

UPGRADE

10 Secrets to the Best Education for Your Child

KEVIN SWANSON



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Introduction

If you are a parent and you have purchased this book with an interest in providing the best education possible for your child, then we are already in agreement on the central thesis of the book. The thesis is that parents have a committed interest in their children's education; and they must, therefore, be equipped to make intelligent, well-informed choices concerning that education.

In our world today, there are few topics more important than education. It is the issue that you will always find near the top of the brochures pitching political candidates. When every other tax initiative fails to gain popular support, the voting public enthusiastically endorses increased taxes to fund some new educational institution or program. The incorrigible assumption clinging to the minds of the voters is that more tax money will solve all of our education problems.

There is a growing dissatisfaction with the condition of education in many industrialized countries today. The concern has some scientific merit. Recent studies comparing the academic performance of school children from various nationalities in the areas of math and science put America into the ranks of third-world nations (still beating out nations like Mozambique and Jordan, but well below Spain, Hungary, and China).¹ Of eighteen industrialized nations, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development recently found the United States ranked dead last in the literacy of sixteen- to twenty-five-year-old high school graduates.² For the last six years, I have worked at an office that receives thousands of phone calls each year

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from parents who are greatly dissatisfied with the education their children receive from their local publicly-funded school district. Parents are rightfully concerned. The statistics illustrate one thing, but there are deeper problems. School violence is on the rise. Negative social influences abound in many schools, causing parents even more distress. Businesses are concerned about the less-than-competent workforce emerging from the high schools and colleges in our country. A decline in academic achievement will inevitably affect our economy, our national defense, and the American way of life.

The most frightening truth that a parent might occasionally assume courage to face is this: Our children *could really suffer* from a low-quality educational experience. It is even possible *to fail* in the raising of children. While every child is responsible for his own actions, it is true that some approaches have been much more effective than others in the training and education of a child. There are children in this world who, for one reason or another, do not receive a good upbringing or a good education. Nevertheless, this is not always the end of the story. Some of these children are able, by God's grace, to transcend dysfunctional early years and excel in life. However, this is much more the exception than the rule.

The chief purpose of this book is not to critique the present system, but rather to present the positive factors that really do work in producing a quality education. Much has been written on the problems with our modern public school system. Reforms are constantly recommended. Hardly a year goes by without the implementation of new reforms and remedies in this nation's schools. My purpose here is not to recommend a reform program for the nation. My purpose is simply to inform, involve, and equip parents with a basic knowledge of the principles upon which a quality education must be built.

There are *hundreds* of different approaches to education. For parents and teachers alike, experts are plentiful across the academic landscape. Contradicting theories abound. The cacophony of competing messages confuse and frustrate us. We throw our hands up and assign the whole thing to professionals who appear to know what they are doing. But they are just as confused as the rest of us.

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There are two explanations for the proliferation of perspectives on education. The first is that some approaches taken are just *plain wrong* and will not work. Somehow we have been trained in this modern age to believe that all new ideas are inherently good. This line of thinking has corrupted education more than anything else; and many of us are growing tired of the new theories, new math, new philosophies, and new reforms. When it comes to the basic issues of life, when it comes to something as important as educating our children, new is risky. New is *not* tried and true. It is essential to build on the principles that are time-tested and reliable.

Some educational theories are wrongheaded because they are mistaken at the root. For example, one person might say there is no God, while another claims there is a God. They cannot both be right. One of them is terribly mistaken. One person might claim that children are basically good, while another claims that children have a sinful nature. Again, they cannot both be right. The method of education for children usually rests on certain basic philosophical perspectives. A method will be developed according to the foundational worldview perspective held by those who administer, teach, or write textbooks. Not every worldview is of equal merit. Some worldview perspectives hold a wrong position on such important questions as the existence of God, the nature of man, the essential value of man, his purpose in life, and so on. Since there are conflicting worldviews, there will be radically differing ideas concerning the education of children. Those who build an educational approach on the wrong worldview will produce a bad education.

