

Unschooling Life Podcast #10 - August 6th, 2014

## Family Bonding

**Amy:** On this podcast, so far, I've been focusing on natural learning that's what happens with unschooling and also happens in some alternative schools environments, but natural learning is not the only benefit of unschooling.

What do families gain from an unschooling lifestyle that goes beyond just the natural learning environment? That's the question for today's episode of the Unschooling Life Podcast.

I asked Sandra Dodd, my favourite advocate of radical unschooling, if she could talk more about the differences between unschooling and other education alternatives.

**Sandra Dodd:** I didn't know, when I first started, what the differences were, but over the years I've seen diverging paths. Because in the 1970, late 60s and early 70s, when John Holt and some others were thinking we can reform school. There was research, there was serious university research about how people learn and that's what unschooling ends up based on. Some of the alternative schools, and democratic schools, they based themselves on that too, but the thing is they never left the harbour, they didn't know that there was a whole world beyond that, so they are still making a different kind of school.

If the parents are paying someone else to keep their children some number of hours and expecting a report of how their children did at least to make worth their money, they have all the disadvantages of school. Well not all of the disadvantages of the worst school you can imagine, but disadvantages of school that unschooling at home never touches.

Like dividing the world artificially into school years and semesters, with days that are learning days and days that aren't learning days.

I mean, it's sad to say, but the schools that are boarding schools based on that, seem to purposely separate the parents from the children. And all schools need to do that so the kids aren't crying and wishing they were home. It forces you to want the children to pay attention to the teacher, and only to care about to what they say. The only good way to do that is to break the bond between children and their parents to some extent.

When people are dealing with the school schedule, they see the children from 6 years old to 18, more or less. And they say "we have only this many years to do what we are going to do" and that affects their view of their children progress.

Whereas the child at home might reach those goals, those sort of checkpoints at 14 or 22, and that's ok, because at home they are counting all the other things that their children did too as legitimate, in a radical unschooling family that really does unworn themselves from schoolishness.

Another thing that happens with radical unschooling is the relationship between the parents and the children is so close, and so warm, and direct, that it affects not just their day to day peace, and their learning, but their lives after the children are grown.

That's another thing that I could not have known as I first started that I see now. Whereas with schools, ideally if a children develops a really strong bond with one teacher or two, loves those people and the very sight of them inspires them to think great thoughts, once that teacher is off duty, it's over. It probably will not be a lifelong relationship.

For a child whose home life isn't better than school, School is the bomb. It is still school.

So, I think for a child whose parents can't provide a better environment than they can buy them in a school, school might be great. And sometimes there are long term relationships between students and teachers, but that's not the goal of school. And if that relationship, if that bonding, can be with the parents, instead of paid strangers, I don't see any disadvantage to that.

So when people say "my school, my charter school, or my this or that, online school... is unschooling", i think it's going to compromise the family's understanding of what the potential of unschooling is.

I am trying to think of what emotion this is... It's not resentment, jealousy... It's something... Indignation, I suppose? When people who are running the school, charging money for people to send their kids there, where they will keep them there everyday, like the law says, and they are reporting to the state, like the law says, to then equate themselves with what radical unschoolers are doing, it's cheater, they are cheating, they are trying to suggest that they can do in 180 days, whatever 6 times 180 is in hours... that they can take the state requirement of hours and create, in that time, what a radical unschooling family who are unschooling can create in 364 of learning.

**Amy:** My audio wasn't being recorded properly at this point, here I said something sort of snarky: "you mean 363 days, because of 'learn nothing day'", because apparently I don't know how many days there are in the year, and Sandra said:

**Sandra Dodd:** I took out the one already, it' would have been 365, hahaha

**Amy:** And we had a pretty good laugh about that. But eventually we got back to talking about the other benefits of unschooling, things that people don't necessarily think of as education.

**Sandra Dodd:** It's easy to see that if you are going to nurse your baby, the bond, the nursing relationship, and the awareness, the sort of visceral communication that happens between the infant and the mom is going to be lost if that baby is put on full-time daycare. And the mom mourns for a while and then just bucks up and picks the baby up when she gets off work. But I don't think it can be as close, I don't think the child will ever trust that mother as much as he

would of. We don't... it's painful to think about it, it's painful to look at the effects of that. And co-sleeping helps with bonding, when parents can do it. And by bonding I think I mean intimate knowledge, each one of the other. The baby can read the mom's mood, the mom can read the babies needs, moods, awakefulness, fear, calm. In ways that you lose if the baby is in a different room, in a different bed.

