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# How Our Children Learn

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Children know no boundaries. They are open to assimilating their experiences in a flash through a never-ending combination of instinct combined with fervent analysis and lack of inhibition. If children are loved, raised in a home with meaning and educated not with rigidity but, as the Bible's Book of Proverbs advises, each "according to his way," they thrive.

Dr. Glenn and Dr. Janet Doman reminded us at the very beginning of the social revolution of the 1960s in their path-breaking bestseller, *How to Teach your*

*Baby to Read*, that there is nothing more exciting for a child than learning. The Domans wrote succinctly, "Learning is the greatest adventure of life." Children are doing it every minute. They absorb every behavioral and environmental detail they experience.

The trick for us parents is to understand that our children's learning never stops. Any education that has a lasting impact on a child's life is ultimately experiential -- it is not found only in the nuts and bolts of the traditional classroom, but in the experiences of life outside the classroom where children make fuller sense of connections within their environment while building confidence in their own possibilities.

Let me offer a brief example of what I mean. I have identical twin 6-year-old sons named Rafi and Ari. Ari likes to cook and Rafi likes business. When I say "cook," I mean really whip up a dish and create new recipes. And when I say business, I really mean figuring out pricing points of items and margins of profit.

One day, the boys and I were in our favorite pizzeria. I asked the owners if they wouldn't mind running a workshop for Rafi and Ari. The next Friday afternoon, the owners were explaining to Rafi why they bought their building instead of renting, and to Ari they explained the qualities of the ingredients they use. Then each boy went into the kitchen and made themselves a personal pie under the guidance of the chef.

Rafi and Ari were empowered that day to follow their dreams. They constantly refer with joy to their experience that Friday afternoon learning the pizza business. I do not know if Ari will become a chef or if Rafi will become a businessman, but each of my sons now realize it is within their grasp to fulfill whatever aspirations they have as they grow.

This path towards lifelong experiential learning begins in the home. If the home is sure in its own values, then the child has no problem assimilating new experiences into an ever evolving holistic worldview secure in its own roots and fearless in trying new things. The key in childrearing is how to instill in our sons and daughters a grounded at-homeness in the world alongside a convinced openness to emergent experiences and an organic acceptance of difference.

Rafi and Ari have been raised in an Orthodox Jewish home. This kind of life is infused with a faith transmitted through elegant ritual and a tradition of question-asking around the study of text and experience. All too often however, religious communities of all stripes utilize their traditions in an exclusionary way. But, if there is one thing globalization has taught us these last several decades, it is that the world is smaller than before. Each of us has been offered the opportunity to know "the other" more than ever in history. This is the gift of our time.

So, I made a choice that Rafi and Ari should dwell in the worlds of Talmud and pluralism all at once. This means that their friendships are open and they invite their friends, non-Jewish or less observant Jewish families, to share in Sabbath dinners, which Rafi and Ari have learned in their 6-year-old parlance to narrate. And Rafi and Ari visit their friends and naturally imbibe diverse traditions and meanings, such as appreciating their friend Alexis' thoughtfulness and pride over her Christmas tree decorations.

These accumulated moments of playful interaction with diversity don't diminish Rafi and Ari's own fundamental Jewishness. In fact, this sense of pluralism extends into Rafi and Ari's experience of their own religious foundation. They at once can attend a Chassidic religious service or a Sephardic one, feeling equally at home in both though the liturgies are recited in completely different manners. Their exposure to other ways of approaching life simply adds layers of knowledge and respect to the tolerance children innately have.

Combine children's absorption of the living reality of pluralism with experiential learning, such as a Friday afternoon at the heart of the business and kitchen of a pizzeria, and, if nothing else, we know those children will be having loads of meaningful fun. It is my prayer that Rafi and Ari's journey through their experience of creation will carry them through a lifetime beyond childhood without boundaries through a never-ending exploratory joy in learning.

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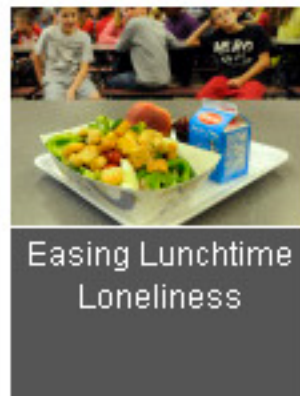
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