

How can we better understand and use the pervasive role of the home as an educative agent?

The Home as Educative Agent

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THAT the home today is a powerful educative agent is axiomatic. The young child learns his language, his attitudes, and his values in the home. In fact, many schools spend countless hours trying to undo the strong language and affective learning the young child brings to school.

As the child grows older, he continues under the pervasive dominance of the home as an educative agent. At home he acquires a conception of his sex role in society; he learns to like—and dislike—many people and things; he acquires a repertoire of facts, and he develops many social and physical skills. More and more, children and youth in the home learn from one another, from their friends, and from their parents and other relatives.

Young children, preadolescents, and adolescents also find mass media and the community quite engaging as teachers. Without much deliberate, widespread planning, the educative power of today's homes has made children far more knowledgeable than their counterparts

of a generation ago. Another testament to the educative potency of the home is that it often can wreck the formal education dispensed by schools.

Potential of the Home

Succinctly stated, there are several major reasons why the educational potential of the home must be more effectively utilized. First, there is a logarithmic increase in knowledge. Second, knowledge is growing obsolete at a rapid pace, and schools often are not as responsive to this fact as they should be. Third, schools have neither the time, teachers, techniques, nor facilities to teach much of what today's students need for successful living.

Fourth, science, technology, and the growing complexity of society demand optimal use of the home as an educative agent. Fifth, there is a critical need for increasing self-direction and independent learning outside the school. Sixth, the rigidity of formalized schooling often vitiates learning. Finally, the home has almost limitless possibilities as an edu-

cative agent, but these possibilities have been poorly exploited.

Utilizing mass media. If the home is to be optimally employed as an educative agent, television, radio, newspapers, and magazines must be wisely used. To exploit television intelligently, a youngster could do the following: Either independently or in cooperation with his parents he may select the television programs he will view during the week. He should strive to achieve a balance in his selections by choosing programs in various fields. With the extensive range of interests covered in programs, it should not be too difficult to achieve this goal.

Some suggested types of selections are: *Science*—weather reports and forecasts, "Mr. Wizard," and the "Challenge of Space"; *Social Science*—"Great Explorations," "Discovery," "Face the Nation," "The Huntley-Brinkley Report," and "Social Security in Action"; *English Language Arts*—"Jack and the Beanstalk," "Mr. Dickens of London," "Living Language," and "Youth Looks at Literature"; *Art*—"Painter's Art" and "100 Paintings"; *Foreign Languages*; and *Business and Industry*.

The local television guide often lists "Sunrise Semester" lectures as well as other educational programs designed for children and youth. Televised spectator sports such as high school, college, and professional basketball and football may interest sports enthusiasts.

After viewing one or more programs, a youngster should be encouraged to think about what he has seen and heard. He might be led to ask himself such questions as the following: Was this a good program? Why do I think so? What was the best part of it? What was

the worst part of it? Why? What relationship does it have to any other program I have viewed? To any book or magazine I have read? To any experience I have had?

In addition to his quiet reflection, the student might be encouraged to discuss what he has seen and heard with his family and friends. He might also try to relate parts of the program or ideas from the program to conversations he engages in.

A student may also use magazines and newspapers educatively. Some magazines which may be used with children are: *Boy's Life*, *Wee Wisdom*, *Jack and Jill*, and *Highlights*. For preadolescents and adolescents, such magazines as the following may be used: *Scholastic*, *Scope*, *Ebony*, *Negro Digest*, *Life*, *Time*, *Seventeen*, *Negro History Bulletin*, *Popular Mechanics*, the *Nation*, and *Sports Illustrated*. Local, state, and national newspapers should be used at home.

If a home does not subscribe to appropriate magazines and newspapers, copies should be obtained from the school or public library. Parents should encourage friends and relatives to give children gift subscriptions to magazines and newspapers rather than some other kind of present for Christmas, birthdays, and other occasions.

In making optimal use of magazines and newspapers, the student should read them regularly. He should select articles, editorials, and comic strips of interest to him and use a dictionary to learn meanings of words he does not know. In response to his reading, he may engage in the same kind of quiet reflection suggested after television. In addition, he may wish to do the following: Write a letter to the editor expressing his views

on a given matter, interview a public official or a reporter for clarification of ideas or to express his opinions, study different treatment of the same matter in different magazines or newspapers, or discuss questions with his parents and peers. A youngster might also recommend a magazine or newspaper or an article to his parents and peers.

Use of audio recordings. Other resources for home educational use are audio recordings. Usually, the school library and the public library will have a listing of tapes and phonograph recordings. Such recordings cover a wide range of subjects. Often these recordings may be borrowed for home use.

Aside from academic subjects, many kinds of musical selections may be secured. A youngster may use recordings of individual artists, choruses, and orchestras to entertain and enlighten his family and himself.

