

**Charlotte Mason: An Introductory Analysis of Her  
Educational Theories and Practices**

by

J. Carroll Smith

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Dr. Patricia P. Kelly, Chairperson

Dr. Sarah Simmons

Dr. Steve Parson

Dr. Jerry Niles

Dr. Larry Harry

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Blacksburg, Virginia

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**(ABSTRACT)**

This study has two goals. One is to begin to explicate the educational theories and practices of Charlotte Mason and the other is to determine whether or not her educational theories and practices are still useful in a 21st Century American School. The first goal is addressed in six essays that discuss major educational tenets of Mason's educational philosophy. The second goal is studied through a case study on The Children's Community School.

The six essays based on major tenets of Mason's educational theories and practices begin with the principle, 'children are born persons,' which permeates all of her beliefs about teaching and learning. 'Children are born persons' means that children change from within and not from without and, therefore, are discoverers of knowledge not vessels to be filled. Rousseau believed that children come with a good nature, but Mason contended that they come with a nature that is both good and evil, as all humans. Therefore children need to be educated to attenuate the evil nature. That is the second tenet. The third tenet is a discussion of authority and docility. If children have a good and evil nature then authority is necessary. However, since children are persons, they have a right to an education and they have a right to self-

authority. The fourth essay discusses Mason's beliefs about the sacredness of a child's personality. In the fifth essay on pedagogy the discussion is concentrated on Mason's use of narration as an instructional tool. The last essay is on curriculum and includes a discussion of Mason's views on curriculum and the use of the narrative in the curriculum. All of the essays bring to the discussion the thinking of other educational thinkers both past and present.

At the end of each essay is the story of the implementation of Mason's educational theories and practices at The Children's Community School. The data collection for this case study is defined by Mason's educational principles discussed in each essay. Data were collected on site at the school through observations, interviews and documents. All interviews were transcribed. Data from transcriptions, observations, and documents were then coded by the six major tenets discussed in the essays. Connections were examined between the theory of Mason and the practice in The Children's Community School.

## **Acknowledgments**

Over fifteen years ago Susan and Ranald Macaulay introduced me to the work of Charlotte Mason. Out of their concern for the education of their children in England, they sought alternatives to the overcrowded, lifeless, local schools. After finding a small school where their children began to flourish educationally, they began to ask questions of the school's director concerning the philosophy of the school. The director shared with them the philosophy of Charlotte Mason. Through a newsletter they offered to share with the readers who were interested their personal discovery of Charlotte Mason. It was with their introduction to Charlotte Mason that I began a journey of studying her educational work. The completion of this dissertation is another chapter of that journey. There have been many people along the way, who have in one way or another, played an important part in this journey. To all who have helped and supported me in this process, I wish to say thank you.

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*Charlotte Mason in 1901. Portrait by Fred Yates*

Figure 1. Taken from *The Story of Charlotte Mason* by Essex Cholmondeley (1960)

## Prologue

### My Introduction to Charlotte Mason

In August of 1979, I began teaching middle school in my home town in the school building where I had attended high school. The building was old and rough with worn hardwood floors and with old windows that rattled. Looking back I see that the teaching was rough and old as well. The teaching of reading stands out in my mind more than the other subjects. The lessons went something like the following: introduce the story by talking about the pictures, have the students predict, read the story, answer the questions at the end, teach a skill such as finding the main idea of a paragraph, take a test, get four out of five correct, and go to next story. If the test were not passed, repeat teaching the skills by using a different story following the same process. By the end of my first semester I was as disgusted as the students. They hated reading, and they hated the way reading was taught. Not only did they hate it, I hated it. I had no clue as to what to do. I struggled with this type of teaching for several years. When I look back, I began to hate teaching not realizing it was the methods we were told to use that I was hating--not teaching. After about two years I was ready to find another career.

Fortunately, about this time acquaintances from England who lived and worked at L'Abri Fellowship wrote in their newsletter that they had found an interesting school where their children were delighting in learning. It had changed their children's attitudes about school. They asked if anyone was interested in reading about the educator who started this school and others like it. I said yes, and they sent me a book entitled, *An Essay Towards A Philosophy of Education*, by Charlotte Mason.

Reading this book began my long odyssey with Charlotte Mason. Her

ideas excited me and stimulated me as a teacher, although I didn't understand everything. Here was an educator who actually addressed the issues of children's developmental and emotional needs and how to match children's learning processes with instructional methodologies. She spoke of the child as being a living organism and in control of his own learning. I had neither read nor heard anything like her work while I was at the university. I'm sure there were professors who thought about and probably taught these ideas, but somehow I missed them. I was dumbfounded and could not even respond to what I was reading. But after reading the book her ideas began to take hold in my mind and slowly changed the way I thought about teaching and learning. When I started learning about whole language a few years later, it seemed to parallel the work of Mason.

Her work continually came back to my mind even later as I read books and articles such as Renate and Geoffrey Caine's book, *Making Connections*, about teaching methods which matched with the way our brains learn. As I will demonstrate through the essays in this paper, it seemed uncanny that a woman writing a century ago could propose so many teaching practices that current educational research is confirming. I believe that through her study of children and how they learn, she arrived at conclusions that may be relevant today as in her day.

Mason developed a set of beliefs about teaching and learning that has impacted Britain from the late eighteen hundreds through the first part of this century and even up to today. Are these beliefs still valid one hundred years later? Why bother to understand Mason's educational ideas? Do they have value for us today beyond just quaint information? Does she truly add to our already astounding body of knowledge about education? Do her principles

apply in today's world -- a world that since her time has been changed by ideologies, technologies, pluralism and postmodernity? To have an understanding of her philosophy of education, I set about writing essays on six of her major educational principles. Then, to see the relevance of these six principles, I did a case study at The Children's Community School. The purpose of this case study is to determine if Mason's six principles can be applied to a present day school.

### **Dissertation Organization**

Although it is not divided, this dissertation has basically two parts that are interwoven. Each chapter begins with an essay on a salient principle of Mason's educational philosophy and ends with case study data from The Children's Community School relating to that principle .

#### **The Essays**

In the book, *The Intellectual Adventures of Ancient Man*, the authors define an essay using Webster's definition as "a literary composition, analytical or interpretative in nature, dealing with its subject from a more or less limited or personal standpoint and permitting a considerable freedom of style and method" (Frankfort, Frankfort, Wilson, Jacobsen, and Irwin, 1977, p. v). Essays, these authors assert, may claim a new freedom of method; they may have to cut across a historical approach for the sake of a new perspective; they may have to ignore the many-sidedness of a problem for the sake of a single aspect of it; sometimes their aim may be to evoke rather than to prove or argue (p. v). While I make no claims as to freedom for a new method, there are aspects of the essays in this dissertation that need to be discussed. The purpose of these essays undoubtedly is to evoke the thinking of educators about the work of Mason. To do this I have selected six major principles of her philosophy of

education and of her pedagogy to discuss. Selection of some of her principles implies that others have not been chosen, thereby, ignoring some of her work for the sake of working in depth on certain aspects of it. Some of her educational principles are discussed in a historical perspective while others are a discussion of her beliefs and how those beliefs relate to current learning theories. Some essays are a combination of a historical perspective and a connection to modern day theorists. However, the overriding purpose here is to connect Mason's beliefs and practice about education to current day educational theorists to determine if she could prove useful. Because her theories about teaching and learning have been buried for years, there is no recent qualitative or quantitative research that substantiates her claims. The point of these essays is to put forth her ideas in pursuit of an answer to the question: What relevance does Mason's work have for children and educators today?

To answer this question all of the essays make connections between Mason's educational principles and current learning theories. The major current learning theories that I use for comparison come from the work of Lev. S. Vygotsky, Jean Piaget, Kieran Egan and others as well as current brain research and its implications for teaching and learning digested for us by such educators as Eric Jensen, Renate and Geoffrey Caine, and Anthony Gregorc. In the discussions on discipline, behavior, and personality, I make reference to the work of William Glasser, Ernest Boyer and Alfie Kohn, modern day educators who challenge the effects of behaviorism on discipline in schools. I have only mentioned here a few of the educators to whom I make reference in the essays.

The first essay is about Mason's understanding of '**children as born persons.**' I develop this essay by discussing historically the thinking of a few

educational reformers and how their thinking influenced educational thought up to the time of Mason. This essay ends with a discussion as to how the principle of 'children as born persons' is relevant to current learning theories. I discuss this educational belief of Mason first because it permeates through all the subsequent educational principles.

In the second essay, **The Nature of Children**, I discuss Mason's views on the good and evil nature of children. Rousseau had a enormous influence on the mind of educators even up to the time of Mason and today. How were Mason's views alike or different from those of Rousseau? The views of Comenius were important to Mason and influenced her thinking on this subject. There are current educationalists, such as Alfie Kohn, who have similar views as those of Mason. The discussion in this essay centers on how Mason's beliefs about the nature of children has implications for teaching and learning.

The essay entitled **Authority and Docility** addresses Mason's views on the use of authority and its counter principle docility, or obedience. In the classroom setting or in the home, what authority do adults have over children? What authority do children have over their own lives? Some references are made to Comenius, but most connections are made to current learning theories such as those of Richard Smith, James Banner, Jr, Harold Cannon, Ernest Boyer, Alfie Kohn, and others.

In the **Personality** essay I discuss Mason's views on personality with references to modern day educational theorists as well as some references to the work of Marie Montessori. Mason believed that the personality of children is sacred, and that adults must not attempt to alter it in any way. In educating children, Mason insisted that adults not manipulate children's personalities through the use of prizes, rewards or even the adult's own personality. Mason

thought that educators should use the child's natural environment; they should use the development of good habits; and they should introduce the child's mind to the best ideas but must not manipulate the child's personality. These three, education as an atmosphere, a discipline, and a life, the tools educators must use to educate children, are discussed in the second half of the essay.

The essay on Pedagogy is confined to a discussion on Mason's use of **narration**. This essay begins with a brief history of the use of narration and ends with a discussion of how Mason used narration as a learning tool. Throughout this discussion I relate her thoughts about narration to current work that is being done with "read and retell" and with current work on how children process information. Connections are made to the work of Brian Cambourne, Hazel Brown, Richard Allington, and others.

The last essay is on Mason's views of curriculum. In this discussion I explicate her views on **curriculum**, and then I narrow the discussion to her use of the narrative as a part of the curriculum. I discuss Mason's views on the use of the narrative in teaching and learning as well as the beliefs on the use of the narrative by some current educational theorists. I use the work of Kieran Egan, Neil Postman, Hunter McEwan and others as they relate to Mason's beliefs about the use of the narrative.

### **The Case Study**

I conducted a case study involving The Children's Community School directed by Jessica Frost. For the sake of anonymity requested by the staff all names are pseudonyms including the name of the school and the city in which it is located. The purpose of the case study is to answer the question: What happens to Mason's ideas as they are implemented in an American school a century later? Instead of the case study being in a separate second part, I have



chosen to tie together the essays and the case study. The data collection for the case study is centered on the six principles of Mason's work discussed in each of the six essays. Therefore, to facilitate the reader making connections between the case study and the essays, the case study is threaded through the dissertation as a corollary to each essay. In addition to the six essays with the case study, there is a context chapter on the case study that follows this introduction and there is a closing chapter drawing together the usefulness of Mason's work for our current use based on the evidence given in the case study.

## Chapter 1

### Charlotte Mason: A Teacher and Teacher Educator

In this chapter I discuss different aspects of Charlotte Mason's life. I begin with a few introductory statements about her as an educator. Then I review who Charlotte Mason was by giving a brief historical view of Mason, including some comments about her early life and training, her teaching, her writing and lecturing, her developing a teacher training college, and her involving parents in the education of their children. The last section makes general comments about her work as seen from her biographer, Essex Cholmondeley and others. The last part of this chapter discusses reasons why I chose to study the work of Charlotte Mason.

Charlotte Mason was an educator who did most of her work in the nineteenth century. She wrote numerous books on education and established a number of schools in England addressing the needs of all children from infancy through college. She wanted to develop a unifying philosophy of education. As she developed her philosophy, she came to believe that all children could learn no matter what their socioeconomic situation. She said, "Acting upon these and some other points in the behaviour of mind, we find that *the educability of children is enormously greater than has hitherto been supposed*, and is but little dependent on such circumstances as heredity and environment" (Mason, 1925, p. xxxi). When one considers the effects of the Industrial Revolution on the nineteenth century poor child, her concepts gain significance. With this as one of the basic premises of her beliefs about children, she developed an educational philosophy and, subsequently, developed methods and curriculum that she thought maximized learning for children.

## Who was Charlotte Mason?

In this section I discuss Charlotte Mason in terms of her early life and her education. That is followed by a summary of her teaching experience. Mason was also a prolific writer, and I mention briefly what she has written. Then, I briefly discuss the teacher training college she started, followed by her parent involvement.

### Early Life and Training

Charlotte Mason was born in 1842 and died on January 16, 1923, at the age of 81. Her father was a merchant, and the family lived in Liverpool, England. She was orphaned in her middle teens and had to earn her own living.



*Figure 2.* Charlotte Mason in 1864. From *The Story of Charlotte Mason* by Essex Cholmondeley (1960)

According to Harry Good and James Teller (1969, p. 409), Elizabeth Mayo in 1830 published a book, *Lessons on Objects*, which used the concept of object-lessons developed by Johann Pestalozzi, an eighteenth century educator. Charles Mayo, her brother, had spent three years with Pestalozzi at his school in Yverdon, Switzerland. In 1836, after Mayo returned to England, the Mayos and others organized the Home and Colonial School Society. Herman Krusi, Jr., a well known Pestalozzian scholar, came to work with them. Christopher J. Lucas (1972) stated that the Mayos opened a Pestalozzian school for boys and a Home and Colonial College for training teachers (p. 358). Mason attended this college for teachers.

She began her studies at The Home and Colonial in Gray's Inn Road in 1860, one of the few training colleges for teachers. J. P. Inman (1985) in his book, *Charlotte Mason College*, points to the characteristics of the college that may have influenced Mason's later thought and practice:

[The school] adhered to Church of England principles, but candidates from any denomination were received if they held the fundamental truths of the Bible.

It had a special course for the training of nursery governesses.

It was prepared to train mistresses for middle class schools.

It studied the work of Pestalozzi, the Swiss educational

reformer who taught that the head, the hand and the heart were of equal importance to the teacher, and it is not the performance but the performer (i.e. the child) who is his chief concern. (p. 5)

## **Teaching Experience**

### **Davison School**

Her teaching experience included twelve years from 1861-1873, as head of the Davison Infant School in Worthing, England, located in southern England near Brighton. As time went on Mason's health became frail. In 1871, she became ill and in December of 1872, at the age of 30, she resigned from Davison School.

### **Bishop Otter College**

Following this time, according to Cholmondeley (1960), she wrote a series of letters outlining her scheme of state education for all children up to age eighteen and a state scheme for the training of teachers. Cholmondeley (1960) indicated that someone at Bishop Otter College may have been connected with the letters (pp. 9-11). In 1874, two years after leaving Davison School, she was invited to be on staff at Bishop Otter College, Chichester, England, as a lecturer in education and psychology. She also held the position of "mistress of method at the Practising School" (Inman, 1985, p. 6). This was the first year for Bishop Otter College, and it was one of the first colleges for training teachers in elementary education. Cholmondeley (1960) indicated that Mason committed herself to her work with great energy and excitement (p. 12). She taught at Bishop Otter College in Chichester until approximately 1878, at which time according to Inman, Mason had a breakdown and had to leave the college and ultimately to give up teaching. Inman (1985) stated that this college wanted young women who could become elementary school teachers to the poorer children. It "sought ladies of culture and good education" and who, more than usual, seemed "promising material" (p. 6).

### **Writing and Lecturing Careers Begin**

#### **Lecturing**

After leaving Bishop Otter College, Mason began writing and lecturing as

well as exploring the English countryside on foot. This exploration resulted in a best selling geography book on the English counties entitled *The Forty Shires: Their History, Scenery, Arts and Legends* first published in 1880. Following the writing of her geography book, Mason was invited to join the staff at the new Bradford School in Bradford, England. She was offered some lecturing work with plenty of time for writing. While in Bradford she was a member of the Philosophical Society, The Browning Society and a poetry club where Shakespeare's plays were read. During this time in Bradford, she was invited by the vicar to become a district visitor in the church. This enabled her to have a first hand view of the working class conditions of a large city (Cholmondeley, 1960, p. 14-15).

### **Writing**

Following the writing of the geography book, Charlotte Mason wrote her book *Home Education* (first published in 1886). Based on what I have read and studied, Mason seemed to be a practical, sensible person. Because government support of public schools was in its infancy, at this time a large number of children were still educated at home by parents or governesses. Inman (1985) pointed out that "it was in the home schoolroom under governesses and parents that most middle class children" (p. 7) were educated. As a practical person, I believe, Mason, wanted her ideas to affect the most children, so, she first began to write her educational ideas for parents and governesses.

Charlotte Mason was a prolific writer. She wrote three volumes on education, one volume on building character in children, one volume on understanding ourselves, and one volume on parenting. Religious writings were also a part of her publications. She wrote six volumes in verse form on

the life of Christ. As mentioned, her first publication was the geography book on the English counties. She also wrote a small series of books on teaching grammar to children. Her last publication was one of the three volumes on Education, *An Essay Towards a Philosophy of Education*, published posthumously in 1925.

### **Teacher Training College**

The school for training teachers that Charlotte Mason began in 1892 was called The House of Education, later called the Charlotte Mason College. She located the school in the Lake District of England at Ambleside in Cumbria County. It offered a free Practising School for local children.

She was insistent that her students, who were training to be teachers, must have a broad understanding of educational philosophy and psychology. She believed that these two were handmaids in helping teachers understand children. Not only did she have an understanding of the past great minds in educational philosophy, but she was well read in current thought. She referred considerably to Jean-Jacques Rousseau, John Locke, Herbert Spencer, and Johann H. Pestalozzi as well as those who were more her contemporaries such as John Dewey, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Charles Darwin. She said, “. . . but I hope I have succeeded in methodizing the whole and making education what it should be, a system of applied philosophy” (Mason, 1925, p. 18).

The Charlotte Mason College is still existing today in Ambleside, England. I spent a week there during the summer of 1999. The college is now a part of St. Martin’s College at Ambleside, England. Its location and name had significance for Mason. The location was chosen because it would afford the college students a place where, “They will learn to know and love the individuality of great natural features--mountain, pass, valley, lake and

waterfall” (Inman, 1985, p. 10) Next, the cost of living in the area was moderate and could be afforded by a larger number of people. Third, the name House of Education was chosen because Mason wanted a home atmosphere versus the coldness of a college. She said, “Household life as a means of culture is much to be preferred to college life” (Inman, 1985, p. 10-11) Inman reported the students were expected to spend their summers with a family in France or Germany learning a second language (p. 13).

### **Parent Involvement**

Cholmondeley (1960, p. 15) said that during the time Mason was lecturing at the Bradford School in Bradford, England, she had become hopeful of sharing a few principles about learning that she thought would be beneficial for parents. She quoted Mason as saying,

A single idea was gradually taking shape and forcing itself into prominence becoming in fact a life purpose. To put it into the tentative form in which it occurred: what if those two or three vitalizing educational principles could be brought before parents? . . . But the question remained, how to approach parents without appearance of presumption. How could I with sincere deference and humility offer to parents the help of those few principles which are a very gospel of education. . . . At last the occasion arrived and simmering thought took shape. (p. 15)

In an effort to share with parents, she gathered a group of interested people to discuss the possibility of sharing her educational ideas through a parents organization. This group of parents formed the Parent’s National Educational Union (PNEU). The new organization’s purpose was to publish and promote the educational philosophy that Mason was developing. Members of this



organization came from a wide assortment of people. There were influential people, but many of the people were parents to whom she had written to answer their questions about the education or the raising of their children. Others were colleagues or students of hers at Bishop Otter College, and others were people with whom she had lived. Her influence in England was tremendous. However, it is not the purpose of this inquiry to determine her influence. But, generally speaking, her influence into present day England has been effected by her books, the *Parents' Review*, a magazine established by the Parent's National Educational Union, schools established by the PNEU, and her teacher training college. I could find no record of her influence in the United States until recent years.

The PNEU's magazine, *Parents' Review*, also became the tool for Mason to help young mothers. She began the Mothers' Education Course in 1891 as part of the *Parents' Review* magazine. From the dedication of the *Parents' Review* in February of 1890 one finds these words (Cholmondeley, 1960),

In these and other respects, the aim of the *Parents' Review* is to raise common thought on the subject of education to the level of scientific research, and to give parents grip of some half-dozen principles which should act as enormously powerful levers in the elevation of character.

The object of this monthly magazine is to keep parents in touch with the best and latest thought on all those matters connected with the training and culture of children and young people. (p. 28)

In the PNEU's magazine, Mason targeted an audience of parents and citizens concerned about education on several levels. She spoke to young

mothers through the Mothers' Education Course. She helped parents of older children educate their children, and she helped governesses hired by parents to educate their children. She founded the House of Education as a College to train young women as governesses and as teachers. She informed parents through the PNEU and the *Parents' Review* of her latest ideas on the teaching of children. And, the PNEU had a yearly conference to which educators from nursery schools, governesses, parents and concerned citizens were invited.

### **Closing Comments about Her Life**

During her years at Davison School, Mason said, "I love my children. How a mother must learn to love her children when even one who sees so little of them can find so many beautiful and lovable traits of character." From the same letter to Mr. Dunning, lecturer in education at the Home and Colonial College, Mason wrote, "I am happy in my work, I have some such interesting children. There is one, a dear little baby, just two years old; then there is my monitors' class consisting of twelve children whom I teach in the dinner-hour. They are all such nice children; you don't know how soothing and comforting I find this. I think it is specially sent of God as balm to my rather troubled heart" (Cholmondeley, 1960, p. 7). We see from these statements the true joy she felt in educating children.

Throughout her life she wanted to help educate the poor children for she believed that all children were equipped to learn. In fact, as early as 1873, she wrote a series of letters outlining in full detail her plan for a 'liberal education for all' (Cholmondeley, 1960, p. 11). Monk Gibbon (1960) in his book, *Netta*, the biography of Henrietta Franklin, Honorary Secretary of the PNEU, stated that her influence was felt throughout Britain. He said, "Mason put the psychological teaching of the day, often to be found only in heavy and difficult tomes, into

language which all could understand, and added her own interpretation of the laws of habit formation, inspiration of ideas and the way of reason and will” (p. 45). He further declared that organizations such as the Boy Scouts, started by Sir Robert Baden-Powell, were directly influenced by Mason ( p. 140). The Natural History Clubs were inspired by her geography series (p. 45). The National Trust, an organization that presently purchases property in Britain for the purpose of preserving the environment and national treasures, was founded by a personal friend of Mason (Eve Anderson, personal communication, October 1997). According to Cholmondeley (1960) in his address to the Conference held in the memory of Mason in 1923, Professor W. G. de Burgh, M.A., of the University of Reading, said,

For instance, by her firm insistence on adequate salaries and conditions of service, she raised singlehanded the status of the private governess throughout England.

Miss Mason stood firm as a rock in a utilitarian age for the essentials of a humanist education. She grew up in an atmosphere of materialism in education; and that this is no longer dominant is due largely to her efforts. The fact that she had to fight for her humanist ideal braced her and called forth her full powers. (p. 289)

There were over 40,000 students in private schools of the PNEU who were taught with her principles. That does not include the public schools in England nor the convent schools in Ireland that were using her methods. What universal principles about education had Mason developed that created such a following? Professor de Burgh credited her with changing education from a utilitarian approach to a humanist approach. She changed the status of

governesses. She ignited an educational fire in Britain that influenced the start of great organizations such as the Boy Scouts, Natural History Clubs and others. The PNEU is not longer in existence. The Charlotte Mason College is now a part of St. Martin's College. Even with the death of some of these organizations, maybe the time has come to revisit her work to determine more clearly the substance of the ideas that changed the educational landscape of Britain.

### **Why Did I Chose To Study Charlotte Mason?**

David Elkind (1997), one author contributing to the 1997 Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development Year Book, said in the chapter entitled "Schooling and Family in the Postmodern World" that all historical periods are characterized by a set of beliefs or principles by which people live. Further, he stated, the modern era has been characterized by the general principles of "progress, universality and regularity" (p. 27). The postmodern world, he believed, is characterized by a belief that universals do not exist and therefore educators such as John Piaget and Maria Montessori have looked to individualization of instruction to help children learn. The modern era sought for universals to explain their world but, Elkind believed, the consequences of "two World Wars, the Holocaust, the atomic bomb and the degradation of the environment have undermined faith in human progress and the belief that society evolves in a positive direction so as to improve the lot of all individuals" (p. 28). Francis Schaeffer (1976) believed that many philosophers long before our day had given up finding universals by which the world could be studied and governed. Rather, he believed that humans as far back as the Greco-Roman times looked to study particulars (see page 20 for a discussion of the meanings of the words universals and particulars) of the world to find

universals. Schaeffer thought that while, of themselves, particulars were not a problem, to begin with particulars to define life and to give meaning to life is weak. Particulars change and to base beliefs on them is unstable. Elkind believed that, because postmodern man has given up on finding universals, educators such as John Piaget and Marie Montessori have studied the particulars of childhood and education to bring about change. Mason had developed a few universals and subsequent particulars that are useful for us today as we seek to understand the nature of children and how to educate them. One such universal was her belief that children change and grow from within and not by teaching from without. Therefore, educational methodologies must match with the way children change from within. The methodologies or particulars must match the universal that children change from within. All the essays in this dissertation are intended to develop a deeper understanding of Mason's beliefs.

In this section I give the reader a short description of Mason's philosophical heritage. This is followed by a brief discussion on the concepts of universals and particulars. These ideas are complex, so obviously this discussion will be brief and therefore leaving out much that could be said. Next, as a means to establish the significance of this study, I will give one example of a universal belief of Mason and how it might affect education.

## **Charlotte Mason's Philosophical Background**

### **Philosophical Thoughts up to Charlotte Mason**

Charlotte Mason was an Anglican. As a result she followed in the Anglican Protestant tradition that had been influenced more by the Reformation than the Renaissance. Schaeffer stated (1976) that through the work of an

Oxford professor, John Wycliffe (c. 1320-1384) England had been influenced by Reformation concepts even before Martin Luther came on the European scene (p. 56). He further claimed that the work of Scottish philosophers and theologians such as Samuel Rutherford had influenced the English mind. Rutherford's book *Les Rex* (Law is King) had influenced specifically the thoughts and ideas of John Locke who secularized Rutherford's thinking (p. 109). Mason (1925) clearly stated that the Scottish philosophers had influenced her understanding of the importance of desires from which she inferred her understanding of the use of our desire for knowledge as a tool for learning (p. 11). This Anglican Protestant background influenced Mason's thinking and helped her develop her philosophy of education. To understand the implications of her religious thinking on her philosophy of education one must understand somewhat the general flow of the thinking of humankind up to the time of Mason. Now, as I have stated, there have been volumes and volumes written about the thinking of western humankind. It is my purpose here to deal succinctly with the broader concepts of universals and particulars and how these concepts may have influenced education and Mason.

### **Universals and Particulars**

To help the reader follow my train of thought I briefly define universals and particulars. For my purposes a universal is a principle which provides a basis for beliefs. For example, a universal we commonly accept without question is that humankind has dignity. One may believe this, but so what? How do I know this to be true (an epistemological question)? The Reformers thought that this belief must be grounded in a principle that is beyond man himself or otherwise tomorrow man may change his mind (much as Hitler did). For example, Hitler only valued peoples of a certain ethnic origin and he

excluded other peoples such as the Jews. From the Christian tradition and one with which Mason would have been familiar, the universal would be that God created man in his image. This grounds the universal in God who is outside man. Therefore, what I think of man does not change the fact that his dignity rests in the image he bears. Further, one's race, gender, economic condition or social status does not change one's position as a human being having dignity. Race, gender, economic condition or social status are particulars and may not be used to define universals. If I can use these particulars to define the universal, *man has dignity as a person*, then since I chose the defining concepts for man's dignity, then I can include or exclude whatever particulars I wish. In the relationship between humankind and me, I am the particular and humankind is the universal. Since I have already mentioned particulars in relation to universals, I can use this same discussion to define particulars. Particulars are facts, molecules, a person, race, gender. They are like the facts that support the main idea of a paragraph, understanding that no one fact can sufficiently define the main idea. In the examples I have given here, the universal is the dignity of man, which is grounded in the image of God. The particulars are one person, race, gender, economic condition and social status (See concluding remarks, pp. 275-276 for further discussion of particulars and universals). Interestingly, Mason would have valued highly the particular, *one person*, because he or she is created in the image of God.

David Elkind spoke about postmodern man beginning with the particulars of education to understand how to teach children. He made reference to Marie Montessori and John Piaget as two examples. To understand the significance of particulars, we must understand that in the flow of history, humanity, from the Greco-Roman time until the Renaissance and on

into the Enlightenment, had maintained the idea that beginning with particulars (facts about the world) and using his own ability (humanism) humankind could establish universal principles that would help them understand and govern the world. According to Schaeffer, this failed. An example he gave of this failure was the despondency of Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519) in his old age. Realizing that using all the information he had as a true Renaissance man, da Vinci still was not able to produce universals that would give meaning to life. Subsequently in his old age he became despondent and pessimistic (Schaeffer, 1976, p. 78). Another example was the failures of the French Revolution and a more modern example was the failure of the Communist Revolution in Russia. In both incidences humankind had tried to solve problems and make the world a utopian dream by beginning with themselves (Schaeffer, 1976, p. 121). Because they started with themselves to make the world a perfect place, humankind was not able to establish universals (could not establish a basis for giving meaning to life); and by the time of Mason all hope of defining universals had disappeared.

What was the thinking that followed when humankind gave up the idea of finding universals to give meaning to life? Because man began with particulars he could not establish universals. All hope of finding universals was given up which led to a materialistic view of the world. Without universals to give meaning to life man accepted the idea that the universe was only a physical universe. For example, Ernest Haeckel in his book, *The Riddle of the Universe at the Close of the 19th Century*, published in 1899, stated that man has no freedom of will because the universe is a material universe and the human mind and soul could be explained materialistically (Schaeffer, 1976, p. 147).

Another example of the effects of the materialistic view of life closer to the



discussion of Mason and education comes from Frederick Engels. He wrote in 1845 a book entitled *The Condition of the Working Class in England*. He described the treatment of children in factories. Children were forced to work at times, in places, and in positions that accommodated the machine. He stated (quoted from Jordan, 1987),

the children work in small, ill-ventilated, damp rooms, sitting always bent over the lace cushion. To support the body in this wearying position, the girls wear stays with a wooden busk, which, at the tender age of most of them, when the bones are still very soft, wholly displaces the ribs and makes narrow chests universal. They usually die of consumption after suffering the severest forms of digestive disorders, brought on by sedentary work in a bad atmosphere. They are almost wholly without education, last of all do they receive moral training. (p. 112)

Because no basis for human dignity had been established, humans (in this case children) were reduced to particulars of lesser value than the factory machine (a particular) they were serving. Without a proper basis for the dignity of man, children and women were reduced to serving the manufacturer's machine.

### **Mason's Use of Universals**

What does this have to do with the significance of studying Charlotte Mason? Mason developed first a set of beliefs about children that are universals. For example, the child as a born person, the first of her beliefs, has implications for education and psychology. This concept of children as born persons is developed more fully in Chapter Three of this study. But to help the reader understand the significance of Mason's work, I will briefly suggest one of

the particulars of education and psychology this universal would affect.

First, for educational purposes, the idea that a child is a born person as Mason understood it, means the child is the active agent of his education and is not to be acted upon. This requires us to see learning as something the learner does rather than what the teacher does. Inman's (1985, p. 6) reflection on Pestalozzi supports Mason's thinking: The performer (the child) is more important than the performance. One must, therefore, define instruction so that it matches the learner rather than creating an instructional model that may produce beautiful exciting lessons that do little more than titillate the learner. Second, because the child is a born person, the sacredness of personality (person being the root word) must be honored. The process of education cannot manipulate children with rewards, punishment or suggestion (Mason, 1924, p 11). Consequently, Mason believed we were left with only three educational instruments: (a) atmosphere of environment (his natural setting - not a made up one), (b) education as a discipline (formation of habits), and (c) education as a life (the need for intellectual, moral and physical sustenance) (Mason, 1925, p. xxix).

### **Other Influences**

Charlotte Mason was well read. When one reads her works, one gets a sense of the clear grasp she had on educational ideas historically, psychologically and philosophically. In *School Education* she discussed Johann H. Pestalozzi, Johann Friedrich Herbart and Friedrich Froebel. Professor de Burgh stated, "She realized the point of Plato's startling question in the *Republic*: how can the State foster the study of philosophy without being ruined by it" (Cholmondeley, 1960, p. 289)? She read Professor William James' work on psychology (Mason, 1925, p. 104). She attended the sermons

and lectures of Frederic Denison Maurice one of the founders of Queens College and The Working Men's College in London. Maurice was also the founder of the Christian Socialist Movement. While she lived, worked and wrote in Bradford, she was a member of the Philosophical Society, The Browning Society and a poetry club. Clearly, Mason was well read in the classics and in the philosophical, psychological and educational writings of her day.

### **Summary**

I chose to do this study because it seems to me that Charlotte Mason developed a set of universals and particulars that might be useful for us today in education. I believe this knowledge is not just for her time in history; but, it seems to me, she has something to offer us today at the beginning of the 21st Century. In a predominately materialistic culture, where children and schools are reduced to little more than a standardized test score, our culture needs to hear a different view point on the education of children. It seems to me that it is time to dust off her works and to relook at her beliefs to see how we can use them today. As she did in her time, maybe we can do in ours: shift the emphasis from a utilitarian education to a humanitarian education.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Charlotte Mason's Principles in a 21st Century School:**

#### **The Context for the Case Study**

In thinking about how to proceed with a discussion of some of Mason's learning theories, it became apparent that her ideas must have validity for present day use or a discussion of them would be purely academic and serve no purpose for 21st Century classrooms. At the time of this case study there are several schools in the United States attempting to use the philosophy of Mason as their foundational principles about teaching and learning. These schools are located in the southeastern part of the United States as well as schools in the southwest and northwest. I chose The Children's Community School in Springtime to answer the question: Are Mason's learning theories useful for implementation in an American school a century later? In this case study I try to determine how Mason's ideas are being used in a private American school in the southeastern United States. For that purpose I set forth the research question mentioned above to guide the data collection, data analysis and conclusions. Bogdan and Biklen (1992) suggested that the results of qualitative research emerge to create a picture (p. 30). Therefore, the purpose of this case study is to document a "picture" of a Charlotte Mason school. From this "picture" and the essays that discuss six principles that are important elements of her theories about teaching and learning, I draw conclusions about the usefulness of Mason's learning theories in a modern school context.

As I set the context for this case study, I must mention as I do in the description of the methodology (Appendix A) that as a researcher I was a participant in this project. My participation, for example, included teaching a class, tutoring a student, monitoring the halls, and eating lunch with the children

and the teachers. Having said that, it is still my intention to let the voices who spoke through interviews and discussions be heard. I use the data from the interviews as a tool to allow the voices of the individuals at The Children's Community School to emerge and paint a context for you the reader. Bogdan and Biklen (1992) quoting Spradley (1979) said, "a good ethnographic translation shows; a poor one tells" (p. 190). I build the context by introducing the reader to the physical surroundings and then to some of the personal educational beliefs of three of the key leaders of the school and to five of its teachers. These three key leaders and five teachers work to fulfill the philosophy of The Children's Community School. Their views reflect much of what is believed about children and the way instruction should occur. In giving the reader a glimpse of their thoughts, ideas and beliefs about education, I give the reader the philosophical context of this school.

This case study takes place at a school located in the "New South." I refer to that city as Springtime. I refer to the name of the school as The Children's Community School. It is a school of approximately 130 students from nursery school to grade eight.

### **Springtime**

According to the brochure entitled "Welcome to Springtime" which is published by the Springtime Area Chamber of Commerce, Springtime has a population of 44,000 residents. The area around Springtime is rural but receives its description as being part of the "New South" because of its growing industry base and moderate climate with access to several institutions of higher learning. To broaden its industry base Springtime has become the home of numerous international companies such as BMW and Siemens. The county of Springtime has a population of 240,000. In 1997, the state had an

unemployment rate of 4.9 percent while Springtime County had an unemployment rate of 3.9 percent. Springtime County retail sales went from \$2,831,502,045 in 1987 to \$5,242,936,433 in 1997, evidence of a growing economy. Median family income went from \$17,453 in 1980 to \$31,857 in 1990. This data speaks to the growing economy of Springtime, which provides an income base for better salaries and standards of living. This broader economic base brings in internationals, mainly Europeans. The Children's Community School is no exception to this situation. Many of its students come from affluent families, several of those being international families who are looking for a high quality education for their children.

To enable the reader to 'see' what I saw as I entered the Springtime area for the first time, I made a tape recording describing what I saw. Here is a partial summary from that recording: As I drove along I-85 I noticed the typical urban sprawl that one sees in many cities in the United States today. This is true of Springtime. As I made my way north on I-26, which is the east-west corridor that brought vacationers from the Midwest to the beaches of the state, as quickly as I had entered Springtime, it now seemed that almost in the blink of an eye the city was gone and one was riding through countryside. The countryside is neither flat nor hilly. This is a bit odd since the Appalachian Mountains have a branch that ends just north of Springtime. As one rides north of Springtime for several miles, suddenly off in the distance one can see the mountains rising suddenly out of the earth. I was riding toward them because I would be staying with the director of The Children's Community School while I gathered data about the school.

On the second day of my stay, I recorded the following description as I rode toward the school.

Highway I-26 runs west to east. Built to bring the Midwest vacationers to the coast of the state. Typical interstate highway. Fast food places and gas places. On the edge of the city is a shopping mall and a mobile home sales lot. On Highway I-26 I passed Michelin, a French tire company. Going under another interstate. Springtime Methodist College and Tietex International are located at this intersection. Now there is another intersection of a four lane highway with a mall in one corner, Sams Wholesale in another along with fast food restaurants and other mall restaurants such as Applebees. Lowes, Taco Bell, McDonalds. Sears--typical urban sprawl. Circuit City, Walmart. K-mart. Best Buy, Hardees. Pic-n-pay. Long John Silvers. Banks. I have moved from I-26 going east on Highway 29 toward downtown Springtime. This street has Barnes and Nobles, Home Depot, banks, Burger King, car wash, gas stations and other little shopping areas with barbers. It seems every corner has a shopping area. Lots of urban sprawl.

Continuing up Highway 29 toward downtown Springtime on the corner of a street that leads into a residential area is located Covenant Presbyterian Church where The Children's Community School's grades nursery school through grade three are located. Although the school is not associated with the church, the school uses the facilities.

Grades four through eight are located in the educational wing of another church on the other side of downtown Springtime. I wrote the following entry in my daily journal about the upper level of the school, grades four through eight which is located in Pleasantville Baptist Church.

The school is housed in the Sunday school rooms of the church plus four rooms located in a building immediately behind the church. The building and grounds of the church are very well kept and look quite modern. The floors in the main building are carpeted and the walls are white. It has the appearance of church Sunday school rooms. The rooms are fairly small.

Although the rooms are fairly small in this church, they are larger than the typical small rooms of a church Sunday school. In fact, at the younger student's campus, which is an older facility, the church rooms have many walls that have been removed to make the classrooms larger.

### **The Director, Jessica Frost**

Jessica Frost has been in education most of her adult life. A tall well groomed woman full of energy, she has given most of her years at The Children's Community School from 1992 when she began the school, until now without pay. She and her husband view her work with the school as their 'ministry' to children. Having worked in public education for a number of years, she yearned for something different for children. As her yearning deepened she came across a book by Susan Schaeffer Macaulay entitled *For The Children Sake*. This book motivated her to pursue starting a school using the methods of Charlotte Mason. She said,

I am the kind of person who is never satisfied with things the way they are and I have devoted my adult life to education and I haven't been satisfied with the school settings in which I have taught or what my children have learned. I was looking for something better. But I didn't have any kind of inspiration on my own for what would be better and I came across a book called,



*For the Children's Sake* by Susan Macaulay. And that started it all.

Upon learning about Mason's writings through the book *For the Children's Sake*, Ms. Frost immediately purchased copies of Mason's work to study.

Through a series of events she came into contact with several schools in England that are still functioning under the Parent's National Education Union (PNEU). At that time, although the PNEU no longer functions as the organization it used to be in Mason's day, a person at the PNEU office conveyed to Ms. Frost the name of several PNEU schools that are still in existence in the London area. She visited one particular director and school, which immediately became partners with Ms. Frost in her attempt to start a school of similar philosophy and practice. The director's name is Eve Anderson, who is now retired from Eton End. This researcher has spent considerable time with Miss Anderson as well, although Ms. Frost and I came to know Miss Anderson through different avenues.

What made Ms. Frost choose Charlotte Mason's philosophy and pedagogy? First, the teachers in England impressed her in their ability to choose a topic for study and formulate lessons around that topic. She admired their initiative and spontaneity; their ability to ask "very thoughtful questions of children;" and their ability to "put (the) responsibility for learning and gathering information on the children." Children, she noticed at Eton End, Miss Anderson's school, "were happy in their work . . . and they were very productive." She is drawn to Mason's philosophy because she senses a great respect for the personhood of the child even the child who is being corrected for inappropriate behaviors. During the interview I asked the question, How do you think the concept of 'children are born persons' matches instructionally with

what you have just said? She responded thus,

Again, I think it goes back to respecting the child as a individual, created in the image of God and someone who is born curious and capable of learning and capable of feeding himself but needs to be given the proper tools. Right now the proper tools for my eight-month-old granddaughter are Cheerios or frozen peas or little bits of cheese on the plate because she likes to pick them up in her fingers. She much prefers to feed herself rather than to be fed with a spoon from her mother.

Ms. Frost was impressed with the quality of work produced by the children in the PNEU schools in which she observed. Ms. Frost described it by saying,

The quality of work that the children were producing was very impressive to me. The teachers in England and the Head Mistress made it very clear that it wasn't just the talent of the teachers in what we would consider the fourth or the fifth grade, the upper level of that school, but it was what the teachers had done all the way along through the years to produce good habits in the students. That's a very important quality that impressed me. To teach them to correct their own work, to work to perfect what they are doing. My experience in American public schools with children in a rural community in [this state], where I taught ten, eleven and twelve year old students in fifth grade, was that 85 percent of the students wanted to go through the work as quickly as you could, get it done to the very minimum standard and be free of it and go on to the next thing.

Ms. Frost was impressed with how the school fostered the desire to know on the

part of the student. She related the story of the student whom she observed at one of the PNEU schools that had gone home on the weekend and completed an unassigned report on Mary Queen of Scots simply because the student wanted to know more about the Queen. Seeing how Mason's philosophy promoted a hunger for learning in the student was another reason Ms. Frost wanted to pursue a school that used Mason's educational philosophy and practices.

### **Assistants to the Director**

There are two assistants at the school. One works at the campus for nursery through third grade and the other works at the campus that houses grade four through eight. For purposes of the context of this study, a discussion of why these two employees of the school chose this school for their children and subsequently began working for the school sheds light on the type of parent and employee this school attracts.

#### **Ms. German**

I begin with Ms. German, the Middle School Director. I spent my first days collecting data from the upper school. There I met Ms. German and interacted with her during this time. I interviewed her, but I also had several informal conversations with her. She defined her job as, "Middle School Director which eventually one day will just be grades six, seven and eight but because our campus is divided, I am overseeing grades four through eight right now." Her professional training is in Spanish.

Ms. German moved from Springtime to Charlotte, North Carolina, because her husband had been transferred there. She mentioned the move to Charlotte, several times during our discussions. I seemed to me from the

continual references that it might yield valuable information about Ms. German's educational philosophy and purpose for being at The Children's Community School. I wanted to hear more about it so I asked her to share the story with me.

We transferred there (meaning Charlotte) with an air freight company to work in a terminal in Charlotte and we had heard terrible things about public schools there so we looked for a Christian school. Jacob's Landing was highly recommended to us. We took the boys there and it was a very large school. The church was huge so it had a tremendous school enrollment and wonderful facilities. But they used the A Beka curriculum and they hired teachers and paid salaries comparable to public schools so they got teachers with Masters' Degrees. It was just a body of knowledge kind of school. The curriculum was very limited. For example, for history they only mentioned Christians in history. If you studied a period of time, you learned about prominent Christians who lived during that time and what they did. You didn't get a good balance. You learned such a limited amount and you learned little snip-its in the textbook and you memorized it and gave it back on a test. The one most vivid, glaring thing that I remember was when they did a nature study. They were studying wildflowers and Billy came home with a test he had taken, the test was a black and white pencil drawing of different flowers that he had to match the picture with the names beside it. They had a daisy and a black-eyed susan in black and white and you had to know which one it was. I wondered why they didn't go on a nature walk, grow some flowers in the

classroom, smell them and draw them.

Interviewer: So the nature study was basically on black and white paper.

Ms. German: The textbook had colored pictures in it, but the test that really defined whether they knew the material was a matching test. I could see both of my boys-- they were making A's and doing fine. Billy tended to get in trouble. He was probably one of the worst kids in the class by the teacher's standards. He was bored. I sound like one of those mothers who excuses bad behavior but it was the truth. *It* was boring. When he would get in trouble, he would be punished at home. We followed through and he did correct that part of it and the teacher said by the end of the year he had really turned things around. I could see their spirits just fading away. They didn't look forward to going to school. Granville would come home from school; he was in the second grade, and he would come home with these elaborate paper sculptures he had made at school of a building or a house or a spaceship with paper he folded and taped together. It was very creative and I asked him when he had time to do this because it wasn't part of the curriculum. They weren't studying it. That's what he did while the other children were finishing their work.

Through these conversations I learned that Ms. German wanted her children's natural desire for knowledge to be fed and motivated. She seemed to indicate that she believed this could be done through meaningful engagement such as growing the wildflowers rather than studying about them

from a textbook. Even assessment for her needed to be more 'authentic.' For example, in concluding her remarks about the black and white test, she says, "I wonder why they didn't go on a nature walk, grow some flowers in the classroom, smell them and draw them." Her child's behavior at school was a concern for her and she followed through on discipline measures at home to guarantee correct behavior as defined by the school even though she believed the behavior was caused by boredom. This is a parent who supported the school even when she believed the school to be wrong. Rather than trying to change the school her husband made a career change so they could move back to Springtime to look for more suitable schooling for their children.

### **Ms. Norman**

Ms. Norman is the assistant at the nursery school through third grade portion of The Children's Community School, which is housed at Covenant Presbyterian Church. Ms. Frost remarked to me once that the members of this church are in their seventies and eighties. The school provides a financial base for the aging church by renting the educational wing of the building. In this building with its narrow hallways and medium sized rooms (made so by removing walls between rooms) Ms. Norman spends her day assisting teachers with students who need special tutoring or educational diagnosis.

Her degree is in Comprehensive Special Education, which is a designation for all the categories of special education under one degree title. Ms. Norman is interested in deaf education and taught in the Springtime hearing impaired program. She is knowledgeable in sign language. She describes her role at The Children's Community School this way.

Well, I do help with the tutoring, evaluations for admissions, and any child the teacher has a concern about. The teacher brings

the child to me and I can evaluate that concern. I think one of the things I bring to this school is a perspective--maybe because of the school and the involvement of parents that I never saw--I am the other side of what they have here. I have the background of no parent involvement and poor socioeconomic situations and behaviors they never see here. So, I bring a lot of perspective to the teachers when they are concerned about a child, I think I can be that level head sometime and I do a lot of the tutoring.

Parent involvement in The Children's Community School, based on Ms. Norman's comments is high and the level of work the children accomplish is high: so high that when a child comes along and does not fit the pattern, Ms. Norman keeps the "level head" and helps the teacher see the child developmentally rather than how he compares to the other children. In fact, using a memo from Ms. German to parents, the performance of The Children's Community School students beginning in third grade through seventh grade is shown in the chart below as defined by a normed reference test, the Stanford Achievement Test. I have not included all areas of the Stanford Achievement Test here, only what I deem as key scores: Total Reading, Total Math, Language, Basic Battery (which includes reading, math and language) and Complete Battery. In her report to parents Ms. German used "normed grade equivalents." These scores were indicative of children performing well above average as a school. These scores also are indicative of children who come from homes where they are well nurtured both physically and spiritually. Based on this data from my conversations with the administrators and the data discussed so far, The Children's Community School is a place of at least middle income families. Parent involvement in the educational life of their

children is high and parent respect and value for education are high. Students achieve well above average and these students have strong desires to pursue

Test	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7
Total Reading	6.1	5.5	7.6	9.4	9.5
Total Math	5.5	5.7	8.3	9.6	7.9
Language	7.3	7.3	7.6	10.5	7.8
Basic Battery	5.9	5.8	9.2	9.4	9.3
Complete Battery	5.8	5.8	8.9	8.7	9.6

Figure 3 : Stanford Achievement Test Scores of The Children’s Community School

learning. I believe the reader will come to understand that based on the data collected by this researcher, the school is a place that respects and values the individuality of students and promotes a learning environment where children are the initiators and the active agents of their own learning.

### **Introducing The Teachers**

#### **Ms. Cassett , Third Grade Teacher**

This is Ms. Cassett ’s first year of teaching at The Children’s Community School. She teaches at the lower school, which contains age 4 through grade 3. Her degree is in art and this is her first year teaching content areas other than art and her first time teaching third grade. I spent a lot of time in her room watching her with the children. She is soft spoken, and I do not recall ever hearing her raise her voice.

