

Information Overload

by Cindie Edmunds

When we first started homeschooling (as public school refugees who came to this adventure rather late in Jake's educational life), the temptation to collect resources, books, web links, magazines, and those glorious, shiny homeschooling catalogues was overwhelming. Oh, it started out innocently enough ... a book on learning styles here, a "grade-level appropriate" (whatever that means) curriculum outline there, an email list, or several, for homeschoolers, a history resource, math worksheets ... after all, I hadn't actually read the learning style book yet, how did I know the kinds of resources my son would need? Of course, I hadn't stopped to ask him what he was interested in learning - I was having waaay too much fun collecting all this stuff. Besides, while he's never expressed an interest before, might he suddenly need to know the different kinds of fossilized insect larvae found on that obscure little island 500 miles northeast of Antarctica?

And so it began! Now it was time to consult those learning style experts. Turns out (depending on which expert you consult) he's a kinesthetic, auditory, intuitive, visual, global learner. Well, now it was becoming clearer! All I had to do was find hands-on, verbal (but not too much), non repetitive activities with lots of pictures, maps and graphs that would allow him to see the big picture rather than having to grasp things step by step. And of course, being an enlightened and progressive mom, I guessed it was probably time to find out what he wanted to learn about. Fortunately for me, with the myriad resources I'd collected (and wanting none of them to go to waste), his interests were as eclectic as his learning styles.

"Okay," I thought, "I'll start with math, it's pretty straightforward after all". He had geometry on his list. Hmm... somewhere in my resources I knew I had a geometry workbook and then there was that email newsletter for geometry teachers and that interactive web page, that catalogue with a whole page of geometry resources ... things were looking up. It should only take me about two weeks to get all this stuff together! Well, while I was busy gathering and planning Jake was "playing!" with tanagrams and legos, "fooling around" with a fractals program, doing something with vectors for an upcoming flight with the Civil Air Patrol and calculating the thrust necessary to send his older brother into orbit. By the time I was ready, he'd moved on to space exploration!

I did a little better this time. He did manage to build a space colony with scrap items he found around the house, while I was checking out space exploration unit studies, but he really loved the chats with NASA engineers that I had tucked away in my web resources. And he managed to test the velocity of various objects with a homemade slingshot device while I was organizing a study of astronaut biographies. (A helpful note: this is not an indoor" activity, pine cones and toy jets do not mix well with macaroni and cheese, televisions or sliding glass doors!) He did, however, spend quite a bit of time at the website I found that calculates- your weight on various planets (he particularly enjoyed calculating the weights of our dogs, cats and iguana as well as a few other randomly selected items). At no point, however, was I willing to let him calculate my weight. And we did enjoy reading a couple of the astronaut biographies together.

So, where are we now? Well, Jake's into World War II, Feudal Japan, sword making, the Dalai Lama, creation stones, Chinese mythology and the Netherlands (I've decided I can't possibly keep up with all this). We go to the library together and I give up the computer long enough for him to email back and forth with his grandfather, who loves sharing his war stories with Jake. I'm hoping he'll develop an interest in building computers soon, so I don't have to share anymore.

We read together a lot and he's joined a couple of learning clubs with some of his friends. We study U.S. history together, but I've given math over to his dad and they like working together. He can't spell worth beans (and for some reason I cant seem to interest him in weekly spelling words), but he does like all the science experiment books I bought. I'm not particularly fond of having three different kinds of mold

growing on my coffee table or finding that my blender has been used to mix ingredients that are supposed to harden into some kind of polymer, but I'm learning to live with it. I'm still collecting resources (a girl's got to have a hobby) but I now mostly collect ones for things I'm interested in. Incidentally, if you're ever interested in links to information about fossilized insect larvae, I think I've got that... somewhere.