

## CHAPTER 1

### WHY HAVE A HOME NURSERY SCHOOL?

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Nearly twenty-six years ago when our oldest son, Matthew, was four, I explored the various nursery schools to which we might send him. The choice was based on the school's reputation, cost, the distance from our home, and other factors. Eventually, we narrowed our choice down to two.

The first was a co-op group that was inexpensive, but the mothers were required to help a certain amount of time each month. With two other pre-schoolers, I would have had to find a baby-sitter for them on those days, which was an impossibility, both from a cost and a time standpoint.

The second school required no time on my part, and, though quite expensive, it seemed the best choice with my time limitations.

After several weeks, however, I found my son becoming increasingly unhappy. He enjoyed school, but he would return home tense and demanding. In addition, he acquired some new words I didn't like. I felt that something was going wrong somewhere.

It was at this time that my husband and I sat down to analyze exactly what our purpose was in sending Matthew to preschool. We knew we wanted him to gain social skills before he started kindergarten and become familiar with a school learning structure. Furthermore, we wanted to help him broaden his horizons and become acquainted with the world in which he lived. As we talked about what we wanted for him, an idea began to form—why couldn't we have our own nursery school just for our children? The more we thought about it, the better the idea sounded.

We talked with several preschool experts in both public and private schools. One of these "experts" said she personally would like to see all families do what we were considering. She felt that the nurturing time between a mother and child during the preschool years was much more important than the associations he could be making with other children.

With this kind of encouragement, I read numerous books and periodicals on the subject. I studied the curriculum used in the child development preschool at a nearby state university. I talked to teachers and visited a number of preschools. Then, on a trial-and-error basis, I developed our program. As our children grew, their needs and situations varied. Nursery school time was always adapted to each child's needs and his/her interest span.

When my youngest child turned five, she was one week behind the cutoff for kindergarten. So that year, I put her into a mother's morning-out program once a week besides *Teach Me Mommy*, so she could begin to associate with other children in a learning situation. Does that surprise you to learn that? No, remember that my philosophy about pre-schooling (and it should be yours too) is that your program should meet the needs of **your** child. That doesn't mean that you send him off to a commercial nursery school at the age of two. A balance should be made which is in the best interests of each of your children. Keep them with you as long as possible!

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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### **How old should a child be to begin home preschool?**

Three years old, or two years before the child will begin school, is a good time to start. That doesn't mean you shouldn't spend activity time with younger children. Reading to children should start from the time that they are babies, and there should always be time spent in finger plays, painting, playing with play dough, etc. However, by age three, most children have a long enough attention span to appreciate and enjoy a more structured learning situation.

### **We live in an area with very few children for my son to play with. Don't I need to send him to a preschool, so he can have interaction with other children before he begins kindergarten?**

The answer to this depends upon how old the child is. If he is three or under, I would say, "No!" He can become just as autonomous on his own at this time alone with you than with others. This can be the time to build his skills—listening, drawing, thinking, counting—then he will have the self-confidence he needs when he is with other children more. If he will be starting school in a year, short periods of time (2–3 hours) two or three times a week are a good way to introduce him to situations involving other children and social experiences. You could contact other mothers and have a play group where the children would rotate homes and spend a morning or two a week together.

### **I am a working parent but would like to spend some quality time with my child every day. How can I best utilize your book?**

The units and days are organized so that you can select how many activities you use and how many books you read. The preparation time is minimal. The book is set up to coincide with the school year with lesson plans for three days each week. If you are not going to be able to spend that much time, you may want to eliminate a chapter from time to time, to coordinate your lessons with the seasons. I know a divorced father who has his preschooler on the weekend. He uses *Teach Me Mommy* to have activities planned when he sees his daughter.

### **I have three preschoolers. How can *Teach Me Mommy* work for me?**

I always tried to time our nursery school activities so that the baby was down for a nap. When I have had younger children "attending" too, their attention span has naturally not been as long, so I also tried to provide them with other toys to amuse themselves at the same time.

### **Won't a child be poorly adjusted in kindergarten if he hasn't attended a commercial preschool program?**

Our children have had no problems adjusting to school and leaving home for that time each day. Rather, since they had adjusted to learning situations in our home, they were eager and willing to start kindergarten. Their teachers have frequently commented that they are confident and knowledgeable in so many subjects. They have interaction with other children at church and in our neighborhood, so it has not been hard for them to make the adjustments to being with other children in school.

The results of research conducted internationally supports my own experience. In an excellent review of studies undertaken in 13 countries to determine results of various types and settings of preschool instruction, the first two of five generalizations that emerge are these:

- "There is *widespread evidence* that participating in a *preschool program* promotes cognitive development in the short term and *prepares children to succeed in school*.
- "There is *no strong or consistent evidence* that the *form* of the preschool experience (pedagogic approach, daily schedule, or setting [i.e., home preschool vs. commercial preschool]) influences long-term outcomes for children."

The reviewer goes on to cite a massive study in the U.K.: "Comparisons among children who attended play groups, private or public nursery schools, or no preschool at all showed that *experience in any preschool* (including play groups) contributed to cognitive development and school achievement throughout the period studied. Disadvantaged children gained slightly more from attending preschool

than did more advantaged children. Contrary to the researchers' expectations, preschool experience did not affect aspects of children's socioemotional development, such as self-concept, skill in getting along with other children, or their ability to apply themselves to schoolwork."

