**Educating in Changing Times:**

**Preparing for *Schooling at Home***

Jonas Sauder—April, 2020

**Introduction**

Without warning our schools closed in March under government mandate. Our staffs did a commendable job of coping. Most found workable ways to finish out the term. But the coping mode that served to finish a term is unsustainable long term, especially from the parents’ perspective.

As I noted in a document a few days ago, looking ahead to another term demands serious planning. Current realities, directives, and trajectories portend, among other things, the increasing likelihood of repeated, extended school closures. If our schools can open in August in some way, we know they can readily be shut again. This unprecedented reality means that our school boards, working with their staffs, must discern, develop, and prepare a *way* for our little ones to be educated that fits the realities of the times. We must plan a *way* to support the education of our children that does not involve their gathering in school buildings for classes taught by teachers.

We have existing school boards that direct our schools on behalf of our church congregations or group of patrons. They have been providing buildings, curriculum and teachers. This work represents something dear to us Anabaptists—mutual aid. We work together as the body of Christ to support our families who are rearing children by arranging for teachers with the gift of teaching to bless the whole body. To continue this support, our boards must quickly discern a *way* that adapts to current realities: *our children may need to learn at home.*

We cannot simply tell our parents that they are on their own and must now figure out to home school. Rather, we must be prepared to provide for *schooling at home*. (I’m using this term to distinguish it from “home schooling,” which basically means that parents take responsibility for all aspects of schooling from choosing curriculum to instruction to overseeing testing—the complete program, without board support.) Some school families may actually be willing to assume the responsibility of home schooling and/or enrolling their children in some type of homeschool plus or distance learning program if possible. But many won’t. They will continue to seek the church body’s mutual aid support through the established boards for their children’s schooling.

A *Schooling at Home* model of schooling must continue that support. But we cannot simply export from the classroom to the kitchen table a model designed for teachers working with pupils full time in classrooms. Neither can we expect that what was designed for the classroom will work long term by trying to “deliver” it via digital technology.

School boards and their hired staff (perhaps a smaller staff) must develop a model that works for them in their local circumstances. They can still make provisions for their people’s schooling even if the children must remain in their homes. It will still be school—but it will be *school at home.* The school will design and provide materials for a workable program of study, develop ways in which studies can be taught/learned, and also provide, to the best of its ability, multiple types of support, oversight, involvement, and evaluation.

A *schooling at home plan* should include…

1. The curriculum materials: books & supplies
2. Overall plan and schedule to follow, including directions and materials for activities.
3. Carefully thought out and developed support for parents (an ongoing endeavor since this is new)
4. Communication with families/students in the home as possible with phone and other technology or in-person visits.
5. Regular dropoff/pickup of materials for ongoing work and for evaluation.

One logical approach would be to choose a curriculum from a publisher such as Christian Light, which has a fairly complete self-study curriculum available. Or to cobble together a workable set of materials from a variety of publishers. The curriculum can then be purchased and distributed with the school providing multiple types of support as it is able, along with record keeping. While many families may find this quite workable and easiest for them, many other parents will be quite frustrated with the *amount* or *type* of teaching this requires them to provide for their children. (What has developed to become our “traditional curriculum” of the last 50 years is designed to be administered by committed teachers who have the “luxury” of complete school days to teach pupils in classrooms.)

***Schooling at Home* Model**

I will outline another model for school boards/teachers to consider. Although it will be significantly different from the model that developed over the last 50 years (which, incidentally, is quite different from what schooling was like fifty years before that) it could fit better with most families. It could also continue in style/substance (albeit with less intensity) if the parents are sometime left on their own resources because the board/staff for whatever reason can no longