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From the Heart—Glimpses of Life at our House. After completing a simple phonics program, Hosanna, age six, began a straightforward program of reading aloud the Gospel of John. I would sit down with her and give her whatever help necessary for her to sound out each word—an approach that might be called discipleship or apprenticeship. Seldom did our lesson last more than about fifteen minutes, nor was it done every day. At first, we did only one verse and it was necessary for me to divide each word into syl-la-bles. When she had finished a verse or two, I would read the passage back to her so she could comprehend it. In the beginning it was slow going, but in time she finished the entire Gospel of John, reading the last nine chapters in four days. Of course, the promise of a twenty-one dollar reward upon completion was a significant motivation. She is now reading a biography of Clara Barton.

You can learn much when home-educating a six-year-old. The other day, I came home for lunch and was making peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. Because the jelly was in a squeeze bottle with an extruder tip, I attempted to use inertia to coerce the jelly to the end, just as one would sling a squeeze bottle of mustard. After first checking the top, I slung the bottle downward to get the jelly to the proper end. It didn't move. Again, this time with more vigor, I slung the bottle downward. Again, to no avail. Then my six-year-old said, "**Dad, . . . watch and learn.**" She set the bottle, inverted, on the countertop. The jelly migrated as if on command and I was left with nothing to say. From the perspective of a teacher, it was a perfect lesson. First came the test. I failed. She didn't point out my failure, but simply called my name to get my attention, and showed me a better way. She did not ask me whether her method was better or whether I understood. She did not give me a quiz, a test, or an assignment. Nonetheless, the lesson was undeniably effective. How simple — educational philosophy from a six-year-old.

With each passing day I am more inclined to agree with John Gatto: If you want to know how to do education effectively, look how the schools do it. . . . and try something different. Do book reports help build reading skills, or do they inoculate against the joy of reading? Do the things you teach build education or immunity against it? Do the educational tools that seem so natural to those who grew up in classrooms cause the mind to develop antibodies against learning and trigger the mind's defense system against intruders? Does the way you teach activate the educational immune system that recognizes useless information and tags it as a temporary visitor or non-resident alien in need of expulsion? Does the mind learn merely to *tolerate* or *endure* this kind of knowledge, just as a person who lives near a railroad learns to disregard the sound of a train? Does a child's mind learn to *ignore* the very things that school tries to teach?

Are you struggling to make your child learn the things he's "supposed to know"? Is the solution resolute will and brute force? Instead of setting your will and saying to your child, "You *are* going to learn this and I'm here to make sure you do," ask yourself this question: If a square educational peg does not fit in a round hole, is there another way or another time? Recently, I was explaining to a mom how education could be compared to nutrition—different ages at different stages. For a baby, all food must be incredibly easy to swallow and even predigested. Later, the mother cuts the food into bite-sized pieces. Then, the child cuts his own food, and hopefully one day he will be able to prepare and serve food to others. This mother told how well-meaning friends and even family members had extolled the advantages of bottle feeding, saying that it used the most "scientific" understanding of nutrition and allowed everything to be precisely measured to ensure the baby's nourishment. The contrast between bottle feeding and nursing led me to consider how home educators may be likewise prone to seek measurable educational input. However, education is not so much a matter of what is taken in or "covered," but rather what is retained. If undigested knowledge could be observed as it left the body, it might not be a pretty sight.

When parents remove a child from school and begin home educating, they often have a rude surprise: many foundational things and other educational building blocks seem to be lacking; things which had been demonstrated on tests and report cards seem to have vanished without a trace. What happened to all that had been taught at school? What had the child been learning? In education, it is harmful to feed a baby, infant, or toddler the mature diet of an adult. Little things make a big difference. Just because

an adult can eat something does not mean it should be fed to infants. Educational tools like flashcards may be helpful for evaluating math skills, but are of little use for *teaching* those skills. If a mature mathematician can digest x^2 , this does not mean these same symbols should be used to introduce and teach concepts to mathematical adolescents. Symbols are wonderful tools, but they do not *convey* concepts; they merely *represent* them. Because symbols address new material *indirectly*, they are not an ideal means of installing new understanding in the mind and establishing the sort of mental connection that would provide years of trouble-free service.

