

AN INDEPENDENT SUPPLEMENT BY MEDIAPLANET TO USA TODAY

Learning through play
Taking a hands
on approach

Building literacy
Developing cognitive
thinking skills

21st century classroom
Advancements
in technology

**MEDIA
PLANET**

March 2011

EARLY EDUCATION

PHOTO: DAVID BURNETT, SAVE THE CHILDREN

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TIPS

CREATING BUILDING BLOCKS FOR SUCCESS

Save The Children ambassadors Jennifer Garner and Mark Shriver help revive education in struggling communities



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your child will grow**

NECPA Accredited Schools

The National Early Childhood Program Accreditation • www.necpa.net



CHALLENGES

Technology is not meant to replace the teacher or the classroom. The mission is to provide every child with the **finest education possible.**

TIP

1

TECHNOLOGY
HELPS KIDS
ADVANCE

The power of education

Kids are more receptive to learning at an early age. By the time a child enters first grade, his educational path is already set, having been shaped by experiences as a baby, a toddler and a pre-schooler.

Build vocabulary

I've been an educator for most of my life and I believe if we can build a child's vocabulary in the early years, he has a greater opportunity for educational success.

As a father of six children, I know the family has a tremendous impact on education. The one thing parents can do to help their kids is talk to them. There's nothing more important than vocabulary. Parents should talk to their children all day long.

Every child is growing his or her own brain and it's strictly a function of stimulus. The newest brain research shows if you're not stimu-

lating the circuits, you're not going to grow.

Language doesn't have to be profound but it should be positive to stimulate the child.

Encourage reading

It's very important to be reading and working on building vocabulary. Ask the child questions like, "What do you think?" Interactive reading allows the child to become active and respond.

Up until fourth grade a child is learning to read; after that he's reading to learn so do your part to keep your child motivated to read. If he's shying away from it, he may be overwhelmed by the words and need help.

Embracing technology

I have always wanted to help educate children all over the world, not just in the classrooms where I taught. Even if you don't have access to great teachers, it's possible to

"We want the children to reach their fullest potential."



Dustin Heuston
Chairman, Founder,
and CEO of Waterford Institute

get online and build a portal to the world. That's why I believe technology can improve the way children learn.

Software programs covering subjects such as reading, math and science, can help kids advance at their own pace.

Technology is not meant to replace the teacher or the classroom. The mission is to provide every child with the finest education possible. It's very exciting to say both equity and excellence are possible.

Don't be passive about technology and say, "I wonder what will happen with my children?" You should study technology for 30 minutes a day and find out what it can do for you and your family.

The message now is about hope. Remember, start a child young and build a mind properly. It's never too late.

DUSTIN HEUSTON

As told to Kristen Castillo

Finding accredited programs

■ Enrolling your child in a great school is starting earlier than ever. Many parents want highly regarded, accredited programs for children as young as babies.

What is accreditation?

"Accreditation is a process by which programs demonstrate they meet specific standards and criteria," says Linda Hassan Anderson of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) which accredits programs for children from birth until kindergarten. The goal of early accreditation

programs is overall program quality.

"Quality in early education is something we're striving for," says Andrea Seidman of National Early Childhood Program Accreditation (NECPA), which serves schools with children age six weeks to eight years.

Accreditation Standards

Each accrediting body has their own standards for schools to meet.

NAEYC's standards include curriculum, student progress, health, and family involvement. NECPA's standards are similar and include health and safety, administration, and parent and

community relationships.

Planned on-site visits, as well as unannounced verification visits establish and maintain the accreditations, which typically are valid for a few years. NECPA's is good for three years and NAEYC's for five years. Both accreditation programs require schools to submit yearly reports.

What to look for

Before enrolling a child in a school, parents need to research the school.

"I would say to parents' credit, they are becoming very, very savvy consumers," says Hassan Anderson.

Parents should ask about the school's accreditation, meet staff

and teachers, and learn about the educator's professional qualifications.

A large part of accreditation programs are centered on parent involvement.

NECPA for example looks at parent-involved activities such as parent-teacher nights, frequent parent surveys, and newsletters and websites to keep families in the know, as well as holiday events to promote family involvement.

"We want the children to reach their fullest potential," says Kristen Grimm, also of NECPA.

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WE RECOMMEND



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"Studies show that early reading is critical for child development and academic and career success later in life."

Jennifer Garner gets involved

Working with Save the Children and bridging the gaps in communities.

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MEDIA PLANET

EARLY EDUCATION, 1ST EDITION
MARCH 2011

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Distributed within:

USA TODAY, March 2011
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A Love of Learning Begins with Early Childhood Education

The Right Choice for Your Child

There are many choices available when it comes to child care. But, according to The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC®) and other experts in the field, an early childhood education program has far-reaching, positive effects on a child's growth.

