**FINDING THE BALANCE WITH INTEREST-BASED-TOPICS**

Today, I want to share some thoughts about child-centred education versus teacher-centred, and to suggest an inspiring way forward.

The concern of education officials, regarding academic standards and accountability, is an understandable one. However, the government’s own ‘Home-school Review Report (2003, p19-20) showed that statistically, home-educated children perform as highly as those in school classrooms, even without being accountable to a school.

Nevertheless, sadly, this does not mean that all home-schooled students receive an excellent education. There is a warning here. In home-education as in the school classroom setting, there are many models of teaching and learning – some being more effective than others. In three decades of assisting home-based educators, we have rarely ever seen highly achieving students (in an academic sense at least) result from a completely laissez-faire, child-centred philosophy, where the child just follows their interests, and is not required to persevere with difficult skills or topics when they don’t feel like it. From observing over 3000 families for three decades, it would seem that a completely ‘child-centred’ approach tends to result in a poor-quality education. In saying this, we have seen great value in providing some time within the program to include learning that springs out of a child’s own interests and passions. It’s all about balance.

While a well-rounded education should definitely include opportunity for exploration in areas of personal interest or passion; a quality education that prepares students for a wide range of opportunities and challenges in life, should include a balance between the following components:

* routine habit-training;
* a broad scope of topics, knowledge and skills;
* and also allowing time for creativity and the flexibility to pursue topics of interest.

This is a balance that we need to work hard at finding, so that you and your children do not end up living in regret.

Whether you are an independent home-educator or enrolled with a school or support service provider, an excellent education is not primarily about who is doing the actual teaching. It is about whether the child is learning, and what is the quality of that learning. There are many children sitting in school classrooms, not learning anything; and (I hate to admit this), but I have also come across a very few homeschooled children who are sitting at home learning nothing.

Regarding educational methods, there has been much debate about ‘process versus content’, and about education that is ‘teacher-centred’ or ‘child-centred’. Perhaps either of these is too narrow. It’s not just about the parents, the teacher, or the whims of the child.

In Parker J Palmer’s (2007) book “The Courage to Teach”, he shares a vision of an invitation into a ‘community of truth’ which provides a more inspiring view:

*“…where the subject ‘sits in the middle and knows’. Perhaps the classroom should be neither teacher-centred [as in the traditional talk and chalk lecture] nor student-centred [child deciding what to do], but subject-centred. Modelled on the community of truth, this is a classroom in which teacher and students alike are focussed on a great thing, a classroom in which the best features of teacher- and student-centred education are merged and transcended by putting not teacher, not student, but subject at the centre of our attention.”* (p.119)



The great educational philosopher Charlotte Mason understood the proper role of parent/teacher and student; and she desired to always keep alive that sense of wonder in the children.