**Understanding the Common Home-Education Methods:**  
*by Bruce & Karen McNeice*

Although ‘Homeward Education Support’ is developing its own multi-age curriculum based on Charlotte Mason’s liberal-education methods, you may find it useful to understand how each different type of curriculum works so that you can choose the curriculum and resources that will best suit your family.The following is a list of the major types of curricula available.

## **1. Computer-Based Education**

Various computer programs are available where the child works at the computer using an internet based interactive program e.g.:

a) IXL (Maths and English) available at <https://au.ixl.com/#curriculum>

b) ‘Readmaster’ & ‘Typemaster’

c) ‘World Book Encyclopaedia on CD-Rom; and the internet-based World Book Research Libraries’

d) On-line curriculum companies: ‘Khan Academy’ online; 'Coursera'; ‘Maths-online’, ‘Mathletics’; ‘Eduss’ (Maths or English).

e) Complete distance-ed programs (Years Prep to 12): It is becoming typical for Schools of Distance Education to move their whole program towards a completely interactive computer-based learning system for every subject. Although we are currently developing an e-learning platform, we recognise that this will not suit many families, and we also see dangers in having a child in front of a computer all day. Therefore, ‘Homeward Education Support’ will always attempt to maintain an option to use real books, to submit work-samples via a variety of methods, and to be able to speak with a real person rather than just completing online forms.

## **2. Graded Textbooks**

Utilises separate textbooks for separate subjects and may even divide up a subject into various texts on individual topics e.g. Phonics, Grammar, Penmanship, Comprehension, Creative Writing, etc. The parent presents and discusses the topic and designs further extension work, assignments, etc. The student reads the text and does review questions (examples are: A-Beka Books or Bob Jones University Press; Rod & Staff; and ‘Teaching Textbooks’ ).

## **3. Non-Graded Self-Paced Workbooks**

Utilises a continual progression (Years K - 12) of self-instructional work-texts for each subject. Children are initially placed at a specific place in the program based on a diagnostic assessment, and then work sequentially through the workbooks as they master each one.

Examples are: A.C.E. (self-tutorial); Wordsmith Apprentice; Do the *Write* Thing; Alpha Omega Life-Packs

## **4. Non-Graded Self-tutorial Reading Program**

* This type of self-teaching curriculum containing many thousands of scanned pages of classic books that the children simply read, and then do a page of writing each day during 12 years of learning at home. It is delivered online, then printed out so there is no use of computers and no internet or screen time. Examples include …
* ‘Robinson Curriculum’. Available at [htpps://www.robinsoncurriculum.com](http://www.robinsoncurriculum.com/)
* ‘Heritage History’. Available at [https://www.heritage-history.com](https://www.heritage-history.com/)

## **5. Thematic or Unit-study Programs**

A planned unit-studies curriculum begins with a single topic/theme. All the discovery-learning activities are set out for older, middle & younger children. There is a list of suggested library books, videos, and resources to experience the topic in different ways. The parent is also involved in the learning process along with the child. Learning to ‘find out’ and ‘research’ is seen as essential, so the students thoroughly utilise the local library and it is very helpful to have access to encyclopaedias at home. Some programs are set out so that the parent just opens at the page for that day and continues on; however, it may also be helpful for the parent to take a couple of hours before the week, to become familiar with the learning activities for the next week, especially to ensure they have the appropriate resources ready for hands-on activities.

Examples include:

a) Homeward

b) Tapestry of Grace (Primary & Secondary; Multi-age)

c) Konos Character Curriculum (Primary & Secondary; Multi-age)

d) Weaver Curriculum

e) Five-in-a-row

f) Valerie Bendt’s books: ‘How to Create Your Own Unit Study’, ‘The Unit   
 Study Idea Book’, ‘For the Love of Reading’, and her audio-file ‘How   
 to Create Your Own Unit Study’

## **6. Charlotte Mason’s ‘Living Books’ and ‘Life Experiences’ Approach:**

The 'Living Books & Life Experiences' approach is based on the writings of Charlotte Mason, ..."a British educator who lived from 1842 -1923. She was largely home educated as a child and subsequently dedicated her life to education. She is often referred to as the 'founder of the home-schooling movement' since she assisted many British home-schools through correspondence. Her detailed writings revealed the deep concerns she had about the conventional methods of education. She believed in respecting the personhood of a child and instead of force feeding them information, she allowed them to read the best books and come to conclusions on their own. She emphasised 'whole' and 'living' books. A child would read a 'whole' book by an author rather than a selected reading in an anthology to fully understand what the author had to offer. 'Living' books would include biographies or historical novels. This type of book allows the reader to identify with and understand the personal lives of the characters while gleaning important facts, rather than using the textbook style of rote memorisation of facts.