Studies prove that a foundation in early childhood education, which focuses on learning through play, better prepares a child for future academic success, develops stronger social skills, and instills greater self-awareness and confidence. High quality early childhood education programs are instrumental in a child's growth — academically, socially, physically, and emotionally.

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NEWS

QUESTION
& ANSWER

Wendy Collie
President,
KinderCare
Learning Centers

What differentiates early childhood education programs from day care?

What sets high-quality early education programs apart is the focus on a rich learning environment that supports the healthy development of the whole child cognitively, socially, emotionally and physically and ensures children have the skills necessary to enter school ready to learn.

- Look for a low teacher-to-student ratio allowing teachers to focus on individual learning.
- Look for developmentally appropriate curriculum and a language-rich environment
- Check to see that the program is accredited—accredited programs demonstrate their commitment to go beyond a state's minimum licensing requirements and meet rigorous national standards.
- Spend time with teachers and the center director—make sure they are qualified, engaged, and can help your child develop the skills he/she will need in school and beyond.

Question: How can parents help children learn through everyday play experiences?

Answer: Parents can show children a variety of activities and involve them in experiences like mealtime.

Turning play into education

Children might want to spend hours on one activity or toy, but child development experts say moderation matters since kids need to learn how to pay attention, finish a project, and make good decisions.

"It's really up to the parent to introduce diverse content and set limits when promoting the idea of self regulation in a child," says child development expert Dr. Karen Hill Scott who is also a mother of four children.

Children's development is often categorized as SPICE, an acronym meaning social, physical, intellectual, creative and emotional skills. Educational play can help kids work on these skills.

Turning play into learning

Involve kids in meal preparation such as choosing placemats and setting the table. While doing laun-



PHOTO: AMERICA LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

dry, kids learn colors, how to fold, and how to match items like socks.

Use creative projects like drawing, painting and crafts to help kids express their imagination. They can explore music by writing and singing silly songs and drumming on tables, too.

While outside, kids can pick flowers, name plants, and watch bugs and birds. No matter the activity, they'll feel helpful and also develop self-esteem.

"They'll feel like 'I mastered this,

I'm smart. I know what I'm doing. I know how to do this,'" says Hill Scott. "And outside of being loved by mom and dad, that mastery is really a big payoff for little kids."

Using media effectively

From cell phones to TV to gaming devices, media is everywhere.

David Kleeman, president of American Center for Children and Media says 85 percent of parents allow children to have some screen time. He says a good use of

media is encouraging kids to take photos with a camera phone.

Even video games can be good. "A lot of the games designed, you can't play sitting down and leaning back," says Kleeman. "You have to be up and moving, so physically they are wonderfully engaging."

Technology can supplement real world learning, but can't replace it. "They're very different experiences," says Kleeman. "If parents acknowledge that, then they can start to choose what their child needs, wants, and likes."

Children need to learn how and when to use media, as well as the importance of turning it off. That's why it's a good idea to treat media as one source of content in a child's day. Balance media with other activities such as reading, coloring, and playing with blocks.

KRISTEN CASTILLO

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We believe that as children learn to think for themselves, they must be free to express what they are thinking.



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INSIGHT

↓ THE TOOLS
OF TECHNOLOGY

■ “Technology (whether pencil, whiteboard, flip camera, or cell phone) is a tool. It’s one piece of a larger puzzle. To be a literate member of the world today, kids need to develop proficiency with tools of technology,” said Dr. Katie Van Sluys, a professor of literacy at Chicago’s DePaul University and former chair of NCTE’s Whole Language Umbrella. The web, 3D imagery, interactive whiteboards and other advanced teaching tools are increasingly capturing students’ attention.

Going online with Skype, email, and educational social media platforms are examples of new classroom technologies that are changing the way children learn from and interact with their world. As Dr. Van Sluys explains, “[Kids] need to use technology to build relationships with others, solve problems, share information, create and critique multi-media texts, and learn how to engage ethically with tools, others, and the world.”

Matt Castanera-Bartoszek is the director of technology at the Beauvoir School in Washington, D.C. His school has students from pre-kindergarten to the third grade using advanced tools such as tablets to make them good digital citizens. “The kids love the technology...we use it in an age-appropriate way; the child uses the tool to learn, which increases the spirit of inquiry.”

Making it all possible are IT

companies that understand how complex some of these education systems can be. Bob Kirby, Vice-President of K-12 Education at CDW-G, works with school districts to successfully implement and support technology. “We help schools understand what they are trying to accomplish, and provide the necessary infrastructure.” He points out a major benefit to classroom technology: “It allows students to not only consume, but create media.”

