

A Plan for Educating Children

by David A. Huston

“And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.” Deuteronomy 6:6-7

AS A HOME EDUCATING PARENT, your goal is *not* to bring what is being done in schools into your home (regardless of whether the schools are run by the government, religious groups, or other private entities). The school approach is fatally flawed and is not God’s plan for educating children, so let’s just forget it. It is not the only way to educate a child and is, in fact, not a very effective way. Instead, let’s think about education as a 24-hour a day process that never really ends.

Purpose, Objectives, and Structure of Education

Before looking at the specific objectives of the educational process, let us first consider its overall purpose. From a Christian perspective, the purpose of education can be summarized in the following way: To equip our children to know God in personal relationship and serve Him in His will. It is not to enable them to make as much money as they can, or even simply to earn a comfortable living. Neither is it to make them good citizens or enable them to fulfill their greatest ambitions, hopes, or dreams. A life lived in the will of God may result in these temporal blessings, but they are not the purpose of a Christian’s life. As the Bible says, “And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him” (Colossians 3:17). The purpose of life is serving God to His glory.

The process of educating children can be divided into two phases: the Foundational Phase and the Perfecting Phase. These phases are divided by a transitional period which in most cases will occur between age 10 and 14. Each phase has a few simple objectives which will give parents direction in the great task of educating their children.

The Foundational Phase: As you drive through a community, you will notice that the houses differ considerably. They are different sizes and shapes. They have different types and colors of siding, different numbers of windows, different slopes to the roof line. Yet, even though the houses are different, the foundations of the houses are all very similar. There may be slight differences to accommodate variations in terrain and soil composition, but in general, the foundations are the same.

The purpose of a foundation is to establish a sub-structure strong enough to support the house that is to be built upon it. The same is true of the Foundational Phase of a child's education. The objective is to establish a base of skills and understanding that will support the more specialized learning of the Perfecting Phase. Like the foundations of houses, the Foundational Phase does not vary widely from child to child. The content of the learning process will vary, but the specific objectives of this phase are the same.

There are three simple objectives of the Foundational Phase which every parent and child must understand. They involve a child being able to show competence in the following areas:

1. Reading: Able to read with understanding.

- This will be reflected in the child showing a strong, continuing desire to read and the ability to describe clearly and accurately to others what he has learned.

2. Learning: Able to learn effectively.

- This will be reflected in the child's ability to develop strategies for finding, evaluating, and assembling meaningful information about specific topics and his love for acquiring further knowledge.

3. Character: Able to clearly describe the character traits exemplified by Jesus Christ and be demonstrating steady growth in these traits. This will be reflected in the following ways:

- The child is consistently honest.
- The child is showing the ability to exercise self-control.
- The child is growing in willingly accepting responsibility.
- The child is demonstrating perseverance in accomplishing tasks.
- The child has the ability to connect with and live harmoniously with other people.

- The child has the ability to recognize and avoid the harmful behavior of

- other people.
- The child is showing kindness and compassion toward other people.
 - The child is committed to following Jesus.

Once a child has demonstrated competence in these three areas, he is then ready to transition into the Perfecting Phase. For some children this could happen as early as age 10. For others it may be as late as age 14. As a general guideline, however, most parents should target age 12 as the appropriate time to begin the transition from foundation to perfecting.

The Perfecting Phase: Any 12-year-old child with strong reading and learning skills, with godly character, and with a deep love for learning is in a position to learn about virtually anything and prepare for virtually any calling in life. The only question is, to what life work is a child called. The purpose of the Perfecting Phase is to clarify the calling and prepare the child in specific ways to fulfill the calling.

Like the houses in a community, the Perfecting Phase will vary widely from child to child. This is because it focuses more on content than foundational skills. All children need to possess the three foundational skills, but not all children need to learn about animal husbandry or chemical engineering. There are broad areas of learning that all children need to learn about, but even in these areas, the levels of learning will vary. For example, every child needs to master certain basics of mathematics, but not every child needs to master advanced calculus.

