

## Unschooling into College

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The day before Cassidy started college, he showed me his text books and predicted that he would make the Dean's List. I was glad to hear that he was so confident, but had a few (unexpressed, I'm proud to say) doubts. After all, this would be his first experience with formal learning. All his life he had decided what, when, how, and with whom he would learn. We trusted him to be learning all the time, even though what he chose to do almost never looked like "Education." We didn't use text books, lessons, tests, or grades. We tried to answer his questions and help him gain access to the real world when he asked for assistance. We tried to give him only as much help or information as he wanted, without turning every question into a "Learning Opportunity." We didn't divide the world into subjects like math, handwriting, spelling, yet he learned all that in the process of living his life.

This is also his first time living away from home. He chose Hunter College because he wanted to live in New York City. By the time he decided to apply it was too late to get into a dorm, so he had to find an apartment and roommates--again without much assistance from us. I believe he got more of an education in that month of apartment hunting than he will in four years of college.

And what about socialization? During his growing up years he mostly had one or two good friends at a time and they went to school, so he spent a lot of time alone. Now he lives with two roommates and has a "posse" of friends at school--a social butterfly has emerged from his cocoon.

Yes, Cassidy made the Dean's List. Does this mean that unschooling is the method I'm recommending as a way to turn kids into scholars? No. I believe that all of us are brilliant and talented in our own way. Howard Gardner, Harvard scholar and author of Multiple Intelligences and The Unschooled Mind and much more, identifies seven kinds of intelligence. All of us are born with varying degrees of spatial, musical, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, logical-mathematical, and linguistic intelligence. About 25% of people fall into the logical-mathematical and linguistic end of the spectrum. They learn best through activities that most people think of as "education" or "schooling" or "intelligence." That means 75% of the population is intelligent and learns best in other ways. When we try to squeeze them into the book-learning mold, we are squashing their brilliance, reducing their intelligence and often breaking their spirits.

John Holt said: "The most important question any thinking creature can ask itself is 'What is worth thinking about?' When we deny its right to decide that for itself, when we try to control what it can attend to and think about, we make it less observant, resourceful, and adaptive -- in a word, less intelligent, in a blunter word, more stupid. Intelligence is not the measure of how much we know how to do but of how we behave when we don't know what to do. It has to do with our ability to think up important questions and then to find ways to get useful answers. This ability is not a trick that can be taught, nor does it need to be. We are born with it, and if our other deep animal needs are fairly well satisfied, and we have reasonable access to the world around us, we will put it to work on that world."

All children are born with the drive - the need - to grow into responsible, effective adults who fit into and contribute to their families, communities, and the world. Can you imagine what would have happened to the human race thousands of years ago if this were not true? It's a natural process. but parents and teachers can thwart nature by trying to force (or motivate, bribe, trick, persuade, or coerce) children into ways of learning and being that go against their wonderful, brilliant, unique intelligence.

Trust your children to choose the activities and ideas that promote their lifelong learning and growth.

