More Support Options - Family Education Conferences & AERC

Note: The following are excerpts from Adele Lyman’s “Report on Family Education Conference,” which was held in Thailand in early February 2002. Adele and husband, Stu, have served in Malaysia for 17 years and have three children, ages 16, 13, and 10.

I have just returned from a very profitable three-day Family Education Conference sponsored by the AERC (Asia Educational Research Consortium). I am excited about the resources that are “out there” to help our families who are using “nontraditional” means to educate their children. The Asia Education Resource Consortium is a cooperative effort among various agencies in Asia to give more effective support to cross-cultural worker families who are educating their children in some situation other than traditional outside-the-home schooling. The conference was designed for any family who home schools or uses national schools or on-line schooling options (or some combination of these) to educate their children.

For several years, Interaction International (www.tckinteract.net) and SHARE Educational Services have sponsored similar conferences in Europe and Central Asia to help families such as ours. This type of help only became available to us in Asia three years ago when the first Family Education Conference was held in Chiang Mai. I would suggest you check out www.tckinteract.net for more information on the vision that Interaction International has for helping families such as ours. There are some wonderful links and resources there. I had no idea that such resources existed.

Family Education Conference Highlights

There were approximately 200 adults in attendance coming from many countries around this region. Each day opened with a time of worship and a devotional by David Pollock, executive director of Interaction International and coauthor of The Third Culture Kid Experience. David shared from II Corinthians 5 about life as a process. As believers, we know the end result is good, and we have hope. And yet there is “groaning” between here and there. He touched on how we support one another as we go through life with its twists and turns and the importance of people such as ourselves in this kind of work demonstrating love to one another. Caring for our TCKs is a very important aspect of this. Reasons to care for our TCKs are (1) their presence—this alone is enough really, (2) their parents—recognizing attrition rates as children’s educational needs become more of a concern for families, and (3) their potential—as kids uniquely prepared to live in a multi-cultural society.

There were two general sessions each morning and one in the afternoon and two workshop sessions each afternoon (two choices were offered each time)—the final session being a general one by David Pollock on “Preparing Your TCK for Successful Reentry.”

“Navigating the Home Schooling Rapids” was a general session presented by Janna Gilbert, founder and director of The Potter’s School, an on-line school for junior high and high school students. See their website at www.pottersschool.com. (Look this up!!!—they have 500 AERC, continued on page 2
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students now and are wanting to accommodate overseas students.) Excellent! She mostly focused on home-schooling issues and talked about it from a very positive approach—being confident of God’s calling and therefore of God’s enabling. Janna presented a “Part 2” to this topic in another general session and also discussed “Using Technology in your Child’s Education” in one of the workshops.

David Pollock presented two general sessions: “New Challenges Facing Today’s TCKs” and “Preparing your TCK for Successful Reentry.” Both were excellent. He really understands these kids’ needs and speaks with a heart of concern for them and their parents. But above all, he exudes confidence that these kids have wonderful God-given opportunities before them. He has a very well-balanced approach to both the needs and opportunities our kids have and offers specific guidelines to parents for helping them grow up as healthy, well-adjusted young adults.

Tim Friesen is a psychologist now based in Chiang Mai. He had three general sessions: “God’s Creativity and Humor Reflected in Personality Differences,” “Legitimate and Healthy Expressions of Sadness and Anger,” and “Trust and Respect Within the Family.” Each was very applicable to families serving overseas whether home schooling or not. Often educational issues aren’t the real problems—relationships within the family are the root causes of difficulties. Very helpful.

Sharon Bridwell is an on-line teacher for The Potter’s School and has a long, long string of experiences and qualifications in teaching writing. I attended her workshop on punctuation and was rather overwhelmed by everything I didn’t know. She really knows her stuff! And she is the sort of English teacher you might have really feared back in high school! But her general session on “Mentoring: a Personal Journey in Education” was excellent. Very inspiring. She shared passionately about teaching our children with our lives through telling stories of how God has worked in our lives and our families’ lives, through reading aloud, through modeling, and through instilling vision.

“What an encouragement to know there are folks out there who are so committed to helping us!”


