

“Perspectives on public school”

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I have a lot of friends who have not been homeschooling from the start as I have with my children, and they shared a lot of challenges they have had with public school. Some of these contributed to their decision to homeschool, but more than that it also helped them visualize what they would like from their home education. Interestingly I still have a lot of friends with children in public school, who also share the same challenges and complaints, but amazingly they do not even consider homeschooling as an option – is it because they do not see the difference in us and our children? In this article I want to share some of these perspectives as a reminder that we shouldn't make the same mistakes in our own home. Just note that not all issues are shared by all people, this is just a summary of different perspectives. Also note that there are positive experiences of school as well, and it is never the fault of anybody specific, but the 'school system' constraints experienced by some individuals. The purpose is to learn from these so as to not make the same mistakes at home.

The issue of ***children experiencing feelings of rejection*** is the most common, biggest issue among many complaints. It seems that the 'social struggle of school' CS Lewis refers to in his book *Surprised by Joy*, is still the most important thing happening in school. This happens on an unconscious level with the children and it is amazing to observe how children adapt and learn the mannerisms and talking styles associated with 'being in' in school socialization. If a child has to be helped or has some problem, this will make the child open to more ridicule than others, from both peers and the teachers. If a child continuously hears remarks such as 'hurry up', 'finish this now', 'concentrate', 'listen' etc. a child can get the feeling that (s)he is not good enough and always need correcting all the time. If the child has some handicap which does not allow him/her to play the usual breaktime games with others eg. ball or running games, (s)he might experience even more feelings of being a failure and not fitting in. Sometimes this handicap is not serious, but still enough to make it difficult to play with the others such as wearing glasses, not having the same ballsense as others or just being the shy one can be seen as a handicap. The social struggle between children sometimes reflect the social struggle parents experience as well, as they socialize next to the sports field, chess game, music performance etc.

Question we need to ask ourselves – do we or our children struggle with feelings of rejection, causing us to think that lots of socialization will validate that we are acceptable ?

The ***lack of having meaningful relationships*** is an interesting issue mentioned. In school it seems one can 'befriend' and 'unfriend' easily within days without even trying to sort out the issues. This does not help children to learn that relationships are sensitive to trust build over time. Children learn quickly not to trust anybody and our relational building skills are hindered. Yes, children meet other children, and sometimes a real friendship develop, but it is usually a result of the time spent together outside of school, and not in school. Often children's friendships are more a result of parents being friends with the other parents, causing the children to develop healthy friendships over time. One parent even raised the fact that neither she nor her child found the other children interesting enough to develop friendships with, as the children's values of what is important in life (dress code, hairstyles, boyfriends etc.) did not match what is important for them.

Question we need to ask ourselves – do we have meaningful relationships with people we can really trust and rely on ? Are we growing in these relationships? What kind of socialization skills are beneficial to learn for life anyway?

Not really knowing your own child was also one of the most common issues raised. When a child is spending more time with peers, teachers, coaches, instructors and other people, and depending on how parents choose to spend the time they do have left with their children - one can feel that you do not know their talents, gifts, learning style, interests etc. When you do not know your child, how will you be able to guide him/her in life's important decisions ?

Question we need to ask ourselves – do we really know our children well enough to guide them on their education path?

One friend shared how ***she never really and truly knew what was going on in school*** - what is happening, what is the child learning or how (s)he is doing academically, socially or emotionally. This must be frustrating and stressful, as you never know how progress is happening, or worse, what is not happening. Some have shared how the workbooks the children are working in only get sent home once a quarter. Trying to help with homework is a burden, as you cannot really understand what is expected of the child to do, learn, know or practice. Teachers are not as available to talk to as often as you would like, and when you do, they cannot give a comprehensive answer to how it is going with your child.

Question we need to ask ourselves – do we know what is going on in our home school ? Or are our children working on their own, without us knowing what they do ? Do we know how it is really going with our child(ren) ?

The ***teachers are not as committed*** to your child as you are. This seems to be an obvious remark, but it is still something that I think a lot of parents assume. Most parents will very readily listen to the teacher's advice on anything, assuming that the teacher really care for the child and understand the big picture of the child's situation. How often is his/her advice based on really caring for the individual child and not on the usual reaction to typical problems they experience and their typical solutions to let the child fit into the mould and into the system ?

Question we need to ask ourselves – are you really committed to your children i.t.o. love, time and attention ? Are other priorities getting in the way of spending time with your children ? Homeschool parents can have the same struggle with busyness as other parents. To whose advice are you listening ?

There is ***no individualisation*** happening in school. There is no room for differences in learning styles, personality profiles and backgrounds in a room of 30-40 children. Although this is not something we can expect from teachers or the school setting, it is something to recognize as a benefit when home educating. We are social beings with a mixture of the “humanness” in between. It is possible that some behaviour modification methods in a classroom amongst thirty or so other children may not have the correct change in behaviour hoped for. One can ask yourself - why is positive reward instead of punishment such a great motivator for children? Any human being would like to be acceptable to an audience. Therefore behaviour modification through positive rewards are an even greater challenge in school and seldom well implemented.

Question we need to ask ourselves – do we see each child as an individual and adapt to his/her specific learning styles, needs and interests as needed, or do we use a blanket approach to education ? Is our focus with our home education only behavior modification or do we truly recognise the ‘angels in the marble’ on a deeper level ?

One parent shared how she realized ***how little is done at school academically anyway***. Some facts are learned (and sometimes these facts are not even correct), then these facts have to be repeated back parrot style in a test/exam and if you earn sufficient marks then you are classified as successful. In some grades, many hours are spent just in ‘coaching for exam’, without any new learning happening. There is no real mental stimulation happening, unless a teacher is really passionate and enthusiastic about his/her subject field. How is this preparing one for life and success in life? How much work is really done at school and is it meaningful ? Are the scope and sequence something with which you will agree with as a parent or not? How much is missing from what you want your child to learn which are not even considered in school? For years this friend has trusted the school system to ‘know what's best’ for her child(ren), until she started seeing all sorts of things children are not learning at school. Another parent shared she found the curriculum ‘horrible’ as it does not teach important things for life eg. critical thinking skills, problem solving strategies and in her viewpoint it may sometimes even be teaching really unimportant things, therefore wasting a lot of precious time.

Question we need to ask ourselves – are we thinking about how we will define success in our homeschool, not just academically but also emotionally, spiritually and socially? Do we have a vision of what we want our children to learn ? Are we creating an environment where our children are mentally stimulated ?

A lot of parents stated that their children have been ***doing school twice***, as the parent has to help with all sorts of projects, tasks, homework and things in the afternoons or evenings. Often a parent has to teach the child concepts in subject areas, as there was no time to learn it in school or the method used to teach it didn't have the desired effect. Sometimes parents even felt that school time is used more for just handing out work to children to do in other times, than in school time. The frustration is bigger when parents are expecting school to take responsibility for the child's education.

Question we need to ask ourselves – are we using our time effectively ?

Children adopts a ***passive attitude to learning***, as it is never them who decide on what they want to learn about, but the curriculum and the teachers. Although teachers can make a difference to the interest of a subject area, children usually do not have enough time in their lifestyle to learn about topics which interest them, and therefore curiosity is not stimulated.

Question we need to ask ourselves – do we allow, encourage and support our children with enough time to learn about topics which interest them ?

If a child is doing a lot of afterschool activities, life becomes busy and rushed. In a lifestyle including school (as a passive learning environment), a busy afternoon (where other activities keep a child occupied), coupled with many visits to/from friends (or 'chatting' with them virtually via electronic means) - children are *easily bored*, as they are seldom in situations where they have to keep themselves busy productively. Boredom is one of the most common symptoms of 'a dullness of the soul', as Marilyn Howshall stated in her book *Wisdom's Way of Learning*.

Question we need to ask ourselves – do our children develop a love for learning? Do they have enough free time to learn to keep themselves busy productively? Do we also struggle with boredom in ourselves?

A parent shared how she felt that school is an *experiment of hit-and-miss of what the outcome will be for her child's education*, and she just couldn't allow that anymore. In a country where the curriculum has experienced lots of changes, more parents are concerned about whether authorities really know what they are doing. When you stop and think about the way assessment is done at school, then you realise that it *does not really evaluate the important things necessary for life* such as – can the child solve problems? can the child think strategically? can the child think about alternative means of tackling issues? Some parents have found that the teachers are not flexible or prepared to allow more than one answer to a question, even where there can be different strategies to getting to an answer. Does school therefore develop paradigms in children that the way to progress in life is to 'do well' academically, even though this may only mean that you have the skill of passing tests well?

Question we need to ask ourselves – do we feel that our homeschool is an experiment, or do we have peace about the education path we have chosen for our children? How do we evaluate our children's progress i.t.o. education and the things we deem necessary for life?

Some parents who have made the decision to homeschool stated how they afterwards calculated how much *time was wasted* while their children were in school. This includes not only the morning hours referred to, but also the many hours wasted to try and figure out what school expects of children in order to do projects or homework, to attend school meetings, functions and school related commitments. These things did not even add value to the child's education or the parent's involvement in school, and yet it was part of being involved in the system.

Question we need to ask ourselves – are we wasting time on unnecessary commitments not adding value to our own or our children's education?

While this list is not exhaustive, it may be a start to thinking about your own vision, goals and objectives for your home. Hope this article helps us to think through our own goals of home education so we do not make the same mistakes observed by parents with the public school experience of their children.