Intro and homeschool overview

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Try this first. Ask more questions than command, than giving more commands. see where that gets you. And they could be leading questions, hey, what do you think could happen next in order to get out the door on time to soccer?

Do you think maybe finding your shoes would be best next? Like, stuff like that just prompts a little bit more executive function thinking and it makes them laugh.

I make them laugh when you ask questions like that. They just start laughing like, yeah, that would be a really good idea. Yeah. This is Doctor Talks, real talk from real doctors on the issues that matter to you most.

Hey, everyone. Welcome back to another episode. I'm really excited. We are going to shift into homeschool mode today. As all of you know, I've been a homeschool mom for a very long time, for 18 years, and my youngest is now graduated.

But I love interviewing homeschool people. So this is what we're doing today. So if you've ever wanted to homeschool or you know somebody that wants to homeschool, you're looking for resources and those types of things, or you're just curious, then this episode is definitely for you.

So make sure you like, subscribe, and share. And then I have a really big request that I need some more reviews. So if you feel so inclined, I would love for you to review this podcast for me because I've got very specific goals.

for you guys and for myself. And so in order for me to upgrade everything, I need you to review me and leave me a five star. That would be amazing too.

So we're going to get started with the interview today. We have Melissa Muir with us today and she's coming to us all the way from Ecuador. which is super exciting to me.

So I can't wait to hear the story how they got all the way to Ecuador, but she is a homeschool mama. She is a certified online teacher. She has her own homeschool business where she teaches children from everywhere.

It's called Curio. And so she really focuses on the middle grades students, and she's going to tell us how she does that, but to sharpen their thinking, their writing, and their confidence.

Melissa's path to homeschooling in Ecuador

And I am so excited to have you here today, Melissa. Thank you. Thanks for having me, Laurie. I'm excited to chat. Yeah, I'm excited to chat, too. Like, when I started homeschooling, of course, there weren't any podcasts, you know, 18 years ago.

So I wish I would have had all this information when I first started. It is quite the time to be a homeschooler. It is quite the time, yeah. Yeah, I mean, we were just doing some online classes, and we thought that was pretty hip, so.

Yeah, you know, advanced. Advanced, advanced, advanced. And I never thought I would homeschool. Did you think you would homeschool? No, not by any stretch of the imagination.

I was like, public school all the way, even college and stuff. Home schoolers are weird. I cannot even imagine doing that. You know, I was exposed to a few when I was younger and I'm like, I am never doing that.

I had some really good friends in college who were homeschooled. They were like, I was like, oh, well, you're surprisingly normal. So like, I went to UVA.

It was so binary, like, a very intellectual school, and we were all kind of nerdy in that way, I guess. So maybe I fit in more than I thought I did. I was like, you guys are cool.

I'm glad I can hang out with you. And I really liked how they related with their families. I was like, you guys are like buds with your parents. This is weird.

I didn't have that, and I love my parents. But we went up like that. So anyway, surprised in a good way. That is a good thing. Yeah. And then when I got married to my husband and his cousins, they homeschooled, and there was eight of them.

They're like, whoa. If they can homeschool, she can handle the first one. So we'll try it. So how on earth, Melissa, did you get started into homeschooling?

Yeah. I guess I probably need to back up a little bit because I am from Virginia. I'm actually born somewhere else, born in California, but lived in Virginia pretty much my whole life.

But after I graduated from college a little bit early, I was like, what am I going to do at this time? And came to Ecuador, had an internship, and the woman who was my boss was like, I had taught in Ecuador for a while.

Let me have a chat with some people. So she hooked me up with a family that homeschooled. I had six kids and I was like, wow, y'all are impressive. And I met their family with eight, their friends with eight kids who homeschooled down here.

And I was like, this is an interesting environment. And did some mission work down here on the coast was doing a teacher professional development. as a 22-year-old, readily that.

