

School, Job, Socializing - It's all an education

By Jennifer Harrison

The late, great John Dewey - American philosopher, psychologist, and educational reformer (not the decimal-system mastermind we grizzled GenXers heeded in high school) – once said, “Education, therefore, is a process of living and not a preparation for future living.” And what does that mean? In a nutshell: just going through life it its own education.

To wit...

I'm not ashamed to admit it, but from the time my children started school, I instituted an annual Hooky Day. One arbitrary day every spring, I would drop off one of my daughters at school then luxuriously pootle past the other's drop-off line before darting past the backpack-burdened masses and toward a clandestine adventure. Each year, each girl received her own, individualized day of unschooling to break the boredom of bookwork and excite their minds (and mom).

Some of the outings were the proverbial slam-dunk: leading my eye-shielded eight year old down the city sidewalk and depositing her beneath Wicked's Broadway marquee; maneuvering life-sized chess pieces as we laughed at Staten Island's Children's Museum; racing across Asbury Park's shoreline. Some, not so much (I'm looking at you, Hoboken puppet show). But whatever the escapade and the reception it received, each managed to emerge as at least equally valuable as anything my kids could have done that day with number two pencil or notebook – these experiences illuminated, inspired, and exposed the girls to something unexpected. In short, they were all learning experiences.

Understandably, this practice isn't always possible for parents; some jobs aren't structured to allow for spontaneous capers, money tends to get tight from time to time, and I've heard lore of administrators who like to pour punch on other people's bonfires (psssssss...). And that's ok. Because in reality, the play's not always the thing, despite Shakespeare's dictum – it's the ethos of the event that matters. Or, plainly, it doesn't really matter what you do, there's something to be gotten from everything.

When we are in school, we are directed to lessons, often told what to consume and how, and sometimes instructed as to how to process it all. And this is entirely utilitarian, indisputably productive.

Education: check.

At work, while we acclimate to our duties, there are always problem-solving opportunities, interactions with others, and the growth we experience by simply showing up every day with resolve. A day's work has undeniable merit for the mind.

Education: check (and paycheck!).

And out in the community, by moving among diverse populations, planning and pivoting in our approaches to making our way through the day, and occasionally taking delicious risks – whether by walking farther than we thought our legs could carry us or asking a stranger where to get the best cheesesteak in town (if you know, by the way, please contact me at helpdesk@planningforadulthood.org...) – we widen our lives and grow our souls.

Education: you betcha.

It's all learning, after all, whether with IEP or simply OUT and (ab)OUT. The more we experience, the more we expand. So, in honor of Special Education Week, let's commit to making all of our education special, every indulgent moment of it.