities, Learning Relationships, and Learning Programs throughout the Lifespan**

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Good morning. This is Dr. Greenspan. Welcome to you to our web-based radio show. Thank you for joining us today. Today's show is going to focus on learning communities and learning relationships for adults and older children. As you may know, this is a subject that is not sufficiently focused on. Often, we focus on younger children, appropriately so, but we need to focus equal attention on all the children and adults. I will not be joined by my colleague, Serena Weider, who is in Israel this week, but any of you who want to call in and ask questions are welcome to do so.


As I mentioned, we don't pay sufficient attention to older children and adults in creating learning communities. Before we get into the details of how to set up learning communities and learning relationships and learning educational programs for older children and adults, let's look at the goals for older children and adults. The goals are quite similar as they are for very, very young children. We should maximize learning, maximize human development. What's interesting is that individuals with special needs, which often means that there's difficulty or challenges in different areas of processing experience, such as verbal or language or making sense out of what you see – visual-spatial thinking – or motor planning and sequencing or modulating sensation –



so that you're not too over responsive or under responsive to sights and sounds and touch. When there are these processing differences which characterize most individuals with special needs or severe developmental problems, it becomes a life-long goal and can be a life-long opportunity and, in many respects, life-long fun and excitement to continue to get stronger in these abilities. It's not any different from anybody trying to develop more competency or capacity in a particular skill, whether it's reading or tennis or ballet or playing guitar. We all receive a lot of pleasure and a sense of mastery from moving forward in one or another capacity. In a sense, you could argue, I think, that the human organism is characterized as much by the need to survive and eat and be healthy as by the need to learn, to master new skills, and master his or her environment.

Now, what's important to emphasize is that individuals with special needs have a longer window of opportunity to master skills. Often, for individuals without special needs, certain basic skill levels are at their peak at relatively early ages. So it's often commented on that many Nobel Prize winning mathematicians or physicists do their best work before they're 30 or, certainly, before they're 40. Yet, many philosophers do their best work at older ages and, certainly, people in my field – mental health professionals, often hit their peak in their later years. Those fields that require enormous experience often result in longer learning curves. Those that require certain acute mental skills may reach a peak at an earlier age, like some of the mathematical and reasoning skills.


The important thing to note is that when I work with adults with special needs I notice that the learning curve for the basics, such as language and thinking skills, which may peak at relatively early ages for individuals without processing challenges, don't peak at these earlier ages, but continue to be very, very learnable, and the learning curve can increase in a nice rapid rate way into the forties, fifties, and sixties, even. So that the old notion that a child stops learning, let's say, at the end of high school or college or graduate school is just not correct. We all know that life keeps teaching us lessons, but we tend to think that experience and wisdom is different from building up that basic brain power, but, in fact, there's evidence that in all of us, different parts of the brain are myelinating and connections are forming well into the forties and fifties, and perhaps sixties, in terms of age. My hunch is that individuals with special needs with processing problems have more of a window, and actually more of a learning curve, in the adult years. What that means is that we have to create challenging learning communities and learning relationships and learning educational programs throughout the lifespan. So that becomes very, very important.



The question, really, is how to do that. As is well known, our system of education tends to slack off a bit. We're putting great energy and effort into early education, and there's often great effort put into working with kids during the early school years, but by the time children are teenagers and, certainly, by when they graduate high school there's very little in terms of formal community supported or state supported educational programs that harness the true abilities of our children and young adults. Often, parents create their own opportunities, with a focus for many on vocational approaches if the individual is capable of mastering a certain vocation. But how do you promote social relationships? How do you promote more basic reasoning skills, more basic capacities for language, more basic capacities for understanding what you see, in older children and adults?

Well these, unfortunately, have only been addressed by pioneering individuals and pioneering programs, but not universally yet. So, what we're going to do today is set up a model for such programs and we're going to argue that we need to come together – professionals, parents, policy makers – to change the assumptions that guide the care of individuals with special needs and see this as a lifespan endeavor – not one that focuses only on infancy and early childhood, but one that focuses equally across the span of life. Many will immediately say this is too costly, but it's really too costly not to do it because it costs more to do nothing and take care of someone than it costs to help that person be a more contributing and functioning member of society or their own learning community. So, it's not a question of saving money, it's a question of simply spending money wisely.