And, you know, enjoyed it, met my future husband down here, went back to my teaching job that I had lined up in Richmond, Virginia, taught there for a year, got engaged, and then came right back down here to get married and teach at an international school.

Due to part of our testimony is that we have kids in the first place. Biologically, that was probably not likely in our case due to a few factors. And we started having kids pretty much right away.

So every two years we had another and another and another. And now we want some sort of bilingual because I speak English, our kids and my husband speaks Spanish to them.

And when we were looking around, we were like, it's going to cost like, I mean, this is wild. I don't know if this perspective is new to you, but I mean, a thousand dollars per kid per month to go to a private school here.

Public schools are not truly an option here for us and for a few reasons, but wow, it was what it was going to be. And I was like, even teaching at that school, the discount would not have been not enough to like make it.

Yeah, I was like, this doesn't match up. I should be earning more than we spend. So we started looking into homeschool. And again, I never thought I would.

But with a teaching license from Virginia, as long as your teaching license is valid, you don't have, this is wild to me, any oversight. So there's no portfolios.

There's no testing, stuff like that. So I was like, this is going to be pretty easy to do. Yeah. But I was K-12 Spanish.

That was my license. And I was like, I don't know how to teach kids to read.

But like, let's try it. And it worked. And it was great. Thankfully, that's where we're at nine years later. So our oldest is just about to turn 12. So it was fun.

It's been a fun adventure. Yeah, it is an adventure. And so you're just going to stay in Brazil because that's where your husband's from. Ecuador, yeah.

Ecuador, sorry, yes. Yeah. This is something that we're frustrating to no end, I'm sure, to our families. But we've always just said, we don't really know.

We're fine for now. But the goal would eventually be to do kind of a 50-50 thing. We have family in both countries, so we would love to be around more and have some housing.

things that are happening. We're building a house and yeah, so it's a fun time for us.

Building Curio and online learning options

Well, and we're so excited that you're homeschooling while you're doing all this because it's all the life skills, you know, your kids are involved, you know, it's just life.

And that's why, you know, you talked earlier about kids being close to their parents. Well, when you just do life together, you can't help but be close, right?

It's not that you don't have any arguments or you don't have any issues. It's just that You just navigate life differently because you're always together.

Exactly. Yeah. I mean, we had an architect over this morning to talk through some things, and the kids were like, why was he talking about like, oh my gosh, we were talking about like gray water.

He was like, what's great water? Yeah. Who would have great water? We were like, well, there's black water and gray water and fratable water and stuff like that.

So it leads to fun conversations. Yeah, absolutely. So you have your own curio business or homeschool business. So tell us about that. Yeah. So again, as a homeschooling family, we saw these kind of needs pop up where we're like, our kids know English and Spanish and they're doing fine.

We want them to have a third language. So we started looking at like online classes for French. So we have been taking French online since 2016. I mean, we felt like trailblazers then and you were taking online classes before that.

This has been around before the pandemic. So I think when people think online classes, a lot of people think, oh, the pandemic was horrible. Like Zoom, man, that was rough.

Of course it was rough. Teachers were thrown into Zoom the next lesson, and it was just tough. Yeah, that is not online teaching. The idea of online classes kind of started coming forward, and I started teaching before the pandemic in 2019 online.

And I was like, this is amazing. As long as these classes are appropriate, engaging, and at a short enough time frame that kids can pay attention and feel engaged, this is gold.

for these families. And so not only have our kids taken class online, but we found that this was a really good option. So language classes, full language arts classes, writing, and now we have book clubs.

I was just saying that I am a mayor. Yeah, yeah. I just finished our book club right before this with a group of six,

nine to 13 year olds, like tweens, middle school is just my jam.

I just love those kind of wet cement years when stuff is really starting to stick, they're starting to open up their world and see what's out there and get curious about things.

So that's where the name of the company comes from, Curio. When I get to meet all these different kids from Arizona to Alaska to Argentina, The kind of combining factor that brings them all together in these very mishmash classes is just that they're curious about something and it's really fun to be able to dive into that together.

