

Unschooling Life Podcast #4 - July 19th, 2014

Deschooling

Amy: Most people who grow up going to school end up believing that learning is something that has to be forced, and therefore that learning isn't fun.

Children who are never forced to learn, or to do schoolish things, have no reason to believe this. But children, and more importantly, their parents, who did go to school and who do believe this, before they can find the joy in natural learning, first have to unlearn this idea that they acquired from the forced-learning school model.

This healing or unwinding process is usually referred to as: deschooling, or the "deschooling period".

And that's our topic for today: Deschooling the Hows and Whys.

Welcome to the *Unschooling Life*.

Amy: First, I asked Sandra Dodd what did she have to say about deschooling.

Sandra Dodd:

It takes longer than you think. And if you don't do it right, it doesn't ever happen.

If the parents don't deschool, then unschooling won't happen.

That's how you know when deschooling is over, is when unschooling is really flowing.

Ok, deschooling: When I first started homeschooling, when I first came to any homeschooling form, in those days there wasn't a separated place to discuss homeschooling from unschooling, people said then "it takes one month for every year you were in school."

They weren't even talking about unschooling, they were talking about regular homeschooling.

That the kids won't settle down and care about learning until they've been home one month for every year that it was they were in school.

So for homeschoolers, they are talking about the kids.

For unschooling, that same formula, one month per year, was, you know, carried around and held up like a little template that maybe it's true, maybe it's not.

Over the years I come to think that really is true.

People can speed it up, a little bit, but if you try to do it fast, that slows it down.

When a person thinks that they don't need to deschool, when they say, "oh well, because I've read so many books about alternative ed, because I refrain to this schools, then I am just going to do it really quick, I am just going to start unschooling now and deschooling at the same time". Then it doesn't work.

If they had that cocky overconfidence that they don't need it, that is going to be hard for them. Because before they can really deschool they have to find the humility to know that what they knew before is wrong.

So if it's going to take a month, and you had a child who was in school for 3 years, that kid will be ready by Christmas to be just frolicking in information.

And won't worry if he has a math workbook. Not a real schoolish one, but the kind that they sell at book stores and grocery stores.

Like my kids had one at the time: Animaniacs, and I don't know if they are like My Little Pony or whatever Ninja Turtles workbooks, but something like that. It's basic a colouring book with matching writing stuff, math stuff.

If a kid wasn't in school for a long time, they can use something like that and not even think "oh my god, is just like school" they will just do it for fun, like they would do any maze book, or puzzle book...

Amy: or video game

Sandra Dodd: Yeah, exactly. And kids don't care if they are learning something inadvertently, if they are not school kids.

But the parents are school kids. The parents, for every year they were in school, for every year that they were in university, for every year they taught school, or even work at a school, even if they were a librarian, or work in the cafeteria, they still are living on that school schedule, school expectation. The vision of kids being divided by age and gender, and time, and hour, and bells ringing...

That structure in your head, that framework needs to be dismantled, so for deschooling to work, the parent, each parent, needs to dismantle the framework on which they are hanging what they think they know about learning.

And then they see the world.

Amy: So when you are talking about deschooling, and the parent has been in school for 20 years, and the child has been in school for 3 years and they are deschooling...

That sounds like the child is gonna be done deschooling in about three months and the parent is gonna be done deschooling in 20 months.

Sandra Dodd:

Right, it's not a team sport, it's not something that the whole family does together.

The fact that the child is starting to be curious and learn, can be a tool that the parent uses that now they're seeing how learning can work.

Now they need to learn to not screw it up, to stay out of the way, they need to not be schoolish with their child, they need not be teacherish with their child.

Every time they do that is a step backwards.

Every time they are able not to do that, to just accept that what the child is interested in has value, then they are moving more toward being deschool.

In the Harry Potter books, the second book I guess, when they are trying to go down, under the school, and they get caught by those vines that are grabbing them. And they are thinking of cutting, burning, doing something terrible to these vines, and Hermione says "relax", and they fall through.

If parents can do that, when they are all tangled up in those vines of school and fear, they can relax, they fall through.

And people are afraid, they are afraid and I understand fear, they are so panicky because they grew up in and around school.

And were told: "school is your job, school is crucial, if it wasn't for school no one would be able to read and write, if it wasn't for school, blablabla, if you don't finish school you will not have a good job."

When I was at school they said, "you will be a janitor", then they started saying, "you will have to work at McDonalds".

But some of the nicest houses up on the side of the mountain here in Albuquerque are people who own franchises of fast food places.

They might have started off working there, and they might not.

But people can work at a job like that, get promotions, be responsible, buy a car, have a house, get married, reproduce, be happy.

I am sure anyone who listens to this could name someone they know personally who went to school, got a higher degree, got a job, can't afford a house that they felt like someone in their position should have, can't afford a car that doesn't embarrass them in the parking lot with the other cars of name whoever they are: lawyers, doctors, professors. And aren't very happy, and have a bunch of student loans to pay off.

So, when they get their big pay check, a lot of them go right back to pay student loans with huge interest rates. And they wish they hadn't spent ten years working to get the MBA and the job or whatever they have, which is not as solid as rock anyway.

Part of deschooling can be looking at that. Just kind of inventory of what you know, who you know what's real, what's actually happening, not to recite what school says, but to really look objectively, as well as they can at real people in their lives, real people in their neighbours, real people that they know.

