

# **HOME – THE FIRST SCHOOL**

A Jamaican Handbook

**By Barbara Blake Hannah**

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**DEAR NEW HOMESCHOOLER**

By MARY McCARTHY – Editor, Home Education Magazine (\*)

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Welcome to home-schooling! Welcome to a bright new world of possibilities for parents and their children! Welcome to a whole new way of learning and growing and sharing and living together as a family! Congratulations on your decision to home-school!

Home-schooling is not just something parents do to or for their children. Home-schooling can be a process the entire family goes through together. It can be a way of discovering new ways to look at what we do and why we do it. The academics of home-schooling are relatively simple and straightforward, no matter which method of learning your family chooses. The important lessons we can learn have nothing much to do with study plans, curriculum, unit studies or whether or not we should test children.

Families come to home-schooling in a variety of ways. For some it is a lifestyle decision, for others it is an education choice. Deciding to home-school can be a little daunting; it will take research, insight, thought, discussion and a little courage, but it is a commitment that is made each day for hundreds of thousands of children world-wide. Regardless of your situation and why you made this decision, learning about home-schooling is an important first step.

**WHAT HOME-SCHOOLING MEANS**

Home-schooling means different things to different people. For some, home-schooling is simply the best method for educating their children. For others it is a choice that reflects their commitment to a strong nurturing family life, offering families the opportunity to provide a loving environment in which their children can learn and mature. For many, the most important benefit is the strengthening of their family life. Others appreciate providing a superior education geared to their children's individual needs, learning styles, personalities and interests.

If you are considering home-schooling your children, you've probably got a lot of questions. Answers can be found in many ways, in many places. Some basic questions, such as whether home schooling is legal, where can you find the right curriculum, what about socialization, and whether kids need to be tested, are all addressed in this book.

You will probably have doubts that you can really teach your child. But you taught them to walk and talk, dress and feed themselves, understand right from wrong. How much more difficult can ABC and 123 be? Look back and you will see that you've already done the tough stuff. Children are always learning and you will discover what they are learning and what they want to learn by spending time with them observing the growth in their knowledge and understanding.

The home-schooling approach you choose should fit comfortably into your lifestyle and will depend on your philosophy of learning, the structure of your family's life and the type of resources through which each of your children learns best. Do you need to know every subject to teach your child? Absolutely not. You do not have to be the teacher for everything your child wants to learn. This book will teach you the many choices, resources and ideas that will help your education process.

Home-schooling is an act of liberation, an occasion to walk away from institutional images of life and to embrace a vision that is filled with personal meaning and truths for our families that makes it possible for them to reach maturity with healthy, curious and fully conscious minds.

Welcome to home-schooling! We're glad you're here!

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(\*) Excerpted From Home Education Magazine – a most comprehensive guide to home-schooling resources and experts. Founded in 1983, HEM presents some of the most outstanding writing available on the subject, including interviews with well-known home-schooling personalities, in-depth analysis of home-schooling issues and a continuously updated list of hundreds of support groups, organizations and parents.

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**FOOD FOR THOUGHT**

(From “The Urantia Book”)

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*The Urantia Book* is a rare book about the structure of the Universe, the role of the Creator in its planetary construction and operation, the origins of different races and religions, and a detailed story of the contribution and purpose of the life of Jesus the Christ. Those credited with authoring the various Chapters include Angels, Archangels, Cherubim and Seraphim.  
(Publisher: Urantia Foundation.)

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**THE IDEAL EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM**

“I am authorized to narrate something of the social, moral and political life of the most advanced human race living on a not far-distant planet, where a very superior civilization is evolving on an isolated continent about the size of Australia.

“These people are self-sustaining, that is, they can live indefinitely without importing anything from the surrounding nations. Their natural resources are replete and by scientific techniques they have learned how to compensate for their deficiencies in the essentials of life.

**“THE HOME LIFE**

“On this continent it is against the law for two families to live under the same roof. And since group dwellings have been outlawed, most of the tenement type of buildings have been demolished. The unmarried adults live in clubs, hotels and other group dwellings. The smallest home site permitted must provide fifty thousand square feet of land. All land and other property used for home purposes are free from taxation up to ten times the minimum home site allotment.

“The home life of this people has greatly improved during the last century. Attendance of parents, both fathers and mothers, at the parental schools of child culture is compulsory. Even the agriculturists who reside in small country settlements carry on this work by correspondence, going to the nearby centers for oral instruction once in ten days.

“The average number of children in each family is five, and they are under the full control of their parents, or in the case of the demise of one or both, under that of the guardians designated by the parental courts. It is considered a great honour for any family to be awarded the guardianship of a full orphan. Competitive examinations are held among parents and the orphan is awarded to the home of those displaying the best parental qualifications.

#### “HOME – BASIS OF EDUCATION

“These people regard the home as the basic institution of their civilization. It is expected that the most valuable part of a child’s education and character training will be secured from his parents and at home, and fathers devote almost as much attention to child culture as do mothers.

“All sex education is administered in the home by parents or by legal guardians. Moral instruction is offered by teachers during the rest periods in the school shops, but not so with religious training, which is deemed to be the exclusive privilege of parents, religion being looked upon as an integral part of home life. Religion is so entirely a family matter among these people, that there are no public places devoted exclusively to religious assembly. Purely religious instruction is given publicly only in the temples of philosophy. In their philosophy, religious is the striving to know God and to manifest love for one’s fellows through service for them.

“Marriage before twenty -- the age of civil enfranchisement – is not permitted. Permission to marry is only granted after one year’s notice of intention and after both bride and groom present certificates showing that they have been duly instructed in the parental schools regarding the responsibilities of married life.

#### “THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

“The educational system of this nation is compulsory and coeducational in the pre-college schools that the student attends from the ages of five to eighteen. There are no classrooms in these schools, only one study is pursued at a time, and after the first three years all pupils become assistant teachers, instructing those below them.

“Books are used only to secure information that will assist in solving the problems arising in the schools shops and on the school farms. Much of the furniture used on the continent and the many mechanical contrivances – this is a great age of invention and mechanization – are produced in these shops. Adjacent to each shop is a working library where the student may consult the necessary reference books. Agriculture and horticulture are also taught throughout the entire educational period on the extensive farms adjoining every local school.

“The feeble-minded are trained only in agriculture and animal husbandry, and are committed for life to special custodial colonies where they are segregated by sex to prevent parenthood, which is denied all sub-normals.

“Everyone takes one month’s vacation each year. The pre-college schools are conducted for nine months out of the year of ten, the vacation being spent with parents or friends in travel. This travel is a part of the adult-education programme and is continued throughout a lifetime, the funds for meeting such expenses being accumulated by the same methods as those employed in old-age insurance.

“One quarter of the school time is devoted to playing competitive athletics, the pupils progressing in these contests from the local, through the state and regional, and on to the national trials of skill and process. Likewise, the oratorical and musical contests, as well as those in science and philosophy, occupy the attention of students from the lower social divisions on up to the contests for national honours.

“Every child graduating from the pre-college school system at eighteen is a skilled artisan. Then begins the study of books and the pursuit of special knowledge, either in the adult schools or in the colleges. When a brilliant student completes his work ahead of schedule, he is granted an award of time and means wherewith he may execute some pet project of his own devising.

“The entire educational system is designed to adequately train the individual.”

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **HOME – THE FIRST SCHOOL**

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Over the years since people got to know that I home-schooled my son Makonnen, I have received many questions on the subject. I have repeated my answers so many times, that I decided to put them into a book that could help answer some questions and give guidance to parents wanting to know and decide about home-schooling.

Many parents have become disillusioned with the quality of education in Jamaica today. They are worried about low literacy levels, low exam passes, undisciplined and antisocial behaviour and the general inadequacy of the education system. While we are aware of the financial and social constraints under which the Ministry of Education is forced to operate, many parents seek a better way of education that can bring more positive results at graduation time and in adult life.

Parents worry about disrespectful treatment of their children by both school officials and peers, intense pressure to perform, harassment, demeaning punishments, religious intolerance, teasing, bullying, violence and crime that is prevalent in too many schools today. All these negatives lead students to lowered self-esteem, failure to thrive, they get depressed and, in some cases, commit suicide.

Even when teachers and education officials try to convince parents that these miseries of ‘real school’ are teaching children about conditions they will encounter in ‘real life’ and that one of the jobs of compulsory schooling is to train children to endure a harsh world, parents who are unconvinced that ‘school’ must be an unpleasant prison in which to spend the first two decades of one’s life feel they must find a way out. Home-schooling provides an excellent alternative.

### THE FIRST 3 YEARS

Let me share with you some of the things I did to home-school my son and where I found guidance and examples to help me along this unknown pathway. In these pages I recommend many books, websites and contacts with home-schooling parents that can help you through the process.

In the book “*Growing Up Gifted*” I read that in the first 3 years of life, a child learns one-third of all the information he/she will need for life. By the age of 6 years, the child has learned two-thirds of all the information s/he will need for life. Everything else – school room education, how to fix a car or cook a meal – will be the one-third more ‘added extras’ that they will spend the rest of their life learning.

You see therefore, how important the first years are for a child. If the first years are filled with happiness, a loving parent or two, (if possible!), and multiple opportunities for learning of all kinds, that child will grow up to be bright, good at academic lessons, and will have a happy personality. If that child has been given the first three years of life as a total learning experience, if that child has been allowed to satisfy its natural curiosity about things in its immediate environment instead of being slapped and punished for exploring, that child will take that curiosity and its rewards to the entire process of lifelong learning.

If that child has been given simple but constructive toys to play with, if that child has been helped to find the link between the spoken and written word, if that child has been treated by its caregivers as a precious gift rather than an annoying burden – that child will make its parents proud by excelling in some way long before his teenage years are ended.

For teaching children, love is the single most important nourishment, as important as water is to make plants grow strong and healthy.

### CHOOSING HOMESCHOOLING

Religious belief has inspired the choice of most home-schoolers in America, where many are either Catholics or parents choosing to give a child the religious education not available in the US classroom. Religious beliefs also led me to choose home-schooling. JAH Rastafari has been my ever-present help and keeper along this uncharted pathway, and my religious belief gave me the strength and confidence to continue my decision to home-school, despite the many critics who said I would be placing my child at a disadvantage if I didn't follow the traditional way.

There are several hundred websites on the Internet that offer advice and information on home-schooling, and I will give details about them in a later Chapter. A visit to these websites can strengthen the will of any parent interested in home-schooling. However, it is worth bearing in mind that most of the examples and advice offered on these sites refer specifically to North American and European experiences. As home-schooling is new to Jamaica, I hope these writings can help us document our own experiences for sharing with others.

Though it would be ideal, you don't necessarily have to go to my extreme and stay home to teach your child from birth to teenage years. Maybe you can't make the economic sacrifice to stay home, and must go out to work and give your child to other caregivers. But, even so, the things I did can be done on a smaller scale to help your child benefit more greatly from its education.

If you just want to give your child an early advantage, you should do your best to acquire a computer and Internet service, then adopt those home-schooling practices your time allows as an

educational enrichment of the standard curriculum. The home is still the place where most learning happens, so whatever time you have with your child at home can be put to good use as Education. As you read on, you can decide what you can or will incorporate into your life.

#### MAKE LEARNING FUN

Life is for living. Life should be fun, especially for children. The greatest benefit of home-schooling for a child is the freedom that child enjoys. Instead of being restricted to one room and seat every day, home-schooling gives children the freedom to express themselves, to move about, to laugh, make jokes, to be a child and play. Please, please parent – don't make home-schooling a stern, hard-edged activity for your child. Don't let all your teaching be strictly serious lessons like you used to endure at school, but make all learning fun.

So when I advise you to make teaching your child 'fun', what I am saying is that if you decide to home-school because you want to give your child the full benefit of what makes home-schooling stand out from other forms of education nowadays, you must have an open mind to the ways in which you can deliver education to your child student. You need a fresh, free mind, ready to explore and enjoy a brand new way of making a brilliant mind and a strong intelligent individual out of the child you have been blessed with.

#### FAMILY VALUES

Home-schooling provides you with the freedom to choose who your child will associate with, what your children will learn, where and when this learning takes place. Parents are free to use, create or dispense entirely with a curriculum for their child's education. Home-schooling allows parents to spend with their children in the best and brightest hours of their day, instead of handing them over to strangers until the end of the day when the children return tired and hungry. At home, the child is far removed from the dangerous influences of schoolyard bullying, the 'don' and 'bling' youth culture, early sexual experience, religious intolerance, the overcrowded public transport system, random street crime and violence.

At home, your child has your undivided Love and attention. No one knows or loves your child better than you. No one deserves to be your child's most important adult influence, but you. No one can better impart your family values of humanity, brotherly love,

honour, justice, morality and hard work, than you.

Encouraging home-schooling could lead to a decrease in the high incidence of child abuse and parental neglect in Jamaica, as a home-schooled child is a child that is LOVED.

Let me not end before saying that I am not a professional educator, but am merely sharing my experience as a guide – not a doctrine – to persons interested in the topic. I welcome your questions: [jamediapro@hotmail.com](mailto:jamediapro@hotmail.com).

**HAPPY READING!**

**HAPPY HOMESCHOOLING!**

### **HOW IT BEGAN**

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It all began with the desire to have a child and praying for 9 years for that Blessing. In that time I had an operation and another painful medical process in the effort to conceive, but remained barren. One day I discovered a copy of an Ethiopian Orthodox Prayer of the Virgin Mary that had been ‘liberated’ from the Magdala Collection in the British Museum by some brave Rastas, that promises to answer the request of any faithful believer who prays it. One month after I had devoutly prayed it, I finally found myself pregnant at the age of 44 years. Confirming my pregnancy, my physician – the distinguished late Custos of Kingston Dr. John Martin – was so surprised he said: “It’s a miracle, Barbara. Please call one of his names John.” (I did.)

My son’s education began in the womb. I used to talk to him often and I would especially hope he could hear me sing my songs of Praise to the Creator for blessing my womb after all these years. He was born prematurely at 7 months, when my water broke on February 6<sup>th</sup>, 1985 at the end of a long Bob Marley EarthDay radio marathon to raise funds for Ethiopian famine. I was given medication to try and delay his arrival, but after 3 days he demanded to be born and came into the world one Saturday evening as the Sabbath was ending.

When I finally got to hold his tiny 3 lb. 6 oz. body in the UWI Intensive Care Unit, tears started rolling down my face, but a kind nurse said: “Don’t let him see you sad.” So instead I sucked back the tears and sang to him one of the hymns I had sung while he was in the womb. “*Praise My Soul, the King of Heaven; to His Feet I tribute Bring.*” To my great surprise and untold joy, the tiny child stirred in my hands, giving recognition of my voice and presence.

That incident alone made me realize that my child could hear my communication and also communicate with me. I continued talking and singing to him, and from that moment on I spoke to him as if he was a grown person, able to understand me perfectly. I tried to make sure that he never cried, and if he did, I was quick to solve whatever problem caused the upset. I hate to hear a child

cry. It hurts my heart. I believed something I did or did not do, was causing his distress and I hastened to find every solution that would return him to his happy state of innocence.

And I breastfed him. I had promised myself that I would let my child breastfeed as long as he wanted, because – I reasoned – breast milk was his food that he had brought with him into the world. How could I deprive him of the nourishment that his existence had caused my body to make? I had also read two important bits of information, the first that breast milk contains nourishment for brain development that cannot be duplicated in man-made milk. This led me to assume that baby food made from cows milk or other animals would promote development of intelligence only as great as that of the animal.

The second piece of information was the advice I gained from a booklet produced by the La Leche League. La Leche is French for ‘the milk’ and this excellent, US based organization encourages mothers to breastfeed. One way, La Leche advises, to overcome the shame and social stigma of the exposed breast, is to wear two-piece outfits with blouses that can be lifted up for baby’s access, then dropped over for modesty. La Leche also advised that a light scarf worn around the mother’s neck can also be used for extra cover. As a Rastawoman, I easily adapted to these practices and noted that my child fed and slept even better with his little covering. I could breastfeed anywhere – on the bus, in an office, among people or alone. No one could penetrate our privacy.

Most of all, I noticed that whatever I read to him or said to him while he was breastfeeding, seemed to stick in his brain. One day when he was 7 months old, I was reading again his “ABC” book that featured “C” for ‘chair’ with a picture of a green-backed chair with a woven sisal seat. My son abruptly pulled his mouth off the breast, crawled out of my lap, across the floor and stopped beside a brown wooden chair with plaid fabric seat we had in the house. The expression on his face asked: “Is this a chair?” So I said “Yes, that is a chair.”

He returned to my lap with a look of satisfaction, and we continued reading. My view through this moment into his learning mind, caused me to concentrate even more deeply on the information I was pouring into his brain. I started pasting up pictures on the wall of our small living room, which eventually

became his ‘school room’ for 4 years. I put up real pictures of the animals that were only drawings in his storybooks – bears, lions, horses, whales. I put up a Map of the World, pictures of the Planets and Constellations, replicas of Ancient Egypt and African art.

We spent hours looking through pictures in a large recipe book, that showed him the existence of such foods as strawberries, soufflés and stroganoff. On walks, we collected leaves from the different trees and plants we passed and took them home. I made him realize that everything in Creation had a name, and we could learn them all. Learning them meant speaking their names, so his vocabulary grew with his knowledge.

As his vocabulary grew, I saw there were certain things he was very interested in. He loved ‘building’ his toys into piles, so I visited the local lumberyard and collected a box of wood scraps and ends of all shapes. This box of simple building blocks became his most favourite toy ever, replaced only when an angel from California named Sumati brought him his first Lego set just before his second birthday.

But above all were his toy cars, and he had a collection of scores of Matchstick cars. The first place he could identify on our wall Atlas was Taiwan, as most of these miniatures bore the trademark “Made in Taiwan”. I traveled on the road a lot from our Port Antonio home to Kingston, and to while away the journey I would call out the names of vehicles we passed. Most of all he loved Leyland trucks, and shouted with glee each time one of the monsters approached us on the road. He asked to be called “Big Truck” and introduced himself as such when asked his name.

One day when he was a little more than 2, we were driving back home to Portland from my weekly trip to the Senate in Kingston, when my son pointed to a car on the road and said “Mummy, that’s a Porsche.” I was totally flabbergasted! I didn’t know that he even knew what a Porsche was, let alone recognize it on the road aged 2. As I drove along, I considered that if he could recognize a Porsche, and recognize it as different from a Leyland truck, he could recognize a letter.

## THE ALPHABET WALL

So was born the Alphabet Wall, which I recommend to every parent. I set aside a section of our wall and divided it into 26 sections. Then I pasted up a red card with the letters “T” and “t”, plus a picture of a truck. Within a week, he could recognize the letter T anywhere – in books, on road signs, and even make a T with his blocks.

The next week I put up the letters “M” and “D” for Mummy and Daddy. After a week, M and D were added to his knowledge. The next week I put the letter “P” for Porsche, then “L” for Leyland. We continued at random in this way, not starting at A, as is usually done, but by the names of his favourite things. From the friends who came to play with him, I saw that when children even as old as 10 recited the ABC, they got lost when they got to the sounds “L-M-N-O-P”, which they pronounced as “ellem-en-opie”. For them the Alphabet was just a series of sounds they recited as best they could, without knowing what they were referring to. But in less than 20 weeks, my son could recognize the entire Alphabet and could tell me where any letter came in the alphabet, by remembering its place on his Alphabet Wall.



*Christmas 1987 (aged 2) enjoying a new book. At top of photo you can see the red cards of the Alphabet Wall.*

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After being able to recognize letters, it was easy for him to learn to recognize small words. A book taught me that there are only 2,000 of the most-used words in the English language, and that most of them are simple words such as “the, it, and, up, to, he, she, go, come,” and so on. Word recognition became my method of teaching him to read, because English has no consistent pronunciation of co-joined letters; the Phonics of English do not follow as standard a path as – say – Spanish. For example: why are the letters ‘ea’ in “lean” and “learn” pronounced differently? Would it be correct to spell “fish” as ‘ghoti’ if we use the “f” sound of “gh” in ‘tough’ and the ‘sh’ sound of ‘tio’ in “motion”?

I didn’t start out to teach my son an entire school curriculum, only to give him some basic lessons as a starter. I wanted to give him a foundation of knowledge that he could build on successfully, despite the limitations I saw in the school system. I believe that Education is really about life and the tools we need to live life abundantly. A child needs core values on which to build its life. However, as our educating continued, I realized I was giving him an enriched version, better than he could obtain in a classroom with other infants vying for the attention of a single caretaker ‘teacher’.

### LESSONS IN NATURE

Living in the country gave me many teaching opportunities, especially about nature. To show a child the beauty of a flower and explain its composite parts; to walk with a herd of goats and talk about the life of animals; to look for shells along a seashore or to sit quietly and watch the sun go down over far away hills, all gave many chances for me to embed some important values in my child which I feel are the fundamentals of all ‘education’.

Finding a dying bird was a chance to talk about life and death and nature and God’s purpose. Watching a caterpillar grow into a chrysalis and then a butterfly, taught the wonders of nature, biology and science. Helping a baby chicken get back into its mother’s nest taught mercy and kindness. These are the ‘values and attitudes’ we must pour into a child. The countryside gave me many teaching opportunities.

I found we could use ten of the shells we collected at the beach, to make the sounds 1-10 while dropping them into an empty margarine tub. The noise delighted him, both of the shells and my

counting. Soon he began to imitate my actions and sounds. In these informal ways began our Maths curriculum. .

Seeing results encouraged me still further and I followed my heart while dredging my brain of all the learning it possessed, investigating how it came there, and thinking about ways to download it to this new brain. I still thought I would soon have to send him to 'school', but I was glad to have the time I saw was necessary to give him as much preparation and foundation as I could.

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**EXPERT ADVICE FROM LINDA DOBSON**

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***Linda Dobson** is the author of the best books on homeschooling including “The First Year of HomeSchooling your Child” and ‘HomeSchooling Success Stories” that includes a chapter on my work with Makonnen. Here she answers some common questions that can guide parents. I heartily recommend her books.*

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*Q: What is the best way to tailor a curriculum to your children?*

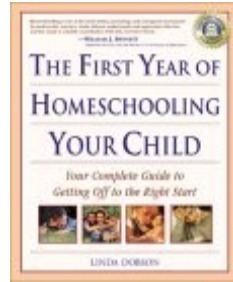
**Linda:** While each home schooling family goes about this in a slightly different way, the most successful seem to grab hold of that "experimentation" frame of mind and, like a scientist, observes for clues as to whether or not a particular curriculum or approach is a "good fit" with the child and his preferred learning style. Hands-on learners aren't likely to appreciate sitting still and reading books for hours on end. Children who like order and consistency may not do well unless a schedule is laid before them.

I would advise any family to keep spending to a minimum until this observation and learning period for mom and dad takes place. Consider it a time to get your creative juices flowing, watching for learning opportunities in everyday life, turning household materials into educational games.

