From Beginning to End:
One Family’s Home Education Story

The Science of Socialisation

Setting Up A Home Ed Group

Life Is Not A Race.....
A different approach to learning to read

Activities & Projects
This has been a long time coming and we are very excited to finally see it published. From the start, our idea has been to provide an informative, sometimes thought provoking, but above all helpful and fun-to-read resource for current and potential home educating families. The kind of magazine we’d have loved to have been able to buy! At the same time we also intend to be of interest to those families who choose to send their children to school, giving them an insight into what we do, and some ideas for spare time with their children.

This is going to be a positive magazine that focuses on the whys and the hows of home education. You’ll find stories of other families’ home ed journeys and have a chance to meet different educational approaches. We’ll also feature things for you to do with your children, from quick activities to longer projects, designed to be used as they stand or modified to suit you.

EOS isn’t affiliated to any home education groups or organisations to remain truly independent, and it won’t feature big discussions on politics. But we won’t have our heads in the clouds either. When there is news that we feel will be of interest to our readers we’ll report it, as far as is possible within our publication dates and lead times.

We home educators are a diverse bunch; often interested to hear how someone else does it, and always on the look out for ideas of things to do, books to read, websites to visit. Whether you just want to recommend something or have an article you’d like to write, we’d love to hear from you.

The middle pages will be a pull out section just for the children. It will include some quizzes, craft ideas, website suggestions, book reviews and a competition! We’ll try to cover all ages, and we are particularly keen to hear from any of your smaller people who’d like to tell us what they’d like to see there. Meanwhile enjoy the recipes and games we’ve put in there for this first issue!
Questions. They just come with the territory when you home educate! We’ve all been there, from the family gatherings when you’ve been gearing yourself up to tell everyone that you’re taking your children out of school, or that you won’t be sending them in the first place, through to those ‘at-the-supermarket-checkout’ moments when you find yourself so interrogated you’re looking around for the Mastermind black chair!

These questions are sometimes born of disbelief and horror that you could even consider such a strange idea, occasionally they are honestly curious and interested, but almost always demonstrate that the questioner has pretty much no comprehension of what home education is, is entrenched in a system and believes that this system must be ‘the right way’.

We’d like to feature those common questions to find out how you answer them! What do you say? Does it depend on the questioner, or their attitude? Does it depend on why you chose to home educate in the first place? Does it depend on how long you’ve been home educating? Have you answered these questions so many times that you have a quick one-liner all prepared! The first question we’d like answered is that old stalwart:

‘But what about socialisation?’

We want to hear from you! Write in and tell us what you say to people that ask you. If you’re new to home ed, we’re sure you’ll appreciate some tips on how to retort. And tell us what are the other questions that crop up with predictable regularity and we’ll feature them in future issues.

Email editor@educationoutsideschool.co.uk

Let’s pool our ideas!

question (n.)
c.1300, from Anglo-Fr. questiun, O.Fr. question “legal inquest,“ from L. quaestionem (nom. quaestio) “a seeking, inquiry,” from root of quærere (pp. quaesitus) “ask, seek” (see query). The verb is first recorded 1470, from O.Fr. questionner (13c.). Question mark is from 1869, earlier question stop (1862). Depreciatory sense of questionable is attested from 1806.

www.etymonline.com
The Science of Socialisation
By Imran Shah

Kids educated at home are brighter and more impressively human than institutionalized kids simply because they are allowed to learn free of bells, bogus experts, phony sequences, endless interventions and similar junk.”

John Taylor Gatto, (Former New York State Teacher of the Year, and three times New York City Teacher of the Year).

I am in Pakistan, visiting my family. My family are comfortable, middle class, and highly educated. Everyone in my family has at least one degree. My brother has three. My cousins attended the top schools and colleges in Pakistan; the same ones where they now send their children, and no doubt the same ones that their children’s children will go to. We are a family of teachers, and doctors, and bankers, and army officers, and senior civil servants, and lecturers. So naturally on this visit here, they ask me about my children and my plans for their education. My eldest being 5, is now of school age. When I say that he is being educated at home, it is easy for me to deal with their concern about how he will learn. It is easy to point out to them that school is not designed to educate and never was. I only need ask them one question. “Do you think that the British brought schools here to educate Indian children, because they wanted to have an educated literate population to rule over?” They immediately understand the purpose of school. My cousins, who are the children and grandchildren of colonised parents and grandparents share a collective memory of British rule. The lessons learnt from the legacy of Empire have a long half-life. No more is said about how my children will learn. So they ask about exams, and subjects and tutoring, and sooner if not later comes the inevitable: “But how will they socialise?”

How indeed?

I could point out that my children get to mix with plenty of children, of different ages. I could point out that the kind of social milieu that home educated children are immersed in, is closer to real life than school life, because it is real life. Not for them the unnatural dynamic of a them and us world of authoritarian adults ordering groups of children all day long, five days a week, for 13 years, engaging them in meaningless activities, devoid of any context or connection, as preparation for an adult life that will be remarkably different. I could talk about the pernicious effects of bullying, how it diminishes the bully, and the bullied, and the witness, whose emotions are a mix of guilt that he didn’t stop it, relief that he was not bullied, and fear that he might be next. Or I could talk about the science of socialisation.

It starts with human biology. We are social animals, and have been social animals for many millennia. Being social is in our DNA. It is one of the defining characteristics of being human. The more meaningful relationships a person has, the greater the resources they have, the happier they are, with significantly lower rates of depression, and other mental health issues. Children that are deprived of loving relationships, especially early in infancy, tend to be smaller, more prone to illnesses, have smaller brains, and in the most extreme instances, they fail to thrive and die. Loving relationships are a vital component of human existence. No wonder adults are concerned about children’s socialisation. In order to get on in life, children need to be able to get on with others. This is what people mean by socialisation: the
process by which social skills are acquired so that the child concerned can relate to others in a healthy, functional manner. Without bravado or timidity, the well-socialised child speaks to the other as an equal, with honour and respect, and is met with by the same.

The unquestioned assumption about socialisation is that it is in school that children learn how to get along, that it is in the rough and tumble of the playground and the hustle and bustle of the halls and the quiet concentration in a studio class that children get socialised. However, if you stop to listen and observe you will see the kind of socialisation that school engenders. Children learn who is the coolest, the weakest, the smartest and the strongest, as they each struggle for status. They learn about values; not the values that are written down in the school charter or mission statement, but the lived values of the playground that arise when children who are but strangers to each other are compelled to be together in the confined space of the school grounds. Playground discourse is characterised by vanity, cruelty, hubris and shame. Vulnerability is picked on. Empathy is absent and generosity scorned. Children tease and squabble and fight. They laugh at each other's mistakes. They are picked on for being smarter, or weaker, or poorer, or different in some way. In this environment, no child can be himself. Each has to hide who they are. Each is compelled to conform. Lurking in the background, like a stalker standing in the shadows, is the fear that forms the foundation of the school project: the fear of being picked on, laughed at, found out, asked to read in front of the class, told off, or humiliated publicly in one of a dozen ways.

Fear gives rise to stress. It is one of the most basic of our emotions, since it warns us of imminent threat. The body’s response is to prepare for fight or flight. The limbic brain, which is the neurological seat of our emotions, over-rides the neocortex which is where conceptual thinking takes place. Thus the concern for survival suppresses cognition. Fearful children, like fearful adults, can’t think straight. In an atmosphere of fear no one can truly be at ease. No one can truly be relaxed and be with another. The only alliances that are made are those necessary for survival.

Nothing that school does has anything to do with how humans learn to socialise. That doesn’t mean that lasting friendships are not formed at school, just that school’s not designed to facilitate friendships. Children aren’t able to mix freely with whom they want to so they can find others with whom they can connect with. Their opportunities to play and talk and engage in social intercourse are subordinate to the demands of the school schedule, and the silence that the teacher demands.

Nothing that school does correlates with the way that socialisation is structured within our DNA. The processes by which self is moulded: attachment, self-determination, reflection and modelling are disrupted, interrupted and corrupted by the inhumanity of school practise.

