



Marginal Unschooling

Robyn Colburn wrote: On Feb 24, 2008, at 4:21 AM, Robyn L. Coburn wrote:

Some things aren't



Unschooling, some things are barriers to Unschooling, some things are turning away from Unschooling.

It doesn't really matter, in that it doesn't hurt me or anyone here, if people want to call themselves unschoolers in their real life.

It doesn't hurt other unschoolers, but how is it helping their children, or the families?

Lisa Celedon wrote:

At a parkday for homeschoolers I attended last week, I heard a parent saying to another parent, "We unschool, mostly, but you know, there're just some things kids NEED to be doing by a certain age, like reading and adding, you know—(everyone nods and murmurs agreement)—and so yeah, we do lessons for that, and then afterward, you know, he can do pretty much whatever he wants."

I was listening from the sandbox, where my little boys and I (and another mom) were sitting and playing with their kids. I was enjoying myself much too much to get up and ask, "Why? WHY are there 'certain things kids need to do by a certain age'?! Can reading or addition help

your son organize his mountain building contest? You know what helped him? Two other adults who could fill in the gaps where his social skills were not quite up to the task of engaging the other children in what he wanted to accomplish. But we helped him get it done, and had a lot of fun doing it. We had conversations about the distinction between "biggest" and "tallest" and "widest," and on the consistency and physical properties of different kinds of sand, and how dampness changes them. We helped make things fun for the kids who were too little to focus on completing one tall mountain. What started as a "contest" turned into a village construction project. It was a lovely time, full of interested, focused, engaged, chatty kids.

Too bad the parents were too busy talking about math lessons and when kids should be learning how to read and comparing which kid started to read at what age, and lamenting how their kids weren't as *into* books as they'd like them to be—they totally missed it. (Lisa Celedon, Feb 2014, on facebook)

Sylvia Toyama, August 2011 on Facebook, responding to a question about whether people can't unschooling mostly, or kind of:

It's certainly possible to *unschool a little bit* just as it's possible to do all sorts of things in combination. I know people who only unschool academically or who unschool except for math and reading—lots of almost definitions exist. And I see those same people make their life with their kids harder than it has to be, with less joy and more frustration, less trust and more anger. And while we're having a conversation and they're putting their kid off in some way or defending why they can't let go of one thing or another, they somehow don't see their part in making their life harder than it has to be. I just don't understand why anyone would want to make their life harder, less joyful, more contentious.

I think Sandra is right; there isn't and can't be one community that appeals to and includes all those who profess to unschool. Obvious as it is to me that unschooling can't be done only by degrees, others don't see it that way. And really, I can't tell anyone how they can or can't live, what they must or must not do, because I'm not living their life. I can talk about what works for me, and if asked I can share with someone what I think might work for them, based on what I know. But at the end of the day, people are going to do what they choose to do, and trying to force people to do what I do, or to accept what I do—when they're not willing, and would rather defend what they do—is poor use of my time and energy.

Schuyler Waynforth, August 2011, same discussion as Sylvia was in:

Can you unschool a little bit? I think there is a level where unschooling a little bit would be like being the boy in the plastic bubble on weekdays so that you were a little germ free. I don't think you have to get it right

on the first try, I work on my own approach to unschooling a lot of the time. And I certainly have a much greater understanding of the process, the approach, the principles than I did when I started on this path 10 years ago.

Unschooling is at its core an understanding that learning is a part of being human. It is a recognition that school undermines that by saying that learning needs to be organised, structured and handed down. School argues that certain things are so hard to learn that they must be taught. If you unschool partway you are mixing up your messages. If you unschool math and science and reading but structure nutrition and media studies you are arguing that while a rich and engaging life may make the three "r"s obvious they won't help you to deal with the difficult studies of food and televisions and video games and computers.

Unschooling is also about supporting the interests of your child. It is about nurturing them whole and not in a parted out way. I don't know what Simon and Linnaea are learning much of the time, so much learning is under the skin, so to speak. If I were arguing that the only learning that had value was the learning that could be forced to fit into the round holed peg board of a school curriculum I don't know what they would see the world. I don't know how they would see themselves. Although I don't know those things now, but I know that each of them are more comfortable with themselves and their interests than I was at 11 or at 14.