And for heaven's sake, give that library card a good work-out! Let the kids bring home books they find interesting, and pay attention to interests they express (or that you discover through conversations held during all the wonderful time you spend together) so you can scour the shelves for books, videos, magazines, and computer software that feed those interests. Finally, keep in mind education doesn't have to be expensive - it's "schooling" that costs so much money!

*Q: Can parents be teachers?*

**Linda:** I'd like to point out that there is a difference between doubting self, and interacting with others who doubt your ability. Beginning home schooling is just like beginning anything else, be it skiing or driving a car...we grow in our confidence as our knowledge and experience increases. Therefore, time and practice tend to be the best antidotes for self-doubt, bolstered, of course, by the gleam in our children's eyes and the smiles on their faces.



Others' doubts in our ability to pull off educating our own children are another matter. I'm still always amazed that the mere mention of home schooling brings so many education experts out into the open. People have a tendency to fear the unknown, and it's often those who know the least who are the most vocal when questioning you on the issue.

Knowledge is most definitely power, so the more you know about home schooling, the more confidently you can explain it to someone else on a personal level. The same holds true when countering the often ill-informed comments of special interest groups. (I don't know if it's so much that they doubt home schooling can work or if they're afraid that home schooling \*does\* work, but that's another story!) Knowledge-filled answers offered in a calm and positive manner may plant seeds for future understanding. And speaking of the future, time works wonders here, too – home-schooled children have always been the practice's best advertising!

**Q;** *Linda can you share one thing that new home-schoolers should know at the beginning of their home schooling journey."*

**Linda:** Some parents spend so much time reading the plethora of available information on home-schooling, and get so caught up in searching for the "perfect" place to start; their children are high school age before they take that first home-schooling step! Rather than think your first step to death, simply "begin where you are." Beginning where you feel most comfortable allows you - the expert on your own children - to use your personal strengths and knowledge of your children to their greatest advantage. For

example, in your study you will have found some people tell you not to think about beginning without a curriculum, while others tell you to steer clear of anything that smells like curriculum.

Everyone is nervous about this choice during the first year, because we've been taught that we can't do it unless we have a degree in teaching," says Cynthia McDaniel of Springfield, Virginia. "The nervousness about doing it causes many parents to recreate school at home."

So what do you have to take to take the place of a D+ teacher training (after cheating, previously called grade inflation)? "I found that if you can read, are willing to learn, and are willing to help your children, you can do this," Cynthia reports. "Learning to love learning again, through trips in the woods, alone or with a book about nature or with a specialist (ranger, scout leader), is an excellent way to proceed."

Over the years you've developed many characteristics as a parent that transfer well and can help in your new role as home-schooling parent. Instead of being trained teachers, successful and happy home-schooling parents, by and large, are....

- Delighted to spend time with children whose company they appreciate
- Possessed of basic literacy and math skills and ready to learn more, if necessary
- Aware that they will be criticized – sometimes by those closest to them – and sufficiently convinced that they are doing the right thing to withstand criticism
- Open to leaning from mistakes and to change based on what they've learned
- Working on becoming more observant and accepting of their children, warts and all
- Possessed of wonderful senses of humor, leading to the ability to laugh at themselves
- Giving and receiving support from like-minded friends

As you can see from the above, you are a lot more likely to have what it takes to home-school than what the myth of needing teacher training reveals. By using and constantly honing the

parental qualities you already enjoy, you are much closer to learning the secrets of lighting fires within youngsters' minds, setting them on a course to appreciate and pursue learning for a lifetime, than many, if not most, trained teachers.

*Q: In terms of your approach to home schooling, what influences have had the most impact on you and why?*

**Linda:** When I began home schooling there wasn't a whole lot to read about it! Because of this I read everything I could find which gave me an introduction to many approaches and philosophies. While I remember a couple of books made home schooling sound overwhelming and difficult, the rest that were available helped me see the potential for our children. I did what I think many home-schoolers wind up doing - I took what sounded good for our family and left the rest.

**Educational Freedom - Observation and Opinion**  
***(excerpts from) The Declaration of Educational Independence***

**by Linda Dobson**

WHEN in the Course of human Events, it becomes necessary for Families to dissolve the Educational Bands which have connected them to a faltering Society, and to assume among the Powers of the Earth, the separate and equal Station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent Respect to the Opinions of Mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the Separation.

WE hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness-That to secure these Rights, Education is instituted among Men, deriving its just Powers from the Consent of the Educated, that whenever any Form of Education becomes destructive of these Ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Education, laying its Foundation on such Principles, and organizing its Powers in such Form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.

Prudence, indeed, will dictate that a Public Education System long established should not be changed for light and transient Causes; and accordingly all Experience hath shown, that Mankind are more disposed to suffer, while Evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by Abolishing the Public Education System to which they are accustomed. But when a long Train of Abuses and Usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object, evinces a Design to reduce them under absolute Government Control, it is their Right, it is their Duty, to throw off such Public Education System, and to provide new Guards for their future Security.

The History of the Government-Controlled, Public Education System is a History of repeated Injuries and Usurpations, all having in direct Object the Establishment of an absolute Control over these Families. To prove this, let Facts be submitted to a candid World.

IT has refused for a long Time, after such dissolutions, to cause other Alternatives to be carried out; whereby the Educational Powers, incapable of Improvement, have returned to the failing System at large for their exercise; the Family remaining in the mean time exposed to all the Dangers of Invasion from without, and Convulsions within.

IT has endeavored to prevent the True Education of the Population of these States; for that Purpose obstructing the Natural Process of Learning; refusing to pass others to encourage their Individual Efforts.

IT has obstructed the Administration of True Education, by refusing to recognize the Sovereignty of Family.

IT has affected to render the Education Establishment independent of and superior to the Civil Power.

FOR cutting off our Connection with True Education;

FOR imposing Taxes on us used to Oppress us;

FOR depriving us, in many Cases, of the Benefits of Family Time;

FOR transporting our Children for large blocks of their time;

FOR taking away our Family Autonomy, abolishing our most valuable Family Connections, and altering fundamentally the Forms of our Families:

FOR suspending our Parental Authority, and declaring itself invested with Power to control for us in all cases whatsoever.

IT has abdicated Control here, by failing us its Protection and waging Educational War against us.

IT has plundered our Pocketbooks, ravaged our Family Lives, burnt our Trust, and destroyed the Lives of our People.

IT has constrained our fellow Citizens taken Captive in our Nation's Classrooms, to become the Competitors of their Friends and Brethren, or to fall themselves by their Hands.

IT has excited domestic Insurrections amongst us, and has endeavored to bring on the Inhabitants of our Nation, the merciless Conditioning, whose known Rule of Warfare, is an undistinguished Destruction, of all Ages, Sexes and Conditions.

IN every stage of these Oppressions we have Petitioned for Redress in the most humble Terms. Our repeated Petitions have been answered only by repeated Injury. A Public Education System, whose Character is thus marked by every act which may define a Tyrant, is unfit to be the Educational Controller of a free People.

NOR have we been wanting in Attentions to our Legislators. We have warned them from time to time of Attempts by their very Government to extend an unwarrantable Educational Jurisdiction over us. We have reminded them of the Circumstances that brought us to this point. We have appealed to their native Justice and Magnanimity, and we have conjured them by the Ties of our common Kindred to disavow these Usurpations, which would inevitably interrupt our Connections and Correspondence. They too have been deaf to the Voice of Justice and of Consanguinity. We must, therefore, acquiesce in the Necessity,

which denounces our Separation, and hold them, as we hold the rest of Mankind, Enemies in War, in Peace, Friends.

WE, therefore, the Families of the UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, in GENERAL AGREEMENT, Assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the World for the Rectitude of our Intentions, do, in the Name, and by Authority of Sound, Sane Parental Consciousness, solemnly Publish and Declare, That these United People are, and of Right ought to be, FREE AND INDEPENDENT FAMILIES, they have full Power to levy Choice in Family Education, consider the Family's Values and Time Needs to choose the extent of participation in and support of the Public Education System, contract Alliances, establish Family Priorities and Values, and to do all other Acts and Things which INDEPENDENT FAMILIES may of right do.

And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm Reliance on the Protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes, and our sacred Honor.

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*Though written in criticism of the US Education system, this is opinion is so relevant to the Jamaican education system that I have included it here. Maybe in time we Jamaican home-schooling parents will publish our own Declaration of Education Independence.*

## **THE COMPUTER AS TEACHER**

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### **21<sup>st</sup> CENTURY EDUCATION**

Thankfully, the world has evolved from the form of education I received in the 1940s and 50s via slates and slate pencils, rows of desks, heavy text books, ruled exercise books and a teacher standing in front of a black chalkboard that had to be dusted clean. The form of education I was taught by copied an English school system that had been in place before my father's birth in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. It was good for creating workers for the boss' businesses, docile lambs who would sit as quietly behind desks in large offices as they did in the classrooms, willing to turn off their own creative minds and do nothing except what the boss ordered.

Developments in the world of computers happen so quickly that 20 years is a very long time. In the 20 years since my son was born, computers have developed from DOS machines with black screens and green letters, to a thousand varieties of high speed connections with the outside world and thousands of programmes for staying connected, creating a profile of yourself that the world can see and for educating yourself -- simply by typing on a small machine in your bedroom. The computer is simply the most important, interesting and influential machine Mankind has ever invented.

The world has just passed through the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, we are now in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and it is time for us to upgrade the delivery of education to incorporate the new ways that mankind has invented to deliver information to us. We need to be developing the creative brain mass of our young people to come up with new ideas, new ways of making money and new ways of making a greater 21<sup>st</sup> Century nation. The innovations of computers, film, television, cellphones, digital cameras, Blackberrys and Ipods cannot be ignored, if we are trying to create Jamaicans that are equal to people of other nations.

Until the education system incorporates these 21<sup>st</sup> Century devices in the education of children already exposed to them, home-schooling is the only way in which you can give your child a step up into this new technologically wired world.

When I first started using a keyboard, typewriters were manual and typing was hard work. Mistakes had to be erased and copies made by inserting carbon paper between layers. The electric typewriter improved work greatly, as typing was not so labour-intensive and improvements such as memory and automatic erase made creating a final document much easier.

Makonnen grew up seeing me working on a keyboard, and as my equipment went through various upgrades from manual typewriter to computer, he sat in my lap and absorbed the techniques for use. When I started working on a DOS computer, he learnt the codes for various tasks and whenever the computer crashed (as computers did in the early days), he would watch keenly as the repair man typed the codes for various tasks.



*L.A. Times photo; Living Section cover story ; August 1998*

This basic DOS information stayed with him and formed the basis for his in-depth knowledge of computers. Today, there is almost no computer programme or function that he does not understand. His un-schooled knowledge continually amazes me, but should be expected because since childhood he has had the opportunity and leisure to investigate every single aspect of computers as his curiosity inspires him.

Compared to today's computer, typewriters of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century are dinosaurs that deserved extinction. Computers today enable the creation of a document that can be easily typed, checked for spelling and grammar, correct mistakes, align margins and produce text in a variety of fonts and font sizes. Pictures, tables, graphs and other information can be inserted into this document with the simplest of keystrokes, and the final document can be printed immediately and a copy saved in the machine used to create it.

The same machine can take you around the world via the Internet like a flying carpet. You can visit museums and libraries of today and yesterday, you can look at the planets through the Hubble telescope or visit NASA and watch a missile launch. You can explore the North Pole, or learn about creatures that live in the sea's deepest depths. Other than classified intelligence and industrial information, there is nothing you cannot learn by using a computer keyboard.

With this ease of connection, a parent with enough time and care can give a child a wide variety of educational experiences via the computer. You can use packaged teaching programmes, you can download lessons and games and you can link online with other home-schooling parents and teachers.

#### 'SOCRATES'

When Makonnen was about 4, I got a friend to purchase An early computer toy called Socrates made by Texas Instruments, USA. 'Socrates' was a keyboard that plugged into the TV and sent an infra-red link that activated the software. The machine offered lessons in Maths, Spelling, Grammar and Music, and was programmed for ease of use by children. Makonnen spent hours each day 'playing' with 'Socrates' and learning valuable information in the process. His pride in getting full marks for an assignment was a joy to behold, and I enjoyed the same pleasure other parents get when a child brings home a workbook with good marks from 'regular school'.

From 'Socrates' we graduated to an adult computer and by this time Microsoft had invented Windows, which made creating text so very simple. With Word, we could write short essays, I could set

him tasks to complete sentences with missing verbs, I could line up a list of words for him to learning the spelling and later repeat to me, and he could have fun creating text designs and other inventions only possible on the computer.

Our most interesting software was “*Where In The World Is Carmen Sandiego*”, an interactive game that taught geography and general knowledge as children tried to track Carmen Sandiego around the world. The game even contained questions about Jamaican people and places like Bob Marley, Port Royal and Dunns River Falls. For a widely-read youngster, this game was like having his own personal quiz show at home and he spent many hours tracking Carmen and her spies to the far corners of the globe, using his vast store of general knowledge.

We acquired the Internet when he was about 10 years old and the world came into our home. Makonnen spent hours surfing the web, especially to sites about cars and bikes. If there was ever a question he wanted the answer to, there was hardly a need to bother Mummy because the search engines could provide far more detailed information. We could track world news of interest, such as shuttle launches, pandas born in captivity, astronomical discoveries and football games. Encyclopedias like Microsoft’s Encarta were another source of in-depth information that filled hours of youthful research about everything under the sun.

The variety of information available by computer provides a buffet of choices for the learning mind and when this information is accessible at any time of the day or night, a child can take his mind down any pathway he chooses. As most parents, I was initially worried that Makonnen would be diverted to search for pornography, but from he was very young I talked to him about sex and sexual perversions and it turned out that he learned those lessons well. Whenever I checked the computer after he went to sleep to see if he had been visiting porno sites, I was always pleased to see a proliferation of car, computer and game sites – but no porno.

Once, at a youth forum in Trinidad he was asked ‘What about pornography?’ by some high school teachers. Makonnen’s smiling answer was: “The porno sites take too long to download when I would rather be downloading some new game.” It seems that pornography is so widely available in both ‘soft’ and ‘hard-core’

versions on TV, magazines and films that children today have enough casual exposure (unfortunately!) that they can easily choose to avoid it and focus on something more interesting.

If you have given your child a healthy and constant education from birth about sexual behaviours, morality and responsibility, and if you have been raising your child to be an ideal human being full of righteous values, then you can rest assured that pornographic sites – like sites about racism, Satanism and other negative activities – will be of no interest. I taught Makonnen early about ‘bad’ people who might seek to harm him by violence, kidnapping or sexual deviancy and as years passed I upgraded the information on these topics in keeping with his advancing intelligence.

By the time pornography became available by computer, Makonnen was more interested in the hope of having a normal girlfriend-boyfriend relationship, than in activities for the sexually jaded. Thankfully, this holds true to today. He has hundreds of computer, car and bike magazines, but not a single copy of ‘Playboy’ -- though I suspect that, like hundreds of others, he and his friends have watched the famous “*One Night In Paris*” video simply because Paris Hilton is an beloved icon of teenage boys. Sexual curiosity is healthy and parents must be careful not to develop sexual inhibitions in their children by paranoia about their sexual curiosity, but sexual development must be directed by years of open discussion and teaching by adult caregivers – preferably parents. I emphasize that some form of religious or spiritual education must be the basis of such teaching and, indeed, a child’s upbringing.

#### STARTING WITH THE COMPUTER

First of all, don’t be afraid of the computer, if you have never used one. Today’s computers are plug-in ready, and they practically walk you through all the steps needed for every and any task. If you have questions, every programme has a Help spot where your questions will be answered. I always tell my young students that they don’t need to learn touch-typing to use the computer. The computer records our information even if we use only one finger to hunt-and-peck the keys and that same finger on the mouse is often all that is needed for access to many programmes and website travel.

If you are just a beginner, choose CD and DVD disk programmes that take you easily through all steps for use. As I am assuming you are choosing programmes for a young child, they will be even easier to use. You might buy a small electric keyboard and a CD programme to awaken an interest in music. At a certain age, you can teach your child to play Chess on the computer, because playing games are important for developing imagination and creativity – even the shoot-them-dead computer games.

You can choose programmes that read a story to a child by computer, but I hope you will choose your stories wisely and not be trapped by too much of the Western cultural pap that strives to create lifelong brand consumers for spin-offs of their cutesy programmes. Read the original “Winnie The Pooh” by its English author A.A. Milne, rather than the watered-down, altered American version marketed as cartoons and illustrated booklets.

Stories from other cultures are a wonderful buffet for young minds, as they show children that there are many different ways of life than the one they know. My son enjoyed reading stories from Egypt after seeing a colour catalogue of the Tutankhamun exhibition. Then he got hooked on Greek and Roman myths, with their larger-than-life heroes and heroines and grand adventures. I found ‘Grimms Fairy Tales’ especially grim, and never shared these horror stories with my child, nor did I read stories in which human-like pigs were among the characters. (Why were there no lions as heroes of these stories?)

You can search on the Internet for free stories from many different countries and cultures and save them in a special file on your computer that will, as your child grows older, become your education record. In time, you will read some West Indian, European and classic novels and one or two of Shakespeare’s plays to let your child know what all the respect for this English writer was all about, or perhaps a book by an author writing in the language you are learning.

As you visit online education sites where certain books are recommended, you can find out what they focus on and go book shopping in Jamaica for something equivalent. If, of course you have enough funds to buy these books with the money you have saved by staying outside the formal education system, you can

send for these books and follow the course. Keep your records and have fun exploring and learning.

#### GOOD E-LEARNING WEBSITES

Microsoft set out to become the first online school and it's still the best online resource for education. As soon as you want to, you can start teaching your child with this resource. You simply log on to Microsoft and put the subject you want to learn in the Search engine. You will find yourself with a number of choices and can start exploring and trying our different education games with your child.

As you become familiar with your favourite location, you are certain to find links to other study sites, online schools, students and teachers that you can connect with to broaden your education experience.

So, to sum up, the computer is a wonderful teacher. Parents can sit beside a child and help them learn, or simply leave them alone to explore along pre-determined pathways. Best of all, the computer is like their own programmable TV set, where they can invent their own devices or adapt existing ones. Let me say, I couldn't have done what I did without a computer.

Thank you, Bill Gates and Steve Jobs.

### **A HOMESCHOOLING GUIDE TO THE INTERNET**

Here are some good places to start e learning with your child. Pick one and start surfing. It doesn't matter at what age you begin, as there will be pictures at each location and interesting activities to help you make these websites as familiar lifelong friends as the cartoon characters your child loves to see on TV.

#### **Microsoft in Education -**

<http://www.microsoft.com/education/default.msp>

Working closely with worldwide education communities, Microsoft has developed technology, tools, programs, and solutions to help address education challenges while improving teaching and learning opportunities.

#### **Jamaican Ministry of Education Curriculum –**

<http://www.moec.gov.jm/divisions/ed/core/curricula.htm>

Downloadable curriculum for all ages of the present Jamaican system , to give you an idea of what 'the system' expects your child to learn and at what age.

#### **A to Z Home's Cool Homeschooling Web Site -**

<http://homeschooling.gomilpitas.com/>

#### **Open Directory - Reference: [Education](#): K through 12: Home Schooling –**

[www.dmoz.org/Reference/Education/K\\_through\\_12/Home\\_Schooling](http://www.dmoz.org/Reference/Education/K_through_12/Home_Schooling)

**Homeschool.com -** <http://www.homeschool.com/>

Lots of useful information

#### **The HomeSchool Mom –**

<http://www.thehomeschoolmom.com/>

A lovely site specially for Moms.

#### **The No Frills, Fast-loading Homeschooling Website -**

<http://www.abasiccurriculum.com/homeschool/>

Just as it's name indicates. Lots of info and links.

**GoGSAT –** <http://www.gogsat.com/>

Get essential information on the Jamaican General Scholastic Achievement Test (GSAT) for primary students and learn how to prepare your child for the exam. An excellent site if you plan to enter the formal secondary system.

### **SOME EXCELLENT LINKS**

TechSchool Jamaica - <http://www.techschooljamaica.com>

MamaMedia (MIT) - <http://www.mamamedia.com>

Clonlara Online School - <http://clonlara.org/index84.html>

Internet Distance Education Homepage - <http://www.studio-ide.com/>

Kaplan Test Prep - [http://www.kaplan.com/a\\_kaptest.html](http://www.kaplan.com/a_kaptest.html)

Markle Foundation - <http://www.markle.org/index.html>

Turner Learning - <http://www.turnerlearning.com/>

E-Biz4Teens – <http://www.library.advanced.org/28188>

The Living Africa- <http://library.advanced.org/16645/>

A Science Odyssey - <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aso/>

Einstein Alive - <http://www.einsteinalive.com/>

The Digital Revolution -

<http://library.advanced.org/25744/index.htm>

Pyramids of Egypt -

<http://www.guardians.net/egypt/pyramids.htm>

These last 6 websites are prize winners in the annual ThinkQuest Student Website competition, built by teenagers under the age of 19 years. 'E-Biz4Teens' is Makonnen's Silver Award winning website about how to become a teen entrepreneur.

### **A Homeschooling Gateway to the Internet:**

This is an excellent website that provides links to educational sites, fun interactive learning activities, information packed articles, and lots of "freebies!" Some of the topics covered at this site that are worth reading are:

- Learning, Teaching - and Online Tools!
- [New!](#) Preschool and Kindergarten Learning Activities
- Go figure! The Fascinating World of Mathematics
- Our World and Beyond - Earth, Science, Space and Technology
- People, Cultures, and the Making of History
- The Written Word, Reading and Language

- Great Gateways to Interesting Educational Sites
- Fine Arts, Fun Arts, Music, & Theater
- Cool Educational Resources from the U.S. Government
- Myths & Folklore
- Especially For Kids and Other Inquiring Minds
- Family Fun, Outings, Holidays, and Crafts
- College & Career Information
- Long Distance Learning - and Online Tutorials
- Positive Support for Special Challenges
- Miscellaneous Special Sites

Some of the Articles featured include:

[A Homeschool Curriculum for Pre-school and Kindergarten, by Lillian Jones](#)

A guide to the important early years - with suggestions for lots of fun and age-appropriate activities and resources.

[Preschool Homeschooling, by Bev Krueger](#)

The creator of Eclectic Homeschool Online, a mom of five mostly grown homeschoolers, offers encouraging advice on how to make the most of the preschool years for the most successful outcome.

[Big "A" and Little "a", by Vivian Gussin Paley](#)

This book excerpt from *Child's Work: The Importance of Fantasy Play* is a "must read" for every parent of young children. Paley, a kindergarten and nursery school teacher of 37 years experience, and award winning author of eleven books - offers a historical account with a great depth of wisdom on the nature of young children and their unique needs.

