

Take the homeschooling journey toward a stronger, happier, well-educated family.

The Art of Education: Reclaiming Your Family, Community and Self – 15th Anniversary Edition

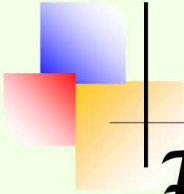
**Buy The Complete Version of This Book at
Booklocker.com:**

<http://www.booklocker.com/p/books/4734.html?s=pdf>

15th Anniversary Edition

When *The Art of Education* was first written, I said it was decades ahead of its time.
Read it now and discover that today's education crisis has proven me right.

~ **Mark Hegener**, Home Education Magazine Publisher



The Art of *Education*

*Reclaiming Your Family,
Community and Self*



Linda Dobson

Foreword by John Taylor Gatto



The Art of Education has stood the test of time as one of the best homeschooling books of the last two decades. Freewheeling and easy to read, it packs a real wallop as it dissects what has gone awry in what passes for "education" these days, while providing the encouragement and practical wisdom to make your homeschooling life sing. Great books only get better."

~ **David Albert**, homeschooling author, speaker and dad

Copyright © 2010 by Linda Dobson. All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means including information storage and retrieval systems, or to be sold or resold, without express written, dated, and signed permission from the author. The only exception is by a reviewer, who may quote short excerpts in a review.

Limit of Liability/Disclaimer of Warranty: This book is for informational purposes only. While the author has used best efforts in preparation of this book, she makes no representations or warranties with respect to the accuracy or completeness of the contents of this book and specifically disclaims any implied warranties of merchantability or fitness for a particular purpose. There are no warranties which extend beyond the descriptions contained in this paragraph. No warranty may be created or extended by sales representatives or written sales materials. The advice contained herein may not apply or be suitable for your situation. The accuracy and completeness of the information provided herein and the opinions stated herein are not guaranteed or warranted to produce any particular results. By providing information or links to other companies or websites, the author does not guarantee, approve, or endorse the information or products available at any linked websites or mentioned companies, or persons. This publication is designed to provide information with regard to the subject matter covered. It is sold or provided with the understanding that the author is not engaged in rendering legal, accounting or other professional service. The author shall not be liable for any loss or loss of profit or any other commercial damages, including but not limited to special, incidental, consequential, or other damages.

PLEASE NOTE: You **do not** have the right to reprint or resell this book.

YOU ALSO **may not** give away, sell, or share the content herein.

If you did not pay for this book through an authorized distributor, you have a pirated copy.

PLEASE help stop Internet crime by reporting this to:

info@parentatthehelm.com.

THANK YOU.

The Art of Education: Reclaiming Your Family, Community, and Self

by Linda Dobson

Published by

Home Education Press

Post Office *Box 1083*

Tonasket, WA 98855

(509) 486-1351, fax (509) 486-2628 E-mail: Hegener@aol.com

© 1995 Linda Dobson and Home Education Press. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or by any information storage and retrieval system without written prior permission from the author and publisher, except for the inclusion of quotations of not more than 500 words for review purposes only.

First printing April, 1995.

Printed in the United States of America by McNaughton & Gunn, Lithographers, Ann Arbor, Michigan

ISBN 0-945097-26-3

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Dobson, Linda.

The art of education: reclaiming your family, community, and self by Linda Dobson

p. cm.

Includes biographical references and index.

ISBN 0-945097-26-3: \$14.75

1. Home schooling 2. Education--experimental methods.

1. Title.

LC40.D63 1995

649.' 68--d c20

95-4148

CIP

CONTENTS

I –V.... 2010 Author Update

9..... FOREWORD - by John Taylor Gatto

19.. .. INTRODUCTION - The Art of Education

PART ONE - Wisdom of the Art

31..... CHAPTER 1 - Meet Your Makers

47..... CHAPTER 2 - Is That All There Is?

55..... CHAPTER 3 - The Education Pyramid

67..... CHAPTER 4 - Addicted to Experts

75..... CHAPTER 5 - Birds Don't Go to Flight School:
Artificial Learning vs. Natural Education

87..... CHAPTER 6 - As You Sow, So Shall You Reap

95..... CHAPTER 7 - Examining Priorities

109.....CHAPTER 8 - Creating Your Family's Personal
Education Philosophy

121.....CHAPTER 9 - Exploding the Top Five Myths About
Family Centered Education (or
Homeschooling)

135.....CHAPTER 10 - Imagine

143.....CHAPTER 11 - Coping with Being a Pioneer on the
Road to Freedom

PART TWO - Benefits of the Art

163.....CHAPTER 12 - I am the Captain of My Soul- Benefits for You

177.....CHAPTER 13 - Suffer the Little Children to Come Unto Me - Benefits for Your Children

193.....CHAPTER 14 - It Takes a Village to Raise a Child - Benefits for Your Community

209.....CHAPTER 15 - A Dozen Simple Starting Points

227.....CHAPTER 16 - Implications for the Greater Society

APPENDIXES

236.....APPENDIX A - Homeschool "Alumni"

237.....APPENDIX B - Notes

INDEX

247.....INDEX

CHAPTER ONE

MEET YOUR MAKERS

When 2000 young men were asked to spell out their greatest concerns for the future, they expressed two major fears in equal weight - and absolute contradiction: fear of not having enough money, and fear of being locked in by the constant pursuit of money. To purchase freedom at the sacrifice of a comfortable life is virtually unthinkable. If only they could have their cake and eat it on Martha's Vineyard....

-Gail Sheehy in Pathfinders

Who are you?

If you answer this question with your name, your profession, your family relationship, your credentials, or any of the thousand labels worn in daily life, please pay attention. This chapter is written with love especially for you.

Before you can take conscious control of your destiny, before you can assume greater responsibility for your family, before you and your children can be assets to your community, you must know who you are. A difficult task, indeed, given years of training to look outside yourself for identity.

Who is the person, for example, called Sandra, working as a nursing supervisor, mother of Jennifer and John Jr., who graduated with honors and a Masters degree? Who is it who has this name, these children, this job? The answer for Sandra, as with all of us, exists inside. It is found, not by asking others or by identifying with the labels we wear, but by introspection.

There are dozens of methods to accomplish this, as well as thousands of books, videos, cassettes, and even technologically advanced machines with which to begin this process. Visit your local bookstore or library to get a feeling for what's available. Learn a little about the method that most readily captures your attention.

Once the journey of introspection begins, one of the first things many folks realize is that the image of a "self-made" man or woman is a myth. Frank Sinatra may *think* he did it "his way," but had he looked closely enough, he would have seen his personality, behavior patterns, likes and dislikes, dreams, and even his thinking were conditioned and shaped by the society and circumstances which surrounded him as he journeyed toward adulthood.

Outside influences blanket the true Self with layer upon layer of conditioning (or programming). Through the years, these layers pile up, rust into place, and crystallize a misplaced faith that who we truly are *is* this very rust pile. To find one's Self and answer the question "Who am I?" requires stripping away the layers of conditioning that hide our true nature.