Before a person can be in a healthy relationship with another, she needs to know who she is as a self. If a child does not know who she is as a self, how can she know or ever hope to know, who another is as his self? In order to develop her sense of self, she needs to be related to in a healthy manner, by another who loves her. Self first begins to take shape in the bond between mother and child. This is the arena where the child learns how to relate and be related to. This is the attachment system. Attachment is the conduit through which connections conduct themselves. Without attachment, there can be, no love, no relationships. It is the process which compels parents to look after their infants, and compels infants to stay close to them. It is as important a system to human development as the digestive system, or circulatory system, or endocrinal system.

As parents feed and cuddle and soothe their baby, changes happen in the baby’s brain. Attachment causes a baby’s brain to grow, and the limbic brain in particular. This forms the foundation for the neocortex which governs abstraction and conceptual thinking. Like the superstructure of a house needs a strong foundation to rest on, the neocortex needs a developed limbic brain to rest on. The limbic brain regulates attachment at the same time as the actions of attachment encourage the limbic brain to grow. As they dance together, and the infant is cooed, and cuddled and held and soothed, he learns what relating is like. At the same time, the pleasure centres in his brain become formed and pleasure becomes inextricably linked with relating. He begins to experience the joy that can be found in connecting with another and, in doing so, his self gets scripted in his brain. As a mother responds to her son, holding him, feeding him, soothing him, talking to him, his brain fires neurons at an accelerated rate, as do hers. How she relates to him is determined by her neural patterns, from the templates that were laid down in her infancy by how her mother and others were with her. If she is loving, and responsive, tending to his needs, he learns to be loving and responsive. He learns that in mutually loving relationships he can get his needs met, and meet the needs of others. If she is cold and aggressive then his brain lays down the patterns for coldness and aggression that will characterise his relationships later on in life. The infant brain copies the adult brain and relating gets written in the form of neural templates in a process that will go on all his life, but is at its most malleable and flexible before all the adult teeth are in.

By sending our children to school or preschool before the age of seven, before the attachment process has completed the work of building the limbic brain based on the loving interactions with his parents and other familial carers, we disrupt the attachment. We disrupt the process by which a child
gets to know, create and discover himself. Secure loving attachment, that meets a child’s needs, results in a child who is secure and confident in himself. He meets his newly created self in the loving embrace of his parents. The brain of a three year old, four year old or five year old that has been sent to school, has not completed the work begun within the family. The bonds are not as strong as they could have been. What is not commonly known is that the philosophers and thinkers and agitators for compulsory schooling knew this. The Prussians were the first to set up skoles in the early part of the 19th Century, with the specific intent of weakening the bond between parent and child. The British Raj knew this too, so they set up schools where Indian children would learn to follow the edicts of their British rulers rather than the cries of their parents.

We have forgotten how anti-nature this practise is. No other animal, no other bird, or mammal, or monkey or ape gives away its attachment phase infants to genetic strangers. They all know that it is a recipe for genetic suicide. We have lost our way. We are social beings, but we are meant to be social with those in our communities, starting with our families. Our children should only move away from the base that our parents provide when the process of attachment has completed the writing of our socialisation script. Children learn the art of relating from those around them. Their neurons mirror the patterns of the company that they keep. At school that company is comprised of other children, each equally unsure of themselves, each an immature, lonely self, struggling for connection. In their hunger for connection each becomes dependent on his peers, and the playground becomes characterised by cruelty and fear. In contrast, healthy, uncompromised attachment gives rise to empathy, the ability to feel another’s pain. By sending our attachment phase children to school we compromise the possibility of what could have been. No wonder children in school are cruel. Empathy exists only as a phantom.

As well as disrupting attachment, school denies children the self-shaping practises of self-determination and reflection. Without opportunities to make choices, take actions and deal with the consequences, a child can never know who she is. She never gets to discover her passions, her limits, her longings. Her self remains a stranger. In school children’s activities are so heavily circumscribed that children never find out who they really are, what they really like, and who they could really be. Told what to do throughout the school day, they never get to explore themselves as individuals, each as beautiful as an individual snowflake. The schooled child never gets to practise and play at whatever is her heart’s delight as the school institution herds her like a sheep from one pen to another. A shell of who she could be, she becomes obsessed with the superficial trappings of status and fashion, as she succumbs to the force of peer group pressure.

“I am just thinking a big think”

If I don’t know who I am, how can I ever hope to even begin to know who you are?
Not so long ago my son was being uncharacteristically quiet and still. My wife asked him what was going on with him and if he was okay. He said that there was nothing going on. “I am just thinking a big think”. She left him to be, a luxury that the noise and the demands of the school day would deprive him. In school there is no opportunity for quiet reflection, those moments where a child tunes into himself and explores the contours of his own being. In the silence that reflection allows, the quietened child can hear his self sing to him, and in listening to his song he fashions his soul, and his self. In the clanging of the bells and the clatter of the pandemonium and the noise and the rush and the constant screaming and shouting and talking and pushing and shoving, the silence of the soul never gets heard. Self gets drowned out.

If I don’t know who I am, how can I ever hope to even begin to know who you are?

That’s socialisation in schools: baseless, groundless and heartless.

Back at home, my two are surrounded by people who love them, and who they love. They play with the children of our family and close friends. They are noisy when they will it and can be quiet when they need it. Their requests for hugs are almost always instantly met. They are never bullied, or ever witness bullying. What they see are adults who love and respect each other, talking and arguing and discussing and laughing and working and playing. Their neurons mirror the patterns of relating that their mature, mixed age community models for them. They make choices of what they will do and when and how and in dealing with the consequences of those choices, they create who they are. Best of all, I think, they have the luxury of being still in response to an internal yearning versus an external demand delivered at the point of a threat as in school.

And in being still, my son thinks a big think, and discovers who he is. He discovers his humanity. That's how home educated children get to be human. They know themselves.

Imran Shah is a qualified social worker, home education consultant, writer and a father of two children who are educated at home.

SOME REFERENCES:

“A General Theory of Love” by Lewis et al

“The Boy Who Was Raised as a Dog” by Perry

“Hold onto your kids” by Dr Gordon Neufeld

History, Myth and Language constantly evolve - so how a nation thinks in one generation can change with the next. As a case in point let us look at at the Greek myth of the dawn, a fitting subject for the launch of this magazine.

To the Greeks, every morning sunrise was attributed to the goddess Eos, as she harnessed her two immortal horses Lampos and Phaethon to her mighty chariot, which was to ride the dawn sky and herald the arrival of her brother Helios (the Sun).

Now Eos, like all other Greek goddesses, had her foibles, and one of them (although technically not her own trait but rather the result of a curse from the goddess Aphrodite for a brief liaison with Ares) was to be desired by handsome mortals, and out of her numerous encounters she falls for Tithonus. She takes him to Zeus and asks for immortality to be conferred onto him, but unfortunately forgets to ask for his eternal youth... Some time later, in horror, she notices him growing old - here is where the older Greek myths relate how she locks him away in her palace, has other affairs and eventually, when he can no longer move, turns him into a grasshopper!

All quite normal for Greek gods and goddesses, having the same imperfections as mortals.

However a later Roman writer named Sextus Propertius (c.50-45BC) added a more romantic touch to the story. He relates:

“Aurora (Eos) did not scorn Tithonus, old though he was, or suffer him to be deserted in the halls of the dawn:

She, as she mounted her car, called the gods unkind and performed unwilling service for the world; him, as she dismounted, she oft fondled in her arms, [and did not first busy herself with washing her unyoked steeds;] him when she embraced, resting near the land of India, she lamented that the day returned again to soon. Deeper her joy that old Tithonus lives, than heavy her grief when Memnon died” [her son by Tithonus slain by Achilles at the battle of Troy].

Though the Romans plagiarised the Greek myths, through a study of literature we can see quite plainly how thought was subtly changing, and views of the old gods were slowly being supplanted with different, more up to date, Roman views of society.

Later, in the 4th century, the Emperor Julian tried to revive Greek culture and was told by the great oracle at Delphi:

“Tell to the king that the carven hall is fallen in decay,
Apollo has no chapel left, no prophesying bay, no talking spring.
The stream is dry that had so much to say”

Many reasons are given for this prophecy but the reality was that the day of the old gods and thought were over, the God of the Christians had arrived!
When you start home educating it can feel extremely daunting. It certainly was when we started and what we longed for most of all was to know how it all worked out in the end for families who had been through it.