Ms. Cassett has only been in contact with the work of Charlotte Mason since her employment at The Children’s Community School. The Director of the school discussed some of Mason’s ideas during the interview and Ms. Cassett is reading the book, *For the Children’s Sake*, by Susan Schaeffer Macaulay.



About the philosophy of Mason, she commented, “this is just backing up what I always believed as a teacher.” I spent considerable amount of time in her room observing in general as well as observing a picture study lesson and a narration lesson. It was in her room that I interviewed her and Ms. Swan.

Her classroom has two entrances caused by the removal of a wall between rooms giving her a moderately sized classroom. Painted white walls and ceiling with five standard sized windows give the room a light, airy, fresh appearance. Students’ work is on almost all the walls along with bulletin boards, posters, and a sundry other items. There is a place for birthdays, and there is a large dry erase board for homework assignments on one of the end walls. On the same wall is a small bulletin board with a thermometer and the school rules are posted there. On the opposite end wall there is a sign that reads: Our Math Meeting. On this wall is posted the multiplication tables chart,



*Figure 4 . Ms. Cassett 's Room, first view*

a number chart, a monthly calendar, a clock and other math related items.

Typically for most classrooms in elementary school, there is a cursive



*Figure 5.* Ms. Cassett 's Room, second view

alphabet posted high on the walls. There are two double-sided bookcases loaded with books as well as clay maps of the state made by the children that are displayed on top. Facing toward the windows or the back of the room, in the right corner near a window is a computer. There are nine desks in a semicircle facing away from the windows toward the wall with the doors. Inside the nine desks are two more giving a total of enough desks for eleven students. The students' desks face toward the doors away from the windows. On the wall with the doors are a world map, a small marker board and between these is a stop sign made of three plates, one colored green, one yellow and one red. On the green plate were clothes pens with a child's name on each pen. There is a boombox in the window. There are several globes. On the floor in various places in the room are storage boxes with school supplies in them. The window sills are loaded with supplies, books, and teacher resource materials. The teacher's desk is in the back left corner facing the wall with the five windows.

The floor is carpeted.

**Ms. Swan, Third Grade Teacher**

This year (1998-1999) is Ms. Swan's third year teaching at The Children's Community School. Her training was to be a math teacher and she spent the years before her current teaching position home schooling her son. Like Ms. Cassett, she is soft spoken. Her classroom is organized as I would image a math teacher would organize: everything in its place as well as all charts and items for display in the room grouped in shapes of squares and rectangles. While her room depicted a highly organized person and while her approach to teaching seemed highly organized, she appears to be a kind and gentle person. She, like Ms. Cassett, speaks rather softly to the children and during the time I was in both rooms, no voices were ever raised above a soft spoken word. Ms. Swan, like Ms. Cassett, learned of Charlotte Mason upon being hired to teach for the school. Like Ms. Cassett, she has read the book, *For the Children's Sake* by Susan Schaeffer Macaulay. Interestingly they have not read any of Mason's work.

Ms. Swan's room was the first room I visited. It is larger than the medium sized room that Ms. Cassett has. This room is in the shape of a rectangle being much longer than wide. It, too, has had a wall removed and consequently has two exit doors that are located quite close to each other. When one enters one of the doors and looks straight ahead to the center of the back long wall, a large dry ease marker board comes into view first. On the left of the marker board is a homework poster and to the left of the homework poster is a window. On the right of the marker board is a traffic light made of poster board, green, yellow and red plates with clothes pins attached to the bottom of the poster board. To the right of the traffic light is a window. Continuing right past this window is a

bookcase, then a file cabinet sitting parallel with and touching the wall.



Figure 6. Ms. Swan's Room

Extended out into the room from the side of the file cabinet is the teacher's desk with a small cabinet extending from the desk further into the center of the room. Under the marker board, homework poster and traffic light are located posters of endangered species, rules for capitalization, parts of speech, punctuation rules, and school rules. Above the bookcase on that same wall were located signs that identified the teacher helpers and birthdays.

From the entrance looking to the right along the end wall is located several book cases with a geosafari on top. Upon entering the door, immediately in the right corner of the room is a computer. On the entrance wall to the right where the computer is in the far corner, along the wall is a "Books come alive" poster, a full sized rural mailbox, a bookcase with a clock above it.

To the left of the entrance doors (see figure 6) are a series of posters about: weather, time, current events, times tables, and money. On the end wall to the left of the entrance doors, are three windows. Around and above the

windows are posters of land forms and the rainforest. On this wall is a world map and a sign identifying that end of the room as being to the east. Plants are growing in the window sill with a thermometer stuck on the window pane. Under the window in the far corner is a table. The thirteen student desks are arranged in the shape of two Ls facing each other with three desk in the middle.

### **Ms. Washington and Ms. Lightfoot, Fourth Grade Teachers**

Ms. Washington, a fourth grade teacher, is teaching her first year at The Children's Community School. She, too, is a soft spoken woman. Her room is located on the campus at Pleasantville Baptist Church in the building behind the church connected to the main building by a covered walkway. She, too, has read *For the Children's Sake* by Macaulay. She said,

As far as *For the Children's Sake*, . . . I was just so impressed by it overall. I hate to say this, but I feel like I'm so Charlotte Mason ignorant, but I am. I don't know that much about Charlotte Mason other than what I gathered from that book and I really feel like the main gist, liked we discussed earlier, is, have a love for children, have this desire to want to see them grow and it's not only in academics but in every area and if the whole person can grow, academically, emotionally, spiritually, every way, then they are going to be equipped to handle something down the road that doesn't fall into a neat little peg somewhere like we think it should. If they have those things, then they can handle it down the road. That's what I would have liked for my children. We didn't have this school and I told my husband yesterday, I would have loved for my children to have been able to be in this atmosphere.

Ms. Lightfoot, the other fourth grade teacher, is teaching for her second year at The Children's Community School. When I asked her and Ms. Washington what they have read about Charlotte Mason, she, like all the others, has read Macaulay's book, *For the Children's Sake*. She went on to say, "It was overwhelming to me when I read it, because I thought, this is not the way I was taught to teach. When Jessica hired me she said basically forget everything you've learned because you will have to start all over. That's pretty much the truth."

Ms. Lightfoot and Ms. Washington are located with the upper school at Pleasantville Baptist Church where the school rents rooms for classroom use. They are located here because of insufficient space at the lower school campus. Behind the church is a small square shaped building. This building is connected to the main church building by a covered walkway. When entering the building one realizes the simplicity of the organization of the rooms. There are four rooms, two on each side of a narrow hallway. Ms. Lightfoot's room is the first room on the right off the narrow hallway and Ms. Washington's room is the second. Their rooms are connected by sliding wood doors located on the wall between their rooms. These square rooms are small and when the sliding doors are opened the rooms together would make a regular sized classroom.

The rooms are symmetrically the same. There is one window on each of the outside walls of each room. In describing Ms. Washington's room one is also describing Ms. Lightfoot's room. They have the same walls, entrances, sliding wood doors between them and windows in the same positions.

In terms of instructional materials the rooms are also similar. There are timelines up on the wall near where the wall and ceiling meet. The timelines encircle the room on three walls and the alphabet is on the remaining wall.



Figure 7. Ms. Lightfoot's Room

There is the familiar traffic light for discipline. Posters that cover topics like the writing process, lists of homophones made by the children, homework assignments, birthdays, the school's five commandments or rules for students, and other posters. There are several dry erase marker boards, a world map, a bulletin board of student's work, a clock and a calendar in each room. Bookcases house tradebooks and books for research. Ms. Washington has the cart with an overhead in her room and a dual cassette recorder. Each teacher has a small desk. The rooms are small and the space is limited. Student desks are typical small metal desks with a closed-in tray under the top for a place to put books and student materials. Each room has approximately 12 children.

**Ms. Little, Fifth Grade Teacher**

Ms. Little's room is located inside the main building at the Pleasantville Baptist Church campus. The rooms and halls are carpeted and the walls are all painted white. Although the rooms vary in size, none of them seem particularly small because they look fresh, light and airy. However, Ms. Little's room is small, but she only has seven students in her fifth grade class.



*Figure 8.* Ms. Little's room

Items similar to the other rooms at the upper school are evident in her classroom. For example, as in Ms. Washington and Ms. Lightfoot's room there is a timeline near the ceiling. There is the familiar traffic sign for discipline and the dry erase marker board with a bulletin board. There are posters of the alphabet, astronomers, famous Americans from history, the school commandments, homophones, homework chart and other posters and charts typical of many American classrooms. Ms. Cassett has a silk flower arrangement in her class and so does Ms. Little. Ms. Little also has a plant on a book case. The one window in the room is located next to a small tree where



the class has placed a bird feeder. While observing in her room, I noticed the children frequently make reference to the bird feeder as to which type of bird is currently eating at it. Along with a few plants, Ms. Little also has large pillows for each child. Because of the lack of space in the fourth grade rooms there would not have been room for these in Ms. Washington's and Ms. Lightfoot's classrooms.

I spent considerable time in Ms. Little's small classroom. When I entered her room for the first time, I made the following notes:

Children lying on the floor working on pillows. They were using legos to represent molecules. They were waiting for two students to come from German and Spanish class. There was not a sense of hurrying. They waited in a relaxed manner. The teacher reviewed yesterday's vocabulary while they were waiting, but she did not seem to keep them busy or occupied in order to keep things under control. They are reading the book *I, Juan de Pareja*. Teacher asked a few questions to bring back what had already been read. The two students entered the room. She told them the next chapter was going to be quite different. She said I don't think we will hear from Mary again. If you look at the title it will give you a hint. She started reading. The children were told they would narrate when she finished. Some students were lying on the floor. Others were on the pillows.

Like the other teachers Ms. Little spoke softly and quietly, seldom raising her voice above normal speech and never to a yell.

These are the members of the staff that I interviewed, observed in their classrooms, and with whom I spent time on the playground and with whom I ate

lunch. I found them kind, gentle people who love their work and love to work with children. Many of them have not read the work of Mason and their only contact with her has been through the book, *For the Children's Sake* by Macaulay; through Eve Anderson, the Charlotte Mason trained school director from England; through their director; and through the Charlotte Mason Institute held in Atlanta each fall.

### **Case Study Structure**

My intention in describing this context is to “set the tone” not only for the physical surroundings of the school and of the area in which the school is located but also to give the reader a sense of the beliefs and values of the school. And I want to give the reader an understanding of the children who attend the school. In the six essays on important principles of Mason’s theories about teaching and learning which follow is located the remainder of the case study. The essay of each of the six principles is written as a chapter and each chapter concludes with a “picture of practice,” i.e. the case study as it relates to each principle, that gives the reader evidence of the practice of Mason’s philosophy by The Children’s Community School. In each of these essays I give further details about the school such as more descriptions of the school and further discussions of the school’s beliefs and practices about teaching and learning as they relate to the theme of the essay. The data that are discussed in this case study have been centered on the six major tenets of Mason’s philosophy. Therefore, to enable the reader to connect the case study to the essays, I place each case study segment with the essays. I also end each “picture of practice,” i.e. the case study segment with Reflections, my assessment of The Children’s Community School in relation to the particular principle.

## Chapter 3

### Children are born *persons*

*The fundamental idea is, that children are persons and are therefore moved by the same springs of conduct as their elders* (Mason, 1925, p. 13).

In this chapter I discuss the guiding principle of Mason's educational philosophy, *Children are born persons*. 'Children are born persons' is a universal extremely important to her and the effect of this universal can be seen throughout all the other principles of her philosophy. I discuss the principle of *Children are born persons* by reviewing educational philosophers before and during Mason's time and how their thinking influenced this concept for her. I do this by laying out the thinking of certain philosophers, with whom she agreed and disagreed but who had a lasting influence on her and education in general. These thinkers are: John Amos Comenius, Francis Bacon, John Locke, Renee Descartes and Johann Friedrich Herbart. Mason had contemporaries with whom she agreed, John Ruskin and Matthew Arnold and with whom she disagreed, T. H. Huxley and Herbert Spencer. Of course, she did not totally agree or disagree with any one philosopher. In the latter part of this section I connect Mason's concept of the personhood of children to some current learning theories.

At the end of this essay I discuss the evidence I gathered while studying this principle at The Children's Community School. Through interviews, discussions, observations I looked to see how the principle "children are born persons" is evidenced. That evidence and reflections on that evidence can be found at the end of this essay.

#### **Why is the personhood of children a significant issue for Mason?**

As she said in her preface to the Home Education Series, "The central

thought, or rather body of thought upon which I found, is the somewhat obvious fact that the child is a *person* with all the possibilities and powers included in personality (Mason, 1907, preface).” What had occurred that led Mason to believe that children were not thought of as persons? What was no longer ‘obvious’ about the personhood of children?

The nineteenth century, as Thomas Jordan (1987) points out in his book *Victorian Childhood*, was a century of much reform in Britain, “for there was much to reform. The physical and mental welfare of children as a generation was ravaged by the factory system” (p. 46). According to Jordan “the factory system” affected the early training of children in three significant ways: one, children were deprived of a childhood and their health because they had to enter the world of adults and the hazards of the work place at an early age; two, the time in a child’s life in which schooling is acquired was destroyed; three, the child was trained and socialized to be the dull, complacent adult whose existence was to meet the needs of the machine and the needs of his boss (p. 111). Life, continued Jordan, was the curriculum which consisted of job related skills and machinery. Children reduced the cost of labor and replaced adult workers. The worker’s needs were less important than the machine. In fact, workers served the machine (p. 111). Dickens in his novels told the story through literature of the abuses of child labor and child neglect. Reform legislation began as early as 1803 but it was not until 1881 that child labor in agricultural groups began to receive political attention (Jordan, 1987).

In the world of psychology the stimulus-response movement was beginning and one of its founders, John Watson (1913), denied the existence of the conscious mind, “The time seems to have come when psychology must discard all references to consciousness” (p. 163). L. C. Lee (1976) stated in his

book, *Personality Development in Childhood*, that “the behaviourists were so successful, some felt, that they removed everything that was uniquely human from psychology” (p. 5). Watson (1913) said, “The behaviorists, in his efforts to get a unitary scheme of animal response, recognizes no dividing line between man and brute. The behavior of man, with all of its refinement and complexity, forms only a part of the behaviorist’s total scheme of investigation” (p. 173). Out of this environment Mason declared, “Children are born persons.” She means that they come with the same powers of mind as any adult and therefore learn, grow spiritually, and change as any adult would. What led up to this devaluing of the child?

### **From Bacon to Herbart**

The church has always taught that humankind has an innate ability to learn. This innate ability to learn comes from the belief that the chief end of humankind is to know God. Descartes (1596-1650) stated it this way: “I am able to think of God, a perfect being, because God has implanted the idea.” Descartes also combined this innate knowledge of God with the need to study the external world (Power, 1970, p. 417).

Francis Bacon (1561-1626) belonged, “to a class of practical scientists determined to convert the secrets of nature to the advantage of man” (Power, 1970, p. 415). Bacon began to popularize the use of induction as a way to gain knowledge. Power (1970) said, “In the first, Bacon idealized induction as a way of pushing back boundaries of knowledge--not (as with deduction) as a way of reworking and trying to squeeze new meaning out of things already known” (p. 416). Bacon, however did not reject the idea of humankind’s innate ability given to him by the Creator.

There is one educator who significantly influenced Mason’s thinking.

His name is John Amos Comenius (1582 -1670). What did he teach that influenced Mason and caused her, as she said, to make an obvious statement like, “children are born persons?”

Comenius was a Protestant Czech, who stood in the same vein as Martin Luther (Boyd and King, 1972, p. 246). In fact, Boyd and King believed he was closer as a Protestant educator to the beliefs of Martin Luther than Luther’s followers who were trying to establish the guidelines for a Protestant educational system. What did Comenius believe about education? He opened education to all: barbarian, handicapped, male and female.

He believed that all humankind is created in the image of God. For Comenius this meant not only males but females whose learning during his time was confined to the skills necessary to run a home. According to Boyd and King’s (1972) interpretation of Comenius, because God planted his image in humankind, within them is an innate need to know God; therefore, all humankind has a right to knowledge.

While Bacon was interested in studying the natural world, Comenius was interested in studying both the natural world and the supernatural world. Another way to say that is to say that while Bacon studied the physical world, Comenius wanted to study the physical world and the spiritual world. Both, he believed are necessary for a proper education. Comenius believed that there are three things humankind must learn to serve himself and God. They are knowledge, morals, and piety. This, he believed, would produce happy people, people more able to serve themselves and God (Boyd and King, 1972, p. 247). Comenius followed the Italian mystic philosophers, for example, Thomas Campanella, in his belief that the soul of humankind and the visible universe are a dual representation of God and, therefore, intricately interrelated.

Following this belief to its end, Comenius thought that humankind, made in the image of God, is a small self-contained unit of the universe. Boyd and King (1972) stated,

From which it follows that learning is a process of development from within, and not the acquisition of knowledge from without. The soul needs no urging or compulsion in its growth. By its very nature as an “expression” of the Divine Being it reaches out after a knowledge of the world, just as it yearns for the virtue and the piety which bring it to a knowledge of self and a knowledge of God. And the universe which seems at first to stand over against man is not an alien mode of being but is akin to him. (p. 247)

We can begin to see the influence that Comenius had on Charlotte Mason. She said, “A person is not built up from without but from within, that is, he is living, and all external educational appliances and activities which are intended to mould his character are decorative and not vital. . . . life is sustained on that which is taken in by the organism, not by that which is applied from without” (Mason, 1925, p. 24).

For Mason, children as persons are born with a mind. This mind is the instrument of their education, and their education does not produce their minds (Mason, 1925, p. 36). She did not believe that the mind is an empty slate, a *tabula rasa*. Children as persons come with the powers of mind that all humankind have. Their minds, she believed, are capable of accepting or rejecting knowledge. In fact, she believed, that if the knowledge is not meaningful to the child, it would be rejected by the mind of the child. Therefore, teaching and learning must occur in a way that allow children to construct their own learning, and teaching and learning must occur in a meaningful context.

As regards teaching and the powers of mind in children, Mason said (1925),

This was illuminating but rather startling; the whole intellectual apparatus of the teacher, his power of vivid presentation, apt illustration, able summing up, subtle questioning, all these were hindrances and intervened, between children and the right nutriment duly served. . . . (p. 11)

Later, in the seventeenth century after Comenius, Bacon, Descartes, came John Locke (1632-1704). He rejected the idea of an innate ability which comes from a need to know the creator; rather he projected the idea of a *tabula rasa*, the mind as a clean slate. He believed a person is educated by gathering empirical data from the world around him. He did not refute the need to know God. Through his experience in his world humankind begins to fill his mind. The mind itself is a static and passive entity (Burridge, 1970, p. 78). In his *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book I, Chapter 1, No Innate Speculative Principles, (Locke, 1689, trans. 1959) he said,

It is an established opinion amongst some men, that there are in the understanding certain *innate principles*; some primary notions, . . . stamped upon the mind of man; which the soul receives in its very first being, and brings into the world with it. It would be sufficient to convince unprejudiced readers of the falseness of this supposition, if I should only show (as I hope I shall in the following parts of this Discourse) how men, barely by the use of their natural faculties, may attain to all the knowledge they have, without the help of any innate impressions; and may arrive at certainty, without any such original notions or principles.

What did Comenius, Bacon, Descartes, and Locke's thinking have to do



with children being viewed as persons? Bacon along with Descartes and Comenius had remained in the old camp with the church in that he and they believed that the chief end of humankind is to know God. This knowing God is beyond a 'religious' knowing God. It is to know the world that God has made. Studying the external world informs their understanding of God and makes knowledge useful to humankind. As shown in the preceding quote from his book, Locke refuted the idea of humankind having an innate ability to know God. Locke's ideas by the time they reached Mason had led to the use of empirical data as the only way to get information. Powers (1970) said it this way speaking about Locke, "If men begin with nothing, no innate ideas or original impressions, then whatever they are to become depends on their experience. To put it another way, environment makes the man" (p. 452). Mason, on the other hand, believed children come as fully human. That is to say that they come with personality as image bearers, with inquisitiveness, which propels them to know.

The notion of the church had been that the chief end of humankind is to know God. God is spirit. Therefore, knowing God is a matter of the spirit. This spiritual need is met primarily through the study of religion. Locke had said, however, that humankind had no innate ability to know God. One could only learn from gathering data from life's experiences. Humankind begins with nothing and gained 'something' as he collected data from his experiences.

Charlotte Mason believed that humankind is both spiritual and physical. Why is this important in terms of Locke's thinking and children as born persons? Humankind is born with a physical body and born also with a spiritual equivalent, the mind. In the mind is his innate desire to know.

What did she mean by spiritual? Spiritual for Charlotte Mason is, simply

put: all that which is not physical (Mason, 1907, p. 168). Her definition includes religious spirituality but her belief about the spiritual nature of humankind encompasses everything that is not physical. Her concepts of spirituality included ideas, creativity, imagination, values, judgments, emotions, reflection and others. She said, "By spiritual I mean that which is not corporeal; and which, for convenience' sake, we call by various names--the life of thought, the life of feeling, the life of the soul" (Mason, 1907, p. 168).

Physically children have a natural appetite for food. As children are born with this natural appetite for food, Mason believed children come with a natural appetite for spiritual food and this spiritual food is not limited to religion. Knowing God includes but is not limited to Biblical studies. Knowing God includes knowing about nature, science, literature, history and all the other disciplines. Therefore, children have a natural appetite for knowledge.

Charlotte Mason often used the metaphor of food to describe parts of her understanding about children as learners and persons. She believed the stomach digests food and does not have to be told to do so. And, even more importantly, the food cannot be digested and assimilated into the body for the child. So, whether the child is fed as an infant, feeds herself, or is fed intravenously the child's body must assimilate the food. When the body can no longer assimilate its food, the body dies. Mason made the same analogy with knowledge. Because we are at the same time both physical and spiritual, children need spiritual food. Knowledge is spiritual food. She believed that without spiritual food the spirit dies (Mason, 1925).

Just as a child's physical food must be digested by his own body also his spiritual food must be 'digested' by his mind. This requires that teachers facilitate learning rather than trying to dispense knowledge and pour it in the

child's mind. "Life," she said, "is sustained on that which is taken in by the organism, not by that which is applied from without" (Mason, 1925, p. 26). As a child needs a well balanced and regular nutritional diet of food to sustain his physical life, so the child needs a well balanced and regular nutritional diet of knowledge to sustain his spiritual life. She said, "No one need invite us to reason, compare, imagine; the mind, like the body, digests its proper food, and it must have the labour of digestion or it ceases to function" (Mason, 1925, p. 26). Education, she believed, is a matter of the spirit.

Therefore, Charlotte Mason believed that children's minds are neither an empty tablet to be written upon nor a biological sac to be filled. The child's mind comes with all the powers it needs to grow and learn spiritually and physically. In other words, children come as persons: they are not educated or molded into being fully human by an accumulation of experiences and data collection. She believed that because children are born persons, they are here to meet their own goals and standards and that they are not here to meet the goals and standards of adults or states. She said, "We must have some measure of a child's requirements, not based on his uses to society, nor upon the standard of the world he lives in, but upon his own capacity and needs" (Mason, 1925, p. 66). Mason seemed to imply that we must have a sense of what the child needs to live in this world, a sense of who he is as a person and work toward maturity for the child as a person. Her goal was to create an instructional model that allows development of the child to his fullest potential, not the development of the child to meet some arbitrary standard.

If the body receives no food or receives food that is not nutritious, it becomes sick and weak. Mason believed any society that did not feed its children with an abundance of ideas would eventually become spiritually sick

and fall ill. She gave as an example Germany, which seemed to her to have put a large emphasis on vocational training without feeding the spirit. She stated, "The educable part of a person is his mind. The training of the senses and muscles is, strictly speaking, training and not education" (Mason, 1925, p. 20). The training of the senses and muscles only, she believed, led to the moral downfall of Germany that eventually led to the First World War (p. 6). Further, like the body, she believed that the mind rejects "insipid, dry, and unsavoury food, that is to say, its [the mind's] pabulum should be presented in a literary form" (Mason, 1925, p 20).

Johann Friedrich Herbart lived from 1776-1841. He moved education to a science. By this time Locke's idea of the use of empirical data as our only source of knowledge is coming to full bloom. According to Power (1970) Herbart tested his own theories and, in fact, if he had not carried his theories to the level of proof, we probably would not know him today. "He was a thorough and searching thinker, and an educational scientist" (p.498).

In trying to understand Herbart's concepts on the soul (spiritual nature of humankind) Boyd and King said (1972),

What we call the soul that manifests itself in time, is not the real soul, but 'only the sum of the actual presentations' or mental states which have come through individual experience. . . . 'The soul is originally a *tabula rasa* in the most absolute sense, without any form of life or presentation: consequently, there are in it neither primitive ideas, nor any predisposition to form them. All ideas, without exception, are a product of time and experience.'

(p. 340)

Based on Body and King (1972) this statement by Herbart seems to indicate

that he believed the children come “without any form of life or presentation” and that “The soul is originally a tabula rasa.” (p.340). Therefore, to gather “experiences” or “mental states” is the beginning of the soul. This is not a complete understanding of children for Mason. For her, a child comes with a soul, a spirit, and is fully human. He does not become complete as a person as he gathers knowledge into his soul which is an empty biological sac. Rather, because his soul is complete, his mind and spirit are instruments of his education. But for Herbart, following in the footsteps of Locke and who systematically studied education, the only way to know is to gather information empirically.

### **Charlotte Mason’s Contemporaries**

At the close of the nineteenth century, Locke’s idea of empirical knowledge as the foundation of all knowledge, along with Darwin’s views of evolution, were beginning to dominate philosophy and education. One example, The Royal Statistical Society formed in the 1830s, was organized by a group of men in the British Association to study society empirically rather than theoretically. Up to the 1890s the society’s journal using descriptive statistics covered many topics. It was an example of using empirical data to support reform (Jordan, 1987, p. 314).

Another example of Locke’s thinking coming to full bloom is T. H. Huxley (1825-1895), who believed that what separated his age from that of the Renaissance even more distinctly than the Renaissance had been distinguished from the Middle Ages was the enormous amount of natural knowledge that fed the Industrial Revolution (Burrige, 1970, p. 88). Herbart Spencer (1820-1903) a great educationalist from the 19th Century is another example of the influence Locke had on prominent thinkers. Spencer agreed

with Herbart and thought that science in all its forms should be the basis for the curriculum (p. 88).

Science was becoming the new authority of the age. Charlotte Mason thought that the emphasis on science and the material world minus the spiritual nature of humankind produces a system of education that concerns itself primarily with preparing children for the world of work. She thought that schooling was losing its focus as a place where one seeks for knowledge in all areas of life. Knowledge was being defined as only what one could discover through science. This emphasis on science did not take into account the spiritual nature of humankind. The information that science brings us is not necessarily bad, as the example of statistical data from The Royal Statistical Society, but without knowledge it could be destructive. Stated another way Mason believed that the individual who reads and thinks on many subjects is the person who is best prepared vocationally. She believed the over emphasis on vocational training without nourishing the mind is destructive to society (Mason, 1925, p. 3). Thus, throughout the writing of Charlotte Mason, one finds her repeatedly calling for “A liberal education for all” (Mason, 1925, p. 235).

There were those who agreed with her on the overemphasis of science. In England, members of the intellectual community such as W. E. Forster, Matthew Arnold, and John Ruskin were calling for more than a functional education. Matthew Arnold said, “ It is not enough for men to have the power of using science. They still need the old civilising agents, literature, poetry, religion” (Inman, 1985, p 6). John Ruskin wanted art to be a part of every child’s education. Inman summarizes Ruskin by saying, “It was necessary to a full development of human nature, to the enjoyment of life and to the banishment of sordid and petty attitudes. Like literature it was a medium of

expression and a carrier of thought and feeling” (p.6).

These are some of the major educational philosophers that Charlotte Mason drew upon. It is noteworthy to recognize the graciousness with which Mason consistently acknowledged the work of others, even those with whom she disagreed. She commonly acknowledged their contributions to her and to society. She said, “Now let us bring Locke up to the standard which we have erected, remembering always that our power to raise a higher standard is due to him and such as he” (Mason, 1907, p. 50).

### **Current Learning Theories**

Before I discuss the current theories of learning that deal with the concept of children as persons, I would like to recapitulate a few important principles stated in this discussion thus far. First, Mason believed that being created in the image of God is a powerful statement about us as humans. Part of that statement is that we have a need to know God and an innate ability to know God. She understood this to mean that we have a need and the ability to know the physical and spiritual world in which we live because the physical and spiritual world tells us more about God. From a Christian point of view, she did not understand this to mean that man could save himself. Second, this imageness, is part of us from conception. We are born with a mind that gives us the ability to discover the world God has made. Third, because we are created in the image of God, we have a right to know all God has made.

One of the dominant systems of thinking in the twentieth century that has effected education is that of stimulus-response. One of the leading proponents of this behavioristic system has been psychologist B. F. Skinner, a disciple of John Watson. Alfie Kohn (1993), who interviewed Skinner and has studied his work, said, “Skinner could be described as a man who conducted most of his

experiments on rodents and pigeons and wrote most of his books about people” (p. 6). About personhood Skinner (1983) said of himself, “If I am right about human behavior, I have written the autobiography of a nonperson” (p. 412). During an interview with Kohn (1993), Skinner said,

When I finished *Beyond Freedom and Dignity*, I had a very strange feeling that I hadn’t even written the book. Now I don’t mean this in the sense in which people have claimed that alter egos have written books for them and so on, but this just naturally came out of my behavior and not because of anything called a “me” or an “I” inside. . . . (p. 268)

As we move into the Twentieth Century, the effect of John Locke’s determinism is still haunting us through the teaching of the behaviorists. Their system of thinking reduces the world to the physical. J. W. Smith (1984) in his book *Reductionism and Cultural Being* stated,

For the Physicalist Scientific Unificationism the world is monistic, consisting of only one type of substance, the “material” or the “physical”, with one type of properties and relations.

Phenomena which do not fit readily into this scheme, must be shown to be in principle either reducible to the “physical”, or else shown to be “illusions,” fit for the ontological scrap heap. (p. 3)

In such a system of thought Mason (1907) believed,

This is not far removed from the announcement of the Frenchman that the brain secretes thought as the liver secretes bile, both processes being purely material and mechanical, and doing away with any requirement for the profoundest thinking beyond that of a well-nourished brain. (p. 52)



This devaluation of the human mind to the purely physical Mason believed began with the thinking of John Locke and was carried further in the mind of Darwin. Locke's states of consciousness, Mason believed, were used by thinkers of evolution as an explanation of the mind. She said, "That is to say, the important personage which I call *I, myself*, need be no more than perpetually shifting states of consciousness effected by the brain; . . .that the brain may be conscious of the same objects today that it was conscious of years ago" (Mason, 1907, p. 52). Such a system of thinking leaves us "devitalized" (p. 53) according to Mason. She said, "It is dreary to suppose that one may not be anybody after all, but only a momentary state of consciousness. Hope goes out of life, for there is nothing pleasant to look forward to. If something agreeable should happen next year, there is no *I, myself*, to enjoy it; only the 'state of consciousness' of some moment to come" (p. 53).

With such a loss of being and loss of self from a system of thinking that reduces everything that exists to one essential element, matter, a great sense of loss is apparent. However, interestingly a different way of thinking about humans began to emerge since the stimulus-response system of thinking was at its height. Lev Semyonovich Vygotsky, a young Soviet psychologist through his research began to see the human differently.

According to Dixon-Krauss (1996), editor and one of the authors of the book, *Vygotsky in the Classroom*, Vygotsky sought "to create a unified psychological science by restoring the concept of consciousness to a field dominated by strict behaviorism" (p. 8). In so doing the noted psychologist from the Soviet Union was implying that there is more to us as humans than our physical bodies and the response our physical bodies give to the stimuli from the world around us. In the book *An Introduction to Vygotsky*, edited by Harry

Daniels (1996) Norris Minick said,

Beginning in 1929, then, Vygotsky's writings no longer reflect the assumption that all animal behavior is restricted to systems constructed on the basis of stimulus-response units. Rather, Vygotsky had begun to argue that certain primitive forms of intellect are found in animals and young children independent of any functional connection with speech. (p. 36)

Here is seen a move away from the stimulus-response system of thinking that had been a part of the behaviorist movement in psychology. The move is toward a belief that children come with an intellect, albeit, primitive in the thinking of Vygotsky. Mason would not term it as primitive because she believed children are born with the powers of mind to live fully as human beings, that is, children are born persons. As food nourishes the body, ideas nourish the mind. Children come with this power. "A person is not built up from without but from within, that is, he is living, and all external educational appliances and activities which are intended to mould his character are decorative and not vital" (Mason, 1925, p. 23). She believed one only has to observe an infant for a short amount of time to realize the powers of mind the infant has.

Vygotsky's concept of primitive intellect, it seems to me, refers to the same concept that Mason refers to as 'children are born persons'. Her concept gives much more power to the mind of a child than Vygotsky's concept. Mason's belief that children as persons who come with the powers of mind to live fully as human beings is further supported by the learning theories discussed in Caine and Caine's book, *Making Connections* (1991). The Caines said, "The search for meaning (making sense of our experiences) and the

consequential need to act on our environment are automatic” (p. 89).

Eric Jensen (1998) said that, “humans are natural meaning-seeking organisms” (p. 46). He went on to say that the search for meaning is innate and is internally controlled. Therefore there is the possibility that external forces can create conflict or interfere with the internal process of meaning making. Mason agrees for she believed strongly that children have to process their own learning. Learning, or change occurs from within as one processes personally external information. Therefore, Jensen (1998) said, “You can either have your learners’ attention or they can be making meaning, but never both at the same time” (p. 46). In an essay later in this paper on narration, I show how Mason put this idea of meaning-making which she called the “act of knowing” into an instructional method. Mason believed that children come with the power of mind to learn. Vygotsky alluded to the same concept as well as Jensen and Caine and Caine in their work synthesizing research on the brain.

Jean Piaget made similar conclusions. Furth (1970) in his book, *Piaget for Teachers*, wrote that, “The prime motivation for intellectual development comes from within the operative structure [the child]. A child’s intelligence develops because it *functions*” [italics added] (p. 74). Because children are born persons Mason believed that children could learn long before they could read. Furth supports this concept when he said a child’s intellect “functions.” In other words it does its own work and is not developed from without the child. Furth went on to say,

This view had rather important practical consequences. It means that intellectual development is the birthright of every human being and actually takes place in any environment. It also means that parents and educators need not frantically look for contrived

situations or rewards that will make intelligence grow. Intelligence grows from *within*. Thus the task becomes one of furthering and nourishing this growth by providing suitable opportunities, not by explicit teaching of what to do or what to know. (p. 74)

One can see the common ground between Mason and Piaget. Intelligence according to Piaget is a birthright. The child comes with it, therefore, development comes from within the child. "Providing suitable opportunities" (Furth, 1970, p. 74) reminds one of Mason's analogy of providing children with a feast so that each child can take what he is capable of taking. In his *Time* article on great minds of the 20th Century, Seymour Papert (1999) stated that Piaget believed "that children are not empty vessels to be filled with knowledge (as traditional pedagogical theory had it) but active builders of knowledge" (p. 105). This is an adamant belief of Mason although her concept of person conveyed far more than intellect.

This belief that intellect or personhood come with children at birth has methodological implications. Furth, discussing Piaget agreed. He said, "A child of elementary school age is capable of operative, intelligent thinking years ahead of his spoken language. More dramatically, the thinking of this child is light years ahead of what he can read or write" (p. 145). In a later chapter in which I discussed Mason's pedagogical device called narration, I will apply Mason's thinking about the personhood of children to a specific methodology that matched the belief that children come with the powers of mind needed to function as fully human. Further, this methodological device (narration) also allows for the minds of children to learn long before they can read.

Anthony Gregorc through his research on Mind Styles has also drawn some similar conclusions as Mason. At a conference in Roanoke, Virginia, in

August 1997, he asserted that we as adults can no longer act like gods and try to make children into our own image. He said, "We err in these actions, and we err to the degree that they and the heavens will not forget. Children are not soul-less, unguided creatures made for adults to manipulate like chattel. They are spirited beings, complete at every given moment and age" (August 1997). Charlotte Mason believed that children are born with all the capacities of mind they need to develop into mature persons. In today's language she would say children are born persons, with all powers of mind they need to construct meaning.

In discussing H. S. Sullivan's view of personality Lee (1976) said, "It (personality) emerges through social relations, which serve to transform the infant from a biological animal into a human being" (p. 21). Mason viewed the child as a born person, not a "biological animal" which, hopefully through socialization would become a human being. This, for Mason, was a deficient view of children. This view led to a misunderstanding of the child which thus leads to poor instructional practices and to inappropriate socialization. Only a view of children as fully human require educators and parents to examine the way they teach children, especially young children. Richard Smith (1985) in his book, *Freedom and Discipline*, agreed with Mason in principle,

When we thus do not regard others as fully persons our sense of ourselves as persons is impaired in the end, for much of our status as persons depends on the relationships we enter into with other people. If many teachers find little enduring satisfaction in their work perhaps it is partly because by diminishing their pupils to the status of an inferior class of beings, likable only when they are 'managed,' they diminish

themselves. (p. 92)

### **Summary**

As I demonstrated in this discussion, Mason lived during the height of the Industrial Revolution, a time when children were devalued and made to serve the machine. Charles Dickens, we know, wrote novels about the same conditions and treatment in schools. Watson, in the early part of the last century, began the stimulus-response movement which materialized all of life. It is this view of life that Mason believed had dehumanized education. This thinking had begun, maybe unwittingly, with the thinking of John Locke. In a materialistic view of the world humankind is devalued. And, as we know, such a spiritual concept as imagination was not discussed by Watson and those in the stimulus-response movement because it could not be “reduced” to the “material” or “physical”.

Vygotsky, in the middle of a culture that was probably one of the most materialistic cultures on earth, acknowledged that children come with an innate ability to learn. This is a slight movement away from a purely materialistic view of life. Piaget could not view children as vessels to be filled but rather as constructors of their own learning. Caine and Caine and Jensen in their review of the research on the brain stated that children have an innate need to know. In other words they grow from within or to say it another way, they construct their own knowledge. Each of these educationalist move the dominating psychological influence on education away from behaviorism to cognitivism. This slow move in educational psychology has brought us full circle from the materialistic view of life in Mason’s time to a view of the child as a discoverer of knowledge, a living organism who changes from within and not without. Ironically, this is what she worked so hard to accomplish during her time.

Now, I take the reader back to The Children's Community School. I spent time observing in classrooms, on the playground, in the hallways, during lunch and during discussions with teachers and administrators Mason's principle, "Children are born persons." I wanted to see how this principle worked itself out in the day to day life of the school. I write vignettes that give the reader a window into the school and its application of this principle. As far as possible I try to allow the teachers' voices to emerge, rather than summarizing with my words.

### **Children are born persons: A Picture of Practice**

#### **Ms. Cassett and Ms. Swan, Third Grade Teachers**

Not long after I entered the room for the first time, Ms. Cassett stepped out of the room for a bathroom break while the children ate their lunches. While she was out, one student, immediately came to me and introduced himself. Another wanted to share what he was learning about the Romans. Other students joined us as he shared with me the book about the Romans. The book had a humorous side to it, and we all laughed as he shared what he thought were some of the funniest parts. None of the children seemed afraid of me or hesitant about talking to me. As the student finished sharing his knowledge about the Romans, several of the students remarked that he was the class's expert on the Romans. As I watched them while he was sharing his book, I noticed they were keen on what he was saying as if this was a chance for them to learn from him. No other student shared information about the Romans. However, they all were excited about the book because they were going to study the Romans next. As they ate lunch, they moved about the room, talked, laughed and shared comments with one another. There was a sense of the children being at ease and relaxed.

Soon after lunch the children went to art. While the students were gone, I had the chance to interview Ms. Cassett and Ms. Swan. I had been in both of their rooms earlier. We sat in Ms. Cassett's room and I asked them questions about the principles of Mason's work that I am studying. We came eventually to the topic of 'Children are born persons.' I asked the question, What do you think Mason's concept of 'Children are born persons' means and how does this concept make your classroom different? Ms. Cassett responded,

I think it is the level of respect the teacher gives a child and that the children show each other. Instead of seeing them as lower than us because they are children and we are adults, it puts them on equal levels, in God's eyes. All of us, including children are created with our own talents, strengths and weaknesses. We should all treat each other with respect. Although, anybody off the street would agree that children are born persons, they would not think of it to the extent I have already described. If you walked into a classroom where they do not base their school on this idea, you might find teachers talking very disrespectfully to children using very harsh tones. This is not to say that you always have to smile with every single thing you say to a child. After working in public schools, I am very aware of how different this school is in this regard and how differently you hear the teachers at this school speaking to children even if they are misbehaving.

Ms. Swan then picked up the conversation and said,

In fact, as I was reading this morning in the book of Jeremiah 1:5, it says that God knew us before we were born and he set us



apart which indicates to me that we are all worthy individuals and worthy of respect as Ms. Cassett was describing. Because of this belief, I think the teachers here hold the child above the curriculum. In some public and private schools, the teachers have objectives to meet and things they have to teach by a certain time and they are just barreling their way through not taking into account the children's learning styles, or the level of stress. When the children are overloaded with stress their self-esteem goes down and they feel like, "I can't do it; it's too much." I think what Mason is saying is that we need to see the child, they are more important than the curriculum.

I followed this question with a comment about instruction as it relates to children as born persons. Mason firmly believed that humans grow and change from within not without. I wanted to know how children as born persons affected their instructional approach in the classroom. We discussed the 'inquiry method' verses the 'teacher as the dispenser of knowledge method.' Ms. Cassett paused for a moment and said,

I use the inquiry method most often; however, that doesn't mean I never feed them information. I try to feed them enough to get them interested to dig further. With math sometimes there is more fact feeding, but the practice of it is more inquiry especially when they are working through problems. I just don't accept somebody raising their hands to give me the answer. They have to tell how they got the answer. The method is as important as the right answer. There are many ways to get the right answer. I want all of the children to realize that even though there may be a certain

method I am teaching to solve a problem, there are other ways to get the answer and if they come up with a different way that's acceptable. The math book may teach one method but there are other ways and we must not make every one fit in the same little box. My goal is to keep the classroom as free as possible but I know sometimes I feed facts.

Although Ms. Cassett's admission of occasionally feeding facts, her practice of using inquiry to give children the opportunity to discover knowledge on their own as well as her willingness to help children see that there is more than one way to solve a problem indicates her acknowledgement of children as processors of their own knowledge. Her teaching approach is not one of always filling the children with information from the mouth of the teacher. She acknowledged through her practice Mason's principle that children as living organisms change from within and when that is allowed to happen children share their joy of learning as the student who so willingly shared his knowledge of the Romans. Further, Ms. Swan spoke very clearly her belief that the child is more important than the curriculum, which remind us of Pestalozzi's belief that the performer is more important than the performance (Inman, 1985, p. 6).

### **Ms. Norman, Director of the Lower School**

Ms. Norman, the reader has already met. She is the assistant at the lower school. Her experience as a teacher before coming to The Children's Community School has been in the hearing impaired program for the town of Springtime. During my visit at The Children's Community School, I interviewed her to glean what she believed about Mason's principles and how she saw Mason's principles being practiced. I asked her how she thought Mason's concept of "Children are born persons" affected instructional practice at The

Children's Community School. She began with the curriculum.

I think for me one of the differences is curriculum driven, goal driven verses child driven. I think many classrooms are very curriculum, goal driven. They look over the child to the end of the year. Teachers ponder, "Am I going to finish the book? I must be prepared for standardized tests." I think for Mason, it is more of a child driven curriculum. The curriculum is just a stepping stone for the child to get to a goal. You are really looking in terms of what a child can achieve instead of achieving the goals of the curriculum. I see that as a big difference. Children should be able to explore a topic deeply. I know some teachers do what I call: spray and pray. You spray the information out there and hope it sticks on someone and it usually hits the middle while the top and bottom are just sitting there. We have a teacher who has a third grader who is extremely bright and finishes quickly. His teacher has extra materials about a topic that allows him to go deeper in his understanding.

My next request of Ms. Norman was to give a story of how Mason's principle of "Children are born persons" has made a difference in the attitude of a fellow teacher, herself, a student or a parent. She related the following story.

I do have a story in terms of children as persons and how an atmosphere of respect, compassion, morality, rightness and loyalty can be developed in children. This story is about three boys in third grade one of whom has always struggled in social situations. He is socially dyspeptic. Socially dyspeptic people are like sand paper and he has always been like sandpaper. He

is having a better year. His teacher has really worked with him and he has improved. But because these kids are together in small groups for year after year they become like siblings in many ways and so everyone knows this particular child. Something happened on the playground. The dyspeptic youngster pushed a peer. Now, even when you know another peer has a problem, you can get tired of the 'sandpaper.' This peer, knowing the dyspeptic child, pushed back. The dyspeptic child pushed again and a third boy got involved taking up for the peer. Now, there are three involved. It was close to a confrontation. It did not end in a fight, but all three boys ended up in my office. This was a new situation for me being the person to handle these kinds of situations. I brought in the dyspeptic child. He cried and is always very sorry. He admitted having handled it poorly. He said, "I didn't mean to push him the first time but then I was angry." He left and the other two boys came into my office. The first thing one of the boys said to me was, "Ms. B., if Joey is going to get into trouble then we should too, because we handled it badly." I was really shocked with their response. I expected them to tell me all the bad things he had done going back two years, all the things he had done to them in the past. I said to them, "Tell me why you think you should be punished." The boy who was originally pushed shared that after it had happened he realized the first push was an accident and he responded badly. The second boy that had come into the brawl said I should never have gotten involved. It

was really none of my business. The maturity of their response almost made me cry. Because I was so anticipating the other kind of response from these two boys, I could not believe their response. All three boys came in and we talked and it was the most mature conversation I've ever had with third graders--well with fifth graders. It was amazing. So, I really think they know they are important here in this school and they know they are valued. They know they are respected and so that's rubbed off and they are respecting others. Even this little fellow that struggles, he was respected by the two other boys and I think for me that was something I had never really seen. I think that was something unusual.

In the context of this conversation, Ms. Norman, in these last remarks, seemed to be comparing her current work experience with her experiences in previous work situations.

As I continued to probe Ms. Norman to different levels of her understanding about Mason's principle of children as born persons, I asked the question another way. Can you describe your attitude about children before you encountered Mason? How did learning her ideas about the personhood of children change your thinking and attitudes about children? She responded by sharing how her attitude toward her own daughter had changed. Her daughter being so opposite of her, Ms. Norman felt the need to push her into situations that would make her more of what Ms. Norman felt she should be. She said,

As a parent of a child that I knew from about the age of five--or I had this feeling from that time--that she was going to struggle in school and in life. I felt like it was my job to mold her.

Remember, I've been in public schools and I knew the kind of kids that were more successful and I had to make her fit. She is shy and tends not to be very social and it frightened me. I spent a great deal of her first seven years trying to make her social by putting her in social situations that I am sure made her uncomfortable. I think that I felt that my religious training required me to mold her. Even before I knew a lot about Charlotte Mason, at some point I realized I was making a mistake, a major mistake with her--that I couldn't make her into something God had not already done. I was really trying to change her. And, around the age of eight, right before we came to The Children's Community School I pulled away from that and tried to let her be herself which didn't always fit what I wanted her to be. And, to this day, socially, she is not the person I was at eleven.

Ms. Norman went on during our conversation to relate how this concept had changed the way she responded to children in the public school setting. It was before she came into contact with Mason's work. Even though the change in her attitude began before she met Charlotte Mason, it was this same principle at work in her mind and understanding that changed her attitude about teaching. She related the story this way,

I think the last four or five years of teaching were truly exhausting. I really felt like a failure. It zapped a lot of my desire and I stopped looking at the kids as people. I coated myself with some kind of protection. I said to myself, "I am going to get through this day." The more I read about Charlotte Mason the more it helped me even while I was teaching in public schools. I started to try to

see the kids as they are. I knew the environment from which they came, and I can't make changes in that, but I can change what they hear from me. I honestly stopped teaching and started sharing. Children asked me, "What would you do if your children came home and told you they had smoked a joint?" Their question wasn't to see how I would respond, but rather it was asked as if the child was saying, "I don't have anyone to ask these kinds of questions to." They seemed to say, "Tell me what you would do." I really changed my focus. The stress of the job was unbearable to me after twelve years. When Jessica came to me at the beginning of the year and said I want you to do something for me, I would do anything for her because in my mind that lady had saved my daughter's educational life. She said, "I want you to quit your job and come to work for me. "I told her she had to be kidding. But, she wasn't. It was the scariest thing I ever did. To be honest, even though I was exhausted as a public school teacher, I knew the expectations of me and I was comfortable with that. This was a real step for me -- something very unusual and out of character for me. So, I think for me it really has changed. I look at people's eyes when I speak to them now instead of just trying to get through a conversation. And, I think I have much more respect for my own children and the children that I teach. And, the children that I taught in the past who are probably now in prison somewhere.

Ms. Norman was very solemn during this part of our conversation. I felt the sense of real change in her, a change in how she felt about herself, and the

sense of relief this change had brought in her attitude toward raising her own children as well as her attitude in working with school children. I wanted to probe further. Part of Charlotte Mason's concept of 'Children are born persons' is that this personhood comes with a natural, innate need to know. I asked the question, She talked about children having a natural propensity for wanting knowledge, for wanting to learn. Do you see that? Ms. Norman referred to her daughter.