Resources

www.tckinteract.net is an excellent website to start with. You’ll find all sorts of information pertaining to TCKs here.

www.pottersschool.com is a fairly new on-line school with about 500 students in 18 time zones. Junior and senior high students attend a live video class once a week and can “chat” live, too. The school has a real heart to help with the needs of TCKs.

Fitted Pieces: A Guide for Educating Children Overseas, edited by Janet Blomberg and David Brooks, SHARE Educational Services, 2001. $22.50 + s/h. This 667-page book is absolutely packed with information on just about everything you might want to know. To order, mail Philip Baarendse at pbaarendse@yahoo.com.

TCK reentry seminars are offered in the U.S. each summer. Interaction International offers several, as does Barnabas through the Narramore Foundation. They are highly recommended for our kids to understand who they are as TCKs and what to expect upon reentry into their home culture. I believe seminars like these may be offered in other countries.

David Pollock is producing a new video for TCKs which will deal with who they are, transition, and issues of reentry. It should be available within a year.

General Impressions and Recommendations

Most of our families would benefit from attending this conference. It is designed for “any family who home schools, uses national schools, or online schooling options (or some combination of these) to educate their children.” I believe this would include international schools as well. Having said that, it is worth noting that the conference is heavily weighted toward native English speakers who are home schooling. I hope that in the future this conference will address the needs of non-native English speakers as well.

The conference had a very positive attitude about the fact that there are many educational options—they really were not trying to push any particular one over another. Their goal really seems to be to help parents working in many different situations.

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I would recommend that both husband and wife attend if at all possible. The issues discussed are family issues, not “mom” issues. The decisions families must make are major ones which impact both family and work. There is also educational testing available—that could be a reason that whole families would want to make the extra effort to attend. This conference would be helpful to families at all stages of life—from those just starting out making educational decisions to those who will be launching their young adults back into the home country. I have attended several home-schooling conferences in the U.S. and have found them very helpful, but this was the first conference I attended that addressed these issues within a TCK framework. Most helpful!

What an encouragement to know there are folks out there who are so committed to helping us! △

Questions
Parents Ask

How can I use the computer to help me educate my children overseas?

Computers are wonderful tools and can be used to advantage in children’s education. The big attractions to many families serving overseas are the volume of material that can be acquired and carried inexpensively on CDs and the possibility that children may be able to work more independently, not requiring as much parental time for teaching. As you evaluate what part computers should play in your children’s education, it is important to carefully consider both what they do well and what they cannot do related to the goals you have for your children.

Benefits

• Most educators agree that computer programs can be excellent motivators for learning rote facts and processes. They give variety and add special effects to drill and practice. They often allow for individualization of level and rate of presentation, so children can proceed with appropriate challenges to sustain motivation and encourage mastery.

• The huge amount of reference material now available on CDs and through the Internet can provide a tremendous library of resources at low cost and easy portability. More and more educational videos/films are also becoming available.

• Children who learn to use word processors can become more fluent writers and are more willing to revise and edit their products. Children who struggle with the mechanical aspects of handwriting and spelling often can express themselves more easily using a keyboard and programs that check spelling and grammar. Writing programs for young children can read back what the child has entered, providing auditory reinforcement and motivation.

• Computer literacy is a requirement to prepare students for today’s world. Computers are a great tool for learning to type. Some programs, such as PowerPoint, can help students organize thoughts and ideas.

• A computer can serve as a window to virtual (on-line) schools, such as NorthStar Academy, where it is a conduit for interaction with teachers and other students.

Questions to Consider

Just as with any other curriculum choice, educational materials for the computer must be evaluated for their quality and suitability for your situation. Consider both educational and developmental issues.

Computers in Education

What kinds of educational input are given? What types of outcomes are expected or responses required? Are they varied enough to broaden your child’s learning abilities and communication skills? Are they appropriate for the age/developmental level of your child? Does the way the material is presented appeal to your child’s preferred learning styles? Does it challenge your child’s higher-level thinking and reasoning abilities?

