The background of the cover is a teal, textured sky. A large, light-yellow, cloud-like shape frames the title. Below the title is a decorative horizontal line with small floral motifs at each end. The subtitle is in a simple, black, sans-serif font. At the bottom, a large, open book lies on a wooden deck. A small, light-yellow figure of a person is lying on their stomach, reading the book. A white tree trunk grows out of the center of the open book. A swing hangs from a branch of the tree, with two small, light-yellow birds sitting on it.

Think Outside the Classroom

A Practical Approach to
Relaxed Homeschooling

Kelly Crawford

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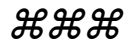
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Introduction

“If a student can be led to the tools he needs to answer his own questions, he will be always learning; and this should be the goal of every educator.”



Every starry-eyed homeschooling Mom begins with great expectations...I know I did. I walked out of a classroom teaching high school English, right into our classroom at home. There my daughter sat primly in her student desk; we recited the pledge of allegiance, asked questions only with raised hand, and I stood with a long, pointy stick aimed at the alphabet chart behind me. This was going to be WONDERFUL!

Then my bubble burst. She was bored. I was frustrated. Neither of us was having much fun. It became drudgery. This was NOT what I had pictured! “Oh dear, this is what I must resign to...a lifetime of force-feeding information to my non-interested children. I knew I couldn't do it!”

What I had yet to learn was that copying “it” at home was only one of many options in homeschooling. The freedom of home taught me that education looked different for every family and even every child. We were “doing school” in those first weeks, but I wasn't sure how much she was actually learning.

I am so happy to report that, today, twelve years later, our homeschool looks *a lot* different. We love homeschooling, we are relaxed, and my kids (and myself) are learning by leaps and bounds. Instead of depending on someone to feed them information, they are learning how to learn. And I write this book to give you hope for your homeschool experience!

We are what some would call “relaxed” homeschoolers. I have come to love and see the benefits of a relaxed approach to learning, and I can't wait to share our experience with you. If your family has a “system”, and it works for you, your children are truly being educated, and you're not under a lot of stress, I would suggest you keep it.

*“If you don't know
where you are
going, any road
will get you
there.”*

Lewis Carrol

But if you find homeschooling to be more of a burden than a joy, perhaps it's time to try a different approach. A friend once said to me, *“Being a mother is hard work. But if God gave us these children to nurture and teach, surely He didn't mean for it to be impossible!”*

Please don't misunderstand me; we are a normal family with the same challenges every family faces. We deal with bad attitudes (children and mom's!), disobedience and strife, just like you do. And we have bad days. But aside from the normal part of working together through those things as a family, we have grown to understand that learning has many faces. Homeschooling doesn't have to be misery and drudgery.

Many moms have said to me, *“I love the concept of relaxed schooling, but I have no idea how to do it--what it looks like.”* Those comments are what prompted me to write this book. I'm going to show you what it looks like for us, and hopefully inspire you to explore what it can look like for your family!

Chapter 1:

Education—Building the Framework

Thinking Outside the Box

So much of the homeschooling experience involves “unlearning.” Because most of us went to public or private school, we have this idea--and rightly so since it's all we ever knew--that education can only be accomplished one way. We basically all think that students sitting in rows of desks with a teacher transferring her knowledge to them is the best, and possibly the only way to learn. Or maybe we've never given it much thought. Or maybe we know it's not the best way, but we are afraid to alter the course because then we wouldn't be doing what everyone else is doing.

John Taylor Gatto, a retired 30-year veteran teacher-of-the-year in the New York City school system, publicly speaks out against the “injury” he says institutionalized schooling inflicts on children. His insight into the way we've schooled for so many years has radically changed the way I view our homeschooling:

“Children learn what they live. Put kids in a class and they will live out their lives in an invisible cage, isolated from their chance at community; interrupt kids with bells and horns all the time and they will learn that nothing is important or worth finishing; ridicule them and they will retreat from human association; shame them and they will find a hundred ways to get even. The habits taught in large-scale organizations are deadly.” John Taylor Gatto

Stepping out of the mainstream, daring to do something different requires a certain amount of faith; faith in the results, in those who have gone before us, and in the intuition God has given us to parent. But the results of taking that leap of faith is so rewarding. After awhile, the fears and doubts subside, and you can see that the fears had no merit after all.

What is Education?

Instead of duplicating the only method we knew regarding how to “do school”, we backed up and began to ask ourselves the simple question: “*What is education?*” In order to begin building, we must know what we're building in the first place. A storage shed and a cathedral are going to have very different-looking blueprints. Most parents fail to realize that the structure the state is trying to design is in the shape of a TEST. Tests are the gauge schools use to determine their success. And while a test can be an important tool for assessing progress, it should not be the end-all for determining the method. In

other words, if we teach solely for the purpose of achieving a desired test score, we have missed the entire purpose of education. So much of the current methods of compulsory schooling involve heaping unrelated information upon students in order that they can score higher on a test. But how many public high school graduates do you know can articulate his thoughts about philosophy, theology or other significant matters? Are they teaching our children to think? To discern truth and wisdom? To do things, to work hard, to really be prepared for the real world? To live life doing things that matter?

