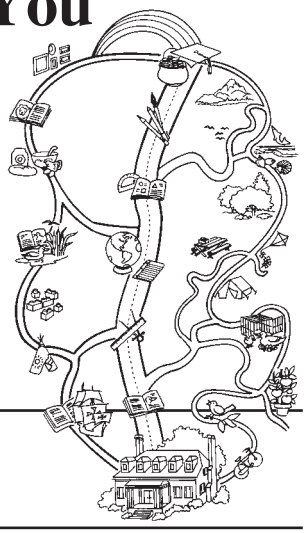
Choosing Curriculum That's Right For You



Homeschooling is a journey parents begin every year. Unfortunately, many families who wouldn't think of traveling without a map begin this homeschooling journey on their own, asking for directions along the way.

Three Important Questions

Common Sense Press can help you chart a course that's right for you and your students. You will discover that route by clearly answering the *"Three Core Educational Questions."* They are:

1. **What is education?**
2. **What are the roles of the teacher and the student?**
3. **What is the role of curriculum?**

Three Approaches to Education... To help you define your beliefs, here are some answers to the Three Core Educational Questions as they apply to three major approaches to education. These approaches can be considered routes on the roadmap.

The Classroom Approach

The most common approach used by teachers with a classroom of 25-40 students. Many homeschoolers also use this approach.

What is education?
In this approach, the student takes in information, usually through a textbook, lecture or video lecture. The student then gives the information back to the teacher through a project or test.

Often, the textbooks will teach the same material year after year, adding a bit of new information each year. For example, American History may be taught for six consecutive years, adding new information each year.

What are the roles of teacher and student?
This approach sees the student as a learner who is able to take in bits and pieces of information, and put them together to form the big picture. Short term retention, via making a good test score, is stressed and rewarded.

The teacher's main job is to follow the curriculum. These teachers believe that the curriculum creators know more about the students than the teacher does. If the student has difficulty, most proponents of this approach will recommend that the teacher force the student to conform to the curriculum. In that sense, it is a "one size fits all" approach.

What is the role of curriculum?
In The Classroom Approach, curriculum is the most important part of education.

Pros & Cons of The Classroom Approach:
- Possible high standardized test scores in early years
- Teacher has little input in curriculum
- Students may simply master the tests, rather than the material
- Students often become bored
- Students who do not fit the curriculum will feel inferior
- Students learn "factoids" rather than the big picture

The Life Approach

Also known as "Unschooling" or "Relaxed homeschooling", those who travel this route believe that education takes place primarily through life itself.

What is education?
In this approach, education is accomplished by developing a student's interests. Proponents of this approach believe that the skills of life will be learned as the student develops and grows, being allowed to discover life at his or her own pace. Often, this education includes a business or service project. Specific skills are not usually targeted, but will be focused upon as needed.

What are the roles of teacher and student?
The student is seen as a naturally curious learner who will learn in the proper environment.

The teacher is primarily a resource to the student. The teacher's main job is to create an atmosphere of learning and to be a learner as well. The belief is that the student will model the teacher's life as an effective learner, thus the student will become an effective learner. Beyond that, it is somewhat difficult to define the teacher's role, because every teacher is so different in this approach.

What is the role of curriculum?
There is usually no curriculum in The Life Approach. If curriculum is used, it is for reading or math only.

Pros & Cons of The Life Approach:
- Students are aware of interests and abilities
- Students develop thinking skills and become independent thinkers
- Little pressure on teachers
- Possible lower standardized test scores in early years
- Opinions vary as to whether or not students will learn all they need

The Applied Approach

In this approach, "Application" is the main emphasis in education.

What is education?
This approach emphasizes the application of knowledge. A student who can complete a math sheet on subtracting money should also be able to make change in the store. Of course not all information is so readily applied to life. This is overcome by actually doing the things being taught or by finding a context in the student's life for the new information.

The age, development, and "readiness" of the student is always kept in mind. Reading may be taught in 1st grade or 3rd grade depending on the child.

What are the roles of teacher and student?
The student is an individual to be treated in an age appropriate manner. It is believed that a student will better learn a new concept if he or she is walked through it and then allowed to do it or apply it, rather than just being told about it.

The teacher's role is very important because the teaching parent knows the student better than anyone else. This approach gives the teacher the power to discern where students need help and how to give it to them.

What is the role of curriculum?
Curriculum is seen as a means to an end, not as the end itself. It is used in a manner that is best for the student. Actual curriculum choices can make the teacher's job easier or harder. An age appropriate, flexible program is best.

Pros & Cons of The Applied Approach:
- Students' individual needs are met
- Student gains confidence, not being compared with others
- Better and longer retention
- Education becomes a practical part of life
- Possible lower standardized test scores in early years

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If you find that your beliefs most closely resemble The Life Approach, and yet you are using curriculum designed for The Classroom Approach, you will likely become frustrated with homeschooling. Instead, talk to other homeschoolers, call curriculum dealers or publishers, and get information about the approach to which their materials are geared.

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Common Sense Press... Curriculum for The Applied Approach

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