We blinked – and ten years later we’re in that position now. So here’s our story of how we worked our way through and how it all worked out.

In the beginning

When we had children, we hadn’t planned to home educate. Surprising really since I’d worked in schools and I’d seen what went on there and was fast coming to the conclusion that it didn’t suit many children. I thought I must be wrong, though, and the millions of other families who had faith in the school system must be right. So we gave the children a chance to go to school and try it for themselves, presenting it to them as an exciting and enjoyable prospect.

Our first daughter was quite lucky. She had empathetic and supportive teachers who cared and a nice bunch of classmates, so she seemed to be enjoying it and happy. For a while!

Our second hadn’t been in school long and we realised that it just wasn’t going to work for her, worse still it was completely switching her off to the pleasure of learning which she’d been so keen on before. It was also making her out to be a child who could not concentrate and who would soon be labelled naughty.

It was that, and seeing our bubbly, happy children become miserable, anxious, unhappy, unsmiling lumps of something that weren’t familiar any more, which finally made us take the decision to try home educating.

The children were so relieved they clasped me in hugs of gratitude and rushed and got some books out to start ‘work’ at home – which wasn’t my idea of home educating at all, but that’s what they were familiar with so we went with it – for a while!

And that’s how we’ve tackled everything we’ve done during our home educating time ever since; we’ve done it ‘for a while’, watched how it worked, remained flexible. And that’s the beauty of educating out of school – the flexibility. The opportunity to make your approach to learning fit your child and their needs rather than, as schools do, make the child fit the approach. Our style changed often in tune with our changing children and their changing needs as they grew and developed.

The early stages

Early on in our home education when the children were still of primary age we decided not to stick to a curriculum but to integrate practise of basic skills, like reading, writing, Numeracy and basic sciences for example, in with their everyday activities, conversation and play. We looked for opportunities to count, weigh and measure etc; like measuring out how long a Tyrannosaurus is down the garden path, dividing the pizza into eighths, playing with measuring jugs and scales. We enjoyed books, approaching reading through sitting together on the settee and looking at words.

● Home education takes some adjusting to - give yourselves some adjustment time.
● Don’t look too far ahead. If you take care of each day the future takes care of itself.
● Children change, circumstances change. It works best to remain flexible.
● Work out your own priorities for your own child. Plan your education around them.
and stories, visiting the library, reading signs and packets, comics and magazines etc. The opportunity to involve children in science presents itself daily through cooking, talking about their bodies and how they work, the need for nutrition through meal-planning, discussions on forces and gravity, weather and water, species, etc when we’re out and about.

We sometimes used workbooks to pick up any short fall in their skills but did not rigorously work through them. Instead we used them to support what we already did. We also used them occasionally for reference, to keep an eye on the National Curriculum and for ideas.

We met up with other home educators for social and physical activities, outings and field trips, the numbers of others educating out of school growing all the time. We were out of the house almost daily at swimming pools, sports centres or parks, using the library and art centres, museums and galleries, etc. It may have seemed to the children that they were just having a nice time doing what they wanted to do. But behind that we kept an eye on the skills they needed, how these skills were progressing and how we could incorporate them into every day things.

We learnt as well as the children

We soon realised that the children were not the only ones learning. We learnt too, that children become educated in a multitude of ways – not just by being talked at by teachers in school. They learn in a variety of situations – not only sitting quietly at a desk in a classroom. And they are basically learning all the time, as long as stimuli are present. They learn lying on the floor with the television on full blast, they learn last thing at night even when you thought they were tired, they learn more through their firsthand experiences of the world than through any other method. And if they’re interested, comfortable and happy they’ll learn almost anything at any time. In fact, provide the right environment and you can’t stop learning happening.

We also discovered that it doesn’t matter what stage they learn at – Key Stages are not important.

- Contact with others helps maintain balance, perspective and gives support.
- Children learn in many different ways – you don’t need to stick with tradition.
- Children progress each at a different rate – don’t worry about other children’s progress.
- An approach you are comfortable with will work much better than someone else’s approach.

Some children pick up reading easily at five, some not till they’re thirteen. And it doesn’t matter; when they’re twenty no one knows the difference. Some children grasp maths concepts quickly and easily early on, others need it leaving and tackling at another time. That doesn’t matter either. Some kids learn things in one go; others need short regular burst with lots of reinforcement. With home education we learnt that you can take away all the boundaries we normally associate with learning and allow a child to learn in tune with their own development. And it is this that can turn what would have been learning difficulties in a school situation, into learning successes. Get the approach right and the difficulty can disappear.

We did not use testing as part of our education but the children were involved with other activities like dancing and swimming where exams and tests were part of what they did. They were also aware of their school friends working for tests and exams and we discussed the reasons behind them. We never felt that testing was a valuable or even useful part of their education unless they chose themselves to participate in them.

The visits from the Local Authority

When we deregistered the children from school we were sent the usual daunting bunch of forms to fill in by the Local Authority (LA). They requested schemes of work and timetables, asked about our intentions and our personal qualifications, who would be ‘teaching’ the children etc. We had decided that a structured, timetabled approach using a pre-determined curriculum would not be the route we would choose so instead of filling in these forms we wrote back to the LA telling them this. We outlined our educational philosophy and approach, i.e. that learning is completely personal to the child and we would be approaching their education from their interests and developing skills from there. And although we may use timetables from time to time and refer to the National Curriculum, we would not be following it rigidly. We also requested some adjustment time for our family to settle into home education.
We received a visit from the LA about nine months afterwards. The officer who came was very open minded and happy that the children were learning through their play and other informal activities. Although we had very little to show her in the form of formal written work, she was quite happy with our approach. So much so, in fact, that the LA didn’t contact us again until years later.

This is not the case in all authorities though, where families get either yearly visits or are asked to submit a report. On the whole, the LAs are fairly flexible and do not necessarily require to see masses of formal work in books. They just want to satisfy themselves that the children’s education is being attended to, in whatever form, that parents have thought it through and can justify what they do, and that the children are happy and progressing.

Later stages

Later on, as the children developed and grew we brought up conversations about the future. We discussed what they liked to do, what work they might like and they were out and about a lot seeing other adults work, meeting other professionals through the course of their visits and trips, so they built an understanding of opportunities for their futures. And they began to see the need to have recognisable skills and qualifications and began to structure their own learning towards these outcomes which they chose for themselves.

Sometimes we built timetables to make sure certain skills were practised and achieved each week.

Children become more socialised by being with a variety of people than by being solely with children of limited age, gender and social skill

But we remained flexible in their use and changed them often. We made sure there was plenty of physical and outdoor activity, variety and company of all ages. And whatever decisions were made were always the result of a shared discussion with the children involved, so they gradually began to understand how their learning and their lives were their own responsibility, something just for them that they could be in charge of, rather than something done to them by someone else.

We discussed exams and qualifications, what they were for and how they were achieved and made it quite clear that GCSEs were what all other children were doing and the option was there for them to do them if they wanted. Some of their home educating friends were studying for GCSEs at home and they also knew of children who had gone onto uni without them. Both children opted not to do them but to gain qualifications for their career paths at FE college (they chose BTEC) where they were accepted without the usual GCSE passes on the strength of their interviews. This is where our youngest is now, our eldest having gained triple distinction with her BTECs and gone onto Higher education.

In the end

Now, as we look back, we don’t know where the time went!

What we do know is that school wiped the smile off our children’s faces, home educating put it back. School damaged our children’s love of learning. Home educating restored it. School was cloning our children into pathways that were creating difficulties and failure and disregarding their natural strengths and abilities. Home education built up their natural strengths and abilities, overcame difficulties and created learning successes.

We didn’t set out to home educate long term. We also discussed school with the children and invited them to go back regularly but they didn’t fancy it – they heard the moaning from their friends! And despite the scepticism from family and friends, despite the energy and sacrifice home educating requires from us parents, despite the inevitable doubts and difficulties it throws up, it is not a decision we ever once regretted.