For us, education has much more to do with nurturing the mind than it does with any memorization of facts.

Gatto, in his excellent book *A Different Kind of Teacher*, writes:

“A study of any list of great men and women will quickly disclose the host of personal methods they used to arrive at personal enlightenment—an education. No one I know ever gave much credit to the daily doses of abstraction prescribed by strangers and imposed on his life by compulsion (modern schooling). But plenty of autobiographies credit a mother, a father, a grandmother, a grandfather, an uncle, an aunt, or a chance accident happened upon while adventuring. maybe there’s a lesson there.”

As parents who have been given the responsibility of educating our children (Deuteronomy 6¹), we can't get this wrong. We have to clearly outline our educational goals and then pursue the best path for achieving them. As Christians, this should mean, above all, that we are far more concerned with eternal things. So often, the reality that we do live in a society that operates within certain bounds overtakes our spiritual duty to raise up men and women who love and serve the Lord. **No preparation, no level of education or training can compensate for our failure to do that.**

John Mark Reynolds, Philosopher of Education and homeschooling dad writes:

“First, education must begin and end with virtue...Too often home educators try to set up a government school at home. How foolish I was with all my records, charts, tests, and clip boards at the start!”

and education simplified:

“Students should read well, write well, be numerate, and cultured.”

Idea Corner:

To keep the attention of little ones while reading, collect old magazines (nature-type are good) and let them cut and glue (with a glue stick!) pictures onto construction paper. After reading, you can talk about each picture with them for an extra learning opportunity.

¹ “Now this is the commandment, and these are the statutes and judgments which the Lord your God has commanded to teach you...And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when **you rise up.**”

Our Educational Objectives

We have basically outlined the following objectives for our children. Yours may be different:

1. To teach them the fear of the Lord as the foundation of knowledge
2. To teach them to be self-learners
3. To teach them how to think
4. To teach them how to effectively communicate
5. To encourage them to love to read
6. To teach them to be productive
7. To teach them to understand math
8. To teach them to love the arts

A Word About Relationships

So often I've seen parents trying to implement their idea of what homeschooling should be, even to the detriment of the relationships with their children. I believe if my children learned NOTHING except how to love the Lord, *and we had their hearts*, I would consider it a successful homeschool experience. No academic goal is worth losing the priceless relationships with our children. I've advised frustrated mothers to "take off" for the remainder of the year and focus on building relationships. Once those are established, homeschooling gets so much easier! And to borrow from the Scriptural concept, "What does it profit a man to gain the world and lose his own soul?" I ask, "What does it profit a parent to raise studious children and lose their hearts?"

Chapter 2:

A Lifestyle of Learning

I will explain how our family seeks to accomplish our educational objectives in detail in the next chapter, but first I want to explain some simple, but often overlooked precepts about the process of learning. It is these foundational principles that will change the way we approach education.

A term I think accurately defines the relaxed homeschool method is “lifestyle of learning.” We believe that learning is a continual process, with no starting or stopping point. We believe that everything in a day has teaching merit, and should be viewed as a learning opportunity.

The details of *how* we implement this lifestyle of learning, ultimately achieving our educational objectives are below. These are merely suggestions and starting points. Every family is different, with different opportunities and goals. Let them be a springboard for your ideas.

Curiosity: The Key to Real-life Education

At the core of this idea of relaxed homeschooling is a simple, yet largely overlooked fact of creation: God instilled in each person a natural curiosity meant to guide and gravitate him toward learning things he needs for life. Simply put, a child is born with everything he needs to obtain a meaningful and thorough education. All he needs is the exposure to information and to be taught how to use that information.

Far too often we squelch the very nature of a child's curiosity with our notions of schooling. Is it any wonder why there is an epidemic of children being drugged to make it through a school day? More often than not, these children aren't plagued with illness; they are simply children, made to explore, move about, find answers to their questions using their five senses, being separated from the world, confined to a sterile environment, and force-fed information that doesn't interest them. I don't think there is an epidemic of ADHD in American schools; I think there is an epidemic of boredom. Let's not repeat the tragedy.

Consider how a child learns language. I don't know a parent who began a rigorous language course with their infant. But consider how crucial it is for him to learn to communicate. And yet, I've never seen a parent wringing hands over his baby's crib, worried that he is not going to get the proper tutoring

"Sit down before fact as a little child, be prepared to give up every preconceived notion, follow humbly wherever or whatever abysses nature leads, or you will learn nothing."

Thomas H. Huxley

for this important life skill.