Concerns

Many educators are concerned about the effects of too much computer use on children. For young children, a main fear is that computer use will replace the time they should be spending doing the activities that have proven to be most beneficial to brain development and learning in the early years—lots of direct, hands-on spatial experience and creative play. Working on a computer shows reality in the abstract (represented by symbols), which is not the most appropriate or fruitful way for children younger than age seven to think. Other risks that have been associated

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with much computer use at young ages include lack of imagination, social isolation, repetitive stress injuries, concentration problems, and poor language and literacy skills. Much educational/game-type software has high entertainment value but low educational value.

A major concern for all children relates to the effects computers may have on the development of thinking skills. Normal human brains have at their disposal two complementary methods of processing information: sequential and simultaneous (often called parallel). Computers almost always process sequentially. Until they can engage in parallel and simultaneous processing, they will be a poor match and a poor model for most forms of human reasoning. Even simulation games (such as Oregon Trail) that are apparently quite educational require a good teacher nearby. Otherwise, they often get treated by youngsters as simply games of chance, with little attention to the educational goals.

As more quality CDs with historical films and science experiments become available, they may give opportunity for more observation and parallel mental processing. However, particularly in the area of science, there is no substitute for hands-on experimentation and direct observation.

Though computers serve well as coaches for mastering certain types of information and skills, children who always have information fed to them and whose focus is on getting “the right answer” may not develop the independent reasoning skills to ask the right questions. Children need to develop a “big picture” framework through self-initiated learning experiences, they need opportunities to organize information themselves, and they need to make inferences, build hypotheses, and apply information to real-life situations in order to develop the kind of thinking skills that are most useful in life.

Even though word processors are good tools for encouraging writing, children need human input and modeling in order to learn how to organize their thoughts into main ideas with supporting specifics, create a good flow of thought, and be descriptive and engaging. Computers have limited capability to encourage expressions of creativity and humor, and they are incapable of helping children unprocess derstand and develop face-to-face communication skills such as the meaning of inflections and tone of voice, body language, and nuances.

The isolation from home-culture peers that most of our children experience only highlights the necessity for face-to-face human interaction to be a significant part of their learning program.

Recommendations

• Use computers for the educational purposes for which they are most suited, but broaden your child’s learning experiences with other types of interaction and activities.
• If you provide much factual input via computer programs, make sure children also have opportunities to do something with the information they receive—hands-on activities and projects that apply knowledge to life and allow for creativity/humor and individual strengths of expression (such as oral, artistic, musical, logical, dramatic, and concrete).
• Vary the subject areas taught via the computer from year to year.
• Make sure higher-level thinking skills are included in your child’s educational experience—categorizing, organizing, making inferences and applications, evaluating, synthesizing, and planning own learning program in areas of interest (for example: asking appropriate questions, planning ways to find the answers, researching using various media resources as well as direct observation and interviewing, presenting what was learned in more ways than just writing).
• Provide modeling and practice of face-to-face interaction around subject matter:
  • discussing issues
  • listening for main facts/points
  • expressing understanding
  • taking notes from orally-presented material
  • asking questions for clarification
  • expressing disagreement appropriately
  • presenting own opinions respectfully —sh

College Prep Handbook

International CHED, along with Post High School Services, has put together a handbook for students who plan to attend college/university in North America. It is packed full of information such as requirements for college, different kinds of colleges, financial aid, and college life. To order a copy, e-mail intl_ched@sil.org.
Crown Financial Ministries, the merging of Christian Financial Concepts and Crown Ministries, has several resources available to teach students about money and the Biblical principles that apply.

### The ABC’s of Handling Money God’s Way
**Ages 7 and younger**

This book follows four children as they try to earn money to buy a puppy. Elizabeth’s mother agrees to help them—if they will let her teach them what God says about money.

Each chapter includes part of the story followed by two activity pages. Activity pages include verses to read and questions to answer, along with something to do. The pages are colorful, and the type is easy to read. The vocabulary is simple enough for young children.

The book deals with the value of the Bible and money, ownership and what belongs to God, stewardship, working for the Lord, giving, saving, being content with what you have, debt, asking for counsel, honesty, knowing Christ, and loving your neighbor.

This book could be used in a family or in a classroom as a social studies project or Bible project.

'THE SECRET
For ages 8 - 12

Four children ask Josh’s grandfather to help them earn money to go to baseball camp. He agrees to help—if they will let him teach them about the financial principles taught in the Bible. Working through *The Secret*, children learn about giving, saving, spending, trusting God, and more.

