

# Parents Can Teach Their Children

By Marcia Neill

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“Most teaching parents do not know what a great job they are doing. Everyone thinks it goes smoothly in everybody else’s house and theirs is the only place with problems.”

Ruth Beechick from *You Can Teach Your Child Successfully*.

The reason home education has proven itself as a viable system of education is that children benefit from the time parents spend working through things together with their children. They are building up trust in that they are committed to this together. The time and commitment make up for less-than-perfect educational materials. This one element in learning is beyond the material, the quality of the teaching or even the motivation and capacity of the student. The effort to overcome obstacles is worthwhile and can only be modeled and inspired in a person.

Parents have a sense of how difficult learning should be. They stress when their children struggle, and stress when their work appears too easy. Their children must not be doing enough. Parents are driven by schedules and stress if they think their children are falling behind. “Behind who?” is the question. It takes courage for a parent to deviate from a prescribed lesson plan.

It is too easy to plug a child into a package program and the parent to remove themselves from “interfering in progression of the lessons.” Many tell themselves that it is better to follow the experts’ lead rather than their own assessment of whether the child needs more or less academically or in a completely different format than presented. It is hard to move away from the basics of 36 weeks per school year. Textbooks offer either a lesson a day or a chapter a week as a guide for how to pace the lessons. Customizing the education tells children that we are committed to their learning.

An active involved teacher can best determine and encourage children’s rate of learning. On a daily basis, parents are constantly asking, “Do you understand, did you get that?” They provide alternative explanations, demonstrations or activities that promote their own children’s learning.

Styles of learning do vary and it is helpful if we present the same material in various formats. The visual learners may prefer to watch demonstrations, the auditory learner listens; the tactile learner prefers to practice the skill themselves. The independent learner prefers doing things by themselves and the social learner prefers to study in a group with their siblings and/or parent.

When parents determine the immediate goals, they are seen as actively engaged and not imposing artificial expectations but dealing with both the material and student. In home schooling this happens both more naturally and intuitively. It is a benefit of the parent who struggles to stay a step ahead of their children academically. I see this active involvement by the parent as the greatest gift of home schooling.

Bishop Fulton J. Sheen makes the point that there is a difference between being trained and educated, a difference between knowing and being Catholic.

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“Education once seemed to some men the gateway to Heaven-on-earth for everyone. Now we have tried it, and we know that schooling, alone, will not save our society. Never before has there been so much education, and never before so little arrival at the truth. We have stuffed our children’s minds with facts, and neglected to teach them how to live. Any system of education which fails to discipline the will, also fails to train the character... It does not make them responsible citizens... Education can never make a man better unless it teaches him the true purpose of man – and the difficulties he must overcome to realize that purpose. Much education today is based on the Socratic error that ignorance of good is the cause of evil, and that all we need do to overcome evil is to give men information. If this were so, every educated man should be a good man, but we know this is not true.”

The goal of education is the formation of the child and not simply having them get the work done. It is the role of the parent-teacher to gauge how much our children can absorb. Introducing great works to children when they are not emotionally nor intellectually ready is a waste of time. Children are not buckets to drop information into their heads. God gave them the desire to know, and we are doing well when we foster that desire.

You may have all the right books, and there are many from which to choose, and you may have a wonderful varied method of instruction, but one of the greatest gifts that you give your children is your own time spent planning, experiencing and sharing in their educational lessons. Discipline, consistency and flexibility, all in balance, make for successful learning.

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