

Classical Education and How to Implement it in a Large Family

by Laura Berquist

I want to thank you for inviting me to be with you to talk about homeschooling in the classical tradition. I am always happy to talk about homeschooling, because I think that in this day and age homeschooling is one of the great hopes for the future. Fr. Fessio has compared its role to that of the monasteries in the so called Dark Ages. They were dark, in certain ways, much as our time is dark. Civilization was crumbling. Uncivilized hordes were taking over previously civilized nations, and the moral code was being eroded. There were great saints and there were great movements in the Church during this time, just as there are now, but there was chaos in the culture and the monasteries were places where the truth was preserved, the moral order was recognized and lived by, and the love of God ruled. When we homeschool we have the opportunity to do likewise. We can pass on to our children the great truths of the Catholic Faith, the moral values that accompany those doctrines and we can model for them how one lives in the love of God.

Further, I am happy to be here to talk about homeschooling because I love homeschooling. I think it is fun, and though not easy, for nothing good is easy, I do think that it is easier, all things considered, than any other method of education. All good parents, homeschooling or not, expend all their resources on the care and education of their children. When you homeschool you just do it more directly than if you have your child in a brick and mortar school.

My own children are older now. My baby is a senior in college. My oldest daughter has three children of her own. But I loved those years with my children. I hated to see them end. I loved the fact that we learned together, we practiced the Faith together, we played together, we enjoyed the same activities and we enjoyed each other. I loved the discussions we had, the field trips we took, the fact that we went to daily Mass together for years.

I think it is much more significant that you homeschool than it is what program you use. I have a program, MODG, and I think it is a good program. It developed out of my experience as a mom, and my (and my husband's) background in classical education. I am a graduate of Thomas Aquinas College (from the very first class!) and my husband, who still teaches there, is a founder of TAC. Thomas Aquinas College is a unique, top tier, program of classical education where the students read original texts, all classes are discussion classes, and the full classical curriculum (the Trivium, Quadrivium, the sciences to which they are ordered, natural theology, and sacred theology) is undertaken in a prescribed order. That classical formation is largely responsible for the program I developed in MODG. I think classical education is important, and I think we serve it well in my program.

But I also recognize the parents' gift of sacramental grace to discern the best fit for their students. I am happy to talk about my program, and I will do that just a bit here, in a moment. Others can talk about their programs and you, the parents, who have the sacramental grace to determine the best education for your children, can decide which program is the best fit for your students. In its own way, choosing the program for your child's education is like deciding which order to enter when you have a vocation. There are Augustinians, Franciscans, Claretians, Vincentians, and, my own personal favorite, Dominicans, in the Church. One doesn't decide which is best, necessarily, when deciding which order to enter. One decides which is best suited to him and what he thinks God is calling him to do.

God has a plan for each of us, from moment to moment. I have learned that recognizing God's personalized plan for each man precludes making decisions for others about what they should

do. This doesn't mean one can't ask advice, or give advice when asked, nor does it mean that there aren't good and bad institutions, curricula, teachers, and projects. But it does mean that the goals of charity have to be kept in mind in every aspect of life. Sometimes another person or family chooses something bad that they shouldn't choose. Most often though, the people we know choose something we wouldn't not because they are making a bad choice, but because they aren't us. I am sure you all know this, but I have to tell you, it took me some time to learn that others don't have to do what I do, or even what I think is best. I freely offer you this insight. It makes life easier.

So, thank you, once again, for giving me the opportunity to talk about homeschooling, my program and most specifically Classical Education for the large homeschooling family. I would like to start with a little information about my background, then talk about classical education, and last give some suggestions for the large family. This is an appropriate time for me to think about how I got here, as my sixth and youngest child is graduating, as all his siblings have done, from Thomas Aquinas College this May 15th.

Before I began homeschooling I helped start a little school, with 6 other families. My mother, Donna Steichen, whom some of you know as the author of *Ungodly Rage: The Hidden Face of Catholic Feminism*, or, perhaps, as the author of her most current book *Chosen*, had suggested that I homeschool. I didn't think I could do it, what with babies and pregnancy and dinner, so instead I helped start a small school. We drew up the legal papers, rented a facility, paid the insurance, hired a teacher, picked the curriculum, and got started. I can't tell you now why I thought that was going to be easier than teaching my children myself. Not only was it hard to get the school started, I retain memories of hurried school days, rushing around the house looking for shoes, and trying to get lunches made, with cries from my children of, "I can't find my homework," and "We're having a test today and I can't remember what Miss Walsh said." Then off to school, or to the car pool, and a few hours of relative peace while I did all the chores, and straightened up the house. Then, just as the baby was going to sleep, it was time to go pick up children from school. After school there were gymnastic lessons and piano lessons, and then Rosary, dinner, stories and homework, and bed. It was an exhausting routine.

