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Educare



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"A third culture kid is a person who has spent a significant part of his or her developmental years outside their parents' culture." Dave Pollock

How to Choose a Home Schooling Curriculum

Choosing a Home School system that suits you and your family is not easy. It is hard to know where to begin. Here are some questions to start you off. I hope that the questions will get you thinking about your situation and what will work for you.

There are broadly 3 areas to consider when looking at any home school curriculum.

1. **Your child (children)**
2. **Your context**
3. **The curriculum on offer**

1. Your Child.

It is a cliché to say that every child is different, but nothing shows that quite so clearly as when you are trying to home school your own children, each with their own unique personality! Are they very physical, wanting to be outdoors and hate sitting still for any length of time? Do they love to sit, draw, pretend to read stories to their teddies? Do they love to work with you on something or are they very strongly I-can-do-it-myself, and don't like taking instruction from you?

Do they have special needs? How bright are they? Are they struggling now in school or are they highly successful? How old are they? Are you looking for a system to carry on what they are doing now in school, or are you starting from pre-school with them? Are you going to be schooling several children at once?



Choosing a system based totally around books and stories for a child that doesn't like to sit and listen to books, or choosing a system that depends on lots of attainment rewards for a child who is not very academic is going to make life difficult.

Think about your child or children and what would suit them.
(But don't fall into the trap of – he hates doing spelling so we never do any!)

2. Your context

Your ideal home school system may not work in your context, so be realistic about what is and isn't possible. If you are going to be in a remote rural area, then you need a system that is not dependent on regular postings to and from a tutor in your home country. Also a system that requires lots of equipment that is not available is going to lead to frustration.

But don't write it off too quickly. Many systems are flexible. Many provide packets with key equipment that you can take with you (things like magnets, number lines, reading books etc). Don't forget the other families around with whom you can swap things (especially books – how old are the other children on your team and what language do they speak?) If it is a tutor based system you can negotiate material being sent less frequently and in larger packets. If your postal system is unreliable, you may need to take several years worth of Home School materials with you at the beginning. This makes it especially important to take time to choose something that suits you, before you buy.

Which raises the next question – cost. Some systems are very expensive, but in some ways you

do get what you pay for. A system which provides tutors, full detailed materials and assessment is going to cost more than a general DIY package. Be realistic about what you will be able to plan and deliver on the field too. If you were to use a local International School, that would cost too. Education overseas needs to be part of our budget.

Who is going to deliver your chosen system? Is it Mum, Dad, a volunteer, a mixture of people for different subjects? Does this person have any experience of teaching? Is it going to change every year or two with different volunteers?

Broadly speaking the more people who will be involved over time, the more you need a system that is thorough, systematic and consistent, at least in the planning stage, to ensure there is continuity from one person to the other, and no needless repetition.

3. Curriculum

Every country has their own curriculum, and may value different things in education. For example, in the UK every child does English, Mathematics and Science from the beginning. If your child is going to return at some point to school in the UK, then they need to do that too. We also have an emphasis on teaching children to think for themselves, and learn independently. These are harder to pin down in a curriculum, but they are essential especially in older children if they are to return to UK schools at some point.

Do you know what is important in your country's education system? It is worth visiting a local school and asking if you can visit a classroom and talk to the teacher. Don't rely on your memories of school days, not only have things changed, but we tend to remember our older years and not what we did aged 5. It may be possible to access your national curriculum through the internet.



A good curriculum will be:

a) Varied in teaching style

No child wants to sit all day with paper and pencil. For under 7 there should be huge amounts of practical, active content. Here are a few simple examples of practical activities:

Mathematics: counting with cubes, number lines; draw round someone in chalk on the floor and then measure bits of the outline; stop clocks and running races; graphs made in 3D (rows of toy trucks and cars)

Literacy: reading should be fun! Read aloud all sorts of books, talk about books, drawn/paint favourite characters, record stories on computer to play back, take an activity from a book and do it in real life.

Writing: menus in play restaurant, letters home to Granny, captions for pictures they have drawn, cartoons to learn to plan stories, play doctors and write prescriptions

Science: floating and sinking in a bath of water; take apart a battery run toy car; different sized pots in the sand pit; planting seeds; magnets; recording the weather.

b) Broad in subjects and content

A primary school curriculum (age 5-11) covers core and additional subjects. In the UK core subjects are mathematics, English and science. The additional subjects give the child breadth, and may be an important link to your home country e.g. geography or history. Here are the additional subjects I would want to make sure my child was experiencing:

Geography

History

Art

Music

Physical education

RE, moral & ethical education

PHSE (personal, health, social, education) this is often the 'hidden curriculum' It is about their social skills, things like sharing, taking turns, empathy with others, for older children drugs/smoking awareness, sex education, preparation for puberty.