[Much Too Early, by David Elkind, PhD.](#)

This popular author and Professor of Child Development explains the realistic educational needs of young children.

[Early Year's Child's Learning Assets, by Linda Dobson](#)

Powerful insights on the ways in which to nourish the natural learning assets of young children, by one of the most popular authors of home-schooling books - and the mom of three grown home-school grads.

[Raising Readers at Home, by Paula Harper-Christensen.](#)

A child development specialist and mom of four, offers a wonderfully reassuring discussion of reading readiness, timing, and the art of fostering a love of reading.

[Your Will or Mine, by Peggy O'Mara](#)

The eloquent publisher of *Mothering, the Magazine of Natural Family Life*, muses on the value of self-direction and the great values of play, suggesting that the greatest advantage of childhood may simply be free time.

[Another Look at What Young Children Should Be Learning, by Lillian B. Katz](#)

Dr. Katz, an international leader in early childhood education, discusses the nature of development, categories of learning goals, and the kind of environment that fosters them.

[Bringing Lessons Home](#)

A book excerpt from *Einstein Never Used Flash Cards: How Our Children Really Learn -- And Why They Need to Play More and Memorize Less*, by Kathy Hirsh-Pasek, Ph.D., and Roberta Michnick Golinkoff, Ph.D., with Diane Eyer, Ph.D.

["Einstein Never Used Flashcards, and Thoughts on the Mozart Effect" - An interview in with Roberta Michnick Golinkoff, Ph.D.](#)

This interview, in the SpeechPathology.com site, with a co-author of the book, *Einstein Never Used Flashcards: How our Children Really Learn and Why They Need to Play More and Memorize Less*, is a fascinating read in itself.

[Understanding Literacy Development in Young Children](#)

This interesting article provides a historical perspective on the shift in our understanding of literacy development in young children, describes elements of emergent literacy perspectives, and offers suggestions for promoting the literacy development of young children.

[More play, less "work" for early years - BBC News Article](#)

Citing research indicating that starting children on reading and writing before they are ready can actually be counter-productive,

and inhibit their learning, the Welsh Assembly Government looks to replace formal early education with play-based activities between the ages of three and seven - called foundation learning.

[The Magical World of Make-Believe, by Lisa Scheer](#)

An informative article on the stages of fantasy life, and how pretend play holds the key to preschoolers' intellectual, and emotional growth.

[The Push for Early Childhood Literacy: A Risk Factor in Child Psychopathology, by Sharna Olfman, Ph.D.](#)

A clinical psychologist, author, and associate professor of psychology describes the ways in which the push for early childhood literacy, and other trends, are harming children in a variety of important ways.

[Time for Play, Every Day: It's Fun - and Fundamental, by The Alliance for Childhood](#)

The benefits of child-initiated play, and what you can do to help your child play - presented by an organization dedicated to promoting policies and practices that support children's healthy development, love of learning, and joy in living.



*Big Truck*

[Technology and Preschool, by Jane Healy](#)

A book excerpt from, *Failure to Connect: How Computers Affect Our Children's Minds ? and What We Can Do About It* (chapter 7). Well known author, Jane Healy, holds a doctorate in educational

psychology, has engaged in postdoctoral studies, has been a classroom teacher, a learning specialist.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **DAILY LESSON PLANS**

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#### **DO YOU NEED A PLAN?**

So how do you home-school? Just how do you begin? Well, as I wrote earlier, the best place to begin is while your child is in the womb.

But in case you have decided on home-schooling when your child is older, don't be discouraged. You can begin at any age, and many parents begin when they find that 'regular school' is not educating their children as they think they should. Parents see that, despite the thousands of Dollars spent on 'education', despite the hours spent traveling to and attending 'regular school', their children are not passing exams with high marks and are coming home with negative social behaviours. They find they are losing touch with their children, who seem to be growing into alien beings with little respect for parents and serious behaviour problems.

This is when the home-schooling alternative becomes appealing to parents, but many are intimidated by the thought that they have to replace teachers and a daily curriculum complete with blackboard, desk, textbooks and exams as exactly as 'school' does.

Not so. Home-schooling is completely different and the beauty is that you, the parent, can create your own curriculum and educational agenda. Don't think you have to teach a little bit of several 'subjects' per day like 'school' does. You only need to spend an hour or two each day on formal lessons, as you have already understood that everything you do each day is a 'lesson' of one kind or other.

#### **PURCHASE A COMPUTER**

With the money you save by not paying tuition fees, you will invest in purchase of a computer with Internet connectivity and choose from the home-schooling guidelines that I and other home-schooling parents recommend herein and in places you discover by yourself. The Internet is not the only place you will find teachers

and education. Your friends and neighbours –especially the elders in your community – will become teaching resources of many kinds of lessons, especially if you and your child become involved in community service of some kind.

### CHOOSING A CURRICULUM

The biggest challenge for home-schooling parents is choosing a curriculum. You can purchase a ready-made curriculum-in-a-box, you can work online with the Jamaican curriculum, or you can make up your curriculum as you go along. A large part of home education is just learning to work with the flow. Allow your children to pursue interests on their own. Each child is different and learns differently.

Public school curricula were developed for classrooms with limited space where large numbers of children of the same age are all supposed to be learning the same thing at the same time under the guidance of an older person who does not know or love the children very well. Curricula have been developed to make this unreal, contrived setting somewhat manageable, not to meet the needs of children who are each individually different in how fast, how well and how thoroughly they learn.

By contrast, home-schools have a few children of different ages, one or more adults who know them well, love them and can give them lots of individual attention, the whole world to explore and no government officials or teaching organizations to please. Government worries about children who are not in school have to do with neglected children and dysfunctional families. Home-schooled children have the best possible start in life because they have the best of families. Parents who choose to home-school are parents who love their children deeply and want the best for them. You don't need to put your children in 'real school' just because you think society demands it.

### CREATING YOUR OWN CURRICULUM

As your child grows, you will automatically be creating a curriculum. The story books you read daily to your child are its earliest lessons in English and Literature, as well as other subjects. You probably have a special time for reading, maybe after you have tidied the house in the morning, in the quiet time before the afternoon nap, or before bedtime. As simply as that, you have

started your home curriculum. As your child grows, you will add to this curriculum in the very same way and as you know exactly what your child knows or wants to know, you will develop your lesson plans and gather your textbooks and workbooks as you go along.

To provide the basic lessons, you may choose to teach just one subject a day, so that –say – Tuesday is History Day, then think up creative ways to make that subject day interesting and fun. Your child may be enjoying playing with a science kit and wants to spend most of his time doing only that. Don't restrict this interest, but find ways to expand it further into exercises such as Spelling Science Words, Writing Down Information, Measuring Amounts, Recording Ideas ... you get the picture.

There is no set matrix for how you fill that small mind with information, and if you set achievement goals, you are free to explore ways to accomplish them. You will find that children like to explore one subject as far as they can understand, before moving on to something else. Makonnen would read an entire Science book in one go and then return to it every day for weeks, digesting bits of information he was specially interested in. Go with the flow – your child will better retain that information if he sought it out himself.

### SIMPLE TIPS

The results of these simple start-up practices will surprise you and will encourage you to continue teaching your child at home full time. When you take your one-year-old with you to the doctor's waiting room, why don't you bring a little book to read to him? Or her toy -- the one that jiggles and rattles and is difficult to put together -- to prevent her becoming bored and restless? Why didn't you put 10 pretty seashells into an empty margarine tub and pass the time waiting by counting them out into his little hands – one, two, three – his first Maths lessons.

At home, where is that cardboard box of discarded wood pieces from the nearby lumber yard, in all shapes and sizes that make wonderful building blocks that can be stacked in myriad designs and that make such a nice noise when tumbling down? No need to buy expensive plastic toys that break apart. What about making a scrapbook book by pasting leaves collected from trees you pass on your daily walk. Writing the names of the trees from which they

come, observing the blossoms and fruits that follow and learning about their uses, is a practical and fun way to teach natural science.

And where are the pictures on your walls that teach? Do you have pictures of the Planets, common and exotic animals, the world Atlas, the photos of people of other cultures, of foods and flowers? Stick them up on the wall and you have turned your entire home into a perfect classroom for your child, years before s/he enters the formal education system.

Above all, parents need to break away from institutional thinking about education and to trust in themselves and in their children. Independent learning is a habit-forming and lifelong activity and a child raised to be an independent learner will be a student for life.

#### LESSONS FOR OLDER CHILDREN

As the child grows older and lessons include more complex writing assignments, Maths and other subjects, there will of course be a time when you will start setting aside a special hour or hours when such work is done, especially if your child is at Secondary School level. You may even have started a special course at a nearby community college that requires delivery of assignments. Don't lock yourself into a rigid schedule like 'real school'. Remain flexible and don't feel compelled to complete a course that your child becomes bored with or finds difficult.

Go with your child's flow, whether fast or slow. You don't have a headmistress and school board to report to at the end of term, and if your child 'fails' to comprehend an Algebra principle in the time allocated for students in 'real school', remember that he/she has all the time in the world to learn it, without the associated pressures and humiliation that accompanies 'failure' in 'real school'.

Remember that everything you do in a day can be counted for education in one 'subject' or other. A child who helps make the beds and tidy the house in the mornings, is putting in hours of Domestic Science (as it was called in my school days), as well as learning life-long survival skills. A child who helps weed the vegetable gardens three afternoons a week is doing Agriculture, Biology and Science, while the child who helps make the dog food

and give the chickens their corn is doing hours of Animal Husbandry.

### LANGUAGES

In today's world a second language is essential for a well-educated person. Spanish is the second most-used language in the Caribbean region, but learning any language provides the basis for a career as a translator that can secure a job that is much in demand and requires verbal proof of competency, rather than a certificate of competence.

Language classes can be fun when done by computer CD, DVD or VHS. Spanish is the easiest language to learn as all letters are pronounced the same way every time, so memorizing is easy. You can choose to teach your child a language you yourself want to learn that isn't taught in the Jamaican curriculum, like Japanese, Chinese or Portuguese. Whichever language you choose, you should find an e-pal for your child online somewhere in the world and start an e-pal correspondence through the keyboard at your fingertips. The children thus connected can exchange information about themselves, their countries and their interests that becomes another 'lesson'.

### BOOKS

In the primary school years, learning to read and write the language well is emphasized because these skills will be used for all learning. While teaching a child to read and write, you can use books on any and every subject, teaching more than just reading. Even though the computer can play a major role in education, there's nothing quite like holding a book in your hands and turning the pages as you and your child read together.



*Beside his Library, hugging his favourite book*

I believe storybooks are the best teachers, not only of Literature, but also of English – that essential language of international communication. No matter how well you speak your native language of Spanish, French or Ga (as in the case of Ghanaian Kofi Anan), English is the language of global communication. The better one speaks, writes and understands English, the better one's chances are of achieving the highest heights in whatever endeavour one chooses.

Books and reading are the best ways of teaching English and we Jamaicans have a head start over people born in non-English-speaking countries, because we are born in a country where English is the primary means of communication. All our laws and Constitution, our newspapers, schoolbooks, television programmes, road signs and examinations are in English, and so I believe that a firm command of English is the best route for education and communication.

#### ENGLISH FLUENCY

We Jamaicans use a national patois of ungrammatical and misspelt English, mixed with contemporary slang, to communicate with each other informally and most of us grow up speaking it from birth, just like Latino children in New York grow up speaking Spanish at home. But, like the Latino children whose parents make sure they learn to speak the English they will meet in school, we Jamaican parents owe it to our children to make our children fully bi-lingual with English as the main language.

Reading English books to a child, is a good way to have the child absorb the flow and habits of the English language. When to use verbs such as ‘was’ instead of ‘were’, or what words are often associated with each other, are learnt when English is read to a child and the bonus is that children who are read to learn to read as a delightful part of their lives. If you have given your child a love of books and reading, you can give that child printed material of all kinds including comics, magazines and newspapers that will expand the child’s mind even further and lead to many learning questions.

I still have about one thousand books from Makonnen’s youth and some of them are such good ‘friends’ of his, that I keep them with us always.

### MATHS

When Makonnen was 4, I was fortunate to work for music manager Olivia ‘Babsy’ Grange, who allowed me to bring him to work with me. Next door to her office the Ramocan family operated a business distributing the Merrill educational book line, and Makonnen spent many hours there exploring the most beautifully prepared set of educational material I have ever encountered. The books on Science and Biology had beautiful pictures, large text and interesting tests and the Ramocans presented him with several of these wonderful school books.

The beautifully illustrated Maths books were accompanied by a Manipulative Kit containing a number of buttons, blocks, rulers, stickers, a counting frame and things like that, making the teaching of Maths a very lovely game. Any child that starts out learning Maths with that set of books or anything similar will have a head-start in Maths for life.

Makonnen had a problem learning the Times Tables, until he was 10 years old and we were staying with friends in Chicago. The man of the house, learning that Makonnen still had not memorized the Tables, set him the task to write them out ten times each day before he could go out and play in the neighbourhood. At first it would be evening time before he was free to meet his friends, but in a few weeks he was out the door by mid-morning leaving behind a sheaf of pages of Times Tables, the information firmly fixed in his brain.

**TEACHING MATHS**

Maths is almost always a required pass subject for high school and university entrance. Yet, despite this requirement, more than half of adults graduate with only a basic Maths knowledge. Times tables and knowing how to add, multiply and subtract usually enables adults to function competently in 90% of situations requiring Maths. For other Maths problems, adults use a calculator and ask or hire someone who knows more for more difficult problems.

With school Maths, unrealistic textbook problems taught in uncreative ways replace real-life situations for problem-solving. A problem that asks a student to estimate how much a train travels between stops at a rate of  $x$  miles and  $x$  speed, minus the time spent at rest in the station, is even more interesting when worked out on a real life train trip and such an activity can inspire a greater curiosity and practical connection for the study of Maths. My own knowledge of basic Algebra and Geometry is all I have needed for life, and I have never needed to know more to survive so far. Certainly I would recommend teaching basic Maths skills to every student, but the level to which you teach Maths will depend on your student.

You may choose to go the formal way, using the Jamaican Maths curriculum, and if your child adapts easily to Maths, you may move faster than the students in 'regular school' and complete the syllabus in less time. Most home-schooling parents whose children adapt easily to Maths find that their child is competent enough to pass Maths CXC years before students in 'regular school'. If so, you should enable your child to do this as an Independent student and to compile not just this, but as many CXC pass certificates in as many other subjects as you wish one at a time.

**HOW MUCH MATHS IS NECESSARY**

On the other hand, your child may be showing giftedness in the art of writing, or playing music, or in exploring archaeological sites. Thus, it will become clear just how much grasp of Maths your student will need to function competently in his or her chosen field of activity. The eager learner will add to his/her store of knowledge as the need arises and don't forget that additional knowledge is available at the click of a mouse.

I did not go far in teaching Makonnen Maths, probably because of my disinterest in the subject. However, he was accepted at age 17 in the CISCO Network Training programme to learn to be a certified network developer. Because of the necessity to know binary code, the course required a CXC Maths pass that he did not have, but his basis Maths, plus his computer knowledge enabled him to be accepted into the class, and to learn and understand as he went along.

Don't forget that these are modern times and that American high schoolers are allowed to use calculators in class and for exams. I see nothing wrong with using a calculator to compute a Maths task, because I am confident that our bankers, accountants and salespersons are using calculators – not pen and paper – to do their daily sums. A basic knowledge of Maths, Algebra and Geometry can be obtained by computer lessons, leading to further study if and when required. So, I have never stressed the memorizing of Maths formulas or processes that can more easily be acquired by the click of a button. After all, Mankind has now invented machines that free our brain space for thinking and creative processes, so why not use them?

#### ALTERNATIVE MATHS

You have the best opportunity to teach many uses of Maths at home. You can teach calculator use, Mental Maths games, the history of famous Mathematicians, and the use of Maths in everyday life. At home you can use any of the many manipulative Maths kits and programmes that make Maths fun and much more than numbers written in an exercise book. Using alternative materials your child will regard Maths as another of the games s/he plays and will undoubtedly assist in creating an adult with greater love of Maths than normal.

As Cafi Cohen writes: *“Kids learn to estimate gallons of paint needed for a room by running through the calculations then trying them out, in this case by painting the room. They master budgeting and balancing checkbooks by helping you juggle (or even taking responsibility for) the family finances. They will never forget how to obtain price per unit after they have stood in a store aisle with the calculator and crunched the numbers several times.”*

### MATHS TUTORS

Of course, you also have the option to hire a tutor, and many home-schooling parents use tutors for subjects such as Maths, Music and languages, especially if students need extra help before sitting CXC or SAT exams.

Tutors also give your child a chance to study under other teachers, but please monitor both the lessons a tutor gives as well as the tutor him/herself, to ensure that the teacher can really teach and – moreover – that your child enjoys being with that teacher. Don't forget that some adults take sexual advantage of children, so monitor the time your child spends with any stranger you allow into your home or to give private lessons at their home.

### OTHER MATHS SOURCES

Microsoft Encarta has the best Maths course I have found online. Once when a student wanted to practise Fractions, we put the word in the Google Search engine and from the results selected a very lovely lesson that we used until the student felt she had mastered and understood Fractions. A mix of formal Maths tuition with alternative approaches is recommended, and teacher and student can choose the lessons and set the pace for learning.

The popular game Monopoly is a wonderful way to teach Maths, as it gives lessons on the four basic Maths operations, as well as lots of mental Maths to calculate percentages, fractions and decimals. A child helping a parent to compute the supermarket shopping list, to record your household budget or to listen as you work out a budget with the builder renovating your home, all provide practical Maths lessons. With the computer as a resource, learning Maths is no longer an intimidating and distasteful activity.

Cafi Cohen recommends that taking a break from Maths lessons can be productive, as there are times when Maths is boring or difficult and a break will do wonders to recharge the mental batteries. She also recommends calculator use, so I am not being outrageous by suggesting teaching Math with a calculator in hand. After all, it's the machine your child will be using as an adult.

### ADDED EXTRAS

Don't deny your children time to play their favourite shoot-them-dead computer games. I used to worry about the amount of time

Makonnen spent playing these games, until I told him it was time to start learning to touch-type. “It’s OK Mom,” he said, “I know where all the keys are from playing computer games.” And he was right.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

### **UN-SCHOOLING**

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‘Home-schooling’ is not the correct term to describe the methods I used to educate my son. Many parents try to operate Home-schooling as a miniature version of ‘school’ in their homes, acquiring books and lesson plans of the regular curriculum, purchasing curriculum packages or using the Internet to access teaching websites. There is a fixed daily schedule of ‘lessons’ and the ultimate goal is to create a child that is ‘brighter’ at a younger age and passes high school or university exams at a scholarship-winning level.

Many parents and children experience ‘burn-out’ on this path, and eventually end up sending unprepared children back into the system because they cannot cope with maintaining such a schedule.

“Un-schooling” is a term more commonly used for the way I did it. Un-schooling means allowing the child to learn what it wants, when it wants, in the way it wants, where it wants, for its own reasons. The learning is learned-directed, and instead of a ‘teacher’, the parent acts as a facilitator and resource person for the student. The same books and information – plus much more – are available for the student, but nothing is forced to boredom, rote or necessity, merely accessible as and when information is needed or wanted.

## CHILDREN THEIR OWN TUTORS

Writes Mary Griffith in her excellent book “The Un-schooling Handbook – How To Use The Whole World As Your Child’s Classroom”.<sup>1</sup>

*Sounds impossible, doesn’t it? The idea that children – even quite young children – should be in charge of their own education, choose what they learn and how they learn it, and even choose whether they should learn anything at all sounds ludicrous,”* “We’ve found a style of child-rearing, an approach to education, a way of life that allows our children so many advantages over conventional schooling that it often sounds too simple and easy to be credible – too good to be true.”

Griffith reminds us that the advent of what we know as ‘school’ only developed in the 1850’s, and that formal education often lasted only 3 to 5 years -- the time it took to learn the basics of reading, writing, arithmetic and a smattering of history and literature. The rest of the knowledge needed to become competent adults was acquired by working alongside adults, either family or as apprentices.

By the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, schools developed into the formal institutions we know and became regarded as a necessary instrument to teach children the information and discipline they would need for future employment in the modern mechanized world. Few children acquired their education outside schools, but there were notable exceptions. Margaret Mead, the famous American anthropologist and heroine who was unschooled, said: “**My grandmother wanted me to have an education, so she kept me out of school.**”

In the 1970s parents began to question the value of ‘school’ as an instrument of educational development. Led by the counter-culture movement of that era, many parents opted to give their children an alternative upbringing and an education that fitted their concept of the global village. Home-schooling also found favour with parents who felt their religious values were not being transmitted to their children within the school system.

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<sup>1</sup> The Unschooling Handbook, Mary Griffith; Prima Publishing Inc., USA, 1998.

## UNSCHOOLING STYLES

Some families come upon un-schooling while their children are still infants and deliberately set out to create circumstances under which un-schooling can thrive. Others, like myself, develop similar ideas and practices accidentally while searching for a form of education that they feel will give their child maximum intellectual possibilities. No two un-schooling families are alike. However, they all have characteristics in common.

Firstly, the home as learning environment is filled with books, toys, games and art supplies. Walls and bookshelves are full of things of interest to a growing mind; the kitchen and the garden are all part of the un-schooling home. What is crucial in un-schooling philosophy, says Griffith, is to know that the child has the desire to learn.

*“The entire un-schooling philosophy hangs on that objective: find nourish and protect a child’s desire to learn. Living this way requires a considerable amount of trust and patience – trust that children will learn what they need and want to know without years of conventional instruction, and patience enough to let them get to it in their own good time.”*

As one parent quoted in Griffith’s book says: *“We don’t approach learning as something people do as a separate activity. We live our lives and learn as we go. We have no teaching, no classes, no lesson plans, no grades, no curriculum, no textbooks, no tests. Basically I don’t pay particular attention to what the children are learning. It is enough to see that they are growing as people and gaining knowledge and experience as they go.”*

Another writes: *“My whole philosophy of un-schooling is based on the premise that learning is a natural, enjoyable, impossible-to-avoid drive that we are all born with. I believe that children want to learn about life and will learn if they are not interfered with. We are un-schooling twenty-four hours of the day, but it doesn’t take any extra time from what we’d be doing anyway. We talk a lot, but there is no special time set aside to do a learning activity, nor are any activities done because they are ‘educational.’”*

Griffith notes that *“...these unconventional learners took a variety of paths for their education. Some had formal tutors to present*

*material their families thought necessary for their education. Some read widely and voraciously. Others accompanied their parents in their work or on their travels; their 'lessons' were simply side effects of the way they spent their time."*

It's this same style of unstructured, wholistic 'education' that I raised my son with, thinking I was 'home-schooling' him and not even knowing that I was actually 'un-schooling' him. I had no formal programme and I just did what seemed necessary at the time to teach him what he needed at the time.

