

What Is A Good Education?

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Considering how much it costs us, and considering that our children and grandchildren spend so much time at it, one would think that we adults would give more thought to it. Even worse, despite all of the contemporary (and constant) talk about "reforming" education, the basic components have not changed.

The politicians of today, and the typical educator, make it sound like education is so complex that regular citizens would find it hopeless to try to comprehend it. However, a quick review of your family dictionary will bring you a pleasant surprise. One common dictionary says simply:

"Education -- The process of training and developing the knowledge, mind, character, etc., especially by formal schooling."

Notice, please, that the definition of "education" will naturally lead you to think of some common synonyms. My thesaurus reads:

"Education -- edification, instruction, study, schooling, direction, tutelage, training."

From cradle to kindergarten there are many graphic illustrations of our little ones being "educated." They are continually "discovering" new things. Each "discovery" can lead to more advanced "discoveries" as the child learns about himself, his family, neighborhood, church -- his whole world. Those same principles continue throughout childhood and youth. Some "discovering" is totally informal, but the experiences of attending school are usually more structured. The totality of this "discovering" is the heart of the teaching/learning experiences that we call education.

One should notice that the definition of education has three key words. The dictionary says:

"Process -- a continuing development involving many changes."

"Train -- to guide or control the mental, moral, etc. development of; bring up; rear."

"Develop -- to cause to grow gradually in some way; cause to become gradually fuller, larger, better, etc."

These three words tell us that education, by its very nature, is more involved than at first appearance. To the conscientious Christian family, the process, training, and development must be "just right." (Caution! It is natural for parents to seek what they deem as a "perfect" education for their children. No such situation exists. We will find it only in Heaven.)

Parents are responsible to God for the education of their children. Unless a family lives on an otherwise uninhabited island, every family chooses other individuals to assist in aspects of education, be they a teacher, coach, principal, baby-sitter, tutor, or pastor. But while some may assist, the God-given responsibility cannot be given away.

Education takes work -- hard work. It is a sobering responsibility. Upon examination, there are four basic components of education, of schooling, of directing. These have not changed from century to century. Look at this listing and a brief summary of each component.

1. DEVELOPMENT OF INTELLIGENCE. Remember that the definition of education includes "knowledge" and "mind." This would probably be the first idea that enters the minds of parents. However, on deeper reflection, the development of intelligence includes three major components. Incidentally, illustrations of all three can be found in the Holy Scriptures.

a) *Develop A Knowledge Base.* This is often referred to as a student gaining a "basic education." It includes learning the core curriculum (reading, writing, arithmetic, spelling, etc.) at the elementary level and learning content in "academic" courses as one proceeds into and through the secondary grades.

b) *Develop An Ability To Reason And Think.* From a child's earliest years, every parent should be helping that child develop the skills needed to conquer new situations and experiences. It is impossible to "teach" everything. All of us, and every child, need to gain skill in taking what we know and applying it to a previously unknown situation. All adults that work with children should realize that they seek to develop these skills within the children in everyday experiences. In formal education, we do the same things in an organized fashion. We integrate activities into the classroom so as to bring opportunities for reasoning and thinking skills development into the schooling experiences of every child. Two formal terms that might be familiar to all parents are "inductive reasoning" and "deductive reasoning." Other aspects include teaching a child to use his knowledge base to confirm what is right or wrong.

c) *Develop The Talents And Abilities Of Each Student.* Historically, it is noted that every child needs a knowledge base and that every child needs reasoning and thinking skills. But it is also acknowledged that every child is unique in the areas of talents and abilities. We that educate are charged with developing those uniquenesses as part of the schooling experience.

2. DEVELOPMENT OF CHARACTER. A key component of education is the development of an inner system of "rights and wrongs," an inner system of how to conduct one's life. Lest it surprise you to have this listed as part of "education," please look at the dictionary definition. Every child is educated in this arena. Every school is distinctive. The difference is only in what kind of character system is implemented in the child. It could be based on conservative ideas, relativism/situation ethics, a Judeo-Christian ethic, humanism, strict Bible teaching, or whatever. But it is impossible to educate without character, and it is impossible to have character without it being transmitted through education.

3. DEVELOPMENT OF LIVELIHOOD SKILLS. There comes a time when a typical student ceases a life with books, teachers, and classrooms, even a time when he wants an independent life with prospects of spouse, family, job, house and car, managing time and money and responsibilities, etc. Again, every school teaches these skills, but the philosophy at each school will vary greatly.

4. DEVELOPMENT TO FIT IN ONE'S CULTURE. In this sense, education is the current generation of adults passing their common thinking on to the next generation. Education typically defines this role as "passing on" a culture, usually with thought of "improving it," from generation to generation. Like each other part of education, there is a core of material to which all can agree. We should be passing on our language, an understanding of our coinage and geography, and certainly the knowledge of what side of the road to drive a car! However, there is wide diversity among schools, and teachers, as to other aspects of culture. Contemporary illustrations could include how a school addresses "alternate lifestyles," alcoholic beverages, use of spare time, family living, religion, sports, and money. Some system of thought, and action, will be taught.

Those are the four distinct components of education, of schooling. Having listed and summarized them, it

is wise to make a number of practical observations.

❖ Parents who are not concerned about spiritual things have little focus about education beyond what education will do for their children *now* -- in this life. For them, a good education may bring a desired job with good pay or opportunity for promotion. A good education may bring opportunity for advancement in academia. A good education may bring pleasure through fitting into the modern culture, and even greater social standing.

❖ Parents who have been born again spiritually and saved by the blood of Christ shed on Calvary's cross already know they have nothing to fear from the White Throne Judgment. But they will be facing the Judge at the Judgment Seat of Christ. These parents are concerned about a good education for *now* -- and for eternity. These parents are wise to be students of the Scriptures, discovering what God says is acceptable to Him. What principles pertaining to child rearing and education can be found in the Scriptures? For example, what principles can be learned from these three passages -- Matthew 5:29-30; 6:25-34; and 16:24-26?

❖ Every aspect of education can be shaped to accomplish godly or ungodly purposes. An individual fact will never change. But when facts are placed together to form a subject or academic discipline, the perspective and philosophy of the teaching adult(s) and the institution that they represent (likely some school) will shape the education.

❖ Every word that describes something in education can be subverted so as to mean something different from the traditional definition. This is a common practice with modern educators who look for opportunity to persuade parents and citizens that they are worthy to be entrusted with the children. Educators are expending millions of dollars with public relations firms to "sell" their product. Naturally, they will use as many conservative, traditional words as possible, and the subverting of the old definitions occurs in all aspects of education. The wise parent must look beyond the surface words to look at the essence of what is really included in an education. Here are practical examples. One can refer to reading programs as containing phonics when they are not old-line intensive phonic. One can talk about developing reasoning when he is really teaching decision-making apart from parental authority. One can talk about standardized tests when the published materials are not testing academic achievement, but values and attitudes. One can have his student take a course in history only to find that "history" has been rewritten to conform to the philosophical presuppositions of the presenter. Words are important, but one must not be taken in by a charade.

❖ There is no such thing as an amoral education. That is an oxymoron. One cannot have an education that is free from values and attitudes. They are interwoven into the curriculum -- always. They cannot be removed. A parent must guide that the type of education is in agreement with his philosophy of life and his wishes.

❖ There is no such thing as an academic education that leaves out the other three components of education. Again, that is an oxymoron. Yes, many parents are protesting OBE and similar modern educational ideas in their state schools. But, no, a state school cannot be created that teaches only cognitive education. Some philosophy of character, livelihood skills, and a view of culture will be part of *all* education.

❖ It is possible to have a strong academic education that is devoid of spiritual virtue. There are many who are smart but who are spiritual fools. However, a truly Biblical education cannot be devoid of strength in all four components of education.

❖ Of the four components of education, it is easiest for parents to compensate for weaknesses in the

intellectual development area than in any other area. There are many ways this can be done. (Start by limiting the TV, frequenting the library, planning family activities that will challenge and stimulate toward discovery, and place education on a higher level than things like entertainment, sports, and teenage jobs.)

❖ To the conscientious Christian family seeking to implement their values into their children and youth, the most dangerous parts of education are not the printed curriculum. Yes, some texts contain materials graphically violating Biblical standards. But at least a parent can see the offensive materials. However, no one can observe every word, every gesture, every non-verbal communication that teachers might use in a day, let alone in a year, of school activities. Yet every one of these is educating the student. (It should be obvious that a good Christian school will use both Christian texts and have a staff that uses Christian methods, communications, and role modeling.)

❖ For the most effective education, all three prongs, the home, the church, and the school, must be united in purpose. A Bible-centered, local church-oriented Christian school with a professionally trained staff is the best alternative that a family can choose in most situations. However, choosing that alternative does not free the parent from the responsibility to regularly and fervently pray for the salvation and spiritual growth of the child and to work at building a strong three-pronged effort to educate the child to be acceptable in God's sight.

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