During the Perfecting Phase, the nature and level of learning should be based on the Lord's purpose for each child's life. Proverbs 22:6 states, "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." In the original language, the phrase "the way he should go" is a single Hebrew word meaning "his way." In his book *Our Father Abraham*, Marvin Wilson explains the meaning of this verse. He writes:

There is a great difference between the training of a child according to the child's way (i.e. encouraging him to start on the road that is right for him), and training him according to the way chosen, prescribed, and imposed by the parents. The former is in keeping with the child's unique God-given disposition, talents, and gifts. It is considerate of the uniqueness of the child; it does not treat all developing personalities the same. The correct translation of this verse places the onus on the child to choose the right path. It is one thing for a parent to encourage, nurture, guide, and inform a child so that the child himself is prepared to choose the path that is right for him; it is something else for a parent to choose the path for the child. Parents must carefully observe each child and seek to provide opportunities for each child's creative self-fulfillment.

During the Foundational Phase, parents are responsible for observing their

children for the purpose of determining the way they should go. This will mean taking note of subjects each child is particularly interested in and skills they are particularly adept at. This is to begin helping the child find a general direction in life. At this stage nothing should be “chiseled in granite.”

During the Perfecting Phase children should be encouraged to explore a wide variety of subjects. They should have many opportunities to talk with adults in a variety of fields. As time goes by, God’s purpose for a child’s life will gradually come into clear focus. As this happens, the child will need to begin focusing his learning on the specific areas that pertain to his purpose. This may mean learning about animal husbandry if God’s purpose is that he be a dairy farmer. Or it may mean learning about chemical engineering if God’s purpose is that he be a chemical engineer. This specialized learning can begin at any time but becomes more focused and concentrated during the latter years of the Perfecting Phase.

The three objectives of the Perfecting Phase are that a young person has become competent in the following ways:

1. Purpose: Able to clearly describe God’s purpose for his life.

- This will be reflected in the young person’s ability to describe the gifts God has given him, the general ways in which he will function as a member of the body of Christ, and how he will support himself and his future family. It is recognized that at age 18 a young person will not have a complete understanding of all that God has planned for His life.

2. Preparation: Able to accomplish work associated with God’s purpose.

- This will be reflected in the competency the young person has attained in knowledge and skills in the areas of ministry and the field of work the Lord has directed him to. It may mean the young person requires further learning and development. In such cases, both the young person and the parents should know what additional education is needed and how it will be acquired.

3. Character: Able to consistently display the character traits exemplified by Jesus Christ. This will be reflected in the following ways:

- The young person is honest.
- The young person is able to control his words and actions.
- The young person is carrying significant adult responsibility.
- The young person prioritizes and successfully completes tasks.

- The young person is living in harmonious relationships with most people around him.
- The young person is recognizing and avoiding the harmful behavior of other people.
- The young person is kind and compassionate toward other people.
- The young person's commitment to the Lord is being demonstrated in consistency in prayer and fasting, diligence in studying the Word, and consistent manifestation of the fruit of the Spirit.

The Perfecting Phase of a child's education will normally end as a daily parental responsibility around age 18. At this time, most young people seek out specialized training or enter into their field of work. We should never think of learning as something that ends, however. In truth, the Perfecting Phase ought to continue on for the remainder of the child's life. And this is exactly what will happen for any child who has developed competence in the three foundational areas.

Initial Objectives

Reading is the single most important component of home education. Because of this, the initial objective of home education is to foster a love for reading and learning. This is done by making all early reading and learning experiences fun (fun is a high priority for little children). Both parents should begin reading to a child on a daily basis around the time a child is one year old. Between the ages of one and five, you cannot read to a child too much.

At the age of two or three most children can begin learning letters and numbers. The purpose of these basic building blocks of education is to equip the child to be able to read and do math, which will ultimately enable the child to seek understanding. Many children can begin learning to read for themselves between the ages of three and six. By the time a child is six he or she should be able to read at a beginning level.

As a child begins to read with comprehension on his own, the parents can reduce the amount of reading they provide for the child. It should not be eliminated completely, however, until the child is nine or ten. It may be desirable to read together as a family for other reasons even when children are older, but it is not a necessary component in the reading development of the child past these ages.

Usually a reading curriculum is not necessary to teach a child to read, but if it seems necessary or desirable, we recommend *Sing, Spell, Read and Write* (please disregard the instructions to bribe children with toy trinkets). Older children can and should help teach younger children to learn reading.