Why? Because God designed that infant to be strangely curious, with a strong desire to get what he wants. He learns by observation about the human language. It is spoken to him, long before he understands each symbol and meaning of the words. If

you think about it, it's almost miraculous that, at about the age of 1, he begins to imitate sounds of words. And by the time he is two, he has a rather impressive vocabulary.

Amazing! No "teacher", no curriculum, and yet he learns one of the most complicated systems on the planet. This demonstration of the mind is no different than how a person learns everything else. The baby was repeatedly exposed to information, he had a need/desire to learn it, and with no forcing at all, accomplished the task. I submit one can receive an entire education based on that same concept. Better yet, I believe it is a superior form of learning!

Parents have been misled into thinking that young children must undergo some regiment to prepare for school. The term "learning readiness" is a buzz word now. But, just as God's ways have always been putting to shame the world's ways, this one is no exception. People are born "ready to learn."

All too often, we take that same little curious brain, that mind that loves to learn, that can't wait to explore the world around him, and we squish it into a box and a time-frame. Tragically, we squelch his God-given love of learning. And in just a few years, we have literally *taught* the child that he can only learn if someone else imparts his expertise to him. Furthermore, we teach him there's an appropriate time to learn, with starting and stopping points. Most children loathe "learning" by the time they reach high school age.

What if we were able to preserve that in-born curiosity, that ability to soak up information simply by hearing, seeing and touching it? What would that do to the way we view education?

Another one of those overly simple things that gets overlooked is the importance of a child just having quiet time to explore, think and create. So he's outside playing in the mud with a stick? Leave him for a time. It's a good thing for a child to be alone with his thoughts, to experiment with his world, to observe "cause and effect" and the laws of nature around him. Our culture is a noisy one where we

feel the need to be constantly entertained, busy or occupied. This busyness can rob our children of an important part of education. A child's soul cannot grow without some silence and solitude.

"If a child is to keep alive his inborn sense of wonder, he needs the companionship of at least one adult who can share it, rediscovering with him the joy, excitement and mystery of the world we live in."

Rachel Carson

Conversation.

One of the most important tools in a parent's hands for teaching his children is conversation. Dialog is a missing ingredient from a typical classroom. It's overlooked because it seems too simple; but keep my language analogy in mind.

Dialog, or conversation, is vitally important to education and to human existence itself. Tragically, the constant access to television, video games, computers and devices keeps us so distracted we are losing the art of conversation. Worse yet, as our ability to verbally communicate diminishes, so does our power to defend our faith to the world around us.

As I talk to even my youngest children throughout the day, I try to engage them verbally and intellectually. When we go for a walk, whether I'm with my two-year old or my fourteen year old, I point out as many details about things we see as I can. For example, my two-year old naturally sees the bright red flower, so she stops to ooh and ahh over it.

"Fower, mommy," she says.

"Yes, that's a red clover...isn't it pretty? I think the colors are brilliant, don't you? Bees like red clover."

I may go on and on, using different words besides "brilliant", so she hears a variety of the same-meaning words. Silly? Think back to how we talk to a child who hasn't yet learned to speak. We repeat things. And the more they hear them, the more they learn. Use some words that are above your child's understanding...remember, all words used to be above his understanding! This is a real, living education.

An important part of the conversation is also questioning. **Asking questions and finding answers is the most basic definition of education.** Instead of forcing our children to memorize someone else's thoughts about a subject, we need to push them to develop some of their own, analyzing, observing and concluding based on their personal experiences about the world around them.

After embracing the importance of conversation for some time, I recently heard Geoffrey Botkin, a father of five brilliant children who are having a huge impact on our culture through writing books and creating media products, say, *"Most of our homeschooling was simply conversation."*

Pay Attention.

A lifestyle of learning is mostly a matter of paying attention to opportunities. What questions are they asking? What questions can you ask them? Many times my children will ask a question to which I don't know the answer. It can be tempting (and sometimes is necessary) to put them off with an "I don't know." But it's much better to say, "I don't know...but come with me and we'll find the answer!" Between books that we continually collect, the library, the dictionary and the Internet, we can usually find the answer we're looking for. **Get into the habit of asking questions and finding answers. This is really the foundation for all learning!**

And if you are in the middle of something that can't be put off, keep a running list of interests your child has shown, and look them up when you get a chance. It's not as good as seizing the moment, but better than forgetting altogether.

Create Solitude.

I fear one of the greatest losses to technology has been the death of solitude. Being still, being quiet and alone with one's thoughts is a crucial, missing element for today's child, and the constant over-

stimulation is damaging to the brain, actually causing a short attention span and lowered ability to retain information.

Idea Corner:

Pick a “word of the day” and see how many times you can use it in the day, and encourage your children to do the same. Make up a song about the word. While reading Winnie the Pooh, I ran across the word “revolving.” I stopped and said, “Do you know what revolving means? It means to go in circles, or spin around.” And then I asked one of my children to stand in the middle of the floor and spin in circles. While she did that, I sang a chorus to the tune of “A Tisket, a Tasket” that went: “Revolving, revolving...Alexa is revolving...’round and ’round, she spins around, Alexa is revolving.”