The second explanation for the proliferation of approaches in education is found in the principle of individuality (a principle considered in chapter 6). Since every child is an individual, there are some methods that *will* work with some children, while they simply *will not* work with others. This means that the method of education may vary depending on the culture, the school, the families, or the children. We are not arguing for uniformity here. On the contrary, we want to protect and nurture diversity in educational methods while, at the same time, maintaining the universal, basic principles of education.

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The fundamental assumption I have taken in this presentation is that there is a God who created the world. Thankfully, He provided a basic operating manual for life—the Bible. It establishes an absolute point of reference for us. Without it, we would be wandering in a blinding snowstorm of relativism without any hope of distinguishing between a good education and a bad education. The principles we will consider in this book are rooted in the revelation provided in the Bible. I would argue that one must take into full consideration the truth about reality revealed by the God who made reality before applying the principles to any specific school or to the education of any child. Moreover, this revelation from the Old and New Testaments bears the time-tested quality that is desperately needed today. *Why would anyone embark on a study of something as important as education without taking into consideration the rich historical writings of the ancient Jews and Christians?*

There is a great deal more to say about education than what is contained in these pages. The reason for leaving this material out is twofold. First, I wanted to write a short book. Secondly, the other concepts are not *basic principles*. They do not hold the indispensable quality that these ten principles hold. They do not have the time-tested quality that is provided in the Book of wisdom thousands of years old, given by revelation from God. What we cover here are the principles that must be taken into account by every parent who is choosing an educational program for his or her child. Individuality forces the door open for a great number of approaches. The methodology used for one student might differ quite radically from another, but each of the principles contained in this book ought to be conscientiously integrated into the education of every single child. While some ideas may have more or less validity in any particular case, there are certain universal principles that are unchanging across time and space. They have been given by God Himself. This book provides the basics of education that are just as relevant and applicable to a 1st-century Hebrew child as they are to a 21st-century Japanese girl or for a 28th-century boy from the southern state of Mississippi.

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This book will address the highest-order principles for education. For example, chapter 10 explains the principle of the honor and mystique of learning. While there are others that might develop *how* the honor and mystique is established in the classroom or the homeschool, the *how* will often be different depending on the cultures and settings in which education occurs. The principles in this book are indispensable yet broad. If one cannot see these ten large girders in the building of education, he will not be able to master the building of an education.

There are some who study the principles of teaching for six to ten years in undergraduate, graduate, and post-graduate university programs. Although I cannot give my reader a doctorate in education in this very short presentation, I submit that one does not have to hold a doctorate in education to be an excellent teacher. Anyone who has the ability to communicate can be a mentor, a discipler, a master, or a teacher. Anyone who maximizes on the principles contained in this book in the education or discipleship of a child will maximize the development of that child's potential.

This book is written *by* a parent primarily *for* parents. While the material contained here is basic for all educators, it is parents who have the deepest interest in their children's intellectual, emotional, and spiritual development. Parents are, beyond all other interests, responsible for their children's training and development. If parents are intimately familiar with the eternal, universal principles of a good education, then they will be able to apply these principles in their selection of an effective educational program for their children. It is not the purpose of this book to define the exact dimensions, shape, and color of that program. The program will take on a different shape for different cultures, different families, and different children within those families. But parents are encouraged to take the ten universal, unchanging principles of education and apply them to their unique culture, family, and children.

This author has been part of the modern home education movement for thirty-five years—as a student, parent/teacher, and leader in the movement. Having taught in various state schools and private schools, junior high through college, I have seen every one of the ten principles used successfully by various teachers in various situations.

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Many good educators, including many home educators, will center in on one or two of the principles and base an entire philosophy of education or curriculum on those factors. Although they are not always aware of what they are doing, every good educator usually employs these factors in their teaching to some degree or another. It is rare, however, to find any school, teacher, or parent in the present day who self-consciously employs all ten factors.

This book is *not* meant to recommend for every child any particular institution of education, whether it be public school, private school, or homeschool. Parents must make their own informed choices. Nevertheless, their choices should incorporate *all ten* of these indispensable elements of a quality education. Every parent and teacher who happens to be holding this book is challenged to consider, apply, and maximize these ten critical factors in the educational program put together for each of the children in their charge.

