

Erasing Misconceptions: Setting the Record Straight on Six Homeschooling Myths
Touching the Future – Laura Grace Weldon
Pathways #41, page 44



Talking Points

- ❖ I am the Pathways Connect Communities Coordinator – Heather Boyd – and my 6-yr old son is unschooling this year. I am a professor of history and art history. Laura Weldon wrote my exact thoughts when she opened this article – “I never planned to homeschool.” She writes how her mother, aunt and grandmother were all public school teachers. She volunteered in classrooms (me too!) and worked on parent committees (me too!) But then she felt like school wasn’t a good fit for her children (me too!) My son is small, her children range from four years old to a freshman in high school.
- ❖ Weldon’s son experienced one of every parent’s worst nightmare. Her son was threatened, with a gun, at school, by other students. The school did nothing, not even call the police! She woke up that next day and faced her fears, the myths she had unconsciously accepted, about homeschooling:
- ❖ Misconception #1: *Education that counts happens in school*
 - In Weldon’s experience, her kids achieved what one researcher calls a “growth mindset.” “It’s the understanding that achievement comes from purposeful engagement, that talents and smarts are not fixed traits but are developed through persistence.”
- ❖ Misconception #2: *Kids Have to Follow Grade-Level Standards*
 - Kids develop unevenly. They can be ahead in reading and struggle in math. If their advancement is uneven, attention is focused on where they are lacking.
 - Outside of school, emphasizing strengths is easy, while other areas are mastered gradually. Children are remarkable good at self-regulating and are drawn to learn from situations that offer the right amount of challenge.
 - Schools treat the inability to read by age 6 as a crisis. Homeschoolers know that this can be early for some children. Rather than stigmatize the pre-reader and leaving them

“behind” in subject matter, the homeschool remains “immersed in a learning-rich lifestyle...because homeschooling is infinitely adaptable.”

- ❖ Misconception #3: *The Parent has to be the Teacher/Coach/Principal*
 - “I find our cultural emphasis on adult-led activities is somewhat counterproductive.” This comes from a belief that learning stems from instruction. But “studies show that a child’s innate drive to creatively solve problems is actually impeded when adults provide direct instruction.” This sort of learning is known to create more linear, less innovative thinking.
 - As a teacher myself (of college-aged students), I whole-heartedly agree with the assessment that adult-led (or perhaps teacher-led) instruction leads to less innovative thinking. The self-directed, intellectually curious students are the ones who do the best in any class. College-professors, and even some high schools are turning to something called flipped classrooms, where students watch pre-recorded lectures at “homework,” and use class time for active, project-based learning. How can we encourage our educational system to promote intellectual curiosity or self-direction?
- ❖ Misconception #4: *I Can’t Afford to Provide a Decent Education*
 - Ok, this one hits home for me! I am not a full-time stay-at-home parent. We have made it work this year by my working here at *Pathways* a few days a week, and teaching classes at night or online. This is not stress-free by ANY MEANS. But my husband and I find that our family time (Saturdays and Sundays) are the greatest learning times! This is when we go for hikes, go to museums, build projects, etc. Other days can literally be free-play all day long. We do send our son to a hybrid program for homeschoolers which provides student-directed play for the two days a week I am in the office.
 - The costs of homeschooling for me have not been in material goods, but in lost wages. A discussion here about how parents might implement more “homeschool-like” qualities of child-led learning and intellectual curiosity, EVEN WHEN their kids attend traditional school would be a fascinating discussion.
 - Homeschool co-ops are also GREAT choices, if you can find a few like-minded parents. It might also alleviate the need for supervision for smaller children. There are a myriad of ways to organize a co-op, but if child care is necessary, then consider an option in which one parent takes all the kids one day a week, but then other parents take all the kids on various other days that cover your work schedule.
- ❖ Misconception #5: *Homeschooling Will Deprive My Kids of Friends*
 - Weldon asks us to re-conceptualize what we mean by friends. Homeschooled children will continue to have same-age friendships from neighborhoods, or other programs they choose, but they will also make friends in various age groups, bringing perspectives shaped by varying experiences.
- ❖ Misconception #6: *Homeschooling is an Experiment*
 - Admitting doubts (something all parents have about every choice we make!), Weldon came to a realization that schooling itself is an experiment. “For 99% of all our time on earth, the human race never conceived of this institution.” Children learned about the world through relationships with extended family and communities.

- “Taking my kids out of school liberated them from the test-heavy approach of today’s schools, one that actually has nothing to do with adult success.”
- All four of Weldon’s children are in college or launched careers, and she credits much of their success to the freedom to focus on innovation, hands-on learning and meaningful responsibility.

Resources

If you are considering homeschooling, there are some marvelous resource sites. Each U.S. state has its own regulations for homeschooling, so please check with your local school district and read the homeschool law in your state. The Homeschool Legal Defense Association compiles a legal analysis of each U.S. state’s homeschool law at <http://www.hsllda.org/hs/state/>

<http://www.navigatingbyjoy.com/>

<http://thepioneerwoman.com/homeschooling/>

<http://sandraddodd.com/>

<http://www.parents.com/kids/education/home-schooling/best-homeschooling-resources-online/>

<http://www.johnholtgws.com/>

<http://www.educationrevolution.org/store/>

<http://www.alfiejohn.org/index.php>

<http://www.homeschoolnewslink.com/>

<http://homeedmag.com/>

<http://www.unschooling.org/>

<http://www.alternative-learning.org/>

<http://learninfreedom.org/>

An interesting blog asking us to consider the positives of obsessive gaming -

<http://education.penelopetrunk.com/2014/02/03/obsessive-video-game-play-is-the-most-beneficial-of-all-screen-time/>

Learn more about “Flipped Classrooms”

<http://flippedlearning.org>

“Flipped Classroom – What it is and what it’s not.” *The Daily Riff*. July 9, 2013

<http://www.thedailyriff.com/articles/the-flipped-class-conversation-689.php>

Watch Salman Khan, developer of Khan Academy, discuss the importance of “flipping” traditional classrooms by giving students videos of lecture as “homework,” and move interactive, project-based work into the classroom. <http://ed.ted.com/lessons/let-s-use-video-to-reinvent-education-salman-khan>