

Homeschool curriculum for Zazu Alhadeff-Racker
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I. Hands-On Learning/ Learning by Doing

Example #1

Building our biocentric eco-art home has inspired the perfect homeschool opportunity for Zazu. It spurred an amazing hands-on opportunity to teach him about co-responsibility and living wisdom. We called the learning opportunity “Adventures in Ideas; Adventures in Action.” The word *educate* means “to draw out.” Our bus-to-home transformation began with curiosity, and further built on body confidence and creative experiments. Our topics of study included physics, engineering, math, chemistry, art, geography, history, current affairs, writing, reading, creative visualization, inquiry-based challenges that encourage real Zero Waste in which all by-products are reintegrated into use-systems.

We explore how to live with a sense of playful responsibility through deep empathy. We investigate what it is like to live within a human-scale economy, how to question, think relationally, research ideas and problem-solve using unusual challenges such as not having electricity in our home, how to incorporate weather extremes, or how to positively function in a world that resists creative-alternatives to mainstream fossil-fuel addicted economies. Instead of being entrenched in the corporatist paradigm of you need or want? Buy it online, or jump in your car and buy it at Joanne Fabrics, Home Depot, or Lowe’s, we teach Zazu about creative-waste living. Since Zazu has been witnessing me lecture and perform about ethnic, economic, and ecological diversity since he was born (I am a former university professor), he is very familiar with interdisciplinary, creative educational models. Because I have never owned a car, credit card or smartphone, Zazu is used to actively working out solutions that are rooted in cross-cultural historical, literary, mathematical, scientific examples of symbiosis and collaboration.

Each morning, we explained the daily plan that included demolition using crowbars, researching reclaimed materials, designing furniture, measuring and cutting local woods, installing floors, walls, decks, second-hand solar power panels, batteries, etc. and using hammers and drills, etc. At the end of each day, we review what had been accomplished with a series of questions—What did we do today? What did we learn? What questions do you have? For example, if we used a circular saw we asked how does it work? Where does the power come from? What are other options or different choices we could have made? Another series of questions came from the materials we used—Where do the objects come from? Are any of the materials toxic to humans and/or the ecosystem? What are the pros and cons of buying new and reusing these particular objects? To answer these questions, we spent time reading old encyclopedias, library books, and talking to many other activists and educators.

The concept of embodied energy is central to how we encourage Zazu to explore his imagination. Everyday, we explore how to cultivate awareness of *embodied energy* to develop social and emotional intelligence. This exploration is about our fundamental relationship to *how* we recognize the context and history of the objects with which we live (from the pencils we use to the clothes we wear to the building materials we use to create our homes) i.e., true cost, life-cycle analysis (LCA), cradle-to-grave, *embodied energy*: the social-scientific concept that reveals local and global cycles of extraction/ production/ representation/ distribution/ consumption/ disposal/ containment/ permeation.

Example #2

Scenario: Zazu at friend's house; TV in his friend's room is on; Zazu asks why he is leaving it on when they are not in the room. His friend simply responds: “I want to.”

Challenge: Zazu has learned (and I believe, he intuitively knows) that this behavior needs to be

questioned in some capacity.

“Solution”: Zazu tells his friend something positive and informative: For example, when recycled, a single aluminum car equals 3 hrs. of a television being powered.

Lesson for all of us: How can we communicate and teach differing perspectives with compassion and clarity? Help his friend see the relationships between various everyday objects he apparently takes for granted (TV, Pop cans, light switches, energy use)

II. Making Interdisciplinary Connections: We always include a thesaurus (in addition to one Zazu has been making for years), a dictionary, and an atlas of the world.

Example #1

When Zazu watches a film (ranging from documentaries—like Aretha Franklin's “Amazing Grace” or “The Biggest Little Farm”—to musicals—like “Cats” or “Chorus Line), he writes 5-10 sentences in cursive about the messages of the film and how they relate to books he is reading and shared activities.

Example #2

On a weekly basis, Zazu writes, draws, and shares his interpretations of a variety of quotes. Here are samples:

Toni Morrison: “We don’t need any more writers as solitary heroes. We need a heroic writers’ movement: assertive, militant, pugnacious.”