Read more on her blog at: http://rossmountney.wordpress.com

Home education works. The thousands of families successfully doing so are testimony to that!!

www.educationoutsideschool.co.uk
While some people look back on school as the 'best days of your life', for others the experience can be unpleasant and gruelling. Learning without School is a practical handbook for parents who want to educate their children at home but are unsure that they have the skills and know-how required to give their child the best education possible.

This book explains what home education is; the advantages and disadvantages of choosing this route; how to begin home educating; what you need to do and how to help your child adjust; and how home education affects children's social skills and friendships. It also covers technical aspects, such as the curriculum, core subjects, exams and timetables. Ross Mountney also considers children with 'learning difficulties' or 'special needs' and how to approach home education differently for this group of children.

Each chapter contains a summary of key points, useful websites, hints and tips and real-life case studies. This practical guide offers indispensable support for parents who are considering home education for their child, and includes a broad philosophy of education that will interest all parents and professionals involved in education and child welfare.

Ross Mountney is an ex-teacher and parent to two children who began school but have now been home educated for eight years. Ross is better known as the 'Home Educating Nobody', having written a diary for the charitable support network organisation, 'Education Otherwise' for several years.

Life Is Not A Race....
By Paula Cleary

Home educating can be scary sometimes. Even if you have the approval of friends, family and the inspectors, it is rarely unconditional support – especially if your child is taking longer to learn to read than they, and even you, expected.

It’s tempting to try to hurry things along with a reluctant reader and to get caught up with buying certain materials, book schemes, or workbooks to motivate your child. Some parents feel embarrassed about their child’s lack of reading skills in the face of increasingly concerned others – be they inspectors, friends or family. It makes our job all the harder to prove to the world that our children are learning very beautifully in spite of their yet un-mastered skill or joy of reading. Without written work to show off it can seem to the outside world that you are a woefully neglectful educator and parent. Otherwise loving peers can raise their eyebrows as the child gets further and further away from the “developmentally appropriate” reading levels required of school children. It’s not surprising that parents can feel a bit twitchy. But what happens if your reluctant 5 year old reader is still so at age 8, 12 or even 15? Is this an unqualified disaster and indicator of doom and failure? Will your child be forever ‘behind’ everyone else their age?

When Dr Alan Thomas was doing research for this book “Educating Children at Home”, he was pleasantly surprised about the learning which occurred in the 100 families (210 children) he studied. He noted that “Starting to read late, had, as far as could be ascertained, no adverse effect on intellectual development, self-worth, or even subsequent attainment in literacy. In general these late readers soon caught up with and, in common with most other home-educated children, went on to thoroughly enjoy reading”.

More recently in 2010, a report published by Otago University in New Zealand has proved that children who were taught at age 5 and age 7 to read in public and Steiner schools respectively, were found to have the same reading ability regardless by age 11. Dr Sebastian Suggate who led the research, told the Daily Telegraph in January of this year that “Because late starters at reading are still learning through play, language and interactions with adults, their long-term learning is not disadvantaged”. He added “Instead these activities prepare the soil well for later development of reading”.

This importance of “preparing the soil” instead of drilling in facts from an early age is common to a number of educators including A.S. Neill, Rudolph Steiner, John Taylor Gatto, John Holt, and many others. Albert Einstein once commented: “I never try to teach my students anything. I only try to create an environment in which they can learn”. A.S. Neill went even further “My view is that a child is innately wise and realistic. If left to himself without adult suggestion of any kind, he will develop as far as he is capable of developing”.

The context in which this learning takes place is no accident however – the environment of his own school (Summerhill in Suffolk) is one in which skilled teachers only give lessons to those who are genuinely interested. Adult help is always available for those who need it, but for the most part the children educate themselves through their friendships and free access to all manner of materials and resources which become educational in the hands of those using them with purpose. Fresh air and freedom and climbing trees are seen as possibly even more important than books, with the development of a child’s character as the ultimate goal.

Taking a similar leap of faith has obviously paid off for many families, judging by the folks writing on Lord Lucas’ blog late last year. In the wake of the Cambridge Review, he posed the question “Reading begins at 6. What have home educators to say?” At the time of writing this article there were 57 responses from parents who gave testimony to their children’s experiences of learning to read. Where parents had protected the right of their child to read when they were ready, many came to reading much later than the school would have allowed, with no hindrance to their learning whatsoever. Some learnt
We’d like to have some puzzles, quizzes and games in each issue, but we also want the children out there to contribute! So what better way than to ask you to send in your favourite games - indoors, outdoors, online; any really. Or maybe you’re interested in the history of games? Or what games children in other countries play?

A quick internet search shows plenty of information out there about this subject, from museums and universities as well as places like the BBC.

It seems that the first games were probably played with dolls; then games that use pebbles or sticks - “pick up sticks” is still played today! Jacks, as I call it, is also still played. I found a reference to Roman times where it was called knucklebones - when they used, erm, sheep bones! Yuck! But it’s the same idea - throw them up, and try to catch them on the back of your hand. Marbles too is an ancient game.

Do you play any of these? Or are you mainly a computer geek? What about sports, do you consider them games?

Write in with your ideas, and any suggestions on what you’d like to see on these pages. Meanwhile, have a look at what we’ve found and do some research yourself on the history of games, maybe we can print an article about it from an HE child’s point of view!
Real Life Home Education

When someone asks how my son will learn at home, I have various responses (depending on the person and how much time I have!); but one of the activities I use to support HE is cooking. “It’s maths isn’t it?” I say. They invariably agree when I talk of changing the recipe for more or less people/cookies. We can then go on to other subjects - cooking is also science; as is lego building. Lego building is design and technology (or whatever it’s called now), and is also art. These are just what’s come to mind - I’m sure we could come up with a long list, and if anyone knows the National Curriculum, maybe we could work out a Real Life version of it?!

Real Life is where we learn, whether we go to school or not. Schooling may well give us tools and ideas and information for real life - but so does real life!

We’ll find out in the future whether my six year old needs any more than he already gets from Real Life for him to acquire the skills for his chosen career; if he needs anything school has, we’ll look into it. Meanwhile, we’re doing the basics, just like any schooled child of his age. Except we get to eat our maths lesson!

One Cup Cooking - A History?

When I first said I’d do this recipe, with the one cup, I said it was an American measurement and that it was used “as they drove across the prairie” in the early years of colonisation - rather than having scales. I now can’t find this reference, so I’m worried I dreamt it... I thought I would however make the suggestion here, so if anyone would like to research this for us, please do, send it in to articles@educationoutsideschool.co.uk and we’ll check and print our favourite!

We’ll be printing more one cup recipes as it is an easy way to cook, so good for children to try.

COMPETITION

To win the cup shown measuring out the ingredients on the opposite page, email us with how to make your own baking powder.

Clue: it’s on the pot of Cream of Tartar...

Email editor@educationoutsideschool.co.uk
Chocolate Cookies

makes about 30

Ingredients
1 cup of softened butter or margarine
2 cups of sugar
2 teaspoons of vanilla essence
2 eggs
2 cups of plain flour
3/4 cup of cocoa
1 teaspoon baking powder

Method
Whizz the butter and sugar
Add the vanilla and eggs, whizz again
Add a cup of flour, whizz
Add the cocoa, whizz
Add the baking powder and the other cup of flour, whizz

Drop by teaspoonfuls onto a baking tray, bake for about 9 minutes at 180°C, until they’ve puffed up. They need to be just a little firm to the touch. Let them cool for a minute, then put onto a wire tray to cool completely.

I used soya margarine and golden granulated raw cane sugar. Sometimes I use butter, sometimes I use light brown muscovado sugar. The consistency changes though, so perhaps a little extra space between cookies for a runnier mixture. Add more or less cocoa, adjusting the flour; try less sugar. Add chocolate chips, chocolate buttons, walnuts.

Experiment!

Don’t forget to lick the bowl...

I’d like to credit all recipes, but I change them so much! I will list my favourite books on the Amazon Shop on the magazine website if they’re available.
Choccie Bread and Butter Pudding

Adapted From a Delia Smith Recipe, to make it easier to follow; and omitting alcohol!

By Sophie Jemima Hayes, Aged 11

10 easy steps to a scrummy Choccie Bread and Butter Pudding

1. Remove crusts from 9 slices of 5mm thick, 1 day old, good quality white bread, which should leave you with approx 10 cm squares.

