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My Stay-at-Home Education

By Katherine Padilla

Shortly after I married, I was assigned as a visiting teacher to another married woman who was a few years older than I was and had a child. She was a university student, and when she told my companion and me about her educational and career plans, she declared, “I will not stay home and be stupid!”

As I listened to the woman’s tirade, I wondered why anyone would think a woman who chose to stay home full-time with her children was destined to be stupid. Why not stay home and be smart?

Not long after this incident I had my first child and began my career as a full-time homemaker, wife, and mother. From the beginning I was determined to “stay home and be smart.”

Now, looking back on the past 21 years, I have come up with seven ideas for improving oneself while staying at home.

1. Develop new skills as you take care of your children and your home. If we mothers made a list of all the things we have learned from our experiences, I think most of us would be amazed. Through mothering, not only can we develop character traits such as patience and long-suffering, but we can also learn practical skills.

With seven children, I get plenty of practice using first-aid skills. I have learned how to diagnose simple illnesses, saving me money and time because I don’t have to take my children to the doctor for every little thing. I have also learned how to give basic haircuts, something I never would have done had I not become a mother.

Often we think of homemaking as only cooking, cleaning, sewing, and doing crafts, when in reality it is a far more comprehensive art. For example, I have researched and found

out how to take care of the walnut tree in our backyard, how to organize my home for more space, how to make drapes and other home furnishings, and how to manage money.

2. *Read good books.* Finding time to read has not been difficult for me. I read while I'm watching my children play outside and when I need to unwind. The key, I think, is to turn off the TV.

It is not only important to read but to read *well*. I look for books that meet Church standards, that are well written, and that are both entertaining and enlightening. The entertainment factor helps me relax and forget my worries for a while; the enlightenment factor lifts me and gives my mind something interesting to think about while I'm taking care of the more mundane tasks of the day.

3. *Sharpen talents by developing meaningful hobbies.* My primary hobby is writing novels. In doing this, I have become more proficient in using a computer, and I have become a more logical thinker. My spelling and vocabulary have improved, and I have developed research skills as I have sought information on interesting topics such as archaeology, architecture, classical music, and medicine.

I find that hobbies are more fulfilling if I can incorporate them into my homemaking responsibilities. What does novel writing have to do with homemaking? Plenty! I can use the skills I've learned to help my children with their own stories and research papers. I know how to find information easily, so going to the library is a pleasure for my children, and the Internet has become an exciting educational tool.

In learning how to construct a long, complex story, I've learned how to distinguish a good story from a poor one. This skill not only helps me choose books but also helps me choose videos, and as I discuss these choices with my children, they learn how to be more conscientious readers and viewers.

4. *Accept callings in the Church and work hard to fulfill them.* I regard callings as laboratories in the Lord's university. The wonderful thing about enrollment in the Lord's program is that we each have our own personal educational track. Through callings we may learn how to plan and create lessons, and we may receive opportunities to study gospel topics in great depth. We may be asked to give talks, helping us to become better public speakers. Often we are asked to work with people we don't know well, and we are therefore required to develop social skills. We learn to manage and organize, and we develop and magnify our spiritual gifts.

We can also hone artistic talents and practical skills through our callings. In high school I took a calligraphy class. Over the years, I have enjoyed using that skill to make posters for classes I've taught and for advertising ward events.

Sometimes we receive callings that require skills we haven't developed yet. When I was called to be the Scout leader for the 11-year-olds in my ward, my husband laughed. He knew better than anyone that the only thing I wanted to do outdoors was sit in a lawn

chair and read. Despite my dread, I accepted the calling. Several years ago I could have told you that I have a couple of maple trees in my yard. Now I can identify all the trees in my yard and also many of the wildflowers that grow there. Because of this calling I have acquired an appreciation for nature that I would not have had otherwise, and I enjoy being outdoors more than I ever did before.

5. Use community resources. I've enjoyed attending plays and concerts in my community and exploring museums and historical sites. If time and resources allow, a mother can benefit from taking a class through a community education program or at a college or university if one is nearby. Correspondence courses are another option. Book clubs or other discussion groups can also help us increase our knowledge of a wide variety of subjects, while helping us develop friendships at the same time.

6. Take time for personal scripture study, temple attendance, prayer, and journal writing. When I am regularly engaging in all four of these pursuits, everything else in my life goes better. When I am doing these things, I am able to keep my priorities in the right place, I have more confidence, and I'm more willing to try new things and reach out to people. I have also found that when I'm spiritually awake, I'm *mentally* awake. The things I learn from other sources then become more meaningful and memorable.

7. Work toward goals. I work on one or two goals at a time until those skills or habits become a part of my life. I try to be flexible. There are times in my life, such as during my pregnancies, when I have to put aside some of my larger goals. During these times I try to take note of any progress I make in any area, however small. Perhaps all I can do during such times is finish reading a book, but I may have learned one new thing from my reading. That may be a tiny step, but it's still progress.

A Privilege and an Opportunity

Many women believe they need to be gainfully employed to develop their talents. In my own life the opposite has been true. I feel I have been better able to develop my skills because I have not been distracted by income-earning pursuits.

Homemaking is a combination of career, calling, and consecration. We normally think of a career as lasting until we retire. Callings, even the calling to be a full-time missionary, are usually temporary. But homemaking is eternal in its focus and destiny. Homemaking is both a privilege and an opportunity. I can't think of anything I would rather do than "stay home and be smart."

QUOTE:

A Noble Profession

"Teach your daughters to prepare for life's greatest career—that of homemaker, wife, and mother. Teach them to love home because you love home. Teach them the importance of being a full-time mother in the home.

“My eternal companion has wisely counseled mothers: ‘Radiate a spirit of contentment and joy with homemaking. You teach by example your attitude toward homemaking. Your attitude will say to your daughters, ‘I am only a housewife.’ Or it will convey, ‘Homemaking is the highest, most noble profession to which a woman might aspire.’ ”

President Ezra Taft Benson (1899–1994), “To the Young Women of the Church,”
Ensign, Nov. 1986, 84–85.