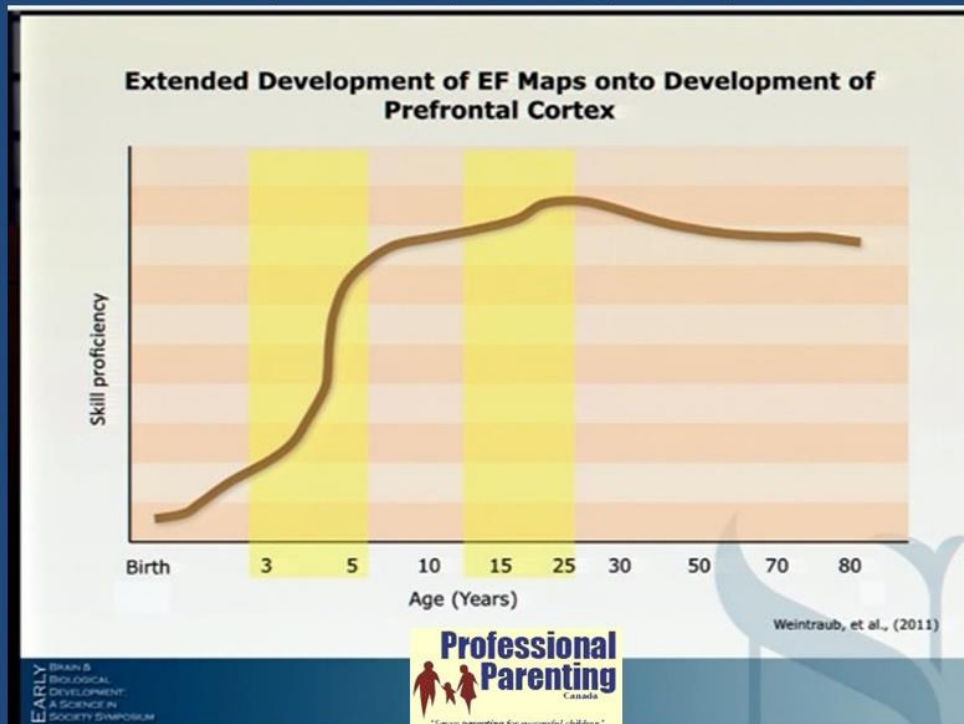


Unschoolers Excel in High School With No Previous Schooling

Posted on October 23, 2020 by Judy Arnall, BA, DTM, CCFE

Executive Function: 1. Focus (filter distractions), 2. Working memory (follow 2 steps), 3. Self-control (inhibitory restraint), 4. Flexibility and Decision-making (Plan B)

Source: Brain Core Story Certification Course, Palix Foundation, Alberta Family Wellness Initiative



Many homeschooling parents and unschooled children do their own thing for grades 1-9 and then sign their kids or self up for high school grades 10-12 at a physical school. Usually there is no report card needed, nor testing for a child to begin a formal high school program. And the kids do wonderfully – academically and socially. Most of the grade 1-9 topics are covered in high school again, but at a higher level because the 15 year old's brain development is proficient enough at thinking abstractly. Because they haven't spent 9 years in a classroom, learners are self-confident, conscientious and eager to learn via classroom delivery. (It might take them awhile to get used to the immaturity of their classmates though.)

How can this happen? Is learning cumulative or absorbed in stages? Do kids not need 9 grades of schooling before high school for preparation? No.

The 15 year old is equipped to learn high school material because they have experiential learning of the education concepts from birth to age 14. Unless they are locked in a room for 15 years or denied access to books or the internet, they are picking up all the knowledge they need at each age and stage. By puberty, the brain is able to process information abstractly and understand theoretical concepts without information being tangible (physical: able to touch, see, hear, smell) or concrete. This means that a child can go from experiential learning (learning through hands-on activities) to a more theoretical learning (reading, analyzing concepts and writing). A teenager is more ready for paper-based learning. A child is not starting at grade 1 when they are age 15. They have still accumulated a massive amount of knowledge, except they did it in an informal way such as self-directed education and observation. This is the stage model of education. Children can learn in different stages because the brain is more developed as the child ages. The brain develops from the back to the front and from the bottom of the brain to the top. At certain ages, different parts of the Cerebral Cortex are sensitive to special types of learning whether motor control, visual processing, language development or mathematical/analytical learning. But these windows of opportunity are never closed to future use.

We used to think that education was cumulative – we put the child on the conveyor belt of education and each grade/year pour more content into their brains, so that by the end of Grade 12, they would have a brain full of knowledge, attitudes and skills. We hoped they would remember everything.

But they didn't. We know now that brains operate on a use-it or lose-it pruning of neurons. If a child doesn't keep using a language they learned at age 5, they will lose it. How many of us remember how to factor trinomials when we don't use it everyday in our work? Yet, we all had to learn it. I was surprised that my 5 adult children didn't remember most of the travels, birthday parties, childhood friends, or the many homeschooling experiences and lessons they did before puberty. I worked so hard to give them a huge range of experiences and learning opportunities. They remembered quite a bit from their teen years, but not much before puberty except a few out-of-the-ordinary moments or events.

We also know that children can learn a new language even as adults because brains never stop learning. In fact, adults can learn anything, anytime. It may not come as readily as when that sensitive window of language learning happens from ages 1-8, but they will learn enough to be proficient for their use.

Which now begs the question, why do we send children to school for 9 years if they don't remember anything? The simple answer is that trains the brain. Learning fires the neurons to connect with each other and form pathways through the brain. But this occurs whether a child is working in a mathbook or playing Fortnite. The real reason we send children to school for grades 1-9 is employment support. When parents need childcare for 7 hours a day, school officials designed a "curriculum" to fill the time and keep the kids occupied. Over 170 years, the education industry, media, and society

contributed to the myth that children only learn in school and absolutely can't learn everything they need elsewhere. With digital access to unlimited education, we now know that learning happens everywhere.

We still need teachers. The best part of school is the relationships they provide to children while facilitating a learning environment. Parents do the same job at home. Most parents can teach grade 1-8 content without teacher's manuals and provide the nurturing, warm relationships that children's brains require.

What this means is that unschooled children are never "behind." They can learn anything, at anytime, as their interest and need dictates and learning never stops. They can start formal direct instruction anytime they wish. For high school. Or not. Many unschoolers teach themselves high school material, write the SATS and move on to post-secondary studies.