Upton Sinclair: “It is difficult to convince a man of something when his salary depends on his not understanding it.”

“I will send you Elijah the Prophet to turn the hearts of the parents to the children and the hearts of the children to the parents, lest the Breath of Life become a destructive wind, a Hyper-Hurricane, to utterly destroy the Earth.” (Malachi 3:23-24.)

Rainer Maria Rilke: “Don't search for the answers, which could not be given to you now, because you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps then, someday far in the future, you will gradually, without even noticing it, live your way into the answer.”

Fadumo Dayib (Somalia's first female presidential candidate-and a mother): “You hold all life's possibilities in the palm of your hands.”

Abraham Joshua Heschel: “Our goal should be to live life in radical amazement. ...Get up in the morning and look at the world in a way that takes nothing for granted. Everything is phenomenal; everything is incredible; never treat life casually. To be spiritual is to be amazed.”

Buckminster Fuller: “You never change things by fighting the existing reality. To change something, build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete.”

Audre Lorde: “The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House”

Leah Sha’rabi: “Everything you see has a spark of holiness in it that is waiting to rise up. It wants to be free, like a person in prison who longs to be rescued.”

Jacques Cousteau: “The impossible missions are the only ones which succeed.”

Harriet Tubman: “Every great dream begins with a dreamer!”

Stephen Hawking: “It surprises me how disinterested we are today about things like physics, space, the universe and philosophy of our existence, our purpose, our final destination. It’s a crazy world out there. Be curious. The greatest enemy of knowledge is not ignorance; it is the illusion of knowledge.”

Virginia Woolf: “I am rooted, but I flow.”

Charles Eisenstein: “America was not stolen from the Indians, because the Indians never owned it. The land was not property. While pre-agricultural peoples often have a tribal territory, they would be appalled at the idea that could be owned. Is not the Earth A being greater than any human, or even any group of humans? How can a greater *belong* to a lesser? To presume to own a piece of the Earth, to say it is *mine*, is from the indigenous perspective a sacrilege so audacious as to be unthinkable. To reduce the Earth to property and eventually to money...”

Example #3

The children's book on Melvil Dewey inspires many topics—including various contradictions: what are the implications of someone who has had a tremendously positive impact on society who *also* has a history of overtly participating in systemic hatred and exclusion (like anti-Semitism and racism); what does it mean that he was such an outspoken activist for women's rights *and* was expelled from his community for his treatment of women. We are also exploring the connection between “socially acceptable” behavior and passion that exceeds the norm. For example in Oliver Sack's *Anthropologist on Mars* that explores how case studies of individuals (like Temple Grandin) diagnosed with psychological disorders actually use their aberrant behavior creatively, productively, etc. This helps us question how we can reframe what is considered “deviant” or “excessive” pathological behavior in order to reveal social norms that are actually self-destructive.

Example #4

- Write and share ideas about cross-cultural polymath's like Rabindranath Tagore and Ibn Sina, and activists like Dorothy Pittman, Dolores Huerta, Flo Kennedy, Bella Abzug, Wilma Mankiller
- Compare and contrast of biographies of contemporaries such as Rachel Carson and Cesar Chavez, or Melvil Dewey, Margaret E. Knight, and Antoni Gaudi

Example #5

- The Way Things Work* discussing and making mini-versions of windmills. Based on years of conversation, Zazu understands and writes about the ecological implications that can help us distinguish between the value of small-scale windmills and industrial-sized wind turbines.
- Critical thinking as we read and discuss articles from *Muse Magazine*, for example an article on “Smart Cities”
- Clean water science experiments, second-hand solar-powered robotics
- Spanish lessons with a tutor
- Pop-up *Atlas of Human Anatomy*
- Geometry through origami

III. My Ecology and Community curriculum that includes several children:

Ecology and Community explores the social scientific concept of embodied energy that designates both the local and global cycles of extraction/ production/ representation/ distribution/ consumption/ disposal/ containment/ permeation. A consciousness of embodied energy can be developed and supported from multiple perspectives at any age. I have been practicing this awareness with my nine year-old son since he was an infant.

