

Unschooling Life Podcast #3 - July 16th, 2014

"Who can unschool?"

Introduction

Amy: Is unschooling for everyone?

I think any child would flourish in a loving, supportive, interesting, fun, resource rich, nurturing, stimulating environment.

In other words, any child, I think, would be a great unschooler if the parents were doing their job right.

So, today's question is: What does an unschooling parent need to do, to do their job right?

This is Amy Childs and welcome to the *Unschooling Life*.

So who should or shouldn't unschool?

First let's turn to Sandra Dodd

Sandra Dodd: Sometimes people say: "anyone can unschool". And I always cringe when they do that.

Because the same kind of people who write, or say things like that in public, tend not to be the people who are going to stick around and walk people through it, and help other people do it. It just sounds good, it's cheery, it's inclusive, and it's wrong.

Amy: Where do you see it not working?

Sandra Dodd: If the parents are unwilling to change it won't work. If the parents want to try it, instead of do it, it won't work.

I mean people need to try it, but they need to try it with the hope and intention of causing it to work, not try it in such a way that they really intended to prove it was stupid and wasn't going to work.

Amy: Or try it and see if the kid proves to them that it works.

Sandra Dodd: Right, right. "Well, I left him alone for a year and he didn't do anything." He probably did a lot of stuff, including wonder why his mother was leaving him alone.

Sometimes people say, when they think it is really easy, they say, "I'll just do this!". And I've come to be really sensitive to the word *just*.

I've been criticized for using *Just add light and stir*. Well that's another *just*. That is simply *all you do*.

But when you say "Oh, they are just playing", or "I was just joking" that's sort of word that takes something all back.

It makes it small, it makes it trivial.

Someone says, "Oh, just do this", and they mean "Oh, just let the kids play", "Oh, just stay home with them", "Oh just..." no you can't just do it.

You need to whole, and fully, and intensively do it.

Big time do it.

If you are only partially, kind of, just doing it, it won't work.

And the *it* is: doing the relationship with your child that involves all the kinds of connection, and answers to questions, and explorations that they will need to come to all of the aspects of, not just the things they teach at school, but other things.

So that in the course of this enriched life with your child, the parents are confident in learning, and their resources.

And the children are confident in their parents interests, and their parents knowledge, and their parents presence.

And when those things are solid, then learning doesn't stop.

The parents too start to see and prize the learning they are doing. That if their child ask a question they don't know, is not a problem.

Instead of being embarrassed. They'll go: "that's a good one!"

It's more interesting when someone ask me a question I don't know the answer to.

If I already do know the answer and it's an easy answer, that's not a fun use of my time.

If every single morning someone call on the phone and said "what's 4x2?"

And I just say: 8.

And they say: ok, thanks so much, I am so glad you knew.

I would be tempted to say: count on your fingers or get a calculator.

But kids figure those things out. When they figure it out on their own, that they can count on their fingers or get a calculator, and that it's not a test, that if they need to know they can find out, or if they want to know their mom will tell them.

Then when all of that becomes pressurised... pressurised is not the right word. You know like a hand pump? When there is a hand pump and the first few pumps don't get any water? All your doing is what they call priming the pump, you are getting the pressure in there.

When the water starts to flow it flows hard, and flows full. And it's like that, when you get over all of the deschooling and all of the little gradual relationship building things that need to be done to get to that point, then it starts to just really flow.

And so I think when someone says: "just do this". They just push the pump handle down once, and they go: "Well, it doesn't have any water?"

And they do it again, and three times maybe... "I really tried to unschool, but it didn't work."

But if they will be around other unschoolers and say: "OK, what do I need to do?" and they actually want to do it, and they actually try to do it, and they actually change their thoughts, reactions... it just start to flow.

And once it starts to flow you can't turn it off, you wouldn't want to. Why would you want to? You can't.

Once the parents know that their learning gets tied up with their children learning and they can all learn together, and that once they start making those connections, the connections that they are making today will be just things that were brought up a year ago, 5 years ago. Toys that they have when they were little, "oh, that's that grip toy, when you pull the string and the other thing pop up. You know, that ladders and pulls"

So when those connections start to be horizontal across their whole life and across the universe, not vertically like school. Like, this is what seven graders in the second semester are studying, so its like a column of knowledge from which you will move on to first semester 8th grade.

When they undo that model and go with the landscape of the universe as their curriculum, there is no going back.

Sandra Dodd: I have been criticized sometimes by other unschoolers for being so anti-divorce.

Sometimes people are reckless when they come to unschooling, they seem to think is something that you can sign up for, like a religion, or you can buy like an encyclopedia. And that when you have it you have it.