When we couldn't provide a third level of courses in our little school, I began formally homeschooling (I say "formally", because every mom homeschools from day one) my third child. We had such a good time, my kindergartener and I, that I decided my mom had been right, and I brought the two older children home for school as well. When we all started homeschooling I was dumbfounded to find how much easier life became. I had thought I was going to be doing something very good but very hard. In fact, I found the household was more serene in general, the children did chores (which was good for them and for me), the baby got uninterrupted naps, we started going to daily Mass, and the children began to read for fun. Until then they hadn't, and I couldn't figure out why, but once they came home I realized that it was because their lives had been too hectic. Reading requires a certain peace, a reflective attitude, and our lifestyle just hadn't contained those elements.

Now, this is not to say that homeschooling was easier in every way than school had been, or that I never fell into bed exhausted at the end of the day. But I was much happier with the attitude in our house, and I had learned that, hard as teaching multiple levels was, it was easier than sending them off to school.

I knew that in my homeschool I wanted classical education, as I wanted my children to have the great good I had been given at Thomas Aquinas College. The program at TAC was started by those with great experience, graduates of Laval University, taught in the Aristotelian, Thomistic

tradition. They had been involved in the integrated program at St. Mary's in Moraga, CA, and some of them had also, additionally, worked in the honors program at Santa Clara University, in Santa Clara, CA.

My husband was involved in all of those enterprises. He had a wealth of knowledge about classical education in its fullness and a great deal of experience in seeing which backgrounds best prepared children to undertake this kind of education. We profited from that experience in our homeschool, though not as much as one might hope, originally, due largely to me. I always wanted to move my children on to what I regarded as the exciting stuff.

I love analysis, and that is what I wanted them to do. I remember I would say, "So, honey, what is the main point of this story?" to my fourth grader, and she would look at me and say, "Well, mom, first this happens and then this happens, and then this...." I would say, "Yes, yes, that's true, but what is the author trying to tell us in that sequence of events, dear?" My little girl would look at me and say, again, "Um, at the beginning there is a girl who...." I thought to myself, "Poor child, what is she going to do with her life? She can't think!"

Then at about sixth grade, when my child said, spontaneously, "Mom, don't you think this story is pushing a point of view?" I thought, "See what a good teacher can do, if she just persists." I didn't understand the stages of intellectual formation as I now do. It wasn't until the third child did the same thing at the same age that I realized it wasn't me, it was them. Just as there are stages in physical formation (children learn to reach toward an object before they can use a pincher movement to pick it up), there are stages in intellectual formation. Skill in sequencing is necessary for learning how to order thoughts. One has to be adept at a chronological order of first, second, third, and beginning, middle and end, before he is able to order according to importance, or analyze a whole in the light of one principle.

This information about the stages of formation is important in effective and efficient home schooling, because while some materials are more effective than others, none will be effective if they are not used properly, in the way the child is naturally inclined at his particular stage of formation.

There is a concrete example of the inefficiency of doing something children are not ready to do, in Ruth Beechik's book, *You Can Teach Your Child Successfully*. Two groups of children were tracked for four years. The first group concentrated on learning to read in kindergarten. That was the primary focus of their time in the classroom. The second group had no reading instruction at all in kindergarten. There was an alphabet strip around the wall of the classroom, but no mention was made of it. These children did not learn the sounds or names of the letters. The primary focus of the instruction of this group was hands-on projects. They planted beans and watched them come up. They took long walks and observed nature. At the end of the year the two groups were tested. Of course the first group did better, because they could read the questions on the test. For the next three years these children were kept together in their respective groups. They were, from this point on, instructed in much the same way. At the end of first grade the 'reading' group was still ahead of the other group on their standardized tests. At the end of second grade, however, they were at parity. And at the end of third grade the 'non-reading' group had pulled significantly ahead.

This story illustrates two things. The first is that we should concentrate on what children are ready to do at any given point. The 'non-reading' group spent their kindergarten year sharpening their observational skills, which is what they were ready to concentrate on. It wasn't that they couldn't have learned to read, it was that learning to read at that point would have taken so

much of their time that they wouldn't also work on the skills more appropriate to their level. Since they worked on those skills at the right time, they were in fact ahead of the game in the long run. This is very important for the mother of many children to remember. Work on the right formation activities at the right time, and you reap the most benefit educationally. Second, we shouldn't be anxious to move ahead. Moving ahead may actually slow us down in terms of our ultimate goals. So, in determining what to concentrate on in your curriculum, don't be too anxious to move ahead to the next stage.

Over time, then, I began to see what children are ready to do when. My husband, Mark did tell me from the beginning to remember St. Thomas' injunction to wait to do philosophy until one had the right experience and preparation.¹ But he also didn't know what, in particular, would best prepare the children. We knew they needed a foundation, so that they would be able to make the right distinctions at the right time, (after all, distinctions like the differences between privation, as Aristotle lays it out in the beginning of the *Physics*, and negation, and contradiction, are subtle, but essential to understanding the doctrine of matter, form and privation – one has to be prepared to make those distinctions) but it wasn't clear what that meant for the young child and the high school student in math and science, language arts, and history. My husband did tell me from the beginning that the best students he worked with in college were smart children who had read a great deal of history and literature, and he wanted his children to do that.

So I experimented on my guinea pigs. For about ten years I experimented, and by then I had a better idea of what worked. As I said, I always had a clear idea of where we wanted to go, educationally, because I thought then, and I think now, that liberal education is the education for a man as a man, and all men should have it.