Effective education should not be determined by measuring what has been studied. “The thing that separates an educated man from an uneducated man more than anything else is *how he learned what he does know*.”¹ As an educator, look around and learn. When I saw a home-educated student at the YMCA deadlift 403 pounds, I asked myself how he had developed this ability. Can education be accomplished in the same way? Which term, weight-lifting or body-training, would better describe this process? Is it not better to emphasize the body that lifts the weights rather than the weights themselves? The body-training philosophy is this: Simple beginnings, small increments, and successive progress, using the momentum gained from *confidence*. It begins with a little, then a little more, and on this foundation builds more and increasingly more. When another home-educated student learned to juggle 7 balls, I compared this to trying to learn the multiplication tables. Trying to master them all at once would result in at least a few of them getting away. It would be better to master one or two, then add others, each time waiting until a certain degree of confidence was established before proceeding.

Consider the value of connected learning. For foreign language, have you considered learning Spanish along with its Latin roots to establish links to familiar English cognates? Once, a Hispanic person asked what we called a certain item from the janitorial closet. He looked perplexed when I responded that it was a mop, so I attempted to clarify by saying that it was a dust mop; but his face only showed compounded confusion. My fingers reached to an undisturbed windowsill, raked up the accumulation there, and, rubbing it between thumb and fingers, showed him something he called *polvo*. He looked satisfied when I responded that the device was a mop *de polvo*, although I was at a loss to comprehend *polvo*. Later, recalling that nearly 80% of Spanish words are derived from Latin, I looked for English offspring of a common linguistic ancestor, because wherever men have gone, they have taken their tongues with them; pens have merely recorded what has been spoken. Words are transmitted from one language to another, not by the way they look or are spelled, but by their sound. Thus, it is no great surprise that related words in other languages are more easily recognized by the ear than by the eye. I was delighted to find that our English word pulverize came from the same Latin root (*pulvis*), but I realized that my understanding of the English word was somewhat amiss: Pulverize does not mean to break in pieces or smash to bits as I supposed; it means to make into powder² or dust. The connection between *polvo* and pulverize enriched my understanding of our English word and provided a link to remember the Spanish word. This use of root words as a key to vocabulary is analogous to the use of letters and their sounds (also called phonics) as a way to read.

At our house, Jeffrey, age 15, learned firsthand the meaning of the root word that gave us the word Algebra. He landed a handspring on unlevel ground and broke the large bone in his lower leg, the tibia, just above the ankle. (This is not algebra, although a certain amount of calculation might have avoided this injury.) In Arabic, the putting back together of broken pieces is called *al-jabr*. (Putting together a jigsaw puzzle would also be described as *al-jabr*.) Our word algebra comes from this simple process of (re)combining the like terms (pieces) in an equation. Our three teenage boys are working together through the Math-U-See program which incorporates Algebra I and Geometry. Hannah has now mastered and used the multiplication tables to the point that she knows the factors of a given number and is ready to begin division. We introduced her to decimals at the YMCA, using the treadmill as a teaching aid. As the counter displayed the distance she had walked (.01, .02, .03 etc.), I explained to her the significance of the decimals. I think she got the idea. The right lesson at the right time is the way to lifelong learning.

Education is about the long haul. Compare education to building a house: If you hired a workman to build a house and came a few days later to find him putting on the final coat of paint, you would be surprised. If you asked how he had done so much when the cement in the foundation had not had time to set, you would be alarmed if he answered, “What foundation?” His approach might work for building

the set of a Hollywood movie; it does give the *appearance* of a house, but it would be worse than useless for building a house to *live* in. Does your education include “set theory” of this sort? Can tests and grade books and report cards give evidence of supposed education that will not withstand the test of time? If your own personal education is a matter of historical record only, you may find it difficult to relate to your children as they approach educational obstacles. Understanding how to guide a mind into new knowledge and skills is best learned, not by trying to do it to children, but by leading your own mind into submission. Much of education is a matter of changing your mind, even tricking it into learning what it thinks it cannot. In diverse areas, successful educational methods share a common theme: they seek to avoid or bypass the self-critical tendencies of the mind by accomplishing success in small parts of a big project. Choose to make education familiar and confident instead of unconnected and mindboggling. To do this, become a learner—this is the way to become an effective teacher. Success as an educator depends on how you educate *yourself*. If learning is a joy and a delight for you, you can share this with your children. If you treasure learning, you will have a storehouse from which to draw whenever needed.

Looking for the Truth,

Greg Stablein

1 *The Marks of an Educated Man*, by Albert Edward Wiggam, 1930

2 Our word powder also came from this same root: the Romans said *pulver-*, the French heard it and said *poudre*.