But its something it has to be built gradually within the family.

And so when people fight with their spouses about it, it can cause a divorce, which causes no chance of unschooling.

Which stresses out the kids forever. So I am not in favour of unschooling over marriage.

Sandra Dodd: When people are wanting to control their children is often because they have the almost magical belief that by controlling or sacrificing something they can guarantee a child's safety, curiosity, innocence.

And if the thing that they sacrifice is a chicken that's voodoo. If the thing that they sacrifice is the television time, that's modern voodoo.

That by limiting a child's access to the modern world, to normal everyday things, they can somehow guarantee creativity, and it doesn't work.

And there will be parents who are thrilled because their kids went out in the yards and dug in the dirt with their sticks.

And they say: "See, see how creative?". I've taken the dirt with sticks as a kid, as adult, but I've never learned as much, no matter what the dirt and what the stick, as i have watching a

television show, or even looking at a picture book, or talking to people, or looking in magazines.

But if they are sitting outside playing in the dirt with a stick and your mother is right there with you and you are talking about other things that can be really valuable.

If the kid is digging in the dirt with a stick because that is the very best thing in his life that he can do, there is nothing more interesting in his house, in his yard, that child should go to school.

Any parent who isn't interesting in, or is not willing to, or is not able to make their unschooling environment better than school shouldn't be unschooling.

They should want the best for their child. And children need people, ideas, information, nice adults in their lives.

And if they can have that more easily and more readily at school, then school is good.

Only people who can do better than school should be unschooling, I think.

Amy: This is Alyssa who was always unschooled.

Alyssa: Well, my mother really let us explore.

We would be able to go to her and say: "what is this?"

And she will be like: "I don't know, let's go to the library".

Most people think, they are like, "Oh my God, how did your parents learn this? and then teach it to you?"

It's like: No, no, no, no. My mum and dad were resources. And that's what's so wonderful about them.

There was no limits on what I can learn and what wanted to learn.

I didn't know you that there was "you have to learn this, and you have to learn that". and they really let us explore, and let us sit outside, enjoy natural things, and let us wonder with our questions.

It was a real "Let's find out!" you know? That was great.

Amy: Here are Jan and Julie

Jan: I think flexibility is probably one thing, I found in my own experience that probably came out of a less flexible point of view, than Julie did.

Probably less flexible intellectually than her might be, but certainly less flexible emotionally than her.

I always have been heavily invested in knowing it all, and knowing the right answers.

I think moving away from that, from being a provider of right answers to somebody who just talks about stuff and helps him find out what the right answers are.

The finding out is the more important aspect, than you already knowing.

Julie: If a parent care too much about right answers it is very easy to slip into teacher mode, and to start instructing rather than just letting the conversation flow naturally.

And I think that's quite key if you are going unschooling successfully you have to stop, if you started, you have to stop seeing yourself as the teacher, because you are not, you are facilitator, you are co-explorer, you are co-learner.

And I think a lot of what makes somebody a good unschooling parent is being curious about the world, about what's going on around them. And willing to look at interesting things, and seeing interesting things everywhere, and helping the child to see interesting things everywhere.

Amy: So, who shouldn't unschool?

Parents who don't want to set outside their old beliefs about learning or who don't want to learn how to set those beliefs outside?

People who don't trust their children or who don't want to learn to trust their children.

Parents who are easily overwhelmed or become angry easily and who are willing to blame their children for their feelings, or who assume that their children are responsible for their overwhelmed or unhappiness.

Parents who don't want to spend time with their kids or who can't spend time with their kids, who can't afford to be at home with their kids.

Parents and people who aren't curious about the world and aren't excited about the world and excited to share the world with their child.

Or people who are afraid of the world, scared of learning, scared of growing, scared of new ideas.

People who don't like to ask questions, people who are overly attached to their own preconceived notions.

And another category is the people who don't want to face the disappointing, unpleasant sorts of feelings that arise when you realise that many of the ways that you were treated as a child were wrong.

That many of the things you suffered as a child were unjust, and just really coming to terms with that.

You got a worse deal than your kids, and you are committed to given them something better than what you have.

And the last category I might add: people who aren't good at having fun.

Unfortunately there are people who really just don't know how to have fun, and I am not sure they should unschool.

I think they should first learn how to have fun before bringing their kids home from school.

If you don't know how to have fun that probably isn't going to work for anybody.

So basically, unschooling works for families when the parents are committed to doing absolutely everything that they can to provide a healthy, interesting, nourishing environment for their child.

And in that environment a child will not be able to help, but learn.

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