

Developing an Educational Philosophy

In talking to people (homeschoolers and non-homeschoolers!), not many have thought about and defined their definition of education – or laid out what their overall goals are for their children's education. I've searched online several times for samples of educational philosophies and questions to ask when developing an educational philosophy. There just isn't much out there. A few teachers have educational statements that they had to develop as part of their teacher training -- though because it was often written before they were in the classroom, many are theoretical and not balanced with experience.

Unlike public and private school teachers, parents (both homeschooling and non-homeschooling) have the flexibility (and responsibility) to make educational decisions throughout their children's lives that will have long term impact. It isn't just one year at a time, it's a much bigger and long term perspective.

Parents also have a broader view than public/private school teachers and can consider a more holistic view of their children -- it's not just the academics, it's also values, attitude, relationships, and life skills. And, homeschooling parents have the ability to take their overall philosophy of education and apply it to the unique individual personalities, learning styles, and needs of each of their children. Homeschooling education isn't constrained by the very detailed state curriculum goals that decide things like "4th grade is the slot to learn NC history"!

Given all of that, here's my attempt to come up with a list of questions to talk about when developing your educational philosophy. It's worth bouncing the topics off of spouses and other family members to see what makes sense for you. I'd love to hear some feedback about the questions -- and, even better, hear some of your thoughts about these areas! I'm continually tweaking my answers to these questions as I learn new things about myself, my children, and how other people think about some of my underlying paradigms I didn't realize I had.

Defining Education and Success

- What is an educated person?
 - How do you know someone is an “educated adult” without knowing their educational background?
 - Do you need formal education to be an “educated adult”?
- As you think about all the adults you know, what do you think is the definition of a successful adult? (separate men/women and define in terms of career/work, family, values, beliefs, lifestyle)

Lifelong goals for your children

- In terms of each of your children, what attributes would they have as an adult for you to consider them “successful”? (think of them at 25 or 30 years old.)
 - Overall
 - Values/beliefs
 - Knowledge base
 - Lifestyle
 - Career/work/salary
- When each child is old enough to leave your direct care, describe what type of people you hope they are? Define it further in terms of:
 - Value system
 - Skills (household/academic/personal)
 - Knowledge
 - Direction headed
- When they leave your direct care, what type of a relationship do you hope they have with you and with their siblings?
- In your opinion, how much of this can you impact and how much impact do peers have - or their basic personality? (the old nature/nurture question!)

How Learning Happens

- In general, how do you think children learn best at different ages?
- What roles do the following play?
 - Rote memory vs. experiential learning?
 - Keeping children on a pre-determined schedule vs. trusting their flow in learning?
 - Self-teaching vs. absorbing/learning from someone else?
- How do you feel most comfortable teaching? I.e., what teaching style do you need to see in order to feel OK about your educational choice?
- What learning style does your child have that will impact how he/she best learns? (Read “How Your Child is Smart”)

Your Child

- What interests does your child have that will play a role in what he/she learns by the time she/he is 18?
- What strengths does your child have that can be built on? What weaknesses need to be strengthened? (keeping in mind the long term goals and all aspects of growth/learning)

- Academically, is it worth doing the Woodcock Johnson test to find out more detailed information about your child's academic strengths and weaknesses? (more for the parents' piece of mind)

What is the best learning environment?

- Given all of those answers, what are the pros/cons of public school settings vs. private school settings vs. homeschool settings?
- What strengths/weaknesses do you think graduates of public schools, private schools and homeschools have?
- Given each option, what is missing in your educational journey? What can you add to or supplement with to achieve the goals for your family/child?

What are your goals for the YEAR (or middle school or elementary school or highschool) based on your life long goals?

- Academic
- Social/community
- Values/spiritual
- Character skills
- Life skills
- Physical skills

Pick the top goal in each category

- Those 6 goals provide the focal point of the year/semester/month. Don't try to do them all but do re-evaluate on a regular basis.

Homeschooling Priorities

- If you're homeschooling, choose a curriculum or approach that best meet those goals this year, keeping in mind your child's learning style, your goals for the child, and your needs in being able to keep your sanity!
- What are your day-to-day priorities? Keep in mind your top goals in each category – those take precedence, though may not happen every day.

One of the hard parts about homeschooling is listening to other people and doubting your own decisions. Everyone you talk to has the "miracle" curriculum or structure or learning style approach that's "perfect" -- and it might be the solution for that family in that season of their educational journey. But it may NOT be the perfect one for your family in this season of your journey. Think about the long term. It is a long term journey, not a sprint!