Classical education is the education that all educated people in western civilization once received, and it is an education that is ordered to teaching men how to think well about the highest and noblest objects. It uses the best part of a man, that faculty that distinguishes him from the lower animals, his mind, to think about the highest things, and in thinking about them, become in some measure like them. Classical education allows one to order his life, because it gives him the principles in the light of which such an order is possible. It begins in wonder and ends in wisdom, which means it ends in an understanding of the causes of things. Further, or additionally, classical education is properly called liberal education, because it is an education that frees. "Liberal" comes from the Latin "liberare" "to free". In having it, he has acquired an understanding of the universal principles and causes of things, and a knowledge of the end of human life and the right order of human action with respect to that end. He has a knowledge of what is most worth knowing, and is able to direct his own life and the life of the community. I saw all of that, but I needed experience to see how best to get there with my young and growing family. After ten years I had a better idea.

That was when I wrote DY OCC. It was 1994, and I founded MODG in 1995. I wanted a program that would help others like myself who wanted to homeschool their children, provide the

¹ Thus, the aim of the philosophers was principally that, through everything that they considered in [their study of] things, they might arrive at a knowledge of first causes. Accordingly, they placed the science of first causes, reserving it for the mature part of their life. First they began with logic, which deals with the method of the sciences. Next they proceeded to mathematics, which even children can have the capacity for. Third, to natural philosophy, which requires time for experience. Fourth to moral philosophy, which young people are not ready for. And last they turned to the study of divine science, which treats the first causes of beings.

beginning and foundation of a classical education, and make sure the program would be fully Catholic.

We started in the fall of 1995 with 70 students. We now have about 3800. Using this program I successfully educated my own children thorough high school and have now graduated many other children as well. Like my children, the vast majority have gone on to college, many to TAC, but also to other good Catholic colleges, and some to secular colleges.

I have always felt that my chief credential for running a program like MODG is that I am a homeschooling mother myself, and so I am happy to tell you that my own children, now grown up, some with families of their own, are, all six, committed to the Catholic Church, and to homeschooling, they have all retained their love of learning, and are involved in ongoing education at some level. One child has a MA in philosophy from Catholic University of America, another is in the doctoral program in philosophy at the University of Dallas, and a third is planning to take this same path. Another child is pursuing her MA in nursing education, and nearly all of the children are teachers for MODG. My oldest daughter is the architect of our newest MODG program, the Learning Support program.

MODG has been generally successful. Our graduates virtually always get into their first choice colleges, they do very well in college when they get there, as a number of the colleges were kind enough to put in writing for us during our recent WASC accreditation visit. One teacher at TAC recently stopped my business manager to tell him how impressed he was with the program we offer. He said he has students of ours in his Aristotelian Physics class and they are extremely well prepared. I was so pleased. Thirteen of last year's juniors were named National Merit Semi-Finalists, a significant percentage from a class their size. They have gone on to the Finalist competition. Further our scholarship monies are large. Last year our 249 graduating seniors garnered over 3 million dollars in scholarship monies.

That's all good, but more important to me is the support we offer Catholic families. When I started MODG I wanted to offer what I would have or did find helpful as I was homeschooling my own children. Every family in our program is assigned a consultant, someone who has actually used this program in her own home with her own children. She has additional training in the methodology and content of the program, but her experience in using it herself is what most qualifies her to help her families in the day to day challenges of homeschooling. We offer a Teacher Assisted Program, where the student sends in papers to be graded by a qualified teacher who has the advantage of seeing many papers on the same topic from students at the same level. The student then talks to his Teacher Assistant about the paper, and he has a chance to correct the paper, as I believe in mastery education. We also now have a program called Learning Support. In this program we offer weekly telephone conference classes led by a teacher who facilitates student discussion, which is a central component of the class. Currently Learning Support classes are offered in every level of Latin, Religion, English, literature, and history, as well as classes in Earth Science, Natural Science, Chemistry, Physics, and Geometry. Every one of these programs has been developed in response to family input, with a view to enhancing the curriculum, keeping in mind the goal of preparing children to do the fullness of classical education well.

In college this will include the liberal arts in their perfection (the Trivium: Grammar, Rhetoric, and Logic and the Quadrivium: Arithmetic, Geometry, Music and Astronomy), the sciences to which they are ordered, such as the Physics (the study of nature), the study of the soul (De Anima), the Ethics and Politics, then natural theology (Metaphysics) and ultimately Sacred Theology. Before the student gets to this level, though, he prepares for these disciplines, by

developing his power of making images, his habits of thought, and by doing the beginning of every one of the liberal arts.

All learning is cyclical. We learn first on an introductory level and then we come back to the same objects at a deeper level. This is easiest to see, I think, in mathematics. When one first masters counting, the very next step is to learn the four operations (addition, subtraction, multiplication and division) with respect to whole numbers. The rest of one's mathematical career is spent learning the power of those operations. One adds, subtracts, multiples and divides fractions, then decimals and percents, then algebraic expressions, then trigonometric functions and then he uses them in calculus. This process is clearly a deepening of one's understanding of what is first learned on a very simple level.