When my daughter was two her favorite word was why. When they have the ability to use language they want to know. I think, in many ways, a lot of trouble kids get into is from a desire for knowledge. I absolutely believed that a child has a thirst for knowledge. I think / do. I don't think we ever grow out of that. I think God gives us that desire. Look at you, to know and to learn.

I think that is very much a part of what Charlotte Mason means.

Ms. Norman was applying Mason's concept of children being fully persons to her personal children as well as to the children she worked with in public school and now in private school. The stories she related indicate her practice of viewing children as persons. Building a school culture where a dyspeptic child is understood by his classmates, albeit not perfectly, is an indication of the application of Mason's principle of acknowledging the personhood of children. Building a learning community would not be necessary if children were not fully human. In a learning community as the one established at The Children's Community School children's needs and desires are met, whereas in other settings the curriculum or standardized tests drive the program.

### **Ms. Little, Fifth Grade Teacher**

I talked with Ms. Little, a teacher in the upper elementary school, about



her understanding of Mason's principle, children as born persons. I asked her, How do you think children as born persons influences instruction and what do you think Mason meant by that phrase. She pondered for a moment and said:

The most important thing is I'm not trying to make them into something. I'm not trying to see that they get a good grade so that they can go to college. I'm trying to deal with them where they are and bring the most out of them that I can. For example, I have one little boy who has a processing problem but he is very good at art and he is very good at athletics. I really use that part to try to bring him out and whenever there's some art that needs to be done, he gets called on to do it.

I prodded with another question. What instructional practices do you use as a result of Mason's belief about children as persons, needing to process their own information?

I don't think of being able to change them. I use very little lecture form and I hardly ever use worksheets. The students do a lot of writing and hands-on kinds of activities. We do group work and I've found that interesting. I think that combines Charlotte Mason's ideas and some of the more modern cooperative group concepts.

Ms. Little, based on the above statements, met the needs of children through her beliefs about the personhood of children. That is, she used the abilities with which they come to promote further growth in their learning. In other words, as Mason did, she thought of them as persons not as vessels to prepare for college. Or, as she observed their weaknesses she thought about ways to use a child's strengths to encourage her weaknesses as she did with

the child she identified as having a “processing problem.”

### **Ms. German, Director of the Middle School**

During my days at the upper school, I had the opportunity to interview and discuss many times with Ms. German, Director of the Middle School. Into our discussions I asked her the question, How do you think the concept of children as born persons not only influences the nurturing issues at The Children’s Community School, but how does it influence how teachers teach?

I had a real struggle with this when I first came. I started here by teaching in third grade. My biggest downfall was feeling like it was my job to make sure that they understood all the things that I felt they needed to understand. When we read a story, if something stood out to me, characters or some detail, I felt like it was my duty to share that with them and make sure that they got it. The more I learned about Charlotte Mason, the more I realized that was an insult to them. I was assuming that they couldn’t chose what was important and latch on. It had to do with forming relationships and what made a connection for them was just as important as what made a connection for me.

At this point in our discussion I made the following comments: “So what you’re saying is that you learned to value their choices and their value judgment in terms of what was important out of that reading selection to them and what resonated with them. Because children are born persons, their choices and value judgments are equally important as what *you* wanted them to know from that selection.” She responded:

Yes. What I understood about something at my age, it was ridiculous for me to expect them to understand the same thing

about it. What they knew in the third grade was just as important.

Ms. German was clearly applying Mason's principle of the personhood of children and their innate need and ability to know to the children in her third grade class. She realized that the children's connections to what they were learning were more important than the connections she would want them to make. In other words, because the children are born persons they make their own connections to what they are learning in ways that she would not or could not make.

### **Jessica, Director of The Children's Community School**

During my interview with Jessica Frost, I had inquired of her concerning the same topic of children as born persons. As with the others I had to probe and ask the question sometimes in different ways. I said, following up on the principle, 'Children are born persons,' how do you think Mason's metaphor of our consumption of food matches with the idea of children as born persons.

I think it goes back to respecting the child as an individual, created in the image of God and someone who is born curious and capable of learning and capable of feeding himself but needs to be given the proper tools. Right now the proper tools for my eight-month old granddaughter are Cheerios or frozen peas or little bits of cheese on the plate because she likes to pick them up in her fingers. She much prefers to feed herself rather than to be fed with a spoon from her mother.

Although, it seems to me, that Jessica's analogy is incorrect, I believe her last sentence speaks to the issue of her belief in the innate ability of children. Children do not have to be given the tools, the granddaughter fed herself. Mason's point is that children have a natural desire for food and hunger is the

signal. They also have a natural desire for mind food and curiosity, or their constant “why” is the signal. They are given the tools, in the case with the granddaughter some of the tools are her fingers, arms, hands, teeth, desire and others. Children are given a mind and a brain as a tool for their learning. What children need, according to Mason, is a feast, a glorious feast and each child takes what he can handle. Whether or not the granddaughter had a feast is a matter of opinion, but the fact that she insists on feeding herself is not left to opinion. This urge to ‘do it myself’ or ‘why’ that we see in children speaks to Mason’s principle of “Children are born persons.”

Jessica gave another example in referring back to her visit to England. “I saw children in England who would go home on a weekend and research a topic. I remember one girl in fifth grade who spent the weekend writing an unassigned report on Mary, Queen of Scots because she wanted to know more about her.” It is that desire and insistence on ‘knowing’ or ‘doing it myself’ that reflects the idea that, as Boyd and King (1972) stated about Comenius, “The soul needs no urging or compulsion in its growth” (p. 247). And, as Mason said herself, “A person is not built up from without but from within, that is, he is living, . . . life is sustained on that which is taken in by the organism, not by that which is applied from without” (Mason 1925, p. 24).

### **Reflections**

Ms. Norman learned to stop force teaching children and to listen to their souls first. She stopped forcing her daughter to be in her own image and released her to be her own person. Ms. Cassett and Ms. Swan believed that the child should be the goal not the curriculum. Mason said it this way, “We must have some measure of a child’s requirements, not based on his uses to society, nor upon the standard of the world he lives in, but upon his own capacity and

needs” (Mason, 1925, p. 66). Jessica saw in her granddaughter the need to ‘do it myself’ and thus fed the child with food that allowed her to do it herself in a safe way. Mason said, “One notices the verve with which the children tell the tale, the orderly sequence of events, the correctness and fulness of detail, the accuracy of names. These things are natural to children until they are schooled out of them.” Jessica also noticed the “need to know” in children in England in a school where the desire to know had not been “schooled out of them” (Mason, 1907, p. 276). Ms. Cassett, Ms. Swan and Ms. Norman believed to respect children as persons meant not to lift the curriculum up as the goal, but to lift the child. The goal was the child’s learning not the amount of curriculum covered. Ms. German came to realize that what was important to her about a story may not be important to her third graders. Her developmental level was different from theirs and she had to respect that. All of these are evidence of a school where the principle “Children are born persons” is being practice, albeit, imperfectly. But, not just ‘being practiced,’ rather it is like Mason’s concept of an idea, a living, growing thing that will be changing them as people for years to come as their understanding of “Children are born persons” grows. From my observations of the comfortableness of the children, their relaxed, non-competitive behaviors, respect for their personhood is clear and evident throughout the school.

## Chapter 4

### The Nature of Children

*There is a common notion that it is our inalienable right not only to say what we please but to think as we please, that is, we believe that while body is subject to physical laws, while the affections, love and justice, are subject to moral laws, the mind is a chartered libertine. Probably this notion has much to do with our neglect of intellect.*  
(Mason, 1925, p. 49)

There are several aspects of Charlotte Mason's beliefs about the nature of children I wish to discuss in this chapter. First, how does Mason's belief about the personhood of children affect her views on the nature of children? Second, how does the purpose of education relate to the nature of children? This is followed by a discussion of the nature of children as it relates to the mind in the following areas: habits, imagination, reason, aesthetics, and intellectual appetites. Then, a discussion of the nature of children as it relates to what Mason called "Misdirected Affections" or feelings, moral training, and love and justice. Throughout this chapter I discuss Mason's views on the nature of children and relate them to current thought as well as past thought. One must realize that Mason has written a large body of information on the nature of children. The topics covered here are selected by this author as the most salient principles. Lastly, I take the reader back to The Children's Community School to get a picture of practice of Mason's principle, the nature of children.

#### **'Children as born persons' as it Relates to the Nature of Children**

Each of us has witnessed the simple kind nature of a child. Maybe we have watched three-year-old children share or watched one two-year-old during parallel play hug another two-year-old who has been hurt. On the other hand we have witnessed the other nature of children. The nature that arises when four-year-old Kevin snatches his three-year-old sister's doll and throws it

out of her reach. Remember from the last chapter that Mason believed that children are born persons. This means then that children, like all other humans, have a propensity for good and evil. She believed that each tendency toward good has a corresponding tendency toward evil. Hence, for her the purpose of education is to bring out the good in all of us.

Alfie Kohn, a current writer on education and human behavior, said in his book, *Beyond Discipline: From Compliance to Community*, essentially the same concept as Mason. He said (1996),

To reject a sour view of human nature, one predicated on the assumption that people are inherently selfish or aggressive, is not necessarily to assume that evil is illusory and everyone means well. We do not have to cast our lot with Carl Rogers --or Mr. Rogers for that matter. Rather, we might proceed from the premise that humans are as capable of generosity and empathy as they are of looking out for Number One, as inclined (all things being equal) to help as to hurt. (p. 8)

Mason (1923) agreed. She believed each of us were born with a sense of justice and love, "It is much to know that as regards justice as well as love there exists in everyone an adequate provision for the conduct of life" (p. 60).

Rousseau (1762) in his educational treatise *Emil*, said that children are born good and are corrupted by the world into which they are born. He said at the beginning of the treatise, "Everything is good as it comes from the hands of the Author of Nature; but everything degenerates in the hands of man" (Rousseau, 1762, trans.1892, p. 4). The logical conclusion from such a belief is that children left to themselves could produce a world that is pure and problem free. This, of course, is the thinking of the Enlightenment, which is, that

humankind, beginning with himself, a particular, can eventually solve all of his difficulties. Of course in a postmodern world we see that this belief may not be as easily accepted. As David Elkind said, (1997, p. 27) after a number of wars, the holocaust, and other human atrocities it appears that the idea that humankind can ultimately solve his own problems might not have been fully true. In contrast to Rousseau, Mason believed that as fully humans, children's nature tended toward good and evil. Kieran Egan (1989) stated in his discussion of the use of the narrative in teaching and learning that children in the elementary school years have in place "binary conceptual tools" (p. 106-107) such as good and bad, security and danger, and competition and cooperation. Because children understand both good and evil, then for Mason, the purpose of education is to bring out the good tendencies. That view is also evident in the educational writings of John Comenius.

Comenius believed that, if humankind is not educated, he could not fulfill the purpose of his creation. He would live in circumstances far below that for which he was intended. Comenius said, "For it is vain to go and not to arrive; to follow and not to overtake, . . . to desire and not to achieve." For Comenius the way to avoid the degenerative circumstances possible for humankind was to educate him. A human being is created a rational being intended to use his reason. To use his reason improperly or not at all, would, therefore, cause him to live in unnecessary deplorable circumstances. Therefore, humankind must be educated (Comenius, trans. 1957, p. 123). How do these ideas apply to groups of people and to the individual?

In contrast to the beliefs of her day in which boys and the upper classes were predominately the ones educated, Mason believed that our concern must not be just for a social class or a particular group of people. She believed that



every nation and every individual child needs to be educated because they are created in the image of God. Comenius agreed. He said, "For we are all made in the image of the most wise God, wherefore we must strive to make the copy true to the model" (Comenius, trans. 1957, p. 124). This belief led Comenius to push for public schools and schools for males and females since both are created in the image of God. Not only that, but this thinking also fueled the missionary movement. In that each person on earth has a right to reflect the image of his maker as best as he can, he therefore has a right to be educated. Comenius believed that all humans should be educated for this reason even "the blind, the deaf and dull-witted" (Comenius, trans. 1957, p.138). For Comenius, the human race was no stronger than its weakest link. Therefore not to see to the health and education of all people, as a human race, is self-destructive (Comenius, trans. 1957, p.136).

Mason agreed with Comenius that education is to be designed to capture the goodness of children. This could only be done with a view that children are persons who grow and learn from within. It is education that encourages the good nature of children and thereby weakening the bad nature. Therefore one must educate to bring out the good in children. Mason believed that one way to do this is to study the use of our minds because it is in the mind that humankind reasons, imagines, creates, and thinks. So, it is the use of the mind that Mason discusses so poignantly in her book *Towards a Philosophy of Education*. Our faith in a person, religion or system, she believed, keeps pace with our knowledge of it (Mason, 1925, p. 47). Therefore, the more one knows about children, the greater one understands them as persons. To promote the good nature in children one must, therefore, have studied their minds and the use of their minds for education.

## The Mind

Charlotte Mason believed the mind to be spiritual (Mason, 1925, p. 24). Caine and Caine (1997) in a recent work entitled, *Education on the Edge of Possibility*, said that “Even if mind is simply an evolutionary development, the essential point is that mind is more than just the activity of the brain and body. Insofar as it is an emergent property, it works at a different system level and cannot, therefore, simply be explained in terms of the physiology alone” (p. 90). For Mason the brain is the physical counterpart to the mind. However, there is no separation between the two.

According to the quote at the beginning of this chapter, Mason believed that we have neglected the use of intellect. What has happened in the thinking of the West to bring about this trend? The early Christian church was influenced by the dualistic philosophy of Plato. Plato believed that the spiritual realm is more important than the physical realm and thereby encouraged his followers to more highly value the spiritual aspect of life. Ranald Macaulay and Jerram Barrs (1978) in their book, *Being Human: The Nature of Spiritual Experience*, analyzed Plato this way, “In the presence of the spirit the human is devalued, the mind has no place, creativity is useless, the earthly is forgotten” (p. 42). When this dualism creeps into the church, it promotes a view that says it is more spiritual to be involved in religious activities. This dualistic view ultimately leads to the asceticism of monastic life. For example, it becomes more important to seek the spiritual in a monastery than to live life as a husband or wife or business person. Macaulay and Barrs in their book said it this way:

Plato's thought had a profound effect on the early church's view of spirituality. In the second century A.D., Justin Martyr had been influenced by Plato before he became a Christian. After his

conversion he carried much of Plato's thinking over into his teaching. He called Plato a Christian before Christ. The old Testament was the pedagogue to lead the Jews to Christ, so, for Justin (and later for some of the Greek fathers), Platonic philosophy was the pedagogue to lead the Greeks to Christ. In the next century Clement and others in Alexandria placed an even greater emphasis on Plato's ideas. The New Testament in particular was read in a Platonic framework. In the third century, Christians began to equate the physical and the sinful completely. Consequently, to obey Paul's command to "mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth" (Col. 3:5 KJV), many found it necessary to sit on pillars in the desert or have themselves sealed up in caves! (p. 42-43)

This thinking soon relegated spirituality to the religious. Thus, there became a tremendous gap between the physical and the spiritual. And, within the spiritual realm there was a narrow focus on the religious. Even more, some within the religious community reduced the spiritual to only emotional and devotional acts or to theologically correct doctrines. Mason counteracted that thinking in her pursuit of a liberal education for all. For her the Christian position is that personhood could not be divided between the physical and the spiritual. Thus, when discussing education, one had to view the whole person not just the spiritual person or the physical person. Devaluing one over the other created an imbalance in a proper education. Therefore, just as the physical body needed a large variety of food to stay healthy, so did the spiritual body.

As I have said, because of the dualistic philosophy of Plato in the church

there has developed in the thinking of the church community this idea of a division between the spirit and the body with a heavy emphasis on the spiritual as being religious. In some scientific communities the spiritual does not exist and life is reduced to a materialistic view. In other words, if there is no scientific explanation for a certain phenomena, then scientists must find one. A creator who designed such a system is not possible. Hence, the stimulus-response movement is an attempt at studying the motivations of humankind from a materialistic perspective. Lee (1976) said in his book, *Personality Development in Childhood*, “many behaviorists no longer espouse Watson’s strategy, which rejects all mentalistic concepts. Nevertheless, some theorists still prefer to study the individual in terms of actions; in doing so, they tend to ignore inner feelings and thoughts. They believe that knowledge of mental processes (what is going on in the “black box”) is not necessary for exploring and predicting behavior” (p. 5). Lee went on to say that, “the behaviorists were so successful, some felt, that they removed everything that was uniquely human from psychology” (p. 5). Thus, the spiritual aspect of humankind is ignored. As a result of these two systems of thinking, Mason did not believe us to be concerned enough with the use of mind.

As one can see in the quote at the beginning of this chapter, Mason believed that our physical bodies are limited by certain biological laws. For example, the arm is connected to the shoulder and not to the hip. The arm is a certain length and therefore is limited in its ability to reach. One must live with the boundaries imposed by physical bodies. She believed humankind is also limited in its use of affections, love and justice. These, she said, are governed by moral laws such as one cannot steal another person’s property or one should love his brother. But, as for our minds, there seems to be no law or

governance, and she refers to our minds as being a “chartered libertine” (Mason, 1925, p. 49). The mind, she believed, has its tendencies toward good and evil, and each good could be thwarted by a corresponding evil. She made it clear that she was not speaking of moral evils but intellectual evils, which we often do not even recognize or acknowledge (Mason, 1925, p. 49).

For example, Mason was disturbed by the teacher who could so easily dismiss the work of children who they perceive as dull. She said, “Does the teacher of a large class always perceive that intellect is enthroned before him in every child, however dull and inattentive may be his outer show” (Mason, 1925, p. 50)? This is a great intellectual evil to her because she believed that all children are interested in the wonders of the world. In fact, this is part of their personhood, their imageness. Therefore, as creatures of God, they have a right to an education and God’s creation, all of it, should be the curriculum.

For Mason it was necessary that teachers make the study of children an important piece of their work. They must know how to engage the minds of children. Mason discussed several ways to engage the mind of children: (a) forming good habits, (b) using their imaginations, (c) using aesthetics, (d) using their reasoning and (e) tapping into their intellectual appetites (Mason, 1925). All of these for Mason were aspects of the mind which must be understood in order to use these attributes to develop the good in children.

Before discussing the aforementioned characteristics of the mind, I must say a word about how Mason believed parents and teachers create mental lethargy or cause the evil nature of children to grow. First, is our assumption that children or at least some children have low abilities. Mason said, “In things intellectual, children, even backward children, have extraordinary ‘possibilities for good’--possibilities so great that if we had the wit to give them their head

they would carry us along like a stream in spate” (Mason, 1925, p. 52). The first way in which one produces mental lethargy is low expectations. This sounds like a modern theme. Research since the 1960s is replete with examples of the effects on students by teachers who have low expectations of them. The Los Angeles County Office of Education (1993) has developed a program, *Teacher Expectation Student Achievement*, which helps teachers analyze their behaviors toward students who might be underachievers, and as part of that program the Los Angeles Country Office of Education has published a booklet, which lists and summarizes research projects that have been completed on the topic of low expectations for certain students on the part of teachers. The evidence is clear; teacher expectations, along with other factors, influence the learning of school children.

Another way in which teachers produce slumbering minds is through instruction that puts the work of learning on the teacher and not on the children (Mason, 1925, p. 52). The more the teachers works the less the children work. Then, to get the children to work, the teacher offers grades, prizes and examinations to prod the children. Mason’s ideas remind me of my own experience in the classroom. We had to use a highly structured lesson plan, which had a great emphasis on the teacher’s behaviors and the teacher’s presentation of the materials. This model had many steps to follow in order to teach well, according to the school division in which I worked. In this model the emphasis seems to be more on the actions of the teacher than the student’s learning, although teachers were instructed to write what the students would learn in a behavioral objective. This system of teaching seems to work best in a philosophical approach to teaching and learning that promotes the idea that teachers are dispensers of knowledge and children are biological sacs to be

filled with that knowledge. Therefore, the emphasis for such a system of teaching is on the behaviors of the teacher and not on the work of the students.

In a system as described in the preceding paragraph, rewards, prizes, grades, incentives for grades all become more and more important. Kohn (1993) said,

They are offered stickers and stars, edible treats and extra recess, grades and awards. New goodies are substituted as students get older, but the Skinnerian formula follows them. Often they are rewarded for getting rewards: a good set of grades means a place on the honor roll, perhaps a special ID card, a basket of freebies at local stores, and even cash from parents. (p. 143)

Mason(1925) believed that the desire to know is sufficient to motivate children to learn. She said, “every child wants to know,” and “the delightfulness of knowledge is sufficient to carry a pupil joyfully and eagerly through his school life and . . . prizes and places, praise, blame and punishment, are unnecessary in so far as they are used to secure ardent interest and eager work. The love of knowledge is sufficient” (p. 57). Extrinsic rewards and prizes are not necessary. Kohn (1993, p. 144) quotes several current day researchers who support this view.

Teachers create deadened minds by talking too much. Mason referred to it as the ‘talky-talky’ teacher (Mason, 1925, p. 52). Children, she said, are like adults who get bored at listening to the person who believes that she has so much to say and talks forever. She said children try to tell us that they are bored at listening by their, “wandering eyes, inanimate features, fidgetting hands and feet, by every means at their disposal; and the kindly souls among us think that

they want to play or to be out of doors” (Mason, 1925, p. 52). The talky-talky teacher is not a facilitator who is in tune with her students and uses their questions as an opportunity to allow children to use their natural desires for inquiry.

Teachers could deaden the minds of their children by “going over and over the same ground ‘until the children know it.’” Mason said, “They cannot go over the same ground repeatedly without deadening, even paralysing results, for progress, continual progress is the law of intellectual life” (Mason, 1925, p. 53). Current educationalist, Eric Jensen (1998), seems to agree. He said that any purposeful educational program must be challenging. These challenges should provide new information and experiences for children (p. 32). Alfie Kohn (1993) said, “we can’t necessarily assume the child’s motivation causes achievement to go up or down; indeed, *there is reason to think that achievement may affect motivation, too*” [italics added] (p. 145).

Mason referred to the *questionnaire* as being another means of mental lethargy. As she discussed questionnaire, she seems to interchange the use of the words questionnaire and tests. Giving children tests is like asking the digestive process of assimilating food to stop and be questioned about its digestion. (If you will remember from the first chapter that Mason used the metaphor of the body’s need and manner of assimilating food as a comparison to our brain and mind’s assimilation of mental food.) She believed that interrupting the learning process with tests produces the same mental interruption and hindrance that stopping our digestive system would do to our bodies. Hence, in schools that followed her philosophy, examinations were given only at the end of a term. Further, tests, she said, of the sort that asks questions like, “If John’s father is Tom’s son, what relation is Tom to John?”



simply produce children who can answer the riddle and are as sharp as needles. However, she believed, children trained in this manner had no powers of reflection or intellectual interests (Mason, 1925, p. 55). Without powers of reflection or intellectual interests, it is hard to sustain the learning that needs to occur to promote the good in each of us. Caine and Caine (1994, p. 8) stated that tests fail to cause children to make connections and to teach to the test deprives children of learning that is connected to real meaning. Further, they said, "Testing and evaluation will have to accommodate creativity and open-endedness, as well as measure requisite and specifiable performance" (p. 8). Then, in Mason's philosophy what are the elements of the mind that allow maximizing the use of education to cultivate the good nature of children?

### **Formation of Habits**

Mason discussed the use of habits as one of the important functions of the mind. Habit, she said, is, "a good servant but a bad master" (Mason, 1925, p. 53). She relates this use of habits to the concept of specialization in studies which she believed was a 'fetish' occurring at the end of the nineteenth century. The habit of only studying in one field of knowledge for too long, Mason believed, is a problem. She gave as an example Charles Darwin, who became so lost in his science that he was unable to read and enjoy poetry or art or other things in life. Although she considered the Renaissance an ungoverned age, it gives us a better example of what learning should be like. The Renaissance was a time when great things were done in art, architecture and science many times by one person. The point she made is that our minds are capable of many activities and we should have the habit of using it across a multitude of subjects. Caine and Caine (1997, p. 104) discussed the brain as a most complex organ. It is capable of processing simultaneously on many levels at

once.

Another example of the human capacity of learning, according to Mason, is Christopher Wren, who was a great mathematician and master of much knowledge. Architecture for him was more or less a hobby, yet he built St. Paul's Cathedral. He also had a plan for a spacious London, which was thrown out because it was too expensive. This, Mason said, happened to the mind of our children. She said, "Just so of our parsimony do we fling aside the minds of the children of our country, also capable of being wrought into pleasaunces of delight, structures of utility and beauty at a pitifully trifling cost" (Mason, 1925, p. 54). There are many such examples of great learners in our own culture, such as Benjamin Franklin and John Adams.

Our minds being with us all our lives as our bodies are, requires a diet of ideas to live abundantly. Therefore, education must be a habit all of our lives not just during school years. Our minds, Mason believed, require us to be life-long learners and to sustain life as it should be sustained, we must continue the learning process all of our lives. This process continues to develop the good nature within us.

### **Imagination**

Dick Keyes (1995) in his book, *True Heroism*, discussed the story of "The Emperor's Clothes" by Hans Christian Anderson. Keyes said, "He could have written an essay against arrogance and another against conformity. But what he did rivets the mind not on abstract ideas but on a very concrete, pompous man whose vanity made him easily duped and then humiliated" (p. 124). Anderson uses a literary form to imbibe us with the truth about conformity and arrogance. His story sparks our imagination to teach us about these concepts rather than use a linear form of argument to convince us of the ugliness of

conformity and arrogance. Anderson, according to Keyes, told the story in such a way as to “create within us a fear of the blinding consequences of arrogance and conformity” (p. 124). Anderson told the story in such a form as to make sure we wish to be neither the king nor the crowd. Keyes stated that we all wish to be the child whose clarity of thought, “courage and integrity” (p. 124) set him above the crowd. The use of the imagination in this sense was implied in the work of Mason. By using the imagination our mind can remember all sorts of good and bad things. It can be a place of evil, for example, glorification of the self or a place for horrors. But Mason said it can also be a “House Beautiful” (Mason, 1925, p. 55). The imagination is developed through those images that are brought to us in our day to day lives. Mason wanted to use the imagination in a productive way to promote the good nature of children.

Mason viewed the imagination as part of the spiritual nature of humans. Humankind, being both physical and spiritual, needs nourishment for each. Feeding the spiritual person of which the imagination is a part was accomplished, according to Mason, through “poetry, fiction, history, travel, all the treasures that are bound up in books, on pictures, on the beauty of the sunset or a flower” (Mason, 1916).

Defining imagination, using the *Encyclopedia Britannica* of her day, she stated imagination as, “in general, the power or process of producing mental pictures or ideas” (Mason, 1916, p. 204) It is through fairy tales and children’s stories that children develop these mental pictures and ideas. She stated that children know very well the difference between fairy tale and fact (Mason, 1916, p. 205). Those children who are not able to distinguish the difference, usually have not experienced sufficient fairy tales. And, children who have not had a healthy diet of fairy tales usually have difficulty distinguishing between a lie and

the truth. Fairy tales, she said, “make for righteousness, for the punishment of the evil-doer and the praise of them that do well” (Mason, 1916, p. 205). She went on to say that all great men and women have had the ability to see the “invisible” (p. 205). Even mathematicians who frequently use the phrase, “Let us suppose” (Mason, 1916, p. 205). In this way our imaginations are developed to bring out the good in us.

Caine and Caine (1997) suggested, using the research of O’Keefe and Nadel (1978), “that we have a spatial/autographical memory that does not need rehearsal and allows for ‘instant’ recall of experiences. This was the system that registers the details of your meal last night. It is always engaged, inexhaustible, and motivated by novelty” (p. 107). Mason wanted instruction to occur such that recall of knowledge is as easy as recalling last night’s dinner (Mason, 1925, p. 173). The imagination is employed to help children let history, poetry, literature, drama, live in their minds. This is the key to her success in that she, without realizing it, helped children use their imaginations to relive history and thereby implanting the information in their spatial memory system. Eric Jensen (1998) in his discussion of our memory systems in his book, *Teaching with the Brain in Mind*, stated that,

How does this process work? Surprisingly, our visual system has both “what” (content) and “where” (location) pathways (Kosslyn 1992). Many researchers believe this information is processed by the Hippocampus in a visual fabric, or “weave of mental space.” Unfortunately, not everyone agrees on how this system of spatial, configural, and relational cues works.

Somehow, though, we possess a back-up memory system based on locational cues because every life experience has to be, in

some way, contextually embedded. Thus, all learning is associated with corresponding sights, sounds, smells, locations, touch, and emotions. You can't not "be somewhere" when you learn. All learning provides contextual cues. (p. 107)

By employing the imagination through the use of narration, Mason was able to help children retain a large amount of knowledge without memorization. Knowledge, gained thus, trains the good nature of children.

### **Reason**

The Enlightenment taught that humankind could better his world through the use of his own reason. Mason believed that our reason should be trained through a sufficient curriculum which should include the Holy Scriptures (See School Education, pp 137-147). She believed that our reason is often guided by our will. Our will and our minds need sufficient training (education) to avoid poor and erroneous reasoning. She said,

In these days when *Reason* is deified by the unlearned and plays the part of the Lord of Misrule it is necessary that every child should be trained to recognize fallacious reasoning and above all to know that a man's reason is his servant and not his master; that there is no notion a man chooses to receive which his reason will not justify, whether it be mistrust of his neighbour, jealousy of his wife, doubts about his religion, or contempt for his country.

(Mason, 1925, p. 56)

Mason was convinced that the way for any nation to guard itself against the fallacious reason of humankind is to provide every child with a liberal education that includes a wide curriculum. A wide curriculum provides children with the ability to compare information across fields of knowledge and gives

children the abundant data needed to make sound judgments thus developing their good nature. A liberal education should also provide sufficient time for reflection. Similarly, Jensen stated (1998) that children must be given what he called “personal processing time” to internalize new information (p. 47). D. A. Schon has written two books on the importance of reflection in our day to day lives as well as in a more structured learning environment: *The Reflective Practitioner* and *Educating the Reflective Practitioner*. Caine and Caine (1994) emphatically stated that, “Reflection is a critical aspect of all sophisticated and higher-order thinking and learning” (p. 158). Mason believed that through such an expansive curriculum from which children acquire many examples of how one uses reasoning, children can develop sound habits of good reasoning. This, of course, enhances their good nature.

### **Aesthetics**

Like the other means of using our minds, Mason believed that beauty is a key to the fulfillment of life, but it also could be a detriment. First, living without beauty is a deterrent to our minds. She said, “. . .it [the mind] dies of inanition when beauty is not duly presented to it, beauty in words, in pictures and music, in tree and flower and sky” (Mason, 1925, p. 56). Echoing a similar idea, Jensen (1998) said that the arts are foundational to success in life. The arts create a foundation in “creativity, concentration, problem solving, self-efficacy, coordination, and values attention and self-discipline” (p. 36). For Mason the lack of beauty in our lives created an evil. On the other hand, to have beauty and to assume that *you* only have and understand beauty is a great evil. Children, Mason thought, should not be raised to believe that their culture produces the only beauty in the world. That, she believed, is arrogance. Our culture often perceives the only evil connected to beauty is its pornographic

misuse, violent films or trashy books but to Mason the neglect of beauty in our lives is a great evil. She said, "It is no small part of education to have seen much beauty, to recognize it when we see it, and to keep ourselves humble in its presence" (Mason, 1925, p. 56).

There is an increasing amount of research today that verifies Mason's requirement for children to be heavily involved in producing art as well as enjoying art and the beauty of the world about us. Jensen (1998) in his book, *Teaching with the Brain in Mind*, pointed out that "a strong arts curriculum is at the creative core of academic excellence--not more discipline, higher standards, or the three Rs" (p. 87). Jensen refers to the research of Kearney (1996) at the Redcliffe Elementary School where implementation of a strong arts curriculum moved test scores for this Title 1 rural school of 42 percent minority students from one of the lowest in the school division to the top 5 percent in 6 years (p. 87). Simmons (1995, quoted in Jensen, 1998) linked art to improvement in visual thinking, creativity, using language and problem solving (p. 87). Art, beauty, poetry are, for Mason, necessary for the proper development of the good nature in children.

### **Misdirected Affections**

Under this heading Charlotte Mason discusses the moral nature of children and how one trains the moral nature of children. Feelings, she believed, are the dominate force in our moral thinking. She centered the discussion on two basic concepts under which most of our feelings fall: love and justice. She said, "it is the glory of the human being to be endowed with such a wealth of these two as is sufficient for every occasion of life" (Mason, 1925, p. 58). How did Mason define love and justice? How does one use them to bring out the good nature of children? What are hindrances to this aspect of

moral training for children?

I have discussed what Mason believed are hindrances to the moral training of children. Reviewing briefly, parents and teachers should not use “tedious platitudes” (Mason, 1925, p. 58) to instruct their children or students. Parents and teachers should be sparse and careful in their use of praise and blame as a way to motivate children to correct moral behavior. She believed that children would completely disregard the moral training taught through the use of praise or blame or would perform in morally appropriate ways to win the parents or teachers affection. Thereby, in each situation the child did not “do a thing ‘for it is right’” and thereby develop their own strength of character. (Mason, 1925, p. 59).

Moral education is a “delicate and personal” (Mason, 1925, p. 59) matter, and a teacher should not teach morality trusting just his own resources. Children must not be taught moral education like pigeons feeding their young. In other words, moral education cannot be predigested for children, that is, taught to them in a fashion of dispensing knowledge. Mason believed that children would pick and choose for themselves. In other words, children learn their morality as they learn all other knowledge, through their own “act of knowing” (Mason, 1925, p. 99). Here, Mason began to hint at curriculum which will be discussed in a later chapter. Children, she thought, must have a great quantity of nourishment from their Biblical instruction as well as a rich curriculum from poetry, history, romance, geography, travel, biography, science and math. All of these are used to spur the minds of children morally as well as intellectually. She said, “all children must read widely, and know what they have read, for the nourishment of their complex nature” (Mason, 1925, p. 59).

## Love



Mason believed that humans are sufficiently endowed with love and justice. She said, "it is the glory of the human being to be endowed with such a wealth of these two as is sufficient for every occasion of life" (Mason, 1925, p. 58). Kohn (1996) said in his book *Beyond Discipline: From Compliance to Community*, that we would do well to "proceed from the premise that humans are as capable of generosity and empathy as they are of looking out for Number One" (p. 8). Mason agreed and believed that the time spent on teaching love through moral lessons is "worse than useless" (Mason, 1925, p. 59). Children whether ignorant or rude are endowed with an abundance of love and are able to show forth all its manifestations which she listed as: kindness, benevolence; generosity, gratitude, pity, sympathy, loyalty, humility, gladness. She reiterated the need for a broad curriculum for children to feed upon. Therefore, as she repeated throughout her educational writings, children must feed from the very best of minds that the world has to offer as well as the Holy Scriptures. The point of education is to enrich love in their lives. Mason believed this is accomplished through the eyes of love rather than punishment. Therefore, she viewed discipline through a loving relationship thereby bringing out the good nature of children rather than controlling children's behavior through fear and punishment.

### **Justice**

C.S. Lewis (1960) in his book *Mere Christianity* discussed his belief about right and wrong as a hint at the meaning of the universe. He said, Every one has heard people quarrelling. Sometimes it sounds funny and sometimes it sounds merely unpleasant; but however it sounds, I believe we can learn something very important from listening to the kinds of things they say. They say things like this:

‘How’d you like it if anyone did the same to you?’ ‘That’s my seat, I was there first.’ ‘Come on, you promised.’ People say things like that every day, educated people as well as uneducated, and children as well as grown-ups.

Now what interests me about all these remarks is that the man who makes them is not merely saying that the other man’s behaviour does not happen to please him. He is appealing to some kind of standard of behaviour which he expects the other man to know about.

. . . It looks, in fact, very much as if both parties had in mind some kind of Law or Rule of fair play or decent behaviour or morality or whatever you like to call it, about which they really agreed.

(Lewis, 1960, p. 17)

Because children are born persons Mason, like Lewis, believed that children have a sense of fair play. Ernest Boyer (1995) used almost the same words in his book, *The Basic School*. He said, “Young Children have an almost intuitive sense of fairness. They expect justice. . . “ (p, 22). Mason said, “Everyone has Justice in his heart “(Mason, 1925, p. 60). And, according to her, people have a sufficient amount to live life honorably. It is misguided teaching about the concept of justice that causes wrong thinking and wrong judging in our society. Justice is that spiritual provision necessary to live a wholesome life. Unfortunately, when justice is wrongly viewed, it slowly dies in us; and this death of justice creates havoc in our lives where instead, it should have brought about better living (Mason, 1925, p. 60).

Remember again the quote at the beginning of this chapter. Mason believed that recognition is given to the fact that our physical bodies have

limitations and that our affections, love and justice, are bound by moral laws, but our minds are free to do as they please. Mason believed that humankind has traditionally not taught that our minds and the use of our minds should have limits as well. This, she believed, is because we have not thought carefully enough about our intellect and the use of our intellect. How does she connect the use of our minds to her discussion of love and justice?

First, because of our spiritual nature, children must have a broad curriculum from which to gather the data they need to make good decisions about life. Our education is a matter of the spirit, our complete education not just our religious education. Children must have a broad curriculum to have the background to make good choices. Mason said, "To think fairly requires, we know, knowledge as well as consideration" (Mason, 1925, p. 60).

Because what we think does matter, children should be taught that their thoughts are not always to be their own. Our thinking about other people is also a matter of justice and injustice. To say and to do as we please can be to act and say words that are unjust. Children must know that they will come in contact with all manner of people, and not to speak appropriately to these persons is to speak unjustly. Children must know that truth is *justice in words*. And, that all people are due the truth. Mason said that, "there are few better equipments for a citizen than a mind capable of discerning the truth, and this just mind can be preserved only by those who take heed what they think" (Mason, 1925, p. 61).

But, justice goes beyond what we think. It also has to do with our actions. This, Mason (1925) said, is integrity which is simply, *justice in action*. Children must be taught that they must have integrity in their work. Of course, not just children, but all people must have integrity or justice in action. Everyone should

do what they do well. Integrity requires that time not be wasted or work done shabbily. Therefore, the young person heading off to college should have been taught that he must not “scamp, dawdle over, postpone, crib, or otherwise shirk his work” (p. 61). Justice in action, or integrity, requires that we keep our hands to ourselves in terms of other people’s property. Children must know that justice in action, or integrity in the material world is called honesty. But, “not the common honesty which hates to be found out, but that refined and delicate sense of values which George Eliot exhibits for us in ‘Caleb Garth’” (Mason, 1925, p. 61).

Mason took the concept of integrity one step further. She said, “Our opinions show our integrity of thought” (Mason, 1925, p. 61). These opinions everyone has whether the opinions come from the newspaper, novels or friends. It is important for children to be taught to think about their opinions carefully. In fact, Mason saw it as our duty to think carefully about our opinions.

If one is to have sound opinions, then one must be given the guidance needed “in arriving at that justice in motive which we call sound principles” (Mason, 1925, p. 62). Principles are those motives that are important to us and move us in what we think and do. According to Mason, humans seem to pick these principles “in a casual way and are seldom able to render an account of them and yet our lives are ordered by our principles, good or bad” (Mason, 1925, p. 62). Again, Mason, emphasizes the need for wide and wise reading for children. Children as well as adults learn the latest catch words such as “What’s the use?” or “Who cares?” or “Whatever.” These must not become the basis of our thought and conduct.

Because the latest fad in thinking or the latest slang expressions must not become our guiding principles, all children must be exposed to the world’s

spiritual treasures. Children must have access to “Every lovely tale, illuminating poem, instructive history, every unfolding of travel and revelation of science exists for children” (Mason, 1925, p. 62). This concept, said Mason, is a contribution to the education of children that the PNEU has given to education, “to discover that all children even backward children, are aware of their needs and pathetically eager for the food they require; that no preparation whatever is necessary for this sort of diet; that a limited vocabulary, sordid surroundings, the absence of a literary background to thought are not hindrances; indeed they may turn out to be incentives to learning, just as the more hungry the child, the readier he is for his dinner” (Mason, 1925, p. 62). This, Mason felt, had been proven by thousands of children who were eager to learn and were being educated by using her educational principles.

Starving intellectually reaps havoc with the spiritual lives of children. Children, Mason believed, must have more than the three Rs. Only getting the three Rs would increase juvenile crime because children are intellectually and spiritually starved. Children find ways to use their imaginations, to fulfill their emotional needs and intellectual needs. Therefore, the latest crime, the latest movie should not be the place where children mentally have their great adventures. They must have their creative and imaginative adventures from the best our world of history, science, and literature can offer (Mason, 1925, p. 63). This spiritual food from the best our world can offer fosters, Mason believed, a good nature in children.

## **Summary**

Mason believed that children as born persons come with all that it means to be human. That includes a nature with tendencies toward good and evil. Therefore, children need to be educated to attenuate the evil and bring out the

good. Because God is love then the approach for bringing out the best in children is through the good nature not the evil.

The use of mind is important in the process of bringing out the good nature in children. The mind being a spiritual entity must be fed with a large quantity of spiritual food. It is necessary then that teachers have high expectations of their student's abilities, and it is necessary to give them a continual diet of new ideas. We as adults must not deaden the minds of children through low expectations, too much teacher talk or direct instruction, covering the same content repeatedly and testing children on factual information that does not relate to real life.

Beauty must be a part of every child's curriculum. According to Mason, living without beauty is a great evil. Beauty brings out the good in individuals, the society and all peoples. Children must learn that beauty is not unique to them or their society but is found across societies and races.

Mason believed that the formation of wise mental habits, intellectual habits, is a key to proper use of the mind. Adults, Mason also believed, are not to manipulate children through the inappropriate use of the adult's personality or through the misuse of love, fear, influence. Additionally, they are not to manipulate children's desires. These aspects of promoting the good nature of children will be discussed in a subsequent chapter on personality. These are concepts that Mason believed are important in the development of the good nature of children.

Before I discuss authority, it is time to take another visit to The Children's Community School. As I spent time observing and discussing with people the major principles of Mason's work, I watched for evidence as to how the school, in general, conceived of and practiced the concept of the nature of children as

Mason defined it. Had they considered Mason's ideas concerning this topic? What was the evidence?

### **Promoting the Good: A Picture of Practice**

Because Mason believed that the purpose of education is to promote the good in students, not the evil, and remembering that all of God's creation should be the curriculum, children should have a feast of ideas from the great minds of the world--the best art, the best music, the best literature along with a study of the Jewish and Christian Scriptures. Therefore, I looked for how The Children's Community School set about educating children in such a way as to accomplish these beliefs of Mason.

The first area I studied as I observed, interviewed and read documents was to see if the school related "Children are born persons" to this area of Mason's beliefs. The basic principles are: a) Does the school believe children are both good and evil? b) Does the school use a proper sense of love as a means of guiding students or is fear the principle that keeps students working? c) Does their approach to learning speak to the whole child, or do they value the physical over the spiritual or vice versa? d) How do they make use of the imagination, habits, aesthetics, reasoning, desires, and love and justice to educate children? e) Do they teach in such a way as to create mental lethargy or to attenuate the evil?

The children at The Children's Community School are well behaved students. When I compare their behaviors with my experience in the public schools in which I have worked, the children at The Children's Community school come from families in which they have been well schooled in acceptable behaviors for the most part. This statement is not a derogatory statement about the children I have worked with in public schools. Many of these children simply

have had no one to train them. As a child, when the person valued most in life does not have appropriate behaviors in front of you day in and day out, more than likely, you would adapt those inappropriate behaviors. In the discussion that follows the reader must understand that the students I observed at The Children's Community school come from families that highly value appropriate social behaviors. (To avoid confusion on "appropriate social behaviors," what I mean by this statement is good manners, not stealing, not lying, appropriate use of anger, a basic sense of right and wrong.)

### **The Stop Sign**

All the grades up to grade five, both campuses, use a system of a stop sign as an approach to behavior control. This system appears to me to be what Alfie Kohn (1993) referred to as "pop behaviorism." This is how the system works. Each child's name in the classroom is put on a clothespin. There are three plates, one red, one yellow and one green, and they are arranged to appear as a traffic light. Each day the clothespins start on the green. When a child misbehaves, his clothespin is moved from the green to the yellow. A form is completed that reminds the teacher of the infraction. At this point the child is punished. On the same day, if there is a second incident of misbehavior, there is a "second" point on the yellow light. The teacher again documents the behavior, another punishment is given and parents are given a note. If there is another infraction, the child moves his clothespin from yellow to red and has to do after-school detention on Wednesday. During this after school detention, the child does work assigned to him or her by the director. I conducted my research at the school in February and based on my interview





data only one school year.

Figure 9. The Stop Sign

What struck me about this approach to discipline is that it seems in opposition to what Mason seemed to espouse as her philosophy. There is a thought of Mason's that I believe is applicable to this situation. It refers to tests. She said, "The child with capacity, which implies depth, is stupefied by a long rigmarole on the lines of, --'If John's father is Tom's son, what relation is Tom to John?' The shallow child guesses the riddle and scores; and it is by the use of tests of this kind that we turn out young people sharp as needles but with no power of reflection, no intelligent interests, nothing but the aptness of the city *gamin*" [street urchin] (p. 55). How does this quote from Mason relate to the stop light approach to behavior? Reflection is one piece that I believe is missing from this stop light approach to discipline. Just as the children who scored well on tests but have no powers of reflections do not internalize what they learn, so

with the child who moves his clothespin and does not have an opportunity to reflect on why his behavior is inappropriate. This leads to another question. Does this approach to discipline attempt to change behavior through fear? If so, this would eliminate reflection and discussion. Where is the place in this program for reflection or discussion that helps the child think about his or her behavior, consider why it might be inappropriate and be propelled from within to change the behavior rather than always operating out of the fear of getting caught. Does this approach promote self-direction, self-control or does it promote control by fear? I asked this question to some teachers during interviews while I was at the school. They responded,

They are actually the ones who have to move the clothespins themselves. And, although we fill out these slips, it's possible for us to give it to them and have them write what is wrong. This chart they take home every week and they fill in green if they stay on green and yellow if they get a yellow ticket or whatever. This is their action. They record their own actions. Each day they start out fresh on green again. But, as little as that may seem, no one wants to get on yellow. It is a motivator to have a goal to stay on green as much as they can. Not that every child will or should stay on green. We know that they will make mistakes and get on yellow. At the first of the year when that started happening [children getting on the yellow] I had to deal with that a lot. It was the children who had made a goal never to get a yellow and when they got a yellow it was crushing to them. Because they had set their own personal goal to never be on yellow which is a higher standard than what a child should put on themselves.

Now, this time of the year. . . when . . . a lot of them have been on yellow at one time or the other, then the pressure they put on themselves seems to slack up some. Those first few that get on it, really, that tears up their hearts. I think it helps because the parents know each week where they are and they can talk with them about it. If there is any kind of recurring problem, it is easy to document and stay on top of that particular problem of the child than it is if we don't have any records of what that particular act was.

Self-direction comes from within, not without. As we saw in the chapter on the concept of children as persons, the child is a living organism and therefore, changes from within, not from without. This was supported by Mason, Comenius, Piaget, Vygotsky and others. How does the child's moving his own clothespin motivate from within? Based on the evidence given in the essay "The Nature of Children," this program is in opposition to Mason's philosophy. It works on the premise of fear and external controls. This is clearly understood when the teacher speaking said, "It tears up their hearts," and "It was a motivator to have a goal to stay on green." The motivation is to remain on the green. Their place on the discipline traffic light program becomes the focal point for the children, not their actual behavior. There is very little use of the program, at least while I was there. I believe this is true because by nature all the teachers seemed to be extraordinarily kind and gentle individuals who truly love children. This precisely, plus the fact that most of the children come from families that promote middle class, Judeo-Christian values speaks to why there is little use of the program. But, the program itself is in conflict with the philosophy of Mason. I believe there are four major reasons why. Along with

the concept of being changed or motivated from within, Mason believed that we should work with children from the same perspective that God works with humankind and that is, first from a perspective of love. Love should be the motivating factor in our efforts to work with children--not fear. Third, Mason believed that punishment should not be used to manipulate children anymore than love should be used to manipulate children. Fourth, is the problem stemming from the teacher, poor instruction or the child? In this type of discipline program, the blame is always on the child.

During my interview with Ms. Frost, I said, "Mason talks about the nature of children and about not using suggestion, influence, love, fear, these kinds of things to motivate children. How do they work themselves out for you at your school?" Her response was one of an admission of using extrinsic motivation as well as intrinsic. She, said, "We use some external motivators and some intrinsic motivators and I'd like to emphasize the intrinsic more but that's not the experience of our teachers and the direction they always choose to go in."

Several of the teachers have not read any of Mason's work. They have only read a book about Mason's work. Many of them, I believe, have no inkling as to Mason's philosophy about fear, love, and rewards and how these relate to the teaching of children. From this researcher's vantage point, the staff is a highly nurturing staff. A full understanding of Mason's concepts and beliefs about this issue could very well cause them to rethink their practice and enable them to bring it more in line with Mason's philosophy.

What led me to believe the staff at The Children's Community School is nurturing and love children comes from the data I collected from interviews. I will give two cases in point that will support my conclusion. In an interview with three teachers one of them said the following when I questioned them about the

nature of children as Mason understood it and then how did they see this part of Mason's philosophy working itself out at their school.

First of all, I think to be a teacher, you have to love children. You have to have this desire and this love for them to begin with. If they can feel that you love them, regardless of what they do, then they are going to be more relaxed in school. I think they function better if they are relaxed and don't have to worry about, "Am I going to say something wrong?" or "How is my teacher going to react if I do this?" We give them the rules at the beginning of the year and they know the boundaries. They know exactly what they can and cannot do and within that guideline of love, they function. I have a child who at the first of the year was very nervous. He would blink his eyes a lot and do lots of facial things. I'm not saying it was my class, but I've seen less of that in him and I'm really thankful for that.