A Successful Education 1

I was an expert in child training and education—that is, until the day our first child arrived. In God’s infinite wisdom, He sent us a little boy who, upon emerging from the womb, was screaming. He screamed for the next two years, only taking occasional breaks to eat and sleep. The experience was instantly humbling for this particular “expert.” Since then, my wife and I have found there are no child-raising experts—except One. There is no silver bullet that solves all problems for all children. Looking back over the last thirteen years, perhaps the most valuable lesson learned was that child raising is a process—one that demands great love, patience, wisdom, and humility from parents. I learned right away that some children are not a mere 30 percent more difficult than others at certain times in their lives. Some children are *one hundred times* more difficult than other children. Occasionally I have seen a parent of a smart, easy-going, motivated child approach a family who is struggling every day with an energetic, slow-learning, intensely emotional, and willful child to offer some little piece of sage advice. The incongruity is almost humorous. These well-meaning counselors soon discover that the parents of the little wildcat are doing the right things. They may be a little frazzled around the edges, but they are doing the right things. Any expert who promises instant success if you use some neat little recipe while training or educating a child either has never had the blessing of raising a tornado or has never had children at all. The timeless principles of child raising and education will only

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work over the long haul, and the true success of that education can only be measured by the long-term results.

When those little ones show up in our lives, they come with “some assembly required.” Every parent quickly discovers that these little ones start out in life with a propensity for sticking pudgy little fingers into electrical sockets, for uncontrolled screaming, and for copious leaking. For some reason God designed children such that they require an investment of certain things into their lives. It was His intent that we develop these beautiful creatures, created in His image, that they might further reflect His glory in life and eternity. That is the role of education.

So, education is vitally important to the life of every single child. There is hardly a politician, teacher, or parent alive who would not agree. But if everyone considers education to be all that important, what is education? If you are pursuing a successful education for your child, it would make sense to first define what it is that makes an education.

I define education this way:

Education is the preparation of a child intellectually, emotionally, spiritually, and physically for life and for eternity.

A Broad Definition

A striking element of a definition like this is that it is very broad. It might include child training, discipline, academics, socialization, and every possible experience a child will meet with in his developing years.

A common misconception of education comes when the definition of education narrows to the intellectual. The child is compartmentalized. He is not seen as a whole person, fully integrated with physical, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual capacities. Thus, if an educational program attempts to address the child’s intellect while ignoring his spiritual and emotional development, the approach is sadly ignoring the true reality of the child. Likewise, those who separate the spiritual and emotional part of the child from the intellectual make a big mistake. You cannot delegate only the intellectual

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training of your child to professionals and retain just the spiritual and emotional development for yourself. Whatever class is taught, the whole child is affected. Physical education (P.E.), for example, does focus on the physical part of the child, but the emotional and intellectual sides are also affected (in the locker room or out on the field). And anyone who thinks that a student develops only intellectual maturity in an algebra class has never taught algebra!

Education Is *Paideia*

And fathers . . . bring [your children] up in the training (paideia) and instruction (nouthesia) of the Lord. Ephesians 6:4

This is the key New Testament passage relating to the raising of children. The key word in this key passage is *paideia*. This Greek word used by Paul in his 1st-century epistle was as common then as our word *democracy* is today. It was a word that carried extensive connotation. *Paideia* was the entire process whereby the ideal citizen was raised for the ideal state. It involved far more than the stack of books assigned to a child at the beginning of the school year. It included every input and influence that came into the child's life (such as peers, games, a geography textbook, novels, and chores). *Paideia* is the development of a child from a baby to a man or a woman. Of course, Paul used the word in a different sense than the pagan Greeks of his time. He spoke of raising the child in the *paideia* "of the Lord." Christians raise their children in the *paideia* of Christ.

Worldview Considerations

Another observation warranted by the above definition of education is that our worldview, our fundamental view of reality, is going to affect our understanding of education. Education differs according to one's view of such things as God and eternity. Education will be very different if a child is *not* being prepared for eternity. If, however, the human soul survives physical death, then the preparation a child receives here on Earth will impact his eternal state. One who has been prepared with a view

to eternity will learn to make decisions in life in light of eternity. For example, he will learn to tell the truth, even though it may be disadvantageous in the short term.