Most of my work was done by reading books to him. By reading over and over again the books he asked me to read to him over and over again, I watched him learn to recognize the pictures, then words, then sentences in his books. Seeing that his learning process raced ahead whether I helped it or not, I was glad to be beside him to help as much as possible.

Reading to a child develops a love of learning, and of books. Each of my son's books was a personal friend. He would surround himself with his books like toys and enjoy them like a buffet. There were some he would read to himself every day, and some he would even take to bed with him. So I gave him more and more books and read them to him. I would buy books, borrow books from friends and ask friends abroad to send him books.

Books were my son's first 'school'. Then came the computer. Both combined to make my work as teacher very easy and lots of fun.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### SO WHAT ABOUT UNIVERSITY?

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One major fear among those considering home-schooling, is that their child will not be able to pass exams to enter secondary or tertiary institutions of learning. The best-known book on this topic is “*And What About College?*” by American author Cafı Cohen.

To quote from the introduction:

*“Cafı Cohen shows that parents did not need to be certified teachers to get their children into college without traditional degrees and transcripts, nor do they have to slavishly follow school methods, curricula and evaluations to help their children become attractive candidates for colleges.*

*Instead, with honest, straightforward descriptions, not education jargon, Cohen tells us how her family developed their ‘eclectic’ high school curricula that utilized a smattering – one to 2 ours a day – of formal correspondence school programs and a large dose of real life activities.”<sup>2</sup>*

Now that the Government’s Education and Technology Ministries have finally overcome their fear of children using the Internet, ‘e-education’ – learning by computer at school or home -- any home schooled child whose parent wishes it to enter the formal system, can acquire the term and test books and papers and tutor their child to exam level, whether Primary, Secondary or Tertiary. In this manner any one of any age can take the tests necessary to

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<sup>2</sup>“*And What About College*” by Cafı Cohen. Holt Associates, Inc. 1997

enter an institution of learning with the required ‘qualifications’.

The growth of home-schooling in the United States, has led education institutions to have separate policies for evaluating home-schooled applicants who may come to them fully educated, but without traditional exam passes.

Stanford University, one of the USA’s top 5, says in their admissions letter for home-schoolers:

*“We do not have a required curriculum or set of courses for applicants to Stanford. Primarily we want them to be able to demonstrate that they have successfully undertaken a serious, rigorous course of study. They should definitely provide a detailed description of their curriculum when they apply, but it is not necessary to follow a prescribed or approved home-schooling program. The central issue for us is how they have gone about the learning process, not how many hurdles they have jumped.”*

The letter continues: *“We look for a clear sense of the intellectual growth and quest for knowledge. Home-schooled students may even have a potential advantage over others in this aspect of the application since they have consciously chosen and pursued an independent course of study. In particular we would like to hear from them about how the family chose home-schooling, how the learning was organized, what benefits they have derived from the experience.”*

Harvard University, among others, has a special Admissions Office for home schooled students and says that the university welcomes such students as home schooling gives a lifelong love of learning that is an advantage at university level.

Students can sit CXC Caribbean Examination Council) exams as independent candidates at any age, so a home schooled student can sit exams as and when they feel competent – spreading the acquiring of 4 CXCs over 4 years if desired, while studying other subjects of greater interest not on the everyday curriculum. An enlightened national e-curriculum should embody e-exams where students will be able to use computers instead of pencil and paper to answer questions. After all, in this day and age, which boss requires employees to deliver work done by hand?

You could, of course, think as I do, that exams and certificates are not as valuable as the ability to earn a living and support oneself financially, and that it is possible to achieve this objective at any stage of one's education – not necessarily only after tertiary and even graduate studies. E-education should deliver students capable of e-earnings, on which to build firm creative job opportunities in the new digital age.

Many parents still believe that the piece of paper that says you have completed a tertiary course, if mandatory for an economically successful adult life. But remember that Bill Gates dropped out of Harvard because his mind was aching to develop his big idea rather than studying.

A teenager who is already operating a digital design studio giving work to 5 other persons, has clearly learnt whatever lessons high school could teach him for his immediate survival and life. If he should decide he needs to know more about business management, improve his digital skills or even change careers, the confidence his education has given him will enable him to acquire this knowledge easily through any of the hundreds of online certification courses offered by recognized universities and colleges.

I personally do not value a US college education for my son. I see little value in him spending 3 or more years in a culture where Greek civilization and material values are studied as most desirable. Fortunately, having seen the US on several occasions, he has made his own choice that Jamaica is the best place in the world to live and work, and that he can learn anything he wants from this home base.

However, many parents are worried that their child won't succeed without that magical university certificate. If you have set your sights on those goals for your child that will need exams, certificates and graduations, then you should start planning early for the end result. If your child shows a gift for medicine and you know he will need to enter medical school, then start collecting the schoolwork records and exam results that you can attach to his application form along with a description of the home schooling programme he has benefited from.

But if you see that he will write some great musical symphonies, then spending hours learning with some of Jamaica’s musical greats would be of greater benefit than a CXC pass certificate in Physics or Principles of Business. With formal tuition needing only one or two hours a day by computer, a home schooled child would have ample time to develop his skill or special genius. Moreover, his acceptance into a music academy would not only depend on pass certificates, but definitely on the talent and potential he displays.

As Cohen’s book states, *“The importance of home schooling is not that our children can get into Ivy League schools and other places of higher education just like traditionally schooled kids, but that there are different ways, new paths, for parents and children to live, learn, find work worth doing, and grow old together. College admissions should not be the goal or yardstick to measure success in home schooling. We must define and accept success for home schooling on our own terms, not the terms of others.”*

CLONLARA and other Internet schools can show parents how to translate their child’s un-schooling into work credits acceptable to traditional education institutions. This online school is also the preferred choice for home schooling parents who want to re-enter the mainstream.

So don’t be afraid that Junior won’t be able to get a university education when he grows up, if you home school. By that time, home schooling, unschooling and e-education will be highly acceptable learning options.

## **HERE’S HOW**

Cafi Cohen tells how Unschooling studies and activities can be assessed for college-entrance credits in her book **“And What About College”**. I recommend it for more detailed information.

Home-schooling two teenagers, she recommends that high school-aged home-schoolers begin by keeping an extremely detailed journal of everything they do. They should list every daily activity from household chores, shopping, errands, jobs, phone calls, books, magazines and newspapers, TV shows, movies, time spent with family, friends, pets, preparing snacks and meals, walking,

bike riding, sports, letter writing, journal writing, trips, field trip activities, and note the approximate amount of time spent on each activity.

She then recommends that you go through this journal and assign a broad subject category to every activity. The basics are: Science; Maths, Language Arts, which includes speech, reading, writing, drama, film, etc.; Social Studies, which includes current events, history, magazines, books, historical fiction, geography (traveling), biographies, etc.; Creative Arts, which includes music, dance, art, etc.; Physical Education, including sports, walking, biking, swimming; and a category Cohen invented -- Independent Living, including everything else such as shopping, home economics, business, computers, typing, jobs, travel arrangements, dining out.

She then assigned a letter for each subject category:

S = Science

LA = Language Arts

M = Maths

SS = Social Studies

IL = Independent Living

CA = Creative Arts

PE = Physical Education

By marking the journal with an appropriate subject letter beside each activity, it became possible to accurately account for education time spent. Here's a typical day for her son, broken down into study credit hours:

- Made breakfast (1 hour) IL
- Tidied bedroom (1/2 hour) IL
- Watched talk show on TV (1 hour) SS
- Read newspaper (1/2 hour) SS
- Rode bike to library, read *Popular Science* magazine, started reading *A separate Peace* (1 1/2 hours) PE, S, LA
- Fixed lunch, baked cookies (1 1/2 hour) IL
- Cleaned pet cage, walked dog (1 hour) IL or S
- Delivered newspapers (2 hours) IL
- Worked on customer accounts (1/2 hour) M
- Watched movie *Dances With Wolves* (3 hours) LA or SS

- Talked with friends (1/2 hour)
- Practiced trumpet (1/2 hour) CA
- Read more of *A Separate Peace* before bed (1 hour) LA

When her son was ready to apply to enter college, she could show the number of credits earned by adding the number of hours spent in each area of study.

A look at the course descriptions attached to her children's resumes includes:

- **First year Latin**, covering vocabulary, grammar, translation, Latin phrases used in English and Roman history and culture;
- **Maths**; using the famous Saxon Maths textbook to teach fundamentals of algebra, geometry and trigonometry, logarithms, etc.
- **Spanish I**; Basic conversational Spanish emphasized through extensive listening and speaking, by reading children's books in Spanish, vocabulary development including clothing, the house, time, weather, the calendar, numbers and geography of the Spanish-speaking world.
- **Spanish II**: History of Spanish speaking countries, traditional Hispanic foods, emphasis on conversational Spanish, focus on verbs, possessive adjectives, cultures of Spanish-speaking countries.
- **World Geography**: overview of physical, political and economic geography; resources and needs of the world's nations, relationship between peoples and the land, land forms and climates that form our physical environment, how people make their living on the earth and how they change it. Materials include the game "Where In the World", National Geographic videos and magazines, atlases.
- **Contemporary authors**: Introduction to 20<sup>th</sup> century authors based on student-selected readings and discussions. Forms studied are the short story, novel, biography, poetry, works in translation and newspaper and magazine articles.
- **English Vocabulary**: course covers the Indo-European family of languages and the development of

English vocabulary, dictionary usage, Greek and Latin affixes/based, and word analysis.

- **Bible Studies:** Bible readings including Genesis, Exodus, Job, Psalms, Ecclesiastes, and the entire New Testament, plus discussion and activities related to the readings.
- **Physical Education:** Tae Kwon Do, netball, cycling, running, walking, hiking as a means to promote lifetime physical fitness. Also included are nutritional studies and meal planning.
- **Introduction to Computers:** Hands-on experience, basic word-processing, graphics, keyboarding.
- **Physics:** Newton's laws, statics, dynamics, thermodynamics, optics, circuits, electro-magnetics and special relativity using text *Physics: An Incremental Approach* by John Saxon.

Here is the Resume of Cafi's daughter TAMARA for her College entrance application:

#### Completed High School Credits

Math	5
English	7
Science	3
Social Sciences	5 1/2
Physical Education	3
Foreign Language	2
Miscellaneous	7

#### High School Courses in Progress

Spanish II  
Physics AP

#### College Courses in Progress

English 101  
Communications 129

#### Activities

Foreign Exchange Student to Australia  
Extensive independent travel  
Foreign paid work experience  
Attendance at overseas high school

Cross-cultural interpersonal communication

Dramatic Arts & Choir

Beginning Choir at Overland High School  
Advanced Women's Choir at Overland High School  
Director of beginning women's choir  
Part of musical "Grease" at Overland High School  
Part of musical "Oklahoma" at Bendigo Theatre Co.  
Instructor of beginning voice lessons  
Solo performances on piano  
Solo performances – singing  
Piano instruction  
Music theory instruction  
Section leader for Advanced Women's Choir

Church Activities

President Overland Bible Club  
Youth group participation  
Youth council participation  
Organizer of activities  
Participation in camps  
Choir (both youth and adult)  
Bell choir participation

Athletic activities

Tae Kwon Do  
Netball team in Australia  
Bush walking (Hiking) in Australia  
Miscellaneous sports: swimming, skiing, softball

Work experience

Village Dry Cleaners  
Taking in clothing  
Tagging  
Customer relations  
Pressing shirts  
Opening and closing duties  
Using a cash register

Vocal lessons

Maintaining student interest

- Planning lesson materials
- Modeling vocal techniques

Sizzler Restaurant

- Greeting customers
- Writing orders
- Supplying drinks
- Using the cash register
- Waiting on tables
- Maintaining salad bar
- Maintaining general cleanliness
- Assisting cooking staff
- Closing and opening duties

Northern Reflections

- Greeting customers
- Selling clothing
- Using the register
- Maintaining store cleanliness
- Opening and closing duties
- Display design
- Wardrobe coordination

Volunteer Experience

Humana Hospital

- Assisting nurses
- Transporting patients via wheelchair or bed
- Taking patient temperatures
- Various paperwork
- Responsibility for general cleanliness

Central Baptist Church

- Leading worship services
- Accompanying congregation on piano
- Computer data entry

Choral Directing

- Vocal warm-ups
- Piano accompanying
- Directing and giving advice where needed
- Picking appropriate music

Awards

8<sup>th</sup> Gup Yellow Belt (Tae Kwon Do)

7<sup>th</sup> Gup Yellow Belt with Green Stripe (Tae Kwon Do)

4<sup>th</sup> Place at Ensemble Festival

A Division Ladies Netball 2<sup>nd</sup>

AA Division Mixed Netball 1<sup>st</sup>

Humana Pin Volunteer Award

**Impressive, yes!**

### **THE CLONLARA HOME/UN-SCHOOLING OPTION**

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Clonlara is an online USA-based school for home-schoolers and un-schoolers. Clonlara's philosophy is:

“A student will learn naturally if s/he follows the path of his/her own interests. A small child's curiosity is insatiable, but that curiosity is peculiar to her/his own unique character. A child cannot be told what to be curious about at what particular time of day, over what span of minutes or hours. A student at the high school level need not have their time so directed, either.

”Our high school students have the freedom to allow their intellect to grow naturally and fully with the assistance and support of parents, Clonlara School Advisors and mentors, and the rich resources of home and community.

”The Clonlara School Home Based Education Program is able to serve students at all ranges of the educational spectrum, from gifted to struggling. Those Clonlara School graduates who opt to go on to college are accepted at universities in every part of the country. Clonlara offers:

- A comprehensive program K -12
- A **Clonlara School Advisor** for each family who shepherds the student files, responds to parent letters or e-mail, and offers as much counseling and guidance as necessary.
- Deals with all school officials with and for a family.
- Maintains all student records.

Clonlara provides:

- Students who wish to transfer to an institutional school with complete grades and records.
- Graduates receive complete final transcripts.
- Issues its private school diploma to those who complete the program.

A Clonlara secondary student chooses learning activities which fits his/her needs and interests; finds and uses resources: books, people who know, videos, tapes, documentaries, libraries, museums, theater, work sites; accounts for time spent in these educational pursuits; have a say in the final evaluation of their work.; takes control of their own education in ways that are not possible in other schools or home education programs.

Secondary students at Clonlara are expected to master academic subjects at least as well as they would in any other school. They consistently do much more than this. They leave the Clonlara School program equipped for the next step in their lives, whether that is college, the work force or entrepreneurship.

Clonlara believes that the usual "three Rs" are not the only worthwhile learning activities. "Toad hunting is learning," says Clonlara on its website. "Visiting businesses and places of interest around the home is learning. Developing a business, singing, storytelling, hiking, sewing, sawing, painting and discussing current events are all learning. Showing compassion for a friend in need is learning. Attending dramatic events, watching a master at work, discussing and examining issues -- all are learning opportunities. In short, anything a student does that results in your learning counts as 'school' in Clonlara. "

### GROWING AND DEVELOPING

Growing and developing are at the core of the Clonlara approach; earning credits toward a high school diploma is just a formality. Starting a project and sticking with it over a period of time to a logical conclusion is something that most high school students are denied, but not home-schooled children whose parents can implement some of the following projects:

**ADVENTURE:** an effort that stretches the student's awareness or courage in a new direction, helping to break down a fear or

resistance s/he may harbor. Taking a trip, climbing a mountain, entering a competition, working out problems in a relationship, embarking upon a physical fitness program, apprenticing to a worker/mentor are some examples.

**CAREER EXPLORATION:** a paid or unpaid experience that exposes a student to some desired future work and/or helps in the development of good work skills. Attending cosmetology school, doing a computer internship, apprenticing to a farrier are but a few examples.

**CREATIVITY:** involvement in some creative process stressing originality, and the interplay between process and product: composing music, art, writing, building, etc.

**LOGICAL INQUIRY:** following any question to a conclusion arrived at thoroughly, objectively, and systematically. One student, starting with no knowledge of physics, built an electromagnetic device and explained its principles. Another developed a study using questionnaires he devised to find out what makes different people upset and stressed.

**PRACTICAL SKILL:** learning any skill that renders one more independent or capable of doing things in the world. Learning a foreign language, cooking, sewing, auto mechanics or accounting are some obvious examples.

**COMMUNITY SERVICE/GLOBAL AWARENESS:** the student chooses any issue that has implications for the welfare of others. Then s/he executes a project which raises awareness of the issue, and contributes to change. The issue can be as general as kindness or as specific as Habitat for Humanity work. Action can involve an internship, a poster, a clean-up project, teaching a class, learning a foreign language, working for an environmental group, working in support groups with younger kids, setting up field trips, etc.

### **Credits**

In Clonlara, the student is ACTIVE! The home learner counts everything that he/she does that relates to an academic subject as part of the clock hours to gain credits for that subject. If a student is studying English Literature for example, he/she counts the number of hours spent reading, the time spent viewing plays and dramas, the time spent thinking about and discussing the above,

the time spent writing about English Literature, and any other activity that relates to it.

These are some of the reasons why Clonlara provides a safe home-schooling environment for parents who are afraid they are denying their children a 'rounded education'.



*With the great American 'techie' Melissa Sconyers, (front) a home-schooled Clonlara student, and TechSchool students Maya & Sarosh*

## CHAPTER NINE

### SEYMOUR PAPERT - A MOST IMPORTANT LINK

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Dr. Seymour Papert is a mathematician and one of the early pioneers of Artificial Intelligence. Additionally, he is internationally recognized as the seminal thinker about ways in which computers can change learning.

Born and educated in South Africa where he participated actively in the anti-apartheid movement, Dr. Papert pursued mathematical research at Cambridge University from 1954-1958. He then worked with Jean Piaget at the University of Geneva from 1958-1963. It was this collaboration that led him to consider using mathematics in the service of understanding how children can learn and think.

In the early 1960's, Papert came to MIT where, with [Marvin Minsky](#), he founded the Artificial Intelligence Laboratory and co-authored their seminal work, **Perceptrons** (1970) . . He is the author of: **Mindstorms: Children Computers and Powerful**

**Ideas** (1980), **The Children's Machine: Rethinking School in the Age of the Computer** (1992). He also has written numerous articles about mathematics, Artificial Intelligence, education, learning, and thinking.

Seymour Papert's best-known book is [The Connected Family: bridging the digital generation gap](#) (1996). His website provides continuously updated advice, including recommended Web sites. Another site that Professor Papert and friends helped create for children (and their parents) is [MaMaMedia](#).

A mathematician by training, Seymour Papert was one of the early pioneers of artificial intelligence. He is also internationally recognized as the seminal thinker regarding computers and pedagogy for children. His collaboration with Jean Piaget at the University of Geneva led him to consider using mathematics to help understand how children can learn and think. In the early 1960s, Papert came to MIT, where, with Marvin Minsky, he founded the Artificial Intelligence Lab and co-authored their seminal work *Perceptrons*.

He is the author of *Mindstorms: Children, Computers, and Powerful Ideas*; *The Children's Machine: Rethinking School in the Age of the Computer*; and *The Connected Family: Bridging the Digital Generation Gap*. He has also written numerous articles about mathematics, artificial intelligence, education, learning, and thinking. Born and educated in South Africa, Papert was an active participant in the anti-apartheid movement.

The distinguished M.I.T. Professor says: *“I wrote my book for parents and teachers (and kids!) who are interested in the profound changes in learning brought about by the explosion of computers in the home. They -- and you -- want to find out more about how to use computers to learn and grow. This web site will complement my book and offer helpful resources that can be continually updated.*

<http://www.connectedfamily.com/main.html>

## ESSENTIAL READING

### **Child Power: Keys to the New Learning of the Digital Century**

Lecture delivered by Prof. SEYMOUR PAPERT at the 11th Colin Cherry Memorial Lecture on Communication, at Imperial College, London, 1998

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I'd rather start by anticipating a certain air of paradox that will strike future historians looking back at the evolution of education policy in these last decades of the second millennium. These historians, I believe, will be struck and puzzled by the fact that in the decades immediately before the most momentous mega-change that had ever come to the practice of learning and of education, we see major governments in the world seemingly attempting to undo those changes that had come about prefiguring the mega-change to come.

The element of denial in much educational policy in this fantasy period is reflected in an advertisement that I recently saw in a *Times* educational supplement. This ad had two faces. On the one hand, by trying to sell computers and connecting services to schools, it was catering to their desire to belong to what is most modern, to belong to the digital age that everybody knows we're entering. On the other hand, the ad takes pains to reassure teachers that this will not disturb the essential elements of the status quo. The ad says, "You will not have to change how you teach; they (presumably meaning the students) will not have to change what they learn."

## RENDERING OBSOLETE

This evening I'll be presenting a diametrically different view of the significance for education of digital technologies. The ad sees the technology as a means to improve existing practice while changing it as little as possible. I see the technology as tending to render

obsolete almost all features that we regularly would associate with the structure of school.

Among these features, I mean to include such well-entrenched ones as the segregation of children by age. I think it bears thinking that we all take for granted that in school, but *only* in school, we think it appropriate to put seven-year-olds in one room and eight-year-olds in another room. If I were to ask you to segregate yourselves by age, I am sure you would laugh at me or certainly wouldn't do it. You'd think I'd gone even crazier than usual. Why is it that we do this in school?

I think there's only one reason. That reason is that this is production-line organization of the product of school. It is like the production line in the [original] Ford factory: the car moved along and at each station an additional change was made, a piece was added, something was checked, an exam was given. This is a model of education that I think was appropriate in an earlier period for a number of reasons. One, we didn't know any other way to do it. And I am going to be elaborating on that by talking about ways in which we can do things very differently because we have another technology of knowledge now.

In addition to segregation by age, I think the idea of the linear curriculum is itself another manifestation of a production-line mode of organization. As the child moves through on the seventh of May in his third year he will learn this; and on the ninth of April in his fifth year he will learn that. In the extreme, it is all spelled out. In practice, of course, it's not quite as rigid as that. But in principle, the way that school organizes the dispensation of knowledge follows this production-line model.

I am going to attribute this to the same causes. But I am also going to argue that in order to take advantage of the new avenues of learning opened by digital technology, we are going to be obliged to give up this linear curriculum mode of dissemination of knowledge. We will be obliged to do it because I think that the major difference that I see between the way education has taken place up to now and the way it will take place in the future is captured by my title of this lecture--"Child Power." I am going to give a number of different meanings, a number of different aspects to the concept of power there.



*Teaching technology to Amerindian children in the Amazon jungle of Guyana.*

## POWER TO CONTROL THEIR OWN LEARNING

First, I am going to be talking about giving the children power to control their own learning process. And if they're controlling their own learning process, this is in radical contradiction with the idea of the set curriculum, the linear order and the arrangement of learning by age-segregated grades. I am also going to use the term *child power* to refer to another aspect and that is to the political power of children as a major force in producing educational change.