For the first couple of years, children should be allowed to read primarily what they enjoy (within certain limits). If they start a book and are not enjoying it, they should not be required to finish it. They can instead be helped in selecting another book. The idea is to enable children to become excellent readers without destroying their love for reading.

Parental oversight of a child's reading should be established right from the start. Children can be granted choices in reading, but only within the sphere of parental oversight. Parents should look over and evaluate ALL books prior to approving them.

Around the age of 3 to 6 children can begin learning basic math. A curriculum may be helpful in teaching math, but it is important that parents DO NOT give children grades on their progress.¹ A test should be used only to determine whether or not a child has mastered the work and to help decide what the teacher and student should work on next. All incorrect answers on a test should be reviewed with the child until the child understands why he did not arrive at the correct answer. Correct answers should also be reviewed to determine that the child understands how he arrived at his answer. In other words, the child should understand all the material on each test before moving ahead. (Consider this: If it is okay to get a problem wrong, then why is the child being tested on it in the first place?)

Parents should be careful not to foster a 9:00 a.m to 3:00 p.m., Monday through Friday, learning mentality. They should rather foster the idea that learning is an ongoing experience that takes place all day, every day. As finite human beings, we must always be learning and growing.

1. For an excellent explanation as to why children should not receive grades, read "From Degrading to De-grading" by Alfie Kohn posted on this website.

A Basic Approach to Home Education

1. A subject or topic is selected for study only when the family believes it will help move toward the educational purpose. This may originate with the child (based on current interests) or it may originate with the parents (based on observed needs or other determinations). Both the father and mother should drive this part of the process by discussing and deciding upon specific areas of study with the children. It may be helpful to maintain a list of areas to be studied and the reasons each is related to achieving your educational purpose. It is also useful to decide which subjects are not useful in moving toward your educational purpose.

2. A book (or books) is selected which is relevant to the subject selected for study. Books can be purchased, borrowed, or obtained at a library. In some cases an encyclopedia may be appropriate. The Internet may also be used as a source of information.
3. For younger children, a parent may need to read the book to the child. As a child learns to read, however, he should do most of the reading himself, the parent being available to answer the child's questions. It is very important that the parent ask the child questions that will help him understand the context and meaning of the subject matter the child is considering. Some examples of questions that can help the learner establish context and meaning are:

What do you think the problem is?

What would you like to learn?

What do you know from the information given to you?

Stop and look carefully at what you're doing.

Let's make a plan so we don't miss anything.

When have you done something like this before?

Yes, that's right, but how did you know it was right?

Where have you done that before to help you solve a problem?

How can we break this down into smaller steps—its pretty big this way.

What is one thing you could do now to get started?

What do you need to do next?

How can we find out?

Can you think of a better way to do this?

Tell me how you did that.

4. After studying a subject, the child should be asked to either tell about the subject (for young children) or write about it. As the child grows, the level of writing should be increased appropriately. The purpose of the report is to help the child understand the meaning of the material he has been reading. A useful method for reporting is to ask the child to teach the meaning of the material to the person receiving the report (one of the most effective methods for learning is to teach someone else about the material you are trying to learn).
5. After a paper has been completed, the child must self-evaluate their work using a written criteria that allows them to understand good quality work. Parents should then review the paper using the same written criteria and help the child if the work is not meeting the criteria. (A criteria for a written report might

include the following: all words spelled correctly, all facts or statements are accurate, all handwriting is neat and clear, sentence structure is grammatically correct, key points of the paper are presented in a logical sequence). Parents should ask the child to evaluate how the paper might have been better, how it could have been more interesting, and what other facts the child might have considered. This self-evaluation should be used to formulate a strategy to improve the next report.

6. The child then rewrites the paper correcting all deficiencies and self-evaluates the new report. The parent and child then review the report using the criteria, noting any other corrections. The child should improve the paper until it meets the criteria.
7. This same basic approach should be used when the study is done through a project, a field trip, or some combination of learning approaches.
8. Other key elements of home education include prayer time; quiet time for mom; doing household chores; receiving an allowance and taking responsibility for how it is used; reading, studying, and thinking about the Bible (especially the book of Proverbs); and participating in a home education co-op.