It is impossible to recognize, let alone remove, these obstacles to our understanding of Self without at least a cursory understanding of what they are and where they came from. There are hundreds, if not thousands of these influences. Some are obvious - Mom, Dad, siblings and friends. Others are not so obvious - the quality of environmental stimulation and experiences changes the shape of your brain, your thoughts affect your environment, you tend to meet others' expectations of you, regardless of whether they are high or low. But for now, we're going to concentrate on the major social institutions that touch your life, for two reasons: 1) They are large and fraught with danger, and 2) their capacity for conditioning us is so well implanted in daily life no one escapes their influence. No matter where you live, or went to school, or how rich or poor you are, with regard to institutional conditioning, you're drifting in the same boat as every other American. Some of us got more, some less, but no one got missed.

So let's meet your makers, the institutions of American life that have, to date, shaped your thinking and directed the life you are leading.

Just Do It

(Or, Teaching You to Pay \$100 for Sneakers with a Smile on Your Face)

Ah, money, up there on a pinnacle unreachable by friendship, love, trust, honor, God or family. How much of your time revolves around greenbacks; waiting (to get the next batch), wishing (you could spend more), wondering (if there will ever be enough), and worrying (will it last until the end of the month)?

Make it. Spend it. Make more. Spend more. The merry-go-round makes you dizzy, even physically, psychologically, or emotionally sick. Yet you stay on, unaware that there are other rides to try, fearing what the future holds if you dare leap off.

Why do we do it? Is constant pursuit of the almighty buck *your* idea of the perfect life, or is somebody or something else pulling your strings, shaping your thinking and behavior?

First you must remember that to a certain degree the government, primarily through the power of taxation and public spending, can control

quantities of available money. However, government officials have traditionally relied on the advice of investment bankers. In the product of over twenty years of research, *Tragedy and Hope: A History of the World in Our Time*, Carroll Quigley explains the results: "The history of the last century shows... that the advice given to governments by bankers... was consistently good for bankers, but was often disastrous for governments, businessmen, and the people generally."¹

Furthermore, "The influence of financial capitalism and of the international bankers who created it was exercised both on business and on governments, but could have done neither if it had not been able to persuade both of these to accept two 'axioms' of its own ideology. Both of these were based on the assumption that politicians were too weak and too subject to temporary popular pressures to be trusted with control of the money system; accordingly, the sanctity of all values and the soundness of money must be protected in two ways: by basing the value of money on gold and by allowing bankers to control the supply of money. To do this it was necessary to conceal, or even to mislead, both governments and people about the nature of money and its methods of operation."²

In "Absolute Absolution," the author of *Dumbing Us Down: The Invisible Curriculum of Compulsory Schooling*, John Gatto, summarizes the omnipotent control of private bankers, stating that since 1914, we have allowed them "to determine the value of currency, whether business expands or contracts, and that these private individuals, who are mostly unknown to the public, have been given the magical power to create money or destroy it as they see fit."³

And you thought *you* made money! You simply earn enough to keep your place on the merry-go-round. But you must spend that earned money, too, for this is the fuel that keeps the merry-go-round operating. Private bankers and their buddy, big business, find getting you to do this is a snap - they advertise!

The purpose of advertising is universal: Create mass desire, then fill it. So marketing specialists study us, the consumers, more closely than scientists study lab rats. They measure our psychological processes, spending habits, TV viewing, hobby pursuits, and reading rituals so their messages take the most direct route to "targeted" markets: young or old,

rich or poor, parent or childless, married, divorced, or owner of a three-legged dog in need of prosthesis.

My own informal study consists of a quick review of twenty commercials on two major networks one evening (sorry, I couldn't take any more!). My notes reveal the following about us as trained consumers:

1) We can be led around by the nose with sex. Subconsciously stir our desire for sex, or to be sexy, and we'll buy your cars, beer, and toothpaste.

2) We desire to be just about anything we are not. Flash colorful, fast-moving pictures displaying people who have and do what we don't (and think we want), and we'll buy your hair coloring, diet shakes, and a pair of those \$100 sneakers that let us make jump shots like Michael Jordan.

3) We like to think we can get something for nothing. Just tell us it's on sale, or you will throw in something for free, and we'll buy your hamburger, exercise program, and a knife that never needs sharpening.

4) We cherish things, worship sports players, compete with our neighbors, honor the ruthless, and use far too much medicine to relieve the symptoms of stress.

(Note: Big business, with lightning speed, is taking its scientific advertising methods and behavior shaping directly into your child's classroom. Be sure to read the chapter titled "As You Sow, So Shall You Reap.")

O.K., O.K., I want. I'll buy! But don't you dare make me wait for it!

Your programming in your "right" to immediate gratification was shaped by big business starting, perhaps, with credit and credit cards. If you are already working steadily enough, you can gain access to the privilege of spending money you haven't earned yet. What better way to insure that you'll stay on the merry-go-round for a few more spins? And if you buy enough on credit, you're entitled to a lifetime ticket!

It was nice, wasn't it, carrying a big screen TV out of the store, driving

home, and enjoying it today instead of waiting two years until you gathered enough cash for it? ("I owe, I owe, so off to work I go.")

Of course, the price you pay for all the things you've been led to desire is determined by the value of your money which, of course, is determined by those nameless people previously mentioned who help create your desire in the first place! It's not your fault that big screen TV costs more than you could possibly pre-save for. It's not your fault all those commercials and ads (whose costs are simply added to the price of your TV) make it look like something you just can't live without. And it's not your fault that you feel your worth as a person just increased with your new purchase. (Where does *that* life-altering misconception come from?)

There's also no need to wait until tomorrow for the money you *do* have; just use the automatic banking machine tonight. And while you're there, your computer silently adjusts your portfolio as the stock market fluctuates. Let it spend while the spending looks so good! My, but you use your conditioning well!

Immediate gratification conditioning even invades the more mundane life activities, like meals (and I use that term for "fast food" loosely), mail (fax it!), and shopping for pots and pans (yes, Ms. Jones, the XYZ Mail Order Co. delivers overnight).

You were not born to desire "things" and consume more rapidly than you can earn money. Consumers are created, programmed with scientific accuracy like Pavlov's dogs and sold something far more expensive than even the fanciest car you can imagine - the reality of a life spent spinning on the economic merry-go-round, chasing the fleeting pleasures of consumption while the money controllers push the buttons of your thinking and manufacture your next desire. Want more, earn more, spend more; the merry-go-round keeps on turning. Oh, and by the way, you now owe more taxes for the privilege of earning more money, which helps your next "maker," the government, grow even larger.

I Pledge Allegiance

Every society throughout time utilized some form of government to provide much needed services for the good of all. Problems occur

historically not with the *form* of government per se, but when the individuals who comprise the government - be they kings, dictators, or presidents - lose sight of honesty, compassion, and civic responsibility under power's intoxicating glow.

Blind trust in an immense, life-or-death controlling institution is either an act of extreme faith or utter stupidity. One only need read a few newspaper or magazine articles to understand that medieval kings who feasted while the peasants died of disease and starvation had nothing on 20th century politicians. Cases in point:

(From *Harper's Index*, 11/93) Average number of members of Congress charged with a crime each decade between 1789 and 1970: 2. Average number charged with a crime each decade since: 24.

