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CHAPTER 1:

Why Bother Designing Your Own Curriculum?

Imagine a school day revolving around topics that your students love and books that capture their attention. What would that day's academic flow look like in comparison to a traditional school day revolving around textbooks based on controlled information selected by textbook publishers instead of you or your child?

Welcome to the world of possibilities--a world where unique learning environments are designed around the individual interests and needs of *your* children. It is a world where literature isn't the only source of engaging ideas and well-written narratives. Here school days no longer consist of content-approved subjects selected to fit narrowly defined parameters but instead consist of academics centered on ideas which spark imaginations.

Where do the thoughts spurred during an action-adventure novel end up in a traditional academic school day? Typically they are filed away under the category of "that was an interesting idea." But what if those ideas actually became the academic day? What are the opportunities for academics built around those intriguing adventures? What does academic exploration outside of the traditional approach toward education do for a child's love of learning and the development of life-long passions?

Working with my children to develop individualized courses has been the backbone of our homeschool. Their educations have been an integrated compilation of subject matter they enjoy, combined with the solid academic objectives they need. Integrating those objectives is the ultimate goal in the development of their courses. The goal is to utilize their interests to develop a solid educational framework but to never allow the solid academic education to become subordinated to just following interests. The two walk side by side, equal in importance, fostering my children's love of learning while guiding appropriate levels of academic output.

Over time I have developed a systematic method that has worked well for designing courses which balances both key objectives: fostering a love of learning and meeting academic goals. The method follows seven essential steps:

1. I have an initial meeting with my student to discuss any areas of interest or subjects he or she wants to study.
2. I conduct preliminary research to find possible resources and additional subject matter that might flesh out the student's original ideas.
3. I meet with the student a second time to share what I have discovered during my preliminary research in order to receive feedback from the student on what I have found.