The researchers concluded that "*preschool experience per se had more influence on children's subsequent development than the type of preschool attended. 'Provided the child receives proper care, has interesting activities and other children to play with (which are common elements in the majority of preschool institutions), the actual type of preschool experience matters very little.'*" (Italics mine. Source: *Early Childhood Programs in Other Nations: Goals and Outcomes*, Sarane Spence Boocock Ph.D., professor of sociology at the Graduate School of Education at Rutgers University, 1995. Available online at: [http://www.futureofchildren.org/lto/05\\_lto.htm](http://www.futureofchildren.org/lto/05_lto.htm))

Of course, every child is different and so I say again, **meet your child's needs.**

**I don't have a lot of free time in my day. Can I really do preschool teaching successfully?**

If you're like most (68%) of the mothers in America with children at home, you are in the labor force. There is a definite amount of time involved in preparation and organization for each day's study. Hopefully, this manual will make it easier for you. Even if one doesn't have to work, we all spend time each week doing housework, cooking meals, preparing for church, and volunteering in the community, etc. Isn't time spent with our children well worth it? After the initial preparation and material gathering, the work is minimal.

**I run a preschool. Your ideas are excellent. Can I adapt them?**

Certainly. Sometimes the phraseology needs to be changed. In units such as Chapter 4, Day 1, Who is in My Family?, you may want to have each child bring a picture of his/her whole family to share. You can put the pictures on a bulletin board for the week. If you have children of other nationalities or ethnic groups, their parents could be good resources for the December holiday chapter.

**I have found that I need to go back to work. How can I choose a nursery school or day care center for my preschooler?**

That is a very important but sometimes difficult question to answer. Here are some criteria you might want to use:

- Ask other mothers about different schools and what they liked or disliked about each. Of course, everyone's opinion is different, but it should help you narrow down the field.
- Talk to the school director and determine his or her philosophy about preschool education. Some may put a lot of emphasis on play, while others may emphasize intense learning. Only you can determine what approach you want to see used with your child.
- Visit the school and sit in a classroom to get a feel for the attitudes of the teachers. This will tell you a lot about the atmosphere there. Plan on spending at least 30 minutes.
- Check on the ratio of children to teacher. Eight or ten to one is ideal. If there is a large class with only one teacher and no assistants, you can be sure that there will be neglect for many (even though the teacher wants to meet everyone's needs).
- Determine what kind of training and background the teacher has had. I was surprised to learn that many states have no requirements as to training and teacher competency when giving preschool licenses. A teacher doesn't need to have a college degree, but they should have had some education in preschool or young child instruction.

You still should try to have your own nurturing time with your child, however, whether he is in someone else's nursery school or not. The activities in this book will help you do this with a minimum of time and preparation.

**Just out of curiosity, how did *your* children do in school, now that they are nearly all grown?**

I have just one child at home now—Brittany, a senior in high school—so I think I can look back with some perspective. From the outset, my primary objective was not to have my children be accelerated beyond their peers. Instead, my primary objective was to *nurture* them by *spending time* with them and *strengthening the natural bonds* between mother and child. I hesitate to respond to your question for fear of appearing immodest, but I believe that ***Teach Me Mommy*** and the time I was able to spend with my children in this program contributed significantly to the fact that:

- all seven of our children were invited to be in gifted programs in their schools
- two were National Merit Finalists and two were Semi-Finalists
- three were presidents of the National Honor Society (an academic honors society for high school students)
- four were school newspaper editors
- six graduated, or will graduate, in the top 5% of their class
- two were finalists in Governor's Honors for the State of Georgia
- two were STAR students (highest SAT scores)
- they have so far earned nearly \$100,000 in tax-free scholarships for college
- all benefited from taking Advanced-Placement courses which gave them college credit and saved them and us thousands more by testing out of many lower-level college courses

The last two points are important, because there was no way we could get all these kids through college on my husband's income alone! The older children are currently in graduate programs (medical and dental schools) or are married or both and the younger ones (except Brittany) are undergraduates or married or both. Again, academic achievement was not our primary objective. It was an unplanned yet happy result of the time we spent together.

Lest you be concerned that these children excelled only academically, we have had five Eagle Scouts, one Atlanta Football Club Scholar Athlete, three All-State Orchestra or All-State Chorus finalists, six student body or senior class officers and one Miss Teen Of Georgia, as well. There are many other things that go into raising successful children besides preschool. I believe, however, that the foundation laid in our ***Teach Me Mommy*** program gave them a significant head start. We feel extremely fortunate and grateful that each one continues to do well.

## **IN CONCLUSION**

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As I consider our home nursery program that began so many years ago, I have reached the following conclusions:

- It was a wonderful opportunity for me to spend quality, nurturing time with my children. I don't know a child who wouldn't rather spend time with his own mother playing, reading, and learning.
- When our baby was awake and our two-year old was restless, the ratio of teacher to child was still only one to three, which is much better than in any commercial nursery program.
- Nursery school has been a good opportunity for my older children to help prepare things for the little ones to use. They helped mount pictures and clip stories. Many times, the one in kindergarten told a story he had read or something he had done in school that I could use. On days when my older children were out of school because of snow, they have even been the teachers.
- I also have been able to control the material used to teach my children. My purpose in having a home nursery school was not to try to teach our children to read or count at a young age, but for them to look to their parents as a source of knowledge and understanding. I didn't pressure our children to develop more quickly than they were ready. However, I did teach our children skills such as the handling of scissors and the use of crayons, glue, and books. I also tried to help them have confidence in their ability to learn things and to understand what others will be teaching them in the future.

The most important thing is that you spend time with your children! The time that a parent has with a child before he starts school is so short. It is important that children have the loving attention of their parents as much as possible.

Once, after one of our children visited an excellent nursery school in a former community, he came home saying that he liked our nursery school better, because he could be with Mommy. That assured me that all the effort was worth it. There are few joys equal to teaching your children within the walls of your own home!