We follow the same process in every field, including the liberal arts and sciences. What young children do, if those who direct them are knowledgeable of the ends of education, are exercises that will prepare their minds and hearts for the deepest level of natural, and, finally, supernatural, knowledge.

It is my view that In the earliest years one helps the student strengthen and make docile his imagination by exercises in observation, memorization and sequential ordering. One does this with a matter that also prepares the mind and heart for those later deep truths. At this level children make their acquaintance with salvation history, something they will study all their lives. They also are introduced to the good and the beautiful in many areas, as a preparation for the true, as such, later on. (See my introduction to *The Harp and Laurel Wreath* where I explore this theme.) They learn the basis of all arithmetic, develop an acquaintance with the geometric figures, are exposed to great music, and study God's effects in nature, including in the heavens. These are the beginnings of the arts of the Quadrivium. They learn the basis of all language arts, reading and writing, which constitutes the beginning of the Trivium.

As the student matures, he continues to perfect these methods and subjects; he keeps coming back to them at a deeper level, developing his habits of thought. For example, in language arts preparation one is clearly preparing for the Trivium done in its fullness. The Trivium, as we have noted, consists of the arts of grammar, logic and rhetoric. It is worth also noting that all of these have to do with speech in some way or another. Grammar is concerned with the construction of the sentence, and its principles are the ways of signifying that determine the parts of speech. Logic concerns the common method of procedure in all the sciences, and principally considers definition and reasoning, both of which are carried on through speech. Rhetoric is the art of speaking persuasively. In all of these there is a sort of making: one makes a statement, one makes an argument, and one makes a speech. In every course in our curriculum we work on perfecting these first connections with the arts that will lead to the sciences that will lead to natural and sacred theology.

Further, young students work on argumentation, so that they can eventually use rhetoric in the service of the truly noble. We teach our students to summarize, which is to order items according to importance instead of chronology, we teach them to identify an argument and then construct their own arguments. We teach them to develop their thoughts in paragraphs, so that they can develop them later in essays and papers using the rhetorical modes: exposition, argumentation, description and narration.

We explicitly, with our older children, introduce the ends of rhetoric into their regular assignments. Rhetoric is of three kinds: the political, the forensic and the ceremonial. The political aims at establishing whether a proposed course of action is expedient or inexpedient;

the forensic, whether an action done was just or unjust; and the ceremonial, whether someone deserves praise or blame. In our high school program we discuss and write about all three types of actions and characters. In my experience, the student in the rhetorical stage is interested in the high and noble, he cares about what is good and bad, and about what is blameworthy and praiseworthy. So the ends of rhetoric are by nature of interest to the high school student. This is a very real preparation for, and participation in, the Art of Rhetoric.

In the commentary of St. Thomas on Boethius' De Trinitate, he notes that the arts of the Trivium are used to producing compositions, and discourses, as well as syllogisms. We work on those throughout the curriculum.

We prepare for the sciences, too. We introduce our children to great literature. Through these works the student gains a sort of experience. The great works of literature appeal to the imagination and move the affections rightly. They present or imply profoundly important views of human life and reality as a whole. Similarly, the great works of history provide vicarious moral experience, a conception of human society, and an awareness of the greatest issues mankind faces. All of this prepares the student well to read the more difficult things, such as Plato's Dialogues, and then the Ethics and the Politics of Aristotle, at the right time. We introduce our children to the arguments our Founding Fathers had regarding the nature of the republic, and the particular "incarnation" of the form of mixed government that was appropriate to us, in this new land. This is the beginning of the study of the Politics. We have the children study natural science, particularly animal behavior, as a beginning to the study of the soul. For those of us who are consciously aware of the fullness of the classical curriculum, there is an intentional ordering of the parts of our curricula to that curriculum, so that the fullness of the classical curriculum can be achieved as excellently as possible when the time is right.

As regards the highest object of the classical curriculum, God Himself, the end of natural and supernatural theology, we are preparing our children for that knowledge from the moment they are born. We do that by the way we live, by the example we give them of Fatherhood, and of sacrificial love, and by the doctrine we teach them as soon as they are able to reason. All of this is their first introduction to the greatest truths, and to the object they will, with God's grace, contemplate in eternity.

Now, this is all well and good. A question that may arise in your mind, however, is how is the mother to achieve all this in a large family? She, after all, has to also focus on shopping, and cleaning, and laundry, and dinner, as well as educating her children. How can she do this? There are many tips I have accumulated over the years about practical helps in the home. I have a booklet that I actually prepared for my consultants, called *Teaching Tips and Techniques*, that has various articles and talks I have written on the subject. I have some of those booklets with me here, and Emmanuel Books carries them on a regular basis. I recommend to you two articles in particular: *Toddlers to Teens* and *Teaching Time for All*, and *Ten things that Really Make a Difference*.

Today, however, I would like to primarily discuss the most efficient methods of implementing the education itself. The first piece of advice I can give is to be clear about the end to which you are moving. The end is the cause of causes. If you know where you are going it is much easier to get there. If you don't know where you are going you *can't* get there. So thinking, seriously, about what you want your children to achieve by the time they graduate from your homeschool is the first big step in finding the best way for your family, even if it is a large family, with many students, to accomplish your goals in classical education.

