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**From the Heart**—Education for our time: What have you learned?

Many parents set their course in home education by the grade level of their children. They dutifully follow the pattern used for the masses in the public school system. When I began to home educate, I started to make the same mistake. But my thinking changed after hearing a speech by John Gatto, New York State Teacher of the Year and author of *Dumbing Us Down*. He explained *why* the traditional pattern of education teaches so many things to students before they are ready or have any use for them. Just because children are able to pass a test does not mean it is the right time to teach the material or that it will be retained. I realized that the conventional approach to education is best suited for school administrations and textbook publishers . . . but not necessarily for children. Once I had my eyes opened, I saw that the common approach of using reading as a vehicle for teaching young children (kindergarten, first-, and second-grade or beyond) requires that the curriculum be dumbed down to accommodate fledgling reading abilities. Hence, a first-grader who could certainly know about elephants, hippopotamuses, giraffes, rhinoceroses, and ocelots would find these carefully excluded from his curriculum, which might have him read about “the big cat” instead. Rather than expecting young children to learn *by reading*, read *to* them and teach them in the ways they learn best. I realized that writing and spelling would be much easier *after* the student became a proficient and experienced reader. I began to understand that a year or more of experience, proficiency and application of addition would establish a much more solid foundation for subtraction. Consider a child who had just beginning to learn to rollerblade. What parent would say, “Now let me teach you how to skate *backward*” and give the child a push in the reverse direction? The painful result would be just as inevitable as the common confusion in institutionalized schooling which comes from teaching too many things at the same time. A child does not have to learn fifty states and capitals *at the same time*. Parts of speech would not be monsters if they were trained and housebroken one at a time. Teach your child about nouns by giving examples instead of definitions. At the appropriate time, try teaching your child that the word “noun” resulted from a Frenchman’s pronunciation of the Latin *nomen*, which simply means “name.” From this we get words like **n**ominate, **n**ominal, den**o**minator, **b**inomial, and **n**omenclature. With this understanding, how hard could it be to learn that the name of a thing is a noun?

Education does not have to be drudgery; it can be enjoyable. Allow yourself to become a learner. This is almost a lost art in our society. To make education alive, study the things around you. Formulate a question in your mind, then find the answer. We were not trained to do this in school. Find out *why* things are as they are. Look for connections. For example, to help learn Spanish vocabulary, I looked for related English words. Why does Spanish use the word *brazo* for “arm”? I look for connections to things I already know, for a peg in my mind upon which to hang this new word. Once I discover that our English words “embrace” and “bracelet” came from the same Latin root, I will not soon forget the meaning of *brazo*. Certainly, the Spanish words for hand, arm, finger, knee, foot, head, eye, ear, mouth, etc. could be memorized without looking for links to familiar English words, but the typical result is “mixed-up-edness” or confusion. Given time, the student may still know the words, but cannot keep them straight; such knowledge is about like a goldfish which has been dropped in the tank with fifty others.

In teaching your children, consider how one thing leads to another. My 10-year-old daughter, Berakkah, was trying to identify a brown crystal. We found it was called aragonite, but that was not the end of the story. Where did this mineral get its name? It was named after Aragon, the region in Spain which was ruled by Queen Isabella. This is the same Isabella who married King Ferdinand of neighboring Castile and who sent Christopher Columbus on a voyage of exploration (and also initiated the Spanish Inquisition, expelling all the Jews and the Moslems from Spain in 1492). You may also know of Catherine of Aragon, who was the first wife of the English King Henry VIII (more at [www.tudorhistory.org/aragon](http://www.tudorhistory.org/aragon)). Such a simple study integrated science, geography and history. (This is the basic concept of an academic approach called “unit study.”) Study the things around you. In the last month, an earthquake, a tornado, and an eclipse have prompted some of our studies. When God’s creation is learned one interesting person, place, or thing at a time, it becomes the richest of subjects for study.

**A Most Peculiar Thing: The Door of a Child’s Mind**—In the name of education, a stream of unsolicited parcels of information is delivered to the door of the student’s mind. Five days a week, lessons arrive at the mental doorstep of the student. Teachers arrange and supervise these regular deliveries of educational cargo. Daily shipping records will show math burdens, spelling packages, English parcels, science bundles, and history baggage left at the mind’s door. Yet closer inspection would show that no one has accepted the delivery; mountains of unclaimed freight remain outside. The key to this mystery is that the door of the child’s mind has only one handle, and it is on the inside. The door is invisible yet real. It is equipped with an automatic closer. In

some children the door closes very quickly or barely opens in the first place. (And when the child's mind retreats from this barrage, he is often labeled ADD by the school system.) To understand this invisible door, observe a child to see what causes him to open the door of his attention. This is the key to learning.

Seeking the Truth,

Greg Stablein