2. Then cut each slice of bread down the diagonal, then down the other diagonal so you have 4 triangles.

3. Next, place 150g dark Choccie, 425 ml whipping cream, 110g caster sugar and 75g butter into a bowl, over a saucepan of barely simmering water, being careful not to let the bowl touch the water, then wait until the butter and chocolate have melted and the sugar has completely dissolved.

4. Remove the bowl from the heat and give it a really good stir so that all of the stuff has been mixed in.

5. Then in a separate bowl whisk 3 size 1 eggs and then pour the Choccie mix over them and whisk again very thoroughly so they all mix together.

6. The next step to making your bread and butter pudding is to spoon about a 1cm layer of the Choccie mix into the base of the dish and nicely arrange the bread triangles over the chocolate (so they overlap). Then pour the rest of the mixture - making sure you get it all out - as evenly as you can, then with a fork press the bread down gently so that it gets covered in the chocolate mixture as it cooks in the oven.

7. Cover the dish with Clingfilm, and allow to stand at room temperature for 2 hours. It can be cooked at this point, but it can be left in the fridge for either 24 or 48hrs.

8. When you are ready to cook your delicious pudding, pre heat the oven to 180° (Gas mark 4).

9. Remove the cling-film and bake in the oven on a high shelf for 30-35 minutes, until the top is crunchy and the inside soft and squidy. Then leave to stand for 10 minutes before serving.

10. ENJOY!!
at 2, some at 6, some as 'late' as 10 or 12. One mother spoke of her child who learnt to read at twelve: "Now 14, has just begun studying with the Open University and now reads adult level books". Another parent wrote on the blog to share her son's experience "My son learnt to read at 13 and has since gained GCSEs (including English) and is now following a course at college".

Even children within the same families learnt to read at all different ages, depending on their own desire, motivation and interest to do so, proving that reading age is not a whole-family trait but a uniquely individual one. Furthermore, those children who were genuinely dyslexic seemed to at least have their dignity and self-esteem intact through gentle parenting/teaching at home. Being a late reader is not necessarily of itself a reason to suspect dyslexia but even if it were, there is no reason to write your child off as a second-class learner. Being a late starter at reading are still learning through play, language and interactions with adults, their long-term learning is not disadvantaged".

Dr Sebastian Suggate

So if you, as a parent, find yourself worrying about what your child isn't doing or achieving academically, perhaps you need to take a fresh look and celebrate the things they are showing great interest in or are brilliant at. It might be an obsession with trains or horse-riding or animation or film studies – it doesn't matter what they're interested as long as it matters to them. Take pride in their unique skills and talents. You could read to them, bake with them, play board games if that's what they like...let them garden or sew, listen to music, build robots or play computer games. Even comic books and Top Trumps require decoding and reading of sorts. Encourage their hobbies and have some of your own. Take them to sports clubs, or libraries, galleries, museums, parks, theatres, workshops. Talk about whatever interests them and hang out with people who are experts in their own right - however informally they were trained. Let them play without forever trying to turn it into an educational opportunity. Your children might enjoy audio books – my children have listened to some of theirs so many times it's a wonder they have not been completely worn out. Oscar Wilde, Philip Pullman, Roald Dahl, Dick-King Smith, Horrible Histories, Tales of King Arthur...all those wonderful stories and worlds and facts and legends effortlessly absorbed. Music is also a wonderful teacher – how can anyone fail to learn stuff when arranged into a wonderfully catchy song? What are songs anyway...
“Children’s developing brains are so complicated that we simply cannot know what they might be ready and keen to know ‘next’.”

Prof. Guy Claxton, ‘What’s the Point of School’

- if not poetry and stories set to music? If they actually like workbooks, support them in that and get as many as you can afford. Even DVDs or YouTube can be a gateway to fabulous stories – our Very Hungry Caterpillar or Anytime Tales DVD are watched endlessly, and following a trip to Stratford-Upon-Avon, the children have watched Shakespeare’s animated tales on YouTube several times over. It’s easy to get snobby about the format, but there is no need if you only look more closely. I write this as someone who owns several hundred books and loves reading – but I am coming to see more and more how they are only a small part of a much bigger picture of my children’s education.

The list of activities I have just quoted are to give you an example of what works in my household. This does not mean I hold it up as a blueprint for the perfect learning environment - the fact is there is no blueprint or magic book or perfect resource to help children to learn and encourage them to read because each household contains a unique cocktail of characters with their own interests. Professor Guy Claxton, described as “one of the UK’s foremost thinkers on creativity, learning and the brain” and director of the Centre for Real-World Learning at the University of Winchester, gave the following advice to parents in his book, ‘What’s the Point of School’:

“Children’s developing brains are so complicated that we simply cannot know what they might be ready and keen to know ‘next’. Much better to have a rough guess as to what might interest them and then sit back and watch. Your guess may be wide off the mark, and the play possibilities either too easy or too hard....It is much more likely that your children will find some way of making use of your offering for themselves that might be quite different from what you imagined, but will be entirely appropriate to their needs”.

Each family must create its own learning environment according to the changing needs of their children and each child will respond within that environment. Perhaps the single most important ingredients in your children’s learning environment, and superior to any materials or resources are your acceptance, love and friendship, and the friendship of other like-minded souls.

To finish, I would like to quote from a beautiful poem by Nancye Sims ‘A Creed to Live By’ which concludes with the line “Life is not a race, but an adventure to be savoured each step of the way”.

It is easy to forget this in an increasingly pressurised world in which early reading is so highly prized. Just ask yourself the question “How many of today’s stressed out school children will still be reading for pleasure when they’re 90?” You can bet your kids will. Where will the inspectors be then? So savour the adventure and let your children enjoy their childhood – whenever they learn to read.

Paula lives in North Cambridgeshire with her faithful hubby, four little monkeys, a shaggy dog, and some other furry creatures. She happily admits she is making it up as she goes along, and is deeply committed to freedom in education

References:

1. Dr. Alan Thomas: “Educating children at home” (Cassell Education Series) ISBN-10: 0826452051
2. http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/6937462/Reading-at-five-fails-to-boost-skills.html
7. p. 179 Guy Claxton: ‘What’s the Point of School?’ (OneWorld Publications)
This could become a few pages long, we know! But we hope you will all consider sending in your reviews of anything. We all appreciate personal recommendation, it makes it easier to visit an unknown place; gives us new ideas when we’re flagging, and makes us watch something we thought sounded like it would be rubbish...!

We’ll edit if necessary, so waffle away!

**Nation by Terry Pratchett**

I’m unlikely to be the only person to recommend any Terry Pratchett, but this is different to his normal style. I found it engaging, page-turning and often sad. It’s about a complete change in one’s life - in this case a loss of a whole tribe, the *Nation* of the title. There’s a secondary story, that I thought we would hear more of, but it’s just a background to the other main character. There’s a whole series of books in this one, and it could easily be a film; it has been a play. It could be about global warming; or growing up. I’m loathe to say too much, so not easy to review, but I want you to read it. It’s technically for “young adults”, but don’t let that stop you if you’re an older adult!

See [www.terrypratchett.co.uk](http://www.terrypratchett.co.uk)

**Folksy.com**

It’s like etsy, if you’ve already heard of that! It’s where you, as a crafts person, can sell your makes. They’re keeping it British, and I think that’s good for marketing. But, there doesn’t seem to be much sold on there at the moment.

I think there’s still some work to be done, but it’s OK to use (once you understand how to load up your work, which just takes practice), and it looks good.

I do wish people would price their work properly though - some things just seem too cheap for the amount of work that must have gone into them, which devalues the whole market.

**Burghley House, Stamford, Lincolnshire**

Highly recommended - though expensive as all houses like this are. The gardens are beautiful, there’s a sculpture garden and a “Garden of Surprise”; I don’t know the last, but the sculptures are all excellent, and can be touched - especially the one which includes a perfect hill to roll down! The house itself is amazing, the painted ceilings in particular. It has been used for TV and film productions, so you may well recognise some of it.

Do visit their website and read about it, and if you’re in the area, think about a visit - but not on Fridays - that’s when they’re open for weddings!

