Freedom to Learn

CHAP Pittsburgh
August 18, 2018

Brandi Gribble Mathers, Ph. D.
Welcome!

Please have paper and pencil ready.
Freedom to Learn

CHAP Pittsburgh
August 18, 2018

Brandi Gribble Mathers, Ph. D.
Alternately titled:

“What they’re doing isn’t ‘school’:”
A Criticism Becomes a Compliment
Timeline

• 1987—Our Lady of Peace Elementary and Middle School
• 1991—Saint Thomas Aquinas High School
• 1995—Kenyon College, B.A. English
• 1996—The Ohio State University, M.Ed.
• 1996—Teacher, Canfield Middle School, 7th and 8th grade
• 1997—Teacher, Clearmount Elementary, 4th grade
Meanwhile...

• Mom and Dad started homeschooling my younger sister (by 14 years)
• Compare my day to theirs, “What they’re doing isn’t ‘school’.”
Since then...

• 2000—Started doctoral program, teaching, University of Akron, Education Department
• 2003—State University of New York, Education Department
• 2004—Completed doctoral program, started Geneva College, Education Department
• 2009—8 months pregnant with first daughter. Supervising student teachers. Suddenly saw what my parents and sister were doing in a different light. Epiphany!
Epiphany

• What they’re doing isn’t ‘school’!
Epiphany

• What they’re doing isn’t ‘school’!
• And they don’t want it to be
Epiphany

• What they’re doing isn’t ‘school’!
• And they don’t want it to be
• Boldly choosing to exercise freedom to educate differently
• Wanted same for my children
• Criticism became highest compliment
You’ve made the same choice

- You’ve decided to exercise your freedom
- What will you do with your freedom?
  - Re-create existing model of “school” at home
  - Create original paradigm
You’ve made the same choice

• You’ve decided to exercise your freedom
• What will you do with your freedom?
  • Re-create existing model of “school” at home
  • Create original paradigm
  • Something in between

_____________________________________________________________
“School”

Original Paradigm
You’ve made the same choice

• You’ve decided to exercise your freedom

• What will you do with your freedom?
  • Re-create existing model of “school” at home
  • Create original paradigm
  • Something in between—mark where you are, currently
History of “school” model

• Current model designed 125+ years ago

• Revolutionary idea: free, compulsory education, paid for by taxation
  • Widespread in U.S. by late 1800’s
History of “school” model

• Current model reflects influence of
  • Enlightenment view of intelligence (Robinson, 2010)
    • Knowledge of the classics and deductive reasoning skill
    • People judged against this one view of the mind
      • Academic (ie: smart)
      • Non-academic (ie: not smart)
    • Dichotomy still runs deep in today’s schools
History of “school” model

• Current model reflects influence of
  • Enlightenment view of intelligence (Robinson, 2010)
    • Knowledge of the classics and deductive reasoning skill
    • People judged against this one view of the mind
      • Academic (ie: smart)
      • Non-academic (ie: not smart)
      • Dichotomy still runs deep in today’s schools
  • Industrial Revolution (Whiteley, 2018)
    • Transform farm laborers (80% of population) into trained, efficient workers for factory
      and assembly-line jobs
      • Reading, writing, math skills needed more so than in agricultural economy
    • Standardization increased efficiency and productivity on the job
      • Likewise, schools utilized standardization
An Assembly Line of the Ford Motor Company
Back to you

• You’ve decided to exercise your freedom
• What will you do with your freedom?
  • Re-create existing model of “school” at home
  • Create original paradigm
  • Something in between—mark where you are, currently

“School” ____________________________________________________________ Original Paradigm
Back to you

• Who in audience attended traditional “school”?  
• Who in audience was homeschooled?  
• Other?
Back to you

• Research says the way teachers are most likely to teach is...
Back to you

• Research says the way teachers are most likely to teach is...the way they were taught (Kennedy, 1999)
Back to you

• Research says the way teachers are most likely to teach is...the way they were taught (Kennedy, 1999)
  • What deeply-rooted, maybe even unconscious, beliefs do you have about “school” that may be keeping you from creating the optimal homeschool experience for your child(ren)?
Back to you

• Research says the way teachers are most likely to teach is...the way they were taught (Kennedy, 1999)
  • What deeply-rooted, maybe even unconscious, beliefs do you have about “school” that may be keeping you from creating the optimal homeschool experience for your child(ren)?
  • Examine these assumptions
  • “School” so ubiquitous difficult to conceive of another way
A starting point for examination

