

# DEMYSTIFYING EDUCATION

by Diana Waring

## 2010 AEA Convention Speaker

The truth is that people -- young and old -- are wired to learn. Learners range from people eagerly scanning the morning newspaper for the latest football scores to a con artist learning a new way to do an online scam. It could be a microbiologist looking for a

new virus or a surfer looking for a better beach. Learning happens. We are all constantly learning something we want or need to know.

So, the question is not, "How do I get my kids to learn?" but "How do I get my kids to learn the things that will benefit them?"

One of the most powerful answers to that question is Learning Styles. When we begin to discover some of the unique ways our children are wired to learn, we can offer educational opportunities that are right up their alley. An understanding of Learning Styles will be one of those tools you use to adjust the way new material is presented so that they can more readily learn.

For instance, if you have (as I did) a child who is constantly moving, fidgeting, twisting, jumping, running, etc., and it is time to teach multiplication, then offer that one the opportunity to MOVE while learning  $3 \times 3 = 9$ . When my son was offered the chance to do jumping jacks while learning multiplication tables, his eyes lit up, and his body literally jumped for joy. He was not only jumping, however, he was learning. In a much shorter amount of time than I would have thought possible, this highly kinesthetic learner memorized his times tables.

Or, ask yourself, "Do my children love to be around others, play games together, dialogue and discuss?" If so, then provide educational opportunities for them to be with people while they are learning. This might be at a co-op, at a learning party you host, on a field trip, with a neighbor. . . the possibilities are nearly endless, as long as there are people within shouting distance, especially yourself. On the other hand, do they prefer books, numbers, orderly schedules, and knowing exactly what is expected of them? If that is the case, a well-planned lesson assignment, where they can see from start to finish what will happen and what is expected, may set them free to love learning. Or, for yet another type of learner, you have to ask, are they one of those people who is always coming up with new ideas about how to get the job done? For instance, are they the ones who put on roller skates to take the trash out? Invite these learners to be part of the process of deciding what educational opportunities might fit your family. They might decide that the best way to learn Canadian history is to first read aloud a library book on the early pioneers and then to make up a Monopoly-style board game called Wagons Ho!, with miniature horses as the game pieces. It might seem impractical to you, but if you set the learner free to learn, the result will be delight and motivation to learn more.

When I started on the path of homeschooling twenty-five years ago, teaching a child to read (or anything else for that matter) seemed like a terrifying, somewhat unnatural activity for a parent without a degree in education. So, naturally, I clung like a drowning rat to any floating book, curriculum, or homeschool wives' tale that came my way—anything that looked like it might support me in the mysterious realm of teaching. Subsequently, I ended up spending far more money than I could afford for curriculum that did not suit; my children languished under boring taskmasters disguised as workbooks; my vision for a wondrous family adventure dwindled to a bleary and hopeless despair over my incompetence. Believe it or not, we hung in there for three long years before I was ready to renounce any more delusional attempts to educate my children at home.

When, suddenly... Sounds like the start of a fairy tale, doesn't it? But this is how my story actually happened. At a homeschool convention in 1989, I met a family who had been homeschooling many years and appeared to actually enjoy the experience. My curiosity whetted, I asked question after question of these new friends, David and Shirley Quine, which they readily and patiently answered. Thus began the process of demystifying education for me. The process continued through reading books that opened the eyes of my understanding, such as *For the Children's Sake* by Susan Schaeffer Macaulay and *You CAN Teach Your Children Successfully* by Ruth Beechick. We went on from there to experiment with different styles of teaching: learning prepositions through rhythmical movements, astronomy through drama, the U.S. Constitution through dialogue, history through music, and more. Once our feet were upon the right path, we began to dance through fields of learning, with my children ready for more!

With that as a background, I'd like to share a few demystifiers with you. They are so basic that you may discover that they have been in your heart all along, but you've never had the confidence to act on them. Prepare to dance!

### **Demystifier #1: Children are always learning.**

They may not be learning what you had hoped, like the date of Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo. It may be that they have just learned how to appear as if they were studying diligently while they enjoy a bout of daydreaming. Or, perhaps, instead of learning that  $3 \times 3 = 9$ , they learn that math is something to be dreaded because Mom gets upset if they don't finish on time. But they are learning something, either way.

Whatever you do, make it your quest to teach them to love learning.

### **Demystifier #2: It's not really learning until it changes you.**

Learning changes you. Getting it right on the test doesn't mean you have learned it. I took a test to get my driver's license and I had to know the speed limit in order to pass the test. But if I blithely drive twenty kilometres over the speed limit, did I really learn it? The police officer who stops me will not be impressed when I say, "Oh, I know the speed limit." He will write me a ticket, I'll pay a lot of money, and my insurance will go up. What are the odds that from that point on, I will pay attention to the speedometer, and actually drive the speed limit? If I do, then I will have learned my lesson.

Learning changes you. If I learn French, then that means I can actually speak it or read it. If I learn punctuation, I will correctly place my commas. If I learn percentages, I will save money at the grocery store. These are all indicators that real learning has taken place.

So, are your children really learning history? Are they adept at using their math facts? Have their biology lessons made a difference in food preparation? Are they able to write a letter to the editor concerning an issue of justice or, if they are much younger, a thank you note to Grandma? Can they remember what they read in the story yesterday?

When we begin to see the importance of letting them learn until they actually have mastered and are able to use the material, we will slow down our mad rush through facts. We will make sure that our children understand what they are studying, that they have time to interact or play with the subject matter, that they have processed and reviewed the material in a way that brings the meaning to life, that they have had the light bulb go on. In short, when what is being studied is no longer a factoid that can float out of the head just as easily as it floated in, but has become a living, interwoven part of their being, then it has been learned.

If you will put these two basic truths -- to help them love learning, and to have them interact with the material to the point of mastery before you move on -- into everyday practice in your homeschool, your children will astonish the world.



*Extremely happily married since 1979, Bill and Diana Waring homeschooled their three children nearly twenty years. The Waring kids (now all grown) were the proving grounds for all the concepts and encouragements Bill and Diana teach! Bill and Diana have worked in speaking and writing for the Christian home school community for more than twenty years. She is well known for her rapid-fire history recordings and presentations, and also for her workshops and books of home school encouragement, like *Beyond Survival* and *Reaping the Harvest*.*