**Further Principles and Strategies on How to Teach and Train at Home or in the Classroom**

**Teaching New & Difficult Work:**For teaching specific skills that are very unfamiliar, be patient with the child, and realise that:
*‘It is not a sin to misunderstand something or to be immature in rational thinking skills’*;
*‘Every child is on a learning development journey, and one day it will all make sense’*.

Use the following sequence to teach difficult skills:
a) you do it for them;
b) you do it with them;
c) they do it with you;
d) they do it by themselves, with your intermittent inspections; then
e) they do it by themselves and present a draft copy for review & feedback, &
     then alter it for final presentation.

**Narration as a key learning tool:**Apart from the five foundational principles we have outlined so far, Charlotte Mason promoted a number of other ingredients for successful educating. One of her mopst significant strategies is the use of 'narration'. Charlotte Mason used retelling, which she called narration, in a much broader sense than it is generally used by educators. Miss Mason observed that narration was not just a process for factual learning, but that it also engaged the mind and imagination of the children in the learning process. She believed that children retained more when they narrated since they put a part of themselves into the retelling and therefore became active participants. They seemed to absorb a sense of the whole and not just isolated incidents. The material was read aloud or silently and then was narrated by the children. Tests at the end of each term were narrations of selected portions of the term's work. Thus, the narration became the means by which children learned. A person of any age likes to tell, or narrate events or stories that are important to him/her because something has stirred his/her interest, imagination or emotions. Charlotte Mason took this natural and spontaneous communication and used it as an important tool in education. When a child is narrating, vague ideas must be organised and verbalised. This process insures that thinking has gone on! Once having put a story into words somehow this remains part of the person far, far more permanently than it would have by merely hearing the story.

Listening only can be shallow and vague if not developed. Children used to only TV viewing may never develop listening skills. Listening with concentration is a discipline. If the child knows he/she is to be asked to "tell me the story" after listening, that listening will be far more concentrated!

Charlotte Mason knew that if a dry, uninteresting textbook-like portion was chosen and read, the child might not have taken anything in. And so, the secret of developing this invaluable skill and discipline lies in the initial choice of the story. It should be well-written, and not depend on pictures for the story to unfold. The story should hold plenty of interest for the child; it should stir the imagination, be alive.

Basically, narration in this Masonian sense begins with the tiny child who, on his/her mother's lap, has listened entranced to a short story read straight through. *"Now you tell me the story."* As the child tells back the story the mother doesn't interrupt. At the end she responds*, "That was good. Wasn't it funny that the cow fell in the ditch? But tell me, what else do you remember .... tell me about the plank the farmer's boy brought out . . ."* This will jog the memory of a whole section left out without giving a sense of failure. However, in following Mason's educational method, the mother will not press for every detail she thinks is important. Mason believed the child's perception and response should be respected. After all, it is the child's response that matters.

A child who had learned to narrate a story would, in the Mason schools, tell back long sections of history by the age of seven. This wasn't a textbook recitation of facts, it was a story retold.

By nine or ten a child can begin to narrate in writing. At twenty-two he or she may be narrating a dissertation for a graduate course using, in fact, the same process. Having read many books on a theme that has grabbed his or her interest and imagination, our 'child' is 'telling back'. But by now this has become a complicated process of interrelating facts, bringing in relevant data and drawing conclusions.

Mason recommended that until a child reaches the age of six, narration should generally be spontaneous, oral responses to what has been heard, experienced, or observed. Therefore, *"Tell me about your vacation,"* is actually asking for a narration. So is, *"Let's play a game. I'll sit here under the tree and you run to the top of the hill, look hard at the view and come back and tell me what you've seen so I can imagine I've seen it!"* You can do this one during your regular ‘nature-walks’.

From six to nine, narration can be used throughout the week in the structured study schedule. The actual process of retelling, or narration, is important. Literature, Biblical stories, history stories, travel descriptions, a person's story (biography), anything that has the children listening or reading eagerly is suitable for retelling in the child's own words.

When the child has mastered fluent writing skills, the average age being about nine, then telling back, or narrating, in writing can begin. For instance*, “Write all you can about the life of Caroline Chisholm,”* after a narrative story of her life has been read with the class, should inspire a good bit of written material from the child used to telling a complete story orally. One accepts that this will be shorter than the oral telling since writing is more time-consuming.