So, what should the goals be of our learning communities and learning relationships? Well, first and foremost, I want you to picture a number of simultaneous goals. Our goal with older children and adults, across the span of life, just like with younger children, is to improve their capacities in two basic areas. One is their processing skills. We want to create learning environments and relationships and educational programs that are constantly working on strengthening language skills; visual-spatial thinking – making sense out of what you see; the ability to modulate sensations – not be over or under reactive to what you hear or touch or smell; and the ability to plan and sequence actions and problem solve. So, we want to have environments and communities that are constantly challenging those skills and helping individuals develop them.




Secondly, we want to create environments that are constantly helping individuals move to higher levels of development, of social and intellectual capacities. We call these the functional emotional developmental levels, which means we want to be strengthening attention; engagement; two-way back-and-forth gesturing; shared social problem solving – the ability to engage in many, many back-and-forth patterns of emotional signaling in order to solve problems together such as two people working together to figure out how something works or to move an object or to find something – in another words, social signal reading and social collaboration toward solving collective problems. The fifth level, is using ideas creatively, whether they're in picture form, in written form, through typing, or in verbal forms, and then the sixth level is using ideas logically and making sense with ideas – again, using pictures, using writing, using words – whatever form the individual is able to organize.

Now, often, unfortunately, when we focus on these basic developmental levels we don't focus on all of them sufficiently, and we don't focus on them in a meaningful context. We may work on having individuals memorize a word and connecting it to a picture, or typing a few words, or trying to communicate their basic needs through pictures, but we don't work on ongoing conversations. In other words, what I'm talking about here is the goal where all six levels are worked on, where we have long chains of back-and-forth interactions using as many symbols as we can in a meaningful way, and in a form that lends itself to the individual's way of expressing him or herself, and that over time we explore all these avenues of expressions – written forms, picture forms, verbal forms, showing forms, etc.

So we have these two basic goals – working on all the processing areas and working to higher and higher levels at social and emotional capacities. And it doesn't stop with just being logical; it goes on to what we call we call multi-causal thinking and gray area thinking and reflective thinking. Again, these can be done using pictures, words, and a combination of the above, or typing or other augmentative assistance. So, we're constantly pushing for higher and higher levels of thinking skills.


So how do we create communities that can have these two goals? Now, there's a third feature – a third goal – where for older children and adults we need to create a living context within our educational context, and a day-to-day interpersonal context where the individual can meaningfully build these skills in ways that are appropriate to their interests and developmental age. I make a distinction here between developmental age and chronological age. You may have an individual at 22 who really



has the interests of a 12-year-old. The way to approach that individual is through those interests, not through what you think ought to be the interests of a 22-year-old. On the other hand, you may have a person who's 30 years old who has the language skills of a six-year-old, but has some of the interests of a 30-year-old, whether it be music or some other activities, and there you want to approach the person through those types of activities.

So, these goals have to be met or approached through the interests of the individual and that's going to vary considerably with a group of different ages. Also, another goal of our communities, in addition to having interests that truly capture the personal motives of the people occupying the learning community, is to recognize there will be a need among many and a desire among those helping create the communities, for facilitating social interaction. Social relationships are really sought after by many individuals with special needs, even though there may be difficulties in mastering social relationships. So an individual may isolate himself because he's over sensitive to noise or sound, or because he doesn't have the skills to negotiate the simplest of social gestures, but down deep there may be a deep longing and yearning to be close to other people. I've never worked with a child, teenager, or adult who didn't have that longing and yearning once we found the way of relating to the individual that is pleasant and enjoyable and meaningful and satisfying. The key thing is finding out how that individual's nervous system works and making relationships something that are enjoyable, rather than obnoxious or aversive. That's the key, and the basic goal is always there, as far as I can tell and, unfortunately, over the years we've mistakenly assumed these individuals want to be alone when, really, what they want to do is experience harmony and pleasure and satisfaction, and they wish they could do it in a relationship with others, but they haven't found the ticket. Our job is to help them find that ticket. We do that by tailoring experiences to the individual's nervous system, but we do it with age-appropriate interests.