Checking two issues per week, an informal, two month study of my local, average twelve-page daily newspaper uncovered the following: NASA fraud, President Clinton's cheating heart, secret government human radiation experiments, Iran-Contra coverup investigator deemed former President Reagan impeachable, possible foul play regarding a White House attorney's suicide, questionable legal practices by First Lady, and a vocal campaign reform-advocating U.S. Senator who bought art and partied with his "leftover" \$106,939 in campaign funds.

Imagine a newspaper reporting "George Washington should have been impeached for trading arms for hostages. Several militiamen also confirm having arranged trysts for George when Martha took leave of their Valley Forge residence."

Was my study a typical two months? Try it and see. Read with the eye of a naive colonist. Give it your complete attention or the reports are bound to slip by you, so familiar, tiring, and disheartening have they become.

The media is shouting at you. At the same time, there are many who work hard to ensure you do not wake up.

Today's government is not what our forefathers worked and died for. It has grown much larger, more powerful, and more intervening into the private affairs of its citizens than Thomas Jefferson could ever have imagined. That intervention has shaped your thinking and your life since you were born. Let's look briefly at its role in family life and education as one of your chief makers.

In *The Way We Never Were*, Stephanie Coontz explains that "child labor legislation and compulsory schooling aimed to root out 'precocious' behaviors among children, restrict them to home, and strengthen the adult male breadwinner role."⁴ Family behavior, it seems, could be - and was - legislated. It's really quite simple: If you want people to behave a certain way, make it illegal for them not to.

The arm of government stretches beyond laws. It pulls the purse strings on assistance to families in need, too. In order to meet government requirements, families learned they had to behave (therefore, think) a certain way or be denied help during tough times. Some pooled economic resources or shared cooking facilities with others to cut costs (perfectly logical and emotionally satisfying ways to save money while getting back on their feet). These families found assistance held back until their behavior changed.

Before compulsory attendance laws forced children into schools, apprentice programs were a mainstay of education. Working adults offered learning opportunities to young men who swapped their sweat for on-the-job training, producing people like Benjamin Franklin. Franklin, who worked in his brother James' Boston print shop, learned his trade so well that he earned his way to Philadelphia, worked for another printer and, after a detour to England, set up his own shop at the tender age of 22. The free spirit in Franklin, incidentally, recognized that a borrower is a slave to the lender, so he quickly repaid the money borrowed to start his business.

Within one hundred years, though, the natural apprenticeship practice that helped so many young men had deteriorated into corrupt programs used, says historian Maxwell Bloomfield, as "a device for the recruitment and exploitation of young paupers." In Franklin's time, apprenticeships were considered a way to help families educate and socialize their children. But by the 1840's, government (and church) authorities gave themselves the power to relieve poor families of their children. Apprenticeships lost that loving feeling of community. They decayed into exploitation. Social services, the "helping hands" of government, were born.

American family life, especially for low-income families, has never recovered from the blow. Self-responsibility doesn't pay, our ancestors were conditioned to believe. Government slowly and systematically replaced the idea of man's home as castle with man's home as tendril of the institution of

government.

(Note: The all-pervading government institution also encompasses military and law enforcement training and service, as well as string-pulling PACs and all brands of nationalism. But these aspects are worthy of books unto themselves! They have all worked as your makers. Take some time to examine their influence on the thoughts, ideas, and way of life you think are your own...that is, if you can find the time.

While government regulations may not *directly* overshadow your life, consider the fact that the U.S. Office of Management and Budget reported, "In the 1980's the private sector was spending over 5 *billion hours* a year just to meet government paperwork demands. It is spending even more time...in the 1990's."⁵ Federal regulations also cost Americans \$395-510 billion in 1990. In spite of your government, find some time for thinking about reclaiming control of your own life. (Good luck.)

In God We Trust

Strange how when I hear this phrase my mind doesn't turn to inner cosmic secrets or theological philosophies. The saying's appearance on government issue notes (\$\$\$) seems, at first, an ironic attempt to bring God into an all-encompassing societal Trinity: Economy, Government, & God (probably incorporated to take advantage of the tax breaks). After all, Christ is credited with instructing us to "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's."

Maybe there was too much separation inherent in this statement. Maybe it was easier to lull us back to sleep and into step if we, the people, never dwelled too long on the relative merits of the inner and outer world. Maybe if God could be assimilated into the outer world, we would never need to consider the inner world at all!

The government and economic institutions found what is really an ingenious solution - add God's name to that which belongs to Caesar! Weave the dominant Christian ethic (just enough so people can see it, now!) into every aspect of manmade law. Ta-da, the new Trinity was erected.

You're right, this is a rather simplistic view of how government lost God and found mass compliance. But we're here, not to review the historic marriage of government and religion, but to understand how the shadow of

this history falls over your life and shapes your thinking and behavior today.

The problem with religion as your maker is not religion itself. Religion, ideally practiced, is an intensely personal matter. A religious person's life - thoughts, work, play, self-regulation, acceptance of others, courage in the face of adversity and death - are an external expression of an active inner world nurtured and tended as a mother cares for an infant. A religious person's life radiates with a loving peace that has blossomed inside, touching everyone in its path as the flower's perfume simply floats on the spring breeze. Right action (what we today label as moral behavior) flows naturally from the inside out. Left unencumbered by society's institutions tugging his attention in a thousand different directions, a religious person is the most content, peaceful, happy soul you'll likely meet.

Say nothing of my religion. It is known to God and myself alone. Its evidence before the world is to be sought in my life: if it has been honest and dutiful to society the religion which has regulated it cannot be a bad one.

- Thomas Jefferson, *Works*, Vol. 7

The religious people in mankind's past - Gautama Siddhartha, Lao-tzu, Moses, Lord Krishna, Jesus Christ, Prophet Mohammed, and others - simply shared the fruit of their internal worlds, providing juicy bites for anyone so inclined. They never set out to "organize" religion. They certainly never worked toward massive institutions developed in their names. And even the institutions' developers would turn over in their graves if they could see what, in modern history, masquerades as religion.

More humanity has killed and been killed in the name of religion than for any other reason. Sunday church attendance passes for absolution of sins in the work and personal realms the other six days of the week. Values classes for the young replace moral living and understanding. Religiosity (excessive or affected piety) serves its bearer's ego no matter the cost to others. Religious leaders turn sexual abuse into a hobby. Behavior management via punishment and reward reaches new heights.

Rather than live the more virtuous, challenging and, at times, difficult

lifestyle of a true Christian, more and more institutionalized Christians fit the definition Ambrose Bierce included in his *Devil's Dictionary* before he mysteriously disappeared in Mexico: "One who believes that the New Testament is a divinely inspired book admirably suited to the spiritual needs of his neighbor. One who follows the teachings of Christ so far as they are not inconsistent with a life of sin."