Chapter 3:

How We Implement Our Objectives

Given what I've already shared about how we approach education, this chapter defines a little more specifically how we teach the objectives I listed in Chapter 1. Your objectives may be different, and your methods may be different. But outlining your goals is crucial to accomplishing them!

Teaching the Fear of the Lord

Above all else, we want them to love the Lord with all their hearts. If you get anything from this book, I would hope that you get this: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge."

I submit that a child, no matter how much he is taught, cannot have a true education apart from this fundamental fear of and love for the Lord. Period. This is one of the reasons that we would go to jail before we let government education be forced upon our children. We live in a culture of "falsely educated" people. People with knowledge but no truth--possibly the most dangerous element of a society.

I cannot underestimate the importance of teaching God's Word to our children. There are many wonderful tools and resources to help parents impart Biblical truths, but there is *nothing* that tops the Bible itself. (It is a given, of course, that Mom and Dad living out the Word in front of their children is paramount to imparting a biblical world view.)

*"If you aim at nothing,
you'll hit every time."
Anonymous*

The inspired Word of God is under serious attack, even within the church. We must be vigilant to defend it, and to teach our children to do the same. Without a solid understanding of the principles and doctrines taught in Scripture, they will be susceptible to the subtle deceptions that are infiltrating the church. And regardless of who else is assisting you in this task, it is your primary responsibility and

must be deliberately executed.

We make a tragic mistake assuming that the Bible is too hard for our little ones to understand, and thus postpone the daily reading of it to them. It's fine to read the children's version of Jonah and the Whale, but be sure to read the original story from the Bible too.

We read a book once called *Ten Peas in a Pod*. The father of the family in the book was an incredible man. The reading of God's Word, aloud, to his family every day, was the single highest priority on his agenda. It got done if nothing else did. And he mentioned that he usually even woke up the baby to sit in on the reading!

I couldn't believe that. But then he explained, just like my earlier analogy of how a child learns language, that if we postponed speaking to a child until he was old enough to understand the words, linguistically, he would be greatly impaired. The same is true of his spiritual understanding. A person who has not heard the regular reading of God's Word until he is old enough to understand likely won't understand it at all. It's one of those faith things, where you trust that the Word of God is powerful, and is not returning void.

The same man in the story had two sons who memorized the entire Bible. Yes, the whole thing. Unbelievable. When they were asked *how* they did it, they said, “Well, we really didn't spend a lot of time purposely memorizing it. We just heard it so much that it came natural”!

Memorizing Scripture, then, is a powerful by-product of simply reading it regularly. Last year, I took several longer passages of Scripture, put them to music and recorded [By Heart Scripture CD](#). It made memorizing them a cinch!

In addition to reading and memorizing Scripture, we feel it is important to be able to point to Scripture for any offense our children commit. If they are being rude at the dinner table, it is not enough that they are corrected because they are causing me frustration. They should be reminded that rudeness is a breaking of the greatest command—to love your neighbor as yourself—and ultimately that is why we practice manners. Any other offense can be directed to a Scriptural principle and should be foundational to their discipline.

Teach Them to be Self-Learners

It amazes me how many people believe that a proper education can only be achieved with an “expert” feeding the student information. If anything, I would consider this a grave disadvantage. The whole world is at our disposal for observation, study and exploration. To be taught that my knowledge is limited only to what another can teach me is, at best, depressing! But it's also wrong. One of our main objectives is to show our children *how* to learn--where to find answers, and how to discover solutions. If a student can be led to the tools he needs to answer his own questions, he will be always learning; *and this should be the goal of every educator.*

Don't worry so much about having your children memorize facts. I've already mentioned several times how we often overlook the simplest of things. I read a quote by Albert Einstein once that said, “*Why should I work to fill my brain with facts and figures when I can simply look them up when I need them?*” I try to look at things and ask “why” or “is this the best way”, before I just assume everyone else is doing it right.

Practically speaking, it is important that a child be taught how to use a dictionary, a map, a thesaurus, a concordance, a library, the Internet, an encyclopedia, graphs, charts and tables. This “teaching” can occur quite naturally as he sees you using those things to find answers. If we are reading about a particular person, or maybe an animal, and we come across a country or region, I usually stop there and point it out on our map or globe. Just getting them familiar with geography in that way is an incredible learning tool. Remember, his curiosity is already guiding him. Make sure he knows how to satisfy it.

One of the most important aspects of finding answers is asking questions. Cultivate his interests, and encourage him to ask. And let him hear you asking others about things you wish to know. Never fail to be curious!