Charlotte Mason believed in a structured morning of basic academics and then dedicating [time in the afternoon] to real-life situations possibly through play, exploration, nature walks, visits to the museum, and reading. This would allow education to be a life-enriching, joyous experience, and adventure. She is well-known for the use of 'narration' as a significant learning tool. The child is required to listen intently to a reading and then retell it as closely as he can. She believed this helped a child to react with the material in an original way and to assimilate and connect information in the process. She felt it was important that children be exposed to only the best literature rather than 'twaddle' which was how she defined literature written 'down' to a child's level.

Mason had a strong, personal belief in God and promoted a Christian worldview in her students. Her motto was, 'Education is an atmosphere, a discipline, a life.'  Her educational methods and beliefs were largely resurrected by Susan Schaeffer Macaulay and Karen Andreola." (Goodchild, 1997)

A more thorough ‘how-to’ guide is detailed in Part 2 of this Guidebook; but the following is a summary of her basic philosophy and education principles.

\* Respecting the personhood of the child, as made in the image of God, and being of infinite value.

\* 'Education is a discipline': Charlotte Mason taught that children who are exhibiting undesirable behaviour (in character, academically, spiritually, etc) are never to be despised, but the parents and educators need to realise that all children have innate possibilities for both good and bad behaviour, and simply need to be trained towards good behaviour and educational endeavour through the discipline of habit, and example; never aggressively crushing, but leading and providing firm boundaries of what is acceptable because it is that which is right to do.

\* 'Education is an atmosphere': The learning environment (whether classroom or at home) should be uncluttered and as aesthetically beautiful as possible. She advocated that … *“we should take into account the educational value of his natural home atmosphere, both as regards persons and things, and should let him live freely among his proper conditions."* We use nature and the whole world as our curriculum, engaging the learner in real-life situations and practical hands-on activities wherever possible.

\* 'Education is a life': A child needs intellectual and moral as well as physical sustenance. The mind feeds on ideas, and therefore children should have a generous curriculum. She explained that the child's mind is no mere funnel shaped sac to pour in the required knowledge, but is rather a living spiritual organism, with a natural appetite for all knowledge. To properly feed their minds, children need 'living books' and ideas rather than canned bits of information from a textbook.

\* 'Education is the science of relations': From the moment a child is born, he or she has naturally innate desires to reach out in every direction to experience and learn about all manner of things. Brain scientists, Dr Schwartz (2002, 2012) and Dr Caroline Leaf (2013) explain how our brain is born with thousands of gene packets of interests, appetites and tendencies passed down from our parents and grandparents to at least four generations. If given appropriate opportunity, a child will open these gene packets and further develop that particular interest, appetite, or tendency. Charlotte Mason understood and explained this principle a hundred years before it was discovered with powerful electron-microscopes. She called these gene-packets ‘appetencies’. And so, knowing the child has all these innate potential interests and talents, she advocated that, as parents/teachers/mentors, we must provide a vast and interesting diet of experiences and ideas in nature, handicrafts, science, the arts, and in many 'living books'; not to try to teach him everything about anything, but to allow him to make many connections and relationships between ideas.

\* Learning through books, things, and real life: In the Charlotte Mason Method, there is a balance between academic skills, cultural enrichment, and practical learning through hands-on activities and real-life experiences.

Charlotte Mason Inspired Thematic Integrated Subjects and the Flow of Ideas:

As with the 'Unit Study Approach', wherever possible, subjects are shown to interconnect, so there is a reason for studying Science, Literature, History, Arts, etc. Although Miss Mason warns of the danger of trying too hard to thematically link every topic in an inane way; she believed in using a chronological sequence of history; and then, wherever it is possible during the study of history, students would also study the literature, and artworks, and any other subject area that springs forth naturally from that period of history. Charlotte Mason was concerned that ial study of history, the children pick up the flow of ideas from great thinkers and influencers through the ages. Ideas shape what an author, painter, or musician composes. Ideas shape the thoughts and explorations of scientists. It is ideas that shape the policy of politicians and economists. A true Charlotte Mason Curriculum includes a study of ideas and their implications and consequences in society.