The decline in our "standard" for living a religious life has a profound effect on you. With millions of us disconnected from the personal nature of religion (private, internal understanding, after all, cannot be monitored), the religion institution compels us to fill our spiritual gap with adherence to its doctrine. When the spiritual well is empty, even a drop of tainted water brings hope.

And when you read next how school prepares us to accept the institutions that surround us, you'll understand how we manage never to notice that our individuality and very ability to think for ourselves are choking on that poison.

Compelled to Attend

Can you think of a better way to insure that you will be "made" according to the dictates of others than by forcing you, by law, to appear at a government-funded, state-controlled institution where you spend a predetermined number of years as part of a crowd subject to constant scrutiny and evaluation? No, I am not talking about prison. I refer to public school.

In August, 1991, John Howard, Counselor with the Rockford Institute, told the University of Wisconsin Center faculty that their university's catalog "acknowledges that education is a process in which the student learns things the educational institution has decided will be beneficial to the learner and to the society." The catalog goes on to insure parents the university "will strive to fit the student for civic responsibilities."

Dr. Bowen, President of Princeton University, called this type of thinking "indoctrination in accepted ideas." The *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* calls indoctrination "the teaching to accept a system of thought uncritically." (As in do what you are told; "they" know what is best for you; don't question authority.) I call indoctrination the

saddest abuse of human potential and the sorriest waste of human minds that could ever be imagined. I call it *shaping our thinking*.

And if colleges and universities ignore the true meaning of education and accept indoctrination as their function in society, what then is the purpose of all the years of schooling that lead up to college, starting at the tender age of five or, in many cases today, even younger?

"School," says Ivan Illich in *Deschooling Society*, "prepares for the alienating institutionalization of life by teaching the need to be taught."⁶ This way you may spend the rest of your life seeking out and paying others for thinking you are capable of doing, if only you knew that to be true. But, sadly, not too many people making a living in the education business are ready to teach themselves out of jobs. Furthermore, "Once a man or woman has accepted the need for school, he or she is easy prey for other institutions."⁷

This is the essence of how school becomes what just may be your ultimate maker. Through the legal power to make you attend for a minimum of ten years, you are part of a captive audience *taught to uncritically accept* that

- 1) you need someone outside yourself to provide you an education;
- 2) your education need only ready you for confinement within yet other institutions; and
- 3) the value or truth of these notions should never be questioned.

This programming comes to you courtesy of the education institution representative closest to you - the teacher. This is not to accuse teachers of consciously conditioning you. They do their time in grade school, then move on to a college that not only espouses "indoctrination in accepted ideas," but there they train to perpetuate the same in future American classrooms. Through the *type* of training teachers receive, this becomes an unquestioned and, optimistically, unconscious part of the job.

In teachers' defense, statistics show one out of five leaves the profession within five years. The powers-that-be call it burn-out. I call it disillusionment. Living the life of an indoctrinator is not what they intended. Leading kids to the joy of learning, they discover, is absent from school agendas. As for the teachers who stay, all that college time spent

studying classroom management pays off as maintaining order and discipline become necessary priorities. Teacher-maintained discipline may keep the classrooms quiet and orderly, but it also delivers lots of thought-shaping. Consider just a few examples:

- Helping a friend is "cheating"
- An "institutional expert" should decide what and when you learn
- Doing irrelevant, mind-numbing chores is good for you
- You are not capable of evaluating your own work or worth
- You are in competition with your classmates for your teacher's limited time and attention
- Answer, don't ask questions
- Time is too short to spend it listening to your ideas

Fortunately there's usually only one teacher promoting these lessons in each classroom. But an equally insidious and important force shows up in greater numbers - your peers.

What are the criteria for choosing these very important influences on your life? Your peers happened to turn five or six about the same time you did, and their parents happened to move into the same neighborhood as yours chose. You wound up together in the same neighborhood school "because it was there."

Of course you didn't realize it at the time, but these fellow "little people" shared their sometimes less-than-correct knowledge (Moms swallow watermelon seeds then have babies), bigotries (all *fill in a nationality or skin color* stink), likes (I want green; Billy likes green), dislikes (Susan says spinach is awful; I don't want any), family dysfunctions (every time he gets mad he punches me!), and many more, bombarding your developing mind daily. The knowledge available within the experience of a fellow five year-old, however, does little to advance your academic career and less to guide you toward maturity. The old cliché about the blind leading the blind was written, I suspect, by an elementary school teacher eavesdropping on student conversations on the playground.

It stands to reason that if a group of people is arranged, as in public school, to be as homogeneous, or similar, as possible from the very start, is

subjected to intense observation and criticism of minute details of behavior, and is then conditioned/programmed/taught the same things at the same time (without individual interests, thought, or ability entering the picture), the results are predictable. We wind up with "graduates" who "will no longer be surprised, for good or ill, by other people, because they have been taught what to expect from every other person who has been taught as they were." ⁸

John Taylor Gatto, retired thirty-year veteran of New York City public schools and recipient of the New York State Teacher of the Year award, takes the horror of this "robot" effect one step further. He proposes a well-researched thesis revealing how the "progressive" education movement, working to cleanse the public schools of a colonial, "angry God" Christian curriculum, succeeded in their goal. Unfortunately when this "angry God" disappeared, so did "the idea of God along with him." ⁹

If this is true it explains how public school programming has managed to create a society void of internal moral motivation and filled with hate, violence, and distrust. These are side effects of public school conditioning creating a society devoted to the economy, providing "busy work" for the masses who, in our sleep, are *powerless* to protect ourselves from the moral bankruptcy of the nation's political, economic, church, and education "leaders."

Armed with skilled - and due to additional programming, comatose - social workers and institutionally trained teachers, backed by law and armies of enforcers in every town and village (all funded with huge sums of taxpayers' money and, incidentally, trained to observe and report on fellow citizens' thoughts and actions), schools offer the perfect place for all your makers to converge, full force, on the young innocents gathered within the confines of the institution. You might call school the ultimate "institutional melting pot," the great equalizer. Under their methods, the needs and interests of individuals don't need to be met - they can be ignored!

Historians have collected materials containing Thomas Jefferson's view of American education ideals. In 1818, Jefferson set forth six objects of primary education which, with his knowledge of the people of his time, he calculated would require three years of schooling to achieve:

- "To give every citizen the information he needs for the transaction of his own business;
- To enable him to calculate for himself, and to express and preserve his ideas, his contracts and accounts, in writing;
- To improve, by reading, his morals and faculties;
- To understand his duties to his neighbors and country, and to discharge with competence the functions confided to him by either;
- To know his rights; to exercise with order and justice those he retains; to choose with discretion the fiduciary of those he delegates; and to notice their conduct with diligence, with candor, and judgement;
- And in general, to observe with intelligence and faithfulness all the social relations under which he shall be placed."