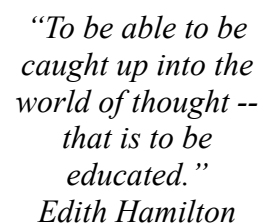
Cultivating the Thoughts

We want children who know how to think. Of course we want them to think from a biblical world-view, and to be able to discern, analyze and critique the information they encounter. One of the best ways to do this is to challenge them with particular scenarios and questions. When they express an opinion, press them to explain it further. And then play the “devil’s advocate.” Of course their age determines how far you can go with this exercise, but as they get older, help them develop their line of reasoning. Keep pushing them to defend their positions.

As they learn to better express themselves in written language, requiring essays in defense of their positions is a great idea. Dad can read them at the table and the family can further discuss lines of reasoning.

An overlooked tool for cultivating the thoughts is simply play and imagination. Building with Legos, assembling puzzles, any “brain” activity during play is a wonderful way to stimulate the mind. We look for these types of things when we purchase toys.

If you have access to a debate team, often parents find it helpful for their older children to participate in those. Any exercise that engages the mind and challenges the thoughts is a worthy one.



*“To be able to be
caught up into the
world of thought --
that is to be
educated.”
Edith Hamilton*

Effective Communication

We believe it extremely important that our children be able to express, verbally and in written form, their beliefs, ideas and values. We desire them to be articulate. Real power lies in the ability to effectively communicate to the world your thoughts. It may seem extreme, but nothing helps develop communication like getting rid of, or at least turning off the television. Other than movies, we simply don't watch TV. It both saves us from a lot of garbage AND facilitates our need to communicate with each other. It's probably the single best strategy for building family relationships. We use a number of practical methods to sharpen our children's communication skills.

Of course, just the dialog I mentioned earlier goes a long way, but here are a few other tangible ways to perfect these skills:

1. Copy Work

We practice a simple exercise called **copy work**. It is simply the copying of some writing we deem to be worthy of imitating. We use the Bible, poetry, famous quotes, favorite books, etc. The youngest children copy a few words or line. The older children may copy a paragraph. The goal is to copy it just as it is written, being careful with punctuation, spelling and form.

Copying sharpens all the skills useful for language and at the same time, makes the student familiar with good writing. It is a practice our forefathers often used, and has been regarded a very important practice improving writing skills.

Don't overlook the simplicity of listening and observing other great communicators. Whether it is a live lecture, sermon or play, or a DVD, copying others who are great at something is a master's way of learning.

2. Writing Thank You Notes

As soon as the children begin writing, I look for opportunities for them to write and send thank-you cards or letters to friends and family. This is every child's first writing experience in our family. (Most importantly, this also helps develop an attitude of gratefulness.)

3. Essays and Stories

As they get older, like I mentioned previously, writing essays to defend their convictions can be a great tool for strengthening their writing skills. Some of your children may show interest in writing fiction. I have a daughter who loves to read and also write her own stories. I encourage her to be creative, show her how a thesaurus can help improve her work, and use her writing to observe areas she needs to work on (capitalization, spelling, etc.) For further writing incentive, get familiar with the Op-Ed pieces in your local newspaper and encourage your children to write one and send it in.

But be open to what your child loves, and allow him to write about those topics. Forcing a child to read and write about subjects that are of no interest to him will likely not inspire him. Find what he loves, and work around that.

4. Journal

Keeping a journal is a wonderful way to develop writing skills as well as encouraging your children to think and observe the world around them. Many a professional writer started by keeping a journal. It helps both the process of writing, and the developing of his thoughts.

*"With life-learning,
there is no start or
finish, no taking off, no
being behind...just a
constant readiness to learn
something else."
Kelly Crawford*

5. Blog

There are differing opinions and I would caution you with this suggestion, but a blog is a fun way to stimulate the thinking skills and hone the writing skills of a student. They are free and easy to use. Be sure to teach how to type first, though! (It's a great motivator for typing!)

6. A Love of Reading

Much of the work of educating our children is reduced if they can read well and enjoy it. There is little out of reach of the mind of one who reads. We try to cultivate not only a love of reading, but a love of good books. Charlotte Mason has coined the term “living books”, referring to those books written by authors with a passion for their subject, and the ability to communicate it through good writing.

Reading is fundamental to a proper education, because it is primarily the vehicle through which all information is passed. We try to include even our littlest children when we read, no matter the difficulty of the reading material. We especially try to read the Bible each day, in the hearing of all our children.

A constant collection of books is a worthwhile endeavor, and can be done quite inexpensively if you know where to look. A great resource for knowing which books to collect is “Books Children Love.” I always browse the thrift stores, especially for older edition books, which in my opinion, are better written. Sites such as Amazon.com and Ebay are also great places to find particular books. Listen to other suggestions and keep a running list of books you would like to add to your family library.