Unschooling school is still about school and not really about life. It's not seeing how life is bigger and brighter and richer and shinier and more than school could ever hope to be and always about learning whatever tool it is you are using to explore it. Be it whipped cream and chocolate and crepes or Jackass 3D.

Pam Sorooshian (2008, same discussion as the Robyn C quote at the top of the page):

I have a friend who used Calvert Curriculum on her kids. She called herself an unschooler because she didn't make them do it EXACTLY as required by Calvert. She'd let them do two lessons on Monday and Wednesday, and they'd take Tuesday and Thursday off, for example. And they'd skip stuff that they didn't think was necessary.

They enjoyed it. It certainly wasn't a big source of misery to any of them. She liked grading all their papers. It was what they felt comfortable doing. They were not looking to make a change. They did lots of other fun things in their free time.

They were about as far from unschooling as you could be, though, so I just kind of grinned and shook my head when she referred to them as unschoolers, on occasion. She wasn't coming to me to learn more about unschooling - I didn't take it as my duty to correct her or help her understand unschooling better.

Her kids both ended up going to public school for high school - one to a science/math magnet school and the other to a performing arts school. They seem happy with that choice, too. They definitely don't consider it a homeschooling or unschooling failure - they consider that their homeschooling prepared them quite well for their current choices - it was a great success.

It isn't a case of unschooled kids choosing school, though. It is a case of schooled-at-home kids choosing school-at-school, instead.

There were a few times, at park days, that people asked about unschooling and this mom started talking about what they did. I did, then, say directly to her, "Of course, you'll want to be clear that you're using a full curriculum," -- something like that. And then say to the new person, "You don't have to use any kind of curriculum." No reason to get into a discussion of whether she ought to be calling herself an unschooler - what was important was the information the new person was getting.

-pam

MarSi77 contributes these:

I have heard this from some people recently:

"We have been unschooling these days. And as far as TV goes, they can watch it for a short time after 4pm each day, and as long it is something educational"

"I would consider us unschoolers, we just do 10 minutes of math and reading each morning to stay on track"

"We unschool but I find we need to have strict limits on all screen time."

~marcia

QueenJane (Katherine) wrote:

I cringe when I hear parents say "We unschool except for math" or "we only do two hours of seatwork a day, then we unschool" or "we unschool on the weekends" or "we unschool, and I only require "X" amt of written work each week, but they get to choose the subject!" While all of that might work for a family, its not really true unschooling. Thats like saying you're a "little bit pregnant"...if you're following a curriculum, or requiring work, it may be very relaxed homeschooling, or eclectic homeschooling, but not unschooling.

I used to be a frequent poster at The Well-Trained Mind forums. I'm always amazed when I see people discussing unschooling. Recently there was a thread about families choosing one day per week for unschooling. In that case, they're trying to plan a free day to follow interests and not be bogged down in the curriculum they use the other 4 days per week but unschooling is definitely not the term I'd use in that position. I tried discussing it a few times but they really just don't get it.

Beth M.

The name has been withheld, but this section is from a blogpost by an undecided homeschooler. The definition of unschooling is a good example of a big misconception:

Can you classically unschool?

It depends on your definition of 'classical' and 'unschooling'...how's that for a cop out?

If Classical is rigorous, incremental learning towards a definite, high-academic goal, that doesn't easily mesh with child-led, 'wait til they ask' unschooling.

"Child-led, 'wait til they ask'" isn't the way radical unschooling works. It's a way for unschooling to fail, if the parents are twiddling their thumbs waiting for the child to lead, or ask to learn something.

[All kinds of Unschooling](#)

[The Difference between Schooling and Unschooling](#) (a chart by Rebecca Justus)

[Radical vs. "just unschooling"](#)

[Unit studies](#) (a brief comment)

[Unschooling is not Child-Led Learning](#) (on Pam Sorooshian's site)

[Sparkly Unschooling](#)

["Relaxed Homeschooling" can't hurt, can it?](#)