So that's kind of the foundation for our classes and whether it's language arts or French or Spanish or writing or public speaking, the kind of where we're headed with these kids.

Oh, I think it's fantastic. And I love the fact you love those. I love your term, wet cement ears. That's great. Because those can be really challenging.

What do you do with kids who are so curious? You're homeschooling, you've got other kids, or even if you don't have other kids, and they're so curious, and you're like…

I don't know what direction to take them. What advice can you give parents in that aspect? You have your online classes, but how did you come to those online classes and know this is what sparks them?

So I think part of the impetus to even get into a class is realizing a few things. Number one, I'm not equipped to do this. I'm not equipped to teach a French class.

I'm not fluent. That's fine. Hands up. I'm giving that to somebody else. If that's you in language arts, because… Real life examples. Kids who just have these big conflicts.

It just blows up at the kitchen table. Nobody's having fun. There are tears. It is bad. That's a time to outsource. The next one is like you literally don't have time.

I have another family who they were starting a business and both mom and dad were like, we want to homeschool, but we can't do this. Great. Here to help.

And then the other one is just, I don't want to. I want to focus on math. I want to focus on the life skills. I want to focus on the tinies who are also running around the house because this is part of life as well.

And I want somebody else to kind of feed the monster that is inside this kid who's super curious and wants to read everything and wants some challenge.

So those are kind of the three buckets that we see a lot of families come into our classes from. And when they get into these classes, we're able to kind of lay things out in a way that's personalized.

And that's what I love about it is that there is people like, what curriculum do you use? I'm like, don't, because I've got so many different things that I can choose from.

to really serve what each family needs. So there's a lot. One of my favorites is Nearpod. Have you ever used Nearpod? Well, I never have. Okay. So it's a lot of something wild, the statistic.

80% of classroom teachers in the US use Nearpod, which is wild to me. I used it when I was in the classroom and then I started doing homeschool and I was like, duh, why wouldn't we use this?

So for example, I've got like this big Google sheet for my third grade son who is really excited about science, but I was like, I can't buy curriculum right now.

Again, part of being abroad is like, weight in your suitcase and I'm not about to bring back a bunch of like physical

curriculum. And so we've got this big list of topics and there are links in there so he can click on that and it's basically like a pre-made slideshow but with VR, with gamified quizzes, with videos that stop and ask questions and he has to either type the answer or give multiple choice answer.

So there's, again, like I mentioned before, it's not the pandemic type of online classes that you're taking.

Outsourcing subjects and easing homeschool guilt

It's like engaging and active, which is really fun and sometimes hard to do for the tinies. But that's kind of what we're excited about. Well, and I love when you have those three examples of people who like, you know, come to your online classes.

And I think let's address a little bit of that because some moms, and I was a supervising teacher for a long time, they just felt really guilty, like not teaching at all, or they didn't feel equipped to teach at all.

And so sometimes they send their kids back to public school or, you know, like there's just a lot of guilt or maybe some condemnation and they're like, I'm just not good enough to do this.

when, oh my goodness, outsource it. If you want, that would fit your child best, then let's do it. So can you address some of that? Sure. Yeah. And I think a lot of times it's like, oh, you're homeschooling, you must do it all.

Yeah. Right. Let's push that aside. Do we expect like the, I mentioned we're building a house, right? Like, and so the idea of, do we expect the architects to design the house, build the house, plumb the house, put the electricity?

No, there are specialists. There's a saying in Spanish, let the shoemaker be the shoemaker. We're not expecting them to be the baker. The homeschool mom, dad can do what they do best.

And I think that is the best service we can give to our kids. So step one, just lower those expectations. Also lower your shoulders and just take a deep breath because this is not something that needs to cause stress.

It's just going to transmit to your kids. It doesn't also need to be as expensive as you might think it has to be. So there are a few ways to do this.