As I already told you, I greatly enjoyed my homeschooling time with my children, and I'm very sorry it is over. But I will say that it wasn't all easy. I vividly remember the period of time just before my youngest was born. I had to stay in bed for the last nine weeks of that pregnancy. Nine weeks can seem like a very long time, especially when it includes school time, which this did. The ages of my children were 12, 9, 7, 5 and 3. Everyone, including the 3 year old, did school with me on my bed. It was then that I came to really appreciate efficient home schooling, which is also effective home schooling.

Time is like money. You only have so much of it, and there are many demands on the amount you have. You have to economize and prioritize. But you also have to pay your bills. And you learn that there is a false economy. Buying the cheapest is not always the most economical, because it may not last. Or it may not work very well, even if it lasts. With time, as with money, it is important to make good investments. The best investment gives a big return on a small outlay. In home schooling, it is important to use what is truly economical and a good investment, so that the goal desired is achieved with a minimum of effort.

A friend once stopped me in the grocery store and said she'd like the five-minute version of my book. I would like to go over what I told my friend, because it's the short and fundamental version of what our program does, and I think a clear idea of the program helps one to make judgments about how to structure her school days.

So I told her: What is essential in learning is that the student do what is appropriate at each period of learning. He should memorize, observe and sequence at the grammatical stage. This strengthens and makes docile his imagination, so that in the next stage of learning, the analytical (sometimes called the logical or dialectical), he will have the help of a trained imagination in following and constructing arguments. In turn, it is essential to this education that when the student is capable of grasping and marshaling arguments, he should practice doing so (7th through 9th grade – desire for argument is often noticeable!). If he does, then the last stage, the rhetorical, can be given to articulating those arguments elegantly, in the service of the truly noble. The student should, at these various stages, have the opportunity to consider much of the same material in a different light, based on his ability, interest, and level of formation. (I have an article on our website which gives this information in more detail, with references to Aristotle's *De Anima*.)

It's worth noticing that these stages are not only related chronologically, that is, the grammatical comes before the analytical, or the analytical before the rhetorical, but they are also related in another way.

Each stage involves gathering the material that the next stage will form in a particular way. If you have your student learn to recognize various birds during the grammatical stage, which fits with his abilities and interests at that time (because he is ready to memorize and observe closely), then he has the material to group birds according to common characteristics during the analytic stage, which will appeal to him at that point. If your student studies well-written speeches, spending time identifying the arguments in each, during the analytic stage, he has the matter, that is, the particular arguments, to use in writing or discussing persuasively during the rhetorical stage.

There is a natural order in learning, both in general and in each specific discipline. Addition precedes subtraction and multiplication precedes division. Recognizing the characteristics of various birds precedes grouping the birds according to those characteristics. Learning the

answers to the questions in the Baltimore Catechism prepares the way to reading the *Summa Theologiae* of St. Thomas Aquinas.

As we consider the curriculum as a whole we want to keep these considerations in mind. At each stage of development we should respect the level of formation appropriate to the particular student. We should make sure that the specific assignments pave the way for the next stage of formation, gathering material that can be formed in a particular way later on.

Now, one could go too far with this insight. One doesn't *only* acquire information in the grammatical stage, or *only* analyze in the dialectical stage. Rather, these are the activities that characterize the stage. The student in the early stages of formation, for example, is consciously, consistently, and with delight, using the method that pertains to this time of life. He loves to memorize and is much better at it than most of us are. He observes closely, and naturally practices sequencing. He can analyze, too, and does so, certainly if he is using WRTR or a similar phonics program, but his intellectual life is not characterized by analysis. He doesn't do it naturally, all the time, with everything. The student in the analytical, or dialectical, stage does analyze and argue naturally, all the time and about everything. He delights in it.

By the way, this is an aside, but it is important. Once one realizes that the 12 year old who is all of a sudden arguing is doing something natural, something necessary to achieve the mature human being, one's attitude toward the argument changes. The student needs to learn *how* to argue, *when* and *with whom* to argue, and even *about what* to argue, but he will learn those things if you approach the matter the right way. Don't feel that he has all of a sudden decided to challenge your authority. Recognize that he just naturally wants to practice argument and he is looking for the matter to do it with. I find one's relationship with a 12 year old is usually better if the right kind of matter for argument is provided.

This information about the stages of formation is important in effective home schooling, because while some materials are more effective than others, none will be effective if they are not used properly, in the way the child is naturally inclined at his particular stage of formation.

Since during the first stage of formation, usually in the K- 5th grade years, sequencing, memorizing, and observing are the most important activities, these activities should be used in every assignment. They are ordered to improving the power of making images and to the quality of the images made. If one does this, the effectiveness of his curriculum will be increased dramatically, both at this time, and later.

What these activities do is improve the strength and docility of the imagination. This makes it possible later to order thoughts, both chronologically and by order of importance, recognize an ordered argument, produce or construct an argument, and present a cohesive argument. Using sequencing, observation and memorization in the early years make it possible for the student to order arguments well later on. So using these methods with your young children will help them you have a more efficient foundational curriculum.