Relaxed, comfortable, these are the qualities of a classroom that Caine and Caine (1994) suggested, based on brain research, that must exist for children to be in an environment where they can learn. The staff at The Children's Community School had the proper understanding of what type of environment is healthy for children. I believe with further reading and study of Charlotte Mason's work, they could easily implement her philosophy as it relates to the nature of children.

### **The Apple that Spoiled the Lot or Failing to Attenuate the Evil**

The other case in point relates to Ms. German, the Middle School Director, who told me that the reason she chose The Children's Community School over other private schools is that the other private schools "weren't

working on the inside of kids and bringing the good out of them. They were imposing rules and regulations.” She told the following situation that relates to children changing from within.

We have one student here in the middle school who has just learned how to play the game. He is just going through the motions and he knows what he has to do to stay out of trouble. Some people, we have a very strict code that we follow with him because we have an agreement with every child and every parent that comes to school here and we can't let one student destroy the atmosphere for everybody else. But, it is one of those outside list of rules. He is playing the game and in that situation I feel like a complete failure. The average person would walk in here and probably not even notice it. He is going through the motions. But, I know he is just going through the motions. We have changed him, nothing inside of him has awakened and responded to all this love and nurturing that we are giving him.

Ms. German is disappointed in not having “reached” or “connected” with this child. She has a strong sense of failure because her ideal of creating an environment that allows children to be motivated from within is not working for this child.

On my last day at the upper school, I had the occasion to learn who he was. I had observed him before in Ms. German's Spanish class without realizing who he was. I noticed that he responded in short phrases not complete sentences or he did not respond at all. I didn't pay much attention to him the first time. My interpretation of the behaviors I observed were that, of all the students taking Spanish, he was lazy and had an attitude of “it bothers me

too much to try.” For me, this was a sign of depression. I did not mention my thoughts to anyone.

On the last day one of the teachers had to leave early and Ms. German was planning to take her place. Another situation arose, so I volunteered to cover the sixth and seventh grade students. There was one eighth grade student in the seventh grade. I had to come up with a lesson on the spur of the moment, and, knowing they were studying the United States government, I elected to have them rewrite the preamble to the Constitution using synonyms and the only words that could remain the same were, We and United States of America. I wrote the following in my journal for that day.

The sixth graders went straight to work after I put them in groups.

The seventh graders went to work without the same vigor. One student sat and did nothing. He reminded me of a very slothful person.

The sixth and seventh grade rooms are juxtaposed in the same fashion as the rooms of Ms. Lightfoot and Ms. Washington. A portion of the wall between the rooms is a door that could be pushed back which opens the two rooms so that I could stand in the middle and see both classes. The rooms are not large and together probably are equivalent to one regular classroom. After I spent the hour with these two classes, Ms. German asked me if I noticed anything particular about any of the students. I told her that the sixth graders had a vigor and energy about them and went to work immediately and did a wonderful job of rewriting the preamble. The seventh grade class, I told her, were taking their cues from the very slothful student. They seemed to want to work with vigor, but they moderated their excitement to not stray far from the slothful student’s expectations. They worked on the assignment, but he, as I

watched carefully, did nothing. This student, the same one Ms. German felt she had not reached, was never disruptive. He never made noises; he never spoke out. He simply sat and did nothing. The other students tried not to be over enthusiastic about what they were doing. In my opinion, his behaviors were clearly having a detrimental effect on the others. The point is that he is the bad apple that is spoiling the group. The bad side of his nature, Mason would say the corresponding tendency toward evil, is ruling him. Not only was it ruling him but it was affecting the attitude of the remainder of the class. The students in the class watched him and watched me to see what I was going to do. I did not engage the student in any way. Although I was at this moment a volunteer, as a researcher, I felt it inappropriate for me to do so. This was a case, in my opinion, in which a student's poor behaviors, whether they stemmed from depression or for whatever reason, were not only detrimental to him but also to the rest of the class.

### **The Report Card**

According to Ms. Frost, the school uses a more subjective report card up to grade four. For grades four through eight, numeric grades are given on all work and averages are taken with a letter grade going home to parents at the end of the six weeks. In fact, the "grading procedures" listed in the Staff Handbook has specific rules to follow for tests and grading. For example, item number one reads, "Administer frequent (weekly) quizzes. Item number two is also quite specific and says, "Plan to have at least 6 grades per subject for each term." Item number 7 gives very specific rules about quizzes. It reads, "Quizzes should be long enough (a minimum of 15 items) to give students a fair chance at an A or B." Even in the rules one can see a move away from what children "know" to the grade they earn. While these procedures are quite comfortable for



teachers who need exactness of rules, they do not reflect Mason's beliefs about grading.

Ms. Frost said that she realizes their grading practices are not according to Mason's belief, but it is the school's "way of living within our community and reporting to our parents." I wonder though, if the parents are enlightened as to why Mason is adamant about what she believed, would they not be more supportive of a nongrading, nonrewarding system of assessment. This issue of grading also came to mind when I was reading the school newsletter, *The Children's Community School News*, dated November 1998. An article entitled, "Teachers in Class," mentioned that the staff would be "meeting in clusters to evaluate the program we carry out day by day against the Charlotte Mason philosophy . . . .We see ways in which we have strayed from our original purpose and are in the process of trying to set it right." This is truly a worthwhile process, and interestingly, the grading system was not one of the areas mentioned that needed to be set right. I wonder how a consistent parent education program would change parent attitudes about this issue?

There is one teacher in the upper school who believes grades are not appropriate. I spoke with her about her beliefs about grades. I reviewed with her Mason's belief of not using grades, prizes, awards as a means to manipulate children. She responded that she agreed with Mason. She went on to say that from her experience she did not have the same value on grades that many other Americans have and felt her beliefs about grades matched with Mason's. She gave the example of one student in her class whose mother does not want her child to see his grades. The child "gets in such a state about it." This teacher felt she could assess a child in a narrative form and give the parents more information than they could get from a letter grade. She gave her

youngest son who had spent most of his educational life in American public schools, as an example of the detrimental effect of grades. He was a bright child and does not have to work hard for an A. According to her he did as little as he could to get the A. This is a huge disappointment to her as an educator and a mother.

In my discussions with Ms. German, I realized that the staff believed one thing and the parents expected another. Could not the parents be brought on board if they were introduced to the ideas of Mason? I asked Ms. German how the teachers determine their assessment practice. She felt they had a good balance between objective and subjective grades. She continued with, "That's one place where there's really a conflict between what all of us teachers feel and what society demands." Upon asking her to clarify that comment she said,

The parents want a grade on a report card. That's what they know. Everybody who comes to this school wants to know what our standardized test scores were last year. That doesn't mean a thing to me but yet when my kids scored in the 97th percentile, I was proud. But, I struggle with report cards, honor roll. Most of our students make A's and B's, some don't, but, they learn a lot. I hate that the names come out in the news and they are not on the list. These kids do not have the same raw material. Their raw material is in other areas and we as teachers have not tapped into it.

There seemed to be a conflict between the beliefs of the staff and the beliefs of the parents. Based on the data from teachers, many of them preferred not to have grades, and yet, their parents seemed to want them. Could this be rectified? Only an effort at training parents in the beliefs of Mason could answer

that question.

### **Molding vs Guiding**

I spoke with Ms. Norman about Mason's understanding of the nature of children. We discussed her ideas about over influencing or controlling children through manipulation of their desires. Ms. Norman clarified that she, in her heart of hearts, believed much of what Mason taught even before she learned Mason's ideas. She said,

Without even knowing her philosophy on the nature of children, in many ways I agree. I understood but I don't think I always acted upon it in the correct way. I was trying to mold children and make them into something that I thought was correct for them. . . .It has always been my desire in one way or another to work with and be a part of children's lives, as a parent, counselor, teacher--to share and be a part of a child's life and do it in a loving way. And, have respect for children but I think as an early parent and early teacher I lost my way trying to decide what was the best thing to do for a child.

I asked Ms. Norman how she saw the role of education playing a part in the nature of children. She answered the question using a metaphor rather than giving a theoretical response. She said, "I think our role is sort of like a river and it runs through a child's life. We are not the engine of a train. . .but we are more like a ribbon. . .[to] help them find a path, to be a guide and share our life with a child."

I framed another question for Ms. Norman, how do you use creativity, imagination, habits, reason, beauty, desires, all these, to promote the good in children? She spoke to the issue of imagination, implying that some educators,

and she mentioned Montessori, did not value the use of the imagination. She said we must as educators encourage the use of the imagination in children. One of the ways to do this is through the study of inventors, who she perceived as being imaginative people. Ms. Norman's comments moved to discussing the praise that children receive from adults. She was concerned about a child's work always being on display or always being rewarded. I asked her to explain her concern.

Let them [children] just enjoy it for themselves instead of everything needing honor. The reward is being proud of your work. I think parents raise the bar. How do you top the next reward? I think it's the same thing with too much violence and too many toys. I think you are continually having to better the previous offer.

I followed her comments with the question, Can you describe an incident in your school when the nature of children was affected for the good? She explained that her daughter's class had read the book, *The Family Under the Bridge*, by Natalie Savage Carlson (1958). Their class, while reading the book, had visited a homeless shelter. Even though her family had talked about homeless people, reading the book, visiting the shelter, and helping at the shelter, had made the issue come alive for her. Ms. Norman said,

She's not from the richest family in town, not even close and there are things that she would like to have that she doesn't have but I think it really put things in perspective for her. She now has the desire for helping others.

In this statement, Ms. Norman is acknowledging the usefulness of children learning "good nature" from the literature they read. Not only are they learning

academics, but they are also learning social behaviors that will make the children better citizens. Earlier in our conversations she acknowledged how parents can raise the bar in terms of rewards. In other words, to get children to make good grades the rewards get more and more valuable.

### **Reflections**

At the beginning of this case study segment I posed several questions. I would like to restate them again: a) Does the school believe children are both good and evil? b) Does the school use a proper sense of love as a means of guiding students or is fear the principal that keeps students working? c) Does the school's approach to learning speak to the whole child, or do they value the physical over the spiritual or vice versa? d) How does the school make use of the imagination, habits, aesthetics, reasoning, desires, and love and justice to educate children? e) Does the school use pedagogy that creates mental lethargy or attenuate the evil?

The evidence in this case study showed that The Children's Community School believed children are both good and evil. The major evidence to support this principle is the Stop Sign Discipline Procedure used to control student behavior. However, as I have already discussed, this discipline procedure is best described in Alfie Kohn's (1993) words as "pop behaviorism." It is an external means of control not an internal means of control preferred in the philosophy of Mason. It works at The Children's Community School because of the social background of the students and staff. Further, it works because the staff, from my observations, are an extraordinary caring staff. In saying "it works," I mean to say discipline problems are seldom an issue at the school. Does it change children from within? That question cannot be answered in this case study.

Does the school's approach to learning speak to the whole child? From the evidence here this researcher has concluded that the staff made every effort to meet both the physical and spiritual needs of the children. There are several important pieces of evidence to support that claim discussed so far. First, as I stated the staff excels in caring for the children and in being sensitive to their needs. Classroom numbers are kept small to help accomplish this goal. Second, physical exercise is a part of their daily routine. This is evident from my observations on the playground. Third, the failure to get the one "bad apple" to respond to the school's nurturing is a tremendous disappointment for Ms. German. She owned the disappointment and did not try to hide the situation from this researcher. Owning this situation is evidence of a staff seeking to meet the spiritual needs of its students. The fourth point also answers question "d" above as regards the staff's ability to make use of imagination, habits, aesthetics, reasoning, desires, and love and justice to educate the children. The staff sought to meet the spiritual needs of its students through imaginative play in allowing and encouraging the students to build forts to reenact the American Revolution. Ms. Little also allowed her students to build forts to reenact the Civil War. Both of these are examples of the staff allowing and creating opportunities for the students to use their spiritual natures.

The Children's Community School taught in a way that does not create mental lethargy in children. The main evidence for this claim is the use of narration which is discussed in more depth in a later chapter on Mason's pedagogy. Further, the opportunity to dramatize what is learned allows for self-expression and self-direction.

The results of this segment of the case study have shown that Mason's concepts of the nature of children are quite applicable today. The Children's

Community School, except for the one student, “bad apple,” and the Stop Sign Discipline Procedure is doing a credible job at implementing Mason’s concepts on the nature of children.

## Chapter 5

### Authority and Docility

There is an idea abroad that authority makes for tyranny, and that obedience, voluntary or involuntary, is of the nature of slavishness; but authority is, on the contrary, the condition without which liberty does not exist and, except it be abused, is entirely congenial to those on whom it is exercised; we are so made that we like to be ordered even if the ordering be only that of circumstances.  
(Mason, 1925, p. 69)

In the last chapter I discussed the nature of children, a nature, according to Charlotte Mason, that was both good and evil. Education, she believed, is a vehicle to strengthen the good nature and discourage the evil nature. Of course, in her opinion, the evil nature of humankind requires authority. However, for Mason, authority does not presuppose a negative view of submission. In this chapter I focus on her view of authority and how it is to be used with children as born persons. I discuss authority and docility which she viewed as a “natural law” working within us. Authority and docility are counter principles, Mason believed, that work hand in hand. After discussing the relationship between docility and authority, I give Mason’s description of authority. I briefly discuss the relationship among curriculum, instruction and authority. Next, I bring to light Mason’s beliefs about children’s “self-authority.” Lastly, in this essay, I discuss what Mason considered as fallacies concerning authority. This chapter ends with a look at the data collected at The Children’s Community School as it relates to authority and docility.

#### **‘Children are born persons’ as it relates to Authority and Docility**

According to Mason, children, born in the image of God, were born persons with all the attributes of personhood. Therefore, children created in the image of God need to exercise dominion as well as adults. I believe it is this sense of dominion that keeps adults and children from becoming cynical or



depressed or consumed with despair. In fact, Caine and Caine (1997, p. 41) and Jensen (1998, p. 59) wrote about a sense of helplessness or downshifting. Students who feel helpless or are in a downshifted mode often feel they cannot learn and have a sense of losing control. Jensen stated that anxiousness, depression and restlessness result. Therefore, children who are not allowed a measure of dominion over their education become dull and disinterested in life. All people have a right to exercise dominion over their lives within moral limits. Therefore, children as persons, also have a sense of authority. But, Mason had a view of authority that included a counter principle of docility or teachableness or obedience.

### **A Natural Law**

In her writings Mason (1925) refers to how startled everyone was at the turn of the century to learn of the telegraph. “We were awed in the presence of a law which had always been there but was only now perceived” (p. 68). This gave her hope for education. In fact, I believe Mason would be excited if she were present today because of the research on the brain that is shedding new light on the laws of mind. She believed that a law existed in the area of authority and docility. This law functioned much like the earth orbiting the sun. She said, “the two principles of authority and docility act in every life precisely as do those two elemental principles which enable the earth to maintain its orbit, the one drawing it towards the sun, the other as constantly driving it into space; between the two, the earth maintains a more or less middle course and the days go on” (Mason, 1925, p. 69). Banner and Cannon (1997) in their book, *The Elements of Teaching*, suggested as did Mason that “Authority has the unusual quality of being dual, reciprocal, and thus dependent upon others for its fulfillment” (p. 21). What are authority and docility and what place do they

have in the education of children?

### **What Is Authority?**

Mason (1925) contended that humans can only have deputed authority. In other words, authority, is not intrinsic to one's being, but is given to us by virtue of our position or expertise (p. 68). Banner and Cannon (1997) supported this concept of authority by virtue of position or expertise by saying, "in the classroom; it is composed both of a teacher's knowledge, character, and conduct and of students' respect given back to the teacher in free acknowledgement of the teacher's greater understanding of the subject at hand and greater ability to convey it" (p. 21). Because authority is given to us, it is not ours to exercise arbitrarily. Banner and Cannon make the distinction between authority and power. "Authority in teaching," they said, "as in anything else, is legitimate influence over others. It is not mere power" (1997, p. 21). We all have some level of authority, Mason said, even children. For example, mothers, policeman, kings, presidents, day care providers, teachers, all have authority because of their position. This position does not give ultimate authority. The teacher exercises authority because of the rules of the school, the school district or the state. Teachers do not exercise authority because of some inherent power within themselves (Mason, 1925, p. 70). Banner and Cannon (1997) stated that "Power, on the other hand, is coercive force--the exertion of will of command action--whose basis is dependency and often fear. As such, power has no place in teaching; its use is contrary to students' interests" (p. 21). This is the point that Mason is making when discussing the raw power used by Mr. Creakle, the school headmaster, on the students in his school and used by Mr. Murdstone, the step-father of David Copperfield. For Mason, as with Banner and Cannon, this use of raw power or coercion, is unacceptable in schools.

Her basis for this belief is rooted in her belief that children are born persons and as such come with the same need for dominion as adults.

Mason believed that true authority exercised with justice in mind is not tyrannical or abusive. In fact, authority in its proper place is the mainstay of liberty and the cohesive element of society (Mason, 1925, p. 69). If authority is not abused, she believed, people, including children, are quite willing to submit to it. Authority in this sense creates order and, in fact, is the reason some organizations name their badges and metals using the word order. An example is the Masonic Order of DeMolay. Ernest Boyer (1995) in his book, *The Basic School*, said that children work best in a safe and fair school. Further, according to the writers of *High Schools with Character* (Hill, Foster, and Gendler, 1990) students' learning increases in schools where children feel safe. Banner and Cannon stated that to teach without authority causes students to "ignore their [teacher's] knowledge, and their compassion for their students' efforts is pointless" (p. 21). Hence, Mason's claim that liberty reigned where order prevailed is corroborated by current educational theorists.

### **Docility as it Relates to Authority**

Docility then must be understood in light of Mason's view of authority. Authority is not an arbitrary, despotic right of one person over another. It is given by virtue of position or expertise and is not inherent to the individual. Everyone has the need to exercise authority, even children. Authority and docility work hand in hand. Mason used the imagery of the earth orbiting around the sun. The pull of the gravity of the sun coupled with the orbit of the earth driving it into space keeps the earth on its course. Docility is the counter movement to authority. They are equals. One is not subservient to the other. Neither does docility

imply slavishness, nor does it imply inequality. She said,

That subservience should take the place of docility is the last calamity for nation, family or school. Docility implies equality; there is no great gulf fixed between teacher and taught; both are pursuing the same ends, engaged on the same theme, enriched by mutual interests; and probably the quite delightful pursuit of knowledge affords the only intrinsic liberty for both teacher and taught. (Mason, 1925, p. 71).

Banner and Cannon suggested that “Mastery does not mean that a teacher knows so much about a subject that there is nothing further to learn about it, for learning is always an endless journey” (p. 25). Boyer (1995) said it this way,

Life is a balance of freedom and constraints, and students in the Basic School begin to understand that everyone lives within limits, that, along with freedom, the rights of others must be sensitively respected. The goal is not to have a list of unenforceable commandments. Rather, it is to assure that all parts of school life are governed by high standards. (p. 26)

William Glasser, M.D., (1992), in his book, *The Quality School*, discussed to a great extent the difference between people who demand authority (boss managers) and people who are leaders. He said, “Boss-managers firmly believe that people can be motivated from outside: They fail to understand that all of our motivation comes from within ourselves” (p. 39). Mason would agree because she believed that children, as born persons, are motivated from within and need to have some control over their own lives. This model for control, she believed, comes from humankind’s reflecting the image of God. Therefore, the need to exercise some authority over our lives comes from within us. How,

then, does one achieve docility?

One method of achieving docility is through obedience. Mason's (1925) belief was that we must understand the child so that he could be "true to his elliptical orbit" (p. 70). On the one hand he must be able to exercise dominion but on the other hand he must be able to submit to authority. But obedience under proper authority should not be oppressive to children or adults and therefore, more willingly assumed. Proper authority combined with obedience produces an ordered life which is essential for leading a happy, productive life. This produces a good nature within us. Mason expressed this idea of the "elliptical orbit" of a child in another way.

Children, Mason thought, have two inherent forces: centripetal and centrifugal which produce in children freedom. These forces are "self-authority, on the one hand, and 'proud subjection' on the other" (Mason, 1925, p. 71). There must be subjection, she said, but it must be worn with pride and distinction. Children are quick to discern between the teacher or parent who uses her own will or pleasure to control and the teacher or parent who uses authority judiciously. Banner and Cannon (1997) suggested that "A teacher cannot flaunt authority or insist upon it. If it is forced, students sense immediately its origins in insecurity, its inauthenticity--that is, the absence of the sense of self that underlines all genuine authority" (p. 24). Children are able to identify the adult who believes themselves to be under authority. There is a distinct correlation between the use of authority on the part of the adult and the obedience of the child. Mason gave as an example the freedom to sit or stand, come or go in the classroom. She said these matters settled themselves as do other matters between teacher and student when "children are allowed a due share in their own education, not a benefit for us to confer but rather a provision

for them to take” (Mason, 1925, p. 71). Here is the balance of which she spoke. Children must have a say in their education because it is theirs to have not ours to give. Students who are given some choice and control in the classroom are less likely to exhibit aggressive behaviors. When this right is taken and dispensed by the teacher, maladaptive behaviors begin. Stated another way, when students are denied any dominion over their education they react in self-defensive ways much as anyone would react when being denied a basic human right. According to a 1984 study by Mineka, Cook and Miller, subjects with no control or feedback over their situation are more afraid than those which receive more control and feedback. Deci and Ryan (1990) made the claim that humans have three basic needs and one of these is autonomy. Their use of the word autonomy refers to ones sense of self-direction, a sense of acting on their environment rather than being acted upon.

Glasser (1992) believed that teachers who choose to act as “boss-managers” create a classroom where the teacher’s authority must be maintained at all cost. This, he believed, produces an “adversarial teacher-student relationship that is destructive.” He further stated that, “As early as first grade any child who does not do as the teacher says is almost always boss-managed, and the coercion starts. It does not make much difference whether it is done subtly or overtly” (p. 29).

### **Curriculum and Instruction as They Relate to Authority and Docility**

Further, because children are created in the image of God, they are designed with a capacity for the knowledge of the universe. Therefore their curriculum should be “abundant, appetising, nourishing and very varied food” (Mason, 1925, p. 71). This varied and abundant food must not be force fed or predigested for children. Hungry minds (desires) that sit down to such a feast

absorb it and grow in astonishing ways. Hortatory (Mason, 1925, p. 74) teaching methods cause the mind to wonder and not focus. The mind must be engaged. If it is not, then the adult begins to coerce and the child is no longer taking what is his. The child then gets off his orbit, so to speak. Therefore, children must be educated on a variety of things. All physical training is not enough or all drama or music is not enough. To sustain the mind the curriculum must be varied. Hence, Mason used the curriculum as well as instruction to spur children forward reducing the need for authority. Banner and Cannon (1997) claimed that “authority encourages aspiration in students” (p. 27). A balanced, nutritious feast of knowledge feed children’s aspirations and dreams and reduces the need for authority.

### **Self-Authority in Children**

Mason (1925) believed that children should have a sense of *must* (p. 73). She further believed, that the problem for many adults is that they act as though only children have a sense of must. Adults who make children feel as though the child is the only one under authority while they can do as they please, have presented themselves as a person in authority rather than a person under authority. Mason believed there are two conditions that achieve proper docility and obedience (p. 73). These conditions are that the teacher or adult cannot act arbitrarily but must be one under authority. Children can quickly discern whether or not an adult feels as if she must do the things she ought. The other condition, according to Mason, is that children should have a sense of freedom which comes with the knowledge they gain thus connecting the curriculum to the issue of authority. This new freedom, based on the new learning, is given, Mason said, without intervention by the teacher. This prevents coercion and hortatory talk (p. 74). Alfie Kohn described such discipline programs as

Assertive Discipline as being the opposite. He said,

Indeed, teachers are explicitly discouraged from reflecting on the wisdom of anything they are doing since this only produces “guilt, anxiety, and frustration” rather than “lead[ing] to confident behavior management” (Canter and Canter 1992, p. 9). The assertive teacher “tells students exactly what behavior is acceptable . . . . No questions. No room for confusion” (p. 17). This matter-of-fact demand for mindless obedience follows quite naturally from the premise that all problems are the students’ fault. (pp. 13-14)

Mason wanted obedience but not “mindless obedience” (Kohn, 1996, p. 14).

This kind of obedience is not compatible with Mason’s (1925) belief that “children are allowed a due share in their own education, not a benefit for us to confer but rather a provision for them to take” (p. 71). Again she said, “Docility implies equality; there is no great gulf fixed between teacher and taught; both are pursuing the same ends, engaged on the same theme” (Mason, 1925, p. 71).

Mason gave several examples of how children learn to use their authority. As born persons they too have the need and ability to exercise authority and docility. Stated another way, children have the need to exercise deputed authority and children have the need to be taught. Her first example was through a form of self-government in their school. During her time in the public schools (which could be equivalent to our private schools) *prefects* were elected by each class to represent the class in a form of self-government (Mason, 1925, p. 74). This, for Mason, was a good way for children to begin to understand authority by exercising authority over themselves. But she



reminded us that all children need to exercise authority so in every class there should be positions of responsibility for all children or the position should be rotated. She said, "The office makes the man as much as the man makes the office and it is surprising how well rather incompetent children will perform duties laid on them" (Mason, 1925, p. 74).

The next example of children exercising authority in combination with docility is that children should be responsible for their own learning. For this reason children should understand that they would only be taught once. Mason (1925) believed that to have the idea that one could go back to content anytime, dissipates attention and memory (p. xxx). Further, to allow repetition in lessons is to shift the responsibility of the learning from the child to the parent or teacher. The teacher, in effect, is saying, "I'll make sure you know it," so the same content is repeated again and again. Dull repetition is one sure way to dissolve learning. Learning is motivated by learning (Mason, 1925, p. 74). Caine and Caine (1994) stated that children have an innate desire to know (p. 143). Children need and want to make sense of their environment. They were also stimulated to know new content (novelty). Other research indicates that the Hippocampus has a larger amount of activity when humans are exploring and learning new information (Restak, 1979, p. 17). Teachers, in their effort to help children, are a hindrance if they allow poor habits of attention and memory. Learning the information the first time spurs children on to learn new information.

### **Fallacies Concerning Authority**

Mason (1925) discussed several "fallacies" that teachers hold which hinder the education of children and which "are apt to slight their high office" (p. 75). First, teachers view themselves as superior and the children as inferior (p.

75). Because of this view they spoon feed children and try to predigest knowledge for children. Teachers have to recognize that some of their students have as great or greater minds than they. Second, teachers assume that children cannot understand literary vocabulary so in an effort to help the child they explain for children (predigesting the knowledge when children must do their own digestion of knowledge) and summarize for them. Explanations should not be offered unless the child asks for them.

In our culture in some schools the classroom environment is so intimidating that children are afraid to ask questions. They sit in an environment that causes downshifting. Instead of classrooms being a place where co-equals work together or where co-equals are “engaged on the same theme, enriched by mutual interests” (Mason, 1925, p. 71), most classrooms are places where the teacher is the dispenser of knowledge to their lesser vessels called students. They are not a place of growing and sharing together. Although Banner and Cannon stated many points on authority which are compatible with Mason’s, I understand her to be in disagreement with the following statement by them, “Authority emerges from an acknowledged difference in the status of teacher and student. Distance, detachment, and impartiality are meant to maintain what some find difficult to accept but which nevertheless remains a major source of authority--an acknowledged superiority in a teacher’s status” (1997, p. 28). Although they later claimed that teachers gain such superiority by their knowledge and extensive experience, such a view of the teacher removes them from a meaningful relationship with their students. Mason (1925) said it this way, “They [teachers] regard children as inferior, themselves as superior, beings--why else their office?” (p. 75). Or, rather, the relationship is based on the superiority of the teacher. As Mason stated, teachers must realize

that they will teach children who have greater minds than they. Such a view as Banner and Cannon's placed teachers in the "one up" position or the "power" position. The gaining of knowledge or knowledge through experience does not automatically give the teacher "superiority." Maybe I, as an American, have more problems with this statement coming from a culture where equality is paramount where as Banner and Cannon, from Britain, are encultured in a more pronounced cast system. However, Mason, as a fellow Englishwoman, viewed the relationship of student and teacher as equals rather than the teacher being superior (Mason, 1925, p. 75). Further, Mason viewed education as power and therefore as an equalizer between social groups. [See also the work of Glasser (1992) and Kohn (1996).]

Third, according to Mason, our beliefs about attention hinder our efforts at education. Mason said, "We believe that it [attention] is to be cultivated, nursed, coddled, wooed by persuasion, by dramatic presentation, by pictures and illustrative objects" (Mason, 1925, p. 75), and teachers believe that their personality is a factor in children's ability to attend. Attention, Mason believed, was not a particular power of mind but rather the ability of the whole mind to concentrate. Every child has a full measure. We must view, she said, attention as an appetite and feed the children with living books and give them access to all knowledge. And, she continued, attention is more than a matter of what children learn. Through developing his ability to attend, the child makes use of authority at its highest function and, that is, as a "self-commanding, self-compelling power" (Mason, 1925, p. 77). To be able to make oneself attend and to know is indeed to allow oneself access to a kingdom. Having this authority over oneself allows children to delight in knowledge which is so satisfying for them. This is why Mason believed in a liberal education for all.

This internal authority that is achieved through knowledge will “form links between high and low, rich and poor, the classes and the masses” (Mason, 1925, p. 78). Alfie Kohn (1996) stated that this self-direction, or internal authority enabled children to see themselves “as the origin of decisions rather than as the victim of things outside their control” (p. 9). For Mason (1925) this concept alone would bring down walls between the sexes, races, and the British cast system (p. 78).

Fourth is our view that the only knowledge children need is that which would help them earn a living and give them the ability to act as a citizen. Humans need a broad curriculum in order to know their world. Not only that, humans have a right to a broad curriculum because they are made in the image of God and are driven to know his world. God’s creation should be their curriculum. She believed that the more we allow children to know their world the better citizens and workers they could be. For this reason the curriculum must cover a large number of topics. Narrowing the curriculum for the functional purpose of work would not produce citizens or workers who are able to think and make good judgments. They do not have the data provided by a wide curriculum that gives them the resources to make good decisions whether at work or as a citizen thus undermining their own self-authority and ability to function as a self-directed member of society. All of these fallacies, (a) teachers believing themselves superior to children, thereby, (b) predigesting knowledge for children, (c) cuddling the attention of children, and (d) limiting the curriculum for children, undermine the natural self-authority of children and create problems in the classroom.

### **Summary**

Based on her presuppositions Mason made the assumption that children

have a nature that is prone toward good and evil, and because of the “evil” component of their nature, authority is necessary. But authority for Mason is given to us by virtue of expertise or position. Authority is not inherent in us as persons. Therefore because authority is given to us, it could not be arbitrarily used. Kohn (1996) said that in many situations “the prescription is dictate, control, and threaten. An effective teacher by definition is one who manages to get compliance with minimal effort and who succeeds in forcing rebellious children to back down” (p. 56). For Mason, because children are born persons, they also have a right to have some dominion over their own lives. For example, as image bearers of God, children have a right to know God’s world (Knowledge) and, therefore, education is not something teachers give but something children take because it is theirs to take.

Docility, Mason believed, is the counterpart of authority. All of us need to exercise authority but we all need to be taught as well. We must use docility as a tool to educate children to be dutiful and considerate citizens who enjoy a wide variety of learning for life.

Mason was concerned about the undue use of authority in the schools of her day. Her views were quite radical. Love, she believed, must be our measuring tool coupled with justice. Richard Smith (1995) stated that, “Not only, then, are there better ways of teaching children justice than simply subjecting them to it in its retributive form. . . [but we should proceed from a] rather different ethical tradition in which the notions of benevolence, sympathy or even love play a central role” (p. 89). Authority should never be used to exercise undue control over children.

Before I go on to discuss Mason’s views on personality, I must return to The Children’s Community School to see how they are, or are not, using

Mason's beliefs about authority. Because authority and obedience in children are closely linked to what Mason called the nature of children this portion of the case study is more analytical in nature than the previous two chapters. This portion of the case study builds on what has already been said in the case study on the nature of children. Hence, here I deal more with the attitudes and beliefs of the staff concerning authority and docility.

### **Authority and Docility: A Picture of Practice**

As described in the chapter on the nature of children the staff at The Children's Community School is a nurturing group of adults who care deeply about children. Discipline problems are a rarity rather than the norm. Only one or two students had detention after school by the end of February of the 1998-1999 school year. I have already mentioned that the system of behavior control using the traffic light does not match Mason's beliefs about authority. Maryellen Marschke (personal conversation, 1999), an educator and student of Mason, saw discipline in schools influenced by Mason's philosophy as "relational." Systems of behavior control such as Assertive Discipline use behaviorism as a psychological base and children are manipulated with external systems of control (See Kohn, 1996, Wolfgang, 1999.) If children are created in the image of God, and if God is a relational being, then children are most effectively disciplined through a relational approach to behavior control. As I have read and reread the data about Mason's philosophy at The Children's Community School as it relates to authority and discipline issues, I have come to realize that there were dominant influences at the school that override their approach to behavior control.

During my interview with Ms. Swan, she commented about the traffic light control behavior system. She said that she had only once had a child get a



*Figure 10.* Ms. Lightfoot's Room and Stop Sign

second warning on the yellow plate. By the end of the second day of my data collection, students seemed less and less aware of my presence. While I moved in and out of rooms gathering data, I never saw a clothespin move from the green to the yellow. And, only one or two children made it to the red plate all year. Ms. Norman told me during my interview with her that there were three children in the school whose behavior concerned her. I was curious as to the “elements of the school life” that made behavior control such a low priority or the dominate influences that overrode their behavioristic approach to discipline.

As I interviewed staff members and had conversations with them through the time I was gathering data at the school, we discussed dominion for children. I questioned the staff as to how the children have some authority over their own

lives, in other words, how do the children have choice and how do they exercise choice. If children are born persons, then they have a right to dominion. How did children at The Children's Community School have dominion? First, it seemed to me to be reflected in the school's basic beliefs about how children learn. I encountered this philosophy in my first interview with three teachers. Ms. Washington said,

It's just not paper and pencil and worksheets and teaching to a certain objective. It's not all teacher-led. You're really trying to help them become speakers and become narrators and become problem solvers and in order to let them do it, you have to kind of let them take the leadership sometimes which is why I've had them do their oral reports and work in groups. You try to help them find their niche and what they're good at. I think in public school the numbers are higher and all the dynamics work together that fit the mold of worksheets . . . (of) making concrete progress that you can actually measure because they are so accountable to the state. I think this is just a different way of trying to achieve the same goal.

Their attitude toward assessment was implied in the following dialogue from Ms. Washington in which she describes an alternative to multiple choice tests. She said,

. . . Because they like to read but I think when you just stick to the comprehension questions and then the multiple choice test you just kind of lose the love for the book. The answers aren't as concrete and you just can't say he made a hundred on this test but you can look at a booklet that they've created with their



imaginations and with what they remember from the story and know that they understood the story.

As indicated from these conversations, children at The Children's Community School have choice and opportunities to make decisions about how they demonstrate their learning. This type of environment as we learned from Caine and Caine (1994,1997), Jensen (1998) and others promotes a sense of well being and a sense of control over one's life.

Upon asking Ms. Norman to describe how she views discipline, she immediately said, "Differently than I used to." I asked her to explain how it 'used to' be and how is it different now as a result of studying Mason.

I knew what was right and I told them what was correct in my effort to mold them and make them a better person. As a parent now, you know when I'm tired and it's been a bad day, I still deal with it that way. But when I try to do what is correct, I try to reason with them. I would rather them come around and tell me why that was not the right thing to do. I try to use fairness and diversion tactics when I see something come up. . .(in the past) I waited until something happened and then I dealt with it by punishment.

"I try to reason with them" is the relational approach that Marschke believes is the basis of Mason's philosophy about authority. Ms. Norman seems to have spoken honestly in saying that before she tried to "mold them and make them a better person." However, her choice now is to "reason with them." Even though she fails at this attempt, she is changing because of Mason's influence. In dealing with the three children who entangled in a brawl, she said, "I'm trying to find out what is causing it instead of just reacting to what they do. I think of allowing a child, not to justify, but express a feeling that may have caused the

behavior.” She is acting as Smith (1985) suggested, “This will often require us to engage with particular children and try to understand why it is that the individual before us has trouble in perceiving the nature of his or her behaviour” (p. 90). Punishment for Ms. Norman is no longer enough. Her goal had shifted from conformity of the child to the rules to a goal of helping the child understand his or her behavior.

In my discussion with Ms. German concerning authority, she related that, when her family originally moved to Springtime, she placed her children in one school where she felt her son was not being challenged. Soon after starting to school,

he was getting so nervous and so afraid of getting in trouble that he was developing some very bad habits, not keeping up, not bringing his materials home. We are talking about a second grader, he wasn't that old and I knew that wasn't right. First of all, I knew he wasn't hyperactive. I knew he was highly intelligent and he just wasn't being challenged. They were not meeting his needs at all and he was winding up getting in trouble and missing recess because he wasn't putting his homework in the right notebook. It was just crazy. I understand that when you are sitting there with a classroom of 40 kids and you have one child who doesn't seem to be able to get his act together, I know that is annoying.

I saw these comments getting at exactly what Mason wanted teachers to understand when she discussed the fallacies of teacher's thinking that caused problems with authority and docility. One of those is the narrow, limited curriculum. Although in this situation I am not sure what content made up Ms.

German's child's curriculum, it is evident that he was not challenged by it. The curriculum and instructional practices at that school were affecting the child's authority relationship with his teacher and himself. Her comment that "he was getting so nervous and so afraid of getting in trouble that he was developing some very bad habits, not keeping up, not bringing his materials home." Here is a child who is unraveling, yet he is intelligent and well-behaved in other circumstances. I followed her comments with the question, What are some of the specific things that The Children's Community School does that you feel meets his needs? She said,

His mind is just stimulated. They are reading and talking about important things rather than memorizing a spelling list and writing sentences with the words. There's nothing wrong with that, but I think there is a time and place for it. But workbooks and handouts, read a chapter, answer the questions, take the test --that is what he was getting at the previous school and here his mind is being challenged. And when his mind is challenged and when he is using up that energy thinking, he isn't wondering around.

In other words, Ms. German was saying that, when her son's mind is actively pursuing knowledge, (or exercising dominion), he is less likely to get into trouble: a direct causal relationship between curriculum and pedagogy and the behavior of the child. When the classroom environment is arranged such that he is pursuing meaningful knowledge about the world, he is on task and learning. In this sense dominion and authority are linked in that children who are engaged in their learning are less likely to need an authoritative figure dictating to them what to do next.

## **Reflections**

It is obvious to this researcher that in spite of the traffic light system, a behavioristic method of controlling children, the dominate approach to discipline is embedded in the environment at The Children's Community School. That environment is one of relationship, interesting curriculum, and process-oriented instructional practices. A lack of these elements were some of the fallacies Mason believed created authority issues with children. Because the staff related to the children on a personal level, it appears that the use of the traffic light behavior control system is infrequent. Further, I believe that their diverse curriculum fostered the children's imaginations and spurred their aspirations to learn. Lastly, the process-oriented instructional program versus a rote memorization program instilled in the children a desire to learn and grow as individuals. In this environment there is hardly a need for a behavioristic approach to discipline as evidenced by the lack of use of the traffic light behavior control system.

## Chapter 6

### Personality

*These principles (i.e. authority and docility) are limited by the respect due to the personality of children which may not be encroached upon whether by the direct use of fear or love, suggestion or influence, or by undue play upon any one natural desire.*  
(Mason, 1925, p. 80)

Mason believed the personality of children to be sacred and must be protected against any form of manipulation. In this chapter I concentrate the discussion on Mason's concern about the manipulation of children through the adult's personality followed by a brief look at Montessori's view on personality. Following Montessori's views on personality as stated by Michael Gross, I mention the contribution that Mason believed Rousseau had in developing an understanding of children. Next, I discuss some of the "tools" of personality manipulation that Mason suggest as being subtle and often not thought of as a means to control the personality of children. Mason was also concerned about the manipulation of children's desires. Lastly, in this section of the essay I briefly review Mason's concerns of the effect of manipulation on children's character development. The last section of this essay will be a brief discussion of what Mason believed were the tools of education that could be used without the manipulation of children. As I have stated before in this discussion of Mason, I have chosen salient concepts that Mason addressed. Her body of knowledge on this subject is too broad to include it all in this discussion. Finally, the chapter ends with a look at the data collected at The Children's Community School as it relates to Mason's principles concerning the personality of children.

#### **The Adult's Charming Personality**

B. F. Skinner (1971) in his book *Beyond Freedom and Dignity*, said, "To

man *qua* man we readily say good riddance” (p. 201). But Mason had the opposite view. She said in her writings that the educational need of her day was not better methods but a clearer and more adequate understanding of children as humans. She said, “Our business is to find out how great a mystery a person is *qua* person” (Mason, 1925, p 80). Our actions, she believed, proceed from our thinking; therefore, we must have a thorough understanding of children so that our actions are congruent with who children are as humans. The personality of children must not be offended in anyway. The greatest offense that could be done to a child is “maim or crush, or subvert any part of a person” (Mason, 1925. p. 80). Richard Smith (1985) concurred when he said, “A person who is manipulated to the extent of his very wants and interests being the result of others bending him to their purposes has no important decisions or choices to make” (p. 105).

Because children are, Mason believed, eager to please and rise to the expectations of the adults in their lives, the charming personality of the teacher must be held in check. David Elkind (1987) suggested the same concept in this book, *Miseducation*, where he stated that children deify adults. Children because of their developmental stage elevate adults, particularly parents, teachers or any adults who work closely with them, and, therefore, adults must be careful not to use their personality to place undue influence on a child (Mason, 1925, p. 12). Herein is a snare for the truly clever teacher. No matter what the teachers’ abilities or knowledge, they should be careful not to use their personality as a means to win the children’s affections (Mason, 1925, p. 82).

Therefore, the personality of an adult in the life of a child can have overwhelming consequences. Children who become dependent on the teacher’s personality then become dependent on the nods, smiles and words of

the teacher rather than pursuing knowledge. The teacher, then, becomes the Pied Piper. Hence, the personality of the teacher should not suppress and play down the personality of the student. Mason gave an example from a novel that she did not name, which was published during her time. The novel was about a school mistress with a charming and winning personality. This school mistress was fascinating but the undue influence of her personality on the students had devastating results on the life of the girls at the school. Mason said, "The girl who kisses the chamber door of her class mistress will forget this lady by and by; but the parasitic habit has been formed and she must always have some person or some cause on which to hang her body and soul" (Mason, 1925, p. 49). This, Mason believed, undermines the child's personality and instead of leaving the child in control of her own life, the child is dependent on the adult. To develop this pattern of behavior in a child, Mason believed, destroys the child's self-efficacy. Another example Mason gave is the way in which Greek scholars educated young boys. The young scholars became dependent on their schoolmasters and the boys' own stability and strength of character are thereby undermined.

### **Montessori and Rousseau**

Michael J. Gross (1986) in his book *Marie Montessori's Concept of Personality* seemed to indicate Montessori's understanding of personality as being that movement is the expression of the harmonious interaction of all the potentialities of personality. The behaviors expressed through this movement are called character. Personality is the degree to which potentialities are developed and harmonized. Montessori contended that newborns show low level development because their physical abilities are not yet coordinated with mental powers. As children grow, their mental and physical abilities grow,

coalesce and produce a more perfect form. Therefore, the more progress in movement, or behavior, indicates a higher level of growth and organization of personality. So, the child progresses from the “vegetable” level of activity on to a “comprehensive” spiritual plane (p. 9-10). However, according to her writings, Mason viewed the child as being spiritually and physically fully human at birth. Her writings indicate that children do not move from a vegetable state in their personality or physical growth to a higher plane of development. Rather, they come as fully human. Our misunderstanding of the full humanness of children, according to Mason, has produced many problems in understanding the developmental needs of children.

On this issue, throughout her educational writings, Mason appreciated the work of Rousseau. Although she would disagree with some of his educational principles, his getting parents more involved in understanding their children’s social and educational development, she believed, was a major contribution to the field of education. She said, “It is true that in *Emil* the parents are supplanted, but, notwithstanding that fact, perhaps no other educationalist has done so much to awaken parents to their great work as educators” (Mason, 1907, p. 96). His ability to get parents more concerned about their children’s education created a desire in parents to know more about their children and their social development. The important issue then is understanding that children are fully human and, therefore, have the same needs as adults. Rousseau, in *Emil*, focused attention on the needs of the child. Mason focused attention on the child as fully human. The child is not cultivated as a plant or coerced into being fully human. If then children are fully human, Mason’s point is that children come with personality and that we should not tamper with the personality of a child.



## **Some Tools for Personality Control**

As I pointed out in chapter three, Mason believed children are born persons. Because children were fully human they are born with a personality unique to them. This aspect of their being, she believed, is holy and sacred. To understand children's personality and how to bring the good out in them without maiming their personality makes the study of children valid and important.

Mason, in considering the personality of children, reminded us that it is for us to "become as little children" (Matthew 18: 2-3, NIV) and not for children to become as adults. She further reminded us that we are not to despise, hinder or offend children but we are to feed them. In John 21:15 where Jesus told Peter to "Feed my lambs" (NIV), the word feed, she said, is better rendered from the Greek as 'pasture.' This concept gives a sense of children 'feeding' as they need rather than being fed. Therefore, we cannot push upon children what we think or believe, or we must not try to make them into a person that we want them to be, but rather, with great respect to their personhood, we must offer them a feast, a place for them to "pasture."

The personality of children according to her chapter "The Sacredness of Personality" (Mason, 1925, p. 80-93) is not to be altered in any way. This includes willfully crushing or subverting a child. She stated that there are many ingenious ways we have of manipulating a child's personality. This process of manipulation is motivated out of our own need to be superior to children. She said, "all of them [those ingenious ways] more or less based upon that egoism which persuades us that in proportion to a child's dependence is our superiority, that all we do for him is of our grace and favour, that we have a right whether as parents or teachers, to do what we will with our own" (Mason, 1925, p. 80). Smith (1985) supported Mason's thinking when he stated,

It is so natural to us to think of the teacher as somebody who knows more and is therefore a proper person to be moulding or influencing his pupils. That is why it is important not to lose our grip on the idea of education as a rational process and not a causal one, a process that transforms the sense people consciously make of things by offering reasons rather than one which simply implants wants, aims and beliefs by any means that happen to lie at hand. (p. 33)

Mason discussed several tools that we use to control and undermine a child's personality.

### **Undermining Personality**

Smith (1985) surmised, "For children, it might be thought, are not fully developed as rational persons, and this may seem to justify manipulating them, treating them as less than fully rational, on occasion, for their own good" (p. 29). Smith was telling us that it is our view of children or what we believe about children that controls our actions toward them. This was Mason's point: not to understand children as fully human leaves children as pawns in the hands of adults, as the superior being, to be manipulated by adults for adult purposes. The purpose could even be for what the adult thought is for the benefit of the children; however, if children are not fully human, then the adult as superior, can use whatever method they choose to control the child. As Smith (1985) said to not view children as "fully developed . . . rational persons" is to give the adult grounds to control the child through whatever means even for the child's own good (p. 29). Mason believed that children are fully human thereby limiting what parents and teachers could do to children even when training or teaching them.

Mason believed that we must understand children as fully human in order to avoid hindering children's learning. She believed there are several ways in which we hinder children and some are more subtle than the cruelty of Mr. Creakle in *David Copperfield*, who used raw power as a means to control the boys in his school. But, they nevertheless undermine the personality of children. Fear, love, suggestion, and influence are the ones discussed in this paper. Mason contended that each of these, though one may not be as obvious as the other, could submerge the personality of a child and create an individual that is abnormally dependent on others rather than an individual that is appropriately independent.

### **Fear**

Alfie Kohn in his book *Punished by Rewards*, (1993) spoke to the use of fear as a means to control children. He said that "if the punishment is aversive enough, or the reward appealing enough, there is no telling what you (or I) would agree to do" (p. 160). His comment is reminiscent of David Copperfield who was dumped into a boarding school by his mother and step-father. The school's headmaster used fear and punishment extensively to accomplish his ends. Master Copperfield said, "I should think there never can have been a man who enjoyed his profession more than Mr. Creakle did. He had a delight in cutting at the boys, which was like the satisfaction of a craving appetite" (Dickens, 1962, p. 86). Kohn said that punishment is a form of coercion and it, "models the use of power--as opposed to reason or cooperation--and this can profoundly affect a child's developing value structure" (p. 27). It creates a problem between the adult and the child in that the latter is always watchful of the adult as adults watch for police cars. Further, Kohn said that punishment causes a problem with children's ethical development. Children want to know

what they must do to please and what will happen to them if they do not please. Rather, Kohn believed, they should be asking “What kind of person do I want to be?” As a result of the use of punishment children focus on themselves rather than their neighbor (Kohn, 1996, p. 26-29).

Caine and Caine (1994) described, using the word “downshifting,” what occurs in us when fear is present.

When we downshift, we revert to the tried and true--and follow old beliefs and behaviors regardless of what information the road signs provide. Our responses become more automatic and limited. We are less able to access all that we know or see what is really there. Our ability to consider subtle environmental and internal cues is reduced. We also seem less able to engage in complex intellectual tasks, those requiring creativity and the ability to engage in open-ended thinking and questioning. . . .

