

## **Traditional Home Education or Individualized (Aligned) or Online?**

by Jennie Van Hooft, Roots Home Education Director

Parents have more choices for their child's education now than ever before, making the deliberation process extremely challenging. This article outlines my perspective on how home education compares to individualized or online programs. These are all programs where the child learns at their home. Before I start, please note that I've supported and encouraged Christian home educators for about 20 years, and I am thankful for the years I home educated my children. In other words, I am definitely biased towards traditional home education. I encourage those investigating the options to also talk to someone from the individualized and online programs.

### **Define these programs available to families at home.**

*Home education*, often called traditional, gives parents the freedom to choose their children's goals, approaches to education and the responsibility for their children's education. The parent is the teacher and is responsible for choosing the curriculum, planning a program, teaching and evaluating. Parents may correlate part or all of their children's studies to what students study in the school system, but we encourage parents to zero in on discipling their children and meeting their child's unique needs more than following Alberta Education's programs of studies. A facilitator is available to assist parents, but responsibility remains with the parents. By the time a child graduates from grade 12, Alberta home education parents must ensure that their child has met the Schedule of Learning Outcomes for Students not following the Alberta Program of Studies. To view these outcomes, go to the "Forms" tab at the top of the Roots home page, and you'll find the outcomes listed on page three of Guidelines for Proposed Education Plan. These are general outcomes that must be met sometime over a child's 12 years of school.

An *individualized or aligned* homeschooling gives parents flexibility in choosing their materials, while also following the Alberta Program of Studies. A certified Alberta teacher is the child's teacher and the parents are teacher aids. Weekly contact and sharing of assignments between the teacher and mother ensures that the child meets Alberta Education Program of Studies requirement and that the child has regular access to their teacher. While parents have considerable flexibility in choosing learning materials, the teacher takes responsibility for the child's education. As needed, staff assign additional modules to ensure AB ED's requirements are met.

In an *online* program a student still studies primarily at home, working with a teacher who gives assignments and instruction through a computer. A parent is still needed to ensure work is completed and submitted, but the teacher is in charge of the instruction and assessment. Since a student completes their studies primarily through reading and writing, this program is typically available to students starting around grade five. A student's rate of success is much higher when the student is proficient at reading for information and expressing their thoughts through written expression.

## *Home education is a great option for Christian families.*

First, a parent has total freedom to develop and carry out a program designed specifically for their child. Without the necessity of the AB Program of Studies, parents can emphasize character, catch up on missed concepts, follow a student's interests, challenge a student with higher academics, provide remediation for missed concepts, and/or follow a curriculum that isn't recognized by the province. A parent may choose to study the same science and social studies subjects with children of varying ages, adjusting expectations accordingly. A family may decide to follow a Charlotte Mason approach to education or a classical education approach. Do you want to start teaching Latin in grade one, no problem. Part of your child's education may be learning to complete their chores with a cheerful spirit. That's a great idea.

To home educate well, give yourself the freedom to explore how God uniquely designed your child, seek God's wisdom in raising your children, stay in continual conversation with your spouse, and disciple your child to walk according to biblical truths. As parents, we want our children to be prepared to live a productive life according to the gifts God has given them. However, it's even more important to ensure your child understands God's truths and learns to live a life that glorifies Him. If you'd like help in this area, I'd recommend *Shepherding a Child's Heart* by Tedd Tripp.

I've heard dialogue that fully-aligned programs offer parents more funding while also giving parents variety in choosing curriculum. Realizing that schools strive to give parents as much choice as possible, I question why fully-aligned parents return to Roots. I suspect they come back because there's less "noise" in traditional home education. Or, one could say there are fewer people and regulations competing for a family's attention. Sometimes less is more.

Along this same line, it's important for parents to assess who they're accountable to and if they're meeting this responsibility well. I propose that parents are first and foremost accountable to God. So, which approach allows you as parents to best meet this accountability to God? That's a question only you and your spouse can answer after carefully looking at what God is requiring of you as parents, your and your spouse's strengths and weaknesses, your child's strengths and weaknesses, your progress in disciplining your children, and where God is leading you. May God give you His insight and wisdom that you may serve Him well.

## **What makes Roots unique?**

Roots is a Christian home education board with a specific mandate:

“By the grace of God, Roots’ mission is to support and encourage Christian parents in the Roots community as they home educate each of their children ‘in the way he should go’ (Proverbs 22:6).”

We take our specific, Christian mandate very seriously. Therefore, we actively seek Christian families who consequently complete more paperwork than usually required.

Our goal is not to be an exclusive group but to provide a specific service to Christian parents. We have a very diverse group of Christian families, nonetheless we are all saved through the blood of Jesus and strive to serve our Heavenly Father. We are saved by grace through faith.

We support and encourage. Roots goal is not to teach children; Roots goal is to *enable* parents to teach their children. Roots has a great group of Christian home education facilitators, but our experts remain our homeschooling parents. Therefore, we endeavor to enable parents to support other parents through support group meetings, google-groups, parents groups that organize fieldtrips and special events, a homeschooling library, etc. Together we are strong.

I have personally found and I've seen in other homeschooling families, the close ties that can develop between parents and children and between siblings when families choose to home educate. Avoiding the age-exclusive environment of today's classroom, give parents and children the advantage of emphasizing working together and cooperation within a family. Don't get me wrong, we're on the wrong side of heaven to expect life without sin. But we can learn to communicate well and learn to resolve conflict. These essential tools will serve our families and our children well for many years to come.

The community opportunities within Roots implies giving and taking. Many Roots parents volunteer in some area, from bringing a plate of goodies to a monthly support group meetings, to helping with an activity for a special event, to assisting with fieldtrips, to serving on the Homeschooling Committee, a group that directs the Roots program. Not all parents are at a stage in their family life where they can volunteer now, but most parents find an opportunity that appeals to them sometime during their home education journey. Nevertheless, there is no requirement to volunteer in order to join Roots.

The Roots program is parent-directed, making Roots unique. A group of Roots parents sit on the Roots Homeschooling Committee to participate in interviewing potential staff, make and monitor the Roots budget, help establish policies, and participate in the general running of the Roots program. Looking to home education parents for leadership within Roots has allowed the program to stay home education focused.

In addition, all of our staff are either home educating their children now, have home educated their children or were home educated themselves. Home education is a great option for your child's education. Combining your love and concern for your child with the support of both a home education facilitator and other Christian homeschooling parents enables parents to find the support they need to raise their child "in the way he should go."

Parents if you're looking for the greater accountability found in the individualized or online program, please contact ACOS, <http://www.abonlineschool.ca>.