**Education is an atmosphere**

Hello- I’m Bruce McNeice – a former school Principal, Homeschool Dad, and education consultant. My passion is to impart courage to parents, and to equip and support parents in their God-given role of teaching and training their children to reach their full potential, and live an abundant life.

In a previous session we introduced Charlotte Mason, and discussed her statement that the child is firstly a person who has significance because he or she is made in the image of God and destined for a divine purpose. Because of this, we have a sacred trust to treat the child with dignity and respect. It is because we are training them for a high purpose that we cannot run roughshod over them or crush their spirit; but also because of this high purpose, that we must train them to have a proper obedience response to appropriate authority.

If we desire to give the child due respect as an image-bearer of God, then this should affect how we establish and manage the atmosphere of the learning environment. One of Charlotte Mason’s major principles is that ‘Education is an atmosphere’.

The educational atmosphere has three aspects that are extremely important for quality learning to take place: i) the atmosphere provided by the physical environment of the classroom or home learning centre; ii) the social-emotional atmosphere; and iii) the atmosphere of ideas, and an enthusiastic love of learning.

i) Regarding the physical atmosphere: When designing a positive learning environment, one consideration is the need for spaces that provide appropriate levels of stimulation and calmness for different activities. Charlotte Mason believed the normal home provided the best learning environment, but it needs to be a clean, well lit, and airy place of quiet order and aesthetic beauty for optimal learning to take place. Research studies have shown that children can become unsettled, agitated, distracted and even physically sick if the home-learning environment is cluttered and chaotic. So, we provide an environment conducive to learning, and we use nature and the whole world as our curriculum, engaging the learner in real-life situations and practical hands-on activities wherever possible.

ii) Regarding the social-emotional atmosphere we provide a warm, loving, personable atmosphere where each child is cared for – relaxed and productive at the same time. In contrast - where there is tension, arguing, anger, a feeling of 'walking on eggshells', constant berating and nagging, no child can relax enough to be interested and learn new things. We aim to provide a positive healthy social-emotional atmosphere without pressure or competition. When I say – a learning environment without competition – I mean without the use of prizes, punishments and rewards, lollies, grade-scores, and without using fear, blame, or threats as a cheap motivating tool. Instead – we create an atmosphere where each child is valued and encouraged and gently redirected to focus again, to do their own personal best - simply because it is worth doing.

One of the ways to keep a sweet spirit in the home is to make sure you are getting time-out yourself. The scripture says it is life that begets life. If you want your children to display positive sociability, good manners, and respect for others, then you need to model this yourself. It is out of the richness and sweetness of your own soul that you pass on good character to your children. Therefore, it is vitally important that you spend some regular alone-time meditating on the words of life in the Bible, while thinking and praying for your family. In these times of reflection and talking with God, He will point out areas you need to change yourself, and give you strategies for training your children.

iii) The atmosphere of ideas:

*“The fact is that much of what a child learns he picks up by watching and listening to those around him. Remember the saying, “More things are caught than taught”? The ideas that rule your life as a parent, will rub off on your child.*

*The question begs to be asked, “what ideas rule your life?” Is your child learning that anger is the way to respond to conflict, or is he soaking up an atmosphere of peacemaking? Is he being educated in the ‘art’ of worry and anxiety, or is he learning to trust the Lord even in the small things of life? Does he think that learning stops when you get your diploma, or is he seeing your desire and love for learning as an adult? (Sonya Schaeffer)*

So, in our home-education we model enthusiasm for learning in an atmosphere of awe and wonder about the world we live in – and the students catch the atmosphere of the home or learning centre – they breathe it in, as we maintain a discipline of the habit of focusing on the true, the beautiful, the honourable, things worthy of good report. As we are modelling a love of learning, children absorb our enthusiasm, and the family or classroom becomes a 'learning community'.

We are always co-learners together with our children; and we strive to maintain a sweet positive, encouraging, spirit in the home. It is not a sin to make a mistake – give your children room to grow and develop.

These ideas have made such a difference to our family, and so many others. In this section, we have been discussing how to maintain a positive atmosphere in the home or classroom. In the upcoming sessions, we will explore another aspect of this foundational concept of respecting the child as a person, and its very practical implications in character training, and the discipline of habit formation.

Before you go – I would like to briefly pray a blessing over you.

Lord God - awesome creator of the universe, you came to set the captives free; and to give us abundant life. So, I ask your blessing over these dear folk as they launch out on their learning journey. Help them to comprehend the breadth and depth of your love for them, and open their eyes to this amazing learning journey in pursuit of all goodness, truth and beauty. Bless them, in Jesus name amen.