

“The fundamental aim of teaching is the assimilation of objective values, and when this is undertaken for an apostolic purpose, it does not stop at an integration of faith and culture but leads the pupil on to a personal integration of faith and life.”

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Most families expressed during the initial interview that through prayer, they decided to homeschool for the ability to have a Christ centered education that allowed the family freedom to pace their children’s education at their own rate of assimilation of the skills of reading, writing, arithmetic, religion and their development of God given talents.

So, after the decision to homeschool and the goal of education is recognized, how to nurture a well-educated, morally integrated cultured Catholic young adult is the challenge. There are thirteen years in which to accomplish this goal. The what-to-teach and how-to-teach it become the two next major factors.

Once a curriculum is purchased and what to teach has been defined, it is time to formulate the plan: when and how much you are going to cover in a day, week, month, semester and the year. During my first summer prior to homeschooling, I laid out a gorgeous lesson plan for the year with activities and assignments all written down covering everything that was covered in their textbooks. It had been decided that we would combine all grades in one US History class, since typically all my school age children would have had that as part of their “normal” school subject. I also decided to cover Old Testament and Church History altogether.

As the months of implementing the lesson plan passed, we quickly realized that “the plan” had not allowed for my children’s spontaneous questions. After nine years in “*traditional schools*” and hours of homework, my children entered homeschooling burned out on learning. Allowing them to ask their individual questions was one of my goals. I never expected that the answers and quest for satisfying their curiosity would take so much time from my planned curriculum. I had a decision to make. I could push the children to follow the planned-out lessons or we could allow for our side-trips that we took answering questions and eliminate some of the planned assignments. I found out that when I asked them to save their questions until we got to the topic later, the same original curiosity was not present. My 5th grade daughter’s telling a friend at Church that the best part of homeschooling was getting to ask your questions and having them answered confirmed to me that we made the right choice. So, by January, I purchased another lesson plan book and began entering on a weekly basis what we were really covering. By April, I was worried that we would not finish the textbooks. The kids all said, with enthusiasm, that we had covered so much more during our year of homeschooling than they ever had done in previous years. Also, they assured me that they had never “finished the books.” My daughter ran to her room and produced workbooks from each of her five previous years that had not been completed. Two things amazed me. The first was that I had not been aware that they were not finishing books, and second was my children were sure that they had learned more during our first year at home.

Their assurance and their standardized test results eased my concerns. However, in the back of my mind was the fear that by failing to do every page in their textbooks, that they might have holes in their education. Now after eleven years of home educating and guiding several hundred families, I have seen the fear of that famous hole threatening whether families have followed a set curriculum or when they designed their own. We know that students enter homeschooling with holes in their education, as the first few months of homeschooling is spent identifying those holes, weaknesses in their education.

I see families switching from program to program afraid that their children might have a gap in their education. It is easy to blame your issues on having the wrong curriculum and get drawn into the endless quest for the “perfect” curriculum. Many of the original benefits of home schooling, i.e., learning at their own pace and loving the art of education, can get lost in the day-to-day struggles.

Successful homeschooling is not so much finding the perfect curriculum, for content is only one aspect of education. Two other aspects are how it is presented and how the content is retained. Method of delivery has been linked with various percentages of retention. Typically, people retain 10% of what they hear, 30% of what they read, 50% of what they in combination hear and read, 70% of demonstrations and 90% of what they experience. Retention of learning is a key aspect and should drive our experiences. Quantity of material is not always quality. What does it benefit a child to read about insects and write answers in a workbook, if his retention is only 10 to 30 percent of the material. It has been well documented that life experiences lead to 90 percent retention. So he may remember how he collected 30 different bugs and searched for their names far more than he read about thirty different bugs.

The secret is not to panic when homeschooling gets difficult and to realize that not all family life issues can be blamed on schooling. Schooling is supposed to be hard at times. Integrating the daily lessons into your home life is key to successful learning. One experienced mother shared with me that after four years of homeschooling, their home looked less like schooling, but their children were learning more. She had given them freedom to explore and experience true learning.

Here is a list of things **not** to do when homeschooling, written by an experienced mother:

1. Plan your day so rigidly, that you lose those really good ‘teachable moments’.
2. Create the classroom in your home. Then, if you deviate, blame yourself for being too.... (fill in the blank) unimaginative, uneducated, unloving, impatient, etc.
3. Forget to include God and Our Mother Mary in your plans. Oh! Forget completely that it’s more important to get to heaven than Harvard.
4. Spend absolutely all your time with the kids. Forget that you need just a little couple time, and single time, too.
5. Be afraid to trust your kids. Sit on them so much that they become little automatons who act badly only when out of your sight.
6. Forget that if you don’t know something, that you’ll have the opportunity to learn it right along with your children.

7. Forget that your spouse needs to be involved, too.
8. Absolutely forget that you can do school type stuff mingled with the everyday type of stuff.
9. Believe someone when they tell you your children will become social retards because they won't be stuck in a classroom with only children their own age, being governed by one adult.
10. Think that your children are ready for activities before their ability.
11. Think that your children need to review, review, review, when they've already demonstrated the ability to move on.
12. Forget to smile, pat yourself on the back for doing a good job and RELAX!

Are you homeschooling because you want your children to have a great education, or because everyone else is doing it? Did you pick your curriculum because of your children's style and level of learning or because it worked best for your friend? Returning to our initial interview, most are homeschooling because they feel called by God and it is the best for their family. So the question becomes, what is homeschooling for your family? It is having the resources to allow your children to find answers to their questions. It is setting attainable daily goals while keeping the big picture ever in mind. It is finding balance in our homes while holding ourselves accountable.

Setting goals for the big picture is a challenge and so is following a plan towards achieving those goals, but it is by the grace of God that we persevere. The plan provides a road map for successful learning. Adhering to the lesson plan will teach your child discipline and structure. There will be days when the child fails to complete their assignments due to pure laziness. It is important to allow your children to experience the consequences of their good and poor decisions. Some of the consequences for poor choices may be discipline in the form of corrections that may cause tears to flow. It is important to experience the consequences of poor decisions quickly, so that the children see the connection and learn from their experiences.

It is essential that the parent evaluate the advantages of deviating from the assigned lesson plan. You may allow deviating from your daily lesson plan in your search for an answer to the spontaneous questions. This lesson on how to find answers to questions may be the more important lesson that we share with our children. Remember to celebrate the little successes and urge your children to self-discipline and self-directed discovery. The key to learning all the rest of their lives is the discovery of how to learn. We cannot possibly teach them everything, nor will they need to know everything. Our choices in selecting how we impart information will be based on how our children learn best and retain information best. It is imperative to spend time with each of your children, listen to them and to pray with them. We are helping our children in their formation of their intellect so that they might know, love and serve God. We are living out by example that we are a Catholic family relying on God's graces and striving to do His will here on earth so that we might have everlasting life with Him in heaven.