• Think ahead to the time your child(ren) is finishing up with homeschooling and getting ready to set out on her/his own. Describe the person you hope she/he will be
A starting point for examination

• Think ahead to the time your child(ren) is finishing up with homeschooling and getting ready to set out on her/his own. Describe the person you hope she/he will be
• With endpoint in mind, thoughtfully consider assumptions
School assumption #1: Standardization

• All students learn same material, in same order: scope and sequence
School assumption #1: Standardization

- Industrial Economy
  - Standardization
    - Efficiency
    - Productivity
School assumption #1: Standardization

- Industrial Economy
  - Standardization
    - Efficiency
    - Productivity

Mommy, is that a school?
School assumption #1: Standardization

- Industrial Economy vs. Technological Economy (Industry 4.0)
School assumption #1: Standardization

- Industrial Economy vs. Technological Economy (Industry 4.0)

- So why is school still standardized?
School assumption #1: Standardization

• Management issue, not learning issue
  • Easier when students learn same material at same time
    • Assess using objective worksheets and tests
      • Multiple-choice
      • Fill-in-the-blank
      • True or false
      • Matching
    • Quick and easy to grade
Freedom from standardization

• Curiosity and choice—intrinsic motivation
  • Learning as a feast—Charlotte Mason
  • Learning-to-learn rather than mandated content
    • Time-management, self-assessment, decision-making, collaboration, communication
Freedom from standardization

• Curiosity and choice— intrinsic motivation
  • Learning as a feast—Charlotte Mason
  • Learning-to-learn rather than mandated content
    • Time-management, self-assessment, decision-making, collaboration, communication

• Concern: allow choice, will miss other content, fall behind
Freedom from standardization

• Curiosity and choice—intrinsic motivation
  • Learning as a feast—Charlotte Mason
  • Learning-to-learn rather than mandated content
    • Time-management, self-assessment, decision-making, collaboration, communication

• Concern: allow choice, will miss other content, fall behind
  • “If we are always learning, we are not missing anything and we’re not behind”
    (Crawford, 2014)
Freedom from standardization

• Curiosity and choice—inntrinsic motivation
  • Learning as a feast—Charlotte Mason
  • Learning-to-learn rather than mandated content
    • Time-management, self-assessment, decision-making, collaboration, communication

• Concern: allow choice, will miss other content, fall behind
  • “If we are always learning, we are not missing anything and we’re not behind” (Crawford, 2014)

• Build bridge between child that’s in front of you and person God intends her/him to become (Mackenzie, 2015)
  • Unique, not standardized
School assumption #2: Breadth

• All students learn same material, in same order, and there is a lot of it
• Goal: “cover” material
  • AP U.S. History covers 520 years in 32 weeks (Whiteley, 2018)
    • Civil War—3 days
    • World War II—3 days
    • Constitution—less than 1 day
Freedom from breadth

• “Stepping off the crazy train...intentionally setting out to participate in slow, sane education” (Mackenzie, 2015)
Freedom from breadth

• “Stepping off the crazy train...intentionally setting out to participate in slow, sane education” (Mackenzie, 2015)

• Concern: take time for depth, will miss other content, fall behind
Freedom from breadth

• “Stepping off the crazy train...intentionally setting out to participate in slow, sane education” (Mackenzie, 2015)

• Concern: take time for depth, will miss other content, fall behind
  • Again, “If we are always learning, we are not missing anything and we’re not behind” (Crawford, 2014)
Freedom from breadth

• “Stepping off the crazy train...intentionally setting out to participate in slow, sane education” (Mackenzie, 2015)

• Concern: take time for depth, will miss other content, fall behind
  • Again, “If we are always learning, we are not missing anything and we’re not behind” (Crawford, 2014)

• “Today, do less. Do it well” (Mackenzie, 2015)
Freedom from breadth

Sarah Mackenzie, author of *Teaching from Rest*, keeps it simple:

- Read to your children every day.
- Have your children write every day.
- Do some math every day. Don’t belabor it.
- Then, live your life. Do it in front of and with your kids.
School assumption #3: Memorization

• All students learn same material, in same order. There is a lot of it and it needs to be committed to memory.
School assumption #3: Memorization

• All students learn same material, in same order. There is a lot of it and it needs to be committed to memory

• Bloom’s Taxonomy (Bloom, 1956; Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001)
  • Classification system used to define and distinguish different levels of thinking
Remember