While it is true Jefferson saw those three years of education as the state's duty, according to Merrill D. Peterson, author of the Bancroft Prize winning *The Jefferson Image in the American Mind*, he specified education should be "secular and practical, a matter of local initiative and responsibility, and *as free as possible of any coercive discipline*." (Emphasis added.)¹⁰

"It is better," Jefferson understood, "to tolerate the rare instance of a parent refusing to let his child be educated than to shock the common feelings and ideas by forcible asportation and education of the infant against the will of the father." ¹¹

Thirteen-year long, legally enforced compulsory attendance was not part of the plan. Public school today is a far cry from the ideal public education Thomas Jefferson envisioned as his country's great equalizer. By the time we're all done boiling in the great institutional melting pot, everyone emerges the same. And void of awareness of the idea of God (or awareness of our spiritual aspect), that means cowardly. Ineffective. Valueless. Lazy. Amoral.

But equally so.

As a young girl teachers loved her. When no one else knew the answer, proudly she held her hand high. Homework arrived on the teacher's desk neat and complete. Like a bird above the clouds she flew straight and

strong through all her school years until she graduated high school with straight A's.

She thought jobs would be easy to snag, and she was right, for she had learned to play the game by the schools' rules which were, in reality, society's rules. All grown up, she was intelligent (her I.Q. said so!) and free (out on her own at last!). Or was she?

"Now I can live!" she thought. She had money, a nice apartment, and plenty of friends. But emptiness surrounded her day and night.

"I became who 'they' wanted me to be. Now, who am I?" I wondered.

As you sort through the cobwebs of your mind and Self, your vision clears and more of the "whole picture" comes into view. You will discover how society's institutions cleverly encourage conformity and complacency by conditioning you in the fine art of submission to faceless, nameless superiors and self-serving rules, complete with subsequent punishment for transgressors and ample rewards for the obedient.

Yes, these institutions are untouchable, entrenched with time and supported by money, laws, and each other. But there is one thing you are in a position to change, and that's *you*. Rising to this challenge can have some miraculous benefits for your family and community. Read on. There *is* something you can do.

CHAPTER TWO

Is THAT ALL THERE Is?

At the end of your life you will never regret not having passed one more test, not winning one more verdict or not closing one more deal. You will regret time not spent with a husband, a friend, a child or a parent.

- Barbara Bush, 1990, from a speech delivered at
Wellesley College, Wellesley, Massachusetts

A neighbor called one morning, frantic because her day required a couple of long distance trips to get several family members to necessary doctor appointments. No matter how she figured her time and travel, getting her son to kindergarten just didn't fit into the puzzle that was becoming the day ahead. Even with my help, his attendance at school just wasn't falling into place.

I finally said, "It sounds like it will be easier on everyone if you just take him with you."

"Can I do that?"

"Excuse me?"

"Well," she clamored, "I never thought about him missing school."

"Whose kid is he, anyway?" I asked. "As his mother, don't you think you have some say in what's best for your family today?"

"I never thought about it like that before."

It is a good bet that if you have school-aged children, your family's daily routine and habits are *strongly* influenced by school's presence in your life. Perhaps, like my neighbor, you have never thought much about this phenomenon, either, so here are a few questions to get your mind in gear.

Have you ever read an ad for an enlightening seminar on astronomy and wished your son could go, if only he wasn't in school? Has the opportunity to take daytime aikido classes arisen, but you don't want to "ask" the school if your daughter can leave for an hour or two once a week? How about a one-night appearance of a symphony in a city several hours away, but, no, the kids have to get up for school the next day? Grandma is very sick in another part of the country, but you don't go care for her because the school frowns upon extended absences? You've been offered a job that could provide much more personal satisfaction, but changing schools would be too traumatic for the children?

Have you thought of other circumstances that apply to your own family yet? Most families bump into these or similar situations at one time or

another. Each one represents missed opportunity, a lost chance for pursuing a personal interest, experiencing unusual or grand occasions that could spark new interests, or fleeting moments that, in cases regarding Grandma, may never be reclaimed and, more often than not, lead to regret that injures us for a lifetime.

In trying to cut down on truancy, some schools enforce a program that separates "excuses" into what may be termed legal or illegal. This boils down to school administrators deciding ahead of time the reasons why a family could allow its children to miss school. Since this need be done on a school wide basis, individual family circumstances rarely enter the picture, let alone the family's belief of what is and what is not valuable to its children. This attitude about school attendance leads us, collectively, to accept that school - its schedule, its requirements, its queer notion of education - should unquestioningly rate the center of your family's universe.

This perspective of forcing children into classrooms, remember, arises as part of a misguided attempt at education to begin with. Now here's a deeper aspect to consider: When it comes to being prepared to live a good, healthy life, is *that all there is*?

No one would argue that intellectual growth and stimulation are not important to us as human beings. Yet through the attitudes and behavior cultivated in us by our makers (the ones we met in the previous chapter), we, as parents, let this objective run our lives as if it is the *only* significant aspect of our children. It's fundamental to remember this is the same education it was so important for today's adults to get. Now the same businesses that helped create the self-serving curriculum you studied have found it in *their* best interest to get "lean and mean," and to use technology to "downsize." Even those who learned their lessons well find themselves in long unemployment lines, shocked and numbed by the reality that what they considered a successful life yesterday is today as disposable as a used Pampers diaper.

Standing alone, mere intellectual development falls far short of providing your child with an education worth having, let alone a life worth celebrating. I think at some very deep level kids intuit this. I don't think they intellectually grasp what's going on, nor could they necessarily put their feelings into words, for words exist in the realm of the intellect. So consider

Benjamin Barber's words written in late 1993:

"Dropping out is the national pastime, if by dropping out we mean giving up the precious things of the mind and spirit in which America shows so little interest and for which it offers so little payback." ¹

Folks, I warned you this is a wake-up call, and truth hits as hard as any cold, wet rag across the face. The truth is America in the above sentence is our society as it exists today. Not America as Thomas Jefferson imagined it would be, nor Lincoln, nor the Roosevelts. Even Kennedy did not speak of today's America, for the full impact of the Technological and Information Ages was still only in his imagination.

Today technology and information and their immense influence on society are reality, continually changing the way we live. And if you'll examine those changes closely enough, for your children's sake, I trust you'll find that they have taken us away from the meaningful, the "precious things of mind and spirit," in a constant pursuit of the meaningless, all for the sake of the economy and the government, all under the guise of perpetuating democracy.

Were we even attempting to live up to our democratic ideals, we would not need education reform. The problem starts with our actions, everywhere in society and particularly in the classroom, for our actions do not demonstrate the example only we can set. Our forefathers' words are empty, existing only in classroom text books that do not reflect the society kids see before them today.

We teach our children that money is a top priority by our example and because their schooling - which takes an inordinate amount of their time and controls their families' schedules and lives - focuses on their place on the economic ladder of tomorrow.

Folks, if parents don't show their kids what's important in life, *nobody else will*. Your kids miss out on umpteen opportunities to join in real life learning, gracefully practicing the art of education, because they are compelled to attend school. A school, by the way, where at least in the elementary grades, "an able student can be absent from school for an entire week and, quite literally, catch up with all he has missed in a single morning." ²

"Yet for all the astonishing statistics, more astonishing still is that no one seems to be listening."