For the uninterested reader:

If you have a child who isn't as interested in reading, keep encouraging him. Be sure to let him see you read, and respond to what you're reading. In addition, try the following tips:

1. Taking your kids to the library can be a great way to spark their reading interest. Let them pick out, with your oversight, several of their own books. I consider a trip to the library and a few hours diving into the books a very successful school day!
2. Create a “reading nook.” A blanket thrown over a table, a corner with a bean-bag and a basket of books—sometimes the environment can be an enticement.
3. Remind him time and again, in a non-implying way, that books take us places; reading is our key to the world around us, and so on. Verbalize the importance of reading.

One woman I know had a nine year old who showed very little reading interest, and actually could hardly read at all. The mother discovered her daughter's deepest interests, and then found an exciting book about that subject. She began to read it out loud to her daughter, but she would stop right in the middle of the most tantalizing part. The daughter became so exasperated with the interruptions, that she finally picked the book up and decided to learn how to finish it! She's loved reading since then.

Teaching them to be productive

Almost always overlooked as part of an education is the teaching of being productive and industrious. Simply put, how to utilize our resources, creating with our hands and heart, something that will bless another. This productivity can be as simple as cooking a meal, or as complicated as remodeling a house. The ultimate reason for productivity is to bring God honor and glory. On a practical level it should involve strengthening the family economy. Stretching resources, making homemade gifts, ministering to others with meals, work, or gifts, creating art—**we consider teaching our children to be creative and productive one of the most important things in life!**

I have a great friend who has established a full-blown ministry and business encouraging families in

this area. In addition to creating and selling instructional DVDs on the homemaking arts, she teaches local classes as well. We are learning basic quilting, sewing, cake decorating, the ministry of hospitality, bread-making, gift-making, how to grow and use herbs, and many other useful skills. They have also added classes for young men as well. [Teaching Good Things](#) is, in my opinion, a really good thing!

Idea Corner:

Lunch time is a great time for working on memorization. We try to keep an ongoing passage of Scripture or poem that I read aloud to the children during lunch. This way, we remember to be consistent.

Grasp of Numbers

To be “numerate” is simply to understand how numbers work and be able to use them when needed. Life math is important as it defines the type of math most people use on a daily basis. Encouraging our children to work through basic challenges throughout the day goes a long way helping them to become numerate.

In the very early years, don't miss the simplest ways to teach your children math. Count out loud. Divide out loud. Cut an orange or apple or pizza in slices and explain fractions, even if they don't quite understand yet. You are laying the groundwork for building.

Cooking is a great opportunity to learn fractions and multiplying. Any time you need something measured, let your children help and explain things as you go. Shopping is an excellent way to deal with numbers. Everyone needs to be able to figure out cost per unit, so he can make the best purchasing decision. Look for mathematical opportunities—they're everywhere!

Besides “life math”, this is one area we sometimes implement a formal curriculum. Our family loves *School of Tomorrow* curriculum, by Accelerated Christian Education. It is thorough, self-teaching, easy-to-use and I highly recommend it. I've also used Khan Academy, short, instructional You Tube videos.

My math challenge

I recently challenged myself to answer why I was making my children do pages and pages of long division. Then I concluded, why long division at all? I have never worked a long division problem on paper. There are devices that make that process much faster and simpler. This is smart. Our children need to know *when to divide*, and the concept of *how it works*, but to spend time doing an archaic algorithm seems wasteful to me when there is so much to learn. We focus our older children on life math—budgeting, learning how interest works, how to save, how to make wise purchases—the things of math that will largely determine their financial peace or misery.

If and when they need to learn higher math, they will.

Culture

Culture encompasses the arts--music, drama, poetry, painting, sculpture —those things which nurture the part of us that deeply longs for beauty and order because we are made in the image of our Creator. *Don't leave it out!* It also presents wonderful opportunities to serve and bless others.

On the simplest level, make your home a place of beauty, and collect books, music, and décor with a richness of art. I try to play classical music throughout our day—music that is soothing and not distracting. I have also purchased several large books with drawings and paintings that I like to leave out for the children to look at (be careful with this!)

Sometimes we will pick an artist—a musician, painter or sculptor--and study him for a week or so. Videos are helpful to enrich a study like this. In fact, the Internet now offers almost any resource you need for free. Utilize that tool!

Keep your eyes open for concerts and performances in your area. Often a company will host a performance for students and the cost is minimal or even free. Expose them to a variety of instruments and music, and if you are able, buy instruments for them and let them experiment. As soon as you see an interest or gift, lessons are an investment worth making (the same goes for art lessons). If lessons aren't feasible due to cost or location, consider purchasing a “how-to” video. Lessons are not always necessary; our daughter is self-teaching the violin right now and is doing quite well.

We are fortunate enough to have a circle of friends with many talented, musical children. Our families enjoy getting together and playing music together. Ultimately, the arts should be pursued from a desire to glorify the Lord through them. If your child shows an interest in drawing or painting, consider how his gift could be used to minister to a lonely relative, neighbor or friend. Perhaps your musical children could perform an informal concert for surrounding widows. Or your family could practice as a Capella choir for that purpose. Always be asking yourself how yours and your child's gifts can be used for the Kingdom!