From then on, both written and oral narrations are used. Oral narration often is a springboard for its cousin, the discussion of ideas. Time should always be left for this. One thing to note, for the older child or teenager, just coming into this method, the child who is not used to narration may be used to only superficially reading a text and even day-dreaming while reading, not really taking much in. In this situation, it is therefore important for the supervising parent or teacher to also have read the text, so that the supervisor can have meaningful discussion with the student and draw out more memory and understanding through appropriate questioning. The parents may only need to do this for the first year or two until your teenager has become a self-learner; but if (time-permitting) you continue this habit of reading the high school material, it could help build fruitful relationship with your teen.

Narration is not parroting or memorisation. Parroting is simply repeating by rote and is usually a mechanical, unthinking repetition of the material. Memorisation is repeating over and over what is being memorised until it has been learned. Memorisation has its place in the learning process, but should not be confused with narration. Poetry, Bible passages, and multiplication tables are examples of things that should be committed to memory. The procedure in the Bible section for memorising Bible passages is the recommended process to follow when anything is memorised.

Being a foundational strategy, the use of narration is advised throughout all Charlotte Mason schools and programs. The selection to be narrated should be read only once. Children will need to learn to read carefully and listen accurately. Most children will pay close attention to what is being read and as a result, will develop good listening and retention skills, if they know that the passage will be read only once and that they will then be asked to narrate. The narration should be a point-by-point and not word-for-word account of the reading. In narrating, the child recalls the proper sequence of events or arguments, the main points of the selection, and items that were of particular interest. During an oral narration, there should be no interruptions allowed. When the narration is completed, the teacher can, by questions and discussion, draw from the class any corrections, clarifications, or additions. Written narration should be read by the teacher. Correct handwriting, grammar, and spelling should be encouraged ahead of time, but only the content considered when checking the narration.

The portion being read can be paragraph by paragraph, two or three pages, or a chapter. The breakdown will depend on what is being read (a literature book lends itself to the reading of a longer portion), the age of the children, and the difficulty of the material. The review of a selection will include the whole section that was read, while the narration following the reading will be only of the portion just read.

The basic procedure to follow when narrating is:
1. Introduce the new selection or book, or review what was read previously.

2. Motivate the children to want to listen by enthusiastically and interestingly introducing the new lesson.

3. Introduce new vocabulary, background information, and items such as dates and geography when applicable.

4. Read the selected portion. The portion is read by the teacher or students and is read only once.

5. Students narrate the portion they have just read.

6. Engage in follow-up activities such as pictures being shown, diagrams drawn, or moral points and questions discussed (but avoid long moralising lectures).

This process allows the individual to read and think and therefore become actively involved in the learning process.

Although written and oral narration will be the approaches most often used, the following are also good variations to include in the Narration Process.

Six- to Eight-Year-Olds:

* Record the oral narration on cassette.
* Create a mural-individual or group.
* Draw sequence pictures-beginning, middle, end.
* Dictating the narration. (Occasionally, the teacher writes it down exactly as the child gives it.)
* Dramatise the selection.
* Draw a picture about the selection.

Nine Years and Up:

* Write a narrative summary of the material.
* Create a mural, diorama, shadow box, TV program, 3-D poster, collage, or scene to illustrate a part of the story.
* Dramatise the selection.
* Record the dramatisation on DVD.
* Record the oral narration on audio file or DVD.
* Record the written narration scanned onto audio file, DVD, or scanned onto CD.
* Draw an illustration of the selection.

Larger Families & Classrooms:

Written, oral, or any of the variations of narration can be used with an individual child, multiple siblings, or with any size class. It is advisable to keep the reading portions short if oral narration is being used with a large group so that more children have an opportunity to participate. Proper courtesy and listening skills should be stressed when oral narration is used. With group narrations, the first person might tell about the opening scene (and stop there); then the second person tells what happened next. A third person might fill in any gaps that were missed; and a fourth person tells the next scene in the story. Don’t allow the first person to tell the whole story; or if you do because it’s a short story, don’t let the second person cop out by saying *“Pretty much everything Johnny said”.* Instead get them to tell the whole story again in their own words but trying to add something else they remember that was not said before.

Charlotte Mason's original program was even used very successfully in the large public-school classes. These often had sixty children of varying ages to one teacher! She would divide the large number into small reading groups. An older pupil would be in charge of a small group. Either choosing one reader, or reading in turns, the selection would be read aloud. Following the reading, children would take turns narrating orally to each other. The older pupil would listen.