Downshifting, then, appears to affect many higher-order cognitive functions of the brain and thus can prevent us from learning and generating solutions for new problems. (pp. 69-70)

The writings of Caine and Caine suggest that fear causes children to shut down in the classroom and hinders their learning. Hence, as Mason said, it is an inappropriate tool to use in school. However, she said, there are more subtle ways of getting compliance from children that are just as damaging as the use of fear and perhaps because of their subtleness, these techniques are more damaging.

### **Love**

What had replaced the fear tactic as a means of controlling children in schools or the home? In her book *School Education* (1907) Mason spoke

about the change in the environment of the classroom that had been brought about by the work of Pestalozzi and Froebel. She, having been trained at a Pestalozzian school, had a great respect for their work. She said, "What we may call the enthusiasm of childhood, joyous teaching, loving and lovable teachers and happy school hours for the little people, are among the general gains from this source. To look a gift horse in the mouth is unworthy, and it would seem pure captiousness to detect any source of weakness in a system of psychology to which our indebtedness is so great" (Mason, 1907, p. 56). However, this system of thinking about children concerned her.

Mason's question was whether or not the "lovable teacher" and the treating of children as "cherished plants in a cultured garden" (Mason, 1907, p.56) are simply removing children too much from real life and real circumstances. Are we cultivating children that are too tenderly tended? Should not our quest be for the "nursery [to] lend itself more to the dignity and self-dependence of the person and to the evolution of individual character, than that delightful place, a child-garden" (Mason, 1907, p. 56)?

What problems exist when using love as a means to educate children and how does it affect personality? Based on her writings, Mason believed that the best way to get children to learn is to use love and a positive approach. Her concern here is not with whether or not love should be involved in the learning process, but rather with the use of love in inappropriate ways that would submerge a child's personality. First, teachers who use a pleasant and winning personality as a means to get children to perform, misuse their position of authority and leadership. Children should not become dependent on the smiles and winning ways of the teacher. Smith (1985) gave an example of how teachers can unwittingly manipulate children. He said,

On this account of manipulation a teacher is manipulating his pupils when, for example, after collecting in equipment at the end of the lesson (perhaps with some difficulty) he announces cheerily, 'Good, now we've got all the magnets back,' where his intentions is to finish the lesson on a note of satisfaction and send pupils out with the sense that they belong to a well-run class so that they will come in with more positive attitudes next time and be easier to teach. Here the attitudes the teacher is trying to engender are not actually justified by much that took place in the lesson. The means of influence is covert and of course it is the teacher's own ends that are furthered. (p. 27)

Children in this situation submerge their own personality to please the adult. Again, the goal is a self-dependent, self-ordered person (one who could exercise dominion), not a person who is dependent on the smiles and pleasures of other people. A child raised in this circumstance, Mason believed, is becoming a "parasite who can go only as he is carried, the easy prey of fanatic or demagogue" (1925, p. 82). Teachers who use loving, pleasant ways convince children to do their school work or any work to gain the adults approval. Therefore, doing something wrong is to be avoided because it offends the teacher. The child has not learned to do his work because it is the right thing to do, but the child has learned to please the teacher. This approach to training children leaves the child without self-determination. To please the teacher, the child does his school work and has a good attitude while, according to Mason, "his character is being undermined" (1925, p. 82).

### **Suggestion**

Mason's next concern was the use of suggestion. This, she believed, is a

most subtle form of manipulation and its use is as inappropriate as the use of fear. In this environment, the adult has mastered the use of motive as a means to control children. This person does not use the obvious forms of manipulation such as rewards, but uses a form of manipulation that is so subtle it is hardly noticed. In fact, it is so subtle that to represent it in an example is hard to accomplish. Suggestions are spiritual values used to manipulate a child. The adult, who knows the child's life, habits, likes and dislikes, uses that knowledge to manipulate the child into behaviors the adult wants from the child. Mason said that a child cannot develop with stability of mind in an environment where the use of suggestion controls and changes the environment. A child in this environment can only function by the suggestions given from without him. He has no self-reliance or self-dependence (Mason, 1925, p. 82). She said, "Perhaps the gravest danger attending this practice is that every suggestion received lays the person open to the next and the next. A due respect for the personality of children and a dread of making them incompetent to conduct their own lives will make us chary of employing a means so dangerous, no matter how good the immediate end" (Mason, 1925, p. 83).

### **Influence**

Being an astute observer of her culture and times, Mason (1925) referred to the middle eighteenth hundreds as a time when it was popular to use one's influence to affect change in others. She related that in the latter part of the nineteenth century "goody-goody" (p. 83) books were written instructing people in the goodness of influence and the duty of influence. To that end, these books described how one is to influence and children are brought up to believe that it is their moral duty to exercise influence over others. As with the use of love, influence, Mason implied, in its proper place can be useful. But improperly

used, influence can have the same devastating effects on a child's personality as the misuse of love and fear. Again, Smith asserted in the example given previously that when teachers manipulate children, "it is the teacher's own ends that are furthered" (p. 27). Influence, Mason believed, will happen naturally as we live our daily lives. We are not able to influence by what we say and do as much as by "that which we are" (Mason, 1925, p. 83). Influence for Mason is the use of atmosphere created by the adult that envelopes the child. When this influence causes the child to idolize the teacher, the child's development toward self-dependence is hindered and the child "goes into the world as a parasitic plant, clinging ever to the support of some stronger character" (Mason, 1925, p. 83).

Thus far I have discussed means that adults use to manipulate the personality of children. Bestowing love on children through the use of the adults personality thereby subverting the personality of the child is one example. Another example, less often used today is that of fear. The use of love, fear, suggestion and influence are exercised by the adult to control the child. There is another means by which Mason believed we could subvert the personality of children. That is by playing upon the desires of children.

### **Desires**

"Man by nature desires to know," begins Aristotle's *Metaphysics* (trans. 1961). Mason believed that our desires are innate and are the driving force behind learning. Mortimer Adler (1990) commented on Aristotle's statement by saying that not only does man have a natural desire to know but he also has a natural ability to learn (p. 149). He stated,

These two powers are irreducible [desire to know and ability to know]. They are interactive and cooperative. Desiring is not



knowing, but we cannot desire without knowing the object to be sought. Knowing is not desiring, but we do not learn very much without being impelled to do so by desire. (p. 149)

As can be seen here from the thinking of Aristotle and Adler, the human being has innate desires to know as well as innate ability to know. Mason was of the same mind. As Gibson (1960) said, Mason had the art of taking complex philosophical ideas and making them easy to comprehend by the everyday person. An example is her often used metaphor of food to relate the idea that our minds need nourishing. As hunger alerts the physical body to its need for physical food, so desires alerts the mind to its need for spiritual food.

Education, she believed, is a matter of the spirit. The process of learning for Mason was a spiritual act. Because our innate desires, as Aristotle, Adler and Mason suggested, are the motivating force behind our intake of spiritual food or knowledge, to manipulate them is exceedingly inappropriate (Mason, 1925, p. 84). Further, remembering her beliefs about the nature of children in that each of our tendencies toward good had a corresponding tendency toward evil, it is the stimulation of the wrong desires that concerned her. Of what desires was Mason speaking?

### **Approbation**

According to Mason approbation is the desire to be formally recognized and to be acknowledged. In her work Mason suggested that infants seek approbation. In fact, the need for approbation in a healthy sense drives us as infants to seek our parents approval, as school children to conquer learning, and as adults to maintain the discipline of work. Mason said that our desire for recognition must be kept in balance. The infant or child seeks approbation from those who have the child's best interest in mind. The need for recognition and

the parent's need to put the child's interest first, act as balances on each other. Where one goes wrong with approbation is to seek the recognition from persons in one's life that do not have one's best interest at issue. In fact, Mason said, persons who do not have our best interest at heart and who desire to give recognition often do so out of their own need to create dependency. The person who has our interest at heart helps us understand ourselves and satisfies the need for approbation. When we seek approbation from persons who do not have our interest at heart, it does not satisfy our need for approbation so the need becomes greater and we continue to seek approbation (Mason, 1925, p. 84).

On the physical level approbation can be compared to a diet of sugar, for example. A diet of sugar promotes a diet of sugar. Sugar does not satisfy us, we are addicted to its taste and want more. We eat more sugar, become fatter and desire more sugar because it does not satisfy. Mason's point is that approbation from the wrong source has the same effect spiritually. If we seek approbation from the wrong persons, it does not satisfy and we continue to seek it. She further suggested that when we are not satisfied with our recognition, how we get recognition matters less and less. In fact, infamy and fame are both means of affirmation and the unsatisfied need of affirmation is satisfied through inappropriate means (Mason, 1925, p. 84-85).

### **Emulation**

Mason defined emulation as the desire of excelling. Emulation, she said, is a natural desire that can lead us to excellence intellectually and morally. In schools she stated that the use of grades, rewards and academic rankings create in children the desire to move ahead and the child thinks of little else. The result is that knowledge takes a second place and usually becomes

uninteresting to the child. The rank, the grade or the reward become paramount in the eyes of the child. In this type of environment, children often study to take the test and do not study to *know*. They usually pass the test and are quite sharp, but they are not children that know, that reflect, that imagine and that create (Mason 1925, p. 85). On a personal level, I have witnessed the transformation of my son from a child who is excited about learning to a child who must make an A. For two years he attended the school where I am principal. There, our philosophy is to promote knowing, not testing or grading. He went to middle school and after a year at middle school, his conversations now are about grades. He seldom speaks about what content he knows. The grade, the A, the 100 have now taken precedent over what he knows.

Kohn (1996) spoke about offering praise which moves from offering legitimate praise to “the sort that backfires” (p. 35). He gave an example.

Consider how many teachers gush over the way a child has acted, telling her how pleased or proud they are: “I like the way you found your seat so quickly and started working, Alisa!” The most important word in this sentence is *I*. The teacher is not encouraging Alisa to reflect on how she acted, to consider why one course of action might be better than another. Quite the contrary: all that counts is what the teacher wants, and approval and attention are made conditional on doing it. Truly, this sort of praise is not about bolstering self-esteem; it is about “control through seduction.” No wonder it is an integral part of the same discipline programs that include punishment. (p. 35)

Kohn (1996) went on to say that recognizing children in this way destroys a sense of community. He suggested that public praise is “fundamentally

fraudulent interaction in its own right” (p. 35). The adult, he claimed, is using one child, in this case, Alisa, to manipulate the rest of the class.

### **Avarice**

Mason spoke to the issue of avarice which is an obsession with wealth. Her comments are obviously in the context of her culture. Her concern is with the desire for wealth on the part of parents who push their children, even young children, to earn scholarships. She refers to scholarships as another means of giving prizes. These prizes play upon the desire for wealth. Her concern is also with the fact that most of the ‘prizes’ go to a select few. Most schools know the criteria to get scholarships so they work to prepare the child for the prize not knowledge. She referred to this process as the “cult of cupidity” (Mason, 1925, p. 86). It was a system that worked for, at that time, only a small group of boys. Not only are their personalities warped as a result, but it also denies a free liberal education for all. This seeking for scholarships and not knowledge produces children who are “shallow in mind and whimsical in judgment” (p. 86).

### **Power and Ambition**

In her writings on personality, Mason contended that power and ambition are proper desires when held in check (1925, p. 87). Power and ambition also have a value that creates a balance. She said, “Power is good in proportion as it gives opportunities for serving; but it is mischievous in boy or man when the pleasure of ruling, managing, becomes a definite spring of action” (Mason, 1925, p. 87). The person whose desire for power or ambition exceeds proper limits would lead others into mayhem. The intoxication that occurs from the excess of power pushes people to do whatever is needed to have the power. Prime examples from history are Alexander the Great and Napoleon.

In the context of school life, Mason said that when the more ambitious

student is allowed to manage or control the other students, the rest of the students are being robbed of the ability to manage their own lives. No one, she said, should have to destroy his own self-efficacy in order to allow another to be first or great. She believed that not only should this situation be rectified for the students being controlled but also for the student who insists on running the lives of others. A student who is allowed to gain uncontrolled power over others is being allowed to become a manipulating, controlling adult who has not learned to control his desires. The goal of the classroom should be to help students have an ambition for knowledge and not for power over people (Mason, 1925, 87).

### **Knowledge**

Our desires, said Mason, serve the function of stimulating our mind to avoid mental inertia. All desires have a function in motivating us to learn. The down side of desires is that any particular desire that is not controlled can produce devastation in personality. The lack of control of any one desire destroys the proper use of our desire for knowledge. Our desire for knowledge is innate. But, she said, often information is substituted for knowledge. Our level of information remains shallow and we dwell on such questions as “What did it cost?, What did she say?, Who was with him? Where were they going? and How many postage stamps in a line would go round the world?” (Mason, 1925, p. 88). In this type of questioning and teaching, the child’s curiosity, desire for knowledge, is satisfied with trivia and incoherent information. Trivia and incoherent information, bits and pieces of information, cannot nourish the mind. Our minds, she said, must have nourishment and only knowledge can nourish the mind.

Mason contended that, because teachers have such a low view of

children, they do not understand that children want knowledge and not trivia. Therefore, we have tried to allure children with wonderful presentations, prizes, grades and all kinds of devices. Smith stated that, "If we persistently reward good work with gold stars there is sound evidence (recently supported by Margaret Donaldson, 1978, p. 115) that children will quickly learn to work for the sake of the stars and not for the intrinsic interest they might have found in the work itself" (p. 26). We distract children from real mind food, knowledge. According to Mason, children who are fed information rather than knowledge become mentally weak and have no power over their own intellectual needs. They become dependent. The mind of the child who works for recognition, grades, prizes, scholarships or examinations atrophies. Children so trained do not have a wide range of knowledge which is required for good citizenry.

Mason agreed with Comenius, Aristotle and Adler in that she said all children have a desire for knowledge. Therefore, children must be exposed to the best minds our world offers. In the past children have not been given access to knowledge through various ways. One example Mason gave is of Richelieu who closed the colleges of France to prevent the poor from educating their children. Education would distract them from France's pursuit of trade and war. She said that educators did the same in her day "by offering matter which no living soul can digest" (Mason, 1925, p. 90). She further said, "The complaints made by teachers and children of the monotony of the work in our schools is full of pathos and all credit to those teachers who cheer the weary path by entertaining devices. But mind does not live and grow upon entertainment; it requires its solid meals" (Mason, 1925, p 90).

### **Effects on Character Development**

Playing any desire or desires over another creates a distortion of values

and understanding. When being first or being the best become aims of education, knowledge takes a back seat. These desires do not give children the stability to propel themselves when difficulty arises. When desires are not checked, they produce an over desire for being first or being the best or gaining more power rather than gaining knowledge and using that knowledge appropriately. Mason stated that the work a child does for grades, prizes, or to be first become monotonous and does not intellectually carry children to further learning particularly when the stimuli are removed. To prepare instruction and examinations that provide absolute fairness in grading to prove a student's position or grade is instruction that is too narrow and mechanical (Mason, 1925, p. 91). She said, "The boy who works to be first and to get something out of it does not always become the quiet, well-ordered citizen who helps to cement society and carries on the work of the State" (Mason, 1925, p. 92).

If we cannot use fear, love, influence, suggestion or the winning personality of a knowledgeable, influential teacher, what tools do we have for teaching children.

### **The Three Instruments of Education**

As I demonstrated in the first part of this chapter, the issue of the manipulation of children's personality, for Mason, is not a neutral issue. I discussed why Mason believed educators should not manipulate the personality of children through a discussion of how love, suggestion, influence and fear are not to be used to control children. Manipulation of children's desires is also not to be done. Undue play on any natural desire or the use of love, suggestion, influence or fear distorts the values and character of children. The goal of the teacher, according to Mason, is to spur the desire for knowledge. Knowledge is the only desire that satisfies children.

In this section I briefly discuss what Mason referred to as the Three Instruments of Education. She stated,

Education is an atmosphere, a discipline, a life. By this we mean that parents and teachers should know how to make sensible use of a child's circumstances (atmosphere), should train him in habits of good living (discipline) and should nourish his mind with ideas, the food of the intellectual life. These three we believe to be the only instruments of which we may make lawful use in bringing up children. (Mason, 1907, p. 217)

### **Education is an Atmosphere**

To begin my discussion on Mason's definition of "Education is an Atmosphere," I will relate an example she gave. It seems she knew a professor by the name of Sir Jagadis Bose, an Indian Scientist. She believed that a proper atmosphere for education is one in which children experience life as it is. Establishing an artificial environment of correct color schemes, items of beauty and the correct lovely people would not guarantee an education. She used Dr. Bose's example of the growth of a plant in a hot house as a metaphor to describe her concern. She quoted Sir Bose as saying, "A plant that is carefully protected under glass from outside shocks looks sleek and flourishing but its higher nervous function is then found to be atrophied. But when a succession of blows (electric shock) is rained on this effete and bloated specimen, the shocks themselves create nervous channels and arouse anew the deteriorated nature" (pp. 95-96). Her point in relating this story is not to suggest that we give children electric shocks but to show that children, who are not shielded from life, become educated children. She said, "Is it not the shocks of adversity and not cotton wool protection that evolve true manhood" (Masons, 1925, p. 96).



School life, according to Mason (1925) should not be “watered down and sweetened” and teachers must not be condescending (p. 97). In other words, teachers cannot use love, influence, play upon a child’s desires or any of the manipulative tools discussed in the first part of this chapter to get children to learn. “The bracing atmosphere of truth and sincerity should be perceived in every school: and here again the common pursuit of knowledge by teacher and class comes to our aid” (p. 97). She said, “Children must face life as it is. . . . and we may not keep them in glass cases; if we do, they develop in succulence and softness and will not become plants of renown” (p. 97). Therefore, even to atmosphere she had a prohibition, “that no artificial element be introduced” (p. 97). Egan (1989) alluded to the same idea. “The alternative principles [of teaching] do not require that we brutalize or terrorize children with all the horror and awfulness of human experience and history, but rather that we do present human experience in a manner that does not trivialize it, bowdlerize it, or sentimentalize it” (p. 107).

For Mason there were two courses for educators to take as it regarded atmosphere. First, they could create a ‘hot-house’ effect. In this situation the environment is fixed and this type of education produces intellectually dependent children. Second, they could leave children to real life with the appropriate protection from being battered or corrupted.

### **Education is a Discipline**

Mason (1925) believed that children are the agents of their own learning. In order to learn, children must do the work or “the act of knowing” (p. 99) themselves. She believed that to sustain children in their learning they must develop good habits of mind. Education is a discipline in that children must form good habits in order to sustain them through the amount of knowledge they

need to gain.

Habits are the tracks of life. They make decision making easier for children. Mason (1925) said that, in our efforts to move from an environment where habits are kept by the iron rule, we must remember that “habit is to life what rails are to transport cars” (p. 101). Without habits, daily life becomes insurmountable. In fact, she believed that habits are inevitable. If we do not take the time to develop good habits in children then wrong habits would develop. Habits of wrong thinking and acting would develop rather than habits of correct thinking and acting. “Habit is like fire, a bad master but an indispensable servant” (Mason, 1925, p. 101). Good habits allow children to have authority over themselves; habits allow them to have self-direction and self-control.

Mason (1925) believed that there is a problem with habits, which is that once they are formed change does not come easy. For her, a broad curriculum in which children have access to great minds, helps to alleviate this problem. It provides them with a large data base from which to make choices and decisions. She believed that the broader the curriculum, which provided children with a broad view of life, the easier it becomes for people to see and understand alternative ways to make decisions and to change. She said, “If we fail in this duty [providing a broad curriculum], so soon as the young people get their ‘liberty’ they will run after the first fad that presents itself” and thus remain doubtful of their own decision making and beliefs (p. 104).

### **Education is a Life**

In the phrase, education is a life, Mason (1925) was referring to the intellectual life (p. 105). Mason, as I have stated throughout this discussion, uses food nourishing the physical body as a metaphor to help us understand

her beliefs about the mind. The physical body is not self-sustaining, therefore it must have sustenance. She believed the same is true of the intellectual life of children. She stated that teachers and parents “should nourish his mind with ideas, the food of the intellectual life” (Mason, 1907, p. 217). The mind, she believed, is not self-sustaining; it needs sustenance. Not only did it need sustenance, she is quite clear that “the mind is capable of dealing with only one kind of food; it lives, grows and is nourished upon ideas only; mere information is to it as a meal of sawdust to the body” (Mason, 1925, p. 105). Not only is information not appropriate, Mason (1925) believed that we should not be so arrogant as to offer children our opinions as if they are ideas. The meager ideas that may possibly be contained in our opinions crystallize in the mind of children and therefore are not living ideas (p. 110). Mason believed that living ideas grow and make connections to other ideas. Sound bites or facts do not allow children to make such connections. An idea, she said, “‘strikes,’ ‘seizes,’ ‘catches hold of,’ ‘impresses’ us and at last, if it be big enough, ‘possesses’ us; in a word, behaves like an entity” (Mason, 1925, p. 105).

For children to have ideas that ‘possess’ them a broad curriculum is necessary, according to Mason (1925, p. 109). She concluded by saying that people, adults and children, wish not for “a naked generalisation, . . . but an idea clothed upon with fact, history, and story, so that the mind may perform the acts of selection and inception from a mass of illustrative details” (Mason, 1925, p. 111). Ideas from art, music, history, science, botany, architecture--a broad curriculum--is essential for children. In fact, she believed it is “their very bread of life” (p. 111). They must have a broad curriculum and they must have it regularly.

## **Summary**

Mason thought, based on her writings, that children are eager to learn and they can learn an amazing amount of material. We have, as their parents, teachers, or any adult in their lives, to make sure we do not over stimulate any one desire which in turn would alter inappropriately a child's values. We, nevertheless, must not use fear, love, suggestion, influence as means to motivate children to learn. She said,

It seems to me that education, which appeals to the desire for wealth (marks, prizes, scholarships, or the like) or to the desire of excelling (as in the taking of places, etc.), or to any other of the natural desires, except that for knowledge, destroys the balance of character; and what is even more fatal, destroys by inanition that desire for and delight in knowledge which is meant for our joy and enrichment through the whole of life. (Mason, 1907, p. 226)

Charlotte Mason believed that we must not exercise any undue pressure from our own personality onto the personality of children. To do so hinders the growth of the good nature in children. Such dependency creates a child who cannot think for herself. For children to develop a strong personality that would serve them well, they need to grow and learn in an environment that provides an education without undue influence on the part of the adult. Smith (1985) advocated the same principle when he said that "Teaching which relies heavily on manipulation will make it impossible for the pupil ever to reflect on the process of his education in any realistic way. . . . Learning to think about his learning is essential for a person who is ever to be able to take ultimate responsibility for his own education" (p. 28). There are, according to Mason, only three tools we are free to use in the education of children and they are the

use of an atmosphere (circumstances), a discipline (habit formation) and a life (the intellectual life).

I return now to The Children's Community School. There, through observations, documents and interviews, I looked for evidence of the views of the staff on the personality of children.

### **The Personality of Children: A Picture of Practice**

#### **Jessica Frost, The Director**

Thinking about the personality of children during my interview with Ms. Frost, I asked her the following question, "If I were a parent coming to check out your school, what would you want me to know?" She responded,

I'd want you to know that we view learning as a developmental process in the early years of our school and that we think the time from age 4 through third grade, approximately age 8, is a time when children have varying degrees of maturity. We like to make school a family oriented place, a place that is an extension of home where teachers work together to bring out what is best in each child. . . .I'd want you to know that we probably are strictest toward a child who insults or hurts another child.

From this comment it is clear that the school is making an effort to meet the child on his or her developmental level. Because of the belief that you meet children at their level and acknowledge that children mature at varying rates, I asked the question, How am I, as a parent, going to know how my child is doing at your school? She responded,

We give progress reports every six weeks because the early years are a time of uneven growth and maturation. We mark

children in a more subjective way at that time. At fourth grade we start giving numeric grades on tests and quizzes and reports and when averaging those grades, a letter grade goes home. I know that doesn't really reflect what Charlotte Mason was doing in England. It's our way of living within our community and reporting to our parents.

The use of grades are used by the school because of the pressure from parents. Although the school does not adhere to Mason's principle concerning grades, they still showed concern by trying to be an extension of the home and by minimizing the use of grades especially in kindergarten through third grade. According to Frost, their goal is to succeed at "bringing out the best in each child." Not one time during all my interviews, discussions, conversations or from what I have gleaned from documents and saw from observations did I notice a concern for school growth in numbers or an attitude of "school success." Comments were always made as to what is best for the children. This is an indication to this researcher that the personality of the children is highly regarded and cared for at this school.

In an article in the school newsletter entitled, "The Best Lessons," Ms. Frost discussed how the children at the Pleasantville Campus (grades four through eight) have developed and learned some of the best lessons in life. Each child accomplishing tasks better than any teacher could have designed. She said, "Our teachers labor over lesson plans. They write details for each idea they teach our children. School Directors read the plans weekly." She stated that the staff attends conferences to help them better understand the developmental needs of children. She ended the first paragraph of her article by asking the question, "If we are doing all these things well, then how did we

let a few nine and ten-year-olds outsmart us?" She discussed in the article that the children had developed lessons, the best lessons of life, on their own by deciding on a project, to build the forts. She said,

To qualify as best, lessons must meet certain requirements.

There is always an element of adventure involved. One must conquer elements previously beyond his control. Risk is a part of the best lessons. And above all, the lessons are unexpected.

**The Forts** meet all the criteria. Students labored for days using natural materials found in the woods outside Pleasantville Church. (Did anyone bring a concealed knife to school to trim vines? Don't ask; don't tell.) From somewhere in the group architects emerged to design the forts. Everyone wanted the best job--construction worker. No one was willing to sit on the sideline and miss toiling and sweating. Our children know instinctively that the one who does the work is worthy of the reward.

Fourth grade boys unanimously agreed on a "no girls" policy. A battle ensued. Then a representative form of government was established. Girls are now welcome on a limited basis. Jack's arms were covered with poison ivy; he didn't need to trouble the school staff--he treated himself. Henry cut his leg on bamboo. That did require a doctor's stitch. Mrs. Smith tore her pants; now she will have to learn to sew.

Every child worth his salt knows that the woods are safer and more inspiring than his hygienic neighborhood. The child's imagination takes him to the woods. Our imaginations send

them to the future. We have many dreams for our children, but they will not achieve any if they do not take chances. Pity the poor child who is not allowed to risk climbing the stairs for fear he will fall. . . .

Without adult intervention, resourceful children have learned to accept responsibility, cooperate with one another, take risks, develop and carry out a plan, engage in strenuous physical labor, solve problems, and treat injuries. Everyone made an “A” on the final test: accomplishment of a worthwhile goal.

There are several comments in this quote that I would like to address as they relate to Mason’s beliefs about personality. First, I will address her belief about atmosphere. She thought that children should see life as it is. This is to be done in a way that is appropriate for children. I believe the example here of the children building the forts is an example of “life as it is,” that is appropriate for children. The children were allowed to build forts in the wood near the school. As you can tell in the picture that the forts do not resemble the fortresses of Europe. However, the children were allowed to build them using what they could find in the wood and using their own imagination, and as a result, the forts appear as though children have built them. When the children came up with the idea to build the forts, adults at the school did not move in to help thereby, creating forts that children could not make by themselves. The children had to use the materials available to them and also cope with what they had. In the process of building the forts, the children learned far more about building and working with wood, people and materials than they would have learned if the adults had helped them build beautiful forts. It is the natural



circumstances that arose as they built the forts that used the children's power of imagination to complete the task.

Ms. Frost said, "Fourth grade boys unanimously agreed on a 'no girls' policy. A battle ensued." The students had to learn the skills of negotiation in order to resolve their differences. The girls with their own self-efficacy demanded better treatment. Hence "a representative form of government was



*Figure 11.* The Students' Forts

established." The boys were not protected from the consequences of their decision. I'm sure, once their "no girls" policy was made, an argument ensued from the girls. As a consequence of the battle that erupted, the students learned something of compromise and self-government. They also learned something of deferring to others and not always having life their way. "Life as it is" forced them to reconsider decisions they had made. This is an example of what Mason meant when she suggested using a child's circumstances and when suggesting that children not be educated in a hot-house.

“Jack’s arms were covered with poison ivy; he didn’t need to trouble the school staff--he treated himself.” Here is another example of children living life as it is and developing a sense of independence and self-determination. On the other hand when another student cut his leg on bamboo and required a doctor’s stitch, the school or parents intervened and got the appropriate help. Further, even though one child was hurt severely enough to require stitches, the children were allowed to continue with their adventure.

“Without adult intervention, resourceful children have learned to accept responsibility, cooperate with one another, take risks, develop and carry out a plan, engage in strenuous physical labor, solve problems, and treat injuries.” This is an example of Mason’s concern that children not be kept in a glass house but about children who are given the opportunity to see and experience life as it is. Teachers were not dominating the children in any way. In fact, teachers were only monitoring the playground as usual. The staff made the choice to let the children develop the forts and all the subsequent rules and relationships without adult interference. Here Mason’s principles of adults not manipulating children is practiced. Further, her comment about children experiencing “life as it is” can be seen at work in this situation.

Additionally, the children used the forts as an extension of the classroom, thus fulfilling Mason’s desire that the intellectual life of children be stimulating. They did not just play mindless games. They organized battles and relived the American Revolution and the American Civil War, thereby bringing the “intellectual life” to the forts. Education is a life, meaning intellectual life, was one of Mason’s tools for education. In this situation the children brought from the classroom the “intellectual life” and relived it as they played their games.

Here is a school that allowed the natural development and learning of

children to take place. Having seen the place where the children built the forts and knowing what was involved, I know that this could easily have been an activity stopped by the school staff for safety reasons. However, the lessons learned in this situation will probably go with these children through life. But more importantly to this discussion, the children's natural personality, their natural inclinations were allowed to emerge and develop freely. The end results were many lessons learned about life, about academics, and about themselves as people. In this situation their own strength of character emerged to show who they are as persons: their diverse personalities emerged and triumphed.

#### **Ms. Lightfoot and Ms. Washington, Fourth Grade Teachers**

In discussing the personality of children, Ms. Lightfoot and Ms. Washington, wanted me to understand that the school purposefully has small numbers of students in each classroom so that individual learning styles and individual needs of children can be met. Ms. Lightfoot gave the following example.

. . . I think this environment is very good for a little girl that I have who is very emotionally sensitive and her classmates are very tolerant and we, as teachers, try to be tolerant but we are also trying to teach her to get over it. She has been here longer than I have so I really don't know how she came in, but I think she is really improving this year. I think she has grown up a little bit and she is maturing and learning how to control her tears and learning when it's appropriate and when it is not. I think the children, the classmates, are just very tolerant, very good to each other and very concerned about each other. You are not going

to find them making fun of each other, thank goodness.

Ms. Washington gave an example of a student who came to her with a nervous blinking of his eyes and other facial movements. She claimed that in a safe environment where his personality can develop, as the year has progressed there is less and less of his facial twitches. As I mentioned in my discussion on Mason's beliefs about personality, in an environment where children feel safe, physical manifestations of inward fear are resolved. Children in a safe environment do not have a need to "downshift" as Caine and Caine (1994) stated. At The Children Community School we see children in an emotionally healthy environment that brings out the shy and timid children. In both of these situations the use of fear, love, suggestion, influence or teacher's personality are not used to manipulate the children. Rather, they develop at their own rate which is suggested by the comment concerning the child who had been at the school longer than the teacher, but, who was only then beginning to develop beyond her emotional uneasiness. Ms. Lightfoot stated, "we are also trying to teach her to get over it." In the context of this conversation Ms. Lightfoot was indicating that she felt it her responsibility to help the child be self-confident and not become emotional uneasy, thereby, helping the child develop her own self-strength.

### **Ms. German, Director of the Middle School**

During my interviews with Ms. German, I noticed a certain straightforwardness about her thoughts concerning the school, the children, her children and herself. This is true of her thoughts on standardized tests. She has a problem with them, feeling that such tests do not meet the individual needs of children. She feels pushed between two systems of thinking about children: one, to meet the child where he or she is and work from there, and the

other, to conform all children to the same instructional methods, curriculum and assessments and management. She wants more subjective type assessments to give room for more individualization and to more specifically meet the needs of individual children. However, she said,

The parents want a grade on a report card. That's what they know. Everybody who comes to this school wants to know what our standardized test scores were last year. That doesn't mean a thing to me, but yet, when my kids scored in the 97th percentile, I was proud. Philosophically, I hate standardized tests because I don't think they show a thing. It's really a conflict and I don't think it is going to be resolved anytime soon.

Mason believed that children who receive grades begin to work for the grade and not to know. It is interesting to note that according to Ms. German, the parents want to know the scores of the school. They do not ask for direct evidence of children's learning. The parents make the assumption that above average standardized test scores are indicative of a good school. They do not ask for evidence of what children actually know. The Children's Community School, like many others, seems to be more interested in what children know than the grades they make, but the school is operating from a belief that is not shared by many of the parents. The school's unspoken philosophy of grades matches that of Mason. They need at this time to convince their parents which this researcher believes could be a possibility.

### **Ms. Norman, Director of the Lower School**

Ms. Norman gave an example of how the school allows the personality of a child to bloom. She gave the example of a third grader who came to them unable to make eye contact and showing signs of insecurity. He was a poor

performer in math. To help him, the school got extra help for him in math. As he grew more confident in his studies, although a quiet child, he now makes eye contact and talks to adults. She feels that his poor performance in his former school was creating an environment for him that made him feel unaccepted and belittled. Because The Children's Community School met his individual needs his personality slowly emerged from behind a blanket of fear of failure. She believes his personality was always there; however, fear and low self-esteem developed from poor school performance had submerged his personality. The use of fear was holding this child back. Probably, the school where he came from had no consciousness of using fear. But, whether it used fear overtly or covertly, it amounts to the same learning situation for the child. That is to say, whether the circumstances were fearful only from the child's perspective or whether the adults at the school directly caused fear does not matter in the sense that the child in either circumstance could not learn. Again, the parents conscious of the needs of their child intervened and move him child to a school that would meet his needs. The use of fear should not be considered, according to Mason, a natural means of motivating children. Fear is a manipulative tool.

I asked Ms. Norman, How do you avoid the use of love, suggestion, influence as manipulative tools to control children? She stated that as a parent and teacher she listens to and learns from Ms. Frost. She has learned from her not to use the "God control thing" on children to get a certain behavior. She said,

I have been guilty of this. The point I knew with my own daughter that I was really messing up, I think she was probably in second grade. She was doing something for school and she had an

idea of something she wanted to do for this project. I didn't mean to, but what I told her was her idea was really lousy, use mine. She said to me, why don't you just tell me what you want me to do. I thought, no I don't mean that, but that is what I meant. I had used my power of suggestion.

### **Reflections**

Each of the staff members at The Children's Community School seem to understand the significance of Mason's principle of cherishing a child's personality. It is obvious that they struggle with cultural influences that can pull teachers away from that view of children. They gave examples. Ms. German and Jessica felt assessments need to be subjective to better meet the needs of children. The parents, who only seem to believe that they can judge a school on standardized tests, create a conflict for the staff. However, protecting the personality of children seems to be accomplished well at the school. As with the school's philosophy of discipline, this researcher believes the school needs to spend more time training the parents concerning the philosophy of Mason about personality. Parents who choose to put their children in a private, nurturing school may well be open to understanding more about the importance of personality development in their children.

## Chapter 7

### **Narration: One Aspect of Mason's Pedagogy**

This may be fancy, though I think the memory of most of us can go farther back into such times than many of us suppose; just as I believe the power of observation in numbers of very young children to be quite wonderful of its closeness and accuracy. Indeed, I think that most grown men who are remarkable in this respect, may with greater propriety be said not to have lost the faculty, than to have acquired it; the rather, as I generally observe such men to retain a certain freshness, and gentleness, and capacity of being pleased, which are also an inheritance they have preserved from their childhood. Dickens (*David Copperfield*, 1962, p. 13)

In this chapter I discuss Charlotte Mason's pedagogy. There is much written in her books on instruction but for purposes of this paper I narrow the topic to narration. Narration is a predominate practice in Parents' National Education Union (PNEU) schools and in homes where Mason's philosophy and pedagogy are practiced. However, narration is not the only methodology used by Mason. And further, what is identified as narration on a closer look is much more complicated than children simply sitting in a classroom reading a selection and telling it back.

In attempting to unpack the complexities of narration, I begin with a historical look at narration starting with the use of the ancient oral tradition in the training of the Jewish priests. Then I acquaint the reader with the oral tradition that, according to Albert Lord (1964) and David Rubin (1995), was used to transfer knowledge, poetry and music to the next generation for thousands of years. Next, I correlate the work of Sir Frederic Bartlett (1932, 1995) on memory, the work of Caine and Caine on brain based learning and that of O'Keefe and Nadel (1978) on memory to the work of Mason. The work of Richard Allington (1994), Hazel Brown (1987), Brian Cambourne (1987) and other current learning theorists is important to this discussion. A discussion of narration would almost seem pointless without a discussion of the effect of



narration on language development. Brown and Cambourne (1987) play a key role. Mason's views on narration are the central focus of this chapter so it seems appropriate to look at narration lessons and discussions that occurred during her time. In the last section of this chapter entitled, *Voices from the Past*, I look at articles from the *Parents' Review*, which was a monthly journal edited by Mason, and published by the PNEU. These articles are about some aspect of narration written by people very familiar with Mason and her work. I chose to use the work of Elsie Kitching (1928), Eleanor Frost (1915) and G. F. Husband (1924). Elsie Kitching was Mason's closest assistant and friend. Eleanor Frost in 1915 did demonstration lessons at the annual PNEU summer conference to which were invited parents, teachers, interested persons and children. The children all participated in the lessons while as many as forty or fifty adults watched. G. F. Husband was well known in PNEU circles. The last section of this chapter is a journey back to The Children's Community School where I look at their use of narration.

## **Narration**

Narration is a telling back of what one has heard, seen or read. The goal in narration actually begins before the narration. As a matter of daily practice, children in Mason's day were given one chance to hear a reading selection. This was purposeful on the part of Mason because she wanted to build into children the habit of giving full attention to whatever task is at hand. Children were expected to sequence the story and to give as many details from the story as they could remember. Narrations are never to be interrupted with questions by the teacher. A child could be stopped only to ask another child to continue with the narration or to add other details. Narrations could also be done in writing, drawing or dramatizing. Why did Mason(1925) refer to narration as "the

act of knowing” (p. 99).

Mason, as I have referred to frequently throughout this discussion, used the example of the body’s processing of food as a metaphor to help her reader understand her views on learning. Just as food has to be processed by each individual’s body and no one could process our food for us, the same is true of spiritual food, each individual has to nourish his or her own mind. To nourish the mind, each individual has to process her own spiritual food. It cannot be predigested by others, parents or teachers. There are acts we can do to break down the food; however, the actual processing of spiritual or physical food must be digested by the person’s own mind or body. Narration is a tool that Mason used to help children process their own spiritual banquet. In the telling back of what they have heard using their full attention, children process the information for themselves by questioning their own minds through the process of remembering what is read. Thus the learning becomes part of the child. Before I get too involved in the discussion of narration proper, I would like to give a brief historical background on narration.

### **Brief Historical Background**

The Jewish people were commanded by God to teach subsequent generations about the covenant he had established with Abraham. When the law was given to Moses they were commanded to teach the law to future generations. “And what other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today? Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them slip from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them” (Deut. 4: 8-9, NIV). To emphasize his point, Moses repeated his comments in Deuteronomy chapter 6,

verses 6 and 7. He said, “These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up” (NIV).

In the ancient near East teaching the next generation was done orally since written texts were not available, and if they had been they would not have been widely copied at that time. Gerhardson (1979), in his book *The Origin of the Gospel Tradition*, said “One could suggest a pedagogical simplification and say that Torah functioned in three external forms or dimensions: (a) as verbal tradition, (b) as practical tradition, and (c) as institutional tradition” (p. 12). He further stated that as far as into the Fourth Century A.D. the Torah Tradition was still being passed down orally (p. 19). There seems to have been a pedagogical method for passing down orally the Torah.

There was a huge amount of material that had to be learned by the students. By the time of Jesus there was the complete Old Testament as well as other writings. Gerhardson (p. 19-24) discussed eight characteristics of the pedagogy used to help the students learn the Torah and other knowledge. First, almost all knowledge was learned through the use of sayings and texts. These were committed to memory. Second, the pattern of instruction seemed to have been “(a) the learning of the text, and (b) the effort required to comprehend the meaning of the text: analysis, commentary, exposition” (p. 20). Just as a written text was generated before one could make comments on it, so the oral text must have been produced before commentary could be made. The students, therefore, retold what was learned to guarantee that the oral text had been thoroughly mastered. Third, on the part of the teacher, they were to speak clearly and to the point. No learning of text was to be wasted on verbosity.

Fourth, Gerhardson said that to enable the learner, the teacher employed didactic instruction, poetry and other devices. They used such devices as alliteration, assonance, rhythmic phrases, picturesque language, and others. Fifth, repetition was employed frequently. Sixth, texts were read aloud in a sing-song, rhythmical voice. The sounds of the words, the rhythms and melodies of the sentences were used to help with the learning of the texts. Seventh, according to Gerhardson, the oral tradition by the time of Jesus was still preferred to the written tradition. The writing of texts was being used at that time as an aid in the oral tradition. Eighth, Gerhardson said the rabbis had no interest in lessons that were simply a cramming for recitation. The rabbis, in fact, continually led a crusade against “lifeless knowledge” (p. 24). It can be understood from the work of Gerhardson that the use of hearing knowledge and giving it back orally, called the oral tradition, has been used effectively to transfer precisely an abundance of knowledge from one generation to another for many years.

The oral tradition was used in other contexts to pass on knowledge. One of those was the oral song and epic poem. Albert Lord (1964) said in his book, *The Singer of Tales*, that through his study of the epic poetry of Yugoslavia, he watched the oral tradition in process. His conclusion was:

We realize that what is called oral tradition is as intricate and meaningful an art form as its derivative “literary tradition.” In the extended sense of the word, oral tradition is as “literary” as literary tradition. It is not simply a less polished, more haphazard, or cruder second cousin twice removed, to literature. By the time the written techniques come onto the stage, the art forms have been long set and are already highly developed and ancient. (p. 141)

Before writing was invented and widely used the passing on of knowledge, poetry, music was done through the use of oral transmission. It seemed that Lord and Gerhardson agreed that the use of the oral tradition did not weaken the content. In other words, the use of committing knowledge to memory and having to depend on the memory of humans did not weaken the authenticity of the knowledge being passed on orally. In fact, David Rubin in his book, *Memory in Oral Traditions* (1995), said, "The transmission of oral traditions is remarkable to the modern, literate observer. Songs, stories, and poems are kept in stable form in memory for centuries without the use of writing, whereas the literate observer has trouble remembering what happened yesterday without notes" (p. 3).

Mason's (1925) historical references to previous use of narration are few. However, she gives several examples of how it was used. First, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries Mason makes reference to narration as being considered a gentleman's equipment. She gives as an example the use of narration by Shakespeare in his play *Henry VIII*. A character in the story who attended the coronation of Anne Boleyn came to those waiting outside the coronation and retold the sequence of events. This incident, she believed, was a stage device used by Shakespeare that he took from a practice used in real life (p. 173). The ability to retell such an incident was considered part of a gentleman's equipment and was used up to approximately two generations before Mason's time (p. 173). Second, apparently, there was a famous story in England of a Mr. Fox at a college supper who retold a complete pamphlet by Burke, which, Mason wrote, was no small feat. She made the assumption that he had read the pamphlet no more than once or twice (p. 29). This ability to retell is a gift, as Dickens believed, that children naturally have and only needs

to be developed.

### **The Importance of Narration**

Mason took the idea of the oral tradition and used it effectively to help children retain a large amount of knowledge. From her writings it is clear that she is after the same effect as the Jewish rabbis who wanted the knowledge of their students to live in their minds. And, according to Gerhardson (1979), the Jewish rabbis were not interested in their students memorizing text to regurgitate for examinations. As they were opposed to “lifeless knowledge” (p. 24) so was she. She said (1925), “a passage to be memorised requires much conning, much repetition, and meanwhile the learners are ‘thinking’ about other matters, that is the mind is not at work in the act of memorising. To read a passage with full attention and to tell it afterwards has a curiously different effect” (p. 173).

Mason has several purposes in using narration, such as its effect on language development. The fundamental reason, however, is consistent with her belief that children must act upon information themselves in order to learn it. Her views about the personhood of children as being created in the image of God and thereby being agents of their own learning, was feeding her view of instruction. She used the metaphor of our consumption of food as a means to explain her understanding of children as agents of their own learning. She believed children had to ‘digest’ their own mental food just as their bodies had to digest their own physical food. Therefore, if children are agents of their own learning and digest their own spiritual food as they digest their own physical food, then instruction must be organized in a way that allows children to accomplish this task. Mason believed, therefore, that the lecture method of teaching is not always the best. She does not dismiss the lecture method as a

method of instruction that should never be used; however, if people must process their own learning, then the “talky-talky” teacher with wonderful, entertaining lessons is not appropriate. She wanted to devise a method that allows children to mentally act on information and touch them personally as they receive it, thereby making it a part of themselves. She said (1925) about narration,

He will find that in the act of narrating every power of his mind comes into play, that points and bearings which he had not observed are brought out; that the whole is *visualized* [italics added] and brought into relief in an extraordinary way; in fact, that scene or argument has become a part of his personal experience; he *knows*, he has assimilated what he has read.

*This is not memory work.* In order to memorise, we repeat over and over a passage or a series of points or names with the aid of such clues as we can invent; *we do memorise a string of facts or words, and the new possession serves its purpose for a time, but it is not assimilated; its purpose being served, we know it no more* [italics added]. (p. 16)

Narration is a way to have children do what Mason (1925) called “the act of knowing” (p. 99). Children by retelling what they have heard, read or seen had to assimilate the information personally and the information they are narrating becomes personal knowledge acted upon by their minds, emotions and spirits. It requires the total use of mind.

In her writings Mason makes several points about the use of mind that relates to the value she placed on narration. First, she (1925) believed that, “the mind can know nothing except what it can express in the form of an answer to a

question put by the mind to itself” (p. 16). That is to say, the mind can only digest what is meaningful to it. Therefore, the passive mind becomes quickly tired and bored (p. 15). The lecture method, the “talky-talky” teacher or “twaddle” (p. 16) put the student’s mind in the passive mode. She said, “The mind tacitly prohibits questioning from without; (this does not, of course, affect the Socratic use of questioning for purposes of moral conviction): and it is necessary to intellectual certainty, to the act of knowing” (p. 17). In this sense Mason is a true constructivist, for the constructivist (Brooks and Brooks, 1993) would, “look not for what students can repeat, but for what they can generate, demonstrate and exhibit” (p. 16). To tell something back, she contended, we must “generate” the knowledge or go over it in our minds, putting questions to our minds (self-questioning from within not from without by the teacher) which causes us to internalize the information. The use of rote or “word memory” (Mason, 1925, p. 173) simply causes us to memorize information long enough for immediate use and then to lose it. But “mind memory” (p. 173) requires something different. She (1925) said,

Trusting to mind memory we visualize the scene, are convinced by the arguments, take pleasure in the turn of the sentences and frame our own upon them; in fact that particular passage or chapter has been received into us and become a part of us just as literally as was yesterday’s dinner; nay, more so, for yesterday’s dinner is of little account to-morrow; but several months, perhaps years hence, we shall be able to narrate the passage. . . . (p. 173)

In her books Mason makes the point that the mind must actively be engaged in the learning process. If this is true, then it is not the actions of the



teacher that should dominate the classroom but what the mind of the children is doing becomes the focal point. This is an interesting point for me personally, as I review my university training and as I experienced observations of my teaching by my administrators. Not once do I remember being asked what the students learned, rather the focus was on my actions and behaviors. Mason wanted to organize instruction to guarantee that children would act on the material to be learned and not be a passive recipient of information, therefore, the behaviors of the teacher become less important than the behaviors of the student.

To get a complete understanding of Mason's views on pedagogy, I must make a short, seeming digression. Mason was confronted with a world that was influenced by materialism. This materialism had grown out of Locke's views on how we gain knowledge about the universe as well as the influence of Darwin's views on the origins of life and the subsequent influence his views had on education. She believed that "we are paying in our education of today for the wave of materialism that spread over the country a hundred years ago. People do not take the trouble to be definitely materialistic now, but our educational thought has received a trend which carries us whither we would not" (p. 260). In her writings she goes on to say that because of a materialistic view of the world educators accept any new method that comes along without properly understanding it. According to her, this is caused by a devaluation of the mind. She said, "We have ceased to believe in mind, and though we would not say in so many words that 'the brain secretes thought as the liver secretes bile,' yet the physical brain rather than the spiritual mind is our objective in education" (p. 260), and as a result we have come to believe that the purpose of education is to function in life. Her view was that education is to provide us with an abundant life.

Further, because we view the mind of children as being a physical brain or “sac,” then the role of the teacher is to fill this sac with knowledge. Hence, the teacher becomes the actor and the children are the acted upon. The teacher is in the “one up” position, the person with the knowledge and the children are in the “one down” position as the baby bird waiting to be fed by its mother. This view of learning is in contradiction to what she had observed in children and in contradiction to her view that children are created in the image of God thus giving them intrinsic value. Schaeffer said, “The humanist thinkers, beginning from themselves autonomously, either come to the conclusion that there are no values and meaning or suddenly try to produce values and meaning out of rhetoric” (p. 150). For Mason it is not enough to believe ideologically that children are persons and yet teach them as if they are not. This concept is more than rhetoric to her. The whole basis of her use of narration is predicated on her belief that children are created in the image of God and, therefore, change from within. This led her to believe that the mind can only know that which it has acted upon itself.