[www.burghley.co.uk](http://www.burghley.co.uk)
Setting Up A Home Education Group - My Story
By Liz Pilley

I never set out to start a home education group. I said to my husband that there was no way I possibly could or would do so. Yet, just over a year later, I find myself running my local home education group with a slightly dazed feeling, wondering how exactly I got here.

What happened was this: we'd just moved house from Croydon to Epsom and our children were two and four. We'd already made the decision to home educate and were hoping to find a vibrant home education community which we could slot into and start making friends. But I couldn't find anything in the local area. There was a huge and active community over towards the other side of Surrey, but Surrey is a big county and, without a car, the journey was too much.

In desperation, screwing up all my courage, I started to contact people who appeared in the contact lists of home education organisations and met with mixed results. Some people obviously didn't want to be contacted, despite having their name on contact lists; others had children much older than mine. I met a couple of lovely people in this way and we saw them on a one-to-one basis, which was great but not what I had imagined a home ed community to be.

One of the people I met told me about the local Yahoo group for our area. I joined and timidly put up a message asking if anyone wanted to start a local, informal, meet-up. A home educating Dad answered saying he'd been thinking of the same idea and so we joined forces and took the plunge, advertising a meeting in a local park. I was hesitant, thinking we'd start monthly and see how it went. Despite wanting to belong, I was wary of committing ourselves to a weekly engagement. But my partner in crime was keen to be weekly and I cautiously went along with it. He was right.

It started with a bang. We had eleven families at the first meeting and we were flushed with success. We were brought back down to earth the following week with only four families attending. This was in September. As we went into October it got colder.

Some weeks it was only me and my co-organiser. We frantically looked for a winter venue but this was difficult. Most potential venues were prohibitively expensive, or wanted booking and paying in advance, or had height or age restrictions. In the end we went with a small and quiet soft-play centre in a local leisure centre. We didn't book it. We just arranged for everyone to meet there. Obviously, for those with two or more children the cost mounted up, and some of the older children were excluded due to the centre's rules, so it wasn't ideal but, with what the snow that winter, it was better than nothing.

We struggled on. Some weeks it was just me, and I started taking a book to read just in case. In the Spring we started meeting in a park again, which was much better, despite the rain which seemed to coincide with Thursdays more often then you'd imagine would happen by chance.

The group doing some apple bobbing

By this time, we'd developed a 'hard core' of about four or five families who usually attended, and three or four others who often did, and the adults were getting to know each other. My original co-organiser dropped out which left just me to carry the torch. After all this effort I was determined not to let it drift away, so I started canvassing opinion on what the other parents wanted for the group. After much discussion, it emerged that a hall of some sort, with its own outside space, was what we all wanted. It wouldn't matter if it rained, the kids could still run about a lot, and we could organise our own activities. Plus, the children would be able to cohere into a group much more easily. So I started looking at halls and getting quotes. And got depressed.

A local tennis club quoted us £100 per hour to hire their hall, another local venue was £50 per hour. I looked at a room at a church which was £15 per hour, but it was tiny and there was no outdoor access. Then
someone suggested scout halls - as they play games, have barbecues and practise putting up tents they normally have outdoor space. I contacted several. Not all were suitable and one didn’t hire their hall out at all due to ‘insurance issues’, but finally I found the hall we now use. The Bookings Secretary was friendly and helpful. The hall had everything we could have wanted: a kitchen; a large indoor space with chairs and tables to arrange as we wished; a small outdoor space with a grassed area and lots of nooks and crannies for dens; boys’ , girls’ and disabled toilets and baby changing facilities. We could even have an area in one of the huts in the garden to store stuff from week to week. It was fantastic. It was also only £9 per hour for regular hirers. I took it there and then for three hours every Thursday afternoon, starting at the beginning of July.

Then came the nervous part. Every week I’d have to make sure we covered the £27 rent. We discussed how we’d charge. It seemed that many people have my aversion to committing themselves to something, which is fair enough when it comes to kids really. You never know when they’re going to have a cold or a bug, or when Granny will turn up for a week and you want to spend time with her instead. We wanted to make it a drop-in group, and we wanted to make it affordable, particularly for those families with more than one child. So we set the cost at £4 per family per session - no matter how many kids and adults in the family, just one flat rate. This meant we had to have at least seven families per week to cover our costs. It was a bit of a risk as we didn’t always get that in our park meetings and we had to buy tea, coffee and milk as well (definitely essentials!)

The first week we had fourteen families and the fewest we’ve had is ten. In fact it’s averaged out at around fourteen families per week, meaning an average of thirty children, so that was one worry discounted. Then we turned our attention to resources. I had bought some basic stuff for the first session - balls, paper, crayons - and I was overwhelmed at people’s generosity. After just two weeks we needed more space in our storage shed with the huge amount of craft stuff, sports equipment, dressing up clothes, balls, push-along toys, cars, and Mr Potato Head gear we had been given.

Then we started our planning in earnest. At the end of each meeting, just before we clean up, we have a catch-up session where I give any news on our position and everyone contributes ideas, thoughts, questions. As a result of these sessions we officially became a non-profit community group - an ‘unincorporated association’ - with a bank account so that we could apply for funding, and to bank our increasing kitty as our session fees continue to more than cover our costs. We have just been awarded our first funding - money to buy a small library of home ed reference book for parents to borrow plus racks to keep them in - from LifeCycle.

We’ve also had outings and picnics, including a Not Back To School Picnic which was covered favourably in the local paper, linked up with our local museum which provides events especially for us, held a Sports Day, made snow-globes, done junk modelling, and started utilising all the skills that we started uncovering among the parents. We have also started regular Adults Social Evenings and I feel that the adults
are starting to make real, supportive friendships. We are currently looking into starting a skills swap and childcare bank.

When I look back over the past year, I can’t believe how far we’ve come. If I’d tried to do it all at once it would have been far too scary and probably wouldn’t have worked. The gradual start as we got to know each other was vital to our success, I think. I would never have thought I could set up something like this, but if I can, then most people can. Maybe give it a try?

Liz Pilley is the home educating mum to two children (Freya, 6, and Heath, 4), and is also a writer and a life coach. In her spare time she also has an allotment and can often be found making jam or working on environmental issues.

Some points to consider:

Gather a group of people around you, and then take your time.

Be realistic about costs. Don’t take big financial risks unless you can afford to lose.

If you set up a group, new people who come will see you as an expert on home education and will want to ask your advice or simply tell you their story. Be prepared to answer lots of emails and phone calls and be patient and welcoming.

Different things will suit different groups.

The key to applying for funding is having a bank account and to get a bank account you have to have a group constitution.

It really helps to have some ground rules for your group from the beginning, before any problems occur.

Consider writing a ‘harmony policy’ reminding adults to proactively model good behaviour to their children and to aid in solving disputes.

Don’t try to do so much that you’re working flat out and dread going to the group you’ve created. Keep it simple and make sure you ask others for help.

Write down all financial details so that everything is always transparent.

Keep a note of all ideas that people come up with so that even if they aren’t feasible now, you can look back at a later date and remind yourself.

Take confidentiality seriously. If you use a website be aware of security issues.

Remember it’s supposed to be fun!

www.educationoutsideschool.co.uk
Our resident Arts Advisor, Karen Harvey is going to be introducing you to some exciting art projects and events over the forthcoming issues of EOS, so here she is...

I’m very pleased to have been given the opportunity to work with the team at EOS and to share with you all sorts of wonderful activities and ideas relating to arts and creativity! I’ll be introducing you to some exciting projects over the forthcoming issues and I will be inviting you to get involved, get creative, learn lots and have fun together, and share all of that with the other EOS readers!

I was brought up in rural Fenland where there was very little access to anything arty, we didn’t have a car and my mum’s sense of direction was (and still is!) so bad that we never ventured very far. There was one bus, on a Wednesday, which went to the next town and then back again- hardly any point in that. I didn’t go on a proper bus until I was 13 when we moved to the city! I look back on my childhood and I think that there is a lot I missed out on, but I never, ever went without. I got my first camera when I was about 8, its was purple and aqua, it was also the 80’s. I used it on my fashion shoots with Barbie, Sindy and the un-named doll round the pond, in their designer swimsuits from my Summer Collection. I could never be bothered to watch television, I used to write notes in a secret book and do drawings, hide in my tree house, dress up as my Aunty Beryl and ride my bike up and down the road... but not all at the same time! I used to run clubs- Nature Club, Care Bears Club, Frog Club... the list goes on. The local children would come round and I would lead them into my studio (an old wooden garage which sadly got blown away in the big winds of ’87) and set them to work, drawing, writing, talking. I thought at the time I might become a teacher, and then, for a while, I thought I would be a spy.

