

What is Unschooling?

Luz Shosie

Unschooling is trusting the learner to be in charge of his or her own learning. It is not a method of instruction we use on our children, but a process we adults go through to unlearn the lessons and undo the effects of our years of schooling.

Schooling taught us that learning only happens in a certain place and time, under the direction and/or force of a teacher.

Unschooling ourselves restores our child-like curiosity. It encourages us to trust that we are all learning all the time and that we are the experts when it comes to choosing what, when, how, where, how much and with whom we learn.

Schooling taught us that our interests were unimportant, disruptive, a waste of time, just play, not “the real world.”

Unschooling frees us to follow our interests wherever they lead. As John Holt said in *Instead of Education*: “We learn something from everything we do, and everything that happens to us or is done to us... It is the quality of our experiences, the satisfaction, excitement, or joy that we get or fail to get from them, that will determine how those experiences change us--in short, what we learn... (O)ur most rapid, efficient, far-reaching, useful, and permanent learning comes from our doing things that we ourselves have decided to do, and ... in doing such things we often need very little help or none at all.”

Schooling taught us that experts know when everyone should learn to read, write, do arithmetic. If we didn't fit into their schedule, the experts labeled us slow or dyslexic, ADD or learning disabled.

Unschooling reassures us that we all learn and grow in our own way, at our own pace, and there is no hurry. At the Sudbury Valley School in Massachusetts, no one is ever told to stop what they're doing and learn to read (or anything else), yet all the students learn to read, write and calculate. Some ask for help, some teach themselves in mysterious ways. Some learn when they are four, some when they're 12, but by the time they're 16, nobody can tell who learned “early” and who learned “late.”

Schooling taught us that learning is sitting still, being quiet, obeying the rules no matter how stupid or harmful or unfair they are. And if we couldn't or wouldn't sit still we were coerced, punished, shamed, even drugged into submission.

Unschooling allows coloring outside the lines. Learning is active, passionate, sometimes sociable, noisy and messy, sometimes lonely, silent and invisible.

Schooling taught us that we could not be responsible for our own living and learning, but must rely on experts, authorities, rules and regulations to make us do the right thing. This is a tough one to unlearn because nobody ever says it in so many words -- it is simply the underlying assumption of the schooling process.

Unschooling respects our intelligence and our virtue. We were all born with the desire and the ability to learn what we need to know in order to be contributing members of our family and our society. Unschooling is unleashing, unfurling, unbinding our innate ability to choose for ourselves the ideas and activities that foster lifelong learning and growth.

John Taylor Gatto, New York City and State Teacher of the Year, said, “I don’t think the world can afford well-schooled children anymore, whether they come from the factories of government, of church, or of private industry. We need a different kind of man and woman to tackle the future, the kind of young people who accept the obligations of living joyfully and with responsibility.”

Because most of us were so well schooled, we sometimes need a little help from our friends to unschool ourselves. Unschoolers Unlimited publishes a newsletter, mailing list, and learning exchange list so we can stay in touch and encourage each other. We hold family gatherings every other month so we can get together to play, socialize, share ideas, information, inspiration and good food. We hope you’ll join us. Request our free information packet and our latest newsletter.

Courage!

Luz

Guilford CT

nedvare@ntplx.net

<http://www.born-to-explore.org/unschool>