I opened by referring to what looked like a pessimistic sense of what is happening in educational policy-making. I anticipate mega-change in the way children learn. When we look around us we see not only an absence of mega-change, we see a number of ways in which policy seems to be designed to prevent the mega-change.

The attitude expressed in the Research Machines ad that I quoted shows this in a general way. You see it in many specific aspects of current educational discussion. I'll mention two. In our country, as

I believe in yours, there has recently been a mounting pressure for standardized tests to be applied to students. The reason given for wanting these tests is couched in terms like we need to impose standards, education is deteriorating, children are emerging from school illiterate, ignorant, bereft of moral values. And in many ways people look around and see that the school system, at least for many members of society, seems not to be working. What to do about this?

I think what we do about it depends on your answer to the question about whether the problem is that school is changing too much or school is changing too little. I think we live in a society in which a rapid and accelerating change in social life and the economy and the kind of work that people do is transforming the need for knowledge. And I think this is pretty widely accepted that knowledge in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is going to be very different. The need for knowledge is going to be very different. You can capture this by noting that even today a very substantial proportion of people are engaged in work, in jobs that did not exist when they were born and that number is increasing.

### OBSOLETE SKILLS

So the model that says learn while you're at school, while you're young, the skills that you will apply during your lifetime is no longer tenable. The skills that you can learn when you're at school will not be applicable. They will be obsolete by the time you get into the workplace and need them, except for one skill. The one really competitive skill is the skill of being able to learn. It is the skill of being able not to give the right answer to questions about what you were taught in school, but to make the right response to situations that are outside the scope of what you were taught in school. We need to produce people who know how to act when they're faced with situations for which they were not specifically prepared.

Now, given that picture of a rapid change of society, one would expect to see a rapid evolution of the institutions charged with preparing the young for it. We do not see this. We see a much slower rate of evolution of the school and that means we're seeing a bigger and bigger gap between school and society. This gap is what I believe is responsible for the deterioration of performance

in our schools and our educational systems. Because the children can see this; they can see that school is irrelevant. They feel that the pace of school and the mood of the school culture is out of sync with the society in which they live. And so it becomes harder and harder to get them to buy into the idea that school is satisfying their needs, that school is a bridge to the 21st century, as our political leaders keep on reiterating.

#### POLITICAL LEADERS AFRAID

Our political leaders and I am afraid most members of our educational establishment I believe miss this point. And that is this is an example of feedback gone wrong.

Feedback, which is such a crucial idea in control engineering and cybernetics, means that if the temperature in the room, for example, is too low, you turn on the means that will raise it; if it is too high, you turn on the means that will lower it. But if you reverse the wires so your thermostat is connected in such a way that it will turn on the heat when it is too hot and turn on the cold when it is too cold, you'll get an explosive runaway deterioration of the environmental conditions. And this is what's happening to the educational system.

The tendency today is for people to interpret the failure of school, the problems in schools, to too much change. And so they push school backwards. They try to revert to the state which, at least in their version of history (and there's something in this at an earlier stage), it did work more successfully. But by doing that, they are aggravating the problem. They're in a state of reverse negative feedback that will lead to aggravation of the problem until the system breaks down, which is what I think will happen.

#### CHANGING EDUCATION

Putting it like that faces a different way of thinking about how change and resistance to change in the education world happens. There is a standard model that we were taught at education school, if you went there, that goes something like, "Well, scientific research will determine that certain methods of education are valid. We will measure and we'll see if this way of teaching or that

way of teaching is the best. We will then design a reform of the system that will implement these new methods."

I don't think that there's any trace of evidence for that model actually applying. I think that the process of change is of a very different nature. And the example of the broken-down feedback mechanism is, a case in point, one aspect of a different sort of mechanism that is saying to us, "Let's understand what's happening in education, not in terms of which theories are right about how learning happens and which theories are wrong, but rather in terms of looking at the education system as a dynamic system." It is a dynamic system that works like any engineering system that has stabilities where feedback operates, where it moves from disequilibriums to equilibriums and where the set of ideas to which we're indebted to people like Colin Cherry are more relevant than the set of ideas to which we're indebted to people like Piaget.

#### FIRST COMPUTERS IN SCHOOLS

I want to give you another example, a slightly more detailed example, of looking at the system as a dynamic system. When I first saw microcomputers, that is, personal computers, in schools, they were invariably brought in by a visionary teacher who somehow managed to get one. The first one that I saw, in fact, had been constructed with a kit by this teacher with the help of his son over the summer vacation. Others were brought in. They bought them, people contributed them, they got a grant somewhere. But it was a visionary teacher who brought the computer into the school.

The teacher brought that computer into that school because she or he saw in ways that maybe were only dimly understood that there was a feeling that this technology could provide a way of breaking out of the rigid structure of the school system, that could allow that teacher to be more creative, to do something closer to creating the kind of learning environment that human intuition, human relationships and looking at people in the learning process would lead one to. This was different from the highly technical process that the curriculum established on the basis of scientific studies and implemented by lesson plans that cover the whole K-12 period. Well, the computer would break out of this.

We saw in those early days--around the early 1980s--some wonderful examples of teachers using very primitive computers to wonderful advantage. They were doing extremely creative things in which children were carrying out projects that cut across curriculum, that cut across the subdivision of mathematics, science, English, history, that combined all these things and produced a product that, like all the products of human effort, draws not on one discipline alone but on putting them all together.

That was a picture in the early '80s and it inspired a lot of optimism. By the mid-80s, though, the situation had changed quite considerably. It changed in a way which I think one can best understand by a biological analogy. By the triggering of something like an immune system, and I am looking at the education system as kind of a living organism, this computer that came in was a foreign body that threatened the established order of the system and like all systems this triggered a defense mechanism.

#### SYSTEM'S DEFENSE MECHANISM

The defense mechanism consisted of taking charge. The system, the administration, the ministries now began to take charge, so the computers were no longer in the hands of the visionary teacher but were in the hands of the administration. And, in principle, the bureaucratic administration has a deep, vested interest in maintaining the status quo. So very quickly we saw the computer converted from being the revolutionary instrument that the visionary teachers hoped to find in it and to become, instead, an instrument of reaction, a bulwark of conservatism. And we saw this in lots of ways.

One was instead of the computer cutting across the disciplines in the subjects, the computer is now confined to a computer room and it is a subject of its own, taken out of the mainstream of the learning environment. There's now a specialized computer teacher. There's a curriculum even for the study of the computer. It has been normalized by the system; it has been tamed. That's not the only way in which it can be tamed.

Other ways are using it to put children through more effective drill and practice in the rote learning that is the goal of many parts of the curriculum. And the computer happens to lend itself, if you

want to use it in that mode, to making the most objectionably rote aspects of the learning even more so. There are many other ways. I don't have time to dwell on all of them.

## MOVEMENT OF ENTHUSIASM

The point I want to make is that I see this movement of enthusiasm and change in the attitude towards computers and how they are seen not as the result of the numerous scientific papers that were being published at the same time as the researchers rushed into print to offer the articles to prove the points they saw would be welcomed by the players in this game that was being played out there. That was not the causal process. The causal process was the system behavior.

Well, now, an aspect of the system is that once it started in the direction of this momentum and schools continued buying more and more computers, computers began to overflow outside of the computer lab. They began to fall back into situations where they could be used by visionary teachers again and used in the more visionary way. And so in the '90s, we began to see the beginnings of sparks here and there of the situation more like the early '80s.

And that's the point at which I'd like to go back to what might have been more appropriately said at the beginning--some remarks about Colin Cherry, in whose honor this meeting is being held. Well, we all owe a great debt to Colin Cherry. Everybody in any of the digital fields recognizes that he was one of the first to see the scope of this field, to write books, like his book on human communication, to hold meetings to bring together people who gained a sense of community as a new discipline.

## CHERRY EXPERIENCE

Now, this was 1960 and it was not a time when computers just sat there, but there was a computer just sitting there and so I began poking at it. After a while a student came by and helped me a little. This was no Windows95 with those fat manuals. It took only 10 or 15 minutes before I'd actually written a program. And writing that program, just thinking of something I could playfully do at this computer, suddenly I found myself with a line on a problem that

had bothered me for many years that seemed just too messy for me to tackle. All of a sudden at this computer I was working on this problem and pretty close to a solution. A few days later I had actually had it. I had a paper off to *Nature*. It was on stereoscopic vision.

Well, that was an amazing experience! There I was euphoric with this sense of empowerment that this intellectual tool had given me. And since at the time my regular job was at the University of Geneva teaching and researching with Piaget, children were close to my mind and an obsession was born. The obsession was that children should get that intellectual power and that sense of thrill that I got, that children are the people who most need an amplification of their intellectual capacities. And that started me on this track that brings me here today. Unfortunately, I can't trace it. It wouldn't be appropriate to bore you with tracing details.



*M.I.I. Junior Summit: 100 students from around the world materialize Papert's dream*

So to the extent that my little incident, my empowering euphoric moment, was going to inspire a sense of what children might do with this technology, it was something that didn't fit the popular image of what information technology was about. The popular image of what technology is about is far too much about information and not nearly as much as you see in that incident, about using it as an instrument, as a tool to do something.

In the real world if you think of what computers do, most of it is not about information in the ordinary sense. If you think of making a spaceship, designing that space shuttle, setting up the control mechanisms to control it, this would be of a complexity that would be completely impossible without computers. And not only because you couldn't get at sufficient information to design it, but because you wouldn't have this material that would control these complex processes that could allow you to design or sketch your circuits on a screen.

## TECHNOLOGY AS CONSTRUCTION

So I'd like to recognize, oversimplifying a complex issue--two, let's say, wings to digital technology. One is the technology as an informational medium and the other is the technology as a constructional medium, as more like wood and bricks and steel than like words and printer's type. Now I think that the existence of these two wings and the fact that for the popular perception the informational wing is highly dominant--because that's the one people can see and that's the one that really affects their lives--has produced a deep distortion of how people think about this technology in relation to education. And I think this is best seen by noting, again oversimplifying a complicated issue, that in education also one can recognize these same two wings.

Part of learning is getting information. Somebody stands in front of the classroom and preaches and information is somehow flowing into people's heads, or so it is said. But that's only one part of education. The other part, which Dewey would have emphasized, is about doing things, making things, constructing things. However, in our school systems, as in the popular image of education, the informational side is again dominating.

And so, it comes about this match between an unrecognized dichotomy in digital technology and a generally unrecognized dichotomy in the education system where in both cases the informational side is best known to the general public and these match one another. So that the image of computers in school becomes one of supporting the traditional role of the teachers in their part of education.

And so we get people talking about finding the best teacher in the world, putting this person on the World Wide Web so every student can have the best teacher. Well, maybe, but that's not the way I think that the technology will change the learning environment. I think it will be more like what happened to me with Minsky's computer--that a problem I just couldn't solve, it was too complex, too messy for me, suddenly I could. My goal in life, which has been my major activity over the last 10 years, has especially been to find ways children can use this technology as a constructive medium to do things that no child could do before, to do things at a complexity that was not previously accessible to children.

And so to take one simple example: I worked with the Lego Company making a little computer this size that you could put in a Lego construct and have it connected to sensors and motor and you could make a little device that will follow a light. You could take the same thing and you could put sensors on it and you could program it to make a sound. You could, and I have seen children do this, make a musical instrument in which moving a slider up and down controls a sound. And then you could face issues like, should it produce sound continuously or only discreet notes? and on and on. As you make this little musical instrument, making it raises a new problem and that raises a new problem and you get deeper and deeper into issues of physics and mathematics and music appreciation and musical history and above all into the management of what's becoming a complex project.

And when I say "you" I mean you might be seven-years-old or eight-years-old, because I see children of that age who are able to carry out this kind of project.

## POWERFUL PROCESS

However, in the meantime, a much more powerful process had come into being. This much more powerful process was that computers overflowed the boundaries of the school and were now becoming available to children in their bedrooms, in the studies, in the living rooms of their homes, in community centers, in all sorts of places where they're outside the control of the school system and so outside the dynamic of its internal mechanisms

What happens outside is a significant new element in the dynamic of the evolution of the education system. Because we are now beginning to see children who had computers at home from the beginning of their lives. Not all children in this situation used them very effectively or had very rich learning experiences with them but some did. And those who at home had these richer learning experiences with the computer are beginning to appear in school as a kind of a nuisance because they are demanding from school--"Why aren't we doing here what we know how to do at home?"

So these children are beginning to produce a pressure on the school from within, a kind of subversive force coming into the system, not only demanding change but most important offering to help in that change. They are offering to make available a degree of technical knowledge and mastery not only of the computer as a machine but of the use of the computer as a research instrument and in many other ways that the teacher may not, in most cases did not, have the time and perhaps inclination to learn.

So we're beginning to see a little foretaste of a greater situation to come at an almost precisely predictable time, because it's only in the last three or four years that there has been a large number of children who have these computers at home and the opportunity to use them. The cohort of young people who grew up with a computer from the beginning has not yet hit school with its full force. It will very soon and when that happens, I predict that we will see inside the classrooms an eventually irresistible pressure to change the structure and the content and the nature of schooling.

#### NEW KIND OF POWER

This is a new kind of power and this is one aspect of child power--children as an intellectual power, as a political power exerting a force for ideas about education, that existed long before there were computers, long before there was technology. But the technology has put these children in a position where they're able to each become a major force.

I want to end by putting it to you that this is a true mega-change in the nature of learning and the possibilities of learning open to children. Dewey would have liked us to believe that the child will

learn only that which is rooted in that child's interests. But there's a fundamental contradiction there between this and the idea that certain subjects like mathematics should be learned by children, because what if the child doesn't have any interest that is related to mathematics? Well, in a sense that can't be; everything is related to mathematics. But it can be and it was the case until recently that most children who were interested in music could not get any access to a mathematical activity that significantly related to their musical instrument.

But these children building this new musical instrument, this is just meant as one way, just an example of one way in which a child whose passion is music could be drawn into a situation with deep mathematical and physical and other ideas closely related to that child's passion. And I think that couldn't happen [before]. This is my sense that with this technology we have the infrastructure that can enable us to realize their dream that you could learn everything through what you care about.

So that is a vision, but let's notice as we close that this vision is radically incompatible with the structure of school. Because although you need mathematics and mathematical ideas to build your musical instrument, if you are a seven- or eight-year-old child these mathematical ideas are very unlikely to have occurred in the curriculum of your school up to that point or maybe anywhere. You need that mathematical knowledge *now*, not on the seventh of May in your eighth year of school or whenever it might be. This is, I think, a fundamental, radical incompatibility.

Of course, it raises a problem--the problem that the motivation of learning mathematics has been replaced by the problem of access. Where can a child get that knowledge? Well, the other side of digital technology gives us the answer--the information side. And as the information available and the communicational possibilities of contacting people somewhere in the world who might share your interests and be willing to share knowledge with you increase through the informational side of digital technology, the implementation of the constructional side as the driving force, as the main guiding metaphor for the learning environment for schooling, becomes possible.

And so, I see mega-change as happening. But this mega-change requires us to think more clearly about the nature of school, to recognize the informational and constructional sides, to think more clearly about the technology, to recognize its two sides, to think about how they're related, to think in system terms about the way learning as an activity, as an environment is going to evolve and to have the courage to realize that we are living in an education system that is inconsistent. There are schools in educational systems that are inconsistent with the technological, intellectual, social milieu of this 21st century. You're not going to answer this by taking tests, where the children take tests of 19th century knowledge. Doing that is building a bridge to the 19th century. It's not opening a gate to the 21st.

We try in our school systems to decide what people will learn in this top-down, centralized way and, for the same reason, it is not compatible with the complexities and dynamic possibilities of the modern world. And I think the subject is increasing strain. The decision to make is not whether we will continue with school or change it. It will collapse. Our question is whether we'll wait until we're driven to the wall and the system is collapsed from within from its own internal contradictions before we decide that we're going to create conditions that will allow a new system where there'll be diversity of learning paths, diversity of teaching methods, diversity of subjects to be learned.

And, if we believe in our free enterprise economies, I think that a blossoming of a Darwinian evolution in the learning sphere is going to take place. Thank you very much.

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### **THE ROLE OF CULTURE IN EDUCATION**

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Observing the deficiencies in the Jamaican education system, as well as the society's preference for Western, Eurocentric lifestyle and mores, it was even easier for me as a Rasta to choose to home-school my son and keep him away from influences that become cultural habits from early childhood continually reinforced throughout the education process.

In vain have wise Jamaicans including Garveyites, Pan-Africanists and Rastafarians pleaded with Government to make the study of the philosophy and opinions of National Hero Marcus Garvey included in all aspects of the Jamaican curriculum. They hope, in vain so far, that the thoughts and attitude of this brilliant Jamaican could create a new intellectual, social and productive flowering of Jamaican development, taking us out of decades of poverty, unemployment, crime and social decay.

It was important to me that my child should grow with the same cultural/racial awareness that I had evolved with since starting along the Rastafari religious, social and cultural pathway two decades before his birth. Looking back at my own education, I could see how a steady diet of English and European history, geography, literature, scientific achievements and empirical power combined to create in me a perfect 'Black Englishwoman', able to function perfectly in an English environment (I lived there for 8 years after school ended), yet totally ignorant of the answers to such questions as: "If Blacks were as intelligent as Whites, how come Blacks never painted a Mona Lisa or built a Sistine Chapel?"

I knew nothing of Zimbabwe, of the universities of Egypt and Timbuktu, of the spiritual ancience of Ethiopia, or of the magnificent art and crafts of Africa – some of which inspired Picasso. I did not know that people of the Dogon tribe were skilled astronomers and astrologists, whose skills are retained today. I did not know that there were African Kings and Queens, or even that the Pharaohs were Black. It took me many years of 'head-ucation' in the schools of Rastafari knowledge to complete my development as an African woman domiciled in Plantation Jamaica.

## HISTORY BEGINS IN EGYPT

Thinking that I would eventually send my child to ‘real school’, I decided that he urgently needed to have his education start in the proper place – not with the coming of enslaved Africans to Jamaica, as Jamaican History lessons usually begin – but rather at the beginning of civilized knowledge: Egypt. Eurocentric education will point to Greece as the origin of philosophy, culture and knowledge, but the error of this methodology is being proved daily, as Europeans themselves unearth the truths of Egypt – the greatest civilization ever, long before Greece.

The development of Egyptian civilization can be traced to the flowing of the Nile River from its source high in the Ethiopian highlands down to the Mediterranean Sea and the establishment of Alexandria in Egypt. The Library at Alexandria, destroyed by the Roman colonizers in the Century before the Birth of Jesus of Nazareth, is acknowledged to have been the greatest repository of information and knowledge in history. Volumes on Maths, Science, Astronomy, Medicine and Philosophy were housed there, and the world still searches for some of the knowledge lost at its destruction. Yet, how many Black students know this?

I determined that my child should have knowledge of his race at the origin of humanity to give him a proud foundation, rather than the feelings of inferiority bred into Blacks who see themselves as coming only from the humiliation, poverty and suffering of the European slave trade, knowing nothing of what Africa was like before the inhuman and barbaric crime of slavery. Without such a foundation and wearing the dreadlocks covenant from birth, I knew my son would be twice defeated in the race of life.

## BOOKS, PICTURES AND VIDEOS

My son was born on Bob Marley’s birthday, February 6, and baptized at 5 months in the Ethiopian Orthodox faith at a ceremony attended and officiated by the head priests of the Church’s Western Hemisphere, who were holding their annual conference in Jamaica at that time. The Archbishop of the Western Hemisphere – Abuna Yesehaq – officiated as his Godfather, giving him the baptismal names Dawit (David) and Johannes (John) to accompany his parental given name Makonnen. With such an auspicious beginning, I ensured he grew up focused on an Afrocentric life path.

To me, Ethiopia was more than the birthplace of Emperor Haile Selassie who showed me that Christ was not just a person but a state of being all humanity should aspire to. Ethiopia was also the home of the world's oldest Christ-ian religion presenting a new and more fulfilling meaning of mankind's role on earth as a child of JAH. Herodotus, the great Greek scholar who visited Ethiopia, wrote that it was 'the home of the Gods'.

At first I simply spoke about African history to my son. Then a copy of the illustrated catalogue of the exhibition of the treasures of Tutankhamun's tomb gave me a chance to show him just how beautiful, rich and intelligent his ancestors were. We got a paperback containing Egyptian legends and tales, and they joined Sesame Street, Winnie the Pooh and Richard Scarry on his bookshelf. Friends abroad sent us African storybooks at my request, including an African ABC.

We pasted up pictures of African animals and read in a National Geographic about the Okavamba Delta in Botswana, referred to as 'the last Garden of Eden'. We laughed ourselves silly at the antics of the South African Bush people in the film "*The Gods Must Be Crazy*" and applauded Whoopie Goldberg in the film of "*Sarafina*". When important Black people like Minister Louis Farrakhan or Dr. Josef Ben Jochannan visited Jamaica, I made sure to take my son with me to listen to their lectures and talk with them afterwards. And of course, as a Rasta, I took him regularly to Nyabinghi celebrations, where he could learn the prayers and chants, and also reason with Africa-conscious adults.

#### VALUE OF RACIAL AWARENESS

From early my son learned of the greatness of people of his race, amidst a world in which the greatnesses of other races were easily visible. Born in a country with great examples of racial excellence in music, sport and literature, his racial education enabled him to grow with a double advantage and self-confidence that has served him well in life. TV and films show him other examples of Black excellence. Tupac Shakur's music gave him access to the history of the Black Panther movement; a love of Spike Lee's films taught him the story of Malcolm X. Stars like Muhammad Ali, Stevie Wonder and Alicia Keys help swell his racial pride.

Of course, nothing has given him greater self-confidence and knowledge than being a Rastafarian. His dreadlocks have been on

his head since birth, never cut, so he has experienced the prejudices that exist in Jamaican society against his hairstyle and religious lifestyle, as well as the joyful love he receives from the majority of Jamaicans just because he is a Rasta. The international acceptance of Rastafari, both as a religion and as a popular musical and cultural fashion, have strengthened him even more.

I have no doubt that this cultural education is what gave him the confidence to take on the job of Youth Technology Consultant at the age of 13 years, to stand on platforms and give speeches to adults and children at schools in Jamaica, Trinidad and Guyana, and at venues such as M.I.T., NASA Kennedy Space Center and the United Nations. As you will read in the section that follows this, his Afrocentric education has been sound.

#### CRITICS OF AFROCENTRICITY

Afrocentricity has its critics, not least of whom are those who say: “It’s one world and one humanity, so why separate us by race?” It’s usually Whites who say this, forgetting that it is they who first separated us all with racist ideology that enabled the enslavement of millions of Africans over 300 years, and created a Black mindset of inferiority that cannot stop hampering our development until we know where we are truly coming from.

