

Cooperative Catalyst

Changing Education as We Speak

Unschooling: A Gentle Approach (Guest post by Carlo Ricci)

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I have 2 children born in 2003 and 2005. We are unschoolers. What this means for us is that our girls are treated so that their voices matter. They have a substantive say in how they live their lives, just as, I believe, any person should.

I primarily see myself as a child advocate and I believe that young people are the last acceptably oppressed group in the world in which we live. Unfortunately, we can treat young people in ways that we would

never dream of treating older people.

In short, unschooling is a learner-centered approach. Learner centered approaches to learning are based on the assumption that the learner him or herself gets to decide what, when, where, and how they want to learn, as well as deciding when they want to opt in and when they want to opt out.

While this may sound like an extraordinary amount of freedom in a typical American or Canadian context, in practice learner-centered democratic education means that children are deeply engaged in what they learn, self-motivated beyond what we typically see in most students, and able to sort through learning problems because they have a great deal of confidence in themselves as learners.

Unschooling sees the world as the school and life as the curriculum. Nothing is ruled out and nothing is imposed. The learner decides what they need. It could be a workbook, a formal school, or a skate park. The democratic part is that they have a substantive say in running the places and spaces that they inhabit as learners.

Learner-centered democratic schooling as a pedagogical approach arises out of some of the radical school movements of the 1960s and 70s, and now is a fully flowered "movement" with many types of schools, practioners, and "graduates."

Unschooling is

Love, compassion, respect, and trust.

Allowing young people to unfold in ways that are driven by their soul, their spirit, and their internal motivation.

Allowing young people, and all people, to learn in the world, to use whatever resources, methods, and tools the learner chooses.

Unschoolers understand that schooling and education are not the same thing, and that in many cases a better education can be had outside of mainstream schooling.

I, like other unschoolers, have found that children who are reared with this worldview and philosophy thrive and their minds, bodies, and spirits soar.

I see unschooling more as a philosophy of life with the children being

empowered to make substantive choices over their lives and to live in democratic spaces and places where they have a substantive say over the running of these spaces and places.

Consistent with this, one of my daughters has decided to go to school and the other has decided to learn outside of mainstream schooling.

They are both thriving socially, academically, and spiritually. They are both happy with their decisions.

As a loving father, there is nothing more I would want for my children. I am glad that I am able to trust my children and allow them the freedom to develop responsibly and to allow them to unfold in ways that they choose, rather than externally impose on them a rigid path that repels them at their very core.

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