Once you recognize the appropriate method for your child, and the later formation to which it is ordered, you know what to emphasize in your schooling. These methods of formation can be used in such a way that if you have to "scale back" because life has severely restricted your time, you can still use these techniques even if you are not using them in precisely the way our syllabus does, or perhaps not with the same materials. Further, if you can't get everything done, you know not to cut back on the most formative activities. In Kindergarten, third grade and fourth

grade, I use Bible Stories to work on sequencing. I would encourage you not to cut this out when you need to make time in these years. Let me show you why.

The method involves reading to the child, or having him read the text we are using. The next day he narrates the story heard the day before. This gives him practice in oral composition, and an opportunity to see the story once again in its entirety. It strengthens the imagination, and improves the memory. As he re-tells the story, I write it down, in his words. If there is an obvious error in grammar usage, I'll correct it, but by and large, I just write down what he says, whatever that is (it's more fun that way). If he leaves out large sections I ignore it. This is his story. But, if the time sequence is wrong, I'll ask a question about it, trying to jog his memory, and if I have to, I'll just tell him the correct sequence. On the third day, he copies what I wrote. Thus, he both sees and writes his own composition, with the correct spelling and writing mechanics. The finished product is truly his work, both in terms of composition and the physical act of writing, but the two parts of the process have been separated. Additionally, we have employed imitation, which is the earliest natural form of learning.

Young children, particularly boys, can find writing frustrating when these two parts of the writing process are not separated. Their thoughts move faster than their pencils can. When the parts of the process are separated, the children can compose at the level of their ability for that skill and they can work on improving the physical act of writing. (Makes a big difference with many reluctant writers.)

The fourth day, I have the children illustrate their stories. When the children illustrate they are re-telling again, in a different mode. They are strengthening their imagination visually.

In kindergarten I use what is substantially this method with the Golden Press Bible, a very well written children's Bible. The language is pleasing to the ear. If a student can use the text, I would highly recommend that he does so. It will not only help him develop the imagination in terms of the method we use, but it will also help him train his ear to recognize when something is put well. In third grade we use Bishop Knecht's *A Child's Bible History*. The language is slightly more difficult, but it is still pleasing, and the student is ready to have his experience of language expanded. The chapters are short, and the event sequence is easy to follow. In fourth grade we use Fr. Schuster's *Bible History*, a much more difficult work. The method stays the same but the level of reading, the difficulty of the language, and the breadth of the material covered is considerably increased.

Now, one might well say this whole description doesn't look efficient. The method is involved and teacher intensive, at least at the beginning, and the language of the texts is demanding at each level for the student at that level. But here is why this is efficient and why you would not want to curtail this activity: many educational goals are being achieved here.

First, the method is important for the reasons I have given. Second, the information imparted is formative in itself, as it is about salvation history, something we want our children to know well and retain throughout their lives. Third, the language of the texts is always challenging, but not too challenging. Children should develop a breadth of patterns of language. The best way to achieve this is to expose them to various patterns when they are young. It is sad when a young man or woman can't read, for example, Jane Austen, because her language is complex. That situation can be avoided by exposing the student to more complex language patterns when he is younger. In the sequence I have described one is accomplishing that goal in stages. We work up to the more difficult, we don't start there. (Now, one always meets the student where he is, and works to take him where you want him to be. If, in fact, any of these texts is too difficult then

it shouldn't be used, for the goal wouldn't be achieved.) Further, in following this learning sequence, the student is learning how to write, in a manner that is commensurate with his talents. He is retelling, not analyzing. He is composing at the level he is capable of, and physically writing at the level he is capable of. These levels are often not the same. He doesn't have to worry about what to say, just how to say it.

This is a very effective series of courses, because so much is accomplished in one activity. Even though it takes some time, the time investment is sound, as the return is much greater than the initial capital outlay. So when I consult with a busy mom, looking for items to truncate in her curriculum, this is not the place where I suggest she cut. It appears easier to just read a chapter from an orthodox catechism, but in the long run this is easier. Now, if one simply can't do this, it's better to read the Faith & Life catechism, for example, than do nothing. However, the truth is that time required each day doesn't have to be very long.

The general point is this: know what is most formative in your child's curriculum and make sure that happens, even if not everything can get done. Think about each child, his stage of formation, and determine what is most necessary for him intellectually. Make sure that gets done.

Another key to effective, foundational home schooling is utilizing small increments of time. Doing something daily for 5 minutes is much better than doing it once a week, or once every other week, for an hour. Three minutes of poetry recitation a day, 5 minutes or less of Baltimore Catechism practice daily, EFRU cards done daily for 2 or 3 minutes, states and capitals flashcards studied for a few minutes each day, are all examples of highly efficient materials used effectively. The student is memorizing material useful in itself, so he is strengthening his imagination and at the same time accumulating information that he will be able to use later on in his course of studies.

Further, in the case of the Baltimore Catechism, learning by heart the answers to those important questions, so that they are available later on when needed, trains the mind to understand distinctions. The words of the Baltimore Catechism are precisely the right words, and learning them develops a habit of thought that makes distinction easy.