As children grow, an increasing amount of time should be given to independent reading and writing (or doing projects and writing about them). Most of the time these tasks can be done without much parental involvement. This means that the parents will have time for other household responsibilities as the children read and write on their own. The most time consuming part of the process will be selecting subject matter for study, providing assistance as needed, and evaluating and correcting the work. Also, as children get older, a part of the learning process can be teaching younger siblings to read and write and do numbers.

Keep in mind that children do not need to be kept busy all day long in a structured learning process. As children get older (9 or 10), they need to learn to have quiet time each day to reflect on what they are learning. They also need time to explore ideas and subjects spontaneously during the course of a day.

Key Components of Home Education:

1. Purpose: Why are we doing this? What are we hoping to accomplish?
2. Prayer (for and with children).

3. Bible study.
4. Participation of Dad (oversight, purpose, support, and evaluation by purpose).
5. Math (using curriculum).
6. Subject matter selection according to purpose (as opposed to traditions or purely random).
7. Reading (and being read to).
8. Writing (and/or telling).
9. Evaluating and correcting writing using criteria for spelling, grammar, factual accuracy, style, and handwriting.
10. Projects.
11. Field trips.
12. Household chores.
13. Managing money (allowance and payments for special household work).
14. Co-op participation and study.
15. Quiet time during the day for Mom.
16. Creating and operating a small business or service projects.

What do our children need to learn about and how do we teach them?

Keep in mind that undergirding the learning process in all of these areas of knowledge is good reading skills.

Christian character: modeling by parents, instruction by parents, observing other people, reading biographies of people with good character attributes, reading stories that teach good character, writing about character, developing a relationship with God.

Christian doctrine: Bible reading and study, instruction by parents and others, reading books on doctrine, writing about doctrine.

History of the world (with emphasis on the U.S.): Reading books and watching films about historical personalities and events, visiting historical sites, visiting museums, writing about history.

Geography: Reading about places, studying maps, visiting places, watching films about places, writing about places.

Mathematics: Learning from a math curriculum, instruction by parents and others, using math as it relates to the study of other subjects.

Science: Reading books and watching films about subjects related to the various branches of science, visiting museums, learning to observe natural phenomena, conducting scientific experiments, writing about science-related subjects. (Science includes biology, chemistry, astronomy, physics, etc.)

Literature: Reading the classics, reading short stories, reading poetry, reading modern fiction and non-fiction, reading and writing about famous authors, writing stories, writing poetry.

Music: Reading books about music and famous musicians, taking music lessons, writing music and writing about music.

Art: Reading books about art and famous artists, visiting art museums, drawing or making art objects, learning from others, writing about art.

Foreign languages: Most parents will need a curriculum to teach a foreign language. Many good ones are currently available with audio recordings.

Spelling, grammar, and handwriting: All writing should be reviewed by parents and corrected in these areas. Children should look up misspelled words, make corrections in grammar and handwriting, and resubmit to parents.

The following areas of knowledge will all require reading appropriate material, writing about the subjects, and hands on experience.

Citizenship: This includes learning about the U.S. Constitution, how local, state, and national governments operate, politics, voting, current events, community services, community involvement (parents should listen to the news with their children and talk about current events) .

Health: This includes physical education, nutrition, medical care, anatomy.

Design and construction: This includes learning how to design, obtaining materials, and building objects made of wood, metal, or other materials (also includes the study of architecture and engineering).

Financial management: This includes banking, investing, insurance, wise purchasing, how businesses operate.

Household management: This includes housekeeping, cooking, organizing, handling repairs.

Social interactions: This includes good manners, common courtesies, hospitality.

Elements of a Home Education Plan

The purpose of the child’s education should be defined by the family working together until they have a very clear concise written purpose which the parents and child both understand and believe is important to the child’s future. The education purpose then becomes the standard for evaluating everything in the education process. “Is what we are doing helping us move closer to our purpose or not?”

1. Define the purpose.

2. State what we hope to accomplish (specific objectives we believe will move us toward our purpose)

3. Note what we have, what has been given (information, resources, structure, limits...).

4. Plan our strategies.

5. Decide on our starting point.

6. Determine the rules and guidelines that will govern our activities.

7. Devise a way to check our work to be sure that we have attained our purpose.
