
When Education Comes Home

BY CHARLES AND EDNA CHRISTIAN

Is there a model for homeschooling that engages the culture and world for Christ and still maintains a relationship of mutual support with the public school system?

This family in Seattle, Washington, participates in a homeschool co-op and a public school-sponsored home-school resource center.

We made the decision to homeschool after many sleepless nights, deep discussions, and fervent prayer. It also came after two years of heavy involvement in the public school system in which our older son attended kindergarten and first grade. Edna was president of the Parent Teacher Association and Charles was a member of the principal's leadership team responsible for school policies. Among other issues, we were consistently concerned about both underfunding and the underuse of resources in the classroom, as well as the way in which teaching time was used.

We continue to count many public school teachers, parents, and administrators as close friends, so our decision to homeschool was not based upon hatred for public schooling. In fact, even though both of our boys (ages ten and six) are now homeschooled, we are enrolled in a homeschool resource center governed by our school district. We also participate in a private Christian homeschool cooperative.

Prior to our decision to homeschool, we saw many models of homeschooling that did not appear to be successful or balanced. Some families tended to minimize the importance of consistently high academic standards.

Other families we encountered lacked adequate involvement with diverse groups of people and appeared to be disengaged from their communities. Our desire was to follow the balanced mandate of Christ for us and for our children: “My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one” (John 17:15 NIV).¹

The reason we homeschool is that we are convinced that it is the best choice for our children academically, socially, emotionally, and spiritually. We recognize that homeschooling is not possible or desirable for everyone, but we will share the primary reasons that homeschooling has been the right option for us.

ACADEMIC REASONS

When our older son was in public school, we were very concerned about the fact that his greatest learning opportunities came from extracurricular activities such as concerts and plays, trips to museums and other travel, music lessons and involvement in sports. Often the academic lessons in the classroom were either busy work or review for him. In our experience, the majority of classroom time involved behavior management, studying for state standardized tests, and preparing for transitions to lunch or other classes. Because of this, the actual instruction time was minimal and often focused more upon minimum grade level expectations than instilling a love of learning.

Homeschooling allows us to give our children the time and resources they need to maximize learning. They have more freedom to pursue their interests and to receive an educational experience tailored to their needs. For example, our older son plays the trumpet and is able to devote more time to practicing than he would if he were in school all day. In standardized testing last year, he exceeded grade level expectations in math and reading, so we are able to devote time and attention to his other areas of interest to help provide a balanced education for him.

An additional educational component that our children experience as a result of homeschooling is that they have more time to focus on practical living skills, self-care, and home management. We believe that this will help them on their journey to becoming independent, functional adults. By having consistent exposure to home life, they are better prepared for the business of life.

Since many of the greatest minds in our country were homeschooled (e.g., many of our presidents, artists, scientists, and so on), we know that academic success has not been the most consistent critique of homeschooling.² Rather, what is jokingly called the “S” word in homeschooling circles has elicited the most concern: socialization.

SOCIAL REASONS

A stereotypical view of homeschooling is that children sit in desks all day doing paperwork and never experience relationships with other chil-

dren. This is far from true for the vast majority of homeschooling families. Our children experience relationships with peers through many different activities in church, sports, music groups, classes, community activities, and clubs. They are able to develop peer friendships, yet they remain free from peer dependence.

As parents we desire to be the most influential voices in the development of our children's values. We feel that this happens more naturally and effectively through homeschooling. A surprising benefit of the choice to homeschool has been the strong relationship between our two sons, even though they are four years apart in age. If they were both in public school, they would rarely have opportunities for meaningful interaction with each other. As it is now, though, they really know and value each other and are experiencing socialization across age groups in ways that are not possible in a typical classroom.

