

## **Educational Philosophy**

Experience has shown that parents are more successful with alternative forms of education if they have a clearly defined philosophy of education. Your philosophy of education is your unyielding convictions about what you believe to be the role of the parent, child, government, and community in the education of your children. There are going to be times during your children's educational journey, when the pressures of life will cause you to question the educational decisions and choices you have made. One main reason for this self-doubt is that there is no perfect educational system--they all have advantages and disadvantages. By having your educational philosophy written out and by referring to it during the challenging periods in your life, you will be better able to re-evaluate your belief system and goals and to prioritize with more reason than emotion. Don't worry this is something to consider as you start to teach and can be determined along the way throughout your homeschooling.

## **Teaching Styles and Methods**

Once you have determined your educational philosophy, you need to think about which teaching style and methods support your philosophy. Margie Rouge has summarized and I have listed here some of the more popular teaching styles:

### **The Schoolroom Method:**

This is also referred to as "doing school at home". This method of instruction is similar to the classroom with a complete textbook curriculum, grading, testing, and schedules. Usually a homeschool "curriculum package" is used with the same subject emphasis as that taught in a traditional school. Each child learns in their grade level independently from the other children who are learning in their grade level. The family has a schedule with a similar amount of time devoted to a subject from one day to the next. The instruction is teacher centered rather than student centered.

## **Classical Education:**

The classical approach to education is based upon the philosophy that the best education involves teaching children to think, not teaching "subjects". The core of the classical syllabus is what is known as the Trivium. The Trivium consists of three parts: "Grammar", "Dialectic", and "Rhetoric".

The first part, "Grammar", is not the subject of grammar; rather it is the study of the basic facts for different subjects. This stage covers the ages of approximately 6 to 10, the stage when children are the most receptive to, and will readily memorize, information.

The "Dialectic" stage begins at approximately age 10 when children naturally begin to demonstrate independent or abstract thought. During this stage, children begin to build understanding and the ability to respond to the

information acquired during the first phase, while integrating that information into a comprehensive whole.

In the "Rhetoric" stage (which lasts from teen into adulthood), the aim is to produce a student who can use language, both written and spoken, eloquently and persuasively to express what he thinks. Emphasis is placed on the ability to intelligently discuss a wide variety of subjects traditionally taught in the western world, such as Latin, Euclidean Geometry, and the classical authors.

## **Theme Unit Studies:**

Theme Unit studies are an integrated thematic approach to learning several subjects/concepts through a main topic. Topics or themes can be chosen by the child's interests, experiences in family life, books, events in the news, etc. This method can be used with different grades at one time to incorporate all the children of a family. Unit studies can be made up by the parent, taken from a book of unit studies or from sources online. The teacher uses all sources available: online, library, community, etc. to bring together studies in various subjects which correlate with the theme.

EXAMPLE: A theme unit study of the California Gold Rush might look like this:

- History: Study of events leading up to, and what happened after the Gold Rush, to cover

all of CA history.

- Science: Study of plants and animals in California expanded to cover life science standards;
- Language Arts: Read books about the time of the Gold Rush; write reports, letters, and stories about the Gold Rush.
- Health: Study about the health and living conditions at the time of the gold rush compared with today.
- Art: Make craft replicas of items used during the Gold Rush.
- Music: Sing songs sang during the Gold Rush days; put on a musical about the time period.
- PE: Play games played by the pioneer children.
- Technology: Play a computer game, "Oregon Trail;" make a "Gold Rush" website by first researching facts online; use a library database to find books related to the theme; use online sources for pictures & documents.

### **Interactive Learning (Waldorf and Montessori):**

Many teachers, parents, and philosophers throughout the ages have noted that children naturally are inquisitive and will readily try out any manipulative items they are put in contact with. (In fact, it is often difficult to keep a young child from touching an item of interest!) With this in mind, several educators have built systems of learning based largely on the practical use of handicrafts and manipulative materials in every subject. Two of the most famous of these are the Waldorf approach to education and the Montessori Schools. Although Steiner (who started the Waldorf school) and Montessori do differ in some of their philosophies, there are more similarities in their approaches to learning than differences, so they are listed here together as examples of the "Interactive Learning" approach to education. Some background about both of these well-known educational systems may be helpful before giving the distinctions of this philosophy.

Rudolf Steiner began his first school in 1919 at the Waldorf factory in Germany. The

Waldorf philosophy is educating the whole child -- head, heart and hands. It is geared to the child's stages of development and incorporates all elements -- intellectual, artistic, spiritual and physical. The goal is to produce individuals who are able, in and of themselves, to impart

meaning to their lives.

Meanwhile, Dr. Maria Montessori, a renowned educator, began her first preschool in 1907, which quickly grew to a complete elementary and spread throughout the world as she espoused her philosophy of sensory, tactile education through spontaneous, purposeful activities with the guidance of a trained adult. Montessori preschools and elementary schools abound in America, with well-trained teachers as facilitators of the active, child-directed education which they are known for.

Some distinctive features of both Waldorf and Montessori education include the following:

- Academics are de-emphasized in the early years of schooling. There is no academic content in the Waldorf kindergarten experience (although there is a good deal of cultivation of pre-academic skills), and minimal academics in first grade. Reading is not taught until second or third grade, though the letters are introduced carefully in first and second. Montessori encourages reading explorations, but children learn to read when they are ready rather than at a predetermined age.
- During the elementary school years (grades 1-8) the students have a teacher who stays with the same class for (ideally) the entire eight years of elementary school.
- Certain activities which are often considered "frills" at mainstream schools are central at Waldorf and Montessori schools: art, music, gardening, and foreign languages, to name a few. In the younger grades, all subjects are introduced through artistic or tactile mediums, because the children respond better to this than to dry workbooks and rote learning. The Montessori Association produces many hands-on educational materials for use in their schools, and these can often be purchased online. Because of this emphasis on activities rather than book learning, I have referred to this method as "Interactive Learning."
- There are no "textbooks" as such in the first through fifth grades. All children have "main lesson books" in the Waldorf system, which are their own workbooks which they fill in during the course of the year. They essentially produce their own "textbooks" which record their experiences and what they've learned. Montessori children use materials from the real world instead of a regular "text." Upper grades use textbooks to supplement their main lesson work.

- Learning in Waldorf and Montessori schools is a noncompetitive activity. There are no grades given at the elementary level; the teacher writes a detailed evaluation of the child at the end of each school year.
- The use of electronic media, particularly television, by young children is strongly discouraged in Waldorf schools and replaced by hands-on activities in
- Montessori schools.

### **Natural Schooling:**

The philosophy here is that education is not separated from living life. Education is embedded in the process of life. It is not a thing that happens only at certain times and in certain ways. In natural schooling, learning can happen anywhere and at any time. It is an ongoing and natural endeavor. Therefore, the parent makes the child a part of the family daily activities, and incorporates the entire community into his daily learning. The world is his school and the child follows his own interests in learning. Proponents of natural schooling believe the child is naturally inquisitive and will learn all the basic subjects if given the time and opportunity. All subjects are incorporated into his everyday existence. For instance, math is taught in relation to how it is used in the real world, not as an isolated set of numbers. Children of natural learners often begin "apprenticing" in future careers even before they reach their teens, and are allowed to excel in their own areas of interest and ability.

ECLECTIC Homeschooling = All of the above