- Benjamin R. Barber

"America Skips School," *Harper's*, November, 1993

If life is more than feeble attempts at intellectual stimulation and preparation for jobs, and you are beginning to see how compulsory attendance requirements undermine the natural flow of learning within the context of family life, it's time to look at what is happening to children in school at yet a deeper level.

The Gift of Time

Much attention has been paid by researchers and the media to the academic success of family centered learners. However, for home educators, academic success is not all there is. They realize that "men cannot remain content with what is given them by their culture if they are to be fully human."³ So what do they provide their children that schools cannot?

Self-knowledge. "...the basis for serious, humane learning."⁴ An understanding of who it is doing the learning.

Interestingly, families don't necessarily start out with this as a goal, nor is there a specific part in their curriculum or time of day when they study Self-Knowledge 101. Rather, this knowledge is a side effect of the family way of learning. It is an important by-product received because the family possesses a valuable commodity anyone trapped by a school schedule envies - TIME.

Young children use this time pursuing the path to self-knowledge through play. Play is your child's spontaneous, joy-filled embrace of life. In play, no walls divide the players from each other or pull the outer child away from the true Self.

It is here, in the Kingdom of Infinite Possibility, that your child physically, mentally, and spiritually strengthens her bond with true knowledge. The value of play lies not in relieving boredom or even in its ability to teach. Play is a child's most important work, providing the opportunity to express all that exists inside. It is at once a way to express - and define - Self. Children learning at home tend naturally

to utilize their precious gift of time in play, thus gathering the blocks that create a solid foundation for the learning process.

Spend five minutes following your young child while she is in active mode. She will find this amusing at first; join in her laughter. She will try to tailor her activity to please you; allow her to lead. She will share with an openness and honesty with which you are unfamiliar; be humble in her presence.

Do not think about the electric bill; it will still be there when you are done. Do not worry about dinner; no one will starve if it is five minutes late.

She has much to teach you. You have much to learn. Never will you find a more loving, forgiving, unconditionally accepting guide. She will not fail you, for it is not her intention to find your faults. Rejoice in this sharing. Her heart and yours are one.

The understanding that we all co-exist on one tiny planet with a delicate ecosystem is sweeping the globe. But just as we harm the planet by tinkering with nature's plan, we harm children when we tinker with the marvelously ordered, delicate blend of mind, body, and spirit that they are.

A child with time for experimentation and experience grows in Self-knowledge. All aspects of her being - physical, mental, and spiritual - receive attention, watered like a budding rose in a spring rain. It doesn't rain in specific areas for allotted amounts of time, training the child that each area stands alone. Every aspect is part of the whole exquisite landscape, a picture made more beautiful because of natural balance.

Those children who intuit their education isn't worth a hill of beans feel the absence of balance in their lives. Adding a class for ethnic studies onto the daily schedule doesn't bring the spiritual aspect of a child into balance with the intellect. Likewise, a forty-five minute weekly discussion of self-esteem and lists of the "10 Things I Like Most About Myself" don't lead a child to emotional stability. School practices still leave spirituality, emotions, and physical learning hanging out on a limb far removed from other "subjects" of learning. They become only more subjects tacked on to a long list of irrelevant, disconnected, "informatory knowledge."

"Present systems of education in various countries of the world only give the students informatory knowledge," says Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, founder of the Maharishi International University in Iowa. "There is nothing precise in the field of education today which will really develop the inner values of mind, body, and spirit. Therefore, whatever education is received by the people is just on the surface level of information."⁵

Emptiness exists where education should fulfill our children. The inability of informatory knowledge to satisfy, to quench the thirst for knowledge every child possesses is sad enough. But the continued practice of school-style intellectual development that strips children of their natural desire to learn, and robs them of any sense of integration, or connectedness, is a sin.

In order to gain a better understanding of the fundamental differences between an education that leaves your child wondering, consciously or subconsciously, "Is that all there is?" and education that brings balance and purpose to your child's life, you need to get a close-up view of both. Let's take a look at the Education Pyramid.

CHAPTER FIVE

BIRDS DON'T GO TO FLIGHT SCHOOL

ARTIFICIAL LEARNING VS. NATURAL EDUCATION

Let us never forget that the law is adaption to circumstances, be they what they may. And if, rather than allow men to come in contact with the real circumstances of their position, we place them in artificial - in false - circumstances, they will adapt themselves to these instead; and will, in the end, have to undergo the miseries of a readaption to the real ones.

- Herbert Spencer in *Social Statics*

If you love *any* child, you are well aware of our society's precarious position regarding our children. With all the promise of modern technology to keep them physiologically healthier than any previous generation, we are losing our youngsters in record number to street violence, drugs, and AIDS, reflecting a general disregard for the beauty and sanctity of this gift we call Life.

What good is the promise of longer life if, in the formative, previously hope-filled years of adolescence, our youth decide that Life is worth less than a temporary high, a ten-minute ride in a stolen car, or the cost of a pair of sneakers?

How have our children arrived at this place? How did the quality of life for millions of young citizens deteriorate so dramatically, so quickly? What happened to our forefathers' promise of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness for all?

There are no easy answers to any of these questions. Each question can - and does - fill book after book with statistics, facts, and conclusions each author hopes can restore sanity to a nation whose young inhabitants grow more and more disturbed each day. While these authors expend precious time and brain power tinkering with the current educational system (which crystallizes our approach to life and learning), most fail to uncover the true cause, the catalyst that sends our children seeking meaning, connection, respect and love from the least likely places.

I'd like you to take a few moments, sit back and relax, and remember your formative years. Any of your teenage time will do. Remember what was personally important to you; think about your environment - your neighborhood, school, friends, teachers, your relationship with your parents; recall your favorite TV show, commercial, songs, movies.

You probably felt the threat of the Cold War, but it remained in the shadows, never materializing. You knew the neighbors knew your parents and wouldn't hesitate to report any mischief you created. Teachers worried about students chewing gum and talking in class. Many times Mom waved good-bye as you left for school, and greeted you upon your return. Keeping

up with the world was easy - just pick one of three half-hour news programs. A favorite TV show tickled your funny bone or sent your imagination flying. It was a very different time, wasn't it?

Now spend a few minutes reflecting on life for a teen today. The threat of annihilation comes not from faceless, nameless Soviets far away, but from the kid who sits in front of history class or the guy that hangs on the corner or a passing car. Neighbors don't know each other's names, and scurry to safety when the neighborhood kids "act up." A National School Boards Association survey released in January, 1994, found that of the 729 school districts reporting, 60% saw student assaults on teachers. Mom has to earn a living, and may not send her kids off to school *or* greet them afterwards. Fast and furiously changing world news and maps confront us from scores of TV stations, and wars - across the world or down the street - unfold before a child's eyes. Favorite TV shows depict countless scenes of violence and destruction or humor that revolves around vivid sexual innuendo, revenge, or insult-hurling. Government sponsored condom commercials blink on and off between ads using sex to sell anything our materialistic little hearts could desire. (Talk about mixed messages, messages targeted to a population fixated on their ripening sexuality. Remember?)