Blacks who ask that question are foolish, and fooling themselves. As Minister Farrakhan asks: “Why is it that if I love the violin and become knowledgeable and adept at playing it, I am called a ‘violinist’ and this is a good thing. But if I love my race and become knowledgeable and passionate about it, I am called a ‘racist’ and this is a bad thing?”

Rosa Parks, a simple black housemaid, became the first woman to receive a Washington Rotunda funeral because she was a ‘racist’ who believed Black people deserved the same seat as Whites on the bus. Muhammad Ali became a Muslim and refused to fight in Vietnam on racial grounds. He was stripped of his boxing title, but gained instead a lifetime title as a great Black man. The list of our heroes in Africa and the Diaspora is too long to itemize here, but we should teach our children of their achievements and inspire them to higher heights.

**BLACK IS BEAUTIFUL**

Black IS Beautiful, and parents who realize the importance of racial consciousness, history and heroes have a personal obligation to provide this instruction for their children –whether you home-school or not. The same cultural freedoms are open to other races, who do not fail to instruct their children in their histories and greatnesses. Let us copy them.

I don't have to tell you where to find the necessary information in books because you don't have to look further than your library. There are such places as the restored Liberty Hall, the Institute of Jamaica and among the scholars of the University of the West Indies, many have researched and published much good work. A most comprehensive library of Black history can be found in the Microsoft Encarta Africa CD, which is an impressive collection of masses of African and Diaspora history and information that will keep you and your family informed for many years.

Additionally, there are many Garveyite scholars, Afrocentric historians and Rastas with whom you can discuss Black history and current affairs, and who give frequent lectures.

Give your children their Black pride. They will thank you for the gift of this education.



*Carrying the Flag at the Celebration of the 100<sup>th</sup> Earthday of Emperor Haile Selassie I, King of Kings, Lord of Lords, Conquering Lion of the Tribe of Judah*

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## **SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY – PAST, PRESENT & THE FUTURE OF THE AFRICAN DIASPORA**

*Lecture given by Makonnen Blake Hannah, May 2003, (age 17) to the All African Students Conference, University of the West Indies, Mona, Jamaica.*

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As a home-schooled child, my mother began my history education early at the timeline of Egypt, when mankind emerged out of caves from the Stone Age into the heights of Egyptian civilization. My most interesting and vivid lessons came from books and TV programmes about Egypt and its early history.

As I studied Egyptian history through reading and these TV programmes, I learned that my African ancestors of that time had given the world the greatest civilization and were the greatest creators of science and technology the world has ever known. In my studies I learned that Egyptians had discovered electricity, mapped the heavenly constellations and planets, and understood mathematics and medicine. I realized that there was a great deal I could do with my brain, and it made me hungry to *learn more about everything*.

From about 2300 to possibly 15,000 years ago or more the ancient Egyptians (or as we know them now to be Khemitians) were regarded as the highest civilization on this Earth – 10,000 years of holding this title. The reason for it was the languages, the writing system and their science and technology. Only up to a 100 years ago has modern science matched the technological and scientific advances of these great people, and even still, there are certain technologies we still have yet to figure out. However, in order to understand their science and technology, we must understand how they used it and why they used it.

Because almost nothing the Ancient Egyptians did was for practical reasons, as opposed to today, in which science and technology is almost always done for practical reasons. Their high sciences and math were not common knowledge, as opposed to today where we can read about high sciences and math if we take a course or read a book and are able to grasp the ideas. Science and technology was a gift....a gift from the Gods. But as well, the term "god" should be expounded. "God" was the driving force behind the various elements in nature, each element, driven by a divinity, and all the elements worked in harmony to produce man. And man in turn was supposed to work in harmony with the elements, to raise their mental capacities to achieve godhood. Divinity was an attainable status for the spiritually inclined.

## PRIMITIVE TECHNOLOGY

Until today, we are unable to discover how, or repeat the building process that created the great Egyptian monuments. How did they move blocks weighing 200 tons with what we would call ‘primitive’ technology? What scientific secrets did the Egyptians possess that have been lost to time?

Centuries later, when European culture ruled the world, history was distorted and it was claimed that Greece was the foundation of civilization and that European culture was the greatest ever known. But today time has shown how much was copied from Egyptian civilization by Romans and Greeks.

I’d like to quote an excerpt from a speech the great Egyptologist and scholar, DR. JOSEF BEN YOCHANNAN:

*“Your ancestors gave to the world the calendar in 10,000 B.C.E. (Before the common "Christian" Era). That is 8,000 years before Adam and Eve. Your ancestors revised that dating system because of their understanding of the astronomical calculations. It is the science of astronomy that gives the ability to read calendars. Thus 10,000 B.C.E. saw the first calendar that gives us the basis of the present calendar, with 364 days corrected each year, instead of 365 days corrected each fourth year.*

*“And I will say again that there wasn't a single European society in existence at that time. The first European writer, Homer, had not been born yet. And when Homer was born and finally became literate because of the teachings the Africans gave him, he too started to corroborate the evidence your ancestors had by stating that even the gods of Europe, Greece, in particular, which was then called Pyrrhus, came from Ethiopia.*

*“The African we must talk about, is the African that caused people to understand science, medicine, law, engineering, etc. It is common at universities to deal with science as if the art of medicine came from a Greek named Hippocrates. We don't have Hippocrates until about 333 B.C.E. One has to realize that*

*Hippocrates himself, in what is called the Hippocratic Oath, wrote that he had a god named Es-Ca-Li-Pi-Us, the Greek name for the God Imhotep.*

*“Imhotep had died 2500 years before the birth of Hippocrates. Imhotep is the first known multi-genius.. The basis of all engineering knowledge was created by Imhotep. He created the first stone structure; that building still stands in a place called Sakkara, about less than an hour north-west of what is today called Cairo. And there you will see the Grand Lodge of Djoser at Sakkara. That modern structure was built in the Third Dynasty, since Djoser was the third Pharaoh of the Third Dynasty.*

*“( Imhotep was the man who gave us the little quip, "eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we shall die.")*

Thank you Dr. Ben.

STOLEN LEGACY

This was the attitude of the Europeans who captured my African ancestors, enslaved them in the Americas and destroyed our history, replacing it with their own. However, in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century a new African pride emerged, especially because of the Philosophy of the great Jamaican prophet and philosopher, Marcus Garvey, that led to a global Black Awareness movement and the birth of the Rastafari Nation.

This spirit of African renewal and rebirth has happened just at the same time as the birth of information and communication technology. Computers, cell-phones, satellite dishes on land and in space, and global access by Internet puts scientific technology once again in the hands of the African Diaspora.

#### SCIENTIFIC FUTURE? SOME QUESTIONS:

Is there still a link between ourselves and our Egyptian ancestors that will re-connect our genetic birthright in our lifetime through Technology? How can we stimulate and encourage young Africans in the Diaspora to ascend these cultural and intellectual heights of Africa's past now and in the future to create the New African Diaspora?

How can we children of slaves use technology developed by our slave-masters to develop Africa and the Diaspora to an equal, if not greater, level? The possibilities to recreate our Egyptian heights are endless. We need to introduce a computer-driven Afro-centric curriculum to teach students at all levels of education, beginning with Early Childhood Education.

We need to establish ICT links with the African Diaspora for Communication, Employment and Entrepreneurship. We need to create website e-communities linking our Diaspora communities for development. We need to be using computers to create music, films, videos, books and other cultural products that can be marketed globally by e-commerce on websites and on an African Diaspora satellite TV network. Our country has given the world Bob Marley, Buju Banton, Sean Paul, Peter Tosh, so many creative stars.

Last, but not least, we must keep the objective of an African Renaissance uppermost in our minds and work towards that objective unceasingly. The blood that was shed by our ancestors, the families that were torn apart, the continent that was stripped of its best humans and minds, demands no less from us, their children.

Thank you.



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*United Nations HQ, New York, June 2003 (aged 17) addressing the Economic & Social Committee (ECOSOC) on the role of digital technology in education.*

## **CHAPTER ELEVEN**

### **THE MONTESSORI METHOD**

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I found the book “The Absorbent Mind” an extremely valuable tool for guiding my home-schooling practices. In fact, I believe that the

Montessori Method is best suited to home-schooling. Let me share some information from the National Association of Montessori Teachers of America.



Maria Montessori was, in many ways, ahead of her time. Born in the town of Chiaravalle, in the province of Ancona, Italy, in 1870, she became the first female physician in Italy upon her graduation from medical school in 1896. Shortly afterwards, she was chosen to represent Italy at two different women's conferences, in Berlin in 1896 and in London in 1900.

In her medical practice, her clinical observations led her to analyze how children learn, and she concluded that they build themselves from what they find in their environment. Shifting her focus from the body to the mind, she returned to the university in 1901, this time to study psychology and philosophy. In 1904, she was made a professor of anthropology at the University of Rome.

Her desire to help children was so strong, however, that in 1906 she gave up both her university chair and her medical practice to work with a group of sixty young children of working parents in the San Lorenzo district of Rome. It was there that she founded the first *Casa dei Bambini*, or "Children's House." What ultimately became the Montessori method of education developed there, based upon Montessori's scientific observations of these children's

almost effortless ability to absorb knowledge from their surroundings, as well as their tireless interest in manipulating materials. Every piece of equipment, every exercise, every method Montessori developed was based on what she observed children to do "naturally," by themselves, unassisted by adults.

*Children teach themselves.* This simple but profound truth inspired Montessori's lifelong pursuit of educational reform, methodology, psychology, teaching, and teacher training—all based on her dedication to furthering the self-creating process of the child. She opened the Montessori Training Centre in Laren, Netherlands, in 1938, and founded a series of teacher training courses in India in 1939. Later, she founded the Montessori Center in London (1947). She was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize three times—in 1949, 1950, and 1951.

Maria Montessori died in Noordwijk, Holland, in 1952, but her work lives on through the Association Montessori Internationale (AMI), the organization she founded in Amsterdam, Netherlands, in 1929 to carry on her work.

## **THE METHODOLOGY**

Montessori (pronounced MON-tuh-SORE-ee) is a comprehensive educational approach from birth to adulthood based on the observation of children's needs in a variety of cultures all around the world.

Beginning her work almost a century ago, Dr. Maria Montessori developed this educational approach based on her understanding of children's natural learning tendencies as they unfold in "prepared environments" for multi-age groups (0-3, 3-6, 6-9, 9-12, and 12-14).

The Montessori environment contains specially designed, manipulative "materials for development" that invite children to engage in learning activities of their own individual choice. Under the guidance of a trained teacher, children in a Montessori classroom learn by making discoveries with the materials, cultivating concentration, motivation, self-discipline, and a love of learning.

Today, Montessori schools are found worldwide, serving children from birth through adolescence. In the United States, there are more than 4,000 private Montessori schools and more than 200 public schools with Montessori-styled programs. The Association Montessori Internationale (AMI), founded by Maria Montessori in 1929, maintains Montessori educational principles and disseminates Montessori education throughout the world.

### **The Prepared Environment**

*My vision of the future is no longer people taking exams and proceeding then on that certification . . . but of individuals passing from one stage of independence to a higher [one], by means of their own activity through their own effort of will, which constitutes the inner evolution of the individual."*

—Maria Montessori, *From Childhood to Adolescence*

The "prepared environment" is Maria Montessori's concept that the environment can be designed to facilitate maximum independent learning and exploration by the child.

In the prepared environment, there is a variety of activity as well as a great deal of movement. In a [preschool](#) classroom, for example, a three-year-old may be washing clothes by hand while a four-year-old nearby is composing words and phrases with letters known as the movable alphabet, and a five-year-old is performing multiplication using a specially designed set of beads. In an [elementary](#) classroom, a small group of six- to nine-year-old children may be using a timeline to learn about extinct animals while another child chooses to work alone, analyzing a poem using special grammar symbols. Sometimes an entire class may be involved in a group activity, such as storytelling, singing, or movement.

In the calm, ordered space of the Montessori prepared environment, children work on activities of their own choice at their own pace. They experience a blend of freedom and self-discipline in a place especially designed to meet their [developmental needs](#).

## **THE MONTESSORY MATERIALS**

In the Montessori classroom, learning materials are arranged invitingly on low, open shelves. Children may choose whatever materials they would like to use and may work for as long as the material holds their interest. When they are finished with each material, they return it to the shelf from which it came.

The materials themselves invite activity. There are bright arrays of solid geometric forms, knobbed puzzle maps, colored beads, and various specialized rods and blocks.

Each material in a Montessori classroom isolates one quality. In this way, the concept that the child is to discover is isolated. For example, the material known as the pink tower is made up of ten pink cubes of varying sizes. The preschool-aged child constructs a tower with the largest cube on the bottom and the smallest on top. This material isolates the concept of size. The cubes are all the same color and texture; the only difference is their size. Other materials isolate different concepts: color tablets for color, geometry materials for form, and so on.

Moreover, the materials are self-correcting. When a piece does not fit or is left over, the child easily perceives the error. There is no need for adult "correction." The child is able to solve problems independently, building self-confidence, analytical thinking, and the satisfaction that comes from accomplishment.

As the child's exploration continues, the materials interrelate and build upon each other. For example, various relationships can be explored between the pink tower and the broad stair, which are based on matching precise dimensions. Later, in the elementary years, new aspects of some of the materials unfold. When studying volume, for instance, the child may return to the pink tower and discover that its cubes progress incrementally from one cubic centimeter to one cubic decimeter.

### **The Process of Normalization**

In Montessori education, the term "normalization" has a specialized meaning. "Normal" does not refer to what is considered to be "typical" or "average" or even "usual." "Normalization" does not refer to a process of being forced to

conform. Instead, Maria Montessori used the terms "normal" and "normalization" to describe a unique process she observed in child development.

Montessori observed that when children are allowed freedom in an environment suited to their needs, they blossom. After a period of intense concentration, working with materials that fully engage their interest, children appear to be refreshed and contented. Through continued concentrated work of their own choice, children grow in inner discipline and peace. She called this process "normalization" and cited it as "the most important single result of our whole work" (*The Absorbent Mind*, 1949).

*She went on to write: Only "normalised" children, aided by their environment, show in their subsequent development those wonderful powers that we describe: spontaneous discipline, continuous and happy work, social sentiments of help and sympathy for others. . . . An interesting piece of work, freely chosen, which has the virtue of inducing concentration rather than fatigue, adds to the child's energies and mental capacities, and leads him to self-mastery. . . . One is tempted to say that the children are performing spiritual exercises, having found the path of self-perfectionment and of ascent to the inner heights of the soul. (Maria Montessori, The Absorbent Mind, 1949)*

E.M. Standing (*Maria Montessori: Her Life and Work*, 1957) lists these as the characteristics of normalization: love of order, love of work, spontaneous concentration, attachment to reality, love of silence and of working alone, sublimation of the possessive instinct, power to act from real choice, obedience, independence and initiative, spontaneous self-discipline, and joy. Montessori believed that these are the truly "normal" characteristics of childhood, which emerge when children's developmental needs are met.

## **MONTESSORI INFORMATION FOR HOMESCHOOLERS**

North American Montessori Teachers' Association  
13693 Butternut Road, Burton, OH 44021, fax (440) 834-4016  
[staff@montessori-namta.org](mailto:staff@montessori-namta.org)



An increasing number of parents are choosing to homeschool their children and want information on integrating Montessori philosophy and methods into their home educational program. Here is a list of resources that may prove valuable to these homeschooling parents. Most of these titles are available from NAMTA.

- [\*The Absorbent Mind\*](#) by Maria Montessori is an analysis of physical and psychological growth during the first three years of life.
- [\*The Child in the Family\*](#) by Maria Montessori discusses basic Montessori principles in a family context.
- [\*Montessori Today\*](#) by Paula Polk Lillard presents Maria Montessori's theories on learning at each developmental stage.
- [\*The Secret of Childhood\*](#) by Maria Montessori is a thorough introduction to the development of the child from birth to age 3.
- [\*To Educate the Human Potential\*](#) by Maria Montessori introduces Montessori principles for ages 6 and up.
- [\*Montessori Read and Write: A Parents' Guide to Literacy for Children\*](#), by Lynne Lawrence, offers 160 pages of age-specific language games and activities for parents and

children to practice at home.

- [\*Michael Olaf's Essential Montessori\*](#) is an accessible introduction to Montessori philosophy and practice as well as a catalog of educational materials, offered for either birth to three (*The Joyful Child*) or 3 to 12 (*Child of the World*).
- [\*NAMTA Publications\*](#) for parents: Booklets, slides, and videos that introduce Montessori education from a parent's point of view.

**Note:** Montessori education can only be truly implemented by a [\*trained\*](#) Montessori teacher in a fully equipped Montessori "[\*prepared environment\*](#)." However, Montessori philosophy and practices have much to offer parents, whether their children attend a Montessori school or not.

## CHAPTER TWELVE

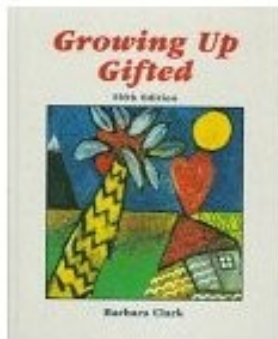
### GROWING UP GIFTED

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Home-schooling rapidly identifies the areas in which your child is gifted. All children are born with some special giftedness, but traditional school with its objective of having all children doing the same thing at the same time, is both unable to recognize giftedness

or to nurture it individually.

As your child grows in the freedoms of home-schooling, parents are better able and willing to recognize, welcome and nourish any special gift or interest a child may seem to have. In fact, parents may have chosen to home-school because they see that their child is 'brighter' and more intellectually curious than others of his/her age.



For such parents I recommend the book ***Growing Up Gifted, 5th Edition*** by Barbara Clark (Prentice Hall, 1997 - ISBN: 0135696585) which was a great source of inspiration and guidance for me.

The following article on raising gifted children first appeared in [Gifted](#) and is available on the Internet.

### **Understanding The Emotional, Intellectual and Social Uniqueness Of Growing Up Gifted.**

By Lesley Sword

AS A CLINICAL psychologist working with gifted people of all ages, I know that most bright people don't like the word "gifted"; probably because it has connotations of high achievement and they

simply don't relate to it. I have come to regard the term "gifted" as a clinical label which, like all labels, is associated with a conceptual framework or model that can obscure the individual to whom it is applied. This paper will examine some characteristics that are associated with giftedness. However, it is important to remember that the theoretical model is not the actual individual - the means by which these characteristics combine and are expressed is different with each gifted person.

When I use the label "gifted" I am referring to people of well above average intelligence. Just as there are people of well below average intelligence whose thoughts and feelings are very different from that of the general population, so too there are people of well above average intelligence whose thoughts and feelings are also very different, more complex and of greater depth. It is the combination of complex and deep thinking with rich and intense emotion that produces the gifted persons' greater potential for high achievement. The gifted intellect suggests to the gifted person a myriad of possibilities to reach an ideal. The gifted emotions provide the intense drive towards the ideals. Supporting and interacting with each other, the emotion and the intellect produce the strong will to achieve.

### **Intellectual Complexity: Being Out Of Step With Age Peers**

Gifted children are more advanced intellectually than their age peers. They can reason more rapidly and accurately with complex abstract material. This exceptional reasoning ability enables gifted children to be more perceptive and insightful, grasping the essential elements of situations quite quickly. Insightfulness leads to unusual approaches to problem finding, problem solving and "interesting" solutions that are often not appreciated by others. Their rapid learning rate is associated with an unusually "fact retentive" memory. Resultingly, this means there is a need for constant mental stimulation, and if this need is not met problems enhanced because of boredom can result. Intellectual complexity means being able to perceive "multitudinous relationships" in all things and this leads to a need for precise facts and exactitude. Demand for accuracy, exactness, precision of thought and expression leads them to be argumentative and can be a social

liability.

For gifted children, nothing is as simple as it seems so precision is needed to help sort out relationships and to enable decision making. True/false and multiple choice questions are extremely difficult for gifted children who see clearly that the answer depends on the context - they see endless shades of grey, not black and white. Seeing many layers of meaning in each situation, gifted children quickly pick up mixed messages in social situations that leaves them very confused and embarrassed.

Gifted children have more intellectual curiosity and their need to understand drives them to seek knowledge. They need to make sense of the world, to understand the world, to create their own world. Gifted children also have a need to understand themselves, who they are, what makes them who they are and how they work.

As analytical thinkers, gifted children excel at critical examination - they can take things apart in their minds and see all the intricate ways that things could be improved. Acute self-awareness results when this critical examination is turned inward and focuses upon themselves. Gifted children will be inclined to worry a great deal and be very critical of themselves. Intellectual complexity that is different from age peers can create great inner tension for gifted children. They can feel (like they are) "different", "out of place" "don't fit in" "an alien". These thoughts often lead to feelings of isolation and aloneness. Internal tension is mirrored in external adjustment difficulties such as a lack of conformity to cultural expectations based on chronological age, problems in relating to age peers and preference for older companions. (Silverman, 1993)

Lack of understanding of the nature and significance of gifted children's intellectual differences can result in their being seen as "weird" or "bad". Without understanding, gifted children may try to ignore or deny their differences. This can lead to social isolation and emotional problems. If gifted children do not understand their intellectual differences they will have difficulty in seeing them as positive. This can very quickly develop into low self esteem. Discussion of individual difference can promote "valuing" of differences as a positive resource in a gifted child life. Discussing difference, to help gifted children better understand giftedness,

focuses less on the label and more on the accompanying behaviours - abilities such as quick learning ability and sensitivity to others' problems. It also prevents the child from equating better learner with better person.

Teachers and parents can positively reinforce gifted children's insightfulness by talking to that exceptionally reasoning part, asking children to solve their own problems by encouraging them to use their insight into problems to promote change. This develops the inner resources for problem resolution and builds self-confidence.

Of course, it is vitally important that gifted children be helped to find intellectual peers, others who share their curiosity, interests and values.

### **Emotional Intensity: The Energy That Drives The Gifted Intellect**

In the field of gifted education it is often not well known that giftedness has an emotional as well as an intellectual aspect. Gifted children not only think differently from their peers, they also feel differently. Michael Piechowski explains this difference in feeling as intensity, an expanded field of subjective experience. "Intensity, in particular, must be understood as a qualitatively distinct characteristic. It is not a matter of degree but of a different quality of experiencing: vivid, absorbing, penetrating, encompassing, complex, commanding a way of being quiveringly alive". (cited in Silverman, 1993. p. 3)

Emotional intensity can be understood as a positive characteristic for gifted children in the context of Dabrowski's theory of emotional development. Emotional development is a function of the interaction between the individual's developmental potential and environment. Developmental potential comprises a person's talents, intelligence, five forms of psychic over-excitability and the capacity for inner transformation. (Dabrowski, 1972; Piechowski, 1979)

Over-excitability is a heightened capacity to respond to stimuli of

various types. The term over-excitability was chosen to convey the idea that the stimulation is well beyond average in intensity and duration. Over-excitabilities can be thought of as an abundance of physical, sensual, creative, intellectual and emotional energy that can result in creative endeavours as well as advanced emotional and ethical development in adulthood. As such, they are a positive force for the gifted, as they feed, enrich, empower and amplify talent. (Piechowski, 1999) .

