

The Why: Know Your Philosophy

How you think about education determines how you educate your children. Nail down your essential convictions.

- We're all 'homeschoolers,' no matter where or how we outsource certain subjects or topics:
 - "Parents have the first responsibility for the education of their children." (CCC #2223)
 - "The role of parents in education is of such importance that it is almost impossible to provide an adequate substitute." (CCC #2221; Vatican II, *Declaration on Christian Education*, #3)
- Even if we outsource to a school (or school equivalent) for some or all of our kids' learning, we're still ultimately responsible for their education:
 - "The right and duty of parents to educate their children is essential... irreplaceable and inalienable, and therefore incapable of being entirely delegated to others or usurped by others." (JPPII, *On the Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World*, #36)
 - "Parents should collaborate with schools and the Church and have the right to choose the formative tools that respond to their convictions and to seek those means that will help them best to fulfill their duty as educators." (*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* – Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 240)

My Personal Educational Convictions (YMMV)

- The first goal of education is virtue — to love the right things in the right way (rightly-ordered loves). It's not job readiness (though when virtue is instilled, this should be a natural consequence).
- The second goal of education is the passing down of tradition — preserving the body of knowledge that leads to wisdom and virtue.
 - Education is "a transfer of a way of life" and "the soul of a society as it passes from one generation to another." -G.K. Chesterton
 - "Tradition is not the worship of ashes, but the preservation of fire." -Gustav Mahler
- St. Paul admonishes fathers to raise their children in "the *paideia* of God" in Ephesians 6. At its most basic foundation, 'paideia' means transferring a view of the world from a teacher to a student. The way we view the world (our paideia) shapes our desires and forms the souls of human beings. The correct paideia is a true one; therefore education, in order for it to be a good one, must be about the transferring of truth.
- ...Our kids' education, no matter where or how it happens, should form virtue, pass down tradition that leads to virtue, and transfer truth. → If it's not at home, then it should help us with these goals.

Parents acknowledge in advance that I teach my (homeschool co-op) classes upholding these three tenets:

1. **The Role of Permanent Things:** There is objective truth, goodness, and beauty, and they are knowable.
2. **The Role of People:** Humans are made by God and are created to thrive within families. Parents, therefore, are the primary and final educators of their children.
3. **The Role of Education:** True education is the formation of loving the right things in the right way. (sources: *Plato and St. Augustine*)

The How: Methods

- There are countless methods to homeschool! And it doesn't really matter what you call yours (most homeschool parents employ an eclectic mix of what works for them), but it's good to know what they are so that you can learn, often through trial and error, what your method is to help narrow down resources.
- Heads up: you will not do "your method" perfectly, but it's always good to recognize the target before you draw your bow so you know where to aim.
- Never say never to any educational method — we decided from the beginning that we are 'year at a time, kid at a time,' with homeschooling as our default option.

Classical: A long tradition of education that prioritizes truth, goodness, and beauty through the study of the liberal arts and the great books. The liberal arts are grammar, logic, rhetoric (the verbal arts of the trivium), arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy (the mathematical arts of the quadrivium).

Charlotte Mason: A method developed by 19th-century British educator Charlotte Mason that emphasizes the whole person, not just a child's mind. It's a three-pronged approach of an Atmosphere, a Discipline, and a Life (Atmosphere: the surroundings in which a child is raised; Discipline: good habits, especially character; Life: academics via living thoughts and ideas). Emphasis is placed on living books, narration, short but frequent lessons, and time in nature.

Montessori: A method that emphasizes 'errorless learning' so the child learns at their own pace, especially with kinesthetic and sensory materials that teach how to function in real-life situations, tying movement to brain development. Philosophically, the method gives the child the opportunity to choose their schedules, books, and snacks so that by making choices early on, they gain a sense of mastery over their lives, which prepares them for the challenges of adulthood.

School-at-home / Traditional: a method that mimics school as we typically know it in our culture, dividing learning into subjects, following a set schedule, keeping track of grades and testing, and the like.

Unit: a method where the parent takes a subject that the student finds interesting and integrates that into multiple learning subjects. They "live" with that theme until the topic is fully explored.

Unschooling: more a philosophy of living than a method, unschooling discourages too much structure in the educational environment in order to let a child's learning occur naturally. Also called delight-directed learning, the parent allows the child to follow their interests as the framework instead of a set blueprint of subjects or curriculum.

Waldorf: a philosophy from 19th-c Rudolf Steiner in which subjects aren't separated and education covers body, mind, and spirit. Textbooks aren't used until the children are older and then only infrequently. Early education focuses on activities and experiences rather than head learning, discovery is the focus of the middle years, and experiences relating to finding one's place in the 'real world' are the focus of the upper grades.

