

Unschooling Kids Will Be Different

A concern I've heard regarding unschooled kids is that "they'll be different". What is meant by this is that they won't have the same education, the same experiences, the same memories, the same cultural influences, yadda, yadda, yadda, as their "peers". In my opinion, that's just dandy.

Yes, they will be different, but to what end? Will their lives be harder? More stressful? Etc.? I don't believe so one whit. In fact, I believe the inverse is true. There are all sorts of benefits with the unschooling approach to life and learning that compulsory schooling can't match. While I believe the "education" part will actually be better, as their learning is interest-based and interest-based learning is harder to forget than rote memorization, unschooled kids develop initiative and problem solving skills far greater than compulsory-schooled kids. It's self-evident. Kids that are given the freedom to explore their curiosities are practicing initiative, and kids that are running into problems, say a road block of some sort, are more likely to solve them if they have a real interest in what they're trying to accomplish.

All well and good, but what I really wanted to touch on here can be explored via analogy. My wife's from Mexico City. She moved to the United States when she was 19. She lived in Chicago, and then moved to Salt Lake City 3 years later. While we were dating, we had all sorts of conversations about our lives. They were quite different. We grew up in different cultures and different countries. I still learn things about her life I didn't know from time to time. She's different. I'm different. So what?

When I gaze through my crystal ball into the future, I see my children as self-starting, hard-working, curious, always-learning, climbing to new heights, loving and respectful individuals. Their childhood will be different from most people they come into contact with. Their conversations will be that much more exciting and interesting. They'll learn all about what schooling was like, and others will learn all about what unschooling was like. Experiences will be shared, and relationships will be made.

I have several friends that grew up different than me. I have friends from Mexico, Finland, Guatemala, Peru, Nigeria, and several other places. As an adult, you meet people all the time that are different, come from different countries, from different cultures, with different educational backgrounds. It's a very small world and everybody is more easily connected with everybody else. Being different is what I've come to expect from people I meet. Being different is normal in the 21st century. Being different is good.

Originally written in 2012.