Responsible for much of the technology in classrooms, Texas Instruments is also leading the push into 3D projection and imagery with their DLP (Digital Light Processing) technology. “Launched in March 2010, Texas Instruments DLP (TI) now has 3D pilot programs across five European Union countries, India, and 30 classrooms in the United States, with more countries including Latin America in the near future,” says Jaime Beringer, customer marketing manager at TI.

“Teachers using 3D technology say that their students learned faster, and retained the information longer because of the interactive element the technology provides,” explains Beringer. “According to Pacific Media Associates, there will be a five-fold growth in models by 2014.”

ANTHONY HYMES

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TIP

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UTILIZE FREE
RESOURCES

Designing libraries

Many parents today remember when they were being read to by their parents. With today’s busy work schedules and outside activities, it can be challenging to find the time to read with a child.

The American Library Association and its divisions, including the American Association of School Librarians, Public Library Association, and the Association for Library Service to Children believe the ability to read is a fundamental skill for children growing up today. Studies show that early reading is critical for child development and academic and career success later in life. Parents and caregivers can help a child be ready to read before starting school by engaging in simple activities every day: talking, singing, reading, writing and playing. These can be done anywhere and throughout the day— at home, in the car, or at the library.

A valuable resource

Be sure to check with your public library for parent programs and resources for both children and adults. Even on a budget, reading and other early literacy activities can be nurtured with free resources and programs from the public library. If your child shows an interest in a certain topic, author or type of book, your librarian can be a valuable resource in identifying additional, age appropriate materials. Public libraries also offer many other options to engage pre-schools and children, including audio tapes and CDs, graphic novels, magazines, and video games in addition to programs and services.

Besides reading for fun, the 21st Century Learner needs to develop critical thinking skills. This is where librarians—especially school librarians—serve an important role. School librarians are in the unique position to partner with other educators and parents to help guide young readers throughout this process.

Successful young readers integrate new ideas with what they already know, and identify what additional resources and information are still needed to complete the picture. School librarians help with comprehension and learning strategies, and assist in determining if the source is accurate and trustworthy. As more information is made available online, it becomes critical for young people to be able to evaluate the quality of the information they find.

While reading itself is an important first step, it is only a start for the kind of information literacy required in our competitive global environment. Preparing children to meet the challenges in the 21st Century is a collaborative effort that is greatly enhanced when parents, teachers and librarians all contribute.

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INSPIRATION

Jennifer Garner gets involved

Why did you get involved with Save The Children?

My mother, Pat, grew up during the depression and to say her family was poor would be an understatement. Still, you wouldn't know it hearing her talk about it. Her family played games, sang songs, recited poetry and Mom had an exceptional teacher who lit her up when it came to learning. My mom was the only one in her family to graduate from college and she put herself through school working in the cafeteria. She has gone on to lead a very adventurous, and as she says, exceptional life.

It was thinking about this gap between my mother's hopeful, forward-looking childhood and the quiet acceptance I saw in kids a town or two away from mine that



Jennifer Garner
Actor, advocate
and mother of two

led me to Mark Shriver and Save The Children's U.S. Programs.

What is one thing you would have changed about your early education?

I think we need to do more to make service and a sense of community a crucial part of every child's education. When I was growing up, school was all about the fundamentals, which is, of course, vital. Education is also about knowing the world around you, how other kids live, and feeling empowered to do something to make a difference.

In your experiences with STC what challenges have you seen in educational settings?

Our kids want to learn and they want to succeed in life, but they need to be in an environment that encourages and fosters learning. To me, everything comes back to our national will. Education is an investment in everything that touches our lives. If we invest fully in all our kids from cradle to cap and gown, there is no question we will have the kind of nation we wish to have.

What are the most important steps in moving forward to enhance the education of our youth?

We need to start at the begin-

ning. Children in this country start kindergarten when they are five or six years old. But kids growing up in poverty have heard, by the time they turn four, fewer words than kids growing up in more affluent homes. And they are developmentally 18 months behind their middle class counterparts. If you think like a two and a half year old at four years of age, imagine where you are when you start kindergarten. Ninety percent of a child's brain growth occurs in the first five years of life yet only three out of five preschool aged kids are enrolled in some form of preschool. We need to make early childhood development as fundamental to our education system as K-12 learning.

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QUESTIONNAIRE

How does Save the Children help the most impoverished areas of the country?

■ We go in and work in the schools in areas with some of the most struggling families in the nation. We're using education to break the cycle of poverty. We hire local people to staff our programs and we provide training to them. This doesn't just benefit the kids, but it also builds the community.

In our early childhood program there is a vocabulary test that is a key indicator of academic success. The national mean for this test is 100; our kids are now scoring at 97.5, which is fantastic and better than other leading and long-standing early childhood programs.

MARK K. SHRIVER
Senior Vice President, U.S. Programs



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