The What: Things They “Need” to Know

What I’ve learned from almost 20 years of homeschooling (aka, What I’d tell my younger-mom self):

- Less is more! ‘Better late than never’ for so many things, especially for boys. Every kid has their own timeline.
 - We tend to do too much school with our oldest because we’re nervous about neglecting their education (and therefore “falling behind”) and unconfident about what we’re doing. Caring this much about their formation already means we’re doing a really good job!
- Little kids learn through play; they really don’t need formal education. “Children are biologically designed to self-educate.” -Dr. Peter Gray
 - Kids learn through play for a *long* time; keep school time short so there’s plenty of time for play, chores, and rest. Trust the process!
- Learning is natural, it’s how God designed us; much of our job is getting out of the way. “Children learn from anything and everything they see. They learn wherever they are, not just in special learning places.” -John Holt
- For the early elementary years, prioritize reading, writing, and math — the ‘skill subjects’. Later, integrate ‘content subjects’ — history, science, literature, art, etc — to further solidify the skill subjects.
- Boys especially need lots of time to move their bodies, learn with their hands, and get dirty.
- Routines > schedules: the beauty of homeschooling is getting to integrate learning with real life, and real life rarely runs on schedule. Prioritize routines.
 - Include a daily quiet time: everyone goes to their designated spot for quiet play and/or rest every afternoon. This is your sanity saver!
 - Start mornings together with a ‘circle time’: catechesis, prayer, Scripture memory, day + weather, etc.
 - Include DEAR (Drop Everything And Read) time every day (this could be during quiet time).
- Prioritize the home environment with the five senses: play thoughtful music in the background, hang beautiful art lower on the wall, shelf living books at kid height, light candles and/or essential oils, have them ‘help’ with cooking (math! science!), & let them learn however their bodies need to be (upside-down, in a tree, etc.).
- Kids learn better when the mom is learning, too; model lifelong learning by doing some of your own learning next to them: read a book, take an online class, etc. (I’ve learned *so* much more post-college than in college!)
- Prioritize living books > textbooks. Avoid ‘twaddle,’ Charlotte Mason’s word for dumbed-down literature.
- Don’t stress finishing a particular curriculum — you get to decide when you’re done.
- Outsource what’s challenging for you! Unapologetically.
- No need to stick to a traditional school calendar — take frequent and/or longer breaks, continue doing math during the summer, make birthdays a school holiday, etc. Do whatever works for your family!
- Same with your daily schedule — start early or late morning, end by noon, take a 2-hour lunch, etc.
- Stay involved in community! Not only does it keep you sane, but we’re hardwired to learn with others. Join (or create) co-ops, keep regular playdates, take extracurricular classes, etc. Our area has *tons* of options!
- Around late elementary, start thinking longer-term: if you *think* college is an option, take note of what they’ll “need” on their high school transcript and reverse-engineer a loose map for getting there. But don’t panic; there’s still plenty of time and wiggle room in middle school!

What I'm still currently learning (aka, What I regularly remind myself with older kids):

- During middle school, start noting what colleges require of homeschoolers (check during high school too; it may change), and make a plan for getting those credits.
- *Still* outsource what's challenging for you! Unapologetically. Especially for the older years — my kids definitely don't need me teaching them math or science.
 - If your kids are college-bound, they'll need set classes for their transcript, like biology and geometry.
 - There's lots of ways to do this: local co-op classes, online classes, self-directed at-home classes, community college, and/or create an amalgam of learning with all the above and declare it a class.
 - The state of Texas is just about the easiest state in the country for homeschooling, and it also has very loose requirements for high school graduation. The bar is low! Use college requirements as your bar.
 - You're in charge of their transcripts, and it's not nearly as official as you think it is.
- Learning still happens all the time! Don't panic if one of your kids would still rather spend his time up in a tree or making explosives, while his indoorsy brother takes forever to finish driver's ed yet reads *The Gulag Archipelago* and teaches himself Russian for fun on summer vacation. (Ask me how I know.)
- Homeschooling the older years provides great opportunities for time management — don't short-circuit this by jumping in to 'save' them. Let them fail well, especially as they take outside classes.
- Time with peers matters a great deal during the adolescent years — this is normal and healthy. Make plenty of time for this, whether it's with extracurriculars, a co-op, a youth group, or a combination.
- That said, make sure they still spend time with younger kids, and with older adults as mentors. Mixed-age environments are a huge bonus to homeschooling! Age-segregated classrooms are a modern phenomena of the Prussian education system that began in the 19th century.
- Homeschooling is not a hindrance to college! In fact, it's usually now a boon.
- Classic Learning Test (CLT) > SAT and ACT. Be free from teaching to the test! The College Board owns the SAT (and AP class rubrics) and they've *greatly* lowered their standards.
 - Bonus: schools who accept the CLT are often schools us Catholics would rather send our hard-earned money to, anyway.
 - Bonus: they have an excellent Author Bank from which they draw the reading material for their tests, which also helps with book selections (I use it for my classes!).

Resources

tshoxenreider.com/homeschooling