Lifelong Learning

(Part 2: The Growing Years)

I remember my first year teaching Grade 10 Biology, and having great difficulty inculcating the system of scientific classification into some of my students. One day, in frustration, I exclaimed, “Even my 5-year-old son knows the difference between insects and arachnids!” My students were astounded! “Well,” said one, “of course, it’s because he is a genius!”

Actually, he was not. I had read Dr. Glenn Doman’s books, starting with “How To Teach Your Baby To Read”, and had followed his advice. When my son pointed at an ant, and asked what that was, I would answer, “It’s an ant!” And if I wasn’t too busy, I would add, “Mmm, probably a worker ant. It’s an insect. You want to check it out? See if it has six legs!” Next time, if he pointed at a cockroach, I would say, “This is a cockroach. Probably a German cockroach, which is also an insect. You want to check it out? See whether it has six legs and two pairs of wings.” The day he would point at a spider, I would add, “Well, this is an arachnid, not an insect. Look carefully, it has eight legs!” Young children learn effortlessly, and all this is nothing at all to a little guy who can roll “Tyranosaurus Rex” around his tongue more easily than most adults. Should we really, really, dumb down “rhinoceros” to rhino, or “crocodile” to croc, or even “hippopotamus” to hippo? All we would be doing would be to produce more scholastic morons who have a hard time telling an insect from an arachnid or a reptile from a mammal in tenth grade.

I have already discussed in a previous article the work done by the “Institutes for the Achievement of Human Potential”, and published in the series of books by Dr. Glenn Doman. So I won’t repeat myself here. But what I do want to point out is that the majority of knowledge acquired by your child during those growing years between birth and Year 18 will not be coming from school. It will come from his environment, his interactions with people, and his readings and viewings. The most important time frame will be from birth to six years of age. Some experts such as Timothy Kailing, the founder of “Native Reading”, even propose a “window of learning” for reading and foreign languages. You miss the window, and your child will forever learn reading or foreign languages in a stilted unnatural way and never be fluent at them.

On the other hand, Makoto Shichida believes that all children are born geniuses, and need nurturing to retain their inborn abilities. In order to do so, he concentrates on fostering the development of the right brain through such methods as high speed listening and imaging. He has opened hundreds of Shichida centers/academies mostly in Japan, Malaysia and Singapore. These centers claim that 5-year-olds trained in their academies show stronger memory retention, effortless recognition of pictures and words, consistent excellence in spelling, keen interest in learning, great ability to follow instructions, great ability to work well independently, great ability to grasp mathematical concepts, and so on.

Once in school, if that’s the path you have chosen for your child’s education, the job of the school should really be only to guide your child to categorize, analyze, classify and so on. Gathering knowledge should have started long before. It should still continue through books, periodicals, videos, internet, and discussions. Unless you are a frequent and regular visitor to your local library, you should have at least one set of a good encyclopedia in the house.

My father used to say that education is the greatest investment we can possibly make. Money can be lost, but knowledge in your brain can never be taken away.