Parents, grandparents and friends will often provide a listening ear for narrations. Another useful contribution for these helpers is the taking of dictation. A child narrates to the adult, who writes down each sentence. It is astounding to see the length, language skill and content of the narrations of young children, once they are in the habit of narrating. In Mason schools, the children had a rich selection of books read to them. There would be weekly narrating, and at the end of the semester, narration would be used to help them "give back" material read weeks or months previously without any review at all. This is possible, because when they first gave their narration, they had to be attentive and think about the story, and then engage in discussion. Actually, Miss Mason strongly discouraged reviewing and cramming for exams. The children developed the habit of making the knowledge their own, from the first time they heard it.

When it does come to exam time (again using narration), the questions should not ask for a specific answer to be given. Essay questions often ask the child to write an answer rather than choose the correct multiple choice, matching, or True/False answer. Written narration is a type of essay response. The child is given a broad, open-ended question and then writes what he or she recalls and feels about the topic or selection.

Narration Exam Question Examples:

* Tell about the play that was read.
* Pretend that you live in Japan. Write to a friend in Australia and tell him or her about holiday customs in your country.
* What do you think about the way Thomas Jefferson reacted to the problems he faced?
* What happened at the Eureka Stockade, and why was it significant for Australia?
* Write a newspaper article about an event which took place during the Eureka Stockade (or the battle of Gettysburg; or the Spanish Armada).
* Tell the story of As You Like It.

When using narration for testing, children should be instructed to write all they remember and to include any feelings or reactions they have. A child who learns to narrate from the beginning of his or her school experience will benefit greatly, as it allows for freedom to learn without tenseness or hesitancy to respond because the answer might be wrong. Narration is also a valuable aid in the retention of knowledge. In addition, telling back what has been read or heard allows the teacher to ascertain what the child has really appropriated.

A child may feel anxious when asked to narrate if narration is a new concept. This will probably be due to fear that the answer will receive a "No, that's wrong." Confidence will be gained, and the fear of answering will lessen and finally disappear if the child is given open-ended questions, ones to which there is no right or wrong answer.

Examples of Open-ended Questions and Activities

* *How would you have felt?*
* *If you had been there what do you think you would have seen?*
* *Whom would you have liked to be and why would you have liked to be that person?*
* *What do you think?*
* *You are a newspaper reporter during the time of the westward movement in the US (or settling in the outback Australia). What would your newspaper article say?*
* *You are part of the first trip into space. How would you describe it in a letter to a friend?*
* *Why do you think some people don't believe Christianity is true?*

Narration variations should be combined with oral and written narration when introducing an older child to narration.

**The Six D’s of Learning:**

The following strategies/principles, are ways of extending the learning and further exploring the topic in engaging ways. Whenever possible, you should aim to reinforce your study and research by utilising ‘The six D’s of Learning’, which are:

**Direct Exposure** to the best literature and works of art

**Discover for themselves:** to develop an enquiring mind, wherever possible, allow the child to explore and discover concepts first-hand, rather than merely telling them the facts, or just using texts and workbooks which tell you everything that you should think and believe about a topic. Then teach them to evaluate what they discover in the light of already-known reality and in the light of the family's Christian or moral foundations and biblical truth. Mistakes or creative disasters are likely but sensitive and informative exchange of ideas and questions in the discussion time will bring the 'blunder' into perspective. E.g.: *“O.K., so it seems like it hasn't worked. What do you think? How could you change it, to get a better result next time?”* Remember: you can learn as much, if not more, from a mistake, as you can from an initial success.

**Do** hands-on activities, building models and creating craft and artworks. This captures the child's interest through his God-given senses. Learning can (and should) be fun.

**Dramatise** the people and situations that you are learning about, whenever appropriate. This gives the child more empathy with a character or concept as they become immersed in the topic.

**Discuss** all that you have learnt together. This helps the children to gather their thoughts and express themselves, and also allows you opportunity to work through difficult issues, beliefs and concepts. Talking things over helps them to internalise truths, while strengthening family relationships.

**Drill** is simply any form of ‘practice’ or ongoing ‘use’ of a skill or concept or the development of a character habit. The habit-forming routines that you establish are a form of drill. Other ways to practice include using and crystallising their learning through games, service opportunities, creative expression projects, show-and-tell nights, preparing for a performance/dramatisation as a culminating activity for a period of history being studied.