Those are just not the things that we speak of in this culture because it has to do with human instinct. When I was a kid we were told in school that humans don't have instincts, that we have to learn everything we learn from books. That we don't know how to build shelter, we don't know what food to eat, we don't know anything except through our culture and what we learn in books. I think that is probably true especially if you set up a religion that says "anything you kind of think it's right, that's a message from the devil. You need to not do that. If you didn't read it in the bible, then it's the devil tempting you not to do what you are supposed to do". And how long that's been going on on this culture? Way over 1500 years. And so, if we were, we, millions and millions of people were shamed about giving into their basic instincts. There are whole phrases that go into that, whole shaming phrases. Like: "You need to ignore your 'urges'". And they say 'urges', like it... it sounds nasty coming out of you. For instincts have been literally demonised by our culture, by our largely religious culture, it keeps people from knowing how to be. And if people feel like they have to buy a book and read what's in the book, and there are so many different books, then the culture that was supposed to help us to know what to do is totally scattered and lost. We are so afraid of instinct. So with radical unschooling it is possible for a family, even who skipped that part, even who didn't have infant bonding, to, as much as possible, restore a relationship between the parents and the children. Where the parent really do care about what the children think and want, more then they look in the book and see what a six year old should think and want.

One thing that John Holt, when he was writing about teacher own, he too had a curriculum in mind, he too was thinking, not teach a curriculum, but do this, instead of school, until school is up, and then you will be done, and it will be cool, you will have dodge the bullet, you will have missed out on the damage of school, that's worthy all by itself.

But John Holt didn't have any children, he didn't actually do what he was writing about people doing. I respect him, I love his books, I am glad he did what he did, but then people come along, after that, and they do it, and then they share that with each other, and then people did it better than they saw their families do it. Their families say "well, I wish I hadn't done this", it was all right, but "oh, I wish we had done this", and so, entire lives of young people have been lived now since John Holt died, who didn't go to school, and what those families discovered, that John Holt couldn't have known, is that if you live your life receptive to the learning around you, accepting of input, appreciative of the other people around you who know things, and as the resources around you, and trying not to be prejudice against inputs like television and videogames and comic book... Then what happens is, the parents learning kicks back in, the parents, who probably had, sort of calcified because of school, they soften back up, and they start to want to learn. And so they are learning along with their children, or in a parallel play kind

of way, they might all be in the same place all learning different things, sharing the good parts. The richness of that environment of learning, where the parents and the children are exploring what they want to explore and sharing little bits along the way, sliding in and out of each others hobbies, is so big, is so rich, and when the children are old enough to get jobs, mine all got jobs as teens, but in some countries it's not as legal as it is where I am, and when they decide to move out, it's so smooth, it's so normal, it already seems not unusual that a child would move out, would find a cool opportunity and move out, and the parents would help them, willingly and sweetly. And I've seen that now a dozens times, and I assume I will see that hundreds of times before I am through, and most people have not seen that one time, they can't imagine that, they don't believe it, what they see is: when the child turns 18, everything changes. I've talked to kids who said they were so scared and stress when they were 17, because they knew when they turned 18, their parents were going to charge them rent, or throw them out, or if they didn't go to university, they should go to the military, all this huge pressure to get out. You are done now, we are done. So people hadn't consider that they could totally avoid that, that that would be a natural off shot of radical unschooling.

Keith and I did think, early on, we said: what we are doing is inoculating our kids against the trait of some, or the fact of some kid leaving with the first person who says "hey baby, do you wanna live with me?", or "oh, let's go get a house", or, you know, that sort of energy of young people luring other young people out and away, to other state, to other places, to dangerous neighbourhoods. We said: "it's going to have to be a pretty good offer to beat what they have at home". And so that becomes a safety factor too, if the children know that they can stay at home, then someone who comes and says: "hey do you want come do something with me? do you want to come live with me?" it better be a good offer.

**Amy:** A few days after recording this conversation with Sandra, she found a few notes, she'd writing a while back about the topic and sent them to me. She wrote:  
"When unschooling is equated with alternative school it can blind people of the possibilities of full-on radical unschooling. No matter how extremely great or different the school is from the traditional school, or the default standard, it is still a school. Parents who are unschooling as a whole way of life, can discover what no school can find, and the core aspect of it is the family as a base for learning. For learning about family, for learning about relationships, and resources, money, food and sleep, and learning about laughter."

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