*“A work of art is
above all an
adventure
of the mind.”
- Eugene Ionesco*

*Don't forget to let your children **create** art.* Drawing, painting, coloring, making crafts with Popsicle sticks, weaving a pot holder on a plastic loom, crocheting, singing—it doesn't really matter the venue, just let them CREATE!

As the members of this society lose the practice and skill of production and art, those of us cultivating it will give our children such advantage and opportunities! *In fact, children raised in a home where the importance of production and economy are taught hardly need depend on a college degree for their entrance into the workforce...they will become the workforce!*

Idea Corner:

Some children enjoy documenting and doing hands-on projects. Let your children design notebooks to go along with particular interests. If they find planets fascinating, encourage them to collect pictures, quotes, facts, etc. and paste them into a notebook or 3-ring binder. This type of documentation not only strengthens what they are learning, but also serves as a record for their studies. You could also have them do a final presentation from their notebooks to relatives or friends to encourage their communication skills.

Chapter 4

Practical Learning Ideas

Much of what we do to facilitate the love of learning in our children is simply make information available to them in several different forms. As I mentioned earlier: so much of the relaxed concept of learning just seems too simple to work. But it's not! Forget what you've been told about how complicated and structured and expensive a good education is. Educating children is actually very simple. They want to learn...provide them the necessary materials to do so.

Leave interesting magazines lying around.

I love to look on Ebay for slightly older collections of educational magazines. One of my favorites is *Creation Magazine*, specifically for kids. I randomly choose one ever so often, and just leave it lying around for them to “find” and dive into. Magazine subscriptions make great Christmas gifts. The kids LOVE waiting in the mail for their new magazine to arrive. Then listen to what interests them...if it's raccoons, find more information to give them.

Family reading

We try to keep a good book going as a read-aloud by Dad at night, either around the supper table or before bed. (Not having television reception helps this a lot!) We have learned so much through these readings. Heroes of the Faith books are some of our favorites. I have included a list of suggested reading at the end of this book.

Buy a telescope and microscope.

Remember, curious minds want to know about life around them—so equip them to learn!

Field guides

Field guides to plants, insects, animals, etc. are *such* a helpful resource. When the children want to know “What kind of tree is that?”, simply open up the guide and find out. We just bought an edible plant book and a book about surviving in the wilderness. The kids are loving it!

Educational videos

Why not? These videos do wonders to pique the interests of my children. We recently subscribed to Netflix. The advantages are incredible. First of all, we no longer have to stand, browsing at all the vulgarity at the movie store. Secondly, there are so many more movie selections available. I can search for exactly what I want—a documentary on Nova Scotia, a movie about Mother Teresa, a movie about how glass is made—something I could never find at Blockbuster. And most importantly, no late fees! It costs about \$10 a month, for as many movies as we wish to see. I almost always supplement a subject we are reading about with a movie or documentary related to it.

Field Trips

Perhaps one of the homeschooler's greatest advantage—look for interesting places to visit and tour. It doesn't have to be a formal field trip...any place can become a fun learning experience for the attentive parent. (Drive to the airport one day and just pique a curiosity in airplanes, followed up by some books and a movie from the library.) If your children show a particular interest in a place you visit, don't forget the most important words: “Let's look it up!”

Art Supplies

Benjamin Franklin's father couldn't “afford” an education for him (he was the youngest of 17 children). So Franklin was mostly self-taught!

Keep art supplies readily accessible to children, younger and older. Encourage them to draw pictures more than they color pictures already drawn. Encourage them to look at pictures other artists have drawn and copy them. Investigate other forms of art that might spark interest. I keep telling my husband I would like to invest in a potter's wheel...who knows?

The Internet

As careful as we have to be, the Internet is basically the world at your fingertips. Teach them how to find information in a safe way. When they ask a question you don't know the answer to, you are sure to find it on the Internet. I'm convinced the Internet alone could provide a solid, rich education.

Idea Corner:

Keep boxes/bags/baskets of “imagination” toys on hand, easily accessible to children.

Puzzles, blocks, “old-fashioned” toys (stacking toys, etc.) all make great learning tools for developing young minds!

Chapter 5:

Answers to Your Questions

“What if there are gaps in my child's education?”

First of all, there are gaps in any education. But if you're concerned that your child won't know the same things their schooled counterparts know, let me offer words of encouragement and suggestions. Keep in mind that a large part of a school day is spent on other activities besides learning. A homeschooler gets in a couple of hours what it may take all day for a classroom teacher to impart to her students.

Secondly, remember that a large part of what you were actually “taught” in school, you didn't remember beyond the test. It's more likely much of what your children are learning is going to “stick” since their curiosities are being fed. That's one of the main points of “relaxed” learning...we hope to ignite what's already there, which is what makes information sink in and stay. And that fact should relax you!

