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Internet and Education—One Mom's Perspective

By A.R. Linder

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What is all the hoopla about children needing to be exposed to computers and the Internet? Let me share my experience.

My child isn't a genius. Most aptitude testing has revealed that she is of average intelligence. But somehow this child has managed to consistently score above the 90th percentile nationally on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills—98th and 99th percentile in math. And, on Georgia's sixth grade Criterion Referenced Comprehension Test (CRCT) scored 450 out of 450 on the reading section, surprising given that math has consistently been her strongest subject. We have just received her scores on the eighth grade CRCT with a score 422 on the reading portion showing the previous reading score was no fluke and exceeding on every other portion of the test. She also scored a 92 on Georgia's End-of-Course Test for Algebra I. In short, she is doing quite well academically in school.

I'm not sure of the exact reasons for the performance on these tests, although I believe a lot of it has to do with her hard work, consistent effort, and my persistence as a parent. That persistence has included using every resource I can find and afford to help my child excel. Many of those resources have been on the Internet.

Friday night found us in front of the computer playing at a website based upon the "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire" game. The differences are that all the questions are related to science, we can't actually win a million dollars, it's absolutely free, and my daughter and I are the players. It isn't unusual for us to spend a couple of hours playing this game. I am always amazed by how much she knows as her age as well as how much I seem to have forgotten at mine.

Many years ago while developing and teaching Air Force training courses for U.S. Space Command, I became fascinated with the use of computers in learning. Also while working in the training area, I became a fan of the basic premises of Thorndike's Laws of Learning. Although some would characterize them as almost forgotten and even sometimes discredited, I have found the laws to be helpful in flagging what works and what does not in educating my child as well as adults and youth in other programs I have managed. I have realized much success incorporating the essence of those

laws of learning and computer technology as I have dealt with my child's learning. Thorndike's laws are pretty simple:

The Law of Readiness deals with ensuring a child is ready to learn—making sure the student is fed, free from too much worry, comfortable, and well aware of the importance of what is to be learned. In other words the student must be prepared to learn. One exercise I have done with my child dealing with this law is researching the admissions criteria for different schools. We have also compared the costs of different institutions. We found sites like CollegeTours.com, a site providing loads of information and virtual tours

of different college campuses, to be a handy reference for this exercise. We have even gone as far as to look at scholarship requirements using scholarship databases such as CollegeNET.com and CollegeIsPossible.org. We have been doing this since the sixth grade. By understanding the

requirements now, hopefully, we won't be running around in the junior and senior years trying to get things in order. It is awfully difficult to bring up that grade point average in a couple of semesters, especially if the young person is stressed by time constraints. Getting my child prepared now is my way of ensuring we are prepared when the time comes. A worksheet for this exercise can be downloaded from my website YouthPlay.org.

The Law of Exercise relates to making sure that practice is part of the study routine—especially when dealing with essential facts and rules. The Internet and various software can be very useful in providing repetition in a not-so-routine manner. Games like Basket Math at ScienceAcademy.com where your child actually makes a hoop each time he or she gets the correct answer can make rote learning of multiplication tables a tad more interesting than just repeating the multiplication tables over and over.

I remember clearly when I began to dislike math—a subject I had loved until, I believe, I ran into the wrong teacher. I remember my worst days in school. I remember my best days. I remember the teachers who were creative and inspiring and know that the best skills I possess today are in the areas they taught. That is the Law of Effect at work. I look very hard for sites that are good learning websites and share them with my daughter. I don't want her to be turned off by sites that are really advertising monsters, just enticing you to a point of enjoyment and then launching an advertising scheme where you must make a purchase before you can go any further. Certainly I understand that many websites survive through their ability to sell products, however I believe this can be accomplished without bait and purchase gimmicks.

Goodness, have you ever tried to unlearn something you learned how to do wrong? This is the Law of Primacy, which states that what is learned first is learned best. You really have to make sure that the resources that your child uses are good resources. Every textbook is not a good textbook; every website is not a good website; and every teacher is not a good teacher. And assuming that these tools are good simply because they exist or because the school system uses them can cause your child a world of harm. A parent really has to do more than have these tools available. If you tryout a piece of software or an Internet resource and you cannot follow the instructions, then there is a very good chance your child may not be able to effectively use the resource either. And the same rule applies with other resources as well. Some sites such as Math.com and MathForum.com gave really simple step-by-step instructions to concepts my child was learning in school, yet I had long forgotten. I was

able to refresh my memory and to get her on track using these resources.

