

Why Am I Doing This?

Someone once said, "If you're not sure where you're going, any train will get you there."

Many of us educate our children by following the current trend or trying anything and everything that comes along. We jump on the train that happens through the station, get off at the next stop, wait for the next train. At some point, we become exhausted with all the changes. How do we get in this cycle? We don't really know why we are teaching our children.

Some parents begin at birth, just as a natural outgrowth of raising their children. Others start homeschooling in an emergency such as something happening at school: don't like the teacher, bullies, tragedy at another school, whatever. Still others, homeschool because the neighbors do and their children are so nice.

These reasons may be nice and valid in the moment. But these aren't the reasons that are going to carry us through those days when we feel we've damaged our children forever, when we feel like total failures, or worse yet, someone else had told us we're total failures who have ruined our children forever. Nor will they stand up to the skeptical relative, a non-custodial parent, or a legal challenge.

The why of home education that will endure day to day, year after year is our philosophy of education. Some people call this a vision or a mission statement. Whatever it's called, we each need one.

Our beliefs about education also establish what curriculum is used, if any, what setting is used; whether we will occasionally use group classes, co-ops or stay home for all teaching; and the methods of instruction used. Our philosophy of education is the foundation of our homeschool.

Karen Woodfin Middleton and Susan Beatty say in *An Introduction to Home Education*

Every system of education, whether state, private, Christian, democratic, communist, or home, has three elements which constitute its essential nature. These elements are: 1) philosophy, 2) curriculum, and 3) methods. The order of listing is neither accidental nor arbitrary, but reflects the true relationship between the three.

Regrettably, most homeschoolers fail to grasp the fundamental relationship and begin and end their consideration of education with curriculum. To attempt to make wise decisions about curriculum without clearly asking and answering the basic questions as to the purpose and goals of education is to set out on a journey with no destination...¹

What is a philosophy of education?

Philosophy is from Greek, *philos*, meaning "to love" and *sophia* meaning "wisdom." The purest definition is the love of or the seeking of knowledge and wisdom in understanding the nature of the universe, man, ethics, art, love, and so on. Philosophy is also "any personal belief about how to live or how to deal with a situation."²

Education is activities that impart knowledge or skill. It can be specific skills such as math or using a power tool. Education is also the less tangible of imparting knowledge, good judgment, and wisdom as well as imparting culture from generation to generation.

So a philosophy of education is passing on the love of knowledge, skills, wisdom, and cultural values.

Ultimately, even though we may not have given serious thought to it, we've based at least part of our decision to homeschool on what and how we want to impart knowledge and wisdom to our children. Each of us already has a philosophy of education, whether we realize it or not. We already have certain beliefs about how to impart knowledge and wisdom and what knowledge and wisdom should be passed on.

Why is your philosophy of education important?

So you can answer the naysayers. Most of us have a fair idea of why we choose to teach our children: it's better spiritually, academically, I like my kids. What leads to that decision?

If ever questioned by authorities, a written philosophy of education, shows a carefully thought out reason for home education. Not just following the crowd. It conveys firm convictions and reasons about child rearing and educational choices, rather than just a preference.

When our children ask why, and they will ask, "Because I said so" may not be sufficient. We really have to know our convictions to answer our child. We want our children to be independent thinkers. They learn the process by watching how we make decisions. When we are able to give our children clear answers, they know we are serious about our convictions.

Being firm in the reasons for homeschooling can be medicine for burnout. Not a cure, mind you, but a salve. Then when those days come, and they will, the ones that find you in bathroom beating your head asking "Why am I doing this?" There it is: an answer. When we have a written answer to look at, to review, it will become our fountain of refreshment remembering why we are doing this.

It overcomes the "right" way to home educate. No matter whether we choose to unschool and our neighbor chooses a satellite school, both of us can be comfortable with the choice.

Because our philosophy determines everything about our "school" model -- what is taught, how it is taught, what tools will be use, even where it is taught -- we are able to make better decisions for our family and our school. With a grasp on our own viewpoint of education, we'll be able to make better decisions about school. No more being sucked into this curriculum or that co-op class just because it's there or because the rest of the group is doing it. We can say "no" with confidence.

In this chapter, we're going take all these thoughts, bring them into formation, and get everything to gel together.

Remember, what is important to you will different than what is important to me or your neighbor or maybe even you home school group.

We will quickly look at the elements to consider for a philosophy of education or determining our why. A complete set of worksheets have been provided to work out the details later.

Writing a philosophy of education may take weeks or months. Mom and dad both should be involved. By working with our spouse to develop our philosophy of education, we learn where we agree and importantly where we disagree. By working together, we can develop a plan that both parents are comfortable with.

There are seven core issues for understanding why, deep down in our souls, we want—need to teach our children. These are world view, belief about God and sacred writings, beliefs about humanity, truth, wisdom and knowledge, education, and children and parental responsibility.