As we sleep, the world and existence changes; whether for better or worse is not to be debated here. Because of these changes, we've increased the demands on our children. They're growing up faster and faster trying to keep up, but we've done absolutely nothing to increase their ability, their intelligence, or even their desire to handle these demands. To make matters worse, we're leaving their emotional coattails exposed, blowing helter-skelter at the whim of every societal breeze.

Change outpaced our schools' ability to keep up. Using teaching methods suited for providing basic skills in the nineteenth century, we ask students staring down the twenty-first century to ingest more and more information - while leaving the heart behind.

Since compulsory schooling began, we've seen a scientific revolution in our understanding of how humans learn, yet schools continue to plod along using the same bland text books, the I preach/you listen approach to learning, and the same "judgment by grade and class position."

Technology invades every aspect of job and work yet fails to appear in many classrooms. When technology does show up, short class periods and long user lines effectively separate individual students from meaningful exploration of its potential.

Times change. Schools don't. That's part of artificial learning.

Off the top of my head, I can't think of another species besides human beings that separates a child from its parents when she's ready to acquire life skills. Because our society accepts artificial learning as the norm, it looks at natural education (or family centered education) as abnormal when, in truth, it is the popular, accepted way to learn that is synthetic.

Birds don't go to flight school. It's Momma standing there when baby first sets sail across the tree tops. Momma teaches babies to hunt for food, and to find or build a shelter. In short, Momma teaches baby Life. Not *about* Life. Life itself. This is natural education.

Our society says: Only trained professionals who have read enough books and listened to enough lectures and taken enough tests may teach our children. They, in turn, read books *about* life with the assembly of children gathered into a special building, isolated from the community - an institution. It's impossible to teach Life itself in the confines of an institutional setting. Anyone who has ever been inside a hospital, prison, military base, school, or college can tell you - the institution is a world unto itself.

You may argue that a robin, for example, has much less to teach her child about life than you. She teaches the basics - robin style - and she teaches them in a much shorter period of time.

Teaching life takes longer for us humans because of all the wonderful complexities of our mind and spirit. We are social beings, so lessons go beyond survival to getting along with our fellow beings. But just because it takes longer, does that mean the job should be handed over to another?

When we pass responsibility for educating our children to others, and send them all off to an institution to do it, we place Life in an artificial context. Thus, any learning that happens to come as a result is, at best, irrelevant; at worst, perverted. Artificial learning takes what is simple and natural and turns it into a complex array of objectives, goals, measurements,

administrators, supervisors, counselors, and transportation experts. Natural education requires only a guide providing direction, and a learner ready to discover and create goals and values that are personally meaningful.

Artificial learning seeks to permeate us from somewhere outside of ourselves. It doesn't strengthen the foundation that already exists, but attempts to attach extensions, no matter the condition of the base. Information pours into our heads, then pours back out to make sure some of it hit its mark. Information received like this is not part of our personal experience of life, so it cannot possibly translate into improvement of our lives. Instead, it works to convince us that our lives improve only as we change to measure up to criteria set forth in somebody else's goals.

There was just enough room for the guidance counselor and me to sit at either side of the desk among the filing cabinets and stacks of catalogs and papers.

"It's time to finish planning your senior year," said Mrs. Case as she surveyed my ever-thickening file. "You need to choose one more elective course. What would you like?"

"Put me down for Home Economics," I answered.

"Linda," said Mrs. Case looking over the rim of her glasses, "You need courses that challenge you on your transcript." She took the list from my hands and scanned the contents.

"Modern European History looks good, and colleges seem to like it," she said to the paper.

I swallowed. "O.K."

The only thing I remember from Modern European History is that the Battle of Hastings was fought in 1066. I don't remember why. I fell in love instead of going to college. I've cooked and sewn daily for two decades.

If we change to fit others' goals for us, we sense we are powerless behind a mask that hides our true nature. Eventually, we forget our original face. If we don't change, labels follow us through our learning careers - trouble maker, learning disabled, special needs, hyperactive, ad nauseam.

Natural learning guides us back to true education. We sharpen the abilities our children already possess - Curiosity, Imagination, Creativity,

Inner Peace, Humor, Artistry, Self-Motivation, and Intuition - which become the best tools to learn anything, anytime. When a child *wants* to learn, she is *ready* to learn. No need for threats, rewards, or punishments in the form of bad grades or humiliation to get her going. You need only be awake enough and observant enough to recognize an interest. Then seize the moment. Her Curiosity will drive her to open the book on the subject you happen to leave on the coffee table. Self-motivation leads her to ask if you can take her to the library or a neighbor to find out more. Creativity, Imagination and Artistry allow her to bring all that she has absorbed into concrete form, be it in the shape of a story, a drawing, a thoughtful question, or the entire next week's theme during playtime.

These moments show us the point of learning is not to memorize facts for a test tomorrow, nor to pull them out of a hat ten years from now. It's to realize learning has its own value, *as is*.

Let's examine the message we send our kids about what aspect of life we consider valuable when we practice artificial learning. A flurry of activity precedes the start of school in September. TV commercials and newspaper ads blast the message, "It's time to get ready!" New clothes, shoes, notebooks, pens, paper, lunchbox; this must be important! The family's schedule revolves around the bus timetable and school hours which, not coincidentally, bear a remarkable resemblance to job hours. Children rush out the door reminded that school - and doing well in it - is serious stuff.

The better part of each day for the better part of each year is spent getting to school, attending school, and doing school work at home. Although there's usually a nice buffet of electives so older children can "spice up" their day, the basics usually run something like this: math, science, history, geography, and English. Other requirements - music, art, health, and physical education - appear on most curricula, but usually receive attention on a weekly, rather than a daily, basis.

This is all "head" work, intellectual stimulation (if the kids are lucky!) day in and day out. While Imagination may occasionally spread its wings in English class creative writing or a forty-five minute art period once a week, the final products, reviewed and graded and criticized, remain the property of the intellectual realm.

The child poet learns he must first master proper grammar and spelling,

understand alliteration, and read the complete works of Shakespeare, to the teacher's satisfaction, before his deepest feelings can be appreciated. By the time he swallows all of this and learns to outmaneuver the red pen, desire to express deep feelings disappears. The child scientist, curious about how the world and its vast array of possibilities works, leaves enthusiasm on a back burner until he memorizes the dates of previous discoveries, watches the life extinguished from a living animal so he can cut it open, and reads others' theories in ten year-old textbooks. He forgets the questions that once fueled his days.

This approach would work if human beings were nothing more than giant intellects roaming the earth. But we also have hands, connected to the brain via nerves, that need to touch, to build, to create. Babies and toddlers, those wonderful little creatures who learn to talk and walk without manuals and college-educated trainers, feel and explore everything in their path. Perfect examples of the power of inner drive in action, young children satisfy their hunger using this particular brand of sensory input to make sense of their world.

The brand new gumball machine sits empty atop the refrigerator. With half the family already out the door on the way to an appointment, the three year-old eagerly eyes the machine. "I want gum, please."