Charlotte Mason believed in teaching history chronologically through stories and great literature. So, most Charlotte Mason education programs will use a historical ‘spine-text’ (a well written, engaging story of history) as the backbone of the program. Such a program includes a historical & cultural study in which ideas are followed through time. Dr. Francis Schaeffer explains that "there is a flow to history and culture. This flow is rooted and has its wellspring in the thoughts of people. Most people catch their [world view] from their family and surrounding society the way a child catches measles. But people with more understanding realize that their presuppositions should be chosen after a careful consideration of what world view is true."

Ideas have consequences. Ideas birthed by philosophers have often been expressed firstly in the Arts and Education, eventually influencing general culture, Sociology, Science, Politics and Law.

Most people are ignorant of this flow of ideas, and how one area affects another. An integrated study of the flow of ideas through every field of knowledge provides a unique perspective on history and culture, helping students to learn from the lessons of the past – “understanding the times to know what to do”, ready to be a positively transforming influence on society.

Another distinctive of a Charlotte Mason program is that it is not presented in a way that spoon-feeds the children with everything they should know and think. We present the feast of interesting mind-food (literature, artworks, hands-on experiences) and allow the children’s minds time to digest (think-about, reflect-on, and discuss) their own thoughts and ideas. Assessment/examinations then (instead of testing what they don’t know), need to be opportunities to creatively express themselves and to tell or show all that they have been thinking about.

#### Examples of a Charlotte Mason Curriculum include…

#### Homeward (Australian; Designed as Charlotte Mason suggested – chronologically, & with Christian character-based themes as a starting-point. Satisfies Australian Curriculum requirements without using them as a starting point.) <https://www.hesupport.com.au>

#### Simply Charlotte Mason (USA; Chronological Sequence) <https://simplycharlottemason.com>

#### Homeschooling Downunder (linked to Australian and State government syllabuses) <https://myhomeschool.com/>

#### Ambleside Online (USA; Chronological Sequence) <https://www.amblesideonline.org/>

#### Recommended Further Reading ……

For the Children's Sake, by Susan Schaeffer Macaulay (1984). If you only read one book about Charlotte Mason's approach, let this be the one. In this wonderfully uplifting book, Mrs. Macaulay shares how education can be "the diet that opens doors for each child to build a relationship with God, other persons, & the universe."

When Children Love to Learn, edited by Elaine Cooper. After you have been inspired by ‘For the Children’s Sake’, read this practical how-to-do-it manual with articles by a number of leading teachers from Charlotte Mason Schools around the world.

The CM Method Guide, by Bruce McNeice. A brief history of Charlotte Mason and her philosophy with practical how-to guidelines for all subject areas for home-education in Australia.

Books Children Love, by Edith Wilson is an annotated compilation of 'living books' arranged by subject area and level of difficulty.

Teaching Children by Dianne Lopez. An invaluable guide to what children should know from preschool to grade 6. Also gives teaching suggestions & a reading list of "living books" by grade level.

The Charlotte Mason Study Guide. A condensation of Mason's most important ideas by subject area.

Educating the Whole-Hearted Child by Clay and Sally Clarkson is a guide to using whole books and real life to teach and train children at home. Each chapter focuses on a facet of home centred education.

For The Love of Reading, by Valerie Bendt. Valerie gives you clear concise instructions for putting the Charlotte Mason method into practice in the areas of:  
- developing a reading program at home;  
- incorporating language arts into enjoyable unit studies;  
- sharpening spelling, punctuation & grammar; - motivating children to take an active part in   
 family reading;  
- becoming better acquainted with good writers, writing and comparing books.

A Charlotte Mason Education: A How-To Manual, by Catherine Levison. A subject-by-subject guide designed for easy understanding of the Charlotte Mason method. This how-to manual will enable you to implement the philosophies Charlotte Mason writes about in her six-volume set and many out-of-print sources.