World view

Our world view is exactly what it says, how we view the world around us. It is what we believe about the world around.

The idea of world view comes from the German word *weltanschauung*, which means “look onto the world or world outlook.” It can also be translated to mean a comprehensive view of the world and human like. In other words, it’s how we look from ourselves out to the world.

James W. Shire says in *The Universe Next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalog*, "A world view is a set of presuppositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true or entirely false) which we hold (consciously or subconsciously, consistently or inconsistently) about the basic make of the world."³

These presuppositions come from our family, community, culture, and faith. We gather information and determine what we believe to be true. All of our actions, whether it is what foods we eat or how we educate our children, are based on our world view.

Other elements of our philosophy of education, such as beliefs about humanity, truth, wisdom, children, are based on our world view. We will take these elements separately than meld them together for a concise statement of why we teach our children.

God and sacred writings

The foundation of all of our assumptions about our world and how we should behave in it is our belief about God. An atheist looks at the world and takes actions differently than someone who believes God exists. An atheist will probably reject the sacred writings of a religion, while a believer will use those writings to guide thinking and behaving.

Our belief, or non-belief, in a supreme being determines how we view the world, our presuppositions. This ultimately determines everything about how and what we teach our children.

After teaching a class on this subject, a local church pastor pulled me aside and said, "What we believe about God has nothing to do with some subjects like math." After initially being stunned that a Christian minister would say this, I told him that I believe math shows the perfection of God. Nothing is random in math; nothing is random about God and his interaction with the world. (For those interested in more about God and math, read the book *Mathematics: Is God Silent?* by James Nickel.)

We need to know what we believe and have faith in. What we believe about God colors everything in our lives. It is certainly foundational to our educational philosophy.

Beliefs about humanity

Were humans created or evolved? Where did people come from? What is humanity's relationship with God?

These questions can't be answer without knowing our thinking about God. It's likely if we believe in God, we believe people were created. If we believe humans, along with all other creatures, are created, then we probably believe that the Creator is involved in our lives. That belief determines not only what our children taught, but what materials are used to teach each subject.

Someone who doesn't believe in God usually doesn't believe there is any order or plan for what has happened (history) in world. This concept affects the importance of some subjects over others. We generally want teaching material that reflects our beliefs about humanity.

What is truth?

This is a tough question. It is one that has been argued for centuries.

The word truth comes from the Greek, *treue*, meaning trust, faith, fidelity. It is defined in English as “conformity to fact or reality.” But don’t let your eyes glaze over. We’re not going to delve into the details of defining truth. We want to look at what we believe about truth.

Honestly, each person must determine what truth is. A few of the basic questions asked about truth are

- What is the source of truth? God? Humans? The cosmos?
- Is it relative?
- Is it absolute or does it change?
- What is the foundation of truth?
- Can we ever really know truth?

The answers to these questions are often based on our beliefs about God and humanity. We have to determine the answers to these questions to determine the truth of anything. Once we have an understanding of truth, we know more about what we want our children to learn and how they will learn it.

If we believe that evolution is truth, we'll not want materials that teach creation. Many religions believe in some sort of creation and divine intervention in our lives. If that's the case, we want this reflected in everything from what books are used to what field trips we take.

What is wisdom and knowledge?

Wisdom is another word not easily defined. The Germans used the word *weisheit*, meaning “to know.” One source tells us wisdom is the result of learning and using knowledge for a strategic advantage. After gaining knowledge, wisdom is used to meet new situations.

Webster's 1828 Dictionary of American English says "The right use or exercise of knowledge; the choice of laudable ends, and of the best means to accomplish them " And Webster goes on "wisdom is the exercise of sound judgment either in avoiding evils or attempting good."⁴

The Greek word sophia is translated in the Bible to mean among other uses wisdom or more properly clarity. We can say with wisdom we can see more clearly to be able to make decisions.

Webster tells us that wisdom is tied to knowledge. So what is knowledge? Knowledge refers to what one knows and understands. Knowledge can also be defined as the remembering of previously learned material. If Webster says wisdom is the “right use of knowledge.” What does he

say about knowledge? “A clear and certain perception of that which exists, or of truth and fact; the perception of the connection and agreement, or disagreement and repugnancy of our ideas” and “Learning; illumination of mind. Or skill. Information.”⁵

Many of us believe education to be giving our children the ability to make responsible or wise choices. That ability is based on what knowledge they receive. The knowledge imparted must be based on truth. We are beginning to see how all of these are tied together.

We can say that information and facts, knowledge, is needed to make wise choices, to have wisdom. The question for us as parents teaching our children is what facts are needed to make wise choices? I believe we are getting to the heart of our reason for homeschooling: to provide our children with knowledge that leads to wise choices.

Before going on let's do a little review. Our world view is how we look at the people and things around us. This view is based on our beliefs about God, sacred writings, humanity, truth, wisdom, and knowledge. Can you see the progression?