"Here," says Mom reaching into the box of gumballs on the counter. "You can take two."

Stomping his foot, the three year-old shouts, "No, I want THAT gum," as he points to the machine.

Mom removes the lid and pours gumballs until the machine's globe glistens with a rainbow of colors. The child already holds a penny retrieved from the coin jar. He waits patiently.

In goes the penny. Out pops a gumball.

"I have one and it's a green one, right, Mommy?" the child asks as he turns the door knob.

Mom smiles. "It is one. It is green." She closes the door behind her.

It is not natural - even if we accept it as normal - to lose this drive with age. Except in those few rare birds who somehow escape and survive as our artists and craftspeople, years of programming to set exploration aside in

favor of book learning buries our drive. It's still there, unfulfilled and withering.

Human beings have a bridge linking the internal world to the external. We call it heart. Through this aspect of humanness we feel and express emotion. It allows us to fill poetry and music and paintings and sculpture with meaning. It allows us connection with fellow human beings. When we serve others who need our time and help, it is because this ground has been tended, nurtured, and prepared to receive the seed of empathy.

The internal world houses intuition, a vast storehouse of knowledge gathered over time. Intuition waits for our intellect to get out of the way so it may guide and serve us. It waits patiently, and will not speak at all if we don't know how to listen.

Is it any wonder our children are failing to achieve in school en masse? They must sense, at some deep, intuitive place, that they are being short-changed. Artificial education's focus on intellect and its accompaniments - job, money, fame, power - throws them off-balance. Learning how to read, write, work with numbers and understand our world and its history are essential - but they're not all that is essential.

When we place all the weight on one side of an airplane, it cannot soar smoothly. When we place all importance on a child's intellect, as artificial learning does, he cannot soar smoothly, either. We make his flight toward independence unnecessarily difficult and dangerous. If we shift the plane's weight, we achieve equilibrium. Only when we pay equal attention to all aspects of a child, when we value his hands and heart equally with his head, will he achieve symmetry. Then watch him fly!

In *The Conflict in Education in a Democratic Society*, Robert Hutchins told us, "Society is to be improved, not by forcing a program of social reform down its throat, through the schools or otherwise, but by the improvement of the individuals who compose it."

Artificial learning situations don't give us opportunity for this type of improvement because advancement of the individual and his unique potential are not their goal. The only thing that has improved in compulsory schooling's history is its ability to absorb ever larger amounts of tax dollars. About the only place the individual counts is in the bottom line, for his presence equals thousands of dollars of federal, state, and local monies pouring into the coffers. If the "individual" happens to wear a label like

learning disabled or gifted, and is said to require "special" education, so much the better - he's worth even more.

Without massive sums of money, where would the education system be? Would local property owners provide rent-free learning space? Would publishers contribute books because they know the books are improving society? Would administrators daily arrive because of a heart-felt knowledge that their work improves the quality of life in homes and communities? Would teachers teach for the personal satisfaction the act provides?

Silly questions? On the surface, yes. But let's alter one small point in the above scenario. Instead of money, what if education is motivated by love?

Suddenly "improvement of the individual" takes center stage. The individual, not the system, is the main concern. Instead of being the source of income, each student discovering his potential is the source, period.

Maybe this attention will never reach every child everywhere. But it is key to the success of "home" schools. When education is directed with love instead of driven by money, our questions aren't silly anymore. In fact, family centered educators can answer yes to all of them!

Many state laws limit you to offering rent-free learning space only to your own children, but that's OK. You know what they say about smaller class size - it's better for everyone.

Publishers don't go around "contributing" books, per se. But when asked, they do offer discounts. This is not to say they are then cheap. Get yourself a real education by reading a few educational supply catalogs and check out the prices: Fifteen minute video cassettes, ranging from poor to excellent in quality and educational value, can cost up to \$69.95! One support group got a distributor to knock 33% right off the top just by asking. Support groups purchase and share materials too, cutting the cost per family. Many evolve into resource centers providing increasingly interesting and unique opportunities to their communities.

The "administrators" and "teachers" in our new scenario are, of course, you. You're an administrator working because you want to, not because the paycheck pays the bills. No unions, no strikes, no school board politics, no state aid to be justified so that next year's donation is at least as large. Just

someone who cares deeply about a child's future.

You choose the role of teacher (and I hope you quickly discover there are dozens of ways beyond our traditional approach to accomplish your goals) because of love for your students. Little do you realize at first how much learning, how much joy lies ahead for you, too. Your journey as teacher, guiding with love, connects you to your own inner abilities and draws them out, even as you guide your children. No tenure, no cost-of-living raises, no student assaults on teachers, no guns or drugs in the "classroom," and a real shot at our forefathers' promise of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness for all.

This is natural education. Education stripped of all that keeps *it* from reaching its potential - an insatiable appetite for money, a layer of administration thick enough to smother any size institution, government control via regulations and funds, and unionization. This is family centered education.

I trust that were we to offer the balance and purity available in natural education as a steady diet to our children, they'd finish everything on their plates and come back for more. Balanced learning with loved ones provides that sense of wholeness it is our nature to seek. Instead of feeling denied, we feel fulfilled. Instead of feeling disrespected, we respect Self. Instead of separation, we experience connection.

To be the best, happiest people we can be, humans need connection on an intimate level as well as on a broader, community level. Gangs and early sexual experiences look like our kids' answer to the missing sense of family, fulfilling the intimate need. And the most accessible answers to a sense of community, at least to the economic community of choice (remember, we hammer the message of money's connection to happiness into our kids) are drugs and violence. They certainly look like the straightest line from being nobody with nothing to being perceived as somebody with something. If fulfillment can't be found, temporarily full pockets will do. If not respect, a reputation. Apathy leading to violence against another or one's self is the shortest route to total disconnection, when the pain and emptiness surrounding Life make severing remaining ties the merciful choice.

ASSOCIATED PRESS NEWS REPORT

*"Mom: Boys Killed Selves Over School," Capital Times,
Madison, WI, September 1, 1993, Excerpted*

A woman whose 10- and 13- year-old sons died of gunshots...says they evidently sneaked out of the house and killed themselves rather than go to school...

"...They just hated school...

"...They wanted me to homeschool them. If I had only known it was that important, I would have tried..."

With the status quo our culture grows increasingly illiterate, unhappy, and hostile. If artificial learning creates, contributes to, or in any way supports our children's sense of disconnection, it cannot be healthy for us as individuals or as a society. If we just left our kids alone, they'd have a better shot at discovering happiness and literacy in their own way. With family centered education, you are there as guide. You can ensure that balance permeates your children's experience of Life.

Save your flight school money. If bird-brain Momma robins can keep their species alive and thriving in an increasingly adverse environment, we can do the same for our children.

Take the homeschooling journey toward a stronger, happier, well-educated family.

The Art of Education: Reclaiming Your Family, Community and Self – 15th Anniversary Edition

**Buy The Complete Version of This Book at
Booklocker.com:**

<http://www.booklocker.com/p/books/4734.html?s=pdf>