

## Homework

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**As a new primary teacher fresh out of College, I quickly warmed to my new role and each day brought fresh levels of enjoyment. Teaching, for me, was an engaging experience, an engagement with children and, perhaps just as vital, an engagement with parents. And this engagement, with no exceptions that I can recall, was positive for all of us.**

Although I have been away from full-time classroom teaching for several years, when I walk into a classroom for an occasional relief day or meet up with my former pupils and their parents, those warm, happy days come flooding back and it feels almost as if I had never left. However, I did leave, putting formal teaching aside to take up full-time parenting. Call it homework, if you will.

I am grateful that my teaching came before my parenting because it helped to prepare me for motherhood. In particular, teaching taught me that children are wonderfully different, and that there is no one way to engage them. Indeed, they enjoy variety in that engagement, as long as it is within a constant context of support and acceptance. I also learned that individual children can behave and respond differently at different times, even when the circumstances appear to be unchanged. As a teacher, I developed a keen sensitivity to this 'changeableness' of children and tried, as best I could, to remain unchanged so that the child did not also have to contend with a capricious or inconstant teacher. This equanimity has transferred to my parenting, with just the occasional mild lapse for none of us is perfect!

Another important lesson that teaching taught me is that children have parents. Hang on, you might say, this is as obvious as day. Well yes, but what is not so obvious is that many of those parents, especially parents of young children who are experiencing school for the first time, also go through a period of acute anxiety. And, like their children, they need to be reassured that all is well. Again, there is no one way to do this. However, getting to know the parents and making yourself available to them is an important first step. Almost invariably that first step leads to a closer collaboration between parents and teacher, not least because the parents soon realise that you, the teacher, have the best interests of their children at

heart. When teachers gain the confidence of parents, and vice versa, there is a subtle understanding by both that each has a legitimate role in the education of children. It is in this climate of mutual trust that the educational needs of the children are best served.

Our eldest child started school this year. I feel blessed and fortunate to have been able to stay at home these past years and raise our three children full time; it has been time treasured. It has also been a time of reflection on my former life, my time as a teacher, because I have always planned to return to that life.

What I have concluded from my reflection on these past years, my 'homework years', is that the roles of teacher and mother have much in common. I am reminded that "the child's first teacher is the mother"<sup>1</sup>, but I am also conscious that there comes a time when mothers must, as it were, pass the teaching baton to others.

However, this handing over of children to other teachers is not the end of a mother's educational homework; that homework simply moves into a new phase in which the educational horizon of the child is expanded and becomes centred more on the school than the home. I see that I must also allow my own horizon to extend so that it embraces the school. After all, my daughter will soon be a part of that school family and she will appreciate that her mother is not a stranger there.

And I won't be a stranger because homework and classwork, you see, complement each other. **TEACH**

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> White, E. (1903). *Education*. Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing, p.275.



*“It is in this climate of mutual trust that the educational needs of the children are best served”*

[Photograph:  
Nicole Meintjes]