What is education?

The website *Working Psychology* says education is “the propagation of a set of beliefs.”⁶ It goes on to say that “We call it 'education' if we already believe in it, and 'propaganda' if we don't.”

Webster's 1828 Dictionary of American English says “Instruction and discipline intended to enlighten the understanding, correct the temper, and form the manners and habits of your, and fit them for usefulness in their future station.”⁷

Education is activities that impart knowledge or skill or the imparting of knowledge, good judgment, and wisdom. Education has as one of its fundamental goals the sharing of culture from generation to generation.⁸

Too often we fall into the thinking that education is a pile of books and memorizing of facts. We give little thought to correcting the temper, forming manners and habits, or even making our children useful. The facts, just the facts. In this model, the goal can be narrowed down to being able to give the correct answer on a test.

As parents, we can determine what is best for our children. If what we determine to be best for our children and family is a school setting — a more formal process — one that teaches facts and figures only, then that is fundamental to our definition of education.

If, however, we believe that a less formal process, which doesn't always focus on facts and figures, one that allows for our children to determine what knowledge and wisdom is needed, then that is a foundational to our definition of education.

What do we believe is necessary to learn the facts needed to make wise choice? How are those facts best conveyed?

What is your belief about parental responsibility? About children?

Let's start with parental responsibility.

I believe that God gave me children to raise to serve him.

What do you think your responsibility as a parent is?

In the book, *Spark Your Child's Success in Math and Science*, the authors ask the question "Who's in charge of your child's education?"

Their answer is

You are — until you hand that responsibility off to your child (a process that begins early but takes decades!). As a parent, it's your role to facilitate and support your child's total education in many ways. There's no one else playing that role. Teachers and schools are in charge of your child's schooling, but research shows time and again that they cannot do a great job of it without your involvement.⁹

Do you think that responsibility lies solely with you the parent? Or, does it take a village to raise a child? Or somewhere in between?

This will determine whether we take complete control of our children's education, share it with someone else, or have another authority over us, directing us.

Our beliefs about children also play a part. Do we think children are born a blank slate for to be filled up? Do we think children are born with a sin nature or all-good? This will determine our approach passing on knowledge to our children, and exactly what we think is important.

Work on it

We can't just sit down Saturday afternoon with a cup of coffee and dash off a philosophy of education. I've known couples who take a weekend away, sans offspring, to prepare their philosophy. Sometimes we have write, edit, and re-write it so the words reflect our thoughts about education.

Both parents should work on this, separately and together. I recommend each parent answer the questions on [the form in the back of the book](#), then come together to find out what's the same and what's different. The philosophy statement can be honed by praying and working it out together.

I encourage you to do your own research. Don't just take my word for it. Maybe you want to go so far as to read books about educational philosophy. (There are a couple recommended in the resource section.) Maybe you want to do a Bible word study on all the terms used in this chapter. Work on the philosophy in any way you are comfortable with. ([See the special offer](#) for a philosophy of education online class.)

Once this is hammered out. Make copies. Have one in school files, one on wall, maybe even on in the bathroom so you can read it while hiding from the children. Have it handy during planning time and when preparing to buy school materials, so you are sure what you're doing is within your "why" of homeschooling.

Read the philosophy to your children occasionally. It helps them understand a little more about your decision to teach them at home. (Although we shouldn't expect our children to defend our decision to teach at home. Teach them to politely tell questioners to ask you.)

Take your time. Re-read this chapter as often as needed. As we grow as home educators, we may even develop and fine tune our philosophy along the way. The basics, however, will stay the same. This is our beacon in the chaotic sea of homeschooling.

Philosophy of Education Worksheet

[Click here to download a fillable PDF](#)

Before making any educational decision, you need to know why you are teaching what you plan to teach. That is your philosophy of education. If you don't have a written philosophy, do it now.

Questions to answer to begin developing your education philosophy:

What is your world view?

Your framework that helps you understand society, your place in it, and helps you with critical decisions. It is your picture of the world and how you respond to it.

What is your belief about God and sacred writings?

Do you believe in God or Supreme Being? Describe your God as you understand him. Do you believe your sacred writings are true without error? Or a series of mythological stories?

What is your belief about humans?

Do you believe humans were created or evolved? What is human beings' relationship to God? Are humans inherently good or evil?

What is truth?

What is the source of truth? Is it absolute or relative? Can we ever really know truth?

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What is wisdom and knowledge?

Who or what is the source of wisdom and knowledge? How does one gain wisdom? How is knowledge related to wisdom?

What is your definition of education?

This is your concept of what education means. Try not to think in the traditional terms of education, i.e.: classrooms, test, lesson plans.

What is your belief about parental responsibility? About children?

What is your responsibility as a parent? Does parental lie solely with you or is a village needed? Are children a blank slate? Are children born with a sin nature or a blank slate?