**Over-excitabilities are assumed to be innate and appear in five forms in the gifted:**

- *Psychomotor* - Surplus of energy, restless, curious.
- *Sensual* - Sensory and aesthetic pleasure.
- *Intellectual* - Strong signs of analysis and synthesis, theoretical thinking, probing questions, learning, problem solving.
- *Imaginational* - Vivid fantasy life, spontaneous imagery, sensitive to imaginary realities.
- *Emotional* - Intensity of feeling - complex emotions and feelings, extremes of emotion, sensitivity, identification with the feelings of others, difficulty adjusting to change

Emotional intensity is positively correlated with intelligence and so the higher the intellectual level, the more emotionally intense a gifted child will be. Emotional intensity is expressed by the gifted through a wide range of feelings, attachments, compassion, heightened senses of responsibility and scrupulous self-examination. While these are normal for the gifted and appear very early in gifted children, they are often mistaken for emotional immaturity rather than as evidence of a rich inner life. (Piechowski 1986).

If gifted children do not understand that emotional intensity is normal for them, they may see their intense inner experiences as evidence that something is wrong with them. Other children may ridicule a gifted child for reacting strongly to an apparently trivial incident thereby increasing the child's feeling of being odd. Also, sensitivity to society's injustice and hypocrisy can lead many emotionally intense gifted children to feel despair and cynicism at

very young ages. Gifted children need significant adults in their lives to understand that it is natural for them to feel deeply and intensely and to experience a wide range of emotions and not interpret their intensity as over reaction or emotional immaturity. It is important to take time to listen to their feelings and appreciate their sensitivities, intensities and passions. However, gifted children need to realise that sensitivity does not mean weakness and so they should not be over protected from the world and from the consequences of their actions.

Teachers and parents can help emotionally intense gifted children to accept their rich inner world of experience and to value it as a strength. If emotional intensity is seen and presented positively to gifted children they can be helped to understand and value their emotions. In this way they will be empowered to express their unique selves in the world and use their gifts and talents with confidence and joy.

### **Idealism Not Perfectionism**

Idealism in the gifted is inextricably linked to exceptional abstract reasoning ability. Idealism is an abstract intellectual concept - a vision of what is possible, what could be. It is a positive quality - the driving energy that propels gifted children forward towards achievement. Problems arise when idealism becomes perfectionism, when what "could be" becomes what "should be" - an imperative!

Perfectionism can be observed in very young gifted children because of the lack of synchrony between their intellectual and physical development. This lack of synchronicity creates great inner tension, such as the case of a five-year old child perceiving a horse through eight-year-old eyes not being able to replicate the horse in clay with her five-year-old fingers. She screams in frustration.

The gap between a child's advanced intellectual capability and more age-appropriate social and physical skills can lead to unrealistic expectations for performance by both gifted children, their parents and their teachers. Young children become frustrated

when their limited physical capabilities prevent the construction of the complex projects created by their extremely capable intellect. Adults expecting social maturity to match high level intellectual development may label a highly articulate, logical child as a behaviour problem when he or she exhibits an age-appropriate tantrum. (Roedell, 1984)

Often adults in gifted children's lives, directly or implicitly, reinforce perfectionism by placing on them expectations of high performance all the time in everything. Because gifted children are often emotionally sensitive to the expectations of others, they feel obliged to meet them. Unfortunately, they often meet them at the cost of denial and suppression of their own passion, their own self. (Grant & Piechowski, 1999)

Perfectionism can also be applied to the gifted self. Ideal standards of thinking and behaviour are set that propel gifted children towards higher level self-development. However, problems can arise when they are not able to live up to these standards and blame themselves for not being good enough. Gifted children rarely compare themselves with their classmates. Instead they tend to think of what they know in relation to what there is to know on any given subject and find themselves lacking. They are highly self critical and over reactive to the criticism of others. They express dissatisfaction with themselves seeing what "ought to be" in themselves and being unhappy with the "what is". These children have a vision of perfectionism that they measure themselves against and they can become despondent sometimes even depressed, at their perceived failure. (Silverman, 1993)

Teachers and parents can foster idealism by explaining it to gifted children and that resources, including time, are not unlimited and therefore perfection is not possible. Also, that while ability may be innate, skills are built up over time by experience. It is important that gifted children are encouraged to explore the process of learning and not only focus on the outcome. It is also helpful to present mistakes as learning experiences and to teach them how to set priorities, help them to realise it is not possible to be a perfectionist in all things at once.

**Expanded Moral Awareness: The Potential For Advanced**

## **Emotional And Ethical Development**

Moral concern can be observed in even very young gifted children. It is an expression of intellectual intensity. When combined with sensitivity and empathy, which are expressions of emotional intensity, it is transformed into moral commitment.

Smutny (1998, p.10) explains how gifted children feel deeply for others. "They sense the joys, pains, sorrows and hopes of family members, friends, classmates and sometimes become distressed when they cannot alleviate the problems of others.....gifted children will often weep at the cruel treatment of an animal. They will frequently ask questions and express concern about world problems - poverty, war, environmental devastation". This empathy for the suffering of others makes gifted children particularly vulnerable to the many forms of insensitivity they see on television, at school or in the world around them. Often these children feel powerless to act and this sense of helplessness can lead them to despair and guilt as they feel a responsibility for these situations.

Because of their intellectual complexity, gifted children are able to consider the possibilities of how things in the world might be. At the same time they can see how far short the world is falling of their ideal and they feel keen disappointment and sometimes despair. When they try to share their concerns with others, they are often met with reactions such as denial, minimising, puzzlement or hostility. (Webb, 1998)

DeLisle (1992, p.169) points out that today's generation of children is the first one in history to receive news about the world, about crises, at the same time as world leaders. "With the flash of a news bulletin.... undigested raw material is laid before the eyes and minds of children who may be left on their own to consider its ramifications." Gifted children, who have a heightened moral awareness, often respond to this with concern, fear, anxiety and a profound sense of helplessness.

It is important for educators to explain and explore some of the world's problems and possible solutions. As gifted children are

concerned about political and social problems, values and moral ethics, they need to be exposed at an early age to areas of the curriculum, such as Science, Social Studies and Philosophy, where these issues can be explored. (VanTassel - Baska, 1998) Educators of gifted children should nurture consciousness, concern, personal responsibility and commitment so that these students will feel equipped to use their talents towards the resolution of global problems. (Passow, 1988) Gifted children can also be encouraged to undertake projects or community service to alleviate their sense of helplessness.

### **The Gifted Introvert: The Rule Rather Than The Exception**

In Western society, extraverts outnumber introverts 3 to 1. They are more vocal than introverts and are more understandable than introverts. However, it appears that introversion increases with intelligence so that the majority of gifted children are introverts. (Silverman, 1988)

Introversion and extraversion are personality types; two complementary ways of operating in the world. The extravert's main interests are with the outer world of people and "things" while the introvert is more involved in the inner world of concepts and ideas. People have both introversion and extraversion in their personalities and are thus not limited either to the inner world or the outer world. However, they have a natural preference for either introversion or extraversion, rather like a preference for right or left handedness. The preference can be slight or quite marked. Introversion and extraversion are aspects of human personalities and should not be labeled right or wrong, nor should one be judged better or worse than the other.

Because of their focus on their inner world, introverts tend not to learn by trial and error. They understand through observation and prefer not to act or respond without thoughtful consideration. Introverts will take in information and perhaps ask a few clarifying questions. They will not frequently interrupt with the questions and comments that most extraverts are prone to do. Introverts need time "to digest" information before responding to it. They characteristically pause before action. This pause, often called

hesitation by others, gives them time to study and classify a new situation so the action taken will make sense in the long run.

Introverts prefer to work with people individually rather than in large groups. They are likely to go deeply into their work and are reluctant to call it finished. When they do display their work they tend to give only their conclusions, without details of what they did. They need time to reflect, time to ponder possible solutions to problems and time to let emotions settle down before they can talk about them.

Tensions can develop when the introvert is in the minority in the classroom, where the prevailing climate is established/controlled by the predominant extraverts. If too much togetherness with others is demanded, the development of ideas is inhibited. Also, introverts need time to reflect on a question before answering and in an analysis of taped classroom discussion it was found that teachers tend to wait less than one second for students to reply to their questions. (Rowe ,1974 cited in VanTassel - Baska, 1998)

Parents and teachers need to appreciate personality differences and understand that they lead to differences in points of view. They should not try to turn introverts into extraverts; introversion is perfectly normal and does not need "curing". Using this understanding they can foster discussion so that explanations of personality both affirm and challenge children. Introverted gifted children need to be provided with opportunities to talk without pressure and be given quiet space, time out, privacy and time to reflect. Introverts have a deep, inherent need for privacy, they get embarrassed easily by either public censure or praise. It is also vital to understand the importance of maintaining their confidentiality.

If introversion is understood and accepted, gifted children have a place in which to be themselves. But if children suspect that their teachers or parents want them to be different, to fight against their introversion, then the children lose trust and confidence in themselves. When others are accepting of their introversion, gifted children will be able to learn how to be extravert when necessary

because they know that they are always free to be introverts.

## **Conclusion**

As teachers and parents we often focus on the intellect at the expense of the emotions. However, neglect of the emotional lives of children impacts upon their intellectual achievements as emotions are critical to the learning process and to the full development of the individual. Gifted children have powerful resources to support themselves emotionally but they need help to apply their critical thinking, reasoning ability, inventiveness, imagination and willingness to explore to their own emotional intensity and sensitivity. They have not yet lived long enough to develop the objectivity that this would require. Parents and teachers are in the best position to help gifted children to alleviate their fears, frustrations, sadness and self - doubt by teaching them to use their prodigious intellectual abilities to support their emotional richness. (Silverman, 1988)

It is vitally important to their intellectual achievement and to their emotional development that gifted children understand themselves and that they feel accepted, understood and supported by others. This means that the adults in their lives must accept and value their own intellectual and emotional experience so that they can be positive role models for gifted children. Gifted children need the help of significant adults in their lives to accept their intellectual differences and their rich inner world of experience and value them as strengths. In this way they will be empowered to express their unique selves in the world and use their gifts and talents with confidence and joy.

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*Lesley Sword is a psychologist and teacher who has worked with gifted children, their parents and teachers of many years. She has a particular interest in emotionally intense and creatively gifted adults and children.*

## **CHAPTER THIRTEEN**

### **RECOMMENDED READING**

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These are some of the best books on Home-Schooling. If you are thinking about or starting to home-school, make sure to read these books. they will not only give you many more answers than I can here, but – best of all – they will encourage you to continue.

#### **The HomeSchooling Book of Answers**

Linda Dobson

Prima Publishing

P.O. Box 1250BK,

Rocklin, CA 95677, USA

*Considered the #1 book on the subject, written with wisdom and experience. Dobson is also author of 3 other books on Home-Schooling*

#### **The HomeSchooling Handbook**

Mary Griffin

Prima Publishing

*Full of valuable insights from home-schooling parents, special assistance for learning disabilities and physical handicaps*

#### **And What about College**

Cafi Cohen

Holt Associates Inc.

2296 Massachusettes Avenue

Cambridge, MA 02140, USA

*How homeschooling leads to admissions to the best universities and colleges.*

#### **The Unschooling Handbook**

Mary Griffin

Prima Publishing

*How to use the whole world as your child's classroom*

#### **Home Education Magazine**

POB 1083,

Tonasket, WA 98859

*Leading information and resource guide with links to a variety of teaching materials, online courses and organisations. Website offers lists of support groups and organizations around the world, e-mail addresses and contact persons.*

**The House on the Hill**

*Account of an English family whose daughter entered Cambridge University at age 11.*

Penguin Paperbacks

**Growing Up Gifted,**

by Barbara Clark

Prentice Hall, 1997 –

ISBN: 0135696585

*Recognizing and nurturing the gifted child*

**The Absorbent Mind**

Maria Montessori

*Madamme Montessori's famous book. Order copies from;*

North American Montessori Teachers' Association

13693 Butternut Road, Burton, OH 44021

## **CHAPTER FOURTEEN**

### **BREAST FEEDING AND LEARNING**

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In China, mothers breastfeed children to the age of 5 years. So do dolphins. If the people of the world's most populated nation and the smartest creatures in the sea all consider breast feeding something positive, this to me is inspiring.

Early in my pregnancy I started thinking about breastfeeding, especially because a book I had read said that breastfeeding provided nutrients for brain development that could not be duplicated in artificial formula. Knowing that the child of a 44 year old woman would need all the brain development help it could get, I decided to learn as much as I could about breastfeeding. Someone told me about the La Leche League in America, and I wrote to them asking for information. They sent me several brochures that I found very valuable in my new role as mother.

I was continually amazed that this body of mine was producing nourishment for another human being. As I continued to breastfeed, I discovered that breastfeeding time (especially before bedtime) was when my son absorbed the most information. Breastfeeding also bonded us in a way greater than the bonds of parental and filial love, giving us a mental and psychological connection that enhanced our ability to communicate without words. We could exchange information telepathically just by the connection that still remained after birth between our two physical forms still united by the milk in me that fed his growth.

I considered myself a purpose-built milk container, a human machine that replenished his need even before it was demanded. I often wondered what was the source of this flowing fountain, for there were many days when money and food were in too short supply to fill my own food needs. Nevertheless, his food remained in constant supply, the daily miracle that continually amazed me. I was even more glad that I was breastfeeding whenever I heard the crying of the babies of the poor country women living in the tree-covered hillsides around our home. Having weaned their babies early, they could not afford to buy the tins of formula to

feed them, and often mistreated their children mercilessly in their frustration and deprivation when the child cried for hunger. I was just as poor as they, but my child was never hungry.

### **THE LA LECHE LEAGUE**

‘La Leche League--A Loving Way of Life’ is the slogan on their website, and I totally agree. The following information from their website at <http://www.lalecheleague.org>, was given to me in booklet form 20 years ago and influenced my decision to breastfeed. My everlasting Thanks go to La Leche for giving me the strength and wisdom to give my child the food it brought into the world with it.

Founded in 1956 by seven women who had learned about successful breastfeeding while nursing their own babies, La Leche League is the only organization with the sole purpose of helping breastfeeding mothers.

Now 8,000 Leaders and 3,000 local Groups strong in the United States alone, La Leche League Groups meet regularly in communities worldwide to share breastfeeding information and mothering experience. In America, an estimated 750,000 American mothers call La Leche League annually with questions and concerns. Telephone counseling is available 24-hours a day, along with access to an extensive library of breastfeeding literature.

La Leche League is a mother-to-mother helping network and a priceless resource for breastfeeding and parenting help, support, knowledge, and inspiration.

### **HELPFUL BREASTFEEDING TIPS**

Breastfeeding is a wonderfully simple and natural process, but mothers do need support and information on such topics as the correct positioning of the baby at the breast, working and breastfeeding, avoiding problems, and overcoming any difficulties that may occur.

Questions also arise: Is my baby getting enough to eat? How can I tell? Why is my baby fussing? What can the father do to participate in caring for the baby? When should my baby wean? What are the benefits of breastfeeding my baby? And so forth.

There are many benefits to breastfeeding your baby! Human breast milk “contains all the nutrients babies need each day, plus many substances that help keep them healthy and promote optimal growth and development.” (*THE WOMANLY ART OF BREASTFEEDING*, page 333). Your milk is made to order for your baby. Research points to the significant value to infants, mothers, families and the environment from breastfeeding.

### **Benefits for Baby**

Chapter 18 of “*THE WOMANLY ART OF BREASTFEEDING - The Superior Infant Food*,” documents the benefits of breastfeeding such as the antibodies in it to protect the baby from illness. For example, deaths from respiratory infections in artificially fed infants were 120 times greater than among breastfed babies. Breastfed babies have a decreased likelihood for allergies and dental caries. They also benefit from appropriate jaw, teeth and speech development as well as overall facial development. This means that people who were artificially fed may experience more trips to doctors and dentists.

### **Benefits for Mother**

“*THE WOMANLY ART OF BREASTFEEDING - How Breastfeeding Affects a Mother*,” describes some of the physical benefits of breastfeeding for the mother such as reduced rates of breast cancer and ovarian cancer. The time saved for mother is immense also. As a breastfeeding mother, you can feed your baby even during stressful times such as when normal supplies of food and water are not available.

### **How long should a mother breastfeed?**

A mother and her baby should breastfeed for as long as they wish to breastfeed. The American Academy of Pediatrics currently recommends that “breastfeeding continue for at least 12 months, and thereafter for as long as mutually desired.” As solids are introduced, usually around the middle of the first year, your baby will shift his primary source of nutrition from your milk to other foods.

“*MOTHERING YOUR NURSING TODDLER*”, by Norma Jane Bumgarner, is the classic handbook for mothers who breastfeed

their children past infancy. The author puts the experience of nursing an older baby or child in perspective, within the context of the entire mother-child relationship. She cites biological, cultural, and historical evidence in support of extended breastfeeding and shares stories gleaned from thousands of families for whom breastfeeding and natural weaning have been the norm.

All the benefits of human milk—including nutritional and health—continue for as long as your baby receives your milk. In fact, as your baby takes less human milk, these advantages are condensed into what milk is produced. Many of the health benefits of human milk are dose related, that is, the longer the baby receives human milk, the greater are the benefits.

### **How do I respond to and avoid criticism about breastfeeding?**

Your attitude and tone of voice can make a world of difference in how people accept your responses. The approaches and phrases listed below are helpful for dealing with criticism. Review them and choose the ones that are most comfortable for you.

1. Everyone has to make the decision they feel is best for their situation.
2. I'm glad that you care so much about the baby. I've thoroughly researched the topic and feel comfortable with my decision. I'd be glad to share my info with you.
3. Your love and concern for the baby really shows.
4. That's certainly another way of approaching it.
5. We're really at odds here. Let's just agree to disagree and still stay friends, OK?
6. I think we're losing sight of our goal here, which is the baby's well-being. Let's back up a little.
7. This is a topic that has been debated and argued for generations. Let's not fall into that trap, OK?
8. There are some valid points to both sides here.
9. You could be right.
10. I'd like some time to think about what you just said.
11. Can we save the arguments for truly vital topics?
12. It's a very individual decision, and I'd never try to impose my viewpoints on someone else.
13. We're his/her parents and this is the decision we've made.

14. This works for our family in our situation, but it might not work for you.
15. Just Smile. :-)

**Ways To Prevent Criticism:**

1. Be discreet if at all possible. Remember to wear a loose top and maybe a scarf for modesty.
2. Don't set yourself up for a discussion you don't really want to have.
3. Offer an explanation of why you do things before you are asked. Do this in a gentle way, letting them know how happy you and the baby are. Be sure you give them permission to do things differently. (See above)
4. Appear confident and happy with the way you do things, even if you are not.
5. Don't express doubts to people who don't agree with you.

Finally:

Rise above criticism as much as you can without a "holier than thou" attitude. A positive non-threatening reply works best. In rising above criticism, making light of things often works.

If you know you will be in a situation where your actions will be criticized, prepare ahead of time by practicing some of these responses. Create your own as needed. Practicing the responses you prefer in front of a mirror or with an understanding friend, will help you to be more confident. When you are in the situation, pause a moment and take a deep, relaxing breath before answering.

**ADVICE FROM MOMMYGUIDE WEBSITE**

**(<http://www.mommyguide.com>)**

*Preparing for Criticism:*

- Keep in mind that the unsolicited advice reflects on the person giving the advice and not on you or your parenting.
- Try to maintain a sense of humor, for your own sanity, not necessarily for the comfort of those giving you unwanted advice.
- Try to maintain a sense of appreciation because most people who will actually make a comment to you are only concerned about you/your baby's well being and are well-

meaning -- think of this as an opportunity to educate them!

- Try not to be offended or get angry; it's hard to put your thoughts calmly into words when you're upset. Instead try to reply in a manner that makes your point so that you aren't walking around all day thinking to yourself, "I wish I had said...".
- Prepare! (That's what you're doing right now; Arming yourself with knowledge and comebacks to deal with what might otherwise be uncomfortable situations.)

### SOME VERY IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

*Should a baby nurse after infancy?*

Response: It is "natural" to nurse up to age six or later. A famous autobiography of a Native American (Black Elk Speaks) includes a statement similar to 'by the time I was six I was acting like a man, and hardly ever ran back to my mother to suckle anymore.'

*Criticism: "You dont see fully grown animals still suckling to the mothers breast years later!"*

Response #1: Actually, you do. Dolphins, which we think of as smart animals, nurse their babies until 2-3 years of age. A dolphin is considered to be full grown between 2 to 4 years of age and the female life expectancy of a dolphin can be as short as only 5 years!

Response #2: Those protrusions on women's chests are not decorations; they are baby-feeders! Do you know that in many parts of the Islamic world where women are obliged to cover their hair and faces it is perfectly normal to be seen in the streets with a breastfeeding baby!! They do not have to take special care to cover the breast!

*Criticism: "A child is too old for breastfeeding when he can logically comprehend that he's sucking on his momma's tittie."*

Response: By that logic, we should also be cutting off bottle-fed babies when they logically comprehend that they're sucking on an artificial rubber nipple. There is nothing wrong with a child understanding that the breast is a part of their mother and a source of nourishment. Breasts are designed/intended for producing milk... they were not intended to be "toys".

*Criticism: Breastfeeding Harder" Than Giving Formula:*

Breastfeeding is far easier, once you get the hang of it, than formula. No tools, no mixing, no need to keep cold or heat up. No forgetting bottles, nipples or any equipment. Just lift shirt and feed -- no attachments needed with the possible exception of a nursing necklace for the distractible child. Formula -- as good as it currently is simply does not contain all the chemical components that breast milk does. Nor is formula specifically designed to meet the immune needs of the individual child as breast milk does. Mom's body will even make milk that has more caloric content for the premature infant's needs.

*About Breastfeeding Being Equal to Formula:*

"A woman who breastfeeds her child for two years dramatically reduces her risk of breast and uterine cancer. Formula has been linked to obesity (probably because bottle fed infants are believed to "need" a certain amount and could potentially be force-fed, then not learning to recognize their body's "full" signal. A breast does not come equipped with ounces marked on it, so the baby eats until full)".

*About Baby Being Too Old to Breastfeed:*

"EVERY child, EVERY parent, and EVERY family is different. Why should an arbitrary age be chosen? Is it based on averages? If so, you'll have kids fall on either side of that. That's why it's important to remember the great range of ages at which weaning can naturally occur when a child is allowed to lead the process. Why should any person, adult or child, HAVE to fit into some presorted, strictly formed mold that society has deemed the only way?

"It's the best food for a human baby, and the best "brain food" there is. Funny how people overall don't find drinking other milk over their lifetime offensive because it comes in nice neat containers instead of having to crouch under a cow or goat and suck on a teat."

