

How to Avoid “Over-buying” Curricula

Terri Johnson

Have you ever been so wooed by a product description that you have purchased it right on the spot? Or so convinced by friends or cyber-buddies that your children’s education will not be complete unless you use a certain curriculum? Perhaps you have felt so intimidated about teaching a certain subject that you have purchased everything available on the topic to be sure that you cover it adequately and not leave holes in your children’s education.

Whatever the reason, many well-meaning homeschooling parents over-buy when it comes to curriculum. This is certainly not an unforgivable sin – in fact, I am the first one to say that we should not skimp when it comes to providing the atmosphere and resources for our kids’ learning.

But let us discuss some ways we can control the financial outflow and unplanned spending during this current economic crises.

Here are five ways that you can avoid over-buying and successfully plan for a bountiful year of learning:

1. **Make Your Plan** – Take some time to map out your upcoming school year. What subjects would you like to cover? How does each of your children learn best? How much time will you have to devote to schooling each day? What subjects will your children need you by their side and which ones can they study independently? These are big questions. Take one child at a time and map out some goals. Take into consideration his/her age and preferred learning style. Take stock of his progress in each subject area. Will you need to emphasize a particular subject more now because of overlooking it in past years? Are there subjects that he is truly motivated in and can pursue more independently, thereby freeing up your time as teacher? Make for yourself a rough plan and schedule for your family and then move onto step #2.
2. **Take Inventory** – Scan your bookshelves and dig through those cabinets to find your educational resources. Pull out those unused math books, grammar and spelling workbooks, literature guides, etc. Make three stacks – 1. Will Never Use, 2. Might Use Someday, and 3. Will Use This Year. Take a look at stack number 2 again and ask yourself, “When will I use this?”, “Who would I use this with?”, and “What am I waiting for?” If you truly feel like you have a good sense that you will actually use the resource sometime in the near future (year or two) then put it away until next year. If you just cannot nail yourself down on when you would use it or what the circumstances would be for you to use it, put this book or curriculum with stack number 1.

3. **Clear It Out** – Take your books and curricula in stack number 1 and get rid of them. The best thing you can do with used educational resources is put them up for sale. Someone out there is looking for what you already have and are not using. There are many online places that you can sell your school books – eBay, VegSource, Homeschool Classifieds, Well-Trained Mind Sale and Swap board, and many, many more. Place a reasonable price to it, then add another couple bucks to the price and sell it “postage paid”. This means that you as the seller will take care of the shipping costs (this just seems simpler to me and the buyer feels like she is getting a good deal). Media mail is the cheapest way to send books and other media products – CDs, video’s, curriculum in binders, etc.
4. **Buy The Basics First** – Now take stock again of what you have and what you now need. Buy your basic subjects first – math, grammar, spelling, history, science. You may even find some of what you are looking for on those used swap boards while you are listing your items to sell. Start this process early so that you can take advantage of good sale prices. If you are not in a hurry, wait until these items arrive before purchasing anything more at this point.
5. **Fill in the Gaps** - Once you receive your basic materials, read through them. Take notes of what else you are going to need to fill out the program. Does the math program that you chose require that you purchase manipulatives? Does the grammar book contain writing exercises and does it meet your requirements for a good writing program, or will you need something more? Does the history curriculum contain geography lessons? Will you need notebooks, composition books or planners for each child? Finally, decide how much time and energy you will have to devote to the extras, such as hands-on projects, foreign language study, logic, music, art and look for materials that will fit the bill.

Follow these five steps and you will bring spending under control. Educating our children is not cheap these days and does require some financial outlay, but we do not have to buy *everything out there* to ensure that our children receive the best education possible. Your commitment to raising your children well, training them to be contributors to the family, and spending time with them – over the books or playing in the backyard – is what will bring about educational success. There is no perfect curriculum just waiting to be discovered – it is *you* that will make the difference in your children’s lives.

Enjoy those learning moments . . .

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Biographical Information

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Todd and Terri have been married 20 years, home teaching their children for 12 years and operating a publishing business - Knowledge Quest, Inc.

(www.knowledgequestmaps.com) - that specializes in history and geography curricula for the homeschool marketplace for the past 8 years. They are currently teaching an online class – Homeschooling ABCs (www.homeschoolingabcs.com) – providing guidance and instruction for new and/or overwhelmed homeschooling parents. Their high school level course will be available this coming April 2009.