The first one that I love that a lot of people don't think about is your family members, the grandparents, the neighbors, the co-op that you might not know exists.

We're not in a co-op, but we know some other families who homeschool, and sometimes we'll talk to them on certain subjects. We'll interview people. I've got one kid who loves medical stuff.

My mother-in-law is a doctor, and so whenever she does, an injection of something or is stitching something. And we've got friends who are scientists and midwives, and she interviews them.

It's weird. I've never seen a kid so excited about this, but that's great. So that's part of her science is just talking to people. Again, free. Doesn't have to cost anything.

Grandparents can be fantastic, especially in those younger years, just doing a read aloud. Gives you 10 minutes to go get lunch on the table while grandparents are doing a read aloud or working on something else with them.

The next one is online classes that are in a group. So there are lots of places to find these. Outschool is a great one. We can find classes of every stripe on there and it's really exciting to see what people are offering.

Things from like Lego clubs and Minecraft clubs and conversations and like AP lit. You know, you can find everything on there. Everything on there. IndieEd.com is another one where you can find a lot of those classes, but these are independent teachers.

So we probably know this now, but a lot of those online platforms take a huge chunk of the teachers' pay. And so this is one of those things where if you're up for supporting independent teachers, that's a great place to find them too.

And then I wouldn't even say as a last resort, one-to-one classes. And that's what we offer. We offer group classes too. But those one-to-one classes, sure, they do cost more because you've got one-on-one time with the teacher with a master's degree.

I mean, this is an expert of the experts, right? But there is a time and a place for that. It's the kid with ADHD and autism, the 2E learner, the twice exceptional learner who's gifted and also has ADHD or gifted and also has autism.

I love meeting with those kids. Those are some of my favorite kids because we can go in all sorts of directions, right? And so when you have those cases, a lot of times, There are scholarships.

You can find a lot of states are offering things like ESA funds, educational scholarships, and those are different in every state. So I would just encourage people to check those out.

And also, again, maybe you talk about this a good bit, but HSLDA membership or just getting a little bit more information on what your state offers and approves.

Yeah, yeah, absolutely. I'm so curious, since you've been raising your kids in Ecuador, and you have all these different educational options that you've done, you've created, you run, how has that shaped your approach to education and parenting?

Oh gosh. I think it's made me way more chill. I don't know if you did this when you started homeschooling, but like I had like the, yeah, school at home.

It was like… You had myself, yeah. Yeah, exactly. Un-school yourself first, please. I had them like saying the pledge. We had like the schedule, little cards.

I mean, it was like… just chill. We quickly saw that that was not going to be feasible when like all the newborns were around. It was just not okay.

And they were still thriving and thriving more because there were not all these other expectations placed. So I would say it's maybe chill out a lot and realize that learning happens in so many different ways and every kid happens that learns in different ways.

So different. Isn't it amazing how different I'm thinking, how did we ever think or who thought that we could put 30 kids in a classroom, teach them all the same way, all the same subject, everything the same, and expect a really good outcome?

I have a really hard time comprehending that now that I've homeschooled for 18 years. I don't understand why we would even want to try that. I mentioned my classroom time in Richmond.

I was in a trailer with 32 gifted eighth graders who smelled like eighth graders and acted like eighth graders, but were curious as well.

How homeschooling shaped parenting and learning

It was a wild time, but it was not quality learning. Having that opportunity to get the one-on-one and or one to four in our case or whatever what that looks like for me is a lot more asking questions.

I mentally like run through life and like progress bars and ratios. Yeah, that might be a weird way to think. But I try to think of the day as how did the ratio go in the way of questions versus commands?

And I think this is a good place to start, especially for families who are maybe either recovering from this past year of homeschool or amping themselves up to start in August or September and getting ready to say, okay, I'm going to do this.

Try this first. Ask more questions than giving more commands. see where that gets you. And they could be leading questions. Hey, what do you think could happen next in order to get out the door on time to soccer?