So, we want to create opportunities for social relationships. Among many older teenagers and young adults there's an enormous interest in being part of a group and being part of a network and having group activities. People will light up. At a recent community function where we have a drama group for individuals with special needs and they put on very interesting productions that they write and produce, and – with a little bit of help from the staff – direct themselves, I noticed after watching such a production at a place called The Imagination Stage here in Bethesda, Maryland, that the performers were talking about the party they were going to have afterward. Now these




were reasonably verbal individuals with special needs, but all with severe language and motor or other problems, and yet they were enjoying social activities – there was some adult supervision available – and these individuals were in their early twenties and they were lighting up in terms of a gleam in their eyes and joy in their faces and talking like almost any teenager would about hanging out after the performance. It was delightful to see the pleasure they had in the sense of group, in the sense of camaraderie, in the sense of relationships with each other.

So, the learning communities have to create a meaningful social context for social relationships and social interactions. The other goal of the learning community, I think, needs to be the opportunity – for those who are able – for meaningful work, as well as meaningful learning. The work should always be learning based. For example, many individuals with special needs who maybe are not ready to fully take care of themselves and live on their own or be in colleges or junior colleges or educational programs on their own, nonetheless have skills they can contribute, whether it's computer skills, whether it's gardening, whether it's other types of work. One individual who I saw not long ago with a genetic syndrome that limited cognitive and social skills was enjoying working in an administrative support capacity doing Xeroxing and doing other support activities in a large research center, and was very efficient and very organized and very dutiful and thoroughly enjoyed that activity. There are individuals, as we know, with special gifts in certain areas, even though they may be limited in other areas.

So, we need to create occupational opportunities, where there's continuing learning, but also development of special gifts, as well as just doing enjoyable activities and work that the person can do. Some of these will have to be more supervised than others, and not all individuals will be capable of doing this. One interesting aspect of this may be individuals with more skills may be able to earn some extra cash, so to speak, and have an occupation helping to take care of some of the individuals with lesser skills.

So, these are some of the goals: ongoing education, working on the processing areas, working on the basic intellectual and social capacities, peer relationships, meaningful work for those able, and meaningful other activities for those not able to perform meaningful work.


How do we create communities that will be self-sustaining, that will create this type of learning throughout the span of life, for everyone from age 16 up through age



95 or older, hopefully? Here's a model and I'm going to present this as an ideal, something that might be strived for, not that every program would need to encompass all the elements of this model. We need to really hear from individuals who've been doing this and have, I'm sure, put elements of this model into place in highly innovative ways, and hear about the details and about the innovative ways they've been doing this. But, here's a model that we can think about as, really, an example of how to accomplish many of these goals.

One would be that you would set up our community for individuals of different ages, different skill levels, and different capacities and have different levels of support for individuals of different capacities, not unlike individuals who are getting into their older years of life who sometimes live in a community with varying levels of support. They have an apartment, sometimes, with no support at all, and just enjoy the golf and recreation and meeting activities and educational programs, but then as physical ailments or other limitations occur there are varying degrees of nursing support available and there's graduated support. I would envision this model as a similar kind of system where individuals who require very little or no support, but there's a little bit of structure, are alongside individuals who require more support, and there's graduated support available for those who need it.