Each “class” begins with playful variations of yoga, meditation, or qi gong, move into storytelling, and concludes with a web-building activity.

- I. Storytelling encourages children's capacity to harness their multiple intelligences (cognitive, intuitive, emotional, corporeal, synesthetic, memory):
- A. Each child discusses: what they are wearing; what they ate for breakfast; how they got to school; what products/ toys are they using
 - B. When we question what is considered habitual and normal, we can more closely examine our taken-for-granted behavior. Co-operative games can help us use our curiosity to understand our habits and play with potential change.
- II. Web-building as interdisciplinary collaborations nourish wonder, curiosity, awe, spontaneity, vitality, flexibility:
- A. Students play! Visualize our interconnectedness! Use our bodies as metaphors!
 - B. Students explore the psychological components of understanding how we are all connected: How do we share and navigate emotions surrounding ecological and interpersonal responsibilities—incorporate the complexity of responsibility, guilt, blame, pressure, pleasure. How do we support one another's alternative choices when the norm tells us to conform—sustaining a community of change (integrity and mutual/ self-respect)?
- III. Unlearning/untraining ideologies of waste generates a cultural paradigm shift.
- A. Recycle vs. Upcycle/ Reuse: Creative, collaborative solutions
 - B. Meet with parents once a month (approximation) to discuss living the theory--practicing these issues at home as a family. My new book, *Confessions of An Eco-Obsessed Mother*, will serve as a foundation for how I present the material to parents who are interested in aligning their parenting with their ethics.

The following is a description of the dynamics of sharing/ teaching *Ecology and Community*:

By disassembling embodied energy, we investigated how embodied energy is directly relevant to our lives, and the ways in which we have internalized shared assumptions and experiences. The children and I were actively intervening in the social construction of our bodies. We began our exploration by making connections between what and how our bodies perceive and are perceived. The children participated in a series of layered activities that exposed the relationship of shame to natural functions, such as sweat, tears, farts, laughter—where the inside becomes the outside of the body. We examined the politics behind the technologies that our bodies commonly came in contact with—for example, how the metal of the doorknobs and cabinet handles had been imported from Bolivian tin mines. Their exercises explained the embodied energy of what they ingested on a daily basis: cafeteria milk in individual wax cartons—on one hand the agribusiness-dairy industry, on the other hand, the visceral process-interaction of milking a cow. The children wrote, spoke, drew, and physically constructed their conceptual and somatic readings of radically holistic relationships.

RESOURCES:

Sample of the texts I use:

The Development Dictionary: A Guide to Knowledge and Power. Wolfgang Sachs, ed. London: Zed, 1991. I will use the *Development Dictionary* as a foundation text and translate it for the children of different ages.

NatureShock, by Po Bronson and Ashley Merryman, New York: Twelve Publishing, 2009.

“Putting Feelings Into Words: Affect Labeling Disrupts Amygdala Activity in Response to Affective Stimuli” in *Psychological Science*, Vol. 18, #5: 421-8. (research about how affective labeling changes brain processes)

“Conscious Parenting: Parents as Genetic Engineers,” *The Biology of Belief: Unleashing the Power of Consciousness, Matter & Miracles*, Bruce H. Lipton, New York: Hay House, 2005.
Plastics: A Toxic Love Story, Susan Freinkel, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2011.

Organizations with whom I hope to collaborate:

CCFC, Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood

1. Story of Stuff Project (they also partner with Corporate Accountability International)
www.storyofstuff.com
2. *The Story of Citizens United v. FEC*, a look at the disastrous 2010 U.S. Supreme Court decision that permits corporations to spend unlimited funds to influence how Americans vote.

