

## OTHER CONTRIBUTIONS

### **Caesurae in Home Education: Losing Control, Gaining Perspective...**

Alice Khimasia  
Independent Scholar

Asked to write about our home education, with the pressure of a deadline, I am somewhat uninspired.

This is because home educators find themselves on a journey and, inevitably, there are twists and turns in the road, steep hills to climb, as well as glorious descents when we can coast along and feel the winds of liberty rushing past our ears. The steep hills can be especially difficult for the majority of us who were schooled ourselves, and are exacerbated for those of us who went on to train as teachers and so were further entrenched in the system of institutionalised schooling and its ideas.

For our family, the past few years in our home education journey have been bumpy due to life events. Most notably the arrival of a baby in 2012 and a rather stressful house move in 2014.

In my mind, these events have meant caesurae: pauses, interruptions and temporary cessations in our boys' education. In reality, this is not the case. The caesurae are not in the children's learning. Children learn, and they will not be interrupted. The caesurae are within my own sense of being in control, of being on top of their education, of holding it all together.

Whether our children are in school or out, it is the nature of parenthood to worry. In times of turbulence, worried that we are failing in our educational efforts, it is difficult to enthuse about what we are doing. However, it seems to me the caesurae are important and worthy of examination.

So often as a home educator, I feel the biggest hindrance to the boys' learning is me, with all my preconceived ideas and misconceptions about how their learning should look. What happens when life events divert my attention elsewhere, when caesurae remove me from the equation and the children are free to learn as they dictate?

Following our move last year, it has been enough each day just to keep our heads above water and stay afloat. In the chaos of boxes, builders and disorganisation, it has been difficult to manage even a basic list of daily tasks for the boys. Against my natural tendency towards hyper-organisation, life has swept us off-script in a way which I have found terrifying, depressing and liberating in equal measure. My carefully laminated chore rotas, and even our daily read-alouds, have been pushed aside by the

immediate urgency of just coping with the day's demands. How does home education look then in such a caesura?

Our eldest son (age 13) has a fascination with cars. Recently, he decided to start his own youtube channel and set up a "studio" area at his desk. He has been making videos which focus on different car parts and to do this, he has made models out of Lego Technic, and researched chemical reactions and how engines work. His communication and presentation skills have improved with each video. He phoned a couple of local garages and was able to go in and look at cars on the ramp, talking to the mechanics and filming their explanations. He has favourite youtube channels of his own, which he watches to glean more understanding and he has asked for his grandparents' car when they replace it, so he can further his understanding by tinkering with his own engine. Never a keen reader, he has also been enjoying the entire Harry Potter series on audio, spending hours listening to these stories in his room.

Our second son (age 11) loves cooking. He watches cookery programmes, and would happily bake every day. He also enjoys art and music, and plays the guitar. He is entirely self-taught and plays by ear. He plays alongside others, and picks up tips about how to improve, then practises at home. Last year, he decided that to develop his art and music, it would be useful to have an iPad. He did a lot of research to find out whether the device was worth its price tag, and saved hard. Since buying the iPad, he has spent a lot of time

figuring out what he can do with it, connecting with friends online and trialling various art and music packages. He has also spent a lot of time recently developing a gaming youtube channel with a friend. He has become quite technically minded, and enjoys helping to fix technical problems that arise at home.

Minecraft has been a particular fixation with our second and third sons. They spend a lot of time creating their worlds and connecting with their friends. Our second son recently wrote a Minecraft guide and spent a whole day engrossed in this task. As the boys are all reluctant writers, this was a fantastic thing for me to observe. Our third son (age eight) spends a lot of his time either with Lego or Minecraft. He has created his own range of Lego sports cars, and is also interested in buildings and architecture. He has enjoyed constructing 3D puzzles and learning about the world's landmarks. Now he builds his own landmarks using Minecraft.

We have a fourth son who is almost three. I have enjoyed observing his development at home with his brothers, especially the way his language has matured over the past year. He is very eloquent for his age, and has a fantastic general knowledge gleaned from spending time with us all. At the moment he is interested in toileting, and has a favourite body book which he loves to look at whilst discussing the process of digestion in considerable detail.

In all of these projects, the boys are intrinsically motivated and they seem to know in which direction they want to develop their interest. We are just alongside them to provide the environment, materials, encouragement and sounding board they might need.

Learning in these examples begins with the learner. It is not driven by my learning objective, or by a teacher, a curriculum or an exam. The learning is also taking place in a real life context. Tasks are done with real objectives and purpose, not in a vacuum. Therefore the learning is remembered. It becomes a part of a child's experience and development, a peg upon which future explorations will hang. In this way, a child's web of understanding about the world expands.

In addition to these child-led initiatives, there is ample time for play, and often the boys' games are rich in storytelling. They are the Three Musketeers, a pirate crew, cowboys in the Wild West. Lego mini-figures embark on space adventures, and rockets, space stations and alien worlds can all be created as the story unfolds. Such games transcend age and gender, and the more often they can be played outside, the better.

There are also the opportunities presented by the life events which have caused the caesurae—so the arrival of a baby presents opportunities to learn about reproduction, childcare and to bond with a new sibling in ways which would not be possible were much time spent separated by school; a new house has presented many opportunities for the

boys to learn practical skills such as decorating. Our recent extension and the presence of builders stirred our eldest son's interest in what they were doing, and he spent many hours in conversation with them, not only acquiring knowledge about house renovations, but also experiencing the valuable company of older men who were willing to share their working day with this interested youngster.

Five years into our home education, I have just begun a little technology club where children aged four to thirteen come together to work alongside one another on a project. This week was our first and they made colour spinners. I wanted the children to run with the project, so we gave them the instructions and off they went. I wanted them to be able to talk to each other and to develop their own ideas. It was wonderful to see how each child extended the project in their own way ending up with a unique interpretation of the initial task. So one boy's spinner had blades which made a sun shape when it span; another adapted the circuitry using Lego Technic to extend the task and his own understanding; one child made the spinner into a fan, another into a flying saucer. They gathered together at the end and shared their ideas enthusiastically, clearly all so engaged and thrilled with what they had created. Their learning moved from the basic to new heights of which, as the "teacher," I would never even have thought.

Ultimately, as John Holt wisely said, it is about trust. "Trust children. Nothing could be more simple or more difficult."

## OTHER CONTRIBUTIONS *Caesurae in Home Education*

Can we trust children to acquire the skills they need to walk into their future and to live their life? How can we know what knowledge will be required as our children grow up? In a technological world, the acquisition of facts is no longer really important. What our children need are skills; in particular the ability to learn for themselves whatever it is that they need to learn.

Tempting as it is, therefore, to dig the canal and direct children from A to B, the picture of learning these caesurae reveal is more that of a meandering brook. We may not plan each twist and turn, but we trust that ultimately the water will flow to its destination. And we hope without our intervention, the child's journey of self-discovery will be all the more beautiful.

### **Author Details**

Alice Khimasia lives in the West Midlands. She and her husband home educate their four sons, and he works as a freelance teacher. She can be contacted via her blog: [www.organiced.blogspot.co.uk](http://www.organiced.blogspot.co.uk).



This work by Alice Khimasia is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 Unported](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/)