The staff would be trained – and, again, some of the higher-functioning or better-functioning individuals could earn some cash in staff roles part of the time, as well – to do two things: to keep fostering higher levels of social and intellectual development, using our functional emotional developmental model – in other words, more engagement, more interaction, more creative and logical thinking and so forth, and we would set up environments in our learning community where there would be activities to strengthen auditory processing and language, visual-spatial processing, motor planning and sequencing, and sensory modulation. In other words, we would have programs just like we do in schools and just like we do in individual therapies for young children, and just like we do in our home program, where part of each day would be spent on strengthening each of these core processing abilities, as well as, again, supporting the overall development of intellectual and social skills. This would be staff directed – some of it would be group activities, but it would be built around the natural interest of the individuals. So, for example, there'd be a heavy emphasis on things like drama and dance and art and music. Why? Because these facilitate motor skills, sequencing skills, visual-spatial skills, and – if you talk while you're doing it – verbal skills. Also, it's often highly pleasurable to many individuals with special needs. Often




those with severe language problems, they often have a very well developed sense of music or sense of appreciation of things that are visual, so it plays to natural strengths. Gardening is another such activity that might lend itself very well. Sculpting is another kind of art activity that lends itself very well. So, we would create centers, areas, where individuals would spend time, where there'd be pleasurable, enjoyable activities that would foster each of these important processing areas.

So, in so doing, at the same time the staff would be trained to be working with the individuals at the basic level of intellectual and social skills getting to higher levels, mastering our six basics and getting to the higher levels of thinking, for example, so that would require doing that part of the day. Another part of the day for those capable would be work or occupational oriented, again, applying this to the natural strengths the individuals have. There is no reason why such learning communities couldn't be set up to be income producing so that they would hire their services out to others in the community, bringing in some income that could pay a salary for those who were able to contribute a little more. That salary might offset some of the fees for operating such learning communities, so individuals capable of doing computer services or gardening or other kinds of work, but for a variety of reasons needed to live in the learning community, would be able to earn varying levels of income based on their skills and their capacities.

As I mentioned before, part of this could also be helping out in the learning community with those able helping out those who are less able, so there'd be a sense of collegiality and a sense of support for one another. There would also be a value system in terms of value on relationships and around mutual support and around building an identity with the community, so there would be a sense of involvement and investment. Obviously, such learning communities would take a great deal of staff training and staff support so that the staff would be knowledgeable in the different processing skills and in promoting in all interactions the basic capacities for engagement and interaction and creative and logical thinking. This would be promoted throughout the day, as well as in special sessions and, depending on individuals' needs, they may have anywhere from four to eight sessions a day with staff members working on these fundamental capacities.


Also, as part of the ideal community, there would be many social activities for those able and capable of it. Again, these could be involved in areas of natural interest – art, drama, music, painting, sculpture – as well as other activities – computer games and



developing new computer games. There should be time, for those able, for them to have, obviously, time for themselves to develop social activities as they see fit, depending on how the learning community is housed so that there are opportunities for doing things in that larger community and, again, that would also depend on the interests and the skill level and the capacities of the individual in these learning communities.

As we talk about this, one is aware that laying out the broad framework – the parameters – is easier than the details in making such a learning community work. Obviously, here's where model programs and individual programs can try different particular ways of accomplishing these goals, and there's probably almost an infinite way of meeting these broad goals. What's important are a few basic facts, however. One basic fact is that individuals can learn and do learn and will learn if we challenge them throughout the course of their lives, and that we as a society have a vested interest in providing educational opportunities i.e., learning communities and learning relationships throughout the lifespan. This is based on the premise that our responsibility should not be age related, but should be developmentally related. If you look back at the history of equal opportunities for equal education, we picked providing educational activities for high school and many places for junior college and college and stated-supported institutions based on the notion that we all achieve certain educational outcomes or educational payment before we send young people on their own to make their way in the world. We thought about that in terms of age and opportunity but, really, doesn't it make much sense to think about it in terms of developmental capacities – that our responsibility is to get all individuals to a certain developmental level? If for some individuals that takes a lifetime of effort, so be it. That's our obligation – to provide that lifetime of effort.

If you think about it, we have programs for the elderly. What is that based on? Individuals who can't take care of themselves, who don't have a certain developmental capacity. We're not adequate in those programs and often we wind up "warehousing" individuals. We do this for our young individuals, too, who have special needs conditions. But it costs more to warehouse – even if you don't have a society that doesn't want to have a heart, but only wants to have a pocketbook – it costs more to warehouse than to do a proper program, and it certainly costs more in the long run because you have people needing more and more services.




