**Charlotte Mason’s Advice on Keeping the Child Engaged**

The following advice is distilled from Charlotte Mason’s book ‘Home-Education’.

Charlotte Mason believed in short sessions of focussed attention, and if the child could not be encouraged to focus on the task, she realised that the particular part of the brain engaged in that kind of activity was getting tired, so she swapped to an activity that uses a different part of the brain.

Taken from *Home Education* by Charlotte Mason, 1918, p99

*“Attention to things; words a weariness-..The tug of war begins with the lessons of the schoolroom. Even the child who has gained the habit of attention to things, finds words a weariness. This is a turning point in the child’s life, and a moment for mother’s tact and vigilance. In the first place, never let the child dawdle over copybook or sum, sit dreaming with his book before him. When a child grows stupid over a lesson, it is time to put it away. Let him do another lesson as unlike the last as possible, and then go back with freshened wits to his unfinished task. If mother or governess have been unwary enough to let the child ‘moon’ over a lesson, she must exert her wits to pull him through; the lesson must be done, of course, but must be made bright and pleasant to the child.”*

So how is this to be done?

Consider first:

The timing of the lesson- academics need to be done in the morning after a good breakfast- brains need water, fresh air and good nutrition.

The appropriateness of the task for the child’s age and concentration span- shorten the lesson, or divert to a more physical lesson. An example is Nature study.

Have prepared a library-type bag per student and fill with an A4 art-pad, pencil, coloured/watercolour pencils, small paintbrush, small ex-vitamin container of water, magnifying glass, a zip-lock bag, a snack and water bottle.

*“We’re going on a nature walk children, here are your supplies.*

*We will go into the back yard to a quiet spot* (without puppy to distract). *Sitting for a few minutes I would like you to write down all you can SEE and HEAR or SMELL or FEEL.*” (pick one sense per session)

*“Next pick something you’d like to draw/colour that you can see, date the page*

*Tell about what you noticed. Collect things that you find interesting, glue when in the house and go back to schedule.*

*Q. How could we attract more birds or lizards? (perhaps a safe water feature? Pond? Bird house, possum house?* - the children can think up options) You could build these in the afternoon.

*Q. where could we go on our next nature walk?”*

You can use the Nature Study to break the boredom cycle by making it a trek just to the back or front yard- short- 30minute- even including a morning tea break.

But to make an event of it, plan it for a once/week afternoon trip. 1-1/2 hours?

Making lessons attractive:
use short lessons (20-25 minutes)- short accurate work rather than long, messy work.

Goals achieved during this time only:

Can be rewarded if finishes early: Reward is a little time to do with as he pleases. For example, he has produced 2 accurate sums or sentences, then he can draw for the rest of the period, OR an exercise completed in half the time leaves half the lesson free to do with as one pleases (within reason of course). Lego, play with dog, ride bike, jump trampoline (ie. only the natural results of diligence, rather than prizes, stickers, jelly-beans).

Gradually his goals will be increased as the demands of study require.

Boredom is evidence of flagging will-power. We need to cheerfully change the tenor of the classroom and set reachable goals and assure them that they will grow to achieve more as time goes by.

One could also change to introduce a science experiment as appropriate to the week’s lessons to revitalise a wandering mind. Or go read a science/history or other literature piece under a tree outside. The fresh air might just do the trick.

Finally remember that we all have moments that are tiresome to us, so we develop strategies to get us through- a walk, sorting a forgotten corner, craft, cooking, washing the dog, reading a book. Brainstorm a list that a child could choose from when you can see that re-directing to another subject or a nature walk doesn’t fit in. Charlotte Mason advised using short diversions, and then coming back onto the task with freshened wits.

Home-education is much more intensive than school lessons in that there isn’t 20+ children demanding attention, therefore more is achievable. We can also cater to the periods when individuals need a fresh change without derailing the whole journey.