Do you think maybe finding your shoes would be best next? Stuff like that just prompts a little bit more executive function thinking. And it makes them laugh.

It makes them laugh when you ask questions like that. They just start laughing like, yeah, that would be a really good idea. Yeah. I know, let's do it.

Yeah, sounds good. So, I don't know, taking it down to basics and then just, you know, taking away the timelines as well, skipping the pages. We don't do any sentence diagramming in our homeschool.

Like, it's just like, make the choice. Make the choice that's best and spend your time in better ways and that might not be sentence diagramming. It might not be.

It might not be chemistry. It might not be Algebra 2. It might not be, you know, a lot of different things. You know, my son, he graduated and he went to Ireland and he participated in the University of Limerick, you know, in their music program and stuff over there.

He had a great time because we checked out colleges and stuff here and, He was very specific in what he wanted and nothing just really fit because we were really specific in our education.

He got his piano tuning certification when he was 16, bought a piano tuning business from the local piano tuner. He started all those things. That's just because that's what he wanted to do.

We didn't do traditional high school. We just did it because it wasn't necessary. He helps a congressman run his campaign. It was very eclectic in what he wanted to learn.

like, hey, I've had it. And then you're got a job, how do I install sprinkler systems? So I think that's such a much better education than everybody going through this whole same thing.

And now he's 26. They just bought a farm. He wants to be like the next Joel Salatin. He's County Supervisor and he still tunes pianos. So that's amazing.

I love that. I'm in a white man because he's not afraid to do it, you know, because like, Hey, if you want to try it, try it. And you know, our daughter, she loves horses.

And so, I mean, I got, I found math horse books, which we did like half of them because she's like, I don't like math, but if you can figure out a recipe and you can measure the stalls, the mats you need in your stalls, and you can balance your checkbook, I think we're pretty good at the moment.

Anything else you need to learn? You can learn as you need it. Yeah, exactly. The process of learning rather than the… Can you speak and can you write and do basic math skills?

I think we're doing pretty good. Check, check, and check. Yeah. I also think with your business, with our business, my husband also owns his own business.

part of the learning. So whatever families are working on, I think it's just really, it's a service. It's not taking away their childhood. It's letting them be curious about what's happening around them.

And, you know, such a gift and our kids cook are two oldest. Yeah. You know, divide the five days of the week and

two of them do Tuesday and Thursday and it's all on their own.

They have to find the recipe. They have to defrost the chicken and, you know, deal with it when they forget to like we all do and stuff like that. Life skills, life skills for sure.

Yeah. I mean, I take, I go to a lot of conferences. I take my daughter with me to all my conferences. You know, she's learned way more of those and better on people who have a high mindset and, you know, good business sense and all those things and learned way more than I could have put her in a business class in, you know, a high school system.

So it is so fun. Yeah. And so when people want to start homeschooling, what would be your like top three things that you would tell them? I would say, you know, analyze what was going well or what wasn't going well before, whatever that was, you know, if there are two.

And they're, you know, you're really just starting. Fantastic. But start. Don't wait until they're like four and you should start teaching letters. No, like, started two.

He did the same preschool curriculum for three years, but just an increasing difficulty. And all of our kids were reading before they were five and like, it was fine.

And I was like, is this allowed? Let's do it. I think it is. Maybe the first rule is challenge what is out there, and you don't have to follow the rules, just follow their lead.

I think the second one would be fomenting curiosity in some way, and it's gonna look different for every stinking kid. It's gonna look like getting all the books for the bookworm.

It's gonna look like giving the kid who's really interested in the medical stuff, like, access to those people and things. It's gonna look like, you know, my eight-year-old who's, like, MBA-obsessed, He started a YouTube channel.

We help him with it. It takes a lot of time to edit a YouTube video, but I will edit your stats video because you love it. You know, it's one of those things where we're giving him that runway to be curious about something.