The great thing about these subjects is that they are not so age dependent, so you can do the same geography or art project with 3 children of different ages, adapting the curriculum to work for your family. Not every subject has to be done at the same time, for example you can do a geography project for a few weeks and then a history project.

It is also important to remember that each part of the curriculum should be broad too. *Mathematics* is not just about adding and subtracting. It should include, time, measurement, volume, graphs, co-ordinates, shape, mental maths, money, weight.

English should include: reading (phonics and comprehension) writing (lists, poems, stories, letters, etc etc) speaking and listening (following instructions, presenting their work, discussion etc)



Is all this necessary?

Well, I think of one lovely family with 2 little girls. Neither parent was very sporty and neither were the girls. They home schooled and the girls never by choice hit, threw or kicked a ball, or used a skipping rope or a bat. It was becoming obvious from their physical co-ordination that they weren't doing any Physical Education. On the other hand they were both learning to play the piano beautifully. It is easy to neglect the bits that don't suit you. It is useful to have a check list to make sure that your children are getting a

broad education.

This may seem like a huge amount to do, especially alongside language learning and ministry. But the great thing is, that if you are aware of the broad curriculum, then you can be reassured that your younger children are learning when they are playing if you send the right play activities their way.

So, after your school session they play outside with a ball (physical education) then they get a washing up bowl of water and different size cups and containers (mathematics, volume, science). You do some cooking together (weights, measures and chemistry). They play with the neighbourhood children (cultural understanding, language, social skills) and so on. For older children it may mean taking time to find a social activity or a sport they can do.

Keeping records

Your curriculum should have some way of recording what the children are doing each year. This may be recording when they have achieved pre-set targets, national curriculum or grade levels; or for younger children it may be by compiling a learning journey book, with samples of their drawing/writing and photos of them busy with activities through the year.

This helps when handing over from one volunteer teacher to another, when returning for home leave, when assessing if your child is progressing at an appropriate rate and is a good memory folder for the child.

So does your chosen curriculum have:

A variety of teaching styles?

A broad curriculum that covers all subjects?

Teaching to encourage your child to think for themselves and learn independently?

Freedom for flexibility for your context?

Enough planned structure for you?

The capacity to fit in with your home country curriculum?

Some form of record keeping?

And finally

Is it going to be fun to do every day for the next 5-10 years?!!

Rebecca; June 2012 – Rebecca home schooled her own children during an overseas assignment of some years in Central Asia. She is now based in the UK and is available for consultation on home schooling concerns by correspondence or face to face. She is also committed to debriefing for children and is keen to offer this to returning families where possible.

Anyone interested in contacting her can reply to this e-mail at SteveGill@mkea.freeseve.co.uk or mk_tck@yahoo.co.uk



Travel with Children

"Are we nearly there yet?" This classic line from bored children to their travel-weary parents is humorously repeated in the *Shrek 2* film as the motor-mouthed donkey drives his travelling companions to distraction en route to "Far Far Away". Sometimes long journeys with children can feel very much like they are way beyond "far far away"! Long-distance travel can pose a real challenge to the creativity and patience of parents!



The most common shared experience of international travel is the medium or long haul flight. The following are a few tips from things that we found helpful and gleaned from the experiences of others.

Preparing for travel

Check the latest restrictions on hand luggage. This is particularly important when liquids, gels and creams are needed for babies and toddlers and the amounts allowed are fairly small. Powdered milk and feeds are OK on most flights where water will be provided to make them up. Some of the basic common sense measures for international travel are even more important when travelling with children - it's one thing to be stuck in difficulty as an adult, but much worse with responsibility for a family. These include informing the bank about the journey so that credit and debit cards aren't frozen; taking more than one type of card; carrying some well-protected cash just in case; copying passports and any other important documents to carry one set and leave another in a safe place where family or friends can access it in an emergency; having a small emergency medical kit in the carry-on luggage; putting enough into the carry-on bags for the first day or two in case the checked bags are lost and more.

Leaving for the airport is one of the most difficult times where it's easy to forget something vital. It is worth making a list of the last-minute things required and checking carefully to ensure that the final tasks are done and the last items picked up. With a big family a bag count to ensure that you have them all at each stage of the journey is useful.

Checking in on-line is now the norm for most airlines and is a great idea to ensure that a family gets decent seats together. It also helps cut queuing time at the airport. Some train stations which feed airports occasionally have check-in and bag drop facilities, leaving parents free to board the train with the children but without the bags. Bulkhead seats are often recommended for families. It avoids the problem of the child kicking the seats in front of them and it's easier to get in and out of these seats.

