

Decoding your son's learning style

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I HAD HEARD rumblings in the schoolyard that the transition into Grade 1 could be tough, especially for a child starting a French immersion program. With great relief, I watched my son Josh adapt very well. It was only after receiving an ominous note from his teacher that I realized there were issues.

“Josh is having trouble with his fine motor skills and is falling behind.”

I panicked. This cannot be my child. My genes are smart. The teacher must be mistaken.

Once Josh started bringing his work home, it was clear she wasn't exaggerating. His handwriting was verging on illegible. His worksheets were incomplete. His numbers and letters were often backwards.

At home, persuading my son to do his homework was a nightmare. He'd moan, crumpling into a pile on the floor. I want my son to love the process of learning. Clearly, we were not on the right path.

If Josh wouldn't do his homework, I'd do mine. I contacted Barry Macdonald, author of *Boys Smarts: Mentoring Boys for Success at School* and leading educator who counsels schools and parents on how best to teach boys.

First, Barry believes teaching should be left to the teacher. However, it is imperative we communicate with teachers to express concerns and insights about our children. If the teacher isn't receptive to adapting their technique, a conversation with the principal would be the

next step. Incorporating humour into the learning process is essential. Research has shown that by making learning fun it literally activates the whole brain.

Another key to learning is the child's state of mind. The ultimate headspace for enhanced retention is relaxed alertness. When stressed, a portion of the brain shuts down. This resonated with me. My son is an introvert. Put him in a boisterous social situation, he shuts down. He needs one-on-one attention.

Be mindful of double discipline. For example, when a child brings home a bad report card it doesn't help if parents openly express their disappointment in the child. Rather, our job is to help build the child's self-esteem and foster a love of learning.

And finally, Barry stresses the importance of understanding your child's developmental stage. No matter how great the teacher, if the child's brain isn't ready to learn what's being taught, it just won't sink in ... yet.

Armed with this information, I nervously sat down with Josh's teacher for our mid-year report card chat. To my delight, she was receptive to all the quirky insight I had about Josh and agreed it would be best to reshape her teaching approach with him.

Which goes to show, if you do your homework, you get results. I'm looking forward to the day my son is able to understand this.