The book is soft cover with either color or black and white pictures. As with the ABC book, each chapter is followed by activities. There are verses to look up, an activity related to what was learned, and a time to share prayer requests and pray for each other. It is designed to be done in a class setting. Each chapter gives homework to prepare for the next lesson.


### Surviving the Money Jungle
**Junior High**

The resource for this age group is in the form of a workbook. There are 13 chapters. Each chapter is broken into four or five steps. The first step hooks the students’ interest, the second step usually looks at scripture, and the third to fifth steps help the students change their thinking and apply what they have learned.

This book addresses getting free from money trouble, dealing with money worries/trusting God, and working with integrity. It also deals with contentment, spending, debt, honesty, tithing, sharing, and more.

It is geared toward the American culture where students are bombarded with materialism. However, students overseas should be able to understand the different case studies and situations with which they are asked to deal.

Price: Student Edition, $10.95

Get a Grip on Your Money
**Ages 15 - 21**

*Get a Grip on Your Money* offers practical, Bible-based information on such topics as creating a budget, balancing a checkbook, using credit cards wisely, understanding insurance, writing a résumé, and others. It can be used as an individual study or in a small-class setting.

Price: Student Edition, $10.95

Other resources for teens and college-bound students are also available at [www.crown.org](http://www.crown.org). —lw

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1 Reprinted from September 2001 issue of *Educators Teaching Overseas*.

2 All prices are in U.S. dollars.
Home School Family Fitness: A Complete Guide

by Heidi Rosendall

Heidi Rosendall and her husband, Patrick, along with their son and daughter, have worked with the Gbari people in Nigeria for eight years. They spend most of their time in a village of 1,000 people, with occasional visits to the city or main town. Following are their comments about this guide.

Home School Family Fitness: A Complete Guide, Bruce Whitney, Ph.D., Home School Family Fitness Institute, 1998. $18.75

We enjoyed using the Home School Family Fitness book. We did not use it the whole year due to busyness, so this is an assessment based on the time we did use it.

First of all, we liked using the book overall and will probably try to use it again another year.

1. What do you like best about this resource?
   We found the many games and the clear instructions for exercises and games very helpful. The kids particularly loved “Tiger Tails” which got rather hilarious at times. The guide for daily activities was also helpful.

2. How easy/difficult has it been to adapt it to a home-schooling situation overseas?
   The book is geared for home schooling, so we did not have to make any modifications in doing what they suggested.

3. Would you recommend this resource to other families teaching their children in isolated situations? Yes, very much so.

4. For what ages would Family Fitness be appropriate?
   The book seems to be aimed at reaching all school-age children. Our four-year-old daughter participated fully with our six-year-old son and their five-year-old Nigerian friend. We didn’t have as high expectations for our daughter. The book should meet the needs of middle school children even more appropriately. It is a book for the parent to use, and as such, does not have many pictures for children to become interested in. There are some charts. I appreciated the exercises which gave attention to the developing child.

5. Were there goals that Family Fitness didn’t address, that you had to meet in some other way?
   We had no goals, we just knew we ought to do P.E. (Physical Education), so the book more than met our goals. Family Fitness has information on the body for the children to learn, provision was made for setting and keeping records of exercise goals, clear instructions and rationale for exercises and games were given, and the games were creative. There was a basic curriculum/program you could follow throughout the school year which provided for variety and progressive learning.

6. Does it require a lot of hard-to-get equipment?
   It required some basic equipment. We didn’t have anything special and still benefited from the book.

Other comments
The book should be read through ahead of time (each section needs some attention) during a time when some planning and preparation for its best use can be done—before you leave town. Patrick found the layout of the book a little confusing at first, since there are different parts to it. Also, for planning, there are pages that should be photocopied while you’re in town, and it would have been nice to have planned the equipment we did need a bit better. We aren’t going to be looking for another text resource for P.E. next time, but rather, we are hoping to give this one the better chance it deserves. The children still beg their father for P.E. time, so they liked it too.

Editor’s Note: The appendix includes record-keeping journal pages for fitness. It also lists the equipment needed, with a rough estimate of the cost of each.

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