

INSIGHTS

by Michael Grose - Australia's leading parenting educator



Nurture your child's thinking skills

Take advantage of your role modelling position and take an active interest in your child's learning and in the activities, such as reading and questioning, that foster learning.

How can you nurture your child's thinking life in the pre-primary and primary years? The purpose is not so much for your child to excel at school, but to instil a desire to learn and the ability to think for themselves and be resilient enough to resist following the crowd in thoughts as well as actions.

Children spend more time at home than at school yet parents often feel most children's learning occurs behind the classroom door. Learning is natural and has no boundaries and can happen anywhere.

Parents teach their children both implicitly and explicitly. Take advantage of your role modelling position and take an active interest in your child's learning and in the activities, such as reading and questioning, that foster learning. If your child sees you reading and taking an interest in a myriad of subjects he or she will be more interested in reading and more than likely develop a sense of curiosity as well.

Curiosity may be the most important learning behaviour that your child develops. Bake a cake with your child and see it rise. Make a model plane and see it fly. Help your child dismantle a broken clock. Ask questions of yourself and of your child. Curiosity needs to be fed by experiences and they don't have to be expensive or externally provided. They can be provided at home by parents.

It is worth considering how your home environment fosters a sense of curiosity and enquiry in children. Consider the following:

- **Spaces for doing and thinking:**

Look at your home through the eyes of a child and his or her learning needs. Do you have spaces that invite your child to explore, create and think? Do you have a quiet place for reading and drawing? Do you have a space for kids to be creative and messy? Do you have a place for noise and music? Do you have a space for kids to be tactile with plenty of textures (this can be outside or inside)?

- **Materials:**

Look at the materials available that can stimulate the senses of a child. These include art materials, books, costumes and masks, sketch pads, construction materials, puzzles and games. Take a minimalist approach. That is, the more bells and whistles that a toy has the less opportunity a child has to be creative with it. Kids don't need much to be creative.

- **The role of television:**

Some specifically designed children's programs such as Playschool are great but much of television promotes a spectator mode of consciousness and suppresses active thinking. Don't let the TV dominate your child's free time.

- **Teachable moments:**

Be on the lookout for teachable moments. These are the opportunities to explain, question and prompt exploration with your child. Looking at insect wings, ants walking in a line or moths flying around the lights can provide teachable moments as long as you are lead by your child and don't get too heavy handed with the 'lessons' learned. Sometimes the experience is enough.

Nurturing in children the ability to think openly about their world starts with their own environment. It involves a mixture of free, open exploration on their own and interactions with adults that stimulate discussions and prompt them to explore new ideas and think. It is these types of experiences that can foster in kids a love of learning and thinking that can help them succeed at school and beyond.

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