

## Parent Meeting Considerations Michael

- Are we (parents) meeting our goals and commitments?
- How is Tara doing meeting her goals, where does she need to improve, how can we support her.
- Are our young learners meeting their goals (tacit or explicit)? Do “they” actually have any?
- How well are our children meeting the tacit or explicit expectations set by parents?
- How are we (parents and Tara) measuring the above?

Academically; language arts and math, and as human beings: kindness, empathy, honesty, intrinsic self-motivation, conflict resolution, modeling high standards for self and others, doing to others what we expect for ourselves....

More deeply; what *are* the parent goals? Based on what? Compared to what, the child’s interests and capacities or ‘institutional standards?’ How do we balance “standards” with “individuality?”

No one will dispute, our children need to learn how read, write, communicate using language, understand and apply mathematic concepts. The question is intrinsic or extrinsic motivation. What does the research say: read “Punished by Rewards,” and research on optimum states of learning and performance, the zone, flow and authentic play, “Magical Parent –Magical Child,” Mendizza and Pearce. Is it the “concept” our children dislike or hate to practice, or is it the way we are presenting the information, our failure to find intrinsically interesting projects or events that bring the concepts to life for each learner, they disdain? Is their resistance something we, not they create? What is the optimum way to overcome resistance?

“Well, life isn’t all play.... We need to force them to do some things,” parents cheer. “For their own good!” Did you need to force them to learn how to walk? Force them to learn how to speak? In multiple languages? How hard are these skills (arguably the two most challenging of their lives)? Survive a stroke and you will find out. But they did, with near zero instruction or formal training (skooling).

Yes, the road to mastery is practice. Ben Hogan won a major golf championship. He was asked by a reporter about a key shot. Hogan replied; “it was luck.” “But Mr Hogan,” said the reporter, “you practice more than anyone.” “Yes,” he replied, “the more I practice the luckier I get.” It is *not* the skill or concept that defines play or work, play being authentic, intrinsically motivated learning, and work being conditioning. It is intrinsic or extrinsic motivation that defines the form practice takes; play or work. “Every child comes with his or her own curriculum and it is our job to discover what that is,” times four, or seven or ten. Most parents expect Tara to do this discovery without parent involvement or support.

There is an implied indictment that Tara is responsible, needs to pressure and force our children to “pay attention” when they being rude, defiant, disrespectful, rebellious, bold, assertive, showing off, and/or disobedient. Is it Tara’s responsibility to herd defiant children, as they fight and scatter in every direction at every opportunity? We, the parents created this entitlement. “Spare the rod, spoil the child,” or is there another way?

Given the above and lot’s more, is it possible to invest time and attention in core human skills and capacities; empathy, kindness, trust, respect, active listening, affectionate shared dialogue, and find ways to meet the parent’s needs and the child’s needs together? For parents and Tara to be trusted friends and coaches in meeting new challenges and not police, the authority or dictator? Where is the balance here? As our children inch closer to “love of the game,” because being excellent is a blast, in everything they do, from the inside out, can we find and invent ways to make practice rewarding and not simply a forced drill? And if so, what investment do parents make in this. Where are Tara’s limits.

Speaking for Carly and our needs; A strong force defining the quality of relationship and interaction of the group is set by the youngest, and most vulnerable, expressing and demanding their needs are met. In tangible ways the group is drawn or tugged (defined) by these needs. Having a slightly larger pool, more mature, implicitly less needy, would give Carly opportunities to reach higher than the current culture models. We would like everyone to make a conscious effort to recruit several new members, including females. We believe a slightly larger group will enhance and expand the group in positive ways.

Z and me (over)

### **Communication Assumptions:**

- Parents have communicated clearly their learning and personal development goals and expectations.
- Tara, Lynn and other mentors understand these priorities and have prepared daily, weekly and long term activities and projects that meet these objectives for the group and each child. Parents are updated as needed regarding progress.
- Parents and mentors discuss learning and presentation styles and agree on how best to meet their child's needs with packaged curriculum, worksheets, play based, embedded in experience activities, etc.
- Parents and mentors discuss and agree on the percentage of time each day will be devoted to each subject or skill (priorities and balance).
- The needs and expressed interests of each child is given equal weight in the above.

### **Themes to be explored:**

- Recalcitrant; stubbornly resistant or defiant, obstinate, difficult to manage, deal with, unkind, or disrespectful behavior. Setting appropriate behavior boundaries.
- When age, capacity temperament and behavioral needs clash? Balancing individualized attention and group activities with independent, theme focused projects and activities that do not require adult supervision. What others do when Tara is giving individualized attention.
- Engaging each learner in ways that draw out projects and activities that nurture and expand their developmental needs and balancing parent expectations.
- Ways to engage parents in ongoing self-education regarding human development and education and how to share insights with the group. This includes enriching parent meetings by sharing discoveries and insights. See attached reading list.
- Taking steps to negate parents being surprised, concerned or dissatisfied. Ideally, parents are engaged and aware of daily and long term activities and agendas, and participate in their evolution. No finger pointing or blame.