And the five year old, I don't know what she's going to be excited about yet, but. Okay, whenever she is. Yes. Yeah. So again, challenge it, get curious about stuff, and then keep evolving.

Advice for new homeschool families

You don't have to buy the Good and the Beautiful curriculum from K-12. No. Please don't. Don't do that. Evaluate every year. See if it's a good fit. If it's not, buy a unit study and go unit study by unit study, or Don't buy history curriculum.

Just read historical fiction books and see where your kids land there. I mean, that's a really open mindset, I think, but there's a lot of ways to check the boxes if your state has boxes to check and, you know, glean some wisdom from others who have done it before.

There's a lot of people out there who have and they're willing to share. Yeah, it is so true. And ask other homeschoolers, like, what do you do? What works for your family?

And it may not work for your family, but just get, you know, other ideas. I used to homeschool 25 different, or not homeschool, supervise 25 homeschool families every single year, because that's what Iowa required for a long time.

And I got to see so many different styles of, what? Insight. Oh my gosh. I know it was fantastic. What was like the coolest thing you saw there? I wanted to hear some stories.

Well, I mean, I had moms that were like putting Post-It notes all over their walls for like math problems, like jump to the one. If that's the answer, you know, they would just call off numbers.

No problems. Like, you know, seven plus five. And then, you know, do you jump to the one where it was just because the kid was so active and she's like, I got it.

So this is the way that we're doing it, you know, or some people are just like, here's all of your stuff. Go build something. You know, and they would just, you know, very unschooling, like they just, which I loved.

But we were kind of like a mix of, you know, a little bit of mishmash of all of it, which was really great. But some really creative mamas out there, I got to tell you.

Yeah. Yeah. And to see people homeschooling one child and other people homeschooling 20 was amazing. I don't know, God bless all of you. Exactly. No, I'm kind of glad I wasn't called to the 20. Yeah, for sure.

Yeah. But it was just so good. So good. Yeah. Is there anything that you would do differently when you started homeschooling now that you know what you know?

I mean, your kids are still pretty young, so you're still kind of scary. Yeah. Well, yeah. And I feel like I've seen a lot with the friends that we have here and have gotten to like watch them experiment and be flexible.

So I think I would tell my, you know, 2014 self, like, chill, like, don't try to make it school. But beyond that, like, we were just low budget, winging it, everything was printed, TPT free, That was where I just lived for a long time.

And then started really branching out and seeing what else was out there and felt a little bit more freedom to pick and choose rather than just stay in my lane.

So I think we've done well. And if I can pat myself on the back, I would say, good job just being okay with it once we got there. being flexible was just the key.

So not being afraid to change course, I think, is another thing that I was afraid of. Yeah, it was huge. Yeah. Yeah. But if the stakes are low, and again, I'm like the queen of free, and so anytime I can find something that's free and I can stretch it and I can, you know, use ChatGBT to like build a science curriculum or a history curriculum or something like do it.

I have YouTube videos on that. If anybody wants an idea on how we do that, it's a thing. And so there's quite a lot out there that you can use in homeschooling in 2025 and beyond.

It's just like, oh my gosh, the jam. Yeah, it's at GDP, it's going to totally change that landscape for sure. Be careful. Be careful with it. Disclaimer.

Sure. It's a great… Where can my listeners find you? Yeah, we're at thinkcurio, thinkcurio.com and all the socials and YouTube and Instagram and Facebook, Think Curio Learning.

And I just want people to understand like stuff that's out there. You have options. And so that's what I talk about a lot and try to share. I love it.

Melissa, thank you so much for being here. Thanks, Laurie. Thanks for having me. We love having you on here. And thank you all for listening. Make sure, again, that you like, subscribe, and share this video with anyone you know.

And don't forget to leave me a review. God bless you all. I will see you in the next episode. Thank you for tuning into Dr. Talks. We hope today's episode has enlightened and inspired you on your path to optimal health.

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