

A Missing Method of Education

Eric Freel

I was baited! I was lured! I was tricked by the class, and it was simply not my fault!

While slipping into the sixth grade class room in order to give a brief exhortation during the absence of the teacher Thursday morning, I was tricked into enjoying one of the most delightful forty-five minute segments of my week. One of the students made inquiry concerning J.R.R.Tolkien's trilogy, *The Lord of the Rings*. The hook was set! The bait was taken! Discussion began, and I must say it was thoroughly enjoyed!

With the advent of the copy machine, the proliferation of printed material, and commonality of electronic gismos and gadgets, a very effective method of educating has been severely reduced or altogether neglected. Through this negligence, certain skills needed for life are not developing in proportion to the need. The missing method and needed skill is discussion. Discussion has the potential of developing the greatest knowledge base and skill set in our students of all the educational stratagems.

I have often been asked by parents over the years a question like, "What can I do to help my child do better?" This question is not limited to doing better on the upcoming test or essay. Rather it deals more with preparing the child for life. What a great question! "What can I do to help better prepare my child for life?" This does, of course, include the next test and essay, but it is far more reaching. One key thing all parents can do is to engage the child in discussion. There are few things, very few things, that compare with discussion as a means of advancing our children in education or preparing them for life.

Here are some ideas to enhance quality discussion with our children. First, do it! The statistics are staggering and sad. The average parent spends very few minutes a day talking with their children. The older the child the less time is involved. The average parent does not discuss the issues of life with their children. It is left for the teachers, the youth workers, and their friends. The breakfast, lunch and dinner table discussions are almost extinct. How sad! This must change.

Second, children need to do a share of the talking. This may sound silly to a parent whose child often governs the conversation, but many children are reticent to talking. Mom and Dad will do the child a great favor by helping him/her develop confidence in communication.

Third, take time to talk about what is important to the child. Do as the Indian proverb encourages: walk a while in their moccasins. But don't wear those moccasins out. Dad and Mom have things they need to discuss as well.

Fourth, use discussion to press your child's mind. Make them think. At times make them stay on a subject for a long period. Keep them from the Sesame Street mindset of thirty seconds sound bytes.

Fifth, help our children think and talk about things of substance – yes, even when they are young. Too much time is spent on the trivial and meaningless; let's move our children to contemplate things of substance and significance.

Finally, search out people of knowledge and experience that your children can talk to, learn from and appreciate.

While in northern Michigan a few summers back I grabbed my oldest son, Alex, and headed down to Uncle Virgil's farm hoping to catch my uncle for a few moments of historical enlightenment concerning the village of Millersburg. It worked. While sitting in lawn chairs behind the garage, in front of the barn, overlooking the field and forests, Uncle Virgil told us of the old days of 'the Burg.' The lumbering years, with trees of immense size pulled out of the swamp by powerful horses over roads of snow and ice, the years of the railroad, the years of farming, and many others. What a delight! In a two-hour discussion my son experienced more history than entire books record.

At that point I knew discussion would play a key role in the education of my sons and daughter and never become the missing method.