The Story of Electronics

The Story of Cosmetics

The Story of Bottled Water

The Story of Change

Empathy Organizations:

Mary Gordon’s Roots of Empathy;

Marshall Rosenberg’s Non-Violent Communication;

Turnaround for Children;

Institute for Community Living;

Ashoka’s Empathy Initiative

Sample of the websites I will be using:

<http://www.digitalmomblog.com/how-family-meetings-have-helped-our-family-connect/>

http://playfulwisdom.com/Family%20meeting_outline.htm

<http://www.kidsrkids.com/expert-parent-advice/the-power-of-the-family-meeting>

IV. Sample description of racial equity curriculum that can include several children:

We will explore how MLK Jr. was influenced (including Harriet Tubman, Gandhi, Clara Lemich, Nelson and Winnie Mandela, Cesar Chavez, Thich Nhat Han--among other non-violent activists), and how Dr. King's passion impacts our personal lives today.

Through storytelling, we will make connections among civil rights heroes from different cultures and time periods. We will see a few excerpts of MLK Jr’s speeches as well as listen to cross-cultural liberation songs--learning how music highlights and transforms tumultuous times.

We will be embodying different perceptions of time (conventional linear timeline, spiralic, cyclical, ancestral, moebius-loop). We will be exploring cross-cultural histories of boycotts, strikes, marches, and non-violent resistance protests/direct actions from a non-linear perspective.

V. Sample two-week session from this year:

Here are the books Zazu has read in the past two weeks. He is in the process of writing reflections about them:

Jewish Western Graphic Novel: *The Adventures of Rabbi Harvey*

A Series of Unfortunate Events: Book 1, The Bad Beginning

Himalayan Kidnap: Alex & James Eco-Adventure in Nepal

Chasing the Tiger: Alex & James Eco-Adventure in Nepal

He is still reading Paolini's *Eldest* (he is really into this author).

Also, a bunch of multicultural graphic novels.

Together we read portions from animal encyclopedias, biographies, and cross-cultural myths. Also, map studies and number problems while we engineer challenges for our small indoor-living space and great big outdoor-living space (what could be better than bathing under Colorado's big blue sunny sky surrounded by snow and pine trees!).

His step-dad is currently reading aloud to both of us Callenbach's 1975 *Ecotopia*. We share detailed discussions about the ideas he explores and how they relate to our daily lives--our struggles, our joys...This week we talked a lot about advertising, greenwashing, agribusiness, and economics in the context of how manufactured consent is different from moral persuasion. We always bring it home! Like the implications of labeling: "made with *natural* ingredients."

Often when we are reading aloud, Zazu interjects and asks about a particular word--like "corrupt." I shared my own version of what the word means--and how it relates to our lives. For example, I used a bag of corn chips as a way to unravel what the word corrupt means--framing it's embodied energy (from the way the corn is grown, production, transportation, consumption, disposal, etc.), the corporate profits, and low-income oppressions--that way Zazu really understands different layers of environmental racism and how it relates to our parenting choices (this is a huge issue since many of his friends are being raised very differently).

Also, since he loves looking things up in a thesaurus, we explore different perspectives of words--always bringing them back home to our lives.

Then, Zazu reflects back what/how he understood our storytelling descriptions.

Zazu's current story-writing is *The Lost Heroes*. He has been reading sections to his Nana (in PA) and sisters (in MI). He will record reading the entire story once he finishes writing it. Zazu has been making multi-perspective cut-outs (so cool!), map games, and chain reactions (since he is obsessed with domino effects, we use them as metaphors to talk about all kinds of cause and effects in our bodies and our planet's body).

Together we watched my aunt's interview with the Holocaust Museum about her experiences (she was Zazu's age) fleeing and hiding during WWII. Here is the link: <https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn720253>. Zazu wrote in detail about what he learned and shared it with my aunt and dad (also hiding during the war as a young child).

Last week, Zazu attended Wild Bear Mountain Ecology Center in Nederland where they focused on indigenous wisdom and Native histories in this area.

When he finishes the audio book of *Hitchhiker's Guide to The Galaxy*, I will ask him to write about it in relation to *Animal Farm* which we read aloud as a family last year.

Also, lots of hiking, snow shoeing, cooking, dancing, wood splitting, and singing.

VI. Relevancy to our daily lives and our relationship with racial equity, health equity, ethnic diversity, and economic diversity
See all examples above