The Law of Intensity deals with the vividness of the learning experience. If I take my child to the zoo to learn about animals, he or she will learn more than if I just explain the animals. One of my favorite sites for young kids is Switchzoo.com. My younger nieces and nephews are fascinated with the animals they are familiar with, but just spillover with excitement as they manipulate the animals to make new ones. I think that my daughter and I are really supposed to be a little old for the activity, but in all truthfulness we have a great time with it too. There are so many places out there that I neither have the time nor the money to take my child. The Internet has been especially useful in getting my child to those places. At our fingertips we have the Virtual Smithsonian Institute and the National Gallery of Art in Washington DC. At GreatPlaces.org we have in living color enjoyed films and photos of Madagascar, Tibet, the Amazon and several other far away places. Through the gateway of MuseumStuff.com, we have viewed museums all over the world including my personal favorite the web only exhibits of our National Museum of Air and Space in Washington DC. And let's not forget the brick and mortar library. Before computers the library is how my parents took me to far away places. It still works and every library that we have visited recently also has wonderful computer resources as well. So, if you don't have a computer at home, that is certainly no excuse for not spending some time with your child using

this wonderful technology. And I still buy books for presents—wonderful, exciting, colorful books.

What is learned most recently is remembered best is the essence of Thorndike's Law of Recency. And that is why those reviews right before the test are so very important. We have also found the hundreds of little quizzes on the Internet to be helpful in this area, for instance the Geography.miningco.com quizzes on U.S. States and rivers and more, the Purdue University Online Writing Lab (OWL) writing exercises, and the Who Wants to Win \$1,000,000 ?—Science Game.

Thorndike's laws are by no means the last word in the education of children, and because of that I spend a lot of time at sites such as the The Education Place and Education World— The Educator's Best Friend. These sites and the many others like them, including my own website www.YouthPlay.org featuring the websites I have used in educating my child, keep us updated on the newest and the best resources in education and help us in making decisions regarding our children's education.

We have heard it time and time again—whether we believe it or not. There is just not enough time in the school day for your child to learn all the things he or she needs to learn. I have found it to be equally the case that there is also little time after school for me to dedicate to my child's learning. It seems after career, housework and the business of running a household, the time I want to spend with my child is not teaching time but chill out time.

But be that as it may, I have tried hard to make time for teaching as well. And the resources on the Internet have definitely helped. While I'm doing some of those household duties, I can park my child right in front of that computer at a website that I have reviewed. And then we can get together afterward and talk about the site as well as the rest of our day. These sites have also helped with the budget because free resources are definitely cheaper than a lot of the software out there—although I have definitely invested in that for Christmas and birthdays.

If you think that I have developed a computer geek, you are wholly wrong—although I don't think this would necessarily be a bad thing. This a child who in addition to the Honor Roll, is a member of the school basketball team, several clubs and organizations, a team leader for the Odyssey of the Mind competition, the first runner-up for her school pageant and a social butterfly.

I truly believe that the resources of the Internet have helped my daughter to tap into all of her talents.

A.R. Linder is the editor of SisterPlay.com compilation of websites showcasing Southwest Georgia. A cornerstone of the website is a wonderful area called YouthPlay.org —a collection of many of the websites she has used in educating herself and her child. Ms. Linder is a graduate of the University of South Florida in Tampa, FL. She has over 15 years of experience in training and workforce development.

5 Ways To Tell If A Preschooler Is Living In Your House

By Deborah Shelton

1. You reheated the same cup of coffee three times this morning.
2. There is always one more person in your bed in the morning, than there was the night before.
3. You can't imagine life without the Cartoon Network.
4. The lock on your bathroom door is purely for decoration... After all, no locked door could withstand, "Mom? What are you doing? Mom? Can I come in? Mom? Can I show you something? Mom? Can I give you a hug? Mom? Can you hear me? Mom?"
5. You have started—or signed—a petition to banish the word "why" from every language known to man.

Deborah Shelton is a mother, freelance writer, and author of the brand new book, "The Five Minute Parent: Fun & Fast Activities for You and Your Little Ones." Visit Deborah's website for more family-friendly ideas:

5 Ways To Tell If A Preschooler Is Living In Your House

What Do Mothers Want?

Scholarships For Single Moms

My Mother, the Person

The Difference A Boy Can Make

Help Your Child Succeed In School

Profitable Puppets

Info Product Marketing Secrets Exposed!

Time Stretching Tips



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