·  
 "As beautiful and eye opening as a child understanding that his / her mother has provided the essentials for his/her growing up in a healthy manner .. that's fine ..'

\* \* \* \*

**RECOMMENDED READING**

If at all possible, mothers should buy or borrow a copy of these books if there are any doubts or questions about breastfeeding.

Remember – only breast milk can develop a baby’s brain to its fullest potential!!!

***THE WOMANLY ART OF BREASTFEEDING**, published by La Leche League International, is the most complete resource available for the breastfeeding mother. (Softcover, 465 pages)*

La Leche League International's **BREASTFEEDING ANSWER BOOK**, 3rd Revised Edition, by Nancy Mohrbacher and Julie Stock is the La Leche League's popular resource book that includes up-to-date references, expanded information, and three new chapters. This publication is an indispensable resource for all who counsel breastfeeding mothers. (Hardcover, Spiral-bound, 680 pages: No. 1260-12, \$68.00

**CHAPTER FIFTEEN****A FINAL WORD**

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January 2006

Two decades after starting to home-school my son, I am looking back on the years with a certain amount of awe and surprise at what my adventurous experiment has achieved. With no set plan except the realization that ‘the system’ did not offer education that was good enough, I decided I could and WOULD do better.

I am glad to say that public opinion has given me a Pass mark, as Makonnen has been called ‘a genius’ and ‘the Whiz Kid’, despite not having passed through the Jamaican education system. I can’t fail to give Thanks and Praise to my Almighty Creator, JAH, whose loving care and protection of us inspired my Faith to continue on the road. Many scoffed, laughed at me behind my back AND to my face. But I have seen those same scoffers observe my son’s development, then initiate some of my methods when their own children were born.

As I write this, Makonnen is one month away from his 21<sup>st</sup> Birthday. I stopped making a daily effort at ‘teaching’ him lessons when he was about 10 and started spending all his time on the computer teaching himself what he wanted to know about technology and music. But as a growing teenager, there were still many lessons in life I had to teach him, and after he became a public figure at 13 there were many more – including how to accept the fact that the world is full of treachery, lies and depravity, but to never let anything crush his good nature.

I’ve never really stopped teaching him many things. He still uses me as his Dictionary, asking the meaning of obscure English words he hasn’t yet met on his literary travels. His interest in his early Spanish lessons has been re-awakened by ‘Reggaeton’—the new Latino version of the reggae music he composes on his computer, so I am constantly asked for translations and new vocabulary, and he’s checking out Spanish language CD lessons online.

He has also become my teacher, especially about new computer software. He taught me to edit my video films on the computer, and how to create digital artwork, so our education has become a two-way activity. Life with him is also a continuous lesson for me in contemporary music and lifestyle.

#### UNIVERSITY OF LIFE

Young people his age are usually attending a university, and he thinks about it sometimes. But for someone who has spent the last few years creating and producing music digitally, the choice is between spending three years in an undergraduate computer course receiving information he already knows just to get that certificate, or one year as apprentice to Jamaica’s best videographer/filmmaker so he can learn something he doesn’t already know from an expert. Guess which he has chosen.

He won’t get a certificate or letters behind his name, but he prefers to learn a skill that enables him to earn while studying and gives him a readily marketable skill, than to emerge after 3 university years to search for an elusive ‘job’. The clear choice to him has

always been: Employment or self-employment? He chooses the latter. So did Bill Gates.

He knows that anytime he wishes, he can enroll in an online school. Right now he's looking at Chicago-based DeVry College to do an online degree course in Electrical Engineering so he can learn to make an invention that's been developing in his mind for some years.

#### TAUGHT HIMSELF MUSIC

Meantime, he has taught himself music theory by reading and studying the book "*First Steps in Music Theory, Grades 1-5*" published by the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music, so that he can compose his music more knowledgeably, musical knowledge that first started with "Socrates" and then by fooling around on an old electric keyboard when he was 6. On it, he composed his first song, the theme for the movie "Kids Paradise" that he made me film when he was 7. He didn't have to pay someone to teach him music. He taught himself at home to assist his work as a music producer.

He has plans to home-school his own children, and intends to have me help him and his wife to do so. I'm more than ready – I've still got his books and I certainly hope to do better the second time around!

#### WOMEN LIKE ME

I have written this book especially for women just like me, who have had to raise a child or children without much financial support or income. As someone with writing skills, I have used them in various ways to earn a living, including authoring and publishing books. The income has been small and periodic, nothing on a regular basis, but it's work I can do from home.

So since I decided to be my child's chief care-giver and stay home with him, I've lived like most Jamaican women on the edge of survival for most of Makonnen's life. While there have been times when I have been able to afford to live in a 'nice' house, there have been times – perhaps the best of times! – when we have lived in a tent or rustic cottage in some mountain riverside community without modern conveniences, or bunked at the home of a good friend. All have made us the well-rounded people we are and taught him many social and survival lessons.

**STRUGGLING TO SURVIVE**

There are thousands of Jamaican women like me, struggling to survive and bring up children, mostly as single parents whose relationship with the child's father has broken down. There are thousands who have given birth to a child they don't know how they are going to care for, wondering urgently how they are going to find the money to pay for 'Basic School' fees, lunch and transportation that they feel their child should have. They sit at home, desperately hoping that a way to find that money comes soon, because they know the best thing they can do for their child is give it an education. This book is for them.

Most of these women stay home because they have no employment, but some help from the child's Dad to pay the bills. This book is to show them how they can use their small resources to teach their own child right there in the home. Instead of becoming frustrated with the child who is growing up, becoming restless and more curious. This book is to show how to use that time productively and positively to make child-rearing a pleasant experience.

There are women like me with 'sometimes' jobs, like the women who sit on the sidewalk and sell icy mints and sodas with young children beside them imprisoned in boredom, inactivity and silence, wasting the most important years of their lives because their mother can afford no better care. This book is to show these mothers how to use that time to give their children a head-start in school, to change an educational future that looks so bleak by the side of the road.

There are women like me with 'good' school education, who have had a baby without the necessary economic support, yet want to continue towards their life goals. Some give up their child to its grandparents and leave the island to get a job that will enable them to send money to care for the child. Sadly, most who make this choice discover that all the money in the world cannot replace a mother's loving care, and that many of Jamaica's problems of crime and violence are coming from children abandoned in this way. I need only point to Lee Boyd Malvo, to confirm this. My book is to show them an alternative way to keep both their child and their dreams.

### HOME SCHOOLING COSTS LITTLE

Home-schooling doesn't cost much money. In fact, it costs exactly what you can afford, and not a penny more. There's no book list, school bag or uniform to buy each term. You don't have to miss school on the days when you have no lunch money or bus fare.

There will always be friends for your children to play with, and I've discovered children love home-schooled children with a great deal of envy mixed with the love. I used to have evening story-telling sessions on our verandah that the neighbourhood children loved to listen to, as I invented tales that included each of them somewhere in the story. You can develop your child's group of friends in this way.

### CREATIVE COMPUTER USE

With a computer at home, you can use it not just to teach your child, but to earn income yourself by doing typing jobs, printing cards and wedding invitations, helping students do their Internet research, and in many other creative ways. You may even write a book, as I did!

There are always events happening every day in your community or not far away, that provide entertainment and enlightenment. A daily walk is always good for health and conversation. Seeing fishermen bring in their catch, pausing to listen to a school band rehearse, watching a wedding party take photos on the Church lawn – these are some of the simple ways to enjoy life with your child.

The blessings are bred into this system. You will grow a child that loves you dearly. What better reward is that? How rare is that today, among Jamaican parents? When I see old people begging, I always wonder what happened to their children and whether it was because they did not grow their children lovingly, that they have reached such a sad situation.

When I see mothers treating their children angrily, abusing them physically and verbally, I warn them that this is the child they will need to hold them up when they are old and broken down. It always stops them. I hate violence against children. They came from the womb perfect and if they do wrong, it is because of what

we have or have not taught them. The parent needs the beating, not the child.

#### PRODUCING BRIGHT CHILDREN

Jamaica needs a new way of educating its children. “The system” admits it cannot cope, struggling from one reforming proposal to another, yet with no success. I believe we need a simple approach that offers a new and different way of education, without the cost, dislocation and negatives of the present system.

How can we produce bright children, if they have to leave home at 5 in the morning, travel on crowded, dangerous public transportation, sit in overcrowded, under-equipped classrooms with people they dislike, return home on even worse transportation, arriving after dark to complete homework? No wonder they all hate ‘school’ so much. Education becomes equal to prison.

That’s for those lucky enough to be in ‘school’. What about the thousands who are not? Home-schooling offers a way to supplement the education system, and a way to ensure that your child has an education – no matter how simple.

It’s for all these women and children that I offer this book. I hope I have been of service.

**HAPPY HOME-SCHOOLING !  
MAY YOU HAVE AS MUCH SUCCESS AND JOY AS I DID**



**HOMESCHOOLING LETTERS**

*Here are some of the letters I received after excerpts of this book were published in the Sunday OBSERVER.*

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Oh Barbara,

Please excuse my sigh...Ha!, You have me looking forward to the articles and recognizing so much of my parenting in them. Again thank you, I also hope that others are emailing you and good luck with the book I've also encouraged my friends with toddlers/babies to start reading...this really is a joy. The positive parenting.

I like the 'alphabet wall' idea. For my 19mth I've begun labelling things around the house, just with cartridge paper and a marker and my neatest handwriting, so that she begins her word recognition. I've also a pack of cards with letters and pictures and she is now at the stage where I leave them on the floor and ask her to bring the car and she does. Yesterday she said 'bath', 'naughty' and 'noise'. The funniest and hardest thing in one is figuring out what she is trying to say but after 'nuff nuff' repeating you get it and laugh that you were so dumb for not figuring it out.

Also with our staircase I've numbered each step and we count every time we go up and down. So that three, nine and thirteen are the numbers she knows by word. My husband reads to her at nights two stories and now she is pointing to the words or pictures as 'asking' as he reads. I've also during reading time brought the 2mth old into the room and she listens to daddy's voice and the excited squeals from her sister and she too has begun the learning process. With the alphabet wall did you allow him to add his own words to it?

From your articles it shows how a parent is totally responsible for the learning of one's child, not school, church or the helper. If a parent doesn't talk to that child then little or no learning takes place. This thing called parenting is a job like no other, when you think you've conquered one stage you're thrown into another to figure out. It also points out that if we as parents have shortcomings then our kids may unless we make that effort to change.

Also as a working mother I've hired a nanny (the English say child minder) for my daughter who when I interviewed her said she

loves children. I find that when people get a nanny the nanny doesn't really interact with the child. I have had to encourage my nanny to read, play and talk to Sabrina.

It is not fair to hire a nanny who cannot read. And she too reaps the joy when she sees Sabrina learning from her tutelage. So now she has reading time, play time, outside time with Sabrina and I love the fact that this happens. There are so many points in this paragraph but one I'd like to stress is that in hiring a nanny I had to train her to the demands of my child rather than leave her to just 'watch' my child grow.

By the way isn't it Parents Month. Then we must congratulate those parents of the 7 scholarship winners that appeared in the papers along with your article. Navin Suckoo said of his mother that his success is due to her constant support and encouragement from my loving but strict mom who always encouraged me to do my best. And that his mother taught him important values. Michael Waul said that in the journey to school each morning his mother became his companion and teacher and so began his thirst for knowledge. Congrats to you and your articles cause they are helping some parents become better parents

Is the MOEYC recognizing these parents for Parents Month???  
Please forgive my sarcasm.

---

Dear Barbara,

I want you to know just how much I've enjoyed your delightful first-person article (How it began, The Jamaica Observer) on numerous levels. Very nice work!

The reason for writing had to do with the way you presented the case for breastfeeding. This is an area of abiding interest that I am pursuing in a number of ways, including writing, commentaries and occasional conference presentations.

You might find this link of interest

<http://www.theberlincitizen.com/guestbook/> and something in Pediatrics

<http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/cgi/eletters/116/3/e432>.

James A.  
Geneva, Switzerland

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Dear Barbara,  
I enjoyed your column about homeschooling:

We have been homeschooling for seven years and have found it very worthwhile. Keep up the good work.

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Dear Barbara

I have been reading your articles for the past few weeks and as a first-time father of a beautiful eight month boy I find them quite instructive. I have noticed that your articles make little reference to the role and importance of positive male figures in the life of your son and the role of male parents and relatives in the well being of children. Do you have any comments on these matters? Will future article address these issues?

Your columns continue to inspire me and I hope your book will be available soon. Any more comments on children's diet? We are inclined to vegetarianism and face so much pressure from friends and family alike who think a vegetarian baby will not be healthy.

Hi Duane

Thanks for your lovely letter. Yes, the role of fathers is SOOO important. I try to speak about PARENTS, including a father, but you are right -- I should stress that the role of education is best done when both parents are around. That is often not the case in Jamaica, but it should be.

Re vegetarianism, of course a vegan child can be healthy. Proceed as you are doing, and of course check with other sources of information at all times. My book should be ready early in 2006, so please be patient. Thanks for your encouragement. Stay tuned.  
ONE LOVE

Barbara

**APPENDIX B**

**CURRICULUM VITAE - MAKONNEN BLAKE HANNAH –  
TECHNOLOGY CONSULTANT**

**JAMAICA**

**FIRST AWARDEE: MUSGRAVE YOUTH AWARD FOR  
EXCELLENCE (2001)**

BORN: FEBRUARY 6, 1985

AGE: 23 YEARS

HOMESCHOOLED by Mother

COMPUTER EDUCATION: Self taught

Able to read at age 3 years. Started using computer at age 4-5 years.

Built his first Bulletin Board System (BBS) aged 10 years, first website age 12.

CISCO Certified Network Associate (2002)

**AWARDS**

Institute of Jamaica Musgrave Youth Medal; 2001 (first awardee).

ThinkQuest Silver Award for Excellence in Website Design – Interdisciplinary 1999

International Development Bank/MasterCard - Youth Entrepreneurship Award; 2004

Ken Matthews Under 14 Football Champions, Real Mona FC - 1998

**SKILLS**

Internet Technology - CGI, Perl, JavaScript, J++, XML, HTML, SQL & related technologies

Network & Internet Security Developer – knowledge of CISCO, SUN systems, did CCNA course.

Website design, Macromedia Dreamweaver, Flash

Photographer, music video film director, editor – Digi-Design Avid, Adobe Premiere software.

Graphic design – posters, flyers, print media, all Adobe software & 3D graphics

Marketing – entertainment & technology, special events, consultant for Lindo FCB ad agency

Composer, music and audio production specialist, Plays bass, keyboard

Studio engineer - recording, mixing, mastering, arranging

Producer - use of all music production hardware & software: ProTools, Nuendo, Reason

**Technology training, research & development**

Co-founder of: TechSchool Jamaica; Evolvinx Ltd. with Reza Khan (\*), company that has done consultancy for UNDP, CitiCorp, New York, HBO, Viacom; Digital Diaspora Project Unity

**Philanthropy –**

TechSchool Jamaica, Maxfield Park Childrens Home, Musgrave Home for Girls, Mustard Seed Zinc Fence, Flankers All-Age; Harvard Law School – Berkman Center inner-city summer school,

Project Unity – UNDP, Caribbean Digital Diaspora Initiative

**Public Speaking –**

United Nations (NY); MIT Junior Summit, Cambridge, Mass.; NASA Kennedy Space Center, Orlando, Florida; Optimist International, Trinidad; Tour of Guyana – Carter Center, UNICEF Rights of the Child celebration, Jamaica Conference Centre; UWI – All African Students Conference; C&W Child Net Awards Ceremony;

**LIFE HIGHLIGHTS:**

Age 7 years

Created storyline and starred in "**KIDS PARADISE - THE GREAT LOST TREASURE HUNT**" -- Jamaican TV drama for children, filmed on North Coast, co-starring Freddie McGregor, Karen Smith, Gina Jarrett and others.

Film screened on JBC-TV and **CHICAGO INTERNATIONAL CHILDRENS FILM FESTIVAL**, 1994; Makonnen guest of Chicago Childrens FILM FESTIVAL

Age 10 years

FEATURED in "**My Room, "NICKELODEON" TV**, Network USA children's cable TV channel feature, describing contents of room

Age 11 years

STAR: 2nd episode: **KIDS PARADISE - SHASTA RUNS AWAY**

Co-starring Judy Mowatt, Elise Kelly, Peter Fraser and many others.

Film screened in AUBURN, **SYDNEY FILM FESTIVAL, 2000 OLYMPICS**

Age 13 years – 1998

\* **APPOINTED YOUTH TECHNOLOGY CONSULTANT to MINISTER PHILLIP PAULWELL** - youngest Government Employee in the world. News carried on Reuters, CNN, TIME for Kids, LA Times, National Geographic for Kids, Newsweek, etc.

\* Established TechSchool Jamaica, online cyberschool and workshop for Jamaican youths. First Summer Workshop for 14 students.

\* Attended **JUNIOR SUMMIT**, Massachusetts Institute of Technology,(MIT) Boston, USA -- gathering of 100 youths from around the world to discuss ways in which they would like to use technology to change the world. Participated in Education Forum.

\* Arising from Jr. Summit: Makonnen contributed articles to **JUNIOR JOURNAL**, the MIT/Jr. Summit online web-magazine written by teens around the world.

\* **NATION 1** - global online community created by MIT out of Junior Summit for teens -- youth United Nations; Makonnen on Public Relations committee.

Age 14 years

\* Shared **THINKQUEST SILVER AWARD** and scholarship prize money for helping build “eBiz4Teens”, website on e-commerce in this International **WEBSITE DESIGN COMPETITION** for students working online with global partners. Makonnen worked online with two teenagers in Austin, Texas. Presented with Award at Universal City, Hollywood California.

\* **GUEST SPEAKER: TRINIDAD & TOBAGO CHAMBER OF COMMERCE ANNUAL TECHNOLOGY EXPO**- Attended with Minister Paulwell. Delivered speech and answered questions in a **YOUTH FORUM** for Trinidadian High School students.

Age 15 years

Visited **NASA KENNEDY SPACE CENTER** as guest of Titusville Chamber of Commerce Technology Committee to speak at the **NEXT GENERATION YOUTH FORUM** held to launch opening of KENNEDY SPACE CENTER Conference Center - (Only international youth guest)

Since 1998 –

\* Makonnen has participated in and taught at **TECHSCHOOL** -- a Jamaican cyberschool which holds Summer and Easter Workshops to teach technology to youths. Students have come from Jamaica, Europe, the Caribbean, Mexico and USA.

\* In Year 2000 he was a TechSchool student tutor at the **Maxfield Park Childrens Home**, Jamaica's largest.

\* In 2001 he commenced tutoring at **the Musgrave Home for Girls** in Kingston.

Year 2001

February 9, 2001: (16<sup>th</sup> Birthday) launched an Inner-City **COMPUTER GAME LEAGUE** using 10 DREAMCAST computer game consoles donated to him by SEGA Corporation - JAPAN, whose CEO he met at Jr. Summit, Boston. Hopes the Computer Game League will help inner-city youths learn information technology through playing video games, and encourage their development as graphic artists, programmers, computer repairers, web surfers and more.

February 24: Received a standing ovation as Guest Speaker for the **OPTIMIST INTERNATIONAL CARIBBEAN AWARDS** Dinner, held in Kingston. His topic was "How To Be Positive".

May: **TOUR OF GUYANA**: One week giving tech talks at 5 high schools across the country and to and university students in a programme sponsored by the Carter Center/National Democratic Institute.

October: Presented with the first **YOUTH MUSGRAVE MEDAL** created by the Institute of Jamaica, for his contribution to Information Technology.

2002

February: Linked by Internet using MSN Messenger to teach 7 students in Mexico how to build websites. The classes lasted over 4 weeks and the results can be seen on the TechSchool Jamaica website ([www.techschooljamaica.com](http://www.techschooljamaica.com))

Writes bi-monthly articles on technology in the Jamaica OBSERVER's 'Teen Age' Magazine.

Maintains a Technology News page on the website of the Ministry of Industry Commerce & Technology.  
<http://www.geocities.com/siliconisland2k2>)

Guest speaker at Annual Conference of Optimist Caribbean in Port-of-Spain, Trinidad.

Commissioned to build corporate websites for phone company (Digicel), bookstore (Kingston Bookshop).

Continues to give lessons at childrens' homes in Kingston.

Attends Caribbean Music Expo, hosts digital music booth. Creates MultiCast Entertainment, digital music production company.

Participates with Harvard Law School/Berkman Institute in establishing IT workshops for in Boston and Jamaica for young digital music producers.

Organises digital music production workshop with a small group of students.

Receives 1 year sponsorship from Clevie Brownie of Studio 2000, Kingston.

2003

January – Speaker at the **UNDP United Nations** (NNew York) forum on establishing a Caribbean Digital Diaspora Initiative. Proposes setting up a Technology link and database for Caribbean youth. View Powerpoint Presentation at [www.tecschooljamaica.com](http://www.tecschooljamaica.com)

February – Honoured as Black History Month Guest of Honour at St. Theresa’s Prep School.

June – Returns to **UN** to address Special High Level Meeting of the UN **ECOSOC Committee**. Speaks on “The Use of Digital Technology in the Caribbean music industry”.

July – MultiCast Entertainment awarded **Inter-Development Bank (IDB) Youth Entrepreneurial Award**, at meeting in Lima, Peru

2004-2007

Music Producer/Composer –MultiCast Entertainment.

Producing music and recording artistes. Specializing in new, young artists. Among artists recorded: Capelton, Aidonia, Jabalance, Mr. Perfect, Jabalance, Raw Raw, Rsenal,

Bulding and creating websites, digital artwork:

Sizzla Kalonji “BLAKK Magazine”.

Royal African Celebration of Love concert.

Celebrity endorser: TV commercial for Courts computers

YARDMAN STYLE - US-based, J-American clothing line, clothing sponsor

Creating logo, trailer, website: REGGAE FILM FESTIVAL



In 1998 Makonnen and 2 US teenagers working online, built “e-biz4Teens” a website about teen entrepreneurship, that won a Silver Award in this competition, presented at a special Awards weekend at Universal City, Hollywood, California.

SUN MICROSYSTEMS Met with John Gage, founder, Networking systems, at ThinkQuest Awards. Helped declare ThinkQuest weekend.

SEGA CORPORATION After meeting Makonnen at M.I.T Junior Summit (1998) Founder/Chairman Mr. Osaka sent Makonnen 10 Dreamcast computer entertainment systems to start a Computer Game League in 10 Inner-city communities

OPTIMIST INTERNATIONAL Makonnen Guest speaker at conferences in Jamaica, Trinidad

CARTER CENTER Sponsor :1-week tech-tour of Guyana schools

N.A.S.A. Guest, opening Kennedy Space Center Conf. Center