So, it's both economically wise, but it's also wise from the point of view of the human spirit to see our responsibility as hinging on the developmental capacities of the person, not their age or not having provided a certain educational opportunity and say, "That's it." So, as long as the person has not yet mastered a certain developmental level, and I would say that's the level of reflective thinking, where a person can be self-evaluative and reflect on his own ideas and reason problems through, knowing where they're strong, where they're weak, and make good judgments for themselves. That's when people can basically begin moving toward self-sufficiency in taking care of their own needs. But until we get to that developmental level, it's usually the individuals who require some community responsibility – this doesn't mean their family shouldn't have a big responsibility in this – they should, but it's really a family/community partnership, because some families are more able and some families less able to provide these kinds of learning communities and learning relationships for our children.

The second broad principle that should be a part of these communities, as I mentioned before, is that we shouldn't be working predominantly on concrete "living skills" and forget the developmental foundations for thinking and social relationships because what we've done historically is made an arbitrary distinction and we've said, "Okay, there are academic skills which are developmental in nature so we teach people to read to do math – or we're going to give up on those skills because we don't think the child or the individual can learn that; instead we're just going to teach them how to take a bus or how to walk outside without stepping into traffic or how to cross the street."

Now, what's missed when we make that arbitrary distinction is that both skills – taking a bus or walking across the street, and doing math or reading – require thinking. What we're really talking about is how high a level of thinking we can really get to. So we shouldn't set the limits or set the direction based on the concrete skill, but we should always be promoting higher levels of thinking and we should always be promoting it in two ways – the way of acquiring new knowledge through reading, through understanding numbers, through verbal or other ideational, symbolic communication interaction and through gestural problem solving.

So we should work on our basic levels, but we should always work on them in multiple contexts – knowledge-acquiring contexts, where you're building higher levels – as we try to do in school in the best schools, not in the worst schools – and in life skills – whether it's taking a bus or going shopping. Again, you can teach someone to take a bus and go shopping while you're teaching him to interact, teaching her to think, teaching




him to figure out what he's buying and what he want to buy, which is just as thinking-based as figuring out the reasons for the Civil War or the Revolutionary War. Again, we can teach either of those skills in a rote memory way. We can teach people to memorize dates and generals and battles, and they don't understand the Civil War or Revolutionary War and why we fought them and how they're different. We can teach them, also, to go to the grocery store and take two steps to the left and two steps to the right and the red package has the milk and the blue package has the cheese, or we can teach them to think it through. Rote memory is the inefficient way of teaching. Thinking is the good way of teaching. So the goal for our learning communities and for schools throughout the lifespan is not to make this arbitrary distinction between life skills and academic skills, but to make the distinction be thinking skills in multiple applications – academics, obviously, knowledge and new knowledge areas – and practical life skills, and always to be focusing on both for all our individuals – the most gifted in different areas and those with severe challenges.

The third basic characteristic that needs a little more elaboration is that while we're promoting both knowledge and practical skills, we're always doing that in a context that's strengthening all the processing areas that I mentioned before, from language to visual-spatial to motor, etc. So we're always promoting all processing areas as we're getting to higher and higher levels of thinking.

The fourth characteristic is we're not going to assume any more that individuals with special needs don't enjoy relationships because they may be avoidant or they may have unusual behaviors. We'll assume that their patterns of avoidance or patterns of unusual behaviors – whether it's shaking their hands or staring at a fan or getting overloaded quickly with too much sound – is related to unique features of their nervous system and that we have to be respectful of these unique features, but always working toward more flexibility, and recognize that nervous systems are by their nature plastic and human beings are dynamic learners whatever their limitations may be, but that the right environment can increase flexibility. So, we're not going to take individuals at face value, we're always going to see the potential for new learning and for becoming more flexible, and our job is to create the environment where that occurs. So that's, again, another different assumption that can guide these efforts.