Another consideration of the mind that is important to Mason (1925) is what she called “informing ideas” or “proper pabulum” (p. 15) or what is called today ‘background knowledge.’ She believed that new learning is built on old learning. Sir Frederic C. Bartlett (1932,1995)in his book, *Remembering: A Study in Experimental and Social Psychology*, addressed this issue in his description or definition of the term “schema.” He said, “‘Schema’ refers to an active organisation of past reactions, or of past experiences, which must always be supposed to be operating in any well-adapted organic response” (p. 201). He went on to say that each action is predicated on previous actions and these actions were not just passively occurring but “have to be regarded as

constituents of living, momentary settings belonging to the organism. . . and [are not] a number of individual events strung together and stored within the organism” (p. 201). Mason’s (1925) point is that the mind declines to assimilate facts or information without its proper “pabulum” (p. 15). As Bartlett said, so Mason agreed, memory is not just a series of events stored in our minds with no connection to each other, but rather, each new idea is informed by previous learning. She realized that for children to learn new material, the new learning has to be built on previous learning so that the child can make connections to previous learning. Therefore, children narrated short sections daily from what she considered a well-written book, building each day on the narration from the previous day. This slow, daily narration allows children the time to deeply know what their minds are acting on. In the chapter on curriculum I discuss how history lessons are structured sequentially so that each narration is built on the previous narration taking the child over a period of years through history.

Books written in a literary style were another issue for Mason (1925). She believed that the mind of children rejects any information it receives that is not in literary form (p. 256), and that when given information in a literary style the curiosity of the child’s mind is stimulated (p. 16). She based this observation on the thousands of children she observed over her sixty years of educational study and research. This is true of children, she said, no matter their socioeconomic condition. Non-literary, dry, dessicated textbooks do not touch the mind. In terms of a subject such as natural science, the books used should be well illustrated, but, the best method for teaching such subjects is through “field work” (p. 16).

Narration, therefore, is the instructional tool that allows children to know and help to accomplish Mason’s goal of children retaining knowledge without a

great deal of labor. With there being such a huge amount of information that children must process, Mason was looking for a means to accomplish such a daunting task. Narration is a means to help children digest their own information, digest large amounts of information and then to remember it as if recalling what one ate for yesterday's dinner. Caine and Caine (1997) referred to the research of O'Keefe and Nadel (1978) who "suggest that we have a spatial/autobiographical memory that does not need rehearsal and allows for 'instant' recall of experiences. This is the system that registers the details of your meal last night. It is always engaged, inexhaustible, and motivated by novelty" (p. 107). Mason (1925) said it this way,

Every teacher knows how a class will occupy itself diligently by the hour and accomplish nothing, even though the boys think they have been reading. We all know how ill we could stand an examination on the daily papers over which we pore. Details fail us, we can say,--"Did you see such and such an article?" but are not able to outline its contents. We try to remedy this vagueness in children by making them take down, and get up, notes of a given lesson; but we accomplish little. The mind appears to have an outer court into which matter can be taken and again expelled without ever having entered the *inner place where personality dwells* [italics added]. Here we have the secret of learning by rote, a purely mechanical exercise of which no satisfactory account has been given, but which leaves the patient, or pupil, unaffected. (p. 257)

Mason believed that when new information touches the inner court of the mind "where personality dwells" (p. 257) perhaps the same as O'Keefe and Nadel's

“spatial/autobiographical memory” (Caine and Caine, 1997, p. 107), children remember the information as they remember yesterday’s dinner. The new learning touches them personally because narration requires of them to reformulate the new learning into themselves. Learning that does not touch personally or learning done by rote is soon forgotten.

There are two concepts of Mason’s beliefs about learning that touch on O’Keefe and Nadel’s concept of novelty. First, she (1925) said, “They cannot go over the same ground repeatedly without deadening, even paralysing results, for progress, *continual progress is the law of intellectual life* [italics added]” (p. 53). Motivated by novelty was a key point. R. M. Restak (1979) in his book *The Brain*, discussed how humans are happy to seek novelty or new learning (p. 17). Caine and Caine (1997) and Jensen (1998) each discussed the human’s natural curiosity or need for novelty. Mason believed that our curiosity is a natural desire that propels us to learn new knowledge. Therefore, covering the same content again and again until children ‘get it’ is one sure way of losing children’s interest. In the process of narration new information is learned every day thus the need for novelty is met.

Currently, many reading programs have promoted the answering of questions at the end of or during a reading selection as a means of determining whether or not children understand what is read. Mason believed that questioning children about bits and pieces of a story does not help children to internalize the story or help children make the story ‘their own.’ Questioning, she believed, interrupts the thinking process, thereby causing more of a hindrance than being a help. Richard Allington (1994) agreed. He said that students in this country spend more time answering recall questions than summarizing (p. 23). According to Allington students are more often asked to,

“copy out information from a text than they are to be assigned an activity that asks them to synthesize information from two or more texts. They are more likely to be interrogated about the facts of a story than involved in a discussion of the author’s craft in producing the story” (p.23). He continued,

Somewhere along the way we confused comprehension with question-answering (Allington & Weber, 1993). School questions are different from the questions we pose outside of school. In school we ask known-answer questions--we interrogate. Outside of school we ask authentic questions--questions we do not know the answer to but are interested in having answered. . . .

To foster understanding, children will need substantially less interrogation and substantially more opportunities to observe and engage in conversations about books, stories, and other texts they have read. . . . (p. 23)

Bartlett (1932, 1995) in his seminal work *Remembering: A Study in Experimental and Social Psychology* said, “the character of what is perceived is lost, the moment we seek to analyse it into partial percepts.” We do in fact, Bartlett said, “respond to whatever is presented as unitary” (p. 31). The “known-answer” question format of which Allington spoke, dissects the narrative and does not allow the children to understand the whole. Children must see it as a unit or whole. Stopping children to ask questions about a reading selection to check for understanding disrupts the child’s process of internalizing the selection. It fragments the story, or, instead of the story being a unit, it becomes pieces. Such teaching destroys the child’s ability to see the whole.

Children must process in their own minds the whole of the story so that

more than just comprehension occurs. Processing the whole, allows a child to bring his whole mind to bare on understanding. To comprehend is defined by Merriam-Webster (1981) as: "To see the nature, significance or meaning of: grasp mentally" (p. 467). G. F. Husband in a 1924, *Parents' Review* article, implied that narration caused learning to go deeper than just comprehension. Husband said that narration developed correctly requires attention and its partner, reflection (p. 616). With attention and reflection children, "condense, classify, generalize, infer, judge, visualize, discriminate, labour with their minds" (p. 616). Husband went on to say that, "The value of narration does not lie wholly in the swift acquisition of knowledge and its sure retention. Properly dealt with, it produced a mental transfiguration. It provided much more exercise for the mind than was possible under other circumstances and there was a corresponding degree of alertness and acquisitiveness" (p. 614). Brian Cambourne (1995) discussed this concept using the word transformation rather than the word transfiguration. Merriam-Webster (1981) treats these words as synonyms. Cambourne (1995) said,

Transformation is the process that enables learners to 'own' or be responsible for their learning. The process of making something one's own involves learners transforming the meanings and/or skills that someone else has demonstrated into a set of meanings and/or skills that are uniquely theirs.

In the domain of language, this is highly similar to creating personal paraphrases. Expressing some concept or knowledge in one's own words while closely approximating the core meanings involved seems to co-occur with the decision to take control of (i.e., assume ownership of, take responsibility for) the

concepts and knowledge involved. Our data suggest that learning that is not accompanied by transformation is shallow and transitory. (p. 188)

Mason (1925) believed that when a child transforms knowledge for himself through narration, what he tells back becomes original work. She said, "He requires that in most cases Knowledge be communicated to him in literary form; and reproduces such Knowledge touched by his own personality; thus his reproduction becomes original" (p. 18). Bartlett (1932, 1995) said, "that memory, in its full sense, always contains a peculiarly personal reference." He went on to say that "the appetites, instinctive tendencies, attitudes, interests and ideals . . . display an order of predominance among themselves. Moreover, this order remains relatively persistent for a given organism. This is equivalent to saying that recall is inevitably determined by temperament and character" (p. 308). Because each of us has our own set of "appetites, instinctive tendencies, attitudes, interests and ideals" our retelling of narratives becomes personal and original. Yetta Goodman (1982) added another dimension by saying that, "the retelling procedure when compared with other procedures, constrains the least the reader's ability to represent what has been comprehended" (p. 302), thereby allowing the originality or our own set of attributes to be reflected in the learning process or in the "act of knowing."

The purpose of narration for Mason was to provide children, agents of their own learning, a means by which they could activate their minds in such a way as to be able to recall readily large quantities of knowledge. Narrating new material constantly fed children new learning, which is a key factor in the learning process. Curiosity, according to Mason (1925, p. 18), was our natural desire to know. She believed that attention enabled us to fulfill that desire. She



(1925) said,

Complete and entire attention is a natural function which requires no effort and causes no fatigue; the anxious labour of mind of which we are at times aware comes when attention wanders and has again to be brought to the point; but the concentration at which most teachers aim is an innate provision for education and is not the result of training or effort. (p. 171)

Bob Sylwester (1997) said, “the best teachers know that kids learn more readily when they are emotionally involved in the lesson because emotion drives attention, which drives learning and memory. It’s biologically impossible to learn anything that you’re not paying attention to; the attentional mechanism drives the whole learning and memory process” (p. 17). The mixing of the need for our personality to be involved in the learning process and our need for attention in order for us to easily recall knowledge is evident in Sylwester’s writing. If emotion drives attention, then this could be the reason for Mason’s call for the use of “the literary style” book. The word literary originates from the two Latin words for literature and letter. Literature and letters are quite personal works of art. Therefore, a “literary style” book would be narrative in nature and engaged the learner on a personal level where our emotions are more easily accessed.

Eric Jensen (1998) said that “genuine ‘external’ attention can be sustained at a high and constant level for only a short time, generally 10 minutes or less” (p. 45). Mason’s classes were often fifteen to twenty minutes in length. To avoid “scrappy” knowledge, fifteen-minute classes do not seem to be the answer. How does one go deep into a subject and at the same time not spend more than fifteen to twenty minutes on a subject. Jensen (1998) said,

“evidence suggests that the brain’s ability to stay attentive for extended periods of time is not only rare, but also difficult” (p. 42). He went on to suggest that the brain has times of strong attention and time of less attention (p. 44). Instruction, in his view, needs to reflect this change in attention. Mason designed narration as a means to use the ten to fifteen minutes of peak attention. Once the attention began to wane, Mason believed teachers should make the shift to another subject. Elsie Kitching (1928), Mason’s protege, stated, “Miss Mason used to say that anything short of full attention was a waste of time, and that was why she insisted on short lessons and many and varied subjects.”

Thus far, I have discussed why narration was important to Mason. It is consistent with her beliefs about the personhood of children. For Mason it matched children’s attention span. Narration also causes learning to be deeply embedded in the mind whereas rote learning is there only long enough to use it for a test and then it is gone never to be recalled. There are still more reasons for the use of narration.

In this discussion I have addressed the use of narration in ancient times as well as how Mason used narration. However, Mason believed that narration had an effect on language development as well. Are there current learning theorists that agree with her? In the next portion of this essay, I elaborate on the effects of narration on language development.

### **Narration and Language Development**

Mason (1925) claimed that through narration or “the act of knowing” (p. 292) children “learn incidentally to write and speak with vigour and style and usually to spell well” (p. 292). Narration, she claimed develop the power of oral composition (p. 190). All the reading and retelling done between the ages of six and nine become the background knowledge for essays which children begin to

write at approximately age nine. The time spent in narration even before children could read and write gives the children an abundance of language experience before the mechanics of reading and writing instruction begin (p. 30). During the early years of narration, the children are gaining knowledge about their world. I have heard it said only recently that kindergarten through third grade children learn to read and at third grade they read to learn. Mason believed, as did Piaget, that for children to sit in a school for three years to learn to read is wasteful. She said they begin to learn the mechanics of reading early, but the process of narration allows them to build a large amount of background knowledge, sentence patterns, word patterns, all which help a child learn to read and write. In a Mason (1935) classroom, instruction in the mechanics of reading and writing begin as the children show interest (p. 202). Further, because children use the language patterns found in the books they narrate, Mason (1925) believed that children should only narrate from books written by the best minds a society has to offer (p. 190). What have some current educational theorists said about narration?

Brown and Cambourne (1987) described narration as an “all-purpose, extremely powerful learning activity. . .it encapsulate(s) all the principles of the wholistic/natural learning model” (p. 1). Specifically, the authors said that,

During the actual written retelling phase, the reteller is engaged in a whole range of significant language processes, including literal recall of events, characters, main points, rhetorical features, stylistic devices and text structure.

In addition, the reteller, when writing the retelling, must engage in a continuous cycle of different cognitive activities, including the selection of information and rhetorical and stylistic

devices, the organisation and summarising of information, and paraphrasing.

While reading the original text, reading a peer's retelling, and creating (i.e. writing) his or her own retelling text, the participant is continually engaging and re-engaging with spelling and punctuation conventions.

Most importantly, Brown and Cambourne (1987) said, "the first reading of the original text is characterised by a concentration on meaning and the comprehension of meaning" (p. 9). The authors listed several effects of narration. First, "There was evidence of a great deal of incidental, almost unconscious, learning of text structures, vocabulary and conventions of written language taking place. While this had been hoped for and expected, we did not expect it to be as pervasive, durable and intense as it turned out to be" (p. 10). Second, weeks or months after the retelling, there was a large amount of evidence that "linguistic spillover" had occurred. In other words, "the reappearance of certain linguistic forms, structures, concepts and conventions" (p. 10) had occurred. Third, the learners became more confident as readers, writers and speakers (p. 10). Fourth, the students became more adept at changing from "casual skim-reading to a very intense and deep engagement with the text" (p. 11).

Brown and Cambourne (1987) discussed in more depth their recognition of "linguistic spillover" (p. 15). Through the "linguistic spillover" the authors realized that the children were internalizing not only the meaning of the text, phraseology, vocabulary, but also, punctuation, spellings and dialogue. Further, through interviews with the children the researchers determined that the focus of the children when reading the text is for meaning. In other words, they

were trying to determine the events or people in the narrative not the textual features. Finally, to the amazement of the researchers, these “textual features were finding their way into other writing these children were doing, sometimes a considerable time after the actual retelling had taken place. These text features ran the whole spectrum--words, phrases, ideas, rhetorical devices, organization of content, as well as relatively superficial things such as spelling, punctuation marks and setting out” (p. 19).

Mason frequently said that narration is natural to us. According to her we are constantly retelling some story or event in our lives. Yetta Goodman (1982) said that “Retelling a story is an opportunity for a reader to present his or her ideas to the world and to have an additional opportunity to rehearse the story again and to integrate it, modify it, and add to its comprehension” (p. 305). She reminded us of how children like to “discuss a movie or TV drama or sports events they have seen” (p. 306). Brown and Cambourne (1987) said that narration is not a new way of learning. They stated, “Because of this, learners are comfortable with retelling. . . . Thus, there is little potential for stress or anxiety, and when anxiety is reduced, the capacity for learning is increased” (p. 25).

Mason believed that narration begins the habit in children of dealing with the content of a passage rather than just the printed symbols. Children who narrated from an early age, before they learned to read, understand that the purpose of reading is to gain meaning. The understanding of the symbols of language come naturally as children learn to handle the text through oral retellings. Narration in this context provides children the opportunity to see reading as a meaning making activity rather than learning the symbols that make up words. Richard Winter in his book, *The Roots of Sorrow: Reflections*

on *Depression and Hope*, stated that “the reductionist sees only the part and mistakes it for the whole” (p. 131). Rather than begin with the mechanics (or parts) of the reading process such as letters, phonemes, words, Mason wanted children to see first the “whole” of reading. She wanted children to know that reading is a meaning making activity. Narration, she believed, accomplishes this task.

As I have discussed thus far, narration accomplishes the “act of knowing” in its many complicated forms. It produces a transformation in the mind of the learner. What did a lesson using narration resemble? To answer this question I have looked at some reviews of narration lessons done in the early part of the last century.

### **Voices from the Past**

My purpose in this section is to make sure the reader has a peek into the minds of several educators from the past who used narration extensively. G. F. Husband wrote an article in the *Parents’ Review* in September 1924 entitled “Some Notes on Narration.” He used narration with large numbers of children. Eleanor M. Frost wrote “Impressions of Conference with Class II,” which was published in the *Parents’ Review* in August 1915. Each summer the PNEU had a conference for parents, teachers and Charlotte Mason College students to learn how to teach children. Frost (1915) made this comment about the lessons, “The very striking point in this and the following lessons was the children’s supreme unconsciousness both of themselves and of the twenty to thirty listeners around the room” (p. 567). These summer conferences were a time for demonstration lessons to be given with parents, teachers and college students observing the “pros” as they executed lessons. Elsie Kitching, who was Mason’s “right hand person” for many years, wrote in *Parents’ Review* for

January 1928, “Concerning ‘Repeated Narration’” and her thoughts about repeated narration have been used in this discussion. There are numerous other articles from *Parents’ Review* about narration, but I chose to use those which were written during Mason’s lifetime, soon after her death, or written by someone who personally knew and worked closely with Mason as was the case with Elsie Kitching. These three educators’ articles have been used as the voices from the past who have left us with their insight about narration.

### **Elsie Kitching**

Elsie Kitching (1928), Mason’s lifetime friend and companion, said, I heard a lesson given some months ago by a junior student of the College, who was just beginning her work in the Practising School here, and she allowed four children to narrate the same passage, and each narration was worse than the first, and the lesson was a failure. A child cannot be expected to give full attention to one subject more than once in one lesson. If he gives his full attention once, that piece of work is done once and for all. But if he knows that there is the least chance of another effort being required, he will not pay full attention the first time. . . . The one reading and the one narration is essential if a child is to acquire the habit of attention. (p. 59-60)

Kitching said early in this same article that the attention of the group was not enough. Our effort must be that every child’s attention is given fully to any one lesson. The point made is that narration develops the habit of attention. We saw earlier that Jensen (1998) and Sylwester (1997) discussed in their work how teachers must give more consideration to the length of a class since the human’s mind is only able to attend for a short period of time. Mason knew this

years ago and worked to arrange instruction so that the peak moments of attention were utilized by the student most effectively. Kitching (1928) said later in the same article, "For the mind re-asserts itself again the moment it makes a fresh start upon a fresh subject, when the child again pays the one attention, and gives the one good narration, but it must always be a fresh start that calls forth the full powers." Kitching stated here with clarity the effect of novelty on the mind. The "new subject" and "fresh start" were the novelty that O'Keefe and Nadel's (1978) spoke of in their book, *The Hippocampus as a Cognitive Map*. The points that Kitching make are that full attention must be given on the part of each child. The lesson is narrated once. It could begin with one child, picked up by another or two and ended yet by another. But the narration is from the beginning of the content to the end and done so only once with no interruptions. Children are never to be allowed to return to the same content again. According to Mason, repeating content is a guarantee that full attention will be dissipated and once the attention is dissipated learning decreases significantly.

### **G. F. Husband**

Husband (1924) begins his discussion of narration by bringing the reader's attention to a comment made by one of "His Majesty's Inspectors of Schools" who said, "The art of questioning is the whole art of teaching and if you persist with Narration methods your teachers will lose the ability to question. You must question to make the children think." During this time, apparently in England, based on what Husband has said, elementary schools were doubling their efforts to teach children to think. They were trying to accomplish this task mainly by oral questions. He said, "Teachers pulse with joy when they find a nice sequence of facts for their scholars to negotiate. I recently witnessed a particularly vigorous display of rapid questioning. Each scholar was on



tenterhooks, alert for the moment when the volley of questions might be directed at him. The questioner enjoyed himself and felt his power. With a glance in my direction--the glance was a challenge to narration--he said: 'That's stirred them up a bit: that's made them think!'" (p. 611). Husband went on to ask the question, "But *had* it made them think?" (p. 611). He then proceeded to answer his own question. He said, "It is quite easy, after a little practice, to question children along a line of thought or through a chain of reasoning and to get them to utter thoughts in expressly the phrases required: but the real thinking is done by the questioner. The questions that are of value are informative, they focus attention on a succession of details one by one. When the questions are recapitulatory they are merely mental jabs" (p. 611). And, he stated, when the child does not give forth the anticipated answer the teacher is expecting, the child is considered to be unintelligent. He gave an example from his own experience. During World War I, he had to attend schools in the army. He was quite startled by being dominated by a teacher in a classroom again. It reminded him of the years he had taught and thought he should dominate the classroom. He remembered clearly one teacher. He said,

He was extremely fond of questioning (dare I add that in civil life he was an elementary school teacher?) Many of his questions were very bewildering and when answers did not come readily he waxed sarcastic about our mental attainments. Sometimes the diatribe was delivered with an air of cold, calm, despair; frequently, with rising choler. He generally concluded: ". . .and now you can't answer that? Why! it's as plain as a pikestaff!"

*Of course the answer was as plain as a pikestaff to him, because he had read it the night before in his book.*

We were very uncomfortable for the first few days of the course of instruction, but learned eventually to shut our minds to the expostulations and await his answer to the question.

(Husband, 1924, p. 611)

When reading Husband's description of his class in the army, one clearly sees Richard Allington's (1994) point of the questioning strategies used in schools. This teacher is looking for "known-answer questions" (p. 23) that we use to "interrogate" (p. 23) children. Husband is making the point that the teacher's questioning does not cause him to think. It merely causes him to try to find the line of thinking the teacher is doing and match his thinking with the teacher's so that the answer the teacher is looking for could be given. In this environment children are not analyzing information and transforming it internally to make it theirs; they are merely trying to find an answer that the teacher wants to hear. Husband explained that the significance of narration is not just the volume of information that can be remembered but the fact that through narration the information is transformed internally by the child and becomes knowledge. When this occurs the children own the new knowledge and, he said, "It is a fact worthy of very careful note that children trained in these methods pick up immediately the threads of their work after quite long absences from school" (p. 615).

Husband (1924) gave several examples of how narration can be done by impromptu drama. In the following example one can see how Mason's belief that attention and reflection fitted together like a hand in a glove. Husband's example gives some insight into the automaticity of reflection through narration. He said,

A senior class had listened to a reading of that portion of

Plutarch's "Life of Aristides" dealing with the quarrel between the Athenians and the Spartans respecting the honour of victory over the Persians. The whole class resolved itself into a Council. A heated impromptu dialogue was carried on between Leocrates and Myronides, Aristides intervened, and then Theogiton, Cleocritus, Aristides, Pausanias addressed the council. Finally resolutions were passed respecting the cost and form of the memorial. (Husband, 1924, p. 615)

In order for these young adults to assume the role of a character upon one reading required a tremendous ability to concentrate, absorb the information, consider its value and significance, organize sequentially, and take a position of agreement with a character in the story. This requires the children to transform the information in their minds. Husband (1924) said that children, "condense, classify, generalise, infer, judge, visualise, discriminate, labour with their minds in one way or another" (p. 616). This was Mason's and Husband's point about questioning children to make them think. Given content Mason believed that the child's mind does its function naturally and its function is to think. Questioning on the part of the teacher causes the teacher to think. Questioning from without does not necessarily enable children to think. Husband makes it clear in his article that questioning from without is not totally obliterated from the classroom. There are times of its proper use. To give an example of how narration is used, I will turn our attention to Eleanor Frost and the demonstration lessons she presented at the summer conference of 1915.

### **Eleanor Frost**

Frost wrote about several of the demonstration lessons she presented at the summer conference of 1915. She gave demonstration lessons on General

History, Picture Study, Natural History and Map Study. These lessons are not written in great detail but each lesson does give a sufficient amount of information to glean what might be involved in a narration. I have chosen two of these lessons to write about.

First, Frost's Picture Talk, as she called it, was a study of the painting by Raphael entitled, "Madonna di San Sisto." She stated that the purpose of the lesson "was to lead the children to appreciate its exquisite beauty and thought" (1915, p. 567). She did this by asking the children to predict what they believed was on Raphael's mind as he painted. Notice the oral language needed for this discussion and that the prediction allowed the children to think their own thoughts as they study the picture. They are not told what to think about the picture directly or through questioning. Following this discussion, Frost said she had the children establish from the painting the evidence to support their predictions. For example, she said, "the Mother and Child are coming from, and bringing Heaven with them, as shown by the glory of angel heads--that they come in haste, seen by the blown-back draperies and hair" (Frost, 1915, p. 568). This was followed by the children studying the painting with their eyes partially closed "to see the divisions and shapes of light and shade, the general balance of tones and the composition of the whole; then with open eyes to notice the wonderful serenity and details of attitude and line. All of this took about ten minutes only" (p. 569). What has happened so far in this lesson causes the child to project in his mind what the painting is about and what the painter might have been thinking, and what has been discussed to this point builds background knowledge for a thorough understanding of the work of Raphael. Next, the children are allowed to spend most of their "time for a silent contemplation of the picture, that its beauty might speak for itself" (p. 568).

Students then completed “memory drawings,” (p. 670) which were pencil etchings of the general shapes in the painting. At the end of the lesson the children narrated what they saw and learned. It is clear from this study of Frost’s lessons that narration is not just simply a reading of text and then narrate. Children predict, build background knowledge, have personal time with the painting, and in this lesson relate it to other works of Raphael that have been studied in the previous school term. All of this allows the children to build on prior knowledge. Notice at no point does Frost force her beliefs about the picture on the children. The children are using their prior knowledge which has been developed over a term of studying the artist, his works and his life; and, they are using the picture itself to apply their own interpretations. Again, Frost is avoiding the “known-answer” syndrome of which Allington spoke.

The next lesson discussed is one Frost did on Natural History. She began her description of the lesson by saying, “Natural History was the next subject on the programme, and from the ‘Diptera’ and its derivation the children knew how this lesson was going to connect with former ones of the term’s work in this subject” (p. 575). In other words, although this is a demonstration lesson in the summer, she chose a lesson that built new knowledge on the children’s prior knowledge. The obvious use of hands-on instruction is interesting as well. She said, “Each was given an ordinary housefly--*Musca Domestica*--which was examined and described; then drawings of the fly and its different parts, the stages of egg, larva and puparium, etc., all very much magnified, were fastened on the board, to show the pupils what otherwise could only be seen through a microscope” (p. 576). Her next comments show how she took the present learning and extended it into further learning. She continued, “Next, mounted specimens of flies, daddy-long-legs, mosquitoes, were passed from one to

another, that the children might see other members of the same order and which had different parts more conspicuously marked” (p. 577). This is followed by the class, along with the teacher, tracing the life history of the housefly and the children drawing conclusions as to why the fly is classified in the Diptera. Following this, the children make their own list of other members of the Diptera. At the end, a narration, is done. Frost (1915) ended her description of the lesson by saying,

This lesson proved how much children love things they can examine, and how everything they can discover for themselves gains an added interest and joy. One felt that a house-fly was a real test of their powers, for it required quite an appreciable amount of patience and exact observation to discover its parts. It is perhaps a truism to add, but useful to remember, that effort begets power. (p. 579)

### **Summary**

In this chapter I showed that, narration, the telling back of what we have heard, read or seen, has been around almost as long as man has been on this earth. Narration has been involved in the transfer of knowledge from one generation to another for centuries. It has been the mainstay of our religious and secular transfer of knowledge through the narrative, poetry, songs and all forms of oral communication. The rabbis used telling back information as a way for their students to remember the religious teachings of their prophets and teachers. Albert Lord (1964) reminded us that the written tradition is a derivative of the oral tradition (p. 141). Mason told us that narration was expected of gentleman up until approximately two generations before her.

Mason told us how the use of narration allows children to learn a

tremendous amount of knowledge before they can read. Her view of children as persons, led her instructionally to assume that children can learn a tremendous amount of knowledge before they can read. Therefore, she started narration before children read. Narration, she believed, leads children to understand the true meaning of reading and that is that words are not just symbols, they convey meaning. Current research tells us that human's are meaning seeking beings (Caine and Caine, 1997; Jensen, 1998). Therefore, narration is a natural learning device that enables children to learn without stress or anxiety (Brown and Cambourne (1987).

The usefulness of narration has been stated clearly in this discussion but now I would like to turn our attention to The Children's Community School to view how they use narration. I did this by interviewing teachers, observing narrations as they occurred in the classrooms and reading the narrations of children.

### **Narration: A Picture of Practice**

#### **Ms. Washington and Ms. Lightfoot, Fourth Grade Teachers**

To begin my interview with Ms. Washington and Ms. Lightfoot, I asked what I perceived to be an easy, relaxing question about Mason. I asked them to give me a Mason belief or idea that works well for them. Ms. Lightfoot responded that,

Narration is probably the skill I am implementing the most and getting the most pleasure out of using and seeing the most benefit for the children. I think it definitely broadens their comprehension. I think by recalling orally and in written form they are learning how to either put it all down on paper or sift through all that they are hearing and remember the important

stuff.

I followed my question with, Does it help students with sequencing? She continued,

I think it does. Eve Anderson was here last week and did extensive narration with the children and I think they do a real good job of backing up two or three pages in a story and recalling the order in pretty close detail. Some of the students are very good about remembering minute details about characters and they are quick to interrupt each other and add to try to get the whole story. They really get involved in the narration.

Ms. Washington chimed in that she believes the children do well at sequencing; however, they frequently might say events or details out of sequence. Then, to make sure no detail or event is left out in the narration, the children frequently go back to details that happen earlier in the story. When asked if they do narrations with art work, the teachers responded that they do not do a lot of art work; art work is done mostly by the art teacher. However, they do try to do some narrations in science and social studies. I then asked them about field trips. When asked if they have the children narrate what they see on a field trip, they responded that they usually have written narrations of field trips. But, further on in the interview, they told about the students' building forts on the school grounds near a wooded area. These forts were built as a result of their studies of the Revolutionary War. The students were studying American history and at the point of the American Revolution, the students began to build forts and act the historical stories and scenes they were studying in class. Reliving the stories in their forts was another form of narration. For their study of the



American Revolution they purchased a book, volume ten, from the set entitled, *A History of Us* by J. Hakim (1993). Ms. Lightfoot said,

We bought the volume (ten) that goes along with the Revolution. The first six chapters, we all read and they would narrate to me portions from chapters or paint pictures. At the end of that unit, in small groups, they had to act out something from that unit and the next one; they did individual reports. It's been a lot of fun. That series of books comes very close to being living books. You kind of have to pick through them a little bit, but there are just some wonderful stories in there.

Ms. Washington explained how they had worked with the book, *The Sign of the Beaver* by Elizabeth George Speare (1983). She said,

We created a little handmade workbook that had sort of guiding questions and vocabulary words. I use vocabulary a whole lot and I don't know how Charlotte Mason did it; we are not looking the words up at all, we are finding them in the context of the story and talking about what do you think that word means. A lot of times, that gets into the story too.

Ms. Lightfoot continued,

That's how we started with each chapter in *Sign of the Beaver* (Speare, 1983). They might have had one word or ten words. It depended on the length of the chapter, usually no more than five. A couple of guiding questions, we read it all out loud and the children took time reading it and then they would narrate it back for me. We did several oral narrations, several written narrations and we just kept making our little booklet grow. We painted and

did a lot of things just from the skeleton of the questions.

Sometimes the question would lead us into a creative writing project or things like that. It worked out really well. I was really pleased.

The interview ended by Ms. Lightfoot commenting that narration is the important technique of Mason's that the school uses the most. She believes that the school is trying to use other instructional strategies of Mason's such as nature studies but "you almost have to learn to do one thing and do it really good and then add the next one."

### **Ms. German, Director of the Middle School**

I was interested in speaking to Ms. German about narration because she used it as a teacher, but as importantly, her children are in classrooms that use narration. I believe she would have a first hand view of the results of narration as a parent. Narration came up in the interview when she was discussing that at The Children's Community School her older son's mind was being challenged. She said that when he was challenged, his behavior was better and his mind was engaged. I asked her, What is it that the teachers do to use up his mind's energy? Do you know some of the types of activities that they do in the classroom to keep his mind busy? She immediately responded that it was narration. She explained that to narrate he had to pay close attention to what was being read so he could tell it back. He was motivated to tell it back as well as to write the narration in a clear manner.

I followed that with the question, Do you think that narration has an effect on his writing? She responded that narration had affected his writing. She believed the quality of his writing had improved. She said,

You imitate what you read and I think his vocabulary and the

quality of his expression is just enhanced because he is reading good literature and he is imitating good writers.

Earlier in the interview Ms. German, as I mentioned above, stated that narration caused her child to use his mind more. Later in the interview I again asked a direct question about narration. I wanted to know as a parent as well as a teacher, what her thoughts were about narration. She said,

Well I can't tell you how many times, I hate to sound like I'm just bashing the school where we were before, but I can't tell you how many times my son would come home with a test paper that he had made an A on and I would ask him about what he had learned and he couldn't tell me anything about it. He couldn't tell the story. He didn't make any connections with any of the historical figures, he didn't know anything about it. He memorized the year and what happened and could put it in order. I feel like when a student can narrate something they really know it. It's a part of them. The discussion around the dinner table is my report card that I look at every day.

I followed her comments with a request for her to relate her views of narration as a teacher. Did she see it as a cop-out for the teacher? She responded,

I think that multiple choice is the cop-out. Narration is not an easy thing to do. As a teacher, you have to read it three or four times for every one time that you do it with the class. You must know it yourself. I think probably that is one reason why it is not used more widely is because it is more difficult.

I asked Ms. German, How do the teachers monitor what the children

know or do not know? She said that for the older children it is easier because many of the narrations are completed in writing. According to Ms. German, the school has limited the number of students in the classrooms so that the teacher can have personal contact with the children.

### **Ms. Little, Fifth Grade Teacher**

This was Ms. Little's first year using narration. Ms. Little related that after narrating the novel *Behind Rebel Lines* by Semour Reit (1988) her students



went into the ba... the girls  
were the Southerners and the boys were the Northerners. According to Ms.

*Figure 12.* Ms. Little's student's fort  
Little the students reenacted battles and scenes as they were reading them from

the novel. The students had spies; they made maps and hiding places. They spent every available moment reliving the Civil War. This, she believed, is a form of narration.

One particular student, according to Ms. Little, is quite smart. Ms. Little said she reads quickly but is weak at reading for depth. Narration, Ms. Little believed, is instrumental in forcing this student to slow down and read for understanding. The student's experience has been, previous to coming to The Children's Community School, to complete worksheets. She is good at skimming the surface and quickly answering the fill in the blank type worksheets. She is not good at reading for understanding. Narration is forcing this child to slow down and read for understanding rather than skimming to find a short answer. Narration, Ms. Little believed, helps the children understand and know what they are reading. She said,

Obviously this is the first year that I've used it. I've found it wonderful. I use it a lot. We have done a few novels this year and I've used it for novels, not all the time but a little bit nearly every chapter. I have found that the student I have with a processing problem is really coming along with narration. In the beginning he started at the end of what we'd just read and he got tired. Now he can really say who the story is about and start at the beginning and get his thoughts in order and do a good job. It's really helping him. He is now one of the best narrators in the class. He's come a long way.

### **Ms. Cassett and Ms. Swan, Third Grade Teachers**

In my interview with Ms. Cassett, we were discussing the inquiry methods of teaching versus direct teaching methods. I asked her which type of method

she believed narration was. She said,

I see narration as fitting in very well because they are putting it in their own words instead of me constantly coming up with the questions about the section that we read. If they are putting it in their own words, then that means they have digested the material and are able to tell it back. I don't use narration with every single reading, but I make it part of a routine.

Ms. Cassett went on to say that she wanted the children to deepen their understanding of a story by asking them to discuss why they think a character might act in a particular way or might make the choices they make.

I asked Ms. Cassett based on her experiences in working with children, could she tell a difference between children who use narration and those who do not. Is there a difference in how they think, process information, read or write? She said,

I believe it affects them in a number of ways but one important way is that children who do not narrate do not pay attention as much because they don't think they are expected to know exactly what is going on. Narration requires of them to pay attention, close attention and to put the material in their own words. Asking the students questions causing them to miss elements of the story that is important to them. As a teacher, I can use their ability to attend to details as a means to help them see the fine details in a painting.

Ms. Swan agreed and added her own support for narration.

I do think it makes the children pay attention to details. And, I think it helps them with their verbal skills and their listening skills

as well. They do know that they may be put on the spot and sometimes you may stop a student who is narrating and have another student to pick up and may ask them if the student narrating has left anything out. They will have to listen to see if they left something out that was important, or something they noticed that the other child narrating didn't.

I don't think my son whom I homeschooled is as good a listener as some of my students are because I did not teach narration because I did not know about it. He did not learn to listen carefully and I still see that in him today. Now, I know he is an individual, he may even be a person who lacks some auditory learning skills, but I still think that if he had been trained sooner, at a younger age, he would be a better listener today. I do think narration helps children concentrate.

### **Ms. Norman, Director of the Lower School**

Ms. Norman had related during my interview with her the story of the three boys who had a disagreement during a time when their class was outside playing. One young man is impulsive and frequently at odds with his classmates. During this playtime there was a scuffle, and the three ended up in her office to sort out the matter. She was impressed with their acceptance of their own responsibility in the problem. She made an interesting comment that related to narration while she was retelling the story to me. The comment related to the children's use of language and their verbal skills. She said,

I think another thing that plays a part is narration. These children are very verbal. They really express themselves well, some better than others. But, they all express themselves instead of

giving that shoulder shrug and down cast look that I am used too when children are sent to the office.

This comment agreed with Mason's belief that narration improves language skills and gave me the opportunity to pursue the influence of narration on the children. I asked Ms. Norman the question, How do you think narration affects their ability to talk to you? She said,

We have gotten this year two children, one from another private school, not a Charlotte Mason school, and one from a public school, but one of the top public schools in this area. One student is in second grade and one is in fourth grade. They come into a narration situation and they really don't know what to expect. It is very obvious which children have been involved for a long time in narration and being asked to retell a situation, to tell details. You can tell the kids who have been used to doing narration. I think it builds within them that ability to recall or express what was heard or what was seen. These two kids are new to narration and are not good at it yet. I mean, their written and oral narrations do not compare although they are bright kids. They come from good backgrounds and have all the positives going for them. They do not express themselves as well.

Ms. Norman went on to say that not only could she see the difference in narration between children who had narrated and those who had not, but she felt that children who had narrated consistently were "more confident when they speak to adults." I posed the question, Do you think it is just narration or the total environment? She responded that she believes their ability to express themselves well and to adults well comes from the total environment; however,



she strongly believes that narration increases the children's ability to use words and to express themselves. She told another incident of two first grade girls relating the details of an incident about a first grade boy who fell from the monkey bars and seriously broke his arm. Their ability to describe in detail the sequence of events was astonishing to her.

Ms. Norman believed that the removal of fear from the classroom equation influenced the children's narrations. She said, "These children know it is okay to say, even if it may not be exactly right, but it is still okay." The point for Ms. Norman was that with the fear factor removed, children were better able to express themselves. The removal of anxiety and stress from the learning environment as a result of using a natural learning tool such as narration was also verified by Brown and Cambourne (1987, p. 25). Ms. Norman gave as an example a student in middle school who was afraid of failure and did not do well at narrations because of his inability to spell. She said,

It is a lot easier to handle internally failing because you didn't try than it is to try and fail. It is a lot easier to handle if you say, 'Well, I didn't care about that. I'm not going to do that' than it is to lay it out there for everyone to see and fail at it. So, you don't try. You can handle that (not trying) as a tough guy in middle school. 'I just don't care about it. I'm not going to try.' It's kind of like opening a wound in front of everyone and for it to be marked up and put down.

Later during the interview I asked Ms. Norman, what would make an effective narration? She said,

I think, of course, reading books with lots of details . . . and . . . situations like events. Especially with children who are

struggling, I think we need to start something real to the child and help them tell about that. I think anything with a gripping story, something that holds your attention. A lot of books we read here are stories like that. For example, my son's class is reading *Johnny Tremain*, by Esther Forbes (1943). When the sixth grade had it read to them they did not enjoy it. They hated it. These fourth graders are able to enjoy it more because using narration and class activities and reading it together has allowed them to understand it, not just be tested on it. I think it (the story) comes alive for them through narration. I think the use of narration, having to process the information and give back the information makes it stick and is a stronger tool for learning.

Continuing my probing questions to Ms. Norman about narration, I asked her to describe a time when she had heard or seen a narration used effectively. She described a situation in which she was dropping something off in a classroom to the teacher. When she entered the classroom, the children were narrating a story about a homeless family. What she saw was an example of Mason's point of "knowledge is information touched by emotion" and Sylwester's (1997) belief that "emotion drives attention" (p. 17). She remembered stopping to listen because the student who was narrating was so involved in the story as he was narrating that he became upset emotionally at the treatment one of the characters was receiving. However, she believed, the student was so involved in describing the treatment this character was receiving that he did not realize how upset he was. She said,

And I thought, how many kids have had the opportunity to feel the emotion of that story in the way he was feeling it. Someone else

added something to the story and there was a discrepancy in the retellings of the two kids. The students hashed out what had actually happened as a group. I knew at that moment that that part of the story, whether or not the rest of it stuck, would never leave that one little boy. It became a discussion and they worked through the confusion of the story and the teacher let them do it. She didn't tell them the answer even though she could have. I don't think it would have stuck with them as well.

As a researcher I wanted to know if Ms. Norman had experience at knowing whether or not children used their learning from narrations days, months or years later. I asked her, Have you ever seen a child two months, a week or a year later remember something they have narrated and apply it to another situation or to some new learning?

I've seen my daughter refer to some narration she did in third grade and now she is in sixth grade. I've heard her share parts of the story. They read *Secret Garden* (Frances Burnett, 1911) in the third grade and they actually went to a local garden, a horticultural garden, the town actually cares for it. They went sometimes three times a week to read the *Secret Garden* (Frances Burnett, 1911) in this garden area. The book was well above my daughter's reading ability. She was a struggling reader but to this day that is her favorite book and she even found and spent her own money to purchase an Afghan of a garden that she keeps on the end of her bed. I know this narration has stuck with her. She remembers details about that book that I can't remember.

I followed her explanation with more questions about narration, such as Why do you think she remembers so much of it, and What do you think was happening in her head when she narrated it?

I think she remembered so much because they narrated a majority of the book. For her, I think it was a totally different way to approach reading, something she had never experienced before that year. I think she was beginning to open up and become a part of it. Before, she was listening and learning but it was the first time she became a part of the narration. Even though she struggled with the reading, it was a first for her and I think in her mind, (she is good with details) she realized she was good at this. This is something she does well. Her written narrations are very detailed but her oral narrations are very good and she realized during *The Secret Garden*, (Frances Burnett, 1911) that she did this well. They read *Strawberry Girl* (Lois Lenski, 1945) that year; it's about Depression times and the dialect was very difficult to read. She doesn't remember as much about that one.

I followed her comments with a reference to Mason's concept that knowledge is information touched with emotion. Ms. Norman responded that her daughter had experienced the book, *The Secret Garden*, (Frances Burnett, 1911) emotionally; but further, she believed that her daughter had changed and this positive change had been experienced during the reading of this book. She said,

Right, it [the book] was very emotional for her and the book lived for her as well as the fact that she herself changed and felt some

positive emotion having to do with that book and she was learning about herself and what she was capable of doing.

Near the end of my interview with Ms. Norman I asked her if she had other thoughts about narration. She commented,

I would like to see narration used more in the classroom in a variety of settings, not just language arts, reading class. I like Charlotte Mason's philosophy of using living books across the curriculum. Narrations should be used in other areas of the curriculum. Doing narrations in other areas of the curriculum helps that topic or subject live for those children. Through narration, I think, it becomes part of their memory and part of their knowledge. I think narrations lead into better writers and better describers and children who have command of essay questions with more ability than just with fact or true false type questions. I think it leaves children with a longer lasting kind of education. I memorized all the states and capitals for a test but I could not tell you what they were except for the few that I have in my memory because I visited those states. I think narration is really a tool for the curriculum that can be used through out. I think it helps the knowledge or learning to become the child's. In our testing now we go with only facts. We don't even ask children to write in complete sentences anymore.

In Ms. Norman's comments can be seen Richard Allington's (1994) point concerning "known-answer questions" (p. 23). Ms. Norman said, "In our testing now we go with only facts." Instead of children searching for meaning from the text, they are looking for the answer to the question (interrogation) that the

teacher expects. The “we” in her comments refers to the culture at large, not to The Children’s Community School.

I observed narration lessons in several classrooms. One of those was Ms. Cassett’s third grade classroom. Ms. Cassett was reading aloud to the children the book, *The Trumpet of the Swan*, by E.B. White (1970). Students listened attentively and at the end of the reading every child wanted to share what he or she had remembered from the story. I found this to be true of all the classrooms in which I observed narrations.

I asked the teachers did they think they had evidence that narration improved children’s language skills. They offered the following creative writings of a fourth grade student from Germany. This student’s family had lived in Springtime for a number of years. She had begun school at The Children’s Community School at the beginning of the year coming from a public school. The following two samples were completed as creative writing assignments on separate days at the beginning of the school year.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>A month of Writing About Me</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">The older I get the more I learn.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Animals</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">If my pet bock could talk I would talk to him. and make him go to school with me.</p>
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Figure 13. Writing Sample 1.

The following writing was from December of the same year and was the creative writing for one day.

### Advertisement

The worlds hottest toy is a frog that feels real and jumps when you put in warm water its grows warts. its only 1 doller ounce you gol to toy R us you get a coupon and . get it when you home you take a bath and swim withe you.

Figure 14. Writing Sample 2.

In March, the same child wrote the following creative writing.

One day when I went to the desert with my day (Dad?) we found lots of thing but they was mosley dry things so I drank a sip from my water-bottle after that there was none more left so I asked dad he said No. So we decided to go home but that wasn't a problem because there was water in the airplane then we went back home and watched T.V. And guess what we saw? We saw one, to. That was the desert we went dry anymore to and it rained there! We were so mad!

Figure 15. Writing Sample 3.

There is clearly marked growth in the child's writing by March after entering the school in August. Even though the child has been in this country most of her life, her writing skills are not nearly as developed when she entered the school as they were in March. Is it narration? This researcher does not believed it can be proven. For example, the child may have come from a school in which English and writing were taught out of a textbook rather than giving children the opportunity to actually write. At The Children's Community School, the child's writing could have been developing because she was given frequent opportunities to write. For example, as part of the documentation for this research, I was given by the school "The Community News" which is the school's newsletter. In the February 25, 1999, issue, this same child, with obvious help from someone, was

allowed the opportunity to write a short paragraph under the article entitled, "Fourth Grade News Flash." She wrote, "In Science we are studying about the different parts of the heart. It is very interesting. I like it because I want to be a doctor when I grow up!" Even with extraordinary weak writing skills, this child is allowed to see herself as a writer being published in the school newsletter. In a February 4, 1999, issue of the school newsletter the same child was given the opportunity to write "I like The Children's Community School because" She responded, "I like TCCS because I have lots of friends and I like the education there. I like to learn about the heroes in social studies. The best thing I learned is respecting each other." Which had the greater effect on her language development in writing: narration or the opportunity to write or both?

### **Reflections**

Mason and others throughout this essay have extolled the value of narration. According to her, narration increases the power of the habit of attention in children. According to Husband (1924) it causes them to "condense, classify, generalise, infer, judge, visualise, discriminate, labour with their minds." Brian Cambourne and Hazel Brown (1987) spoke of how children's language development grows through the use of narration. Yetta Goodman (1982) spoke of how children naturally like to tell what they have heard from events in their lives. At The Children's Community School many of these claims are substantiated by the teachers. These same claims were made during interviews with the teachers even though they had never read Husband, Brown, Cambourne, Goodman or even Mason herself. Ms. Lightfoot stated that narration "broadened their comprehension" and taught the children to "sift



through all that they are hearing and remember the important stuff.” Ms. German claimed her son “paid close attention” more so now than before, and she claimed that “the quality of his expression is . . . enhanced.” Ms. Little, Ms. Lightfoot and Ms. Washington told how the children had carried the narrations of history out to the playground where the students relived the Revolutionary War and the Civil War much like Husband’s student had relived the events in Greece in their classroom almost a hundred years ago. Ms. Cassett extended narration into a discussion about the characters in a story, asking students to predict why the character had acted so. Ms. Swan felt that the lack of narration her son had been exposed to caused him to be weak at giving his full attention to a given task. And, all the teachers believed narration increases the children’s ability to attend to a topic. All of these evidences point to the benefits of narration and narration’s positive effects on learning at The Children’s Community School.

My observations of children narrating is that it truly is a natural learning device. Children are always ready to narrate and share what they learn. The removal of fear and more general questions, such as making a prediction, increases the opportunity for children to digest the knowledge through narration without trying to find the answer the teacher wants. Narration allows children the opportunity to discuss and determine what is significant for them from the story. Although the narration lessons as seen through the eyes of Frost were quite teacher directed, they always allow the children to process information for themselves and direct them to discover for themselves. In this chapter I link Mason’s views on narration closely to the views of current educational theorists. It seems to this researcher that narration is still a tool for learning and should be employed much more frequently than it is currently being used.

