Start the Learning Journey:
Seven Ways to Turn Your "Smart" Kids into Great Learners

By Professor Edward D. Hess, author of the new book *Learn or Die: Using Science to Build a Leading-Edge Learning Organization* (Columbia Business School Publishing, 2014, ISBN: 978-0-231-17024-6, $29.95, www.EDHLTD.com)

Every day your kids go to school to learn the "stuff" they're told they'll need to know in order to get into a good college or to get a good job. As a result, their minds, at least for the time being, are stuffed to the gills with information they've usually crammed in mere hours before an important exam. Did they get a good grade on that exam? Sure, maybe. But does that really make them smart? No way.

Parents should take their children's focus off meeting traditional concepts of being smart and instead focus on helping them become great learners. Read on to find out what you can do to help:

Role model the right learning behaviors. Think deeply about how you teach your children at home. When they give you answers, ask them, "Why do you believe that? How do you know that?" Teach them how to test their thinking against reality. Discuss topics about current events and show your willingness to listen carefully to what they say.

Narrate the paradigm shift. It's important that your kids understand that while getting good grades is wonderful and important, there is so much more to success than that. They also need to grasp the difference between truly learning a concept and studying it just long enough to recall it on a test the next day. Explain to them the paradigm shift that is happening. Make sure they understand this learning skill set is important because it will be essential for getting a job in a world where human contributions are idea- and innovation-based.

Get involved in your local schools. Understand what your children are learning and what they are not learning. Advocate that your schools teach more of the skills that your children will need to do well in a world of smart robots and smart machines. Take action to get more funding for schools, more teachers trained in the needed skills, and more learning-by-doing activities.

Reward your children at the right times. Instead of rewarding good grades, reward them for working hard and trying new things. That means if you see your child working hard on an assignment or you know they've put in extra time and effort to really grasp a concept, reward them even when that hard work doesn't translate to a good grade. Similarly, if you see them take the initiative to learn more about a topic—for example, if they choose to read a book, for fun, about Abraham Lincoln after learning about the Gettysburg Address—be sure to let them know you're proud of their efforts to seek out new knowledge.

Change the way you deal with mistakes. Quit punishing mistakes and instead use them as learning opportunities. For example, when your child brings home their next test, work with

them on going back over each question they missed. Make sure they understand why they got the question wrong. Often, this kind of revision is what helps a topic really sink in for them.

Engage in exploration. Go on family outings to local museums. Spend an afternoon on a creative activity, such as "inventing" a new product using items from around the house. Do science experiments with them. All of these activities are opportunities to learn the basics of good critical and innovative thinking and to get comfortable with making mistakes.

Take advantage of outside resources. Good resources can be found at the Microsoft Educator Network. Google also provides great materials you can use to teach your children how to solve complex problems via its "Exploring Computational Thinking." Harvard University's Graduate School of Education Project Zero has very good work on "Visible Thinking" for children. Another great way to find learning development resources is to search for materials on the websites of reputable education and psychology departments, such as those at Stanford University, Johns Hopkins University, Carnegie Mellon University, Harvard University, and the University of Minnesota. Other good resources are CASEL.org, the National Math and Science Initiative, Plato-Philosophy.org, and the Foundation for Critical Thinking.

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