### **What I would like:**

(Broad, sweeping and general. The intent is to have dedicated time given to individualized (parent/child defined) priorities that meet the needs of each family.)

9:30: A brief orientation each morning at reviewing "the feeling of the day and general humanities," the day's schedule and expectations. Began the day together and coherent, assuming parents arrive no later than 9:30AM.

10:00: Independent language arts (each learner working at their level on needed skills with Tara and Veronika supporting): writing practice, creating sentences, spelling, phonics, workbooks, etc. When not engaged with Tara or Veronika, each learner is focus on independent language related practices. Not running loose, crashing and distracting others.

11:00 Break and snack

11:30 Math (each learner working at their level on needed skills with Tara and possibly Veronika supporting), not relying solely on Lynn and the gym for math. Lynn adds value and novelty to the math base created by Tara. Gym is recess, not the main subject.

12:30 Lunch

1:00: Reading and Story Arts.

2:00: Art and special projects, ceramics, (the assumption is that each child has one or more long term projects they can continue to develop).

3:00 closing

## Revisiting Organizing Philosophy and Core Values

**Recall:** Homeschooling is doing at home, what is done in school. Same paradigm, based on comparison. Unschooling or Deschooling is a different paradigm where real intrinsic learning replaces conditioning.

How do we begin to reimagine what real learning and therefore schooling looks like in 2023? Compulsory, top down, authority centered, forced and comparative, is all most parents know and therefore these qualities are the conceptual building blocks for what most believe learning is. Alternatives are implicitly measured against compulsory.

By alternative, I mean alternative; completely different core values, definitions, intentions, hopes and expectations. Everything changes. To live and breathe 'alternative,' the adult must face their deeply conditioned basis, and step into a completely different reality. This is fundamentally different from having our kids do as well on standardized tests, in a kinder, softer setting. The net is the same, a compulsory and comparative based reality. Having the courage to embrace this shift in ourselves demands study. See books below.

### **Core Themes:**

#### **One: Learning is Intrinsic, Natural, School is Optional**

Children are natural learners. They don't need to be "motivated" to learn. Children are naturally curious and inquisitive, who strive for understanding and competence. We support their basic drive to learn and grow by providing the opportunity to direct and regulate their learning in the manner that they choose, at their own place and pace, and for as long as they want and need.

#### **Two: Child Centered and Led**

"Every child comes with their unique curriculum. It is our job to discover and nurture what this is." Child led means; each child participates and is free to select what and how they will invest their attention.

#### **Three: Democracy: the empowerment of people to make real decisions about their lives.**

Our children have the responsibility and freedom to govern their personal learning, but also their community. Each child and teacher has an equal voice in decisions that affect the daily operation and educational programs. By sharing control we develop independent learners, cultivate diverse talents, produce thoughtful, compassionate and productive citizens.

#### **Four: Real Play is Real Learning**

Ashley Montagu described authentic play as the 'genius of childhood.' This natural, intrinsic state, coupled with what Maria Montessori called the child's 'absorbent mind' is nature's design for optimum learning and performance, in any field, at any age, if retained, allowed to expand, distill and mature. Culture, and therefore traditional authoritarian-compulsory-schooling, demands that this optimum capacity for learning and performance be domesticated, tethered, limited and constrained to conform to predictable patterns. The form and structure we call mass schooling, with its rules, schedules, bells, neat rows, classrooms, authority, control and conveyor belt curriculum, was specifically designed to bring about this conversion. So complete, successful and near universal is this conversion that nearly all accept cultural conditioning as the essence of learning. Most have forgotten and sacrificed their innate genius long ago.

#### **Five: Complete Attention, Practice and Mastery**

Sing, as if no one is listening. Dance, as if no one is watching. Mainstream confuses knowledge, standardized and IO tests with intelligence. Mastery, in any field, is built on complete, playful attention. Being watched, compared, graded, judged, creates a different state where attention is split between looking good and true performance. Feeling judged, compared, builds mastery of a different kind, defense, stealing attention from mastery in growth, learning and performance. The high road to mastery is being safe enough to play, meaning zero attention is needed to defend.

### **Six: Relationship; Empathic-Entangled Identity**

Life is relationship. The actual nature and quality of our relationship, to others and the living world, is primary, with empathy and entanglement being our core identity, defining how we think, feel and behave. Our priority is balancing the rich and skillful use of knowledge and academics, with sensitive, still, empathic attention, with its implicit action.