## **Chapter 8**

### **Curriculum: A Banquet of Ideas to Nourish the Mind**

That is, the early curriculum would be designed to introduce children to the great stories by which we can make sense of our world and experience. Again, to emphasize, these are not fictional stories. These are the stories of science, technology, language, history, life on earth, the stars and planets, and so on. (Egan, 1989, p. 108)

Mason has much to say about curriculum. Her definition of curriculum, as with all of her philosophy of education, is connected to her belief that children are born persons. ‘Children as born persons’ has been discussed in a previous chapter and, in fact, her belief about the personhood of children has been woven throughout the chapters in this dissertation because it is a universal belief that affects every strand of her philosophy of education. Therefore, this belief also has implications for her ideas about curriculum. Because she wrote prolifically about curriculum, I have confined this essay to three of her basic assertions about curriculum. First, I begin the essay almost backwards by discussing concerns she had about hindrances to curriculum that she believed were prevalent in her day. I do this because one of her concerns, in particular, is still prevalent today. Second, I define what she meant by a “full and generous” curriculum that she believed all children, as persons, should have. Third, Mason used the “literary style” or narrative throughout the curriculum. I discuss why she used the narrative so extensively and point out what some current educational theorists have to say about the use of the narrative in teaching and learning. Lastly, I take the reader back to The Children’s Community School to study their views and practice of curriculum.

#### **Hindrances to Curriculum**

Interesting to this researcher, in light of the current movement in the United States to have higher standards, usually meaning a requirement to

improve standardized tests scores, Mason (1925) began her discussion about curriculum by decrying the use of college entrance examinations and secondary school entrance examinations as a means to define school curriculum. She believed that examinations of this type deintellectualized children. She thought that headmasters should govern their curriculums by what is understood about how children learn and by what children need to know to live a full and rich life, not by college or secondary school entrance examinations. Because children live in a broader context of life than what examinations encompass, their curriculum should be as broad as life itself. In light of her comments, I believe we have the same problem today for educators, although this time the problem is lifting its head in the name of “tougher standards.” Educators in Virginia, where I live and work, have a sense that the state mandated Standards of Learning, which are a prescribed list of skills and content, are controlling school curricula. The Virginia Standards of Learning cover four subject “core” areas, English, history, math and science. The four core content areas covered by the Standards of Learning are supposed to be embedded in a local school division curriculum; however, because these four core subjects are tested and because the state ranks the schools by the results of the test scores and posts these rankings on the Internet and publishes them in state newspapers, schools have reduced most of their school day to teaching these four subject areas. All schools want to be perceived as successful and to be considered successful schools must do well on these examinations. Therefore, most all schools have limited their curriculum to these four core subjects.

Schools where the population is inclined to perform poorly on standardized tests, spend the preponderance of their day teaching the skills and content of these four core subjects. Many times the teaching of skills is done

over and over until the child “gets it.” Therefore, whether the state intends to control curriculum, by virtue of its power or by publishing each school’s test scores either on the Internet or in local newspaper, it has controlled the children’s curriculum indirectly if not directly. Music, art, architecture, or any subject beyond the four core subjects are considered “fluff.” This system of education has limited tremendously the curriculum for children in Virginia and created an environment where reteaching of skills is done to the point that children are truly “devitalized” to use Mason’s expression.

And, children are sent through a prescribed curriculum whether they can keep up with the speed of the curriculum or not. As a parent I have personally experienced this phenomenon which I share below. Teaching according to how children learn becomes second in importance to covering the curriculum. In other words, the curriculum is the most important issue in instruction and teachers looked past the children in order to see the content and skills that must be covered. Therefore, as a school principal, I am currently experiencing exactly the same point Mason is making when she criticized headmasters of schools for limiting the curriculum to the content contained on college and secondary school entrance examinations. Principals in the district where I work are required to limit their curriculum to the Standards of Learning. As headmasters or principals we are experiencing the same pressures as the headmasters of which Mason spoke.

As a parent, I can see the same system as it affects my children. My son, currently in the seventh grade, gets a steady diet of Standards of Learning daily and his curriculum is controlled by the Virginia Standards of Learning. On October 28, 1999, a case in point happened. It was time for the end of the first nine-week conference with my son’s middle school team. All the teachers were

quite complimentary of his abilities and behaviors in class. They spoke of how he makes good connections and thinks critically quite well. I made it very clear to the team that what my son knows is more important to me than grades. Pursuing that idea, I spoke to the mathematics teacher about his continuing problem with conceptualizing fractions. This has been a problem since primary school. This is a child who gets all As and Bs and in mathematics gets mostly Bs. When I said to the teacher that I was concerned about his problem with fractions, she said to me, I have a curriculum that I must cover and he should have gotten fractions in elementary school. I asked her if she had manipulatives that she could use to help him better understand the concepts. She responded that she did not use manipulatives, that was for elementary school. In return, I politely said to the teacher that what she had just said to me was that the curriculum was more important to her than what my child was learning or not learning. In return, she made it clear that she taught seventh grade mathematics and had Virginia Standards of Learning to cover and did not have time to go back and teach what he should have learned in elementary school. In frustration, I stopped talking to keep from responding in an inappropriate way. Virginia's Standards have affected the attitude of this teacher and as a consequence that attitude is affecting the instructional needs of my child. What has happened is the state standards are more important than my child. It works this way. The curriculum must be covered so that all the material covered on the test has been taught. To do that, the school division devised a curriculum that states what must be covered each day, week and month of the year. Whether a child understands a particular concept or not is immaterial. The next concept must be taught regardless.

The worst part of this approach is what it is doing to my son's attitude

about learning. Being in an environment where it is clear that the curriculum and subject content that must be covered at a certain pace is more important than he is, is a statement to him as to where he belongs in such a system. For the first time in his life he talks about being bored at school and is losing the joy of learning. This kind of attitude about standards and grades is taking from him a motivation to learn and changing him into a child trying to “make the grade” and as long as he makes the grade, he’s okay. Whether or not he “knows” and enjoys knowing, is no longer important. Therefore, Mason’s (1907) belief that, in such a system of education, the desire to learn is schooled out of children (p. 276) is reflected each day in many Virginia classrooms.

Mason believed, in her day, that there were other factors which educators allowed to limit the curriculum. She (1925) believed that the curriculum was controlled by rather erroneous thinking. She said, “we teach him those things which, according to Locke, it is becoming for a gentleman to know” (p. 156). The curriculum was also controlled oftentimes by the idea that children should be taught certain content “that he may not grow up an illiterate citizen” (p. 156). Kieran Egan (1992) in his book, *Imagination in Teaching and Learning*, suggested somewhat the same concept when he stated that any history curriculum designed for the purpose of making a child a good citizen was an “impoverished conception of history” (p. 161). Further, children should not be schooled for the purpose of a profession or trade (p, 156). Defining a child’s curriculum by citizenship, profession, trade or by “those things . . . becoming for a gentleman to know” (p. 156) are not sufficient for educating children. For Mason, these must not control the curriculum as examinations must not control the curriculum. Then what should define the curriculum?

## **Defining the Curriculum**

Children, as persons, influenced Mason's concept of curriculum. As the reader will remember, Mason believed that humankind is both physical and spiritual and thus needs both spiritual and physical nourishment. Therefore, the curriculum should satisfy our physical needs as well as our spiritual needs. Further, Mason believed humankind to be created in the image of God. This, she believed, gives children access to all of creation. In order for children to better reflect the image of God, they must know about the physical and spiritual world he has created. Such a belief led her spirited call for a liberal education for all children that was heard throughout England at the beginning of the last century. No matter the profession, trade or career chosen by the child, having a full and generous curriculum enables him to better live life and such a curriculum would break down the barriers between rich and poor. Knowledge she believed has power and would be the great tool for equalizing all peoples (Mason, 1925, p. 78).

Mason (1925) claimed that the curriculum should be defined by "the very nature of things" (p. 156). That is, all of life should define the curriculum. She said,

Education, no doubt, falls under the economic law of supply and demand; but the demand should come from the children rather than from teachers and parents; how are their demands to become articulate? We must give consideration to this question because the answer depends on a survey of the composite whole we sum up as 'human nature,' a whole whose possibilities are infinite and various, not only in a budding genius, the child of a distinguished family, but in every child of the streets. (p. 156)

Two ideas are learned from this quote. First, if she is correct, we must understand human nature, and, therefore, one finds throughout her writing a discussion on the nature of children. She discussed more than just their “good and evil” nature. She defined what it means to be a person and that should also define curriculum. Therefore, “the very nature of things” (Mason, 1925, p. 156) means that we must understand children and the curriculum itself must be defined by “the very nature of things,” that is, all that exists in the world. Giving children access to all that exist, is another way of saying a full and generous curriculum. She believed that “there seems reason to believe that the limit to human intelligence coincides with the limit to human interest” (1907, p. 234). Knowledge is truly power in that, the greater the interest, the greater the learning. And, she believed that a full and generous curriculum would motivate children to learn.

Second, Mason did not devise a curriculum solely on what children wanted to know. In fact, at the college that she founded, the curriculum was set by her and her staff and sent out to schools, governesses and parents. What did she mean when she said, “the demand should come from the children rather than from teachers and parents” (p. 156)? I believe she meant that our decisions about curriculum are based on what we know about the nature of children or what we understand to be the developmental and psychological needs of children. Further, the curriculum is to be defined by what it means to live life. That is, children should have contact with as much of the physical and spiritual world as possible. Our mind, the spiritual entity of the physical brain, is nourished on ideas. This nourishment is accomplished by the “Science of Relations” with both the physical and spiritual world. To make this definition of curriculum practical or concrete, I will use Maryellen Marschke and Rebecca



Brown's definition of curriculum based on their understanding of Mason's beliefs about curriculum. They have defined curriculum in their new introductory brochure to their recently founded organization (summer 1999), Charlotte Mason Schools International:

**Education is The Science of Relationships** emphasizing the interconnection between persons, disciplines, and skills. Learning comes about through the **human relationships of the present** (kin, friend, neighbor, elder, hero, authority, person in need), and the **human relationships of the past** (histories and literature), and the **science relationships** (geology, mineralogy, geography, biology, astronomy, mathematics, nature study), as well as the **dynamic relationships** (running, playing, reciting, dancing, and singing), and the **tactile relationships** (writing, sewing, molding, drawing, painting, sculpting).

By using this definition of curriculum, Mason got at Lynn Erickson's (1995) concern about curriculum. In her discussion about constructivist views of curriculum, Erickson said, "I believe it is possible to have students initiate the search for knowledge, discover connections, and construct personal conceptual frameworks within the context of an articulated core content curriculum" (p. 180). It seemed to me by this statement that Erickson means children must be given core knowledge if we want them to act and do constructively. Erickson (1998) however addressed the core curriculum within the context of a concept-based curriculum which would be process oriented as well as core knowledge oriented. Neil Postman (1989) declared that, at least initially, E. D. Hirsch, Jr. had put forth in his *Cultural Literacy* a system of learning that is mainly facts

driven. Postman believed that Hirsch is right in that children need information but he believed at the outset that Hirsch left out the important piece of which Postman, Erickson, Egan and Mason were all supporters. Egan (1992) stated it this way, "All those procedures of teaching, testing and curriculum that see education as a process of accumulating knowledge and skills uninvolved with emotions, intentions, and human meaning, will tend to be inadequate to do more than create conventional thinkers" (p. 51). Erickson said it this way, "We have two goals in a systems design for curriculum. One is to ensure that students develop process and skill abilities developmentally . . . (and) to ensure that students develop an increasing fund of critical content knowledge and conceptual understanding" (p. 47). Mason (1925) declared that children who study for factual information and not for meaning "Cram to pass but not to know; they do pass but they don't know"(p. 57). The point being for all of these current educational theorists, as well as Mason, facts or just core knowledge is not sufficient. Children need to be brought to a higher level of thinking. Engaging children on the higher level, on the emotional level, intellectual level as Egan said, "we tie knowledge in with the human passions, hopes or fears which attend its invention or discovery in the first place, or which account for its continuing human value" (p. 57). This is what I believe Mason (1925) means by "the demand should come from the children rather than from teachers and parents" (p. 156). In other words, children do not know the content to explore, however, their teachers should introduce them to the knowledge in ways that excite their "human passions, hopes and fears" (Egan, 1992, p. 57).

Mason, I believe, defined curriculum in two broad areas: physical and spiritual. These two broad areas are the make up of the human being and "are the very nature of things" (Mason, 1925, p. 156). And yet, she was adamant that

we must not see ourselves as two entities. Egan said, "As it becomes clearer that the mind functions as a whole and that this whole includes our bodies, then the sense of the mind as an elaborate calculating organ with reason as its mode of calculating becomes increasingly untenable" (p. 62-63). Yes, for Mason the human is both physical and spiritual, but there is no division between the two. Children, she believed, should have relations with all that is vital in both areas of life. As Marschke and Brown suggest, it is a curriculum that not only deals with the physical world but also includes a curriculum that invites children into a relationship with the spiritual world: the mind, the intellect, beauty, imagination, sensitivity as well as the religious. She (1925) said, "all I have said is meant to enforce the fact that much and varied humane reading, as well as human thought expressed in the forms of art, is, not a luxury, a tit-bit, to be given to children now and then, but their very bread of life, which they must have in abundant portions and at regular periods" (p. 111). Mason wanted children to have access to this broad curriculum because she believed them to be fully human not because such a curriculum would make them human. Children need abundant physical activity as well as abundant spiritual food or ideas. She (1925) said, "The mind feeds on ideas and therefore children should have a generous curriculum" (p. 111). This basis should define curriculum rather than college entrance examinations, a trade, a profession or what is deemed necessary to be a proper gentleman. In the following quote I will allow Mason (1925) to say it in her own Victorian English.

The days have gone by when the education befitting either a gentleman or an artisan was our aim. Now we must deal with a child of man, who has a natural desire to know the history of his race [meaning humankind] and of his nation, what men thought in

the past and are thinking now; the best thoughts of the best minds taking form as literature, and at its highest as poetry, or, as poetry rendered in the plastic [meaning to shape, mold] forms of art: as a child of God, whose supreme desire and glory it is to know about and to know his almighty Father: as a person of many parts and passions who must know how to use, care for, and discipline himself, body, mind and soul: as a person of many relationships, -to family, city, church, state, neighbouring states, the world at large: as the inhabitant of a world full of beauty and interest, the features of which he must recognise and know how to name, and a world too, and a universe, whose every function of every part is ordered by laws which he must begin to know.

It is a wide programme founded on the educational rights of man; wide, but we may not say it is impossible nor may we pick and choose and educate him in this direction but not in that. We may not even make choice between science and the 'humanities.'

Our part it seems to me is to give a child a vital hold upon as many as possible of those wide relationships proper to him.

Shelley offers us the key to education when he speaks of "understanding that grows bright gazing on many truths." (p. 157)

Mason believed that such a broad curriculum is not tiring or burdensome to children. Because the relationships a child has with life are various, then the curriculum should be also. Such a broad curriculum feeds naturally the curiosity and desire to know that is innate in children; it feeds the need of children for novelty or new learning which motivates the desire for new learning and the cycle is continuous.

But, the curriculum must not be “scrappy.” The curriculum must be well planned and thought through. Hence the many hours of planning and setting out the curriculum for parents, governesses and schools. Mason (1925) said, The knowledge of children so taught is consecutive, intelligent and complete. . . . For it is a mistake to suppose that the greater the number of ‘subjects’ the greater the scholar’s labour; the contrary is the case as the variety in itself affords refreshment, and the child who has written thirty or forty sheets during an examination week comes out unfagged. Not the number of subjects but the hours of work bring fatigue to the scholar; and bearing this in mind we have short hours and no evening preparation. (p. 158)

Mason (1907) stated that the Parents’ National Education Union (PNEU) asked the question, having assumed the philosophy guided by the three instruments of education (discussed in a previous chapter) “what should be the end in view as the result of wise use of due means” (p. 217). Stated today this question might read: What outcome do we wish to achieve by using the three instruments of education? The answer she said is to understand education as “The Science of Relations.” She went on to say that this understanding is not to be understood in the way Herbart would have understood it (p. 217). She said “that things or thoughts are related to each other and that teachers must be careful to pack the right things, in together, so that, having got into the pupil’s brain, each may fasten on its kind, and, together, make a strong clique or apperception mass” (p. 217). Education, as the science of relations, meant to Mason that the quality of our lives, the fullness to which we could live life, our ability to serve others is determined by the extent to which we develop relationships, “with what there is in the present and with what there has been in

the past, with what is above us, and about us” (p. 218). Every child “is an heir” (p. 218) to these relationships. Our job is to determine how “to put him in possession of that which is his” (p. 218). She went on to say, “We take the child as we find him, a person with many healthy affinities and embryonic attachments, and we try to give him a chance to make the largest possible number of these attachments valid” (p. 218). Children, she believed, from infancy naturally establish these relationships or “attachments” because they come with the ability to perceive, to use their personality and innate abilities to establish relationships with their world. It is our job as educationalists to continue helping the child establish these attachments. She believed the child’s “life will be dutiful and serviceable if he is made aware of the laws which rule each relationship; he will learn the laws of work and the joys of work as he perceives that no relation with persons or with things can be kept up without effort” (p. 219). It is our job to help facilitate the natural relationship the child has with the universe. She continued, “Our error is to suppose that we must act as his showman to the universe, and that there is no community between child and universe except such as we choose to set up” (p. 219). Mason believed that facilitating for children “education as the science of relationships” provides a definite aim for educators (p. 219).

The curriculum was important to Mason (1907) because she believed that “knowledge is power” (p. 225). What was the difference between knowledge and information? For Mason, knowledge was the “voluntary and delightful action of the mind upon the material presented to it” (p. 224) whereas information is the “record of facts, experiences, appearances, etc., whether in books or in the verbal memory of the individual” (p. 224). The significance for curriculum is that, since knowledge is power, the child must have access to a

broad curriculum and it must be presented in such a way that the mind of the child could act upon the information touching it with his own emotion thereby making the information the child's own personal knowledge (p. 220). Similarly, Egan (1992) asserted that the imagination aided us in making knowledge personal. He declared, "[Imagination] is important because transcending the conventional is necessary to constructing one's sense of any area of knowledge; accepting conventional representations is to fail to make knowledge one's own, is to keep it inert rather than incorporate it into one's life" (p. 48). Like Egan and other current educational theorists, Mason believed that the narrative, or the literary style is the tool that allows information to become the child's personal knowledge. Therefore, the narrative should be a mainstay of the curriculum.

### **The Narrative or Literary Style in Curriculum**

#### **Basis for using the narrative**

I move into the discussion of the narrative first by defining exactly what narrative is. Then, I proceed with a discussion of a basis for using the narrative as it relates to curriculum. After that, I give a brief discussion of the usefulness of narrative. Lastly, I make a few comments about how the narrative works on our minds. The topic for this section of this chapter is to shed light on how Mason used the narrative as a component of curriculum. Because these two, narrative and narration, are closely linked, some material may be repeated to make sure certain points are clearly made.

One of the tools Mason (1907) used to help children develop their "science of relations" or "to put him in possession of that which is his" (p. 218) is the narrative. She referred to the narrative as "the literary style" or "living books" (Mason, 1907, p. 228). I discuss this as a major principle or universal of

Mason's beliefs about teaching and learning because she used the narrative throughout most content areas even in math and science. The narrative was used by Mason to help children learn the content of a vast curriculum. In fact, the narrative was a major portion of the curriculum. (See in Appendix D - the copy of the first page of an end of term examination given to a PNEU student in 1921 to get an understanding for the number of subjects taught each term.)

Mason believed that the mind of children rejects dry and dessicated textbooks, and to use them for direct instruction is a waste of time and energy. Children, she believed, learn best through living books or by reading texts written in literary style, that is, in the narrative. Textual material or books written for purely information are repugnant to children. She believed this to be so basic to the mind of children that most all the curriculum she designed was presented to children by way of the narrative. There are current educational theorists who agree. Robert Coles (1989) said that we must have, "a respect for narrative as everyone's rock-bottom capacity, . . .(and) as the universal gift" (p. 30). Similarly, David Lodge (1990) observed, "Narrative is one of the fundamental sensemaking operations of the mind, and would appear to be both peculiar to and universal throughout humanity" (p. 141). McEwan and Egan (1995) also said, "Narrative is a fundamental human capacity, and as such its role in education clearly merits attention" (p. vii). Mason (1925) believed that the power to produce oral compositions is innate in children (p. 191). She believed the story is fundamental to learning and used it on two levels. The first is the narrative as I am discussing it here, the story form. The second use she made of the narrative, is our own "rock-bottom" ability to tell stories and through the telling or retelling of stories to remember what we have heard. Thus, she used narration as a pedagogical tool which I discussed in the previous



chapter. Here, the intent of this discussion is how Mason used the “literary style” or narrative as a means to convey the curriculum to children. In fact, it was not just used as a means to convey the curriculum, it was much of the curriculum.

To help the reader understand the importance of the narrative to Mason, Egan, and other current educationalists, I would like to discuss briefly one system of thinking that has led us away from the use of the narrative. In fact, in the last chapter I discussed Mason’s views on materialism and how it had affected the way we teach children. By way of reminding the reader, Mason believed that materialism, a view of life that only acknowledges what we can know through the physical universe, has led us to devalue the mind of man. Therefore, we teach children as though they are objects to be filled. The mind of man is no longer a living organism growing of its own right or growing from within, but rather, is a “sac” or tabula rasa to be written upon or filled from without, for example, by a teacher. McEwan and Egan (1995) suggested that the narrative “as a way of knowing and as a way of organizing and communicating experience, has become, if not lost, at least of less importance than it ought to be” (p. xii). They believed that the usefulness of the narrative has been destroyed by an educational environment, “where a pervasive nonnarrative and behaviorist chill has prevailed” (p. xii). Mason declared years ago that children could not tolerate reading dry, dessicated texts. McEwan and Egan (1995) said it this way:

Truth, for the tireless promoters of modernity and technical rationality, is measured in terms of standard procedures that demand an icy, critical stare at the object of study. In contrast, the story form invites the listener or reader to suspend skepticism and embrace the narrative flow of events as an authentic

exploration of experience from a particular perspective. The decline of the storyteller, or narrator, may be read as a symptom of the desire for a certain kind of objectivity, the application of a neutral, unbiased point of view from which to gauge the veracity of knowledge claims. Art, religion, morals and even philosophy are suspected of not measuring up to the dictates of such thoroughgoing positivism. But in forging ahead with this program, we forget the power of narrative to inform and instruct.

(p. xii)

What happened as a result of the view of learning described above by McEwan and Egan is that children become empty vessels to fill with objective facts. Mason (1925) said, for children to understand, facts must be clothed with “padding as they reach us in a novel or poem or history book written with literary power” (p. 109). She went on to say that, “ a child cannot in mind or body live upon tabloids however scientifically prepared” (p. 109). Egan (1992) stated that we must not allow education to become the teaching of just “a set of algorithms or discrete pieces of knowledge, but that always, however briefly, we tie knowledge in with the human passions” (p. 56). This materialistic view of man which produced a behaviorist approach to teaching and learning has mechanized education. Instead of education providing, as Egan suggested, a link to our passions, the materialist view has now provided us with a list of “core knowledge,” facts, or standards with no links to our passions or emotions.

Of course, to attend to our imaginations, emotions, passions and so on, is to believe that these components of mind exist and have value. According to Egan (1992), John B. Watson, considered the father of behaviorism, did not see a need to study the imagination because such functions of the mind could not

be measured (p. 34). As discussed in an earlier chapter, such a view of life is a reductionist view. That is, unless the concept can be reduced to a materialist understanding, it does not exist. For example, a study of the imagination would be to understand the physical properties of the brain that caused imagination. Imagination would have no spiritual impetus. All characteristics of imagination are explained by physical properties such as chemicals or hormones in the brain and body. As Mason contended, to have such a view is to believe that “the brain secretes thought as the liver secretes bile” (p. 260). Such a materialistic view causes us to teach the physical brain and not to the spiritual mind.

What happens to the curriculum with the materialistic view of life dominating education? Philip Jackson (1995) said that the humanities in schools usually go first. Curriculum ideas such as “back to basics” move to the front. He quoted from the Report of the Commission on Humanities, “wherever basic education concentrates exclusively on the three R’s, or whenever academic achievement is reduced to what can be measured by standardized testing, the humanities are likely to be misunderstood as expendable frills (Report, 1980, p. 28)” (p. 7). Further, the mechanization of teaching and learning has been around so long that we have little else to compare it too. Egan (1992) stated that the learning of facts and the testing of facts has gone on so long in schools that it is taken “straightforwardly as evidence of learning” and that this system of teaching and learning has gone “on so long and so ubiquitously in schools that the meaning of learning that is most common is this kind of mechanical storage and retrieval” (p. 49).

Mason believed that children had a sense of “I amness”. I believe she based this on her Judeo-Christian belief system. In Exodus 3:14 God told

Moses, "This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I am has sent me to you.' (NIV) Hence Mason and the PNEU had developed "I am, I can, I ought, I will" as the motto for the organization. Dick Keyes (1984) said that, "People are aware of themselves in a way that they cannot be aware of others. There is a central "I am" in each of us that seems the core of our consciousness" (p. 36). This "I amness" gives us a sense of being and a sense of our own story. But to know myself I must live in relationship to others. The narrative provides that relationship with the present and the past. Mason's use of the term "Science of Relations" included the relationship to the past through history and literature. It is the building of these relations that the curriculum must provide. She (1907) said, "In regards to a curriculum, . . . Perhaps the main part of a child's education should be concerned with the greatest human relationships. History, literature, art, languages (whether ancient or modern), travel--all of these are the record or expression of persons, so is science so far as it is the history of discoveries, the record of observations"(p. 234). Therefore, for Mason, the narrative as a means of knowing and building relationships was the tool throughout the curriculum.

The point in this discussion is that the narrative is a tool for knowing and thus should be used across the curriculum. It is our "amness" that gives us a sense of story and our need for relationships that require the story. Mason (1925) stated that children must not have "a naked generalisation,. . . but an idea clothed upon with fact, history and story, so that the mind may perform the acts of selection and inception from a mass of illustrative details" (p. 110). According to McEwan and Egan (1995), the research and study of feminist scholars not only made the fact that the narrative is a way of knowing but their research has brought about a renewed interest in the use of the narrative as a way of knowing (p. xiii).

## What the narrative does to make it useful?

How is the narrative useful to us? Much of what I have said in the previous section can also be applied to the usefulness of the narrative. There are a few points that I would like to be sure are clear about the usefulness of the narrative.

Egan (1992) stated that “As it becomes clearer that the mind functions as a whole and that this whole includes our bodies, the sense of the mind as an elaborate calculating organ with reason as its mode of calculating becomes increasingly untenable” (p. 62). In the view that “the mind functions as a whole and that this whole includes our bodies” (p 62), the physical world (materialistic world) is only one part of us, the other is the spiritual and according to Mason the mind, our spiritual counterpart to the physical brain, must be fed on ideas; and, as we saw in the last section, these ideas are best fed through the narrative. According to McEwan and Egan (1995), Bruner stated, “‘Story must construct two landscapes simultaneously (1986, p. 14)’ the outer landscape of action and the inner one of thought and intention” (p, xi). This is the bringing together of the physical and the spiritual. We cannot separate the two. The narrative allows us to join both. The concept that we are spiritual and need both spiritual and physical food is stated so poignantly in the story of *Crow and Weasel* by Barry Lopez (1990) when he said, “If stories come to you care for them. And learn to give them away where they are needed. Sometimes a person needs a story more than food to stay alive” (p. 49).

Stories, as I have said, give us a sense of identity or “I amness.”  
Narratives according to Egan (1992),

invite us to come to know the world and our place in it. Whether narratives of history, present experience, or the imagination,

stories call us to consider what we know, what we hope for, who we are, and what and whom we care about. (p. 40)

McEwan and Egan (1995) also pointed to another use of the narrative. Children, they believed, are more capable of difficult thinking than we often give them credit. They stated that we often think of children as concrete thinkers with no ability to think abstractly (p. xii). Philip Jackson (1995) spoke of the transforming power of the story (p. 9). This concept of the transformative power of the narrative was also discussed in the last chapter. The point to be made here is that children can think beyond just concrete pieces of information. Egan (1986) stated that past views of education have caused us to present a curriculum to children that is superficial. To present to children the real world through the narrative does not mean “we brutalize or terrorize children with all the horror and awfulness of human experience and history, but rather we do present human experience in a manner that does not trivialize it, bowdlerize it, or sentimentalize it” (p. 108). He went on to say that we must respect the minds of children and that we must realize that by age five they have the necessary intellectual tools to learn about the world. In fact, according to Egan, many current educational theorists have an “arid and impoverished image of the child” (p. 17). Because of this view of children, their curriculum has been reduced to the “concretely manipulable and directly tied to some simple content within the child’s immediate experience” (p. 17). When one reviews the curriculum used by Mason (see Appendices D), it is evident that more than the concrete or manipulables were used. Because she believed children were born persons, the curriculum she used is extensive and full of narrative. The narrative engages the young child as it engages the adult.

Mason claimed to use the narrative so that each child could take from the

content what fitted him as a person. Egan (1986) stated that we must get rid of the idea that we cannot educate children in the same way. The mechanistic view of education emphasizes what Egan called the “controllable” (p. 34). The point he made is that “Children can then use in individually unpredictable ways what was the objective of the lesson. But the point here is that it is the unpredictable use, the spontaneity, the creative imagination that is at the educational heart of the matter. What the model (mechanistic) does is leave this out in the cold, and suggest that the heart of the matter is the controllable, predictable, prespecifiable past. It is by such means that a model can deform an enterprise it is supposed to serve” (p. 35). The point of this discussion is that the narrative allows children to learn what fits them, as Egan said in “individually unpredictable ways” (p. 34).

Postman (1989) in his article, “Learning by Story” discussed the usefulness of the narrative as a means to help us make meaning of facts and information. He said, “Without stories as organizing frameworks we are swamped by the volume of our own experience, adrift in a sea of facts. Merely listing them cannot help us, because without some tale to guide us there is no limit to the list” (p. 123). In discussing the work of E. D. Hirsch, Jr., Postman believed that Hirsch asked the correct question (a question about ignorance) in his book *Cultural Literacy* but gave the wrong answer: a list of facts. He further stated that Allen Bloom’s solution of reading the classics as a way to solve the problem is not correct. Postman saw the classics as an insufficient answer. He stated that each nation, generation must tell its own story. The story can include the writers of the past but the past writers must be integrated into the story of the present generation.

Not only does the narrative help us make meaning of facts and

information, but the narrative also teaches us virtues. Egan (1992) stated, “Stories are good for ‘educating us into the virtues’ because the story not only conveys information and describes events and actions but because it also engages our emotions. . . .The powerful stories of the world do not simply describe a range of human qualities: they make us somehow a part of those qualities” (p. 55). By making us “a part of those qualities” the narrative allows us to change from within.

Finally, because we change from within as beings created in the image of God, Mason (1907) believed that it is through “living books” (p. 228) that children could create their own story. Without this, children become “devitalized.”

Mason (1925) contended that through the use of the narrative and by narrating the story, children created their own story. She said, “thus his reproduction becomes original” (p. 18). Egan (1992) likewise observed that “Virtually nothing emerges from the human memory in the same form it was initially learned” (p. 49). Thus, in summary to this discussion about the usefulness of the narrative in the curriculum, we have seen that Mason used the narrative because it provided a means for children to think more deeply and with more complexity than through the memorization of facts. Narrative, or story, made effective use of the imagination and as Egan (1992) stated, “Imagination also differs from perception in that perception ‘receives’ its objects, whereas imagination generates them” (p. 28). The narrative, we have seen from Mason and current educational theorists, causes the mind to work as a whole thus using not only our cognitive abilities but our emotional abilities as well. This makes use of the mind in a true constructivist sense; that is, the mind is constructing knowledge. Further the narrative allows for more individual,



spontaneous learning. Lastly, the narrative enables children to involve themselves in the story in such a way as to learn social virtues. Finally, putting these points about the usefulness of the narrative together, children are able to develop their own story, allowing as Postman stated, each generation to pull from the present and the past to create its own story.

### **Summary**

Children as spiritual beings need to be provided a feast of ideas. This feast according to Mason (1925) should be based on “the very nature of things” (p. 156). That is life itself and all the relationships it has to offer children: nature, science, history, literature and on and on. This is the curriculum proper to a child. A child created in the image of God should have access to the world God created. To do less is to cheat children of their educational birthright. She said, “All the world is in truth the child’s possession, prepared for him and if we keep him out of his rights. . .we are guilty of fraudulent practices” (1925, p. 42). This full and generous curriculum or liberal education is to be for all children. This was a new cry in Mason’s day. This was her wish for all the children of Britain. She believed that knowledge is power and that it is the instrument that could equalize all peoples. Further, she believed the narrative was the tool that engaged the minds of children and should, therefore, be used across the curriculum as a tool for effective learning.

We turn our attention now to The Children Community School and observe their use of curriculum. The focus of the curriculum portion of the case study will be on the school’s use of a “full and generous” curriculum and the school’s use of the narrative in the curriculum. The school did not have a curriculum that was as “full and generous” as Mason advocated, however, they provided a curriculum more “full and generous” than is available, for example,

currently in Virginia. Further, I did not observe the use of the narrative in mathematics or science, although teachers stated that narration was used in science. The narrative was used most often in history and literature. I have written this portion of the case study a little differently than previously. The difference is that I begin the case study with a summary of points of interest that all the teachers made in my conversations with them about curriculum at the school. From the general information about their curriculum, I move to individual teacher's beliefs and thoughts about curriculum. Interspersed with these conversations, I bring to bear my observations about the use of curriculum at the school and any information about the school's curriculum I have gleaned from documents.

### **A Full and Generous Curriculum: A Picture of Practice**

First, I will point out the school's curriculum in light of Mason's belief that because children have minds that need to be fed ideas, therefore, the curriculum should be "full and generous," a banquet of ideas to nourish the mind just as the physical body needs a variety of food and exercise. Does the school offer a full and generous curriculum? The school's curriculum is not as extensive as that provided by Mason. For a useful comparison of a list of subjects taught using Mason's curriculum and the curriculum of The Children's Community School, I have included in Figures 16, 17, and 18 a list of subjects included on The Children's Community School report card for grade three, four and middle school. These can be compared with a copy of the first page from two end of term examinations for children in a PNEU school located in Appendix D. The first page contains a list of subjects taught during the term. Why do I contend that the curriculum at The Children's Community School is not as "full

<b>Subjects listed on the grade three report card</b>	
Oral Reading	Mathematics
Reading Comprehension	Science
Composition/Grammar	Social Studies
Spelling	Foreign Language
Handwriting	Art
Music	Physical Education

Figure 16. Subjects Listed on Third Grade Report Card

<b>Subjects listed on the grade four report card</b>	
Literature	Mathematics
English	Science
Spelling/Vocabulary	History
Foreign Language	Art
Chorus	Active Games

Figure 17. Subjects Listed on Fourth Grade Report Card

<b>Subjects listed on the Middle School report card</b>	
Core Curriculum	Electives
Literature/Vocabulary	Foreign Language
Grammar/Composition	Art
Math	Music
Science	Computer
Social Studies	Physical Education
	Special
	Bible

Figure 18. Subjects Listed on Middle School Report Card

and generous” as that of Mason’s?

On the school’s Middle School Progress Report the following subjects

are listed in two categories. In the first category are listed Literature/Vocabulary, Grammar/Composition, Math, Science, and Social Studies. On the second category are listed Foreign Language, Art, Music, Computer, Bible, Physical Education and Special. On the progress report for the primary grades, the following subjects were listed: Oral Reading, Reading Comprehension, Composition/Grammar, Spelling, Handwriting, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, Foreign Language, Art, Music, and Physical Education. However, there were some subjects on the curriculum not included on either progress reports. For example, while visiting in Ms. Cassett's class I observed a picture study of a Grandma Moses painting. This painting is published in the Open Court Reading Series that the school is using. Further, I did not observe an actual nature study lesson, however, the staff during interviews talked about nature study. In fact, the Director stated,

Charlotte Mason would take children on walks, not necessarily in the woods although that's a nice place to go, but in the garden. We just walk around our schoolyard and look at what happens to be blooming at the time or turn a log over and look at the mushrooms or the little worms crawling on the underside of it. She'd bring a sample of whatever it was into the classroom and she wouldn't do an in-depth science study where she lectured the students about whatever the plant was or the critters. But she would just ask the children to make watercolor pictures of what they were observing. . . . They used dry brush watercolor technique.

Along with the nature study we see added to the curriculum in a natural way the use of watercolor paints. Ms. Little referred to her students as doing a

lot of nature study by observing the “birdbath and bird feeder and the children have really been interested in watching the birds coming. We’ve drawn them and learned about them. They’ve drawn beautifully. I’ve been amazed because they all said they couldn’t draw.” Again combining nature study with art. The children have weekly what is typically known in elementary schools as “art.” I observed several of these classes in process. But the issue of watercolor connected to nature study is different from the traditional art class. It is a time of learning to use watercolor as well as a time to explore on a personal basis nature. I’ve stated on a personal basis, because the children are allowed to paint what interest them about the nature they are observing.

The school has philosophical beliefs about curriculum that are compatible with that of Mason. First, the general attitude of the school’s director and that of the teachers are that children should direct the curriculum. Jessica Forest, the school director, stated that the curriculum can bend to meet the interest and needs of the teachers and children. She said they can pursue whatever they are interested in. For another example, Ms. Norman tied together the concept of children as born persons with that of curriculum. She said in response to my question about the implications of Mason’s belief about children as born persons, “I think for me one of the differences is curriculum driven, goal driven verses children driven and I think many classrooms are very curriculum, goal driven.” I observed this same philosophy in Ms. Little, the fifth grade teacher.

One afternoon when I was spending most of the day with Ms. Little, I walked out onto the playground after lunch with the fourth grade teachers and Ms. Little. After standing for a while and watching the children play, someone suggested that everyone should show me the forts. After visiting the set of forts,

Ms. Little took me to the other side of the campus with her students and showed me the forts her class had built in the bamboo forest that is located along side of the big open field behind the school. What interested me about the forts as it relates to curriculum is that the children are allowed the time to build the forts and relive the Civil War. The children's need to reenact or recreate the story of the Civil War takes precedent over hurrying to another time in history. Their need to act out the Civil War as a way of knowing was more important than hurrying the children along through the curriculum.

The children recreated the narrative of the Civil War in their own lives. Ms. Little said, "The girls were Southerners and we had spies, they reenacted that whole thing. They made maps where they were hiding, where they were going. They just relived the whole thing." As part of their language arts, the children were reading the trade book, *Behind Rebel Lines* by Seymour Reit (1988), as they were studying the Civil War in history class. During their free time the children relive the narrative as they build forts, make maps, become Civil War heroes and march with General Lee. Allowing the children the time to recreate narratively what they have learned in class allows the children the opportunity to transform the history into their own lives. They have taken a historical event from the past, like Postman suggested, and, using the narrative, as Mason has suggested, transformed it into a meaningful experience in their own generation. Here, the teachers meet the two curriculum elements discussed in the essay. First, the children are allowed a rich curriculum about the Civil War. Second, they are learning the Civil War through the narrative as well as creating a narrative of their own about the Civil War and thereby transforming the Civil War into their own lives as Postman suggested.

The forts built by the whole student body on the other side of the school's

back campus are used to relive the American Revolution. Again, the teachers are providing another opportunity for the children to recreate the curriculum into the narrative form as a means of knowing the history of the early American colonies and the American Revolution. Reenacting the American Revolution and the American Civil War are both opportunities that allow the children to recreate history into a narrative form which allows them to transform that history into their own personal history. The narrative places them or their “I amness” in the middle of both wars, thereby allowing the children to bring the meaningfulness and significance of both wars into their current 21st Century lives.

Mason and Egan suggested that when children retell stories or incidences in their lives, because the story is delivered through them and thereby touched by their “I amness,” it not only transforms the past into the present as Postman suggested, but it also becomes an original piece of work as it is touched by the personality of the child. It is this use of the narrative that The Children’s Community School allowed to happen naturally through not only times of narration in the classroom but through allowing the children to use the narrative and narration through their creative play.

Ms. German, the Middle School Director, and Ms. Norman, the Lower School Director, both believed that curriculum should leave children with a desire to know more. Ms. German said that she wants children to get an understanding that the twelfth grade is not the end. She wants children to have a love of learning. Ms. Norman believed that the curriculum should motivate life long learning. It should not be a “spray and pray” approach. That is, teachers should not have as their intention to “spray” information out to children, praying that they get it. Rather, the curriculum should encourage life long learning.

Ms. Little believed that the curriculum should be broad but also with depth. She related the following thoughts.

I went to college last year. I had to be certified to teach and I went to college here. I was appalled at what I wasn't taught and people's attitude about learning. You only take a class if you want to get a good grade. . . .I think it is very important to have a broad curriculum. That's what education is. Education is the knowledge about as much as we can find out. . . .I think that's what civilized people should be like, having the art of conversation is so important, to be able to converse with other human beings about the things of life and it's part of discovering ourselves, our history, who we are and how we got here and literature is all really about who we are and how we got to the point we are.

From this interview it is clear that Ms. Little believes that children's curriculum should be more than just facts. Their curriculum should invite them to know their world, their place in the world and themselves as members of the world or community.

All the teachers used the narrative in the study of history by coordinating their use of literature with history. For example, while studying the beginning of the settlement of America, the fourth grade read and narrated the trade book, *The Sign of the Beaver* by Elizabeth George Speare (1983). Ms. Little's class studied *Behind Rebel Lines* by Seymour Reit (1988) while studying the Civil War. While studying the Renaissance, they read and narrated the trade book entitled, *I, Juan de Pareja*, by Borton de Trevino (1965). This book was a story about the slave of the Spanish artist, Valezquez. The children immediately



began to make connections to American slavery. These are examples of the school using the narrative in the literature and history curriculum.

### **Reflections**

Although for most schools The Children's Community School has a curriculum that includes more subjects than most, it still does not encompass as many subjects as Mason. For example, the examination that I copied while at the Armit Library in Ambleside, England, in the summer of 1999, has listed on its first page the list of subjects the eleven year old was to be tested on. The subjects listed beyond that of The Children's Community School are: Dictation, French History, General History, Citizenship, Geography, Practical Geometry, and two languages instead of one for a total of sixteen subjects. On this examination paper there were forty-five pages of responses to questions the child answered based on what had been studied for the term. That did not include the title page or several pages left out by the librarian during the copying process. The Children's Community School by standards of today's school has an extensive curriculum for an elementary school, particularly, compared to that of Virginia which, as I have stated, has reduced its curriculum to four core subjects. However, The Children's Community School's curriculum still does not contain the breadth of curriculum as that of Mason's.

Thus, there is evidence that the school has a fairly broad curriculum; however, not as broad as Mason suggested. And, it is also clear from the documentation provided here that the staff uses the narrative effectively not only in the classroom through the history and literature connection but also through the children's creative play.

## Epilogue

I entitle this last section epilogue because the word conveys a sense of continuing on. In fact, a synonym for epilogue is the word continuation. Although this paper contains conclusions I have drawn and many relevant points of interest, it is in no way a “final conclusion.” Based on the research contained in this paper, I believe there is much still to understand about Mason as an educational philosopher that can ultimately help many children love life and love learning. She discusses many more topics on education and children that are not contained in this paper. This work is only the beginning of what may turn out to be my life study into the principles and practical methodologies of this remarkable woman, and I hope that in some measure this paper serves to encourage others to join me in my pursuit.

When I began this research project, I had two goals in mind. One was to explicate the educational philosophy of Charlotte Mason and the other was to determine whether or not her philosophy could still be useful in a 21st Century American school. I have accomplished the first goal through the essays contained in this paper. I have not only learned more about Mason’s philosophy, but I have learned much about what many current learning theorists know and believe about teaching and learning. The second goal has been achieved through the study of The Children’s Community School, where I spent time observing, interviewing, and collecting documents to determine if Mason’s ideas can still be effectively used today.

My goal in this epilogue is to briefly summarize my findings as they relate to the two goals mentioned above. I accomplish this by succinctly reviewing each of the six principles of Mason’s philosophy studied in this paper and then

by briefly summarizing my findings from the data collected at The Children's Community School. In each of the case study sections of the previous chapters, I establish at the end of the case study whether or not The Children's Community School is accomplishing the educational principle discussed in that essay. Here, I summarize those findings. Second, I provide a short personal experience that relates to Mason's theories from the school where I currently work. Third, I mention a few of the many possibilities for further research and study into the work of Charlotte Mason. Lastly, I give some closing comments about the effect of this study on my personal growth.

### **The Essays**

The personhood of children is a theme throughout the educational philosophy of Mason. It is the foundation from which she viewed children and humans and from which she developed how children should be taught. Because **children are born persons** then they come with all the attributes of humanity. One of those attributes is that humans have, as Adler (1990) said, not only an innate desire to know but an innate ability to know (p. 149). For her it was clear that if humanity has this innate desire to know and this innate ability to know, then it is from within that children learn, not from without. Therefore, we do not have to teach children to know or to learn when we try to do so, it is a waste of time. Mason expressed her beliefs about children's innate ability and need to know using such phrases as "living organism" or children must perform their own "act of knowing." Because children have these innate abilities, she believed there are natural laws of learning that we must study and know in order to effectively work with children. An example of a natural law of learning was her use of the narrative and narration. Because children change from within, she believed that we must seek methods to teach children that capitalize

on this innate need and ability to know.

I believe, based on the evidence I gathered, and demonstrated in the essay on the personhood of children that The Children's Community School is substantially accomplishing a respect of and caring for the personhood of children. I give here a few examples that I believe support my conclusion. First, the staff made clear on a number of occasions that the children are more important to them than the curriculum. The staff makes sure that all children learn. If a child needs extra help, such as one of the students who needed extra help with math, the school provides the child extra help through tutors. The number of students in each classroom is fourteen or below. According to the staff the school purposefully keeps classroom numbers low so that children's individual needs can be met. Further, the instructional program is arranged through the use of narration and process-oriented activities to meet the needs of children who are viewed as "living organisms." Based on this evidence, the school is implementing Mason's concept of 'children are born persons' in a credible fashion.

In the essay on the **nature of children** I discuss Mason's view that children, like all humans, are born with a propensity for good and evil. In her understanding, the purpose of education is to teach children the good in life and to attenuate the evil. Mason believed that the formation of habits, training of our imagination, reason, enjoying and acknowledging the beauty in life as well as the proper exercise of justice are all important in educating children for good. Mason is not alone in that endeavor. Kohn (1996), Smith (1985), Boyer (1995) and others believe that children have good in them and our educational settings must promote the good.

At The Children's Community School we saw an example of a student

which the school, or particularly Ms. German, felt that they had not succeeded in helping, a child who is lazy and slothful and they seemingly could not help him out of mental lethargy. Their discipline procedure 'The Stop Sign' does not attenuate the evil in children in a relational manner, but is probably more "pop behaviorism" as Kohn (1993) called it, than based on Mason's principles particularly her principle that children change from within. However, notwithstanding these points the staff at the school is developing an instructional program that encourages the good in children in many aspects. Their use of curriculum such as picture study, nature study, literature, history helps in this regard. Their own ability to nurture the children helps as well. Further, the creative play and projects designed by the staff allows for the use of the children's imaginations, creativity and reason.

**Authority and docility** can be such explosive issues in many schools. While many people feel that children should be under the complete authority of the teacher, Mason felt this is not quite as it should be. Children, created in the image of God, also have a need to exercise dominion and should learn to exercise this dominion properly through education. We should be educating children so as to develop a healthy sense and a proper use of dominion in children. Adults who exercise absolute authority are wrong to do so according to Mason. Authority for her is by virtue of one's position and expertise. Because authority is not invested in us personally, then no one has absolute authority and should not act as such. According to Mason, children should be allowed to exercise a proper sense of authority for themselves in the classroom. Self-authority through the development of good habits promotes liberty and is the best gift we can give a child. Children, according to Mason, are willing to obey and learn from adults who do not exercise absolute authority. I pointed out in

these discussions that writers such as Smith (1985), Kohn (1996) (1993) and others agree with Mason.

Authority and docility at The Children's Community School are mainly exercised through a truly nurturing staff. However, the use of the stop sign program for discipline does not match with Mason's more relational approach to discipline and authority. The school might consider training parents and teachers in a better understanding of authority and docility from Mason's point of view.

**Personality** is an important clue in the education of children for Mason. In this essay I discussed the sacredness of personality as Mason understood it. Because the personality is sacred, Mason believed that we should not manipulate children through fear, love, suggestion, or influence. And, she believed that the desires of children should not be manipulated by adults. To do either of these is to distort the character of children and to manipulate children for our own ends, thereby creating dependent children rather than children with appropriate self-dependence. Smith (1985), Kohn (1996) as well as others agree with Mason. Since we must not manipulate the personality of children, then Mason believed we are left with only three proper and necessary tools to educate children: first, education as an atmosphere, or the use of a child's natural environment or circumstances; second, education as a discipline, or the formation of habits that provide for self-authority; third, education as a life, or the feeding of our spiritual minds with ideas. Mason believed ideas from the great minds of all time should be the spiritual food for children, not our opinions.

At The Children's Community School I did not witness the use of the stop sign approach to discipline. I did not witness at any time any behavior on the part of the adult that would indicate to me that the staff is trying to

inappropriately manipulate the children. The stop sign approach to discipline could have had a generalized effect, although I did not notice children giving any attention to the procedure at all. Being around someone for a number of days, people often forget that new people are in their environment. I believe that over the time I spent at the school, if the stop sign approach had been a dominating approach, the children would have constantly been aware of it. No one, not even the teachers tended to acknowledge it. Therefore, at the time of the school year in which I observed, I could not state that the stop sign approach had undue influence on the children. As I have said, it was not an approach consistent with Mason. This lack of a match between their discipline procedure and Mason's philosophy could be caused by the fact that most of the staff had not read any of Mason's work. Further, many of the staff members with whom I spoke had examples of how children had come out of their shells after attending the school. This suggests an environment where children's personalities are valued.

