

## **“Mistakes homeschoolers can make”**

by Willemien Krüger © June 2011

Mistakes ? what mistakes ? Is there a possibility of making mistakes ? These are questions that can make one experience fear and anxiety. However, the purpose of this article is to encourage you not to become more fearful and anxious but to learn from others and try and prevent them. The idea is to become aware of the things you can and cannot do, as you are trying your best. Sometimes we are blind to our mistakes and it will do us good to learn from others. These ideas came primarily from my own observations of other homeschoolers.

Seven possible mistakes homeschoolers can make :

### *1. Unclear or no vision or goals or plans*

“Without vision the people perish” (Prov 29:18) is a well known scripture and it is true. It is said that if you aim for nothing that is what you will achieve all the time. This is true also for your educational goals for your children. It is not that important that this vision must be eloquently defined, or that it must be hard or confusing, but to have a vision is important. Refining the vision i.t.o. clarifying what you want to achieve and what is not that important to achieve, come as a result of life and learning along the way. But if you do not have something to work towards, how will you know if you are moving/growing/learning ? Without a vision you cannot measure. Often your vision at the start is just the reason for homeschooling, but later on you might find that there are things that are lacking and which you want to add to your vision. It is my observation that people tend to limit how they live by not having a vision. To envision something to aim for will be challenging and there may be those that will think it is a waste of time. But I have seen that those with the clearest idea of where they want to end, are the most likely to end up there.

It is a fact however that not all people will think this to be important. There are those who think that planning is a futile exercise and that one should just take life as it comes. If this is your philosophy you should not complain if things do not turn out as you would like it to. More likely one will find that it is good to **envision the future**, as it will most probably put you in the right frame of mind. Make the time to dream and have the courage to have a vision for your family and your home school.

“If you fail to plan you plan to fail.” is a saying that is common in teaching management courses. We as homeschoolers can learn from that, in that it will be futile to have a vision without any concept of how to get there. I have seen this happen....families actually verbalising their dreams for their children but without any plan of getting there. Just having the dream will not let the dream happen. One can take the steps in the right direction. If for example your vision includes for your children to have read a wide variety of books, but you do not even plan reading time or to incorporate books in your home, how will your vision be achieved ? So be encouraged – have a vision and a plan for your homeschool.

### *2. Unclear or no measurement of progress*

This issue is closest to my heart as I have observed many homeschool families. One can have vision and even a plan, but if you do not measure how you are doing, you can miss the target. I have known a family who had a vision and a plan, but the thing they did not do was measure. To illustrate : their vision was to train their children to be honest (as we all usually have as part of our vision), and they even thought their children were honest, but they never checked. As it turned out in later years, some of their children had formed a habit of lying, and not even knowing that. It was sad to see and it served as a warning to me personally, to check and make sure that we are still on the path we want to be on. We cannot assume that things are happening as planned – nowhere in life is this realistic, why would it be with our homeschool ?

Along with measurement it is important to adapt, adjust or change as you find that things are not going according to plan. It will be useless to measure your progress but not do anything about it. I have seen this happen...how people know they are not achieving their goals, but fail to do something about it. Complaining is all that happens, and they end up never achieving their goals and wondering why. So

be encouraged – take the time to measure, it is not difficult and if you do it consistently, you will know whether there is progress or not.

### **3. *Misguided expectations***

Your homeschool expectations are determined from a number of things – exposure to other homeschool families, personal research, reading, inner convictions and belief. But whatever your sources were, determine now to clarify expectations for yourself to be realistic and achievable, so that you will not be so disappointed if things do not work out for you as you have thought it should be. From my experience a lot of frustration and irritation happens if you have seen something, or compared yourself or your children to others and then suddenly there are new unrealistic expectations. If you see other children behaving well in a setting, and your children are not always well-behaved, remember that you have only seen those children in that setting and for a short time. Most probably those same children also have their ugly behaviour days. Not all days of homeschool are moonshine and roses. Not all work is nice. Not all relationships with children are wonderful every day. It is very encouraging to realize that most people struggle with the same issues as you are. Remember that we mostly see other people for small chunks of time, their behaviour over longer time may be different to what you see most of the time. Do not let misguided expectations become the guide to your home school. Be real and discover that others are also real.

### **4. *Not enough focus***

One of the things that I have observed being a real hindrance to home schooling efforts and causing a lot of frustration, is when the parents are too busy with other things. It is all right if those other things are part of their homeschool vision and plans, but often it is not, and then the complaint is “I do not have enough time to home school”. Sometimes these ‘other things’ are good things, but causing loss of focus. Everybody has equal time, so if one feels as not having enough time, the question is more ‘how do you spend the time you have?’. I have seen how easy it is to become too busy even with ‘good activities’, which may not be ‘the best’ for your current family situation. We all need wisdom constantly to be able to distinguish what it is our family needs to do and NOT TO DO for now. How we spend our time is something we determine, and no activity have to be committed to for life. There is always a ‘time for everything’. A time for something may only be for a season, and then you need the guts to let go.