Preparation

Education is defined as *preparation*, but preparation for what? There must be some purpose toward which that preparation is directed. The classic Old Testament text encouraging parents to provide an education for their children is Deuteronomy 6:6–9. Thankfully, this passage is prefaced with the main content of that education, the purpose for which that child will live his life: “Love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength” (v. 5). Every child will also have a unique calling for which he must be prepared. This usually involves work, a future marriage, and a future home. Sometimes it includes positions of high responsibility and leadership. In the case of children with special needs, this preparation may call for a great amount of faith and wisdom. Parents must recognize the inherent value of the child in this life, especially in terms of the relationships he will cultivate. But even more important is the fact that our children are being prepared for a calling in eternity.

Each child has a specific calling, framed by his unique talents and abilities. This we would draw from the principle of individuality (1 Thess. 4:11 and 1 Cor. 12:17–31, presented in more detail in chapter 6). Every child is created with unique gifts for a unique calling. It is a common mistake to reduce these callings to intellectual gifts, which happens when you conclude that some children are gifted in math, others are gifted in writing, and others are not gifted in any intellectual pursuit. Everybody is gifted and has a purpose in God’s world. Some gifts may lie in the spiritual, emotional, or physical arenas more than the intellectual.

The challenge of the first eighteen years of a child’s education is to find that calling. One thing we can safely say is that every child is called to a life of glorifying God and enjoying Him (1 Cor. 10:31). That is the first level of purpose. After that we begin to note distinctive callings. The first difference you will note between children in the determination of calling is *gender*. This should be an obvious difference, though it

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is sadly ignored in many cases today. After taking account of gender differences, each child's calling will then depend on the gifts and abilities that God has given him.

When a child is young, his calling may be defined in broad terms. For example, one might determine that the child needs to know how to use the restroom, purchase groceries, and read the Bible. As he grows older, it is crucial that more specificity be added to that calling. Efforts must be taken in the high-school years to flesh out the calling for each individual child. What a tragedy to find twenty-eight-year-old men wandering about from college program to college program, from career track to career track, searching for a calling. From the time a child is twelve years old, serious efforts must be taken by parents and child alike to focus in on that calling. Part-time jobs, apprenticeships, tours of work sites, counseling, and testing¹ should be incorporated into those key developmental years. A much wider selection of special elective courses should be made available to the teenage high-school student. Parents should be intimately involved as counselors in this focusing process. Who knows the student better than his parents? A fulfilled life will be determined to a great extent by whether or not a man or woman has centered in upon his or her life calling. How many midlife crises could be avoided if this were taken seriously in the teenage years!

Preparation of What?

The *whole* child must be prepared for his calling. The child is more than a brain. Certainly at two years of age a child is not ready to go to work and establish a household. A tremendous amount of development must first occur. His intellect, body, emotions, and soul must be prepared for the challenges that will make up that calling God has placed on his life. The emotions are prepared for the complex emotional challenges he will face in his calling. Those callings that involve more emotional strength will require stronger emotional preparation. Those callings that involve more intellectual development in some area (such as law, medicine, or engineering) will require a higher level of preparation in that particular area.

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As we grapple with the definition of education, we must also consider the matter of a successful education. If education involves preparation for future life, it stands to reason that we would want a successful life; and a successful education would seek that end.

Interestingly, there is a disconnection today between modern college education and the business world. Many corporations are forced to provide extensive in-house training programs to produce effective employees, for both blue-collar and white-collar jobs. This disconnection is even more pronounced in the K–12 academic world. It is conspicuous in a humorous quip commonly used in the entrepreneurial world of millionaires: “A-students end up teaching, and B-students end up working for C-students.”