Additionally, use efficient materials wherever possible. I like the Abeka mathematics books for the first three grades simply because they are more efficient. In 20 to 30 minutes daily the student covers the needed material to be ready to undertake the later mathematical texts well. Now, some children need more concrete, manipulative, experiences of the concepts of number than others. If a child needs more of that kind of instruction, clearly the Abeka books are not going to be effective. But when they work, they are highly efficient. The texts don't require much teacher time, and don't belabor points that are easy to grasp.

The Emma Serl books, *Primary* and *Intermediate Language Lessons* are also effective texts. They work with the student in just the right way. Mrs. Serl uses copying, dictation, conversation, usage exercises, and creative writing to develop the student's patterns of language. She doesn't ask for analysis, and she does utilize the natural appetites.

As I think about what is most effective in the early years, what courses or materials I recommend for the very busy mom with K-5 students, the texts and methods I mention above stand out. I would with great reluctance abandon them for a workbook, which would be quicker, but not achieve the goals as effectively. Now there are some courses that can be done with a workbook, and when that is the case, that can be a real help for a mom. But always think about

this child and what he needs and what is most formative for him. Don't just do what is quickest – because it may well not be quickest, in the long run.

In every stage of formation, sustained silent reading, done by the child, and reading aloud to the child, are efficient methods of formation. Reading good literature to children exercises their imaginations and memories, trains their ear, exposes them to new experiences, increases their vocabulary, and can be done with a number of children at once. I couldn't recommend highly enough including both directed reading, my name for the period of time my child spends reading the books I have chosen for him, and daily reading aloud, in your curriculum. This is much more efficient than using study guides, reading comprehension activity books or vocabulary books. (Don't misunderstand me, I have used and recommended all of those myself. They can be very helpful sometimes and for some people. But they are not as effective as having the child read, and reading to him, daily.) One of the reasons the MODG curriculum does history the way it does throughout grade school and high school, using a framework text and many supplementary readings, is our recognition of the importance of reading real books.

We now (as of 2010) include in our syllabi "Language Arts Scope and Sequences", so that you can see what the goals of the program are, and where they are achieved in the curriculum. Our courses are integrated, so writing skills are taught in many subject areas, as is reading comprehension.

In what I often call the analytic stage of formation, about 6th to 9th grade, among the most effective materials one can use are good grammar books and a good Latin program. For grammar, I recommend both *Voyages in English* and *Easy Grammar*. Which text is best for you will depend on your circumstances, but using some good grammar text is important in achieving the goals of this stage of formation. At this stage of formation grammar is a priority. If something is going to go, it should not be grammar.

In the middle years, sixth or seventh through ninth grade, children are ready to analyze. They are ready to put their minds to making deductions, to categorizing, to thinking carefully and in an orderly fashion. Concentrate on the courses and assignments where this method is employed. Analytic grammar during these years has a central importance to the formation of the mind. Sixth grade, in particular, is a transition year from the 're-telling' stage of formation to the 'analytic'. Up to this point the student has concentrated on 'patterns of language', accumulating experience of beautiful and correctly used language patterns he is now in a position to study. He now uses the material he has accumulated and considers it under a particular aspect. This aspect is the relationship of the parts of the sentence to one another and to the whole. "How does each part of the sentence function?" is the question to which the student addresses himself.

This is important. Grammar, though useful for correct speaking and writing, is primarily significant in terms of training the mind. When the student asks himself, "How does each part of the sentence function?", he is bringing his intelligence to bear on a particular matter, ordering it, and seeing its relation to other aspects of reality.

Latin similarly trains the mind. One recent study showed that students who had some kind of foreign language scored an average of 114 points higher on the SAT than those who didn't study a foreign language. If that language was inflected, that is, had particular endings that signified the use of the words, as German does, the difference in test scores was 127 points. But when the foreign language was Latin, the difference in scores was 169 points. Latin requires distinction and analysis that the student's mind can then apply to other matters.

In this stage of formation, discussion is also important. Your student wants to talk, he wants to argue, and he is interested in the distinction inevitable in discussion. Fortunately, discussions can be done in the car, or while one is doing the laundry. The BC discussion questions, the questions in DYOC for Mark and Acts of the Apostles, and the history questions raised in the MODG history courses all provide material for discussion. Also, the literature that the student is reading can be discussed. Sometimes we are tempted to skip these discussions, because they “take too much time”, but they are an important component of the program of study. MODG now offers various Learning Support discussion classes – but they shouldn’t limit the discussion in the home, they should enhance it. I can’t overemphasize the importance of conversation with your children.

If you want your homeschooling to have the right effect in your children, if you want to have your children develop obedience, and the other virtues, you are going to need to *talk to your children*. The first time I mentioned how important regular conversation with children is, it was as an aside in a talk I was giving at a conference. It wasn’t the main point of the talk. But after that talk, not only was it the topic most frequently mentioned to me, but the other speakers at the conference came to me and said, “I’m going home to talk to my children.” We homeschool, so we have our children at home with us, but I think many of us talk *at* our children instead of with them.

