

Conversations - the secret ingredient of homeschooling/unschooling

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Overwhelmed by all the materials available to help your child succeed at homeschooling? Items that promise to help your child learn better, faster and more? If I were just starting to homeschool today, the sheer volume of products would confuse me. I'd be panicking because my budget couldn't cover the cost of all that's available and I'd be worried that I'd make the wrong choices and jeopardize my children's future.

It is so easy to get bogged down when you help your children learn at home. It's similar to how you felt when you had a new baby and you felt like you never accomplished anything because you did the same things day after day. You might feel again as though you're not accomplishing anything. You make lunch, clean the bathroom, read stories to your child, think of something to make for supper, and go to the grocery store while worrying that you're not doing anything to facilitate your children's learning. Maybe if you only bought that curriculum you saw advertised you'd feel better.

You drive to the grocery store and your eight-year-old tells you all about the spider she saw in the bathroom this morning and how he was going home to his family carrying a brief case. Your mind comes back from thinking about what you should be doing to provide a rich environment for your child and you ask your child to repeat what she just said. She says, "I was just kidding mom 'cause you weren't really listening." And then you listen and she tells you things you had no idea she knew. You walk into the grocery store together holding hands talking about what kinds of food people ate before there were grocery stores.

This conversation and others like them are much of what unschooling/homeschooling is about. In the process of daily life, our children learn all sorts of things in conversation. Conversations that take the two people involved in all sorts of directions and often lead to totally unexpected places and explorations. It seems so very radical and scary to let learning take place in such a seemingly haphazard way. But that is really how all learning takes place - in an organic serendipitous fashion regardless of our attempts to contain and control it.

Those times spent in conversation with your child, perhaps even over the ads that appear in homeschooling/unschooling publications for educational materials can be just as, if not more, educational than the products the ads are trying to encourage you to buy. I don't mean to say that you shouldn't have stuff for your child to do, play with, manipulate, etc. or have materials to help them learn what they are interested in learning. But remember, conversations are one of the most important parts of learning at home. They are priceless and impossible to buy, yet free to anyone who takes the time to listen to and converse with a child.