When I grew up (a debatable subject amongst my friends and family) I studied Fine Art and then Photography. I almost became a spy (very good interview with MI5) but then the creative side of me won the battle and I became the first female photographer for Britain’s oldest newspaper... and then I went solo! I have been freelancing for 8 years now and my work takes me all over the place and in all sorts of directions. I have photographed wonderful and beautiful things, exhibited in the UK, America, Europe and Israel, won awards for my work and been published in books. I have lectured to photography students across the UK, written for magazines, written poetry and won awards for that too! And, so many more fantastic things that make me very happy and proud! You see, although I led, what many would consider, a sheltered childhood, I was always encouraged to explore, to express, to be myself and most importantly to do the things that I wanted to do. My mum has always told me to do the things I love, sometimes you have to do boring or horrible things to get there (flash back to evil summer job in a pea factory!) but you should never settle for anything other than reaching your goal. So, here I am. Happy and grateful to have been given that support and I guess that is why I do the things I do. Alongside my many, many projects I run Atelier East, an arts organisation dedicated to delivering high quality arts and creative experiences and helping people to develop new skills, self confidence and well being through raising their aspirations and making sure that they have lots and lots of fun!

I hope that gives you a bit of an insight as to why I am here! I’m really looking forward to getting to know some of you and sharing lots of creative and educational ideas with you all!

Karen is the Director of Atelier East, www.atelier-east.co.uk
Exploring colour

A Project Idea from Atelier East

Try using abstract art as a starting point for unleashing some imaginative creations.

Ideally, plan a trip to an art gallery. The sense of occasion, the environment of the gallery and sometimes the sheer size of the paintings can really help spark an interest.

If you can't make a trip, though, all is not lost. Gather some images from artists such as Paul Klee, Gustav Klimt, Picasso, Jason Pollack and others. Borrow books from the library, buy postcards from gallery sites, or print some picture from the internet. Try to include as many different artists as you can.

Show the pictures to your children. If working at home, you could use them to make your own art gallery first! Talk about which ones you like or don't like, work out why. Let everyone have their say and encourage them to believe that their opinion is as valid as anyone else's - even if they hate the lot!

Focusing on colour is a good way to start thinking about abstract art. Which colours do they like best? Which combinations do they think work well?

Use these colourful ideas to produce something abstract! Follow the ideas on these pages, or come up with your own!

Working alone...then together!

Using artists such as Paul Klee and Gustav Klimt for inspiration the Young Artists all painted an abstract painting which they then cut into small squares to create a colour block collage.

This idea could work well within a group setting, or could be adapted for a single child or family by painting several abstracts and using them to create the collage.
Inspired!

This artist took his inspiration from the work of Fenland artist Neville Palmer, mixing individual colours and using the square as the fundamental form.

Find an artist the child likes and let them come up with a similar piece of work.

Abstract artists are particularly good to introduce to children who think they can’t paint - abstracts don’t have to look like anything so they can be encouraged to produce work to be proud of!

Inspiration from unlikely places...

This artist made an interactive clay model inspired by the Rubik’s Cube

Resource List:

http://abstractartist.com/ ‘Amazing Abstract Artists from all over our planet!’ A great website which displays paintings from many abstract artists.

Artists mentioned in this article can also be found here:

www.zpk.org
www.gustavklimtcollection.com
www.expo-klimt.com
http://www.atelier-east.co.uk/2009/03/neville-palmer/

Printing pictures can be very expensive!

It’s going to be extremely ink heavy if you choose to print pictures from the internet yourself. Printing a dozen can seriously deplete you colour cartridge, and at £20 a time that’s going to make you wince!

It’s often much cheaper to have them printed at a professional printer. Save the pictures you’d like on a disc or memory stick, go and talk to your local printer and get some costs for printing on ordinary 80gsm paper.

Atelier East’s Young Artists scheme includes after-school Creative Club sessions and also offer specifically tailored workshops during the daytime to schools, pre-schools, children’s centres, and community groups.

They work on different art projects with the Young Artists to increase awareness, encourage creativity, develop the ability to express ideas and feelings....and to have fun!

The sessions often work to themes, usually set by the Young Artists themselves, and the idea is to learn about new subjects, experiment with a variety of materials and ideas, work together to produce work as a collective and singly, and share ideas with others.
Let’s Go to The World Cup!
- a Big Project Idea from EOS

I’m always on the look out for the chance to put learning into a context, to make it relevant. In fact, sometimes it’s hard to resist turning everything into an ‘educational experience’! However, having two football mad sons means that the World Cup is just too good an opportunity to miss.

The 2002 World Cup came around just a few months after we had started our home education journey. I still remember the walls of the kitchen being covered in A4 size flags of every participating nation as we used it as an introduction to continents and countries for my eldest. This year with my younger son we’ve come up with a few more football and World Cup themed activities that I hope will be fun and meaningful to him. I’ve described some of them here, with my ideas of what we’re learning along the way. Maybe you’d like to use some yourself, either exactly as they appear here or adapted to suit.

### The Nations

We’ve chosen to research each country, finding out its flag, capital city, official language, main exports and what side of the road they drive on! To keep it football relevant we’re also naming the ‘Best Footballer’ of that nation’s current team. My son is creating an index card size summary which he is attaching to the wall near a map of the World and we’ll add a piece of string or wool which stretches from the index card to the place on the World where that country is located.

As well as the obvious Geography, it’s a way of reinforcing the use of capital letters for countries, cities and names, as well as trying out some tricky spellings!

But there has been spontaneous, unplanned learning too, with discussions on the concept of ‘best footballer’. What does ‘best’ mean? Does it mean something different to different people? A chance to introduce the term ‘subjective’. And while both boys had pretty strong ideas of who they would choose as best for England, Spain, Italy and the like, there were a couple of countries from which they knew no footballers at all. How to choose? What criteria to use? Goals scored was quickly rejected as a measure since it ignored the talented defenders and goalkeepers. I think we eventually went with how many caps they had, deciding that longevity and consistency were hard to argue against!

### Food

An idea from my husband is to cook a meal from each of the nations taking part. Well, I’m not sure I’m up to 32 new dishes over the next few weeks, but I’m working on the idea! After a search on the good old World Wide Web (how did we ever manage before it?) these are the ones I’ve come up with so far. Of course, if you live in a suitably metropolitan area and money is not an object you could always choose to eat at restaurants instead!

You can find recipes for many of these dishes at www.tescorealfood.com/Our-Food/World-Cup-Recipe-Ideas.html. "\(^{\text{V}}\)" denotes a Vegetarian dish.

**USA**
- Burgers - home made, with a home made relish to boot!
- American stacked pancakes with maple syrup "\(^{\text{V}}\)
- Chocolate brownies "\(^{\text{V}}\)

**Japan**
- Sushi
- Teriyaki Chicken
- Japanese noodle soup with fresh tuna

**Brazil**
- Bean fritters (Acaraje) "\(^{\text{V}}\)"

**Nigeria**
- Chicken and Peanut Stew
- Yellow Rice "\(^{\text{V}}\)

**Spain**
- Paella
- Estofado de Pollo (Chicken Stew)
- Churros (Spanish Fritters) "\(^{\text{V}}\)

**Ghana**
- Joloff Chicken & Rice
- Plantain-stuffed roast chicken with spicy mango salsa

**Greece**
- Greek souvlaki
- Moussaka-stuffed aubergines

**Argentina**
- Spicy Bean and Sweet Potato Stew "\(^{\text{V}}\)
- Sirloin with chimichurri sauce
Fantasy Football

Try joining in with one of the online fantasy football games, some free to play, some which have a fee. The idea is simple. You sign up for the game on its website and pick your team using any of the players who are taking part in the World Cup. As the tournament progresses your players score points according to how they perform in the actual, real games played. At the end of the tournament, the person with the highest number of points wins!