While there is no way this quip could be supported by empirical studies as a universal rule, there is evidence indicating that grades have little to do with success in the business world. The research conducted by Dr. Tom Stanley on 733 millionaires proves just this point (see pp. 26-27). The factors of high intelligence quotients and high academic grades showed up near the bottom of the list of those factors contributing to business success; while honesty, self-discipline, hard work, socialization skills, and career fit (or calling) scored at the top of the list.²

Robert Kiyosaki, author of *Rich Dad's Cashflow Quadrant*, insists that it “does not take a good formal education [to make money]. I have a college degree and I can honestly say that achieving financial freedom had nothing to do with what I learned in college.”³ Among those who did not acquire a college degree before achieving outstanding success are Thomas Edison, Henry Ford, Bill Gates, Ted Turner, Michael Dell, Steve Jobs, and Ralph Lauren. The reasons behind the disconnection between the business world and the academic world will be thoroughly explored in the remainder of this book as we review the factors that contribute to a successful education.

But what about a successful education? Is success strictly measured by monetary gain, a notion that seems to be pressed upon us by a materialist age? Does success for a

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child who achieves a perfect score on the Scholastic Aptitude Test mean the same thing as success for a child with Down syndrome who may never leave his parents' home? What is success in the education of a child?

Success in education cannot be confined to academics. Indeed, a child might be very smart yet never learn to stay focused and motivated on a life calling. A child might have an outstanding technical ability but use it to crack safes and rob banks. Success must include spiritual and emotional maturity. For parents of faith, passing that faith to the next generation is of great value. In most cases, a successful raising will produce a young man or woman able to lead a family. Successive generations will then be better prepared for life than the previous ones.

In the ultimate sense, only God can define success for us because only God can identify the ultimate purpose for man. Therefore, success must have something to do with a child raised in the “*paideia* of God,” whether or not that child becomes a millionaire or a great leader. God's method means success only because God's method is designed to deliver God's purposes. I define a successful education as follows:

A successful education is achieved when a child is prepared to make maximal use of his God-given talents and abilities in the accomplishment of the child's calling.

Generally speaking, the success of a family (a husband and a wife) that is effective in the calling to which God has brought them is manifest in some material blessing. This material success is usually seen in terms of growth in net worth or an expansion of the initial capital investments of inheritance or educational training. But this is not true in every case. Some who have achieved material success have done so without exercising their respective callings. Conversely, others have exercised their respective callings with great care and diligence without any tangible material success.

What is assumed in a definition of success is that which is proposed here—the recognition and maximum use of a person's gifts and abilities. It is vital to have a vision for the *paideia* of a child if you want to achieve anything approaching success. If you have no objective for which you are preparing your child, you will never achieve any appreciable success. Therefore, the first measure of success would have to be found in

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the identification of the calling and the first implementation of it in something like a first business venture or apprenticeship.

Successful preparation for a calling must also involve a full-orbed scope, including an emotional confidence, a spiritual faith and character, and an intellectual and physical equipping targeted for the particular calling that has been chosen.

This preparation must include an element of motivation and focus. If the specific vision conveyed to a young person does not produce some degree of focus and motivation towards that calling, one must conclude that either the calling was not chosen correctly or the preparation was inadequate. If the calling is properly selected, the young person should come to realize, “This is where I fit.” He or she will retain a measure of confidence and motivation to keep moving in the general direction of the calling.

Conclusion

As we will discover later in this book, the success of education cannot be limited to a quarterly report card. The success of education cannot be measured by education itself. The capstone of education is found in the implementation of a calling. Education is preparation for life, so life is the only real measure of the success of education. That is why success has a great deal to do with the *successful exercise of one's gifts and abilities in life itself*. Without this objective measure, the progress of education will be measured the same way the emperor monitored the progress of his new clothes makers! Therefore, success in education must be seen in broad terms, which does not eliminate the precious child with special needs who never exceeds a “third-grade” level of learning. Success in education will be seen in the success of relationships, the success of a spiritual journey, the success of a marriage, the success of a family, the success of a business, and the success of career and investments over an entire lifetime. It will be seen in young men and young women who find where they fit in life. It will be seen in those who learn to love the Lord their God with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength. It will be seen

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in those who have learned to glorify God, enjoy Him, obey Him, and worship Him. Ultimately, that success will be seen in eternity.