In the essay on pedagogy, I concentrated most of the discussion on the use of **narration**. I showed how narration, through the eyes of some current educators, is still perceived as an effective natural learning device. I discussed how narration not only allows a child to learn a story or piece of history, but uses the spatial memory system to retain the knowledge for a long time. Further, I discussed how through the use of narration, children can transform the literature or history into their being. This parallels Mason's ideas that, since each of us is unique, when children narrate they produce the story in an original form thereby making the story personal. Making the story personal, Postman (1989) stated, is important for us in order to make history a part of our own story. So, narration, I showed was a natural learning device for remembering large amounts of

knowledge as well as a device to help us make literature, art, history, math and so on, a part of our personal history. Further, through what I discussed about Mason's beliefs concerning narration as well as Brown and Cambourne's beliefs regarding narration, I demonstrated how narration is useful to help children acquire language.

At the Children's Community School I observed narration in literature, history and art. Ms. Cassett used narration for a picture study that I recorded. She and others used narration as a learning device in the literature they were reading from trade books. Through interviews the teachers told me that narration is the piece of Mason's pedagogy that they use most often and the part they feel the most comfortable with. Eve Anderson on her visits from England has done demonstration lessons for the staff. Hence, they have first hand experience with the use of narration and not just theoretical knowledge. Many of the teachers believed narration to be effective in helping children learn to develop their attention, concentration and their ability to sequence information. From my discussions with them, they believe narration to be an effective learning device.

In the essay on **curriculum** I discussed Mason's views on curriculum, hindrances to curriculum and the use of the narrative in the curriculum. Egan and McEwan (1995), Postman (1989), as well as Mason believe in the use of the narrative as an effective tool for learning. The narrative allows us the connection to people in history, literature, science, art and across the curriculum. It is the story form that engages our emotions and passions and this helps us connect deeply inside of our own personalities with events and people from the past. This is the kind of deep learning of which Caine and Caine (1994) speak. Lodge (1990) and Coles (1989) said the narrative is basic to



human life. Because Mason believed that children could not tolerate dry, dessicated texts, she used the narrative to work with the natural learning abilities of children. In fact, our ability to tell stories (a natural learning device) was her clue to understanding the use of narration and the narrative as tools for learning. Therefore, the narrative was used over a “full and generous” curriculum. For many PNEU schools this meant a curriculum that covered as many as sixteen or seventeen subjects. Children need, according to Mason, a broad, rich and deep curriculum from which to pull the data to make decisions about life.

I demonstrated in the case study that The Children’s Community School did not have as broad a curriculum as that recommended by Mason. The school, however, does have a broader curriculum than that promoted in many states’ curriculums that focus narrowly on four core subjects: English, history, science and math. It is also clear that the school uses the narrative in literature and history. This is demonstrated by the use of trade books in literature such as *The Sign of the Beaver* (Elizabeth George Speare, 1983) and *I, Juan de Parejo* (Borton de Trevino, 1965), and in history, by the historical anthology, *A History of Us* (Hakim, 1993).

Therefore, based on the summary of findings at The Children’s Community School, and based on the essays and the findings of current educationalists, I believe that the educational philosophy of Charlotte Mason that I have discussed here can be used effectively today. I would like to give a personal example of why I believe this to be true which further supports the evidence from The Children’s Community School.

### **My Personal Experience**

The school system in which I work is heavily dominated by behavioral

psychology; for example, we have to write each content area for each day's lesson in what is called a behavioral objective. When I became principal at the school where I now work, I began to encourage the teachers to read books about whole language and brain-based learning. These are the educational theorists who have not formed their thinking about education from behaviorism. They develop their thinking about teaching and learning from cognitive psychology or from a constructivist background. Through the several years of these readings and discussions, the staff and I have come to recognize the usefulness of trade books, small novels, for children particularly the small historical novels as a way to make history more meaningful and more alive.

What is useful about these books? Once we began to read these stories in connection with historical time periods, we noticed an increased interest on the part of the children in reading and history. For example, when studying the American Revolution, several trade books such as *Jump Ship for Freedom* (J. L. Collier and C. Collier, 1981) and *Guns for General Washington* (Seymour Reit, 1990) were available for the children to read along with their studies in history. The increased interest in history and reading at a school where seventy percent of our students are urban at-risk children was a delightful discovery. The point I wish to make here is that the school staff saw how the narrative engaged the minds of children. The narrative is essential, or as Mason (1925) said, children must not have "a naked generalisation. . . but an idea clothed upon with fact, history and story, so that the mind may perform the acts of selection and inception from a mass of illustrative details" (p. 110). Postman (1989) stated that "without stories as organizing frameworks we are swamped by the volume of our own experience, adrift in a sea of facts. Merely listing them cannot help us, because without some tale to guide us there is no limit to the

list” (p. 123). At first hand, I watched children begin to enjoy reading and to become more interested in learning, especially history. Now I believe, they used the stories in the trade books to connect the facts and information they were learning in history to their own experiences and to their own imaginations, making the stories “their own.” The narrative gives them the “organizing frameworks” (Postman, 1989, p. 123) needed to allow their minds to delve into the story without getting lost “in a sea of facts” (p. 123). Therefore, I believe that through the use of the narrative these children, who previously had no interest in history or literature, began to make sense of what they were learning and subsequently began to enjoy history and literature. Further, reading good literature awakened in them a self-motivated interest in learning.

### **Suggested Further Research**

Oftentimes when we study an issue about education or study another person’s beliefs about education, we come away with more questions than with which we started. That is true of this study. There are several areas of Mason’s work that I believe need further research.

First, based on the knowledge gained from this research, it seems that **narration** is truly useful for retaining large amounts of information. And, although I am not a behaviorist, I believe that if this is true, then narration as a psychological/cognitive process needs to be measured and documented. Therefore, there needs to be further study in this area of narration. Does using narration truly affect the language development of children? Beyond the work of Brown and Cambourne (1990) in their book entitled *Read and Retell*, which uses variations of retelling, there needs to be more research to prove the effects of narration on the language development of children. Mason claimed that children should be allowed only once to hear a reading and then they must

narrate. This she believed developed the ability to attend. The staff members at The Children's Community School agree with Mason. It seems to help the children strengthen their ability to attend; however, I believe this subject needs more conclusive research. Another question that remains is: Does narration truly allow us to transform information into ourselves? All of these questions need to be studied further.

Second, the use of the **narrative** as a device to help children make connections from themselves to the past stories of history, science, math and literature needs further study. It seems at the school where I work that it has helped children become better readers and more interested in history. Postman says it is a framework on which we can attach facts. Mason said that for children to remember history, literature and other subjects, these must come to the children in the story form to ignite their imaginations so the knowledge would be implanted in their memory. Does learning using the narrative increase children's ability to retain more knowledge? How does the narrative affect the memory of children? These ideas need further research to substantiate the claims.

Generally speaking, I believe most people would acknowledge in theory that the **personality** of children should not be manipulated. Yet in practice the story is frequently different. For example, a friend's daughter recently was told by her principal that if everyone did well on their state tests and raised the school's scores, they could have a sock hop dance. She came home feeling bribed. My concern is what effect will such actions have on the moral development and character of children. No matter how subtle the bribery is, does it affect children's moral development and character development? These concepts need to be researched and studied further.

If one looks at **authority** through the example in the preceding paragraph, one question arising from this instance is: What respect should a child have for the authority of a person who manipulates him or her through bribery? How is a child's view of authority affected through such behaviors? How does this type of behavior on the part of adults affect the **nature of children**? Does it promote the good in children? Or, does it promote learning how to manipulate others? This type of behavior on the part of adults and its results in the lives of children needs further research.

When one looks closely at the suggestions for further research that I have suggested here, the personhood of children is contained within all of them. For, as Mason believed, **children as born persons** permeates all of what we know and believe about children.

### **Closing Comments**

I want to draw my reader's attention back to universals and particulars that I discussed in the first chapter of this dissertation. Vishal Mangalwadi (1992) in his book *When the New Age Gets Old*, gives the following story as an explanation of universals and particulars.

Imagine a child who interrupts his reading to ask, 'Mum, what's a guava?'

The mother replies, 'It's a fruit.'

The child sighs with relief. 'Oh, I thought it was some kind of an animal that lives on trees and was wondering why John [in this story] ate it straight off a tree!'

In philosophical terms, a 'guava' is a *particular*, while an 'animal' or a 'fruit' is a *universal*. The child understands what a particular (guava) thing is only by reference to the universal (a fruit

or an animal).

All knowledge is like that. If the mother were to ask, 'What is John [a particular]?', the child would have to reply with a universal, 'a boy'.

No particular can be understood without reference to a universal. A particular is a specific thing -- e.g., a guave or John. A universal is a broader category -- e.g., a fruit or a boy. A universal, if it is finite, itself becomes a relative particular. In the above example, John is a particular and 'boy' is a universal. But 'boy' being finite, is only relatively a universal. It too needs a higher universal if it is to make any sense. For example, if someone whose English vocabulary is very limited asks, 'What is a boy?' we can only answer that with a still higher universal -- 'a human being' -- which makes sense of (relative) particulars like boy, girl, man or woman. (p. 239)

It has been my life long journey to know more about learning. It seems to me that my experience in schools has been that most people focus on teaching. But teaching and learning, at least in the context of education, are particulars. In this instance Children are the universal, although a relative universal, the higher universal being the human being. When one focuses on particulars (teaching and learning) without seeing the whole (the child), it is easy to go astray. In the case of teaching one can design beautiful, visually pleasing and exciting lessons, but the point is not the presentation, but, in fact, what do children *know* as a result of the lesson. In the case of learning, one can learn many "soundbites" or tidbits of information, but does one *know* on a deeper level? It is the whole that I must see and understand in order to direct my efforts

correctly. Therefore, It is the child that needs to be my focus. As Mason said, “Our business is to find out how great a mystery a person is” (1925, p. 80). My business is not to seek teaching and learning as ends unto themselves. Therefore, my personal goal has become to study more about children both physically and spiritually and let this understanding inform my beliefs about teaching and learning. This, it seems to me was Mason’s focus. It was her focus because she believed that the child is a living “organism” (Mason, 1925, p. 24), self-directed being or as Piaget believed, little scientists, in their own right, not vessels to be filled. If they are vessels to be filled then beautiful, exciting lessons could be my only concern. Mason understood that her knowledge of *children* must inform her teaching practice. She did not design exciting lessons, but rather lessons that conformed to the learning needs of *children*. Because she (Mason 1925) sought “to find out how great a mystery a person is *qua* person” (p. 80) her views on children and pedagogy for children are still relevant today.

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## **APPENDIX A**

### **Case Study Methodology**

#### **Introduction**

This dissertation is an analysis of the educational philosophy of Charlotte Mason intended to serve as an introduction to the ideas supporting the schools she founded. Currently, in the United States there are several schools using the philosophy of Mason as their foundational principles about teaching and learning. There are several schools in the southeastern part of the United States as well as schools in the southwest and northwest. The purpose of this case study is to use one of those schools as a case study to answer this question: Are Mason's learning theories useful for implementation in an American school a century later?

It was my purpose in this case study to try to determine how Mason's ideas were being used in a private American school in the southeastern United States. For that purpose I set forth the core research question mentioned above as a guide. As Bogdan and Biklen (1992) suggested, the results of qualitative research emerge to create a picture (p. 30). It was my hope that as I completed this case study the evidence would emerge and produce the data necessary to document a "picture" of a Charlotte Mason School. However, as Bogdan and Biklen also stated, even though the results of the study emerge to produce concepts, it would be foolish for the qualitative researcher not to have a plan (p. 58). Therefore, I realized that to allow the answers to my research questions to emerge, there would have to be a plan on which they could emerge.

Therefore, for this case study I used Bogdan and Biklen's (1992) five questions that they assert, were common to any good case study proposal. The



questions were:

1. What are you going to do?
2. How are you going to do it?
3. Why are you doing it?
4. How does what you are going to do relate to what others have done?
5. What is the potential contribution (to basic research and/or practice) of your work? (p. 76)

### **Case Study Site**

Bogdan and Biklen (1992, p. 29) suggested that it is difficult for qualitative researchers to precisely define and describe what they would do before it is done. The researcher, according to Bogdan and Biklen, (1992, p. 29) should spend time in the natural setting. This setting, a school, or a classroom, would be the source of information for the researcher. The qualitative researcher must realize the setting has great significance for the participant and to get to that significance the researcher must go to the setting.

To accomplish this, I spent a week immersed in the life of The Children's Community School in Springtime, Georgia. There were several reasons for this choice. This school was recommended by Eve Anderson as a school, which is making a substantial effort to use the educational theories of Mason in the United States. Miss Anderson is one of the few remaining educators trained in the pedagogy of Charlotte Mason. She was the director of the Eton End PNEU School, Windsor, England. The Parents' National Education Union (PNEU) was the organization that grew up around Mason to support her educational theories. Miss Anderson for the last six or seven years has come yearly to consult with schools in the United States about the implementation of Mason's

beliefs about teaching and learning.

The purpose of this case study was not to decide whether or not The Children's Community School's educational practice is a perfect match with the philosophy of Mason. Although the philosophy of Mason is the guiding principle, the purpose here was not to decide if The Children's Community School succeeded at one hundred percent complicity to Mason's philosophy. There is a different educational culture today. This alone could have created various interpretations. There has been one hundred years of educational research by such great thinkers as Dewey, Piaget, and Vygotsky to mention only a few. Their research changed much of what we understand about teaching and learning. The cultural changes since Mason's time and the educational research completed since her death have offered both positive and negative changes. Whether the changes are positive or negative was determined by the person speaking at the moment. The point to make is that time will obviously cause changes in the way Mason would be interpreted. Because of these changes parents may be or may not be willing to use aspects of Mason's philosophy. Therefore, any school using her methods must be willing to bend according to the demands of the current time.

I believe I must say a word about my position in this research. It would be a wonderful story to say that my interpretation of Mason's philosophy was the correct one. But my interpretation of Mason came through my personal grid. Lemke (1995) stated that no researcher can assume that he has the objective final reality. Lemke believed that each of us makes meanings of life that are defined by one's experiences which are also defined by one's "social position" (p. 4). Therefore, my experiences, educationally and socially, provided influences on my thinking about Mason's philosophy and pedagogy.

Not only was this true about my interpretation of Mason's philosophy but this same concept applied to my interpretation of The Children's Community School's application of Mason's philosophy. My beliefs about Mason, my personal beliefs about teaching and learning, even my beliefs about rearing children influenced my interpretation of The Children's Community School use of Mason's ideas. Lincoln (1996, p. 10) said that "any text which displays honesty or authenticity 'comes clean' about its own stance." I cannot detach myself from my beliefs. They influenced the way I viewed The Children's Community School. They have influenced every aspect of this case study. Keieger (1991, p. 30) said that the person doing the research was not a "contaminant." He believed that we cannot disengage ourselves from the research process, but we must acknowledge our role. I must, therefore, acknowledge that my views of Mason and all that makes me a person have influenced my interpretation of the implementation of her philosophy at The Children's Community School.

It is important at this point to say a word about The Children's Community School as I view it. The Children's Community School was established in 1992 by Jessica Frost. The brochure about the school stated that the school is fashioned after the traditional British school providing a classical education. The school's intent was to provide an environment where students are encouraged to become "self-governing, life-long learners" (School Brochure).

The brochure of the school stated that the curriculum is guided by literature. In the early grades reading instruction included phonetic study progressing on to short stories to novels and to Shakespeare. Narration is used as a tool for remembering information. Mathematics is taught incrementally through the use of visuals, manipulatives, problem solving and computation.

Learning by doing is an emphasis of the early grades particularly in history, science and geography. Field trips, model construction, experiments, and projects are ways children learn and demonstrate their learning. Middle school students study world histories, geography, life sciences and earth sciences. Foreign languages are offered beginning in kindergarten.

Although the school was started by Jessica Frost, according to the brochure, it is governed by a board of directors. Admission is made based on referrals, interviews and testing.

The cost of attending The Children's Community School for grades one through eight is \$2800 plus a registration fee of \$125. Additionally books and materials cost approximately \$150 with an assessment fee of \$25. The total cost for a child in grade four is approximately \$3100 a year.

### **Methodology**

As I have stated the school was selected on the advice of one of the few remaining retired teachers trained in Mason's methods, Miss Eve Anderson of England. This school was recommended for its sincere attempt at implementing Mason's ideas, an important consideration for the purpose of this study. In order to understand how the tenets of Mason's educational philosophy and the subsequent educational pedagogy were being practiced today, a sincere effort had to be made on the part of the school in order to implement them. It is in the context of a sincere effort to implement her work that, it seems to me, I could truly determine to what extent her ideas have been accepted today by teachers, administrators, students and parents and to what extent, based on acceptance, her ideas have been practiced by the school.

According to Bogdan and Biklen (1992) numbers are not the key element in qualitative research. Rather, words are the tools of data. The researcher

uses words to describe and validate his findings. Bogdan and Biklen stated that, "In their search for understanding, qualitative researchers do not reduce the pages upon pages of narration and other data to numerical symbols. They try to analyze the data with all of their richness as closely as possible to the form in which they were recorded or transcribed" (p. 30). To gather sufficient data through words, I have included at the end of this discussion a list of subquestions that I used to help guide and direct the research. These questions were meant to provide a focus. They were the skeletal backbone for interview questions of this case study that allowed the answers to emerge from the data. Bogdan and Biklen (1992, p. 58) stated that, even though the results of the study emerge to produce concepts, it would be foolish for the qualitative researcher not to have a plan. Therefore, in order to allow the answers to my research questions to emerge, there had to be a plan for collecting data on which they could emerge. Further, these questions were defined so as to limit the aspects of Mason's philosophy and pedagogy that would be the focus of this inquiry. The educational philosophy and subsequent pedagogy of Mason are complex and extensive. It would take years to study, understand and observe the practice of her philosophy and pedagogy. Therefore, the focus of this study is limited to the tenets discussed in the preceding essays: (a) children as born persons, (b) the nature of children, (c) the use of authority, (d) the personality of children and the three instruments of education, (e) narration, one aspect of pedagogy, and (f) curriculum.

The six topics in the preceding chapters in this dissertation covered most of the major tenets of Mason's philosophy and pedagogy. The point of the case study was to determine how Mason's philosophy is being practiced 100 years later. To get a general picture of the implementation of Mason's methods, this

first case study was intended to be general in nature. Subsequent research studies should detail more specifically individual aspects of Mason's philosophy and pedagogy.

### **Data Collection**

Data were collected using three methods: interviews, observations and documents. According to Merriam (1988, p. 69) the use of three methods reduced the chance of flawed research. "The rationale for this strategy is that the flaws of one method are often the strengths of another, and by combining methods, observers can achieve the best of each, while overcoming their unique deficiencies" (Denzin, quoted in Merriam, 1988, p. 69).

### **Interviews**

For purposes of data collection through interviews, this researcher conducted both group and individual interviews. First, I did individual interviews with the school director, assistant directors, and teaching staff. Of the last constituent mentioned, I interviewed seven teachers. For the purposes of cross analysis of interviews, I interviewed as a group two fourth grade teachers and the middle school director. I also interview the middle school director individually. I interviewed the middle school fifth grade teacher individually. At the lower school I interviewed the director individually, and from the lower school I interviewed two teachers collectively who taught grade three. The seventh interview was with the school's general director. The purpose of these conversations, as Merriam (1988, p. 71) referred to them was to get the data needed for this case study from their thoughts, feelings and personal beliefs. Patton said (1980, p. 196) that there were some things we could not observe; therefore, we must ask questions through interviews to get to this information. All interviews were recorded for verbatim transcription. Please see a list of

interview questions in Appendix B. Questions were designed using Patton's (1980, p. 207-209) suggestions for types of questions that get at various types of information: experience/behavior questions, opinion/value questions, feeling questions, knowledge questions, sensory questions and background/demographic questions.

### **Observations**

Observation has been used in research as it "(a) serves a formulated research purpose, (b) is planned deliberately, (c) is recorded systematically, and (d) is subjected to checks and controls on validity and reliability" (Kidder quoted in Merriam, 1988, p. 88). In this case study the researcher's purpose was to determine the current practice of an educational philosophy (Mason's) that was developed over one hundred years ago. However, in relation to the tenets of Mason's philosophy that were included in this dissertation, observation was a major component in the research design as a means of determining what was truly practiced at The Children's Community School. Observations were one angle in the triangulation of data. In interviews, the interviewees could easily give forth what they ideally wanted to see practiced, but the purpose of this case study was to determine what was actually practiced. Observation, then, was a useful and practical tool for the purpose of this study. Therefore, I describe below a plan that sets forth how this researcher used observation deliberately, systematically, and with controls on validity and reliability.

Merriam (1988, p. 92) discussed Junker's descriptions of the relationship between observer and observed. She mentioned four principal roles: complete participant, participant as observer, observer as participant and complete observer. Merriam went on to say that the researcher is usually

somewhere between complete participant and complete observer. My role was more as defined by Gans (Quoted in Merriam, 1998, p. 93) in which he referred to the researcher as one who participates in the situation but who is only partially involved so as to function as a researcher. Merriam posited that the goal of the researcher in qualitative research is to thoroughly understand the participants' perspective, but it is not always possible to have full participation on the part of the researcher (p. 94). Distance and time did not allow me to become a complete participant observer.

Merriam (1988, p. 90) suggested a list of elements to be considered when observing, especially for the initial observations. She based this list on the research of various other writers in qualitative research. The list included the setting, the participants, activities and interactions, frequency and duration and subtle factors. I developed the grid below. However, I did not find the grid as useful as I had anticipated. For this researcher recording events on cassette tape and taking profuse written notes during activities observed was the most efficient method. Further, I did observations beyond the classroom. For example, I observed the halls, before and after school, staff meetings, during lunch, on the playground, or any situation that occurred during my stay that I was allowed to observe.

Merriam suggested (1988, p. 96) that a researcher should plan to spend as much time writing the observation as the researcher spent doing the observation. In fact, she further suggested that one begin with short periods of observation to then practice recalling and recording (p. 97). On the other hand, Bogdan and Biklen suggested (1992, p. 127) that the researcher plans to spend three times as long to write the observation as the researcher spent doing the



## Participant Observer Grid

Describe the setting.	Describe the participants.	Describe the activities.
What happened?		
First	Second	Third
Fourth	Fifth	Sixth
Seventh	What was significant? Why?	What concerned me? Why?
What continues to nag at me? Why?	Who said what, that I need to remember?	Write here the things that come to mind later.

*Figure 19.* This is a condensed version of the original grid. It was developed from Merriam's (1988) suggestions for data collection through observation.

observation. To enable the researcher not to lose the data collected during a participant observation, Bogdan and Biklen (1992, pp. 126-126) suggested several other strategies that I followed. I mention here the salient ones for me: (a) Do not procrastinate. (b) Do not discuss the observation with anyone between the time you observe and the time you write. (c) Develop an outline by following the sequence of the observation. (d) Add as you remember conversations and events of the observation even after you finish the summary. (e) Remember that this process is laborious and difficult.

The principles about observations that I have mentioned in this section were guiding principles for me as I set out to accomplish this case study. In

addition, Bogdan and Biklen (1992, p. 121) referred to the process of the researcher recording his own personal thoughts, ideas and feelings during this data accumulation time as “The Reflective Part of Fieldnotes.” They referred to this time as a “more subjective side of the journey ” (p. 121). It was in a personal research journal that I wrote my own thoughts about the data I gathered as well as my thoughts about the school, the participants, and the situations that arose. Bogdan and Biklen said that the researcher must “let it all hang out ” (p. 121). They suggested the researcher do this through several means such as, field diary, memos, and comments. My plan, as I have stated, was to use a research journal which is akin to the field diary. During observations of classrooms, halls, meetings, I wrote copious notes. When I was not observing or interviewing, I used a laptop computer to keep my research journal. Further, I used a cassette recorder to record my impressions of situations, incidents, conversations and observations.

### **Documents**

Documents were a vital part of this research. As Merriam said, “Documents . . . are usually produced for reasons other than research and therefore are not subject to the same limitations. They were, in fact, a ready-made source of data easily accessible to the imaginative and resourceful investigator” (1988, p. 104). This researcher used documents as a triangulation tool. My purpose was to use statements of philosophy, mission statements, vision statements, lesson plans, report cards, nature notebooks (Mason, 1925, p. 217), book of centuries (Mason, 1925, p. 175) and any other documents that became available as a means to verify the use of Mason’s educational philosophy and pedagogy by The Children’s Community School. I have used these documents as a means of verifying the use of Mason’s practice along with

observations and interviews.

Documents do not come through the mind of the researcher and, therefore, are not affected by the researcher. Merriam (1988) said, "One of the greatest advantages in using documentary material is its stability. Unlike interviewing and observation, the investigator does not alter what is being studied by his or her presence" (p. 108). But, Merriam also stated that because documents were not produced for research purposes, they may not always be relevant to the research. For purposes of this case study, the validity of a document and its usefulness were measured by its relevance to the content of the essays in this dissertation, i.e. the key principles of Mason's philosophy and pedagogy selected for analysis. In other words, just as the interview questions and what I looked for in observations were limited to the content of the essays on the major tenets of Mason's philosophy, so was the use of documents.

## **Data Analysis**

Analysis of data, according to Merriam in qualitative research, was a process that happened as the researcher began his process of collecting data through interviews, observations and documents. She said (1988),

. . . qualitative research is not a linear, step-by-step process. Data collection and analysis is a *simultaneous* activity in qualitative research. Analysis begins with the first interview, the first observation, the first document read. Emerging insights, hunches, and tentative hypotheses direct the next phase of data collection, which in turn leads to refinement or reformulation of one's questions, and so on. (p. 119)

However, she went on to say that data analysis is "more intense once all" (p. 123) data are collected. She discussed analysis of data during collection as

well as after collection is finished.

### **Data Analysis During Data Collection**

Merriam (1988, p. 124) suggested the work of Bogdan and Biklen as providing helpful hints for analyzing data as it is being collected. These suggestions are as follows: (a) Keep the study narrow. Everything cannot be studied in one case study. (b) Make decisions about the type of study to conduct. (c) Develop questions that are analytic. Bring questions to the study, and immediately after the data collection begins, reassess the questions to determine which ones are still relevant and which ones need to be restated. These questions should direct the work. (d) Adjust the data collection sessions based on the previous collection. In other words, follow leads that answer the questions. (e) Constantly write comments throughout the process. (f) Write about what you are learning. (g) As your ideas emerge try them out on the research subjects. (h) Go through the literature that deals with the study while you are on the field. (i) Always be making connections. Use metaphors, analogies, concepts to avoid narrowness of thinking. To accomplish these nine considerations for data analysis during data collection, I used a laptop as a research journal, typing my notes, thoughts, ideas daily. In my “laptop” journal, my constant companion while at the site, I speculated about what I was learning

### **Analyzing Data When Collection Is Finished**

Merriam stated that two ways of writing a case study tend to emerge. Some researchers were satisfied with a description and others believe that the researcher must go beyond description to interpretation and drawing conclusions. Goetz and LeCompte (1984, p. 196, quoted from Merriam, 1988, p. 131) said that researchers who “fail to transcend what has been termed the

'merely descriptive' risk their data being misinterpreted by the reader."

Described below is the procedure this researcher used to analyze data collected for this case study.

Step 1. Reviewed the research questions to avoid analyzing data that did not speak to the research proposal. (Goetz and LeCompte, 1984, p. 190)

Step 2. Organized data according to documents, interviews, observations.

Step 3. Merriam (1988) said that the data should be read through several times. While reading the data the researcher should make notes, observations and questions in the margins. She stated, "At this stage the researcher is virtually having a conversation with the data, asking questions of it, making comments, and so on" (p. 131). As this reading occurs and simultaneous notes are taken and comments are made, Merriam suggested that categories of data begin to emerge. In this case study the data were analyzed and categorized by using the six major tenets of Mason's philosophy discussed in the essays.

### **Steps I took to Analyze the Data**

After following the steps described above for collection of and analysis of data, in this section I describe the step by step process I used to analyze the data. I used as a guide to help with the process, Bogdan and Biklen's (1992) book entitled *Qualitative Research for Education: An Introduction to Theory and Methods*. They recommend organizing the data and then numbering each page of the data (p. 176). All interviews, narrations and picture studies were recorded. All recorded sessions were transcribed by me or a hired typist. All observation notes, interviews, narrations and picture studies, were organized under each staff member's name from The Children's Community School. All

documents were categorized under headings such as lesson plans, school newsletter, report cards, student handbooks, staff handbooks, and student work. All documents including transcriptions of interviews, observations, and my “laptop” journal, were organized in a stack and numbered from beginning to end as recommended by Bogdan and Biklen. That stack of data were then copied three times.

Bogdan and Biklen recommended that after the numbering of the data pages, the researcher takes considerable time to read and reread the data (p. 176). As I read I identified paragraphs, sentences, phrases, or words as to which of the six principles of Mason’s philosophy it was applicable. Once all documents were labeled as just described, each document was then cut into appropriate strips and placed in a folder labeled with one of the six principles of Mason’s work. For example, any segment of an interview, document, or observation that was identified as relating to curriculum was cut and placed in the curriculum folder. Using this process required use of the three copies made of the data as some pieces of data applied to more than one principle. When this process was complete, all data were in seven folders. The folders were entitled: Context of the Case Study, Personhood of Children, Nature of Children, Authority, Personality and The Three Instruments of Education, Pedagogy (narration), and Curriculum.

Once the data were placed in the appropriate folder, I then wrote the essay concerning that particular principle of Mason’s work. Following the writing of the essay, I then reread the data in the folder that matched with that essay. For example, after writing the essay on curriculum, I then reread the data on curriculum that I had placed in the curriculum data folder. Sometimes I had to reread the data and the essay numerous times before I began writing that

portion of the case study. This process helped me narrow the case study further because I tried to keep the topic of the case study centered on the educational issue raised in an essay. Again, on curriculum, because I narrowed the topic of the essay to a discussion of Mason's general beliefs about curriculum and then to her use of the narrative in curriculum, I then centered most of the case study discussion around those two points of interest concerning Mason's philosophy about curriculum. I followed this procedure throughout the writing of the essays and case study.

Because the six tenets of Mason's philosophy are the guiding principles around which this paper is centered, I chose to place the case study at the end of the tenet to which it applied. The purpose for this format is to have a close link between the essay and the evidence of whether or not it can work in a current day school. This enables the reader to more closely follow the discussion of the essay and the relationship between the essay and the case study.

### **Other Research Considerations**

I spent a week at The Children's Community School in February 1999. To begin my relationship with the school, I spoke several times on the telephone with Ms. Frost, discussing plans for my research at her school. To further develop my relationship with Ms. Frost, I attended the Charlotte Mason Institute in Atlanta, Georgia, on October 8 and 9, 1998. At that time I was able to meet her and members of her staff personally and spend time with them discussing my visit the following February. These beginning contacts were crucial in that a sense of trust was established as a foundation on which to build a rapport for subsequent discussions and for my visit. Merriam determined that there were three stages to data collection through observation (Merriam, 1988,

p. 91). These stages were entry, data collection and exit. Entry involved getting the confidence and trust of the participants. I accomplished this stage as I described above. Taylor and Bogdan's (quoted in Merriam, 1988, p. 91) suggestions on what to do the first days in the field were of particular significance to this case study. They suggested: (a) The researcher be unobtrusive, making people comfortable and observing the culture to learn to act and dress as the participants do. (b) The researcher must realize that collecting data was not the primary objective for first day in the field. Becoming familiar with the setting was the primary objective for the first day in the field. (c) To prevent becoming over stimulated with the newness of the environment, the researcher should make his first observations relatively short. (d) The researcher should be straight forward about his role and purpose, but give few details. These suggestions are meant to establish trust and to give the researcher the time to get immersed in the culture. With my time being a week, it was crucial that I establish trust and develop community as quickly as I could. Therefore, I used the previous meetings with the staff and the director as tools to get to know them. It must have worked. When I arrived at the school, there was a schedule prepared for me to interview, do observations and collect documents. The director and assistant directors had organized each day such that I could maximize my data collection. Marshall and Rossman (1989, p. 11) believed that qualitative research should be an "immersion in the everyday life of the setting chosen for the study, that values participants' perspectives on their worlds and seeks to discover those perspectives, that views inquiry as an interactive process between the researcher and the participants, and that is primarily descriptive and relies on people's words as primary data." My intention was to spend a week at The Children's Community School collecting



data through interviews, observations, and various school documents. Because of the willingness and cooperation of the teachers and administrators of the school, I was able to collect sufficient data.

### **Why I Am Doing It?**

My research question was: What happens to Mason's ideas as they are implemented in an American school a century later? If Mason's ideas could transfer in one setting, then I believe I can pursue a more long-term approach to studying her work and testing it.

The other reason I wanted to do this case study is that I believe her theories about teaching and learning to be ahead of her time. In fact, as a practicing school principal and teacher, I view her ideas as still ahead of our time. We still have not learned the lessons she taught in the late nineteenth century. I want the richness of her ideas to affect the learning environments that I come into contact with.

As I ask myself the question, why are you doing this research, I am reminded of a conversation I had with my wife's sister. In the summer of 1999 she and her family were visiting from California. She is quite educated with two masters degrees, one in English as a second language and one in French literature. As is my nature these days I am curious about some aspect of Mason's claims, for example, when children complete what she called "the act of knowing," they could recall information readily even information learned years and years before. I asked my sister-in-law what she remembered about French literature. Her answer was not much. I inquired a little further and asked her about specific authors. She remembered reading their work, but she could not tell me anything about them. Since that conversation I have asked numerous people this question in one form or another. I have listened to other

conversations about learning, and I have talked to parents about their learning. It is horribly astonishing to me to hear all of them repeatedly say they remember nothing of what they studied in school. If Mason, using her theories, could get children to recall years later what they had learned, based on my unofficial inquiries this summer, she has something very important to offer us.

### **How Does What I Did Relate to What Others Have Done?**

There have been few studies on the work of Charlotte Mason in England, and at this time none in this country that I know of. Although there are school principals and teachers in several schools in this country who are trying to apply her principles, to my knowledge, there are no published works on Mason's philosophy. There are principles of Mason's philosophy being studied by other educators although these principles have not been identified with Mason. For example, there is discussion about whether or not children have an innate need to know, which is a view that Mason held. This innateness gives children the drive to be self-directed, self-motivated learners who change from within; thus her philosophy is similar to that of current day constructivism. Narration has been studied by researchers such as Brian Cambourne and Hazel Brown. Mason's use of narration, I believe, has added valuable information to that body of knowledge. McEwan, Egan, and others have begun to discuss the use of narrative in education. I contend that what I have said in this study about Mason's use of the narrative in curriculum has added knowledge to that discussion. One example is her belief that children's minds cannot accept dry, textual information leads to the practice that facts and information must come clothed in language much like that of a novel or poem, what she called the literary style. Kohn and others have had much to say about the effects of behaviorism on the use of rewards, punishments, grades and other topics. My

discussion on Mason's views of that topic has deepened my understanding of how we must not tamper with the desires and motivations of children. And, my discussion on her belief that children were born persons, I see as having given me and those who read this paper, a deep and rich appreciation for children. Mason was opposed to the beliefs and practices brought on by behaviorism and fought against them. It was a view, she believed, that reduced education to the material world. She asserted that education was a matter of the spirit thereby engaging children's imaginations, desires, and aspirations. We are now coming out of years of the "behaviorist chill" (p. xii) as McEwan and Egan (1995) called it. I believe, we are seeing a return to many of Mason's beliefs and practices that I have described here.

### **What Is the Potential Contribution of My Work?**

I believe that what Mason discovered years ago through basically action research as a teacher and through hours and years of observing children matches with current research and theories on teaching and learning. Mason did not just do research, she also developed curriculum, schedules, examinations, methodologies based on what she was discovering in her research. Therefore, she was not just a theorist but she was also a practitioner. It was this practice applied to the schooling of thousands of students that I find so fascinating. She not only developed a philosophy but she also developed methods to match. In other words, in today's slang, she "walked the talk."

I believe that what I have done with this case study is to offer the field of education a re-vision of Charlotte Mason's philosophy and methodologies. I also believe that this case study has provided a good picture of how her philosophy and methodologies are useful tools that match with what we currently know about teaching and learning. In a culture of schooling where the

basics of education (reading, writing and arithmetic) are frequently the goal of education, her ideas are rich and deep compared to such narrowness.

## APPENDIX B

### Interview Protocol\*

I am trying to determine if Charlotte Mason's beliefs and practices about education can be effectively used today. Please answer these questions to the best of your knowledge. Remember: I am not looking for a "perfect" match between your beliefs and practices and Mason's beliefs and practices. Rather, I am looking for areas of her beliefs that you are using in your context. Please feel free to be direct, succinct and as thorough as you can.

In doing interview questions the pros who do case study research suggest that questions be written to cover not only facts but feelings, opinions, etc. So, these questions have been written with these types of questions in mind: experience/behavior, opinion/value, feeling, knowledge, sensory, and background/demographic. These different categories simply help to jog your mind to consider and process answers.

I am sending these questions in advance so you can read them and be able to have some think time to let them settle in your mind. When I come next week these questions will be familiar to you. Think about the ones that jump at you first and come back to the others later or don't answer them at all. I hope these questions make sense to you. If you prefer to write the answers instead of a verbal response, please feel free to do so. Names will not be used.

The questions are also categorized under the major tenets of Mason's philosophy that I am reviewing.

(Again, do not feel obligated to answer all the questions. Pick and choose according to your needs and how you can relate to each question.)

#### **Children are born persons**

1. What do you think Mason meant by this statement?
2. How do you think this statement affects classroom instruction?
3. Can you tell me ways you practice this statement in your classroom?
4. Can you give a story of how this principle has made a difference in the attitude of fellow teachers, yourself, students, parents?

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\* *Note.* These questions were sent to the staff at The Children's Community School before my data gathering.

5. Can you describe situations when your understanding of ‘children as born persons’ changed the way you taught?
6. Do you think that her beliefs about the personhood of children are still useful today? Why or Why not?
7. Can you think of an instance in which this principle affected the lives of children?
8. Thinking about the types of parents you have, how would they understand Mason’s concept of personhood?
9. Can you describe your attitude about children before you encountered Mason. How did learning her ideas about the personhood of children change your thinking and attitudes about children?

### **The Nature of Children**

1. What are your views on the nature of children and how do they parallel or differ from Mason’s views?
2. What role do you see education playing in the nature of children?
3. How does your classroom nurture the good nature of children and play down the bad nature of children?
4. Do you use any of the following to promote the good in children?  
  
imagination, creativity, habits (attention) reason, beauty, desires
5. Can you describe an incident when through what happened in your classroom, the good nature of a child was affected? (i.e., maybe after reading a biography on a person from history, science or other subject, the child learned an important principle of character.)
6. What do you value most about Mason’s concept of the nature of children?
7. Are her beliefs applicable today? Why or why not?
8. How do you offer the child the ‘best minds’ the world has to offer? Can you give a story how reading behind the ‘best minds’ is more interesting and meaningful to children than reading textbooks?
9. How have your views of the nature of children been changed by Mason’s influence?

10. How do you understand the concept of children exercising dominion applicable in your classroom?

### **Authority**

1. Describe how you deal with discipline problems.
2. Do you believe Mason's view of authority works here at the school?
3. What do you believe to be the important points of Mason's views on authority?
4. How does the concept of authority and obedience, as Mason understood them, work themselves out in your classroom/school?
5. Do children have opportunities to exercise dominion in your classroom/school? (i.e. student government, self selection of reading materials)
6. What do you think are the beliefs about discipline that most of your parents have?
7. Do you have many discipline problems?

### **Personality**

1. Tell me a story about an incident in this school that shows how children's personality is not undermined. (i.e. how a very shy child may have been brought out.)
2. How does one undermine a child's personality?
3. Mason was opposed to the use of grades, prizes, rewards, etc. How do you feel about this and how does it work itself out at your school?
4. How are you practicing Mason's beliefs about personality?
6. How do you avoid the use of love, suggestion, influence and desire as a manipulative tool to control children?

### **Pedagogy (Narration)**

1. What would make an effective narration?
2. Can you tell about a time when narration had enabled the children to

remember more information for a longer period of time?

3. What is the intent of narration? Do you believe narration accomplishes what it is intended to accomplish?
4. Do you believe narration is working for late twentieth century children?
5. Do you believe it develops attention?
6. Are parents convinced it should be used?
7. Describe a narration lesson? How would it be organized?
8. How do you use it in your class?
9. Describe a time when you have heard or seen narration used effectively?
10. How are children new to this school trained in the ways of Mason?
11. How is narration tied to assessment?
12. Mason used narration extensively as a way of allowing children to do the 'act of knowing.' She believed children had to learn for themselves. How do you feel about this idea? How is the 'act of knowing' done in your room?

### **Curriculum**

1. Mason believed in a broad curriculum. Describe or give an example of how a broad curriculum has made learning different for your students.
2. Describe your curriculum at your grade level. Is it a broad curriculum? Why or why not?
3. Do you think Mason's curriculum guidelines were too broad for children? Why or why not?
4. Does the broadness of the curriculum affect the depth to which content can be studied? Explain your experience.
7. How do your parents feel about your curriculum? Would they agree with Mason?



## APPENDIX C

### Research Subquestions

The educational philosophy and subsequent pedagogy of Mason is quite complex and extensive. It would take years to study, understand and observe the practice of her philosophy and pedagogy. Therefore, the focus of this study will be limited to the tenets discussed in the preceding chapters: a) children as persons, b) nature of children, c) use of authority, d) personality of children and the three instruments of education, e) pedagogy (narration), and f) curriculum. To unpack each tenet with the overall research question in mind, I developed the following subquestions.

**Research Question- What do the pedagogical tenets of Mason's educational philosophy (derived in England) look like one hundred years later in practice in an American private school?**

### Subquestions

#### Subquestions for children as born persons

1. What evidences are there of Mason's belief of children's right to dominion in their own lives?
2. How do children exercise control over themselves and their school environment?
3. How does the school show evidences of trusting and respecting the mind of the child?

#### Subquestions for the nature of children

1. Is the concept of the good and evil nature of children apparent in the everyday life of the school, in the schools policies and philosophies?
2. Mason believed we must deal positively with children. How is this evidenced in the day to day life of the school?

3. Mason believed that to train the nature of children a broad curriculum was necessary for them to acquire the data needed to make good decisions. Is a broad curriculum evidenced?

4. What about this school indicates that the staff has high expectations for the learning ability of all children?

5. How are the intellectual interest of children encouraged? Reflection?

6. What evidences are there that children are imaginative, creative, that children have a chance to enjoy beauty?

Subquestions for the use of authority

1. What is the authority structure of the school?

2. Are there discipline problems? How are they handled?

3. What is the role of the student in a disciplined situation?

4. How frequent are the problems?

5. What is the role of the adults?

6. What is the role of the parents?

7. What is the role of the teacher's personality?

Subquestions for the Sacredness of Personality and The Three

Educational Instruments.

1. How are children's personalities respected?

2. Are there evidences of fear, love, suggestion, etc. being used as means of undermining children's personality? How is this evident?

3. Are there evidences of playing upon desires of children inappropriately?

4. How is the child's natural environment used to support his education?

5. Are grades, prizes, rewards evident?

6. Is the discipline of learning the child's responsibility or the teachers?

What evidences are there that learning is the child's responsibility?

7. How is instruction designed to promote students being active agents of their own learning?

Subquestions for Pedagogy (Narration)

1. What current assessment practices are being used at the school?
2. How are the different subjects taught: Reading, History, English, Languages, Art, Music?
3. How is attention developed in the children?
4. Is narration (read and retell) used? To what extent? How is it used?
5. How do children perform the 'act of knowing?'

Subquestions for Curriculum

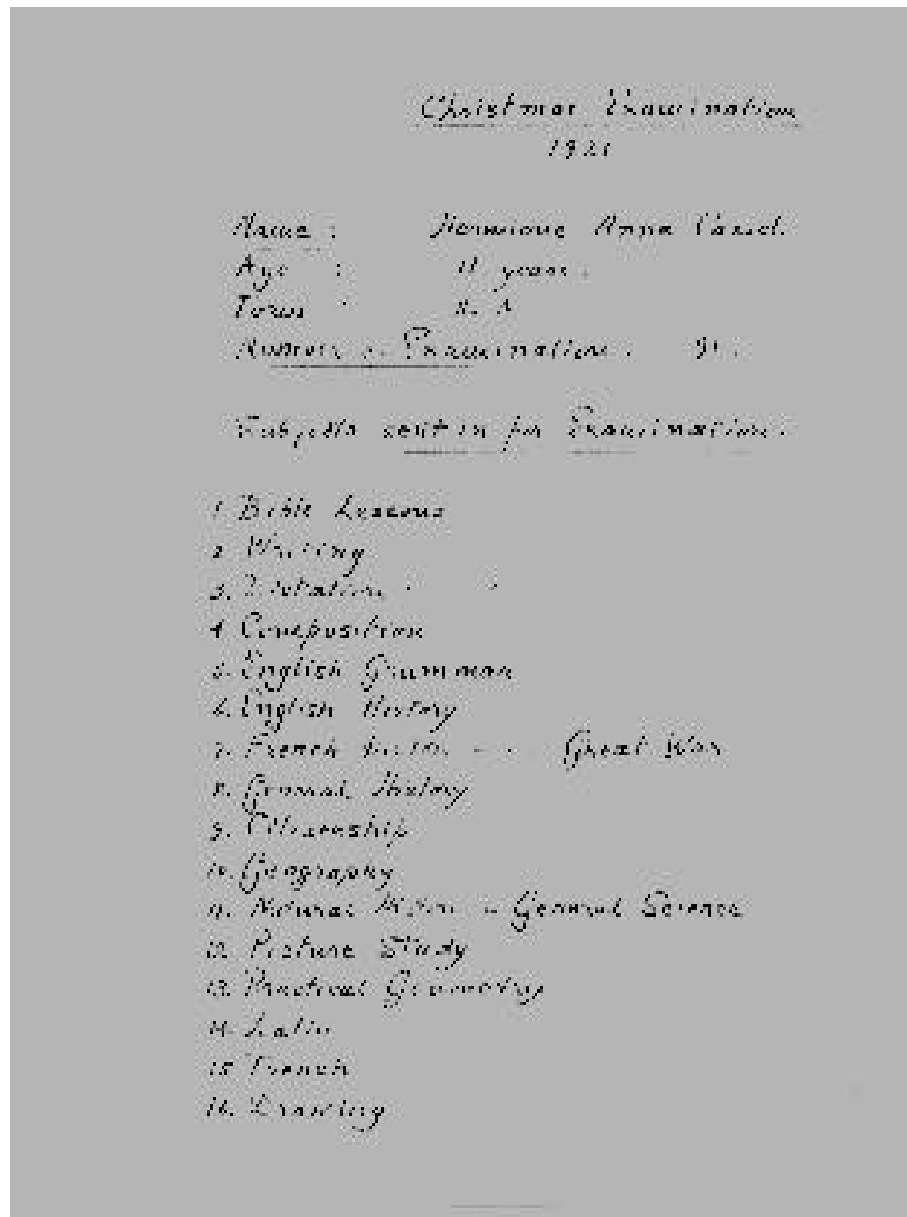
1. What subjects are taught?
2. How many are taught?
3. What is the evidence that the subjects taught go into depth?

**\*Appendix D**

**Examination Sample I**

**Dated: 1921**

**Child's Age: 11**



This examination was copied from the Armitt Library, Ambleside, England

**Examination Sample II**  
**Dated 1939/1940**  
**Child's Age: 14 years 9 months**

Rachel Dalby. 14 years 9 months. Form IV A.  
 Examination 146.

1. Bible Lessons II.	35
2. Writing.	100
3. Composition.	80
4. English Grammar. 1.	75
5. Literature.	75
6. British History. 1 & 2.	85
7. General History: 2.	80
8. Citizenship	85
9. Geography.	85
10. Natural History.	80
11. Physiology.	85
12. General Science.	80
13. French.	80
14. Geometry. Section I.	75
15. Algebra. Section I.	65
16. Painting.	90
17. Picture Study and Architecture.	75

General Remark - Nearly always very good

This examination was given to me by Eve Anderson, Windsor, England.

## VITA

**J. Carroll Smith**  
**Roanoke, VA**

### EDUCATION

- May 2000 Ed. D., Curriculum and Instruction, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University  
Dissertation Topic: Charlotte Mason: An Introductory Analysis of Her Educational Theories and Practices
- May 1984 Masters of Education in School Administration, East Carolina University
- May 1979 B.S., Intermediate Education, East Carolina University

### WORK EXPERIENCE

- 1979-1986 Teacher, Pitt County Public Schools, Greenville, NC
- 1986-Present Teacher, Vice-Principal and Principal for Roanoke City Public Schools, Roanoke, VA

### PRESENTATIONS

- May 2000 Charlotte Mason: A Sweet Auntie or a Serious Educator, and Current Research on Narration, Presented for Interested Educators at Church of the Holy Spirit, Roanoke, VA
- January 2000 Current Research on Narration, Presented for Charlotte Mason Schools International at the First Annual Capitol Charlotte Mason Conference, McLean, VA
- November 1995 Student Portfolios, Presented for the Virginia Association for Supervision and Curriculum

- Development Conference, Williamsburg, VA
- April 1995      Teacher Portfolios: Learning from the Process, Presented for the National Council for the Teachers of English, Baltimore, MD
- Fall 1994      Panel Discussion on Student Portfolios for the Virginia Council of the Teachers of English, Roanoke, VA

### **AWARDS**

- 1998-1999      The Virginia State Reading Association Exemplary Reading Award
- 1996            Virginia Tech Excellence in Education Award

### **PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS**

National Association of Elementary School Principals  
Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development  
Virginia Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development