Understand

Apply

Analyze

Evaluate

Create

Combining parts to make a new whole

Judging the value of information or ideas

Breaking down information into component parts

Applying the facts, rules, concepts, and ideas

Understanding what the facts mean

Recognizing and recalling facts

© tips.uark.edu
School assumption #3: Memorization

• Which level does “school” tend to over-emphasize? Why?
School assumption #3: Memorization

• Which level does “school” tend to over-emphasize? Why?
  • Easiest to write and grade questions at lower levels
  • Management issue, not learning issue
    • Easier when students produce evidence of convergent thinking
    • Objective worksheets and tests
      • Multiple-choice
      • Fill-in-the-blank
      • True or false
      • Matching
School assumption #3: Memorization

- Which level does “school” tend to over-emphasize? Why?
  - Easiest to write and grade questions at lower levels
  - Management issue, not learning issue
    - Easier when students produce evidence of convergent thinking
    - Objective worksheets and tests
      - Multiple-choice
      - Fill-in-the-blank
      - True or false
      - Matching

- How much of this type of information do you remember from your schooling?
School assumption #3: Memorization

• Which level does “school” tend to over-emphasize? Why?
  • Easiest to write and grade questions at lower levels
  • Management issue, not learning issue
    • Easier when students produce evidence of convergent thinking
    • Objective worksheets and tests
      • Multiple-choice
      • Fill-in-the-blank
      • True or false
      • Matching

• How much of this type of information do you remember from your schooling? (No worries: smartphone)
Freedom from memorization

• Why do we insist students memorize all the things we, ourselves, have forgotten?
Freedom from memorization

• Why do we insist students memorize all the things we, ourselves, have forgotten?

• Lawrenceville Academy study (Whiteley, 2018)
  • Students retook simplified version of science final 3 months later
  • Average dropped from B+ to F
Freedom from memorization

• Why do we insist students memorize all the things we, ourselves, have forgotten?

• Lawrenceville Academy study (Whiteley, 2018)
  • Students retook simplified version of science final 3 months later
  • Average dropped from B+ to F

• Albert Einstein: Why should I work to fill my brain with facts and figures when I can simply look them up when I need them?
  • And this was before the age of computers
  • An aside: Plato thought writing would destroy people’s memory capacity (Gee & Hayes, 2011)
Freedom from memorization

• “We need to give our children freedom to pursue their education... education has much more to do with nurturing the mind than it does with any memorization of facts” (Crawford, 2014)
Freedom from memorization

• “We need to give our children freedom to pursue their education... education has much more to do with nurturing the mind than it does with any memorization of facts” (Crawford, 2014)

• What could this look like?
  • Selective, useful memorization: math facts, scripture, foreign language, others?
  • Lots of time spent on higher-level thinking
School assumption #4: Comparison

• All students learn same material, in same order. There is a lot of it. It needs to be memorized and regurgitated so we can compare students’ progress
School assumption #4: Comparison

• All students learn same material, in same order. There is a lot of it. It needs to be memorized and regurgitated so we can compare students’ progress

• “Schools are for showing off, not for learning. When we enroll our children in school, we enroll them into a never-ending series of contests” (Gray, 2013)
  • Pressure for students and parents
  • Labels
    • Enlightenment view of intelligence—students judged against one view of the mind
      • Academic (ie: smart)
      • Non-academic (ie: not smart)
    • Create self-fulfilling prophecies
Freedom from comparison

• Multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1983)
Freedom from comparison

• Multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1983)
  • No one is “expert” in all areas, or needs to be
Freedom from comparison

• Multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1983)
  • No one is “expert” in all areas, or needs to be

• All aspects of life have teaching value
  • Charlotte Mason: Education is an atmosphere, a discipline, and a life
Freedom from comparison

• Multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1983)
  • No one is “expert” in all areas, or needs to be

• All aspects of life have teaching value
  • Charlotte Mason: Education is an atmosphere, a discipline, and a life

• Growth Mindset (Dweck, 2006)
  • Fixed mindset—belief that abilities person is born with won’t change
    • Labels: smart/not smart
  • Growth mindset—belief that abilities can be developed through effort
    • Praise effort with specific feedback
    • Intrinsic motivation increases effort
School assumption #5: Avoid mistakes

• All students learn same material, in same order. There is a lot of it. It needs to be memorized and regurgitated so we can compare students’ progress and reward those who make fewest mistakes with an “A”
School assumption #5: Avoid mistakes

