

Chapter 8

What Should I Do with All This Theoretical Knowledge?

(Where the Rubber Meets the Road)

There are several excellent methods for teaching tiny children for you to consider. Perhaps one of these methods sounds like a perfect fit for your family and you are excited to try it out as soon as possible and see how your child responds. But how does one integrate these methods effectively into everyday life?

Or perhaps you feel (as we do) that each of these methods has strengths to consider. What to do then? Should you try one method at a time to see what works best? Or create your own hybrid method?

As the parent of your child, you are the expert regarding that child. You know better than anyone else what interests your child, what motivates them, what their attention span and physical activity levels are, and therefore how they are going to learn best.

You don't have to go through some checklist or formally label your child as a visual learner with a long attention span but high activity level (or whatever applies to your child) to instinctively know that some activities will or will not work for them. This alone makes you the best teacher possible for them.

You will have to decide on your own what activities and how much activity is right for your family. And this may change over time as your child grows, when working with different children, and through different seasons of life.

In this section, we will give you lots of practical examples and advice on how to apply aspects of all of the different methods we have talked about in your own home. You can then pick and choose the activities that fit best with your child and life in general. Don't attempt to implement all of these ideas at once (and don't feel like you have to do all of

them), and don't expect instantaneous results. Enjoy the journey of getting to be your child's first teacher and exposing him or her to the joy of the written word gradually. All children grow, mature, and learn differently, enjoy this process of learning alongside them.

For our family, we decided that each method had such great benefits that we wanted to use a combined approach, pulling the aspects we liked best from each. Basically, in the beginning we decided that we would try anything that we could do ourselves that fit into our schedule (which was often busy) and see what stuck with our children.

After we had such early and great success with our first child, Aaron, using certain methods, we thought, "Great now we know what works. We'll do that with the next one, too." But of course, as children are apt to be, our second was very different from our first. Complete opposites, you might say. Andrew learned differently and later than Aaron. (Although Andrew was only two years old when he started reading fluently, so he was still quite early.)

Their personalities and learning styles are different, so what worked great for one, didn't always work for the other. Our third child, Alexander, has already shown us that he is very unique compared to his brothers and will likely learn somewhat differently as well. Alexander loves attention and to do big people things, so he frequently comes up to us while we are working on the computer and asks to do Reading Cards.¹⁷ He also signs more than his older brothers, and has shown us that he can read many words that he cannot even speak.

Many things have worked well for all of the boys so far, sometimes at the same age and sometimes different ages. Sometimes they showed relatively the same interest level in a particular activity and sometimes different preferences.

The good thing about their differing learning styles is that it required us to notice these differences and individualize our teaching methods for each child early on.

17 See http://greenfieldeducation.com/reading_cards/.

But it also required us to be flexible and willing to adapt our approach. In the end, this process of learning how they learn has proven very beneficial for our family because we have learned how to approach each child. We also discovered how to more easily tailor other subjects to them as well. Our two older children are already excelling in many other areas as well.

We suggest trying out a few elements of the method that resonates most with your family, and see how they work for you. Then later you can introduce other methods as you desire until you find a comfortable rhythm for your family.

As with any new element that you wish to add to your daily routine, slow and consistent change is much more sustainable long term than a rapid and drastic overhaul of your life. We suggest adding only one or two new activities at a time and implementing them consistently for several weeks before attempting to introduce others.

For instance, if you have a toddler whom you are already reading to, perhaps the most logical thing to implement first is consistent text pointing during the times when you read and sing. Later, you may choose to add in letter games, videos, or flashcards one at a time.

If you have an infant, perhaps the first thing to add in is a few minutes of flashcards, perhaps including sets that you sing along with. This is similar to the idea of infant stimulation cards (or even just brightly colored artwork geared to infants), but it also provides auditory stimulation, exposure to the spoken and written word, and meaningful parent-child interaction.

As a child's attention span allows, text pointing when reading is a great way to draw a child's eyes to the written page and maintain interest. As children grow, songs, games, toys, art, and writing can gradually be added into their playtime (while allowing for plenty of free play too, of course).

When assessing effectiveness, don't judge merely based on how quickly results materialize. Just as infants must take

in the spoken word for a long time before beginning to speak, so infants must take in the written word consistently for a period of time before demonstrating the ability to read. The length of time will depend on the age when exposure begins, the amount and consistency of exposure, and a great deal on the personality and learning style of the child.

Therefore, one should consider a child's mood, level of enjoyment of the activities, and how the activities integrate into your family life. If a child shows enjoyment during an activity, that's great. They, themselves, may encourage you to do this activity even more frequently. Some children, especially kinetic learners, may not demonstrate a great deal of fondness for sedentary activities (like reading a book or flashcards). But even if a child appears indifferent yet stays nearby and isn't upset or frustrated, you may want to continue because they may be absorbing far more than you realize.

If an activity obviously upsets or frustrates your child, you should stop and try again at a later time. This may be later in the day, week, or even year depending on your child.

The diversity of personalities and learning styles among children is amazing, so we will present a wide variety of learning activities in the following chapters.