

JOY – September 1999 The home school forum – Choosing a curriculum

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I'm so glad I can write this article after my travelling experiences of a few weeks throughout South Africa, which have brought me so much closer to and in contact with the needs, fears and doubt of our people. I therefore hope this information will help keep us focussed on the child and not on the curriculum.

What does the word "curriculum" mean? The dictionary defines it as the entire programme of study of a school. In home education circles, we usually use the word "curriculum" specifically in terms of the materials we use to teach. It literally means "the course" – the route – to follow. It refers to the way we educate our children.

"In developing a curriculum for our child, the issue at the heart of the matter is the question, 'What does God want my child to learn?'"

We should lower our expectations of what a curriculum can do for us. Even if we do primarily choose and adhere to a particular curriculum, it should not imply that we become slaves of that specific system, but rather that it becomes a starting point on the map.

"The centre is your child's heart, his discipline and the fear of the Lord. Upon that base and within the love of the family, you direct your child's education. That's the most important element." So says Ruth Beechick, expert home educator from the USA.

There is no one "right way" to home education. There is no one right method or curriculum. It is actually best not to have one curriculum for everything. It would be deadening to fill in workbooks for every subject, and futile to only sit at the computer for every subject.

Many workbooks are simple to use and make the child very self-directed, so there is less work for Mom to do. But that is a minus; not a plus. Mom needs to be as involved as possible in the learning process of her children.

"The essence of home education is the parent-child relationship," say Rick and Marilyn Boyer, parents of 12 children, all of whom have been home educated.

As an artist has at her disposal an entire palette of colours to mix and use; so a home educator has a vast array of effective methods from which to choose. Several factors must be kept in mind, such as the ages of the children; the number of children we are teaching; the learning styles a child finds most effective; the time we as parents have available for our family needs; our budget; and, of course, our own philosophy of life and Biblical views. The current availability of learning methods are endless. As we choose and use, our home school will become an unique work of art.

Choose these methods and learning material that you, as a parent, feel most comfortable starting out with. Often it is good to use no curriculum, but books and real life case studies and scenarios instead, but it can sometimes be less overwhelming to use a prepared curriculum from a textbook for your first year.

The best option and advice is to re-evaluate and experiment with different materials and methods, and to make adjustments as you become more experienced with home education. It has been proved that home educators go from a formal to a more informal system after approximately two years.

Give top priority to your child's spiritual and character development. Don't let the curriculum dictate and restrict you, but rather focus on the child behind the learning materials.

Home education is a way of life, where the house is the centre of learning. As Christians and godly parents, it is our vocation and responsibility to raise our children in the fear of the Lord.

Whenever you feel you are failing and falling, keep in mind that there are certain outcomes that are more important.

To give the child a love for learning

To equip them for life by giving them skills

To teach them to be independent thinkers, and

To establish Godly character

In the next issue of Joy!, we will take an in-depth look into the different curriculum options that are available for home educators in South Africa.

Dynamics is a ministry that supports the home educators and has all the different curricula available to look at. We are a mobile information centre that comes to your community and gives help on how to get started.