Then the other assumption is not only do individuals want to relate, but there is a special natural tendency among most individuals to want to be part of the group – to share a group identity. In learning communities we can create these group identities




through shared activities. They can be work activities, they can be recreation – again, the ones that come to mind readily, but we shouldn’t be limited to these, have to do with drama, art, and music. A lot of these lend themselves because people can do them together, but also work opportunities – individuals like to master, like to contribute, like to have a sense of accomplishment. At various levels individuals can perform different kinds of tasks, some very, very sophisticated and some very, very challenging. The individual may need support for social activities and support in basic judgment, but may also be able to create software programs that are major contributions to the world. Other individuals may be capable of creating great works of art even though they may need support in other areas. So we have to be sensitive to special talents alongside the special needs and harness those.

At present, it’s going to take, I think a very, very large effort within the private sector among parents of individuals with special needs to help create model programs that show that this notion of learning communities, learning relationships, and learning educational programs can occur throughout the lifespan and demonstrate that this is workable, and demonstrate that this is financially achievable. Then we have to develop a grass roots effort among our representatives at the community, city, state, and national levels to change their assumptions about the nature of public responsibility for individuals with special needs, and see it as a lifelong commitment, a lifespan involvement in continuing the learning process until the individual achieves the developmental capacity for self-sufficiency. We’ve been struggling with this for almost centuries now – how to evaluate the individual’s capacities – and we’ve come very, very close to embracing the developmental perspective, for example, in our legal system – it’s not the actual age of the person, it’s the developmental age of a person. I think we have to have a similar basic assumption when it comes to our educational responsibilities, not just our legal responsibilities, to individuals.

So these are the outlines. Again, the challenge is in the details. How will we implement such programs? Let me just give an example of an individual in such a program who’s done very, very well, just to illustrate it can be done.

An individual whom I’ll call Robert is a 32-year-old man who had not spoken and tended to isolate himself and tended to be involved in certain routines. He stayed in bed during a large part of the day. He didn’t interact with others and would gesture just very, very crudely when he was hungry with some loud grumbling sounds. His very dutiful mother had been taking care of him with little hope for advancement. We were




able to involve Robert and his mother, after she sought consultation, in a learning relationship and began building a learning community for Robert to participate in, taking advantage of existing resources in his community – it wasn't yet organized into one building or one structure or one integrated program, but you'll see it could very well have been that way, as well, and it would've been much easier if it had been like that, but it showed how elements are so important.

Robert's mother was very devoted, so we had her begin to work on building that engagement, building a more complex system of gestural communication with Robert, and getting into more problem-solving sequences. Since Robert's main form of communication was around getting fed, Mother played a little more dumb and extended those moments when Robert was negotiating for some of his favorite foods, from gruff voices to actually some pointing and some hand maneuvers, so he could show what he really wanted. When Mother would get it wrong and bring the wrong thing in, he would shake his head and eventually take his mother to the refrigerator and show her exactly what he wanted when she couldn't "get" it. We built a more complex system of preverbal communication. This was done gradually and very gently so as not to aggravate Robert, who could easily have meltdowns, and he was a big, 32-year old man and this was not something we wanted to invite since his mom was small and frail and since Father had passed away.

As Robert got more purposeful and intentional, and as their time together increased through negotiations around food, Robert began brightening up a little bit. We began making these interactions even more complex, and then began using pictures where Robert could point to the type of food that he wanted, which enhanced the communication system. Robert was not verbal but could make certain sounds, and we began – as he became more interactive – playing some more imitative games where we increased the range of sounds and got a speech pathologist involved doing some oral-motor activities. There had been a speech pathologist involved when Robert was a child, but there hadn't been any services for Robert for many years. Slowly, but surely, Robert increased the range of sounds he could make and also increased the number of pictures he could use to communicate his part of the long negotiations for food.

It turned out that Robert also was listening in his room to music his mother played, but we had not known that Robert enjoyed the music. As he got more communicative he actually would communicate whether he liked a song or didn't like a song and it turned out he had quite a good musical ear and liked certain classic music




that Mother liked to play, and didn't like other classic music that Mother played. So, we discovered another vehicle for increasing communication with Robert as we strengthened his oral-motor abilities.