En route - before boarding the plane

Some airports have a 'meet and assist' services when booking your flight. Whether or not you get it depends on the availability of staff - but a parent travelling alone with more than one child will be given priority.

Security checkpoints can be the scariest part of flying for children. Even if they have done it before, it's best to discuss the security each time. They may have forgotten so explain that all toys,

backpacks, contents of the pockets, and maybe even shoes and belts have to go through the scanner.

Make the most of the waiting in airports to move around. Some airports have very few facilities, but even there it is possible to walk around and look at something rather than just sit and wait. You and



the children will be doing this anyway for hours on end cooped up inside the aeroplane, why add to this beforehand? For the same reason there's no need to line up and get on early only to add to the time spent sitting in one place. Some airports have plenty of things to see and do and make interesting destinations in themselves.

If you are a member of an airline's frequent-flyer club, you may be entitled to use a private departure lounge. Facilities such as a supervised place to leave hand luggage, comfortable chairs, free drinks and snacks, TVs and spacious toilet facilities are especially welcome when travelling with children. If you are not a member, you can often use the

lounges if you buy a day pass.

En route and on board

The dry air can irritate the nostrils and cause a runny nose - wetting the inside of the nostrils with a finger dipped in water can be helpful. Ear pain is usually at its worst in early descent (30 - 40 minutes before landing), so that is the best time for children to have a sweet to suck on or time the baby feeding for then if possible.

The parents' imagination may be really stretched when trying to prevent boredom on very long flights. The classic solutions of games, activities, puzzles and books are now very well supplemented on many airlines by a huge choice of AVOD with many child-friendly films and programmes. For travel on airlines that do not offer this, portable DVD players, games consoles and MP3/MP4 players are potentially very useful.

Silent toys are essential. Even a slight beep or peep can irritate fellow passengers on a long haul flight. Avoid anything that has multiple essential parts or is delicate. One parent bought a new toy as a present for each child and kept them secret until on board. These weren't expensive, just a package of small cars or aeroplanes, or a few plastic animals. Another parent developed origami skills and enjoyed teaching these during flights.

Within reason it is a good idea to allow children the choice of what to carry in their hand luggage as they get older. This is also part of giving them some element of choice and control over what they keep and dispose of when faced with longer home leave or definitive re-entry. Generally the children know what they want to carry and what they need to keep them occupied during the long flight and associated waiting. Younger children may need some help though. One of our children chose some bits and pieces of lego and duplo as his main entertainment only to find out to his consternation and his brother's amusement that this wasn't a very interesting choice for such a journey when he quickly exhausted the possibilities with this limited range!

Break the journey where possible if it is very long. I make some very long journeys now of 40-50 hours or more door to door that I would never have made with children.

Some destinations are so far away that overnight travel is inevitable. Others involve night flights because of cheaper landing rights and timetable limitations from minority destinations. Whatever the reason, overnight flights are a fact of life. There are pros and cons depending on the children concerned. For those who sleep easily it helps ease the passage of time, but for others it becomes a



frustrating and disturbed night where the children become more fretful for lack of sleep as the night wears on. Keeping to routines such as reading stories, listening to relaxing music, not taking in caffeinated or high-sugar drinks can all help, but nothing is guaranteed in these exceptional circumstances. Our own children always seemed to enjoy night flights with the excitement of breaking the routine and trying to stay awake as long as possible in a night punctuated by food and film offerings. They still enjoy flying now like so many other TCKs who gained that familiarity with air travel as children

On arrival

For the first arrival in a developing country normally someone should meet the family. If that doesn't happen, or if there is a mix-up, it is worth paying for the taxi ride to get to the destination. Prepare in advance with the address written in the local language and a good idea of the correct price for the journey. Some of the less honest drivers and businesses are all too prepared to take advantage of a travel-weary family.

When travelling across time zones jet lag becomes an issue. One simple tip is to stay up late the first night. A good way to do that is to go outside and do something active. The children usually are so excited that they will want to experience this new place rather than go straight to bed. Another part of jet lag involves meal times being out of sync, but this usually just evens out with time and the same principle of staying up until the normal bed-time or later helps as well.

We would like to hear your stories and any useful advice you'd like to pass on from your own experiences. Whether it's a humorous story of a boring journey or other travel experiences, whether it's a top tip from entertaining your own children, or anything else on this subject we'd like to read from you. Send your accounts to mk_tck@yahoo.co.uk or SteveGill@mkea.freeseerve.co.uk

We also welcome any other feedback on any other issues we cover in Educare whether you agree with what is written or not. Ideas for articles or offers to write an article are also welcome.



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