

A Professional Development
Journal for Homeschool Teachers

Morning Coffee

A hand wearing a black and white striped long-sleeved shirt is pouring white milk from a small glass bottle into a glass mason jar mug. The mug already contains a brown liquid, likely coffee. To the right of the mug is a tall, clear glass bottle filled with green eucalyptus leaves. The background is a dark, textured wall.

DENISE GASKINS

Author of *Let's Play Math: How Families Can Learn Math Together and Enjoy It*

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One of the best ways we can help our children learn mathematics (or anything else) is to be lifelong learners ourselves.

Here are a few stories to read as you sip your morning brew . . .

That Moment of Epiphany

Dan Meyer wrote about the importance of [Teaching the Long Cut Before the Short Cut](#):

“It would have been quite easy, nothing at all really, to share the epiphany with students, to share the short cut, to tell my kid that these are all the even numbers and here is where you’ll find them, to tell the seventh graders that if they combine like terms first they’ll see I’m asking them to do the same thing twice.

*“In both cases, however, it seemed useful to let the kids experience the long cut first, both so the short cut might make more sense and also because **it feels good to feel your existing knowledge wake up, stretch out, and turn into something new.**”*

—DAN MEYER

For the same reason, I’ve spent years fighting against the idea of teaching children to memorize math facts. (For example, see [The Necessity of Math Facts](#).) Most kids are capable of learning those early single-digit additions and multiplications by rote, but it’s so much more useful—and fun!—to explore the math for themselves, to see how numbers work together, building mental relationships.

*“We don’t teach children how to learn, how to make mental connections, because they’ve been doing it from birth. It’s not that some kids are able to make mental connections, but others need us to do it for them. Children **must** make their own connections. No one else can do it for them.”*

—DENISE GASKINS

Which reminded me of Teacher Tom’s argument that [Understanding Must Precede Algorithms and Rules](#):

“Whenever we find ourselves relying too much on rules, we must ask ourselves if what we are expecting of the children is appropriate. I mean, if we need rules and algorithms, then maybe the kids simply aren’t capable of understanding and we’re just, at best, wasting everyone’s time.”

—TOM HOBSON

May you always enjoy the adventure of learning!

Denise Gaskins

Narration: Explain Dan Meyer’s distinction between a “short cut” and a “long cut.” How does teaching the long cut lead to moments of epiphany?

What is the difference between “arbitrary” and “necessary” knowledge.
Give some examples of each type.

Consider your interactions with children. Do you catch yourself falling into
a “train the puppies to obey” attitude?

This week, how can you give your students the freedom to explore
necessary knowledge, to see for themselves the patterns and relationships
behind the surface-level facts?

A person is hiking on a mountain trail at sunset. The hiker is wearing a blue jacket, a backpack, and a hat, and is using a trekking pole. The background features a large, bright moon in a dark blue sky, with silhouettes of evergreen trees and mountains in the foreground. The overall scene is serene and adventurous.

Discover the World of Mathematics

Textbooks make math feel like a ladder to climb, rung by rung, working systematically from one topic to the next. But that's an illusion.

Learning math is more like taking a meandering hike, charting our own new path through the wilderness. Students need to wander around concepts, notice how things relate, wonder about patterns, and enjoy the journey.

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Instead, we need to focus our math lessons on ideas, on how our children are reasoning and figuring things out.

And when we make mathematical thinking our goal, the right answers will come along as a side-effect, a natural result of making sense of the math.

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—Denise Gaskins



Tabletop Academy Press publishes playful math books for parents who want to help their children build the understanding and skills they need to succeed in school and beyond.

Homeschoolers, afterschoolers, unschoolers, and even classroom teachers appreciate our flexible approach that can work alongside any math curriculum.

Visit us today:
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