If you are experiencing disappointment, anxiety and frustration in your homeschool, ask yourself if there is enough focus to do what you want to do. Ask the real hard questions if there are things you are busy doing that are not helping you focus. Have the courage then to get rid of the things that do not help you focus. Remember that even this trimming down to simplicity may also be for just a season.

### **5. *Not enough challenges***

It is amazing to observe how many parents will give their children the idea that they are to choose what happens in their lives when they are still very young. Of course the purpose of training your children is to be able to make their own decisions more responsibly as they grow up, but if a child is ‘king of the house’ at a young age, decision making will not happen responsibly. Prov 29:15 “a child left to himself bring his mother shame”. Children can grow up with the idea that they know what is good for them, but the truth is that you know what is good for them and they learn from you. Sometimes we as parents need to challenge our children more, even when they do not think it is nice to be challenged. It will not be a natural thing for a child to challenge him/herself. I believe that learning opportunities are missed if children are not challenged enough. It is sad to me to observe my friends with their children in some situations and see how they discourage any form of challenge (because they are so fearful) – even when the children are eager to participate and want to try and do the thing. It is also the strangest thing to hear some of these parents then complain how afraid their children are, not realizing how they have contributed to that fearful nature.

I am involved in a youth organisation where children are constantly challenged on nature camps, and it is amazing to see the growth taking place in the individual child as (s)he discovers what they are capable of doing ! Things they would never have thought of even trying....are accomplished and obstacles overcome ! It is as if one can see how potential develops in front of your eyes.

Challenge yourself more by doing things that are not naturally comfortable to you, and in the process involve your children as well. See how both of you then grow together.

#### *6. Not enough volume and deadlines*

This issue is related to the one above on challenging your child more. How much work your child should be doing is a matter of personal choice as much as it is a curriculum choice. If you use a curriculum, somebody else made the scope and sequence choice but if you are compiling your own curriculum, you must decide how much work is enough. It is amazing to see different perceptions on volume of work and how it affects how people home school. My question is – is it enough for that child? I am not urging just increasing work for the sake of being more busy, but to challenge and develop potential.

Often when people just start out homeschooling after they have taken their children out of school, the tendency is to want to overload. Then they quickly realise that it is not appropriate and they start to relax more, which is a very good thing. But what I have observed is that sometimes the question of increasing volume of work is never asked again...doing the minimum amount of work becomes the norm. Is it possible that our children can actually do much more than we expect, and we are limiting them in what we do not expect?

It will also be interesting to not only require more work from our children but expecting it to be completed by a certain deadline as well. This will help them very much in preparing for after school studies and real work, where volumes of work and deadlines will be very much part of their lives. Our role as parents will be to help them grow in this process. Raise your expectations a little and see how your children rise to the challenge. Maybe we'll be amazed to see what they can do.

#### *7. Not teaching an ability to learn, think and discuss*

In a world where information is changing constantly and the availability of information is increasing daily, the challenge for our children will be to read, learn, analyse, critically judge, absorb and remember and do it quickly. The classic school model of teaching 'scope and sequence', with the goal being to remember content, is already not that relevant anymore. The ability to learn quickly is needed. So how do we teach that?

The first question should be 'what is real learning?' Yes, reading is one of the first skills you need to learn, but the more important skill after knowing to read is to understand what you are reading. And the bigger challenge after basic comprehension is to be able to judge what you read – is it true? is it valuable? is it good for you? will you grow? what does it mean? how can you apply what you have read? The skill of critical thinking will become more and more needed with the amount of senseless information we can be bombarded with daily.

All home school families have enough reading material and learning opportunities in their homes. The question is if critical thinking is supported by discussions of what is learnt. Discussion, narration and critical thinking skills are developed as children have **sensible** conversations with adults. Do we do that enough? Do we know what our children read and learn? Do we discuss it with them and observe how they develop thinking skills? Thinking is hard work, and that is why narration and discussion is also hard work. Therefore I have also struggled with my child not wanting to discuss all things, and we do not discuss and analyse everything! But we do make a point of discussing the good books they read, the variety of research information they discover on the Internet, the different ways of seeing a problem, analysing different approaches to tackle a report etc.

Let us not be afraid to discuss information with our children, and as we do enjoy their opinions, perceptions and growth.