Because if the PHD made people statically happy, that would be clear.

The happiest people in the world would all be doctor so and so, the happiest guy in the world.

It would be harder for some and for others depending in how invested they were, and how successful they were. How willing they are to look at their relatives and friends, and see what really helped with life, and what maybe worked against life.

Life meaning calm, happy, wake up, eat, drink, do some interesting things, be kind to some people, go to sleep feeling you are a whole, satisfied human being.

Amy: Here is Jerry Mintz

Jerry Mintz: When you first start doing this, if the student has had 5 or 6 years or whatever number of years in a regular, traditional school, there is going to be a period of detoxification taking place.

That means that in the beginning students will choose to do nothing if they have that choice because they never had that choice before.

The interest thing is there is an awful lot that's going on beneath the surface while that's happening.

I think of one particular case which looked like a student was doing nothing for a whole year, and we thought: "this is not really working for you".

So what happened is we all came to the conclusion he should go back to public school.

But I tested him and it showed he had gone up 3 grade levels while he was with us.

So one of the things we discovered is: you don't really know a child is learning.

You can tell somethings, but not others.

And even during this detoxification process there is a lot going on, but you have to be patient and you have to have confidence that it eventually is going to work out.

Amy: this is James Daniel

James Daniel: The underling is the question of trust. Having trust.

If you are engaged in this somewhat half hazard process without imposing a process, or a pattern, or criteria on it, it's necessary to trust.

It will give rise to a sufficient degree of completeness, that you touch upon enough of the things that the child needs to end up knowing, in enough depth and sultity that the child needs to end up appreciating.

That does require a great degree of faith, and its not something you could easily substitute for. I don't mean faith in the religious sense, I mean just faith that the process will complete itself in the appropriate way for that child.

Amy: and to Kelly Lovejoy

Kelly Lovejoy: He came out of the school at the end of 6th grade and he had already shutting down.

If you asked him about school he would say school is stupid, he hated learning, and that just broke my heart. That my child hated learning.

So we brought him home and it was all about healing.

One of the first things I did was I would go to the car, we would be taking a trip, and I would pack the back of the car and I would say: "Look, this is geometry. We are fitting all the things on the back of the car". "Well that's just stupid, just shut up. I didn't need you saying this kind of stuff."

Or we would go to the botanical garden. "Tell me, write about what you see."

It is really hard when you are in that school mode to quit doing that.

It really is just relaxing, letting them heal, watch a lot of movies, cook.

Do things that calm them down. Nothing academic, or even that looks academic.

It's really really hard, but really what you need to do is just let them relax and heal.

They say it takes one month to every year that you are in school, and that's our rule of thumb. But it starts over the first time you nag, the first time you say "this is geometry", or "write about something", or making any academic reference.

So it took us about 18, 19 months to cover, to get over that hump.

And during that time he was, of course, talking to his friends online, and they were still at school. And they were saying how he was going to be stupid, and he would never learn algebra, and he would never get a job.

Well within that 18, 19 months he got a job, he was still technically too young to be working, but we had some friends who let him work at their deli.

And I remember he came home one day, and he had had fractions at school, but he came home and he said: "I understand fractions".

He was making a milkshake and the guy said: fill it halfway with ice cream and then $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way with milk. And Cameron didn't understand what he was saying and he showed it to him on the cup and all of the sudden the light went on.

And he came home so excited he understand fractions all of the sudden. And that was very exciting to me to watch that. I don't know when they start fractions in school but I am guessing 3rd grade. So he had probably 3 years of fraction and still didn't understand it.

And that was a light bulb for him too because he kind thought that I was dropping the ball in his education, because we always said how important his education was to us. And here, I was saying "you don't have to learn anything". Well, that was not what I was saying. But that was the vibe I was giving of, I guess.

Then he saw that that was what I was talking about. That helped him so much, understand that this was not moms crazy... i don't know... I think a lot of people think we have got off the deep end when we take our children out of school, especially as interested as I was in academics.

It's hard for us to put it into practice, and its hard still for the kids until they have a light bulb moment, and that was his light bulb moment, filling that cup and understanding that he can learn that stuff and not have to be in school for it.

Amy: Here are a few excerpts from an article Jean Hunt wrote about deschooling.

Jean Hunt: It's only natural for parents to feel unease and uncertain when contemplating a path for their children other than the one they themselves travelled.

Those of us who decided to unschool, even when we are convinced that this is the best option for our child, must unlearn many unfounded assumptions about learning that we were conditioned to believe for so many years.

If we can do that, we can rediscover the natural love of learning we were born with.

Amy: Emotional unlearning usually takes longer than intellectual unlearning.

The deschooling process can be slow because it's not just about understanding, it's about allowing your emotions catch up with your intellect and that takes time.

Sandra coined a handy mantra for parents who need a simple reminder of what to do during this deschooling time.

She said: Read a little... Try a little... Wait a while... Watch.

And Pam Laricchia added to this: Repeat.

So, just remember that when you are in the throes of deprogramming yourself and relaxing into the joys of unschooling.

Read a little,
Try a little,
Wait a while,
Watch.

Tom Chapin sings "*Grow in Your Own Sweet Way*"

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