Use of community resources. Community resources (human, natural, and cultural) may be used by parents to promote intellectual, social, emotional, and physical growth of children and youth. A young child may be taken to a park by his parents and taught about the things he sees: the pond, ducks, fish, flowers, labels on trees, the birds, and other things. Such a visit might be followed up at home by asking the child: What things did you see in the park today? The child and his parents could also discuss why the community has a park and why the park contains what it does.

A teen-ager could interview an "old timer" in the community and learn a great deal about the growth and development of the community. He could con-

fer with a juvenile judge or with a criminal court judge to learn about the nature and amount of crime and delinquency in the community and how the community deals with such problems. He and his parents might employ similar techniques in learning about such things as business and industry, health, recreation, and institutionalized education.

Using books. Books are the most commonly used resources for educational purposes. Yet, both parents and their children need great assistance in the intelligent selection and use of books. Parents usually employ books to help their child learn to read. Not only is this job often very poorly done, but the child is not strongly encouraged to read after learning to do so.

Aside from helping their young child to read, parents should read to him, talk to him, and tell him bedtime stories. Also, parents should provide attractive books for him so that he will want to read or be read to. For preadolescents and adolescents, parents should help them acquire books of their own—books which they can read, do read, and enjoy. If a home is able to do so, it should own a set of reference books. Both children and their parents should use these books together or independently.

New Role for Parents

If the home would become a more powerful educative agent, children and their parents must make optimal use of mass media, recordings, community resources (human, natural, and cultural), and books. It must also make optimal use of members of the family.

In making the home a highly educative agent, parents must assume a new

role. They must become more interested and active in the educational experiences their children have at home. Parents must encourage their children to listen, talk, read, view, discuss, visit, think, and be self-directive. Today's youngsters want more responsibility, and there are compelling reasons why they should be entrusted with it. To help make the home more effective educationally, parents should provide the child with a place and time to study and think. Also, children should be provided with books, magazines, newspapers, radio, and television.

Moreover, it is the inescapable duty of parents to involve children in family matters which can be made highly educative. Some such matters are: writing letters, budgeting for family living, computing tax returns, preparing reports, planning menus, caring for the home, the yard, and car, planning picnics, planning for school, and selecting and buying clothes.

Another role of parents is in discussing local, state, and national affairs with their children. Such topics should be discussed as though both parents' and children's views are valuable. No parent should assume that because he is older he is right. Parents should learn to question their children—to find out what they believe, why they believe it, and what views they think others have on the same subject. Parents should discuss sex, drugs, the hippie movement, and other subjects of special concern to the youngsters. If necessary, the parents should seek the aid of experts in specific areas. After all, no one is able to supply all the data needed in all situations.

Finally, parents should ask their

children such questions as these: How well are you doing? Where do you need help? What can I do to help (or may I get help for you)? What other things do you feel you should give careful attention to? Briefly, the suggestions rendered above should lead to more effective performance by parents and students. The new role of parents conceived herein means that they would become new kinds of teachers requiring new knowledge, new understandings, new attitudes, and new skills. Admittedly, such parental performance may be difficult to secure especially in socially and economically disadvantaged homes and in homes where children are alone most of the time.

New Role for the School

If the school would accept the challenge of the home as a powerful educative agent, it must assume a new posture. First, there must be an imaginative conception of the home with its immense educational potential. Second, the school must become an effective center for educating paraprofessionals and parents from all socioeconomic levels. Third, the school must capitalize on the rich learning background students bring to school. Fourth, the school must specialize in a cycle of evaluation—counseling and guidance—curriculum—school instruction or independent study. The school must become a center for diagnosis of learning difficulties and for prescription of individualized curricula and instruction. Finally, there must be a new kind of teacher performance. As their *forte*, teachers must develop skills in guiding, listening, diagnosing, prescribing, and generally facilitating growth.

Teachers must accept the fact that much of what they learned is not worth teaching. They must also realize that everything worth learning cannot and should not be taught in school. Furthermore, they must concede that students are capable of enormous amounts of self-achievement through self-direction—far more than schools care to admit. Teachers must become skilled in identifying the times when the best thing they can do is leave the student alone.

Technology and the Home

Most school-age youngsters today have a great chance to be alive in the year 2000. Those then alive will no doubt witness the decline of the family and the dissolution of family bonds because of birth control and artificial insemination. Automation will take over housekeeping and home upkeep. To further complicate matters, some humans will be selected to breed children. There will be a much longer life span, and one

will need two or three different careers during his lifetime. There will be large amounts of leisure but a rationing of recreational facilities. Also, the nation will be covered with vast urban centers.

The youngsters of 1968 (now 37 to 52 years old) will see the decline of schooling as they knew it. Their schools spent considerable time on drill and cognition. In 2000 A.D. home information retrieval consoles will be connected to local, state, and national information storage centers. In his home, the youngster will use high-speed data processors to secure information from all over America and to solve many kinds of problems.

There will be highly efficient home education which utilizes computerized programmed learning materials. This will be the heart of the home learning program. In the twenty-first century, one may rather reliably predict that technology and the new society will utilize the home as the locus of education for children and youth. 

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