Lots of watching the games, checking results and adding up how many points your striker earned you, or your goalkeeper lost you, and lots of Maths at the same time. Some websites give you a set amount of ‘money’ to spend on ‘buying’ your players, giving practice in big numbers!

Online games have thousands of people playing so often they have the option to create your own private league for friends and family. Fear not if you know nothing about football. I once topped our family’s fantasy league with a team that took me 10 minutes to choose and was based pretty much on the fall of a pin with closed eyes! Very satisfying to be ahead of those carefully selected and balanced teams, borne of hours of planning and discussion!

Here are some you could try:

- www.fantasyfifaworldcup.com
- www.worldcup2010fantasyleague.co.uk
- http://en.mcdonalds.fantasy.fifa.com/M/home.mc
- http://worldfantasyfootball.skysports.com/

There are more to choose from - type ‘World Cup 2010 Fantasy Football’ in to your search engine. Don’t be long choosing though - it all kicks off on June 11th!

Art

You can even use the World Cup to boost some enthusiasm for art.

**Kit Design**

Try designing a football kit; shorts, shirt and socks. How about the goalkeeper’s shirt?

Or could you design a better referee’s kit?

If you have a young child, or one who doesn’t want to draw the clothes from scratch, you could use the website http://www.makingfriends.com/friends/soccer.htm

Here you can print out paper doll bodies, then print hair and football kits (although, being an American site, it’s called ‘Soccer’) to customise and dress your paper dolls with. There’s an example on the right.

If they don’t feel like being imaginative, they could colour in using the designs of the actual international kits instead.

**Player Collage**

Over the next few weeks, keep hold of magazines and newspapers with pictures of the players. When you have a good collection, use them to make a collage. Cut out or print off an image of the World Cup trophy to place in the middle of your collage, then gradually build up a mass of players around. It doesn’t matter if some are full bodies and some just heads, or that they are different sizes - in fact, this will only add to the interest.

We’d love to see your results! If you’d like to show off, please send your photos to:

editor@educationoutsideschool.co.uk.

....And Statistics!

Use one of the wall charts that will doubtlessly be published in many of the newspapers in just a couple of weeks, or type ‘World Cup Wall Chart’ into your internet browser to find one to download. There can be a lot of Maths involved in the group stages, working out how many points for a win and a draw, where each team is positioned in their group, how many points they need to be sure of qualifying and when a team mathematically has no chance and is off home!
Education is Compulsory, Schooling is Not

With thanks to THEN UK

The specific legalities of home educating in the UK differ somewhat between England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland as much as they do in countries throughout the rest of the world. The national organisations listed to the right go into this in detail and are a good place to go if you are unsure or have specific queries. However, some things are clear:

YOU DO NOT need to be a qualified teacher to educate your child at home

YOU ARE NOT obliged to follow the National Curriculum or take national tests

YOU DO NOT need to observe school hours, days or terms

YOU DO NOT need to have a fixed timetable, nor give formal lessons

THERE IS NO FUNDING directly available from central government for parents who decide to educate their children

THERE IS NO WRONG WAY to home educate. There are many different approaches, from the autonomous or child-led to the highly structured, through a myriad of hybrids in between. In fact it has been said that there are as many different approaches to home education as there are families doing it.

You may have seen in the media various references to a report and subsequent proposed changes to the law. These were lost in the “washup” - the bargaining between political parties as to what bills will pass/fail in the days after the election was announced. Many Home Educators breathed a sigh of relief when they heard that the HE part of the CSF Bill had been cut. The hard work of many parents to inform and educate MPs and others enabled those in power to see that the proposed changes would not help those they wanted to help, and would in fact alienate many families.

The above is a swift ‘FAQ’ style list; basically, if you’re thinking of HE, and your children aren’t registered at a school, just keep them home. Talk to them. Research what they could do, and discuss with them how they’d like to learn. Then just do it. Go out, enjoy. (Museums, playgrounds, everywhere, are much quieter in school time!)

If they are at school, send a letter to the head teacher, use recorded delivery; say you will be home educating, and that’s it. Nothing else is required of you. You are the parent, you are responsible for your child’s education, as you are responsible for other aspects of their life.

If you do your research, you will find yourself impressed and maybe amazed at what children can do outside of school. They really can learn very successfully! Don’t Panic. Research, and enjoy.

Local Authority information and actions differ wildly, but the facts remain as above. If they wish to speak with you, check out the websites of HE organisations for suggestions on how to do this first. LAs are interested in making sure your children are receiving a good enough education, they are allowed to check if it seems they’re not.

www.educationoutsideschool.co.uk
Home Education Websites and Groups

There are many home education groups, national and local, all over the UK. Most websites and lists are full of very valuable free information provided by other home educators. A few charge a subscription. EOS Magazine is not affiliated to and does not recommend any particular group over another and they have been listed in no particular order - please use your own discretion and follow your own home ed path! Any omissions are purely due to our own human fallibility! If you run a website or a group that you would like to see featured here, or if you know of one that you feel should be here, please contact us and tell us.

National

AHEd
Action for Home Education
www.ahed.org.uk
PO Box 7324, Derby, DE1 0GT

Education Otherwise
www.education-otherwise.org
PO Box 325, Kings Lynn, PE34 3XW

Freedom In Education
www.freedom-in-education.co.uk

HE-Special
Home Education in the UK - Special Educational Needs
www.he-special.org.uk

HE-UK
Home Education UK
www.home-education.org.uk

HEdNI
Home Education in Northern Ireland
www.hedni.org

Home Education in the UK
www.home-ed.info

Home Educated Youth Council
An independent voice for home educated young people
heyc.org.uk

Schoolhouse
For home education in Scotland
www.schoolhouse.org.uk
PO Box 18044, Glenrothes,
Fife KY7 9AD
Tel: 01307 463120

THEN UK
The Home Education Network
www.thenuk.com
PO Box 388, St Helens, WA10 9BS
admin@thenuk.com

Regional

North East
North Yorkshire
www.nyhe.co.uk
West Yorkshire
wyheal.wordpress.com

East Midlands
Leicestershire
www.he-al.org.uk
Northamptonshire
www.iflow.org.uk
www.northantshe.org.uk

West Midlands
Worcestershire
www.worcestershire-home-educators.co.uk

East
Cambridgeshire
www.cambridgehomeeducators.org.uk

South East
Berkshire
www.heroesberkshire.co.uk
Isle of Wight
www.iwlearningzone.co.uk
Kent
www.flags-education.org.uk
www.ukhome-educators.co.uk
Surrey
www.pact-he.org.uk
www.swsurrey-home-ed.co.uk

South West
Bristol
www.bristolhomeeducation.org.uk
Dorset
www.he-ed.org.uk
Somerset
www.homeeducationcentre.org.uk
Wiltshire
www.nwiltsh-he.org.uk

Wales
North West
www.creativelearningandsupport.co.uk

Home Ed Gymnastics Group
Mansfield, Nottinghamshire

The group is open to all home educated children aged between 4-16 years old, subject to the availability of places. We meet on Friday afternoons during term time and half term holidays (but not during Easter, summer and Christmas holidays) from 3pm-4pm.

For further details, contact Alexandra or Martin at martin.gray6@ntlworld.com or on 01623 477922 or 07923496701

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Listed below you will find details of our Full Family membership package. Your membership fee can be paid via PayPal, Cheque, Postal Order or Standing Order. You are also very welcome to set up a Direct Debit and pay for your membership monthly if this suits you better.

No matter where you are in the World you are very welcome to join us as a member. Our Newsletters are now via E-Mail however a membership card will not be sent to you for fear of such a small item being lost in the post.

- 6 x Bi-monthly E-issues of ‘Jigsaw’, our full colour magazine for children
- 6 x Bi-monthly E-issues of ‘Choices’, our full colour magazine for the parents
- A family Membership card
- Bi-monthly prize draws for the children (no entry required)
- Details of how you can join our chat nights
- An invite to the parents for our members only Yahoo & Facebook group
- An invite to your children for their members only Yahoo and Facebook group
- Discounts available only to our paid up members
- A Contact list of home educators wishing to be contacted