

Educational Philosophies

Example 2

Unstructured Approach

As our approach to M.'s education is largely opportunity based, child centred and flexible, it is not possible to submit a timetable, or to specify in advance the activities we will be undertaking.

We strive to keep a balance between child centred and directed learning. On the whole we aim to facilitate learning through M's interests rather than to contrive situations in order to reach pre-determined outcomes. However we are always on the look out for any gap that may arise and we make the necessary adjustments to ensure that such gaps are filled. We usually tend to look at topics in the form of a theme or project, usually taken from some interest expressed by M. These topics can last anywhere from a few hours up to months depending upon the amount of interest and variety of activities we can link in to the theme. We find that we can start off by looking at one topic and move on to several linked topics very quickly.

In addition to actual activities and projects much time is spent in preparation and consolidation of work done. Discussion plays a great part in our approach.

Our highest priority is to instil a love of learning and a desire and confidence to find out for herself. Our approach is a holistic one: we are concerned with the development of the whole person. M is always encouraged to take part in decisions regarding her education and her own future. She is also encouraged to use her own initiative and to make her own judgments.

M. has almost unlimited access to PC, Internet, telephone, television, video, radio, audio equipment, and a huge variety of craft materials and equipment. We have an extensive library of appropriate literature, computer software etc.

Whilst we can isolate some aspects of the various subjects, many of our activities, projects etc. cover a wide range of subjects. We tend to look upon M's education as a whole rather than dividing her knowledge into subject headings.

As an example, M.'s current interest in dinosaurs includes elements of Maths, Science, C.D.T., History, Geography, English, Archaeology, Natural History, etc. M has had experience of finding fossils, taking rubbings from fossils and looking at books about dinosaurs and prehistory. She has discussed evolution, measured out the lengths of dinosaurs, counted dinosaurs, cooked dinosaur biscuits, made models in paper, clay, papier mache, visited the National Stone Centre, watched several videos and many other activities under the general umbrella of "Dinosaur".

Similarly we recently had a project of "growing things", where M saw how plants and animals grow and develop. Some of the activities we included were growing cress on a plate in the shape of her initials, these were later eaten in a salad. Sprouting mung beans which were then included in a meal made to celebrate Chinese New Year which we ate with chopsticks. Wearing Chinese clothes, this led on to drawing dragons, making dragon masks, learning how to say Happy New year in Chinese and making lucky red envelopes for the traditional Chinese new year gift of money, which the children then took to a local school fair to spend.

We grew potatoes in a bucket, then harvested them and made some into oven crisps and did potato prints with the rest. We watched carrot tops grow and made them into a jungle plate garden. A primula was chosen from a local garden centre and brought home to feature in a still life drawing. M made a cress head by decorating a yoghurt pot with a face and growing cress in it for hair. M has her own patch in the garden where she chose to plant some flower seeds and tended them until they bloomed. We regularly visit local farms and animal centres. We were lucky enough to watch a chicken hatching out of an egg, which fitted in very well with our theme.

We regularly go for walks in the woods to look for flowers and wildlife and have discussed the changes over the seasons. We made a huge flower mural covering the wall in our hall. We made flower bracelets out of felt. We made flowers out of hot beads, tissue, clay, paper, etc. We read book after book on related topics. We grew nasturtiums and eaten the horn off the flower in salads. We harvested fruit from our own garden and from pick-your-own farms and made juice and pies with it.

Accompanying all these activities was conversation and the appropriate weighing, measuring, recording etc. Most of these activities were undertaken in the company of other children. M regularly attends home-education group meetings as well as meeting friends on a daily basis.

One of our main aims is to fit M for life in the real world. We encourage basic skills such as reading and writing, use of computer and calculator, house and garden maintenance, personal safety, self discipline, respect and care for others, for animals, for the immediate community and environment and for the world as a whole.

We consider that M is learning all her waking hours and we strive to provide a fertile learning environment at all hours of the day.

This is just intended as an illustration of the variety and breadth of activities we undertake, all of which is accompanied by hours of discussions ranging far and wide. We do not follow a curriculum and our studies are subject to change without notice, however we have found from our previous experience with our son that children are very good at learning all that they need to know if trusted to do so.