The other thing to remember, is that a ‘culminating activity’ does not always have to be a physical product such as an essay, test or project, etc.  For those families with two parents, one way of assimilating and checking what learning has been taking place, would be for Dad, to ask the children what they have been doing today, and then ask them further questions about different aspects of their learning. During this discussion, Mum could make a journal note of concepts that the children have a good grasp of, and anything that needs to be followed up and clarified the next day. You could also set aside one night each week (e.g.: Friday night) for a ‘Family Concert Night’ to have a presentation in front of Dad. In this way, the children have a goal to work towards, and Dad will feel a part of what is going on. For single parent families, find a supportive friend or relative or fellow home-educator with whom you can conduct a presentation evening or morning on a regular basis.

**Designing Your Own Research Project  (using the ‘Unit-Study’ method)**
**Thematic Unit-Studies:**The idea behind using a Thematic Unit-Study approach is to take one topic of study and then to research that topic from as many different perspectives as possible. We do this by integrating as many subjects as possible into the study, also using creative projects to experience the topic in a variety of ways, and then a creative presentation as a way of rounding off the learning or bringing the topic to a conclusion. The student studies the topic at their own level of understanding and then presents the topic at their own level of expertise. This final presentation may be conducted in front of the whole family or form part of the student’s term assessment.

A thematic unit-study can be designed to be ‘multi-age’ (allowing the whole family to study the one topic). In order to design a multi-age unit study, you could select the topic from one subject (such as Social Studies or Science) within the grade level of your oldest child and then select related topics from your younger child/ren's grade level. In many instances, the same topics are covered in more than one grade. The younger children in the family also learn much from the older ones via the 'trickle-down effect' during family discussions, creative projects and activities, as well as during final exhibition-presentations.

**Selecting the Topic to Study - Options for Topic Selection:**There are various ways to decide which topics to study.

The PNEU education-program has its own sequence of topics; and of course, if you are enrolled in a Charlotte Mason school, you will need to follow their allocated sequence of topics.

However, other homeschoolers may wish to mix it up a little to cater to the needs of your children. These are some options for choosing topics:
\*   Select a topic from the Science or Social Studies section for your child’s Year level, and then brainstorm ways to integrate the other subjects into that topic;
\*   Alternatively, your topic of interest might arise out of the hobbies and interests of the children, and then springboard off onto other interesting tangents.
\*   Some families choose to use the Bible as their starting point and then branch off into related topics of interest.

It is also advisable to mark off all topics studied in a Checklist so that you have a record of what topics you have covered or not covered.

**Integrating Other Subjects:**If you wish to make your studies ‘subject-integrated’, you can take your selected main unit topic and then select related topics within other subject areas. These ‘related topics’ could be chosen from the PNEU program or from the Australian Curriculum. Alternatively, you could think up your own related topics within various subjects. The following list is an example of how you might integrate various subjects into your unit study:

First of all, select a suitable topic from your oldest child's grade level. Then simply do a brainstorming activity where you think about and come up with ideas as to how you can look at the same topic from different perspectives which are reflected in the different subjects. For example, if you are studying horses, you can integrate history and geography through the historical development of horse breeds and their varied uses in different countries and eras. Look also at climates and natural environments that suit horses.

Within social studies and language arts, you could look at the uses of horses in different cultures and read biographies, poems and stories of famous horses and horse riders (e.g.: Phar Lap and The Man from Snowy River).

In science, you can study the anatomy of horses as well as their needs and how to care for them.

You could also do a Bible study using a concordance to find out references to horses in the biblical times and cultures.

The subject art can come into your methods of presenting what you have learnt for example through creative projects, etc; or you could do a special study on how to draw and paint horses, as well as the use of horses in paintings and sculptures by famous artists.

For a manual arts project, the older children could make hobby horses for the younger children and then use these to study how to put on a bridle and bit, etc.

To integrate a service activity with manual arts, your older children could make wooden rocking horses for the local children's home/orphanage or stick-horses for the local kindergarten or as presents for friends and family.

Now all these related topics can be studied together as one unit, that is ‘multi-age’ as well as ‘subject-integrated’ thus making your time more efficient.

NOTE: Refer to *CM-Australia (The CM Booklists Prep to Year 12)* for lists of suggested and optional books and resources.