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WHAT'S THE PURPOSE OF EDUCATION?

Excerpt from: Anyone Can Teach Art; How to Confidently Teach Art in Your Classical Homeschool
-By Julie B. Abels

There are many compelling reasons we need art, but before I dive into all the juicy benefits, I want to ask you one question —and I hope you'll take a few minutes to think through your answer:

What is the purpose of education?

Have you ever sat back and formulated an answer to this question? Here's a collection of further questions that are interrelated: *Why does it matter if our children are educated? Why does it matter if the citizens of our country are educated? What does it mean to be educated? How will we know if and when we have effectively educated our children? Do standardized tests show us? Is success in a career evidence of education?*

These questions have shaped my whole approach to homeschooling, and to parenting in general. In fact, they've changed how I spend my personal time as well.

By some standards, I'm a well-educated person. I have a Bachelor's and a Master's degree. However, the diplomas are in a drawer somewhere and no one has asked to see them in many years. In my life as a home-schooling mom, art teacher, and online business owner, no one really cares about my degrees. Should they? I don't think they should. I learn what I need to teach my children from the curriculum I purchase. I learn what I need to teach art from art books, other artists, and non-credit classes. I learn what I need to run an online business from friends, YouTube, and online training programs.

So then, what does it mean to be well-educated? When I started my website years ago, I didn't know how to create a website or write a compelling ad to run on Facebook. When I started teaching my son how to parse and diagram sentences, I didn't even know what those words meant. When I started painting with acrylics, I had no idea how to make the best use of them or even where to start. Was I uneducated then?

I believe the key is to separate 'training' and 'education' in our minds. Training teaches us how to do a specific thing well, while education teaches us how to think so we can become wise and virtuous. Virtue may sound like a religious answer, and while I find it inherent to my faith, even secular Humanists agree our society is built on some agreed tenants of morality.

I really love the definition that the CIRCE Institute[1] (a wonderful source of additional information about education) gives: "Education is the cultivation of wisdom and virtue by nourishing the soul on truth, goodness, and beauty." The Bible tells us we are all created in God's image (Gen. 1:27), capable of wisdom and virtue. The Bible also tells us we are to do "all for the glory of God" (I Cor. 10:31) and to "Rejoice in the Lord always" (Phil. 4:4). So, when we learn how to think, we must also learn in a way that moves us toward the act of glorifying God and enjoying Him.

My favorite definition of 'education' comes from a source I stumbled upon one day: The Mother of Divine Grace School. On their website, they take the definition a step further:

> "Classical education is the cultivation of wisdom and virtue by nourishing the soul on truth, goodness and beauty, so that, in Christ, the student is better able to know, glorify, and enjoy God."

What do you think of these definitions? I believe these definitions and the Christian perspective bring to light six important facts about education:

1. Education should nourish the soul, not just inform the person.
2. Education should focus on wisdom and virtue, apart from whatever might be on the latest and greatest standardized test.
3. Since education results in wisdom and virtue and because it almost always takes place within relationship, the worldview of the teacher is important. No human can teach you how to think —or lead you to wisdom and virtue—without including at least some of their own worldview.
4. Education should look to the true, the good, and the beautiful as sources of knowledge.
5. Every student is capable of wisdom and virtue.
6. Our life purpose is to glorify God and enjoy Him.

How does this connect to your understanding of the purpose of education?

The facts we learn about any subject are important, of course. However, what we learn must serve the ultimate goals of education. Art is important in the same way; its value lies in how it helps us grow into wise and virtuous people. Throughout this part of the book, as I cover the skills art teaches us, the ways we can use art to teach other subjects, and the benefits of an art-filled life, I'll refer back to some of these components regarding what education should be. I hope you'll see how perfectly art helps fill in the gaps in an education that leads to a good and beautiful life.

Chapter Summary

- Our view of the nature of education drives what we do in our homeschools, our families, and our lives.
- Education does more than convey information; it forms us into people who can learn and live well.
- Art education is an important part of how we accomplish this very high goal.
- A great summary of the purpose of education is: "Classical education is the cultivation of wisdom and virtue by nourishing the soul on truth, goodness, and beauty, so that, in Christ, the student is better able to know, glorify, and enjoy God."

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1. CIRCE, the Center for Independent Research on Classical Education, can be found at www.circeinstitute.org.

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