We also noticed that his visual memory was quite good for pictures and that he had some relative strength in visual problem solving. For example, he could figure out where things were in the house, where to find a CD or a record he liked to hear, and where his mother hid some of the favorite cookies that he enjoyed and he tended to overeat. She was very worried about his weight and she tended to nurture him like he was a little baby.

Because of Robert's visual skills, we wondered whether he could also, perhaps, even at his late age, learn to read. So we began putting words under the pictures he was using and also began – as he became more and more interactive – using picture symbols more and he began actually vocalizing a few simple words for the foods he wanted, like “milk” or “juice.” Although he said them in a shortened way, “juh” and “muh,” we found that he actually memorized some of the words under the pictures. Then we worked with him on actually matching sounds to some of the letters, and he could even learn to sound words out over a period of many months and learn to be a little bit of a reader. Then we began working with augmentative communication and symbol boards, and because of his visual strengths he could actually begin communicating with the symbols. Over the course of the next year he actually learned to type a little bit and could use both symbol boards and typing words out, and also began having a slightly increased vocabulary for some very simple words and phrases – never very elaborate.


As this was developing, he became more and more engaged and more interactive and more problem-solving sequences were occurring. Because he liked music, mother began venturing out with a local group that had a program for individuals with special needs – for young adults – focusing on drama, music, and the arts, and he became involved in liking to go listen to the music. He was able to get involved – since he was actually fairly strong – in doing some support work for one of the dramas in this program, and he did some of the stage moving and actually began looking forward to spending part of some days during the week out at this art center where he would listen to some music, participating in some sessions where he could select what was being played with others, and also participating in a drama group by working on the stage, not yet wanting to be involved in the performances.



Over a period of about five years, Robert has become a much more engaged, interactive individual who now can sequence and problem solve and get involved in lots of gestural back-and-forth interactions. He can use some simple phrases and words, can use the symbol board to communicate basic needs, has shown some pleasure and enjoyment in being part of a group at the local art center, and is much more flexible with his mom. There are very few meltdowns now, very few tantrums when he doesn't get his way immediately. While he still enjoys plenty of rest and plenty of sleep and having Mother cook good food, he's a happier camper and more participatory at home, actually helping Mother move things and find the food, and actually assisting her in some of the activities at home.

So, for Robert it's an ongoing adventure. We're still working on his language skills and his motor planning and sequencing skills, and turning some of his visual-spatial memory and processing skills into more and more strengths. He had been very sensory under reactive with low muscle tone, but he'd also had some selected over reactivity to certain noises and sounds. Now he's become more flexible with these sensory differences so he can cope with more environments. So Robert, I would say, has made very, very good progress and improved his functional capacities by about 300 percent since we began a number of years ago, and the job is not over. It's a work in progress, and Robert will continue to make progress in the learning community we've created for him. Now, his is a learning community having many elements, it's not organized in one center physically, nor does it need to be. It can be built around the individual, but I think communities need to have learning programs and learning centers where individuals like Robert can be there for part of the day or all day long, and some individuals may need residential care in such a setting, but where such programs can be organized. In the sub communities there may be different components and different locations, but there should be some glue that kind of holds it together, and that is organized around the developmental principles that we've been talking about – strengthening the processing abilities, strengthening the basic functional capacities for thinking and for social relationships and for having meaningful peer-to-peer relationships, and some meaningful satisfaction if the individual is capable of work.

This is just a brief example of a not easy situation where we saw some success with such a program. What I want to do is invite you during the break to send in any questions you may have and we can begin answering them when we pick up after Labor Day on September 8. In the meantime, I also want to alert you that we have our November conference on the 11, 12, and 13 with pre-conference workshops for our



Interdisciplinary Counsel of Developmental Learning Disorders here in the Washington, D.C. area. You can get information about that from our websites at [www.icdl.com](http://www.icdl.com) or [www.floortime.org](http://www.floortime.org).

I hope you all have a good August and will listen to some of the archived shows. We'll look forward to communicating with you again in September. Thank you very much.