I think it is interesting that in preparation for a talk on character formation, I once asked my own older children what advice they would give to parents. Unanimously, and separately, they said, “Tell parents to talk to their children.” My children were either in college, or had graduated from college, and they had had an opportunity to see, on occasion, someone from a good home who seemed not to have made internal the lessons he was taught. It is as though the virtues were only external, imposed by an exterior force, namely, the presence of the parent. Once that force was gone, the virtues were also gone.

We want our children to be formed internally. As a friend of mine said, “Obedience is no good unless you have their heart, too.” The best way I know to gain the heart of your children is to talk to them. *Enjoy* being with them, make an effort to spend time with them that is mutually pleasant. But above all, talk to them, and don’t talk ‘at’ them.

Summarizing is another efficient analytic activity, children in the analytic stage should always have some summarizing to do – so include it in your curriculum at this level. MODG includes it in religion assignments, and history papers. In order to summarize one must analyze the whole into its parts and make a judgment about the relative importance of those parts. This activity trains the mind and enables it to apply those methods to other subjects. It’s a logical exercise.

In the high school years, the most important activities have to do with understanding and presenting an argument. We address this throughout the curriculum, as the curriculum is intentionally integrated. (This is a help to a busy mom.) We work on learning to write persuasively and logically, for example, in numerous 9th grade courses. In religion our content goal is to deepen the student’s understanding of the truths of the faith that he has learned in grade school. There are, however, numerous writing assignments as well as reading and discussion. This will help concretize the content, but also help the student understand the craft of writing. He uses outlines provided by the text. We find it is important that the student follow these outlines. When grading these essays the first element of the grade comes from the student’s correct use of the outline. By following the outlines provided the student is learning from a model how to order his papers. He is not just seeing the order, he is actively using the order provided. It is a powerful learning tool, both for writing and for constructing a cohesive intellectual argument. The student is learning argumentation from a master teacher.

The 9th grade Earth Science course has four levels of its own. This course teaches students about Earth Science, and does so effectively because it uses various learning modes. The student reads, writes and draws, and his reading is very active, because he has to locate the correct sources and the correct places in those sources. This is another level of the course. The student is learning research skills, something very important in all future courses. He learns how to find what he needs in a text, not just turn the page. He also learns to write. There are two essays to write each week. Though this often seems overwhelming at the beginning of the year, but the end of the year it is easy for the student to do. It makes all other writing assignments in high school easier. The fourth level is the most important, however. This course is a course in applied logic. The information on the worksheets is all related information, but it is not ordered. In order to write an essay the student must order the information. He must see the relationships between the various pieces of information, see what is subordinate to what, and put together what goes together. This is an exercise in logic, and in order.

The US History course is setting the context for the next three years historical conversation. The content object this year is to learn about the beginning of our country, the issues that moved us into revolution, and the way those issues, and others, have affected the course of our history as a nation. The student reads about colonization, the revolution, westward expansion, the Civil War, the period of recovery, WWI and WWII. He explores both sides of the controversies surrounding the revolution, the Civil War and WWII. He learns to exercise judgment about those issues.

At the same time, however, the writing sequence in history is intended to teach ninth grade students how to write a paper exploring a controversial issue, presenting both sides clearly, and then making a judgment about the truth of the matter. This helps them learn how to make judgments, and how to present a persuasive paper. One will never persuade anyone of anything, unless he understands and can show he understands both sides of the position. The process is gradual: the first paper is written in the first person, so that the student learns how to speak from someone else's perspective; the second paper is a conversation between persons holding opposing views, so that the student learns how to present two opposing points of view persuasively; the third paper is a straight narrative, so that the student practices writing objectively, in the third person; and the fourth paper puts all those skills together. The fourth paper presents two opposing views, each position written as cogently as possible, and then the student makes a determination about the justice of the positions. He writes in the objective voice, but he present each point of view as persuasively as possible.

This use of writing integration throughout the curriculum is an example of how to be efficient and effective with homeschooling even with a large family. Don't do too much. Use exercises and assignments that accomplish more than one goal at a time. Be clear about what is most necessary at each level, so that if something doesn't get done, it is not the assignment that will most form the child.

So, in summary, home schoolers need to have an efficient curriculum, because they have many roles to play in their homes. The home schooling mother is not only a teacher, but she also is the domestic administrator. She is a companion to her husband and children, as well as the curriculum advisor. She needs to spend her time wisely.

To do that she must identify the goals she wants to achieve. Her curriculum, to be efficient, has to aim explicitly at those goals. She should work consciously on having her student observe, memorize and sequence in the early years, with an additional emphasis on patterns of

language. This prepares the mind and imagination for the next stage of formation. When a child is ready for intellectual argument, but not before, he should have the opportunity in every subject to analyze. He is ready make deductions, to categorize, to thinking carefully and in an orderly fashion. Concentrate on the courses and assignments where this method is employed, especially grammar and Latin. Have the student make summaries, so that he can practice ordering thoughts by an order of importance. In the high school years have the students work on understanding and presenting an argument. Integrate the subjects and methodology you use so that there are fewer items to do, but more is accomplished in each assignment.

The homeschooling mother is truly the valiant woman of the Scriptures, living her life in the service of God and family, so that at the end she will be welcomed into the presence of God with the words, "Well done, my good and faithful servant." That's my goal, and I know it is yours as well. God bless you.