• All students learn same material, in same order. There is a lot of it. It needs to be memorized and regurgitated so we can compare students’ progress and reward those who make fewest mistakes with an “A”

• Get it right first time, no time for do-overs
Freedom from mistake avoidance

• Again, “Stepping off the crazy train...intentionally setting out to participate in slow, sane education” (Mackenzie, 2015)
Freedom from mistake avoidance

• Again, “Stepping off the crazy train...intentionally setting out to participate in slow, sane education” (Mackenzie, 2015)

• Time for taking risks, making mistakes, re-doing, and re-re-doing
Freedom from mistake avoidance

• Again, “Stepping off the crazy train...intentionally setting out to participate in slow, sane education” (Mackenzie, 2015)
• Time for taking risks, making mistakes, re-doing, and re-re-doing
  • Thomas Edison
    • Attended public school for 3 months, teacher called him “addled”
    • Mother taught him at home instead
Freedom from mistake avoidance

• Again, “Stepping off the crazy train...intentionally setting out to participate in slow, sane education” (Mackenzie, 2015)

• Time for taking risks, making mistakes, re-doing, and re-re-doing
  • Thomas Edison
    • Attended public school for 3 months, teacher called him “addled”
    • Mother taught him at home instead
    • Lightbulb: 1,000 unsuccessful attempts
    • Reporter: How did it feel to fail 1,000 times? Edison: I didn’t fail 1,000 times. The lightbulb was an invention with 1,000 steps.
Freedom from mistake avoidance

• Again, “Stepping off the crazy train...intentionally setting out to participate in slow, sane education” (Mackenzie, 2015)

• Time for taking risks, making mistakes, re-doing, and re-re-doing
  • Thomas Edison
    • Attended public school for 3 months, teacher called him “addled”
    • Mother taught him at home instead
    • Lightbulb: 1,000 unsuccessful attempts
    • Reporter: How did it feel to fail 1,000 times? Edison: I didn’t fail 1,000 times. The lightbulb was an invention with 1,000 steps.
    • Edison: My mother was the making of me. She understood me; she let me follow my bent.
Freedom from mistake avoidance

• Again, “Stepping off the crazy train...intentionally setting out to participate in slow, sane education” (Mackenzie, 2015)

• Time for taking risks, making mistakes, re-doing, and re-re-doing
  • Thomas Edison
    • Attended public school for 3 months, teacher called him “addled”
    • Mother taught him at home instead
    • Lightbulb: 1,000 unsuccessful attempts
    • Reporter: How did it feel to fail 1,000 times? Edison: I didn’t fail 1,000 times. The lightbulb was an invention with 1,000 steps.
    • Edison: My mother was the making of me. She understood me; she let me follow my bent.

• Focus on process, not just product (an “A”)
Other “school” assumptions?
A different approach: An education

• What is the difference between “school” and “an education”? 
A different approach: An education

• What is the difference between “school” and “an education”?  
  • Go back to the description you wrote at the beginning of the session. Does it align more closely with “school” or “an education”?
A different approach: An education

• What is the difference between “school” and “an education”?
  • Go back to the description you wrote at the beginning of the session. Does it align more closely with “school” or “an education”?

• Goal of home education for Mathers Family:
  • To help our children figure out God’s purpose for their lives. This includes helping them to identify their passions and to pursue them fully. It also involves exposing them the other skills necessary for leading a balanced life.
Personal application

• You’ve decided to exercise your freedom

• What will you do with your freedom?
  • Re-create existing model of “school” at home
  • Create original paradigm
  • Something in between—mark where you are, currently
Personal application

• Consider where you are now and where you would like to be
• List 3 action steps that would move you toward your goal
Personal application

• Consider where you are now and where you would like to be
• List 3 action steps that would move you toward your goal
• Choose 1 and commit to implementing it this fall
Personal application

• Consider where you are now and where you would like to be
• List 3 action steps that would move you toward your goal
• Choose 1 and commit to implementing it this fall
• No matter where on continuum you end up, your child(ren) will benefit from having been educated at home. What a blessing!
• May you have a year full of joy and peace
  • “Keep cutting back until there is peace in your home” (Kelly as cited in Mackenzie, 2015)
Thanks for attending today!

Brandi Gribble Mathers, Ph. D.
Department of Education
Geneva College
bgmather@geneva.edu

This talk is dedicated to my mother, Cyndee Gribble, and my sister, Lauren Gribble Kunkel. You are my inspiration!