Thirdly, whatever “gaps” show up in a repertoire of knowledge can easily be filled at the needed time, especially if a child is taught how to learn. The knowledge that goes in is not nearly as important as the ability to be able to find it when needed (remember Einstein said that, not me!)

Another practical way to “keep up” with what their peers are learning if this is really important to you, is to apply the “relaxed” learning style using a text book corresponding to your child's age as a kind of guide as you explore subjects. You would simply look through the text books to see what other children your child's age are learning, and then direct your studies to those particular subjects. It's a little more confining, but will work great. Also, if you use this method, just don't be afraid to “venture from the course”, missing good opportunities for spontaneous learning.

*“I'm glad I was never
sent to school; it
would have rubbed off
some of the
originality.”
Beatrix Potter*

“What About Keeping Records?”

Many homeschool coverings require detailed records or reports from their families. And even if they don't, some just feel better having them. Make the record-keeping simple. Using a notebook, journal or three-ring binder, log the activities of the day, including any books read, activities, movies, trips, etc. Don't hesitate to write things that you think are “too small.” Looking up things on the Internet, or in a dictionary is legitimate “research study skills”; tracing a map to follow the missionary's journey from the book you're reading is geography; taking a walk and coming back with a leaf to look up is science.

Make it count! Regardless of the type of form your homeschool covering provides, you should be able to easily transfer your written records to it.

“Is There a Schedule?”

Some families, some moms, and some children need more structure than others. A schedule provides necessary structure, based on your family's needs. Structured and relaxed can go together, as long as you keep the big picture in mind. What is the structure for? Let the schedule be your guide, not your master. As the old wise saying goes, “Don't miss the forest for the trees”.

We have a regular “sit down” time where the children do their math work, copy work, and reading or English. We also have regular intervals of read-alouds, or an older child reading to a younger one. It's OK to have a framework. Just be open to spontaneous learning moments when you see a spark! And don't forget to be constantly questioning, “Why are we doing this?” Challenge the status quo. If it's not a real education, toss it.

“How Will a Child Learn Discipline With This Model?”

Many argue that this relaxed method will create haphazard or even lazy students. That in order to teach discipline, there must be a rigid schedule. It has been my experience there are lots of other opportunities to teach a child proper discipline and adherence to a schedule, especially in the area of chores and household responsibilities. And really, even though we learn in a relaxed way, our whole day is still confined within a schedule. There is order, even when we are exploring a subject. It doesn't make sense to me that just because the school schedule doesn't follow a bell, our children won't learn discipline.

“What about Standardized Testing and College?”

I know many families practicing the relaxed method of schooling whose children have scored exceptionally high on standardized tests. Again, you may want to follow an outline out of a textbook to make sure you cover things expected to be on a test. You may also find practice tests on-line to assess testability. Colleges actively seek homeschooled students. Keep a journal or record of your studies, and you will likely have no trouble at all with entrance.

Additionally, more and more families are rethinking the over-emphasis placed on having a college degree. Many companies are seeing the benefit of other credentials besides a paper in hand. A **portfolio** can be a weighty addition to the homeschooler's arsenal. Keeping track of any on-the-job training, on-line courses, extra classes, etc. can be as convincing as a diploma...maybe even more!

Resources

Internet Sites

The Internet contains all the information for an endless education. However, we limit the amount of time our children spend viewing the screen, and we carefully monitor their access. But used properly, it can be an invaluable resource. If your budget is tight, there are enough resources here that you shouldn't have to spend a dime on anything else. Even coloring pages, copy work sheets, math practice pages and tests are available for free printing. These are some of our favorites:

Starfall A great site for phonics and reading
Khan Academy

TLS Books-- Free printable sheets

You Tube — A great place to look for videos to correspond with your studies.

Answers.com---A sort of on-line encyclopedia and dictionary

Kid Zone—Information Site

Ebooks Read--download free ebooks

Just browse for more—it's an ocean!

Great Books: (I could list a bunch, but here are a few to get you started!)

Christian Heroes: Then & Now by Geoff and Janet Bengt

Lamplighter's Series

The Light & the Glory by Peter Marshall

The Kingdom Series by Chuck Black

The Pilgrim's Progress by John Bunyan

When Science Fails by John Hudson Tiner

For Those Who Dare by John Hudson Tiner

Shakespeare Tales by Charles and Mary Lamb

Trial & Triumph by Richard Hannula

Ten Peas in a Pod

Fifty Famous Stories Retold by James Baldwin

When You Rise Up by R.C. Sproul Jr.

About the Author



I am a Christian, a wife and a homeschooling mother to ten children. I formerly taught high school English and Drama. The Lord has so richly blessed me with the opportunity to combine my passions for writing, sharing my experiences with other people and earning extra income for our family. A freelance writer for various magazines, websites and ebooks, I also enjoy writing music. But my main passion is serving my Savior through serving my family. May God be praised to use this broken, earthly vessel through which His purposes may be fulfilled.

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