



Principles & Pedagogy

A Charlotte Mason Philosophy

TO KNOW & TO LOVE

With the dawning of the “Enlightenment,” western civilization made several fundamental oversights. First, it forgot that the foremost knowledge is the knowledge of God, that all other knowledge has its ground in the knowledge of God. True, secular research may advance our knowledge of what is, but such research has no capacity to tell us what ought to be, what is important or the meaning of such things. Second, it casts our life together as a zero-sum game (a contest in which one person's loss is equal to the other person's gain). Resources are scarce and only the fittest survive. Consider how many schools are ordered on this principle: The few, the victors, take home the prizes.

Third, and perhaps the foundation of the first two, western civilization began to associate knowledge with the mastery of data and ability to control; rather than the intimacy with creation in all its Goodness, Truth, and Beauty. Knowledge was associated with the cold, calculating, rational processes of the brain's left prefrontal cortex. It abandoned the much more global **relational circuits** of the brain in favor of the **rational circuits**. This is not to say that the brain's relational circuits are irrational. In healthy mature brains, they are supra-rational, integrating the very important data which comes from the rational circuits with the relationally meaningful data which comes from other parts of the brain and extended nervous system.

Our educational system, including that of most Christian schools, is ordered towards systems of education which unintentionally mal-form the hearts of students. A society which structures itself in the vain, competitive pursuit of prizes (such as rewards and recognition), that possess no inherent satisfaction invariably mal-forms. There are, of course, individual teachers who bring light and life; intimacy with flower, poem, or an elegant algorithm. But, the system itself mal-forms. Older brothers (performers who perform to win the game) are generally rewarded for their performance (a very different thing from celebrating the good and beautiful) and identified as successes. A performance orientation fixation is reinforced. Younger brothers (rebels who reject the system, finding no life in it) are shunned for their behavior and identified as problematic. Finding no life in their school society, they journey to a “distant country.” In the light of Christ, the character structures of both are symptomatic of relationships born out of transgression. Of the two, it is usually more difficult to recover from the “older brother” syndrome than from the “younger brother” syndrome.¹ Societies tends to reward and reinforce the former while disparaging the later. It is not surprising the Jesus had greater difficulty leading Pharisees to repentance than leading tax collectors and prostitutes to repentance.

¹ Note: It is almost impossible for a “younger brother” to recover if he/she is locked into a co-dependent relationship. It is almost impossible for either “younger” or “older brothers” to recover if locked into addiction.



Is this not a worthy goal to put before ourselves and our students *to know* and *to love* – to know and to love God, others, self, flowers, birds, stars, music, art, literature, math, all that is Good, True and Beautiful? It is obvious that this kind of knowing is not “the parrot-like saying of lessons, the cramming of ill-digested facts for examinations”² which characterizes too much of so-called education.

CHILDREN ARE BORN PERSONS

They are not an empty vessel to be filled or clay to be molded, but rather persons who bear the image of God. Their value and potential are immeasurable. It is the duty of the teacher and parent to give proper respect due these young people, to allow them to grow and learn in a life-affirming way. When dealing with persons, we aren’t interested in short-term data-based outcomes - we are asking: *how is this person growing?* Thus, the Habersham Mission: *Partnering with God as his servants in seeking the restoration of his image in our students through education.*

ATMOSPHERE OF JOY

Children learn best when they are at peace. An atmosphere of joyful acceptance and togetherness is necessary for a child to grow and thrive. The sense of joy in the classroom is non-verbal - it is in the air and breathed in. Joy is not mere happiness, it is a felt sense of peace and delight. The atmosphere should give us a sense of “it is good to be me here with you.”

ATMOSPHERE SETS OUR AFFECTIONS

When you step into a classroom where everyone is paying attention, the easiest thing to do is pay attention. Our affections, our desires and motivations, are set by our community, family, or tribe. Atmosphere has a powerful influence in setting these affections. Affections are caught, not taught. They are held in that thought-environment which surrounds the child as an atmosphere, which he breathes as his breath of life; and this atmosphere in which the child inspires his unconscious ideas of right living emanates from his parents and teachers. Every look of gentleness and tone of reverence, every word of kindness and act of help, passes into the thought-environment, the very atmosphere which the child breathes; he does not think of these things, may never think of them, but all his life long they excite that vague appetency towards something out of which most of his actions spring. Oh, the wonderful and dreadful (awe inspiring) presence of the little child in our midst.

INSPIRATION & IMAGINATION

An inspiring idea can take us places. It can lift us up above our nature and bring us to a place far better than where we started. Whether in work or at play, we desire for children to be regularly engaged with ideas that they might be inspired to live a better, richer life.

² Mason, Charlotte, *Home Education*. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1989. 171-174.



HABITS OF MIND & BODY

Charlotte Mason writes, “Habits are to life as rails are to a train.” Whether for good or ill, our lives are shaped by our habits. Over time, they become our character and serve to shape who we are, how we think, act, work, & relate. It is our goal to support children in developing habits that will serve them well over a lifetime.

SCIENCE OF RELATIONS

A marker of a life well lived is the quantity and quality of the relationships within it. We seek to put children in the way of as many good, life-giving relationships as possible - not just with teachers and peers, but with God, self, creation, and the world of ideas.

How do we make education a joyful discovery? Is it knowledge alone or do relationships have something to do with it? What kind of relationship does your child have with history, with their siblings, with math, with their teacher? If relationships are important, how do we shape the affections of what our children love? Perhaps the environment we create, and what we celebrate or criticize can have a huge impact.

KEY PRACTICES

Is the true goal of education to learn or to win a prize and impress others? Build the character, build the love for learning, build the passion to know, build the discipline to work well - and all of that takes care of itself.

The heart of a child will shape how they live and how they experience life. Growth means the formation of new habits, habits formed with the right kind of heart, the right kind of intrinsic motivations, which have to be cultivated relationally. At Habersham, we use the following key practices in PreK-8th grades to ensure a child’s growth in and love for learning. 9th-12th grade practices grow from these foundations.

1. Oral & Written Narration
2. Transcription/Dictation/Modeling
3. Nature Study/Picture Study
4. Number Sense Development
5. Mastery Practices for Disciplinary Subjects