### **Seven: Different Brains, Bodies, Temperaments and Preferences (Learning Styles)**

Building capacity and mastery create an endless horizon. The farther we go the further we can go. In this long view, comparison and failure don't exist. While physical, cognitive and temperamental preferences matter, we place emphasis on optimizing the way a subject is presented and equally, the quality of relationships created along the way. Relationship is primary. How we relate to a subject or challenge defines what we learn and how we perform.

### **Eight: Assessment**

Assessment doesn't arrive from some statistical measure of achievement compared with predetermined, bottom lines for "success" and "failure," We don't ask the question, "is our child performing at grade level?" Each child represents their own curriculum, and can only be evaluated or measured against itself. Our assessment emerges from our core philosophy; children are naturally curious and inquisitive, who strive for understanding and competence. We assemble a cumulative portfolio of each student's work and let it speak for itself. This includes the student's self-evaluation, and may at times or when appropriate take the form of a community presentation of accomplishments during the preceding period.

### **Fine but Let's Get Real**

Kids need to learn the basics, how to read, write clear and effective sentences, be competent with basic math concepts, and parents compare our child's progress with standard curriculum and grade level expectations, or our personal experience marinating in mainstream. Did our child learn how to stand on two legs and walk because we compared them to standards and forced instructions? Did they learn to speak because we sat them in a chair and pointed to words on a blackboard? Carly learned to ride a bike because she wanted to. We provided a little support until she 'got it,' and off she went. And this implied overcoming, "I can't," or "I don't want to." The same with roller skating, and skiing. Why don't we trust that she will do the same with math, writing letters, reading or spelling, in her own time? She is doing exactly that with reading. Yes, we nudged at the beginning to get the basics humming, and then off she went.

This isn't about worksheets or not. If a child loves worksheets, use them. If not, find a way to cultivate capacity in ways that reduce resistance. Just as they can't eat ice cream for every meal, we insist that they overcome their habitual "I don't want to," or "I don't like it." We met and overcome obstacles in ways that respects his or her needs and ours. We push back just as they do. The golden rule (playfully) expressed every day.

What is the rush? Compared to what? Carly is deeply interested in fashion, which involves design, patterns, sewing, history, art, drawing, and when she experiences the need, written communication and math, measurement, volume and scale, and much more. She also needs to move. Writing letters is not moving. Our challenge is; how can we help Carly develop and practice penmanship and sentence construction without her 'hating' the process? The process is the learning, not the abstract content being forced and conditioned. The nature and emotional quality of that process is the primary content learned. Why is this so difficult to grasp?

I was dyslectic as a youth, had a speech impediment, was the first to sit in spelling bees, always in the 'dumb' reading group. I had difficulty reading a birthday card, was forced to attend summer school every summer, and I became an entrepreneur in my early 20's, my last paycheck was in 1973. I have authored five books, founded four successful companies, traveled the world as an independent filmmaker. I read multiple dense books at a time, and write every day, and did so in my own time. Schooling had very little to do with my development or success. My life experience challenge many core assumptions regarding compulsory schooling.

Only 5% of lifelong learning occurs through formal instruction, including schooling.  
Of that 5% most retain only 3% to 5% for any length of time.

What is learned and retained lifelong is the physical and emotional context  
that learning and conditioning rest in, how we are relating to  
the experience or process, not the abstract content.

## **Books to Read**

### **John Taylor Gatto**

- Dumbing Us Down - 25th Anniversary Edition: The Hidden Curriculum of Compulsory Schooling
- Weapons of Mass Instruction: A Schoolteacher's Journey Through the Dark World of Compulsory Schooling
- The Underground History of American Education, Volume I: An Intimate Investigation Into the Prison of Modern Schooling
- Homeschooling: A Hope for America

### **John Holt**

- How Children Learn (50th anniversary edition)
- Teach Your Own: The John Holt Book of Homeschooling
- The Philosophy of Unschooling

### **Chris Mercogliano**

- In Defense of Childhood: Protecting Kids' Inner Wildness
- Making It Up as We Go Along: The Story of the Albany Free School

### **Alfie Kohn**

- Schooling Beyond Measure  
And other unorthodox essays about education
- Feel-Bad Education  
And Other Contrarian Essays on Children and Schooling
- The Homework Myth  
Why Our Kids Get Too Much of a Bad Thing
- The Case Against Standardized Testing  
Raising the Scores, Ruining the Schools
- Punished by Rewards  
The Trouble with Gold Stars, Incentive Plans, A's, Praise and Other Bribes
- The Brighter Side of Human Nature  
Altruism and Empathy in Everyday Life
- No Contest  
The Case Against Competition

### **Peter Grey**

- Free to Learn

### **Ivan Illich**

- Deschooling Society

### **David Elkind**

- The Hurried Child: Growing Up Too Fast Too Soon, Third Edition

### **David Orr**

- Earth in Mind: On Education, Environment, and the Human Prospect