Additionally, it is our conviction that our children should have rich, multi-cultural experiences. We recognize that this aspect of education has not traditionally been a strength of homeschooling, and examples abound of extremely separatist approaches to homeschool education. However, for families committed to celebrating diversity, homeschooling affords more opportunities for exposure to other cultures because children are not confined to the same group for six hours a day, five days a week. Indeed, recent reports have shown increased economic and racial diversity among families who choose homeschooling, which is producing greater economic, racial, and even religious diversity among those participating in homeschool cooperatives and public school-sponsored homeschool resource centers.³

SPIRITUAL REASONS

As Christians, we obviously want our children to love Jesus and learn his ways. While we are not advocating for schools to be places of worship or discipleship, we recognize that any place where our children spend thirty-plus hours per week will have considerable spiritual influence over them.⁴ Homeschooling allows for us to more intentionally incorporate our moral and spiritual values into the education of our children. We do not mistake moral teaching for a sound, well-rounded education. Instead, we seek to provide a thorough education that is intertwined with our Christian convictions. We believe that one does not have to sacrifice a well-rounded classical education for a strong emphasis upon values and morality.⁵

THE BALANCE WE SEEK

We believe that there is a model for homeschooling that engages the culture and world for Christ and still maintains a relationship of mutual support with the public school system. For instance, our older son participates in a local elementary school band program one day per week. This allows all of us to interact with and encourage those involved in the public school system while our child benefits from a fine music program.

As mentioned above, our children also take classes at a public school-sponsored homeschool resource center that serves a wide range of students who reflect the economic, ethnic, and religious diversity of our community. In order to participate in the Seattle Homeschool Resource Center (HRC) operated by the Seattle Independent School District, our children are enrolled in the public school system as “home-based instruction students.” With input from and approval by the HRC staff, we have developed a home-based course of study for them that includes taking classes in subjects such as math, science, social studies, writing, art, physical education, and chess club. These classes, which are taught by certified public school teachers through the resource center, usually are free or have only a small fee. The center provides classrooms, a library, computer facilities, a gym, and a meeting area for students and families. As part of the Seattle Independent School District, the HRC is supported by tax dollars that defray some of the costs of faculty salaries, buildings, and supplies. As parents, we receive an annual stipend of four hundred dollars to use for additional educational materials and activities in each child’s approved course of study.⁶

Furthermore, our children enjoy classes offered by the Seattle Christian Homeschool Cooperative, a group of families that gather each week at one of the churches in the North Seattle area. Co-op parents draw upon their various interests and gifts to teach classes and provide other learning opportunities. Outside teachers are contracted to provide classes that parents are not qualified to teach, such as fencing, Spanish, and piano. There is an annual membership fee, supply fees for parent-taught classes, and monthly tuition for classes taught by contracted teachers. The Co-op governing board meets each month and works in conjunction with the host church regarding facility usage and maintenance.⁷

Our family desires to be engaged with our culture while being led by Christ and pointing others to him. This is a desire we share with other Christian families, regardless of their educational choices. We recognize that God has blessed us with the time, education, and logistics to be able to provide an intellectually challenging and spiritually enriching homeschool environment for both of our children. Our prayer is that homeschooling will allow our children to be everything that God has created them to be without withdrawing from the world in which God has placed them. We also pray that through homeschooling our children will gain a broad and mission-oriented view of the world that will allow them to impact others for Christ.

NOTES

1 Scripture quotations marked (NIV) are taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. NIV®. Copyright© 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved.

2 Several recent studies indicate high academic success rates among homeschoolers. See, for example, J. Michael Smith, “Washington Times Op-ed: Testing Proves Success of

Graduates," online at www.hsllda.org/docs/news/washingtontimes/200812010.asp, accessed January 23, 2009.

3 Milton Gaither, "Homeschooling Goes Mainstream," *Education Next* 9:1 (Winter 2009), online at www.hoover.org/publications/ednext/34685614.html, accessed March 23, 2009.

4 In *Worldwide Guide to Homeschooling* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2005), Brian Ray indicates that high on the list of priorities for homeschool parents is their desire to influence the values and moral instruction of their children more directly. See also Mimi Davis, *So Why Do You Homeschool?* (Longwood, FL: Xulon Press, 2005).

5 Many helpful books assist homeschool families in teaching values and morality, including Rebecca Rupp, *Home Learning Year By Year* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2000), and Susan Wise Bauer, *The Well-Trained Mind* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2004).

6 See www.seattleschools.org/schools/hrc/welcome.html for more information about the Seattle Homeschool Resource Center.

7. See www.seattlechristianhomeschool.org/ for more information about the Seattle Christian Homeschool Co-op.



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