

Don't Entertain That Thought

By Lisa Frater

It amazing that over years, once we are past our initial enthusiasm, that slowly, if we do not guard against it, we have little doubts gnawing away at our homeschooling confidence. And one of these gnawers seems to be if one of our dear little students are 'struggling' at a subject. And our little doubting minds, that once were full of confidence and courage in starting this homeschooling endeavour, begin to crumble and we think, maybe our child is better off at school.

I feel for people who think like this, it can happen to us all - but in reality is this true, would they be better off in school?

Let us explore this idea. Is it worthy of consideration. Are you failing your child, depriving them from the State System? Or have we simply allowed a thought to be entertained that is not worthy of such attention.

Being an ardent homeschooling mother of three - who has no intention of ever placing my children in school, I think you may know my swing on things here. But lets explore what I hope may be helpful on the subject.

Firstly, is your child 'really' struggling. When we begin to think we have a child struggling with a subject it is amazing how our ears only tend to tune into other children who 'seem' to be at higher levels. So little Johnny down the road can whip though his times table accurately and faster than your boy - this certainly does not mean all thirty kids in his class can! The schools certainly have their fair share of 'failing' children - and the situation is not getting any better. Also remember many are simply passing subjects at significantly lower levels than they were decades ago. Comparing our children with other children or siblings who are naturally talented in a particular subject can be a disaster to our confidence. Have you been to quick to label your struggling children, are you sure that they really are! Something I've noticed about homeschoolers is - what we call struggling can be far removed from the schools call struggling. In a world where 50% or even less is often considered a pass - we as homeschoolers seem to have a much higher threshold at which we begin to worry!



Like many things we many choose to believe, homeschooling goes against the flow! It can be unlikely for you to gain a true picture of failure in the classroom from a 'schooled' child, parent or teacher. With certain personalities, the mere fact that we homeschool in itself seems to be enough to put many people on the defence. Unfortunately there is nothing we can do about this, but graciously accept that for some reason homeschooling has made them feel uncomfortable. But hey! that is not our fault! However, this will often provoke them to tell you of the great accomplishments of their children in school - it seems to make them feel better, but makes you feel worse! Don't assume everything is rose coloured in the classroom - you are not going to get a full picture from these people.

Of course maybe your child is truly not doing so well in an area of study, would they be better off in school. In a previous article, I wrote about how we tend to forget ALL the reasons why we homeschool, and academics is

just one part of the numerous advantages of home education. Maybe its time for you to look again into the reasons you choose to do this crazy and wonderful thing at the beginning.

With that aside, I wonder where the notion of putting a struggling child into the school system is going to benefit the child - if we have that confidence in schools then why did we choose to homeschool in the first place? I went to school, I know! One things that schools are good at - even though it is not purposeful - is making children who are struggling feel dumb! They can so easily loose their confidence and their love of learning, as they notice how much worse they are at things than other students. They will place themselves into the 'stupid' category - that they only go to school to eat lunch, and as an adult will continue to battle with that 'title' for years or decades. Surely you can do better than this!

So what can you do? Home Schooling gives you the opportunity to protect and cultivate your children's confidence so they need never feel 'dumb'. Why do this, because a confident child is much more likely to try and continue trying. This is your new goal - to make sure your child does not know they are struggling! And how do you do that!

Remember, all children are unique - each will have their different talents and strengths, and at different times. Be realistic, if your child has a struggle with a subject yet progressing nicely in others, control your concern. This is completely normal, everyone's report card from school reflected weaker and stronger subjects - it is to be expected. Just because you home school does not mean your children have to be great at EVERYTHING !

Lower your expectations to control your frustration. When your expectations are high, disappointment will readily follow if they are not met. But if you expectations are lowered, how pleased we are when they are met or exceeded. Children often know when they have not met your expectations - it is a real confidence knocker, guard against it. Practically, this may be something as simple as before you correct their work think to yourself 'right they probably will get many wrong' you may be pleasantly surprised or you may be correct, but you are not going to get as disappointed and frustrated, than if you'd a much high expectation. Lowering your expectations does not mean lowering your goals for your child, it just practically helps you with continual frustration.

Watch your sympathy so not to feed a negative attitude. So what do I mean here. Lets say 'Sally' hates english, and so does mum! "Don't worry dear, I hated it too, but we have to do it!" mum sympathises. This is not going to help matters! Its turning a subject into a chore - and as homeschoolers we have the ability to help this too. Your child does not need your negativity to mount alongside theirs. If you have a negative attitude on a subject, keep it to yourself and try not to subtly portray it. Why do you have the attitude in the first place I wonder, did your performance in school help you form it? We need to be positive and encourage, not sympathise with our children doing lessons. After all they're homeschooled - how very lucky they are!

Never compare children or even more so siblings. Don't talk about their difficulties in earshot - you have no right to subject them to these opinions. Children are particularly sensitive to their parents comments, and can take them far into adulthood - they only want to please, make sure

they know that they are.

Also, don't forget the possibility that your child is simply not ready to engage in that level of a particular subject at this time. If this is the case, it is even more crucial to help them sustain an interest in any subject - so when they are ready they will approach it with enthusiasm and confidence, without any bad experience or bias behind them. It's likely your child will get there in the end, but it will be much faster journey if you're working with them to make the process stress free.

As for practical ideas, seek out 'stable' home educators to help you with this situation. If your child is truly struggling deal with it calmly, realistically and slowly - most of all put things back into perspective, and start a new goal to ensure their confidence, nurture a love for learning and keep their fire lit no matter their ability. After all confidence has led many people far beyond where academics could not follow.

So if your child is struggling make it your goal that they don't realise that they are! Continue to encourage them, be positive and be patient.

After all "***the sweetness of the lips increases learning***" proverbs 16:21b.

... and on patience, remember

We did not choose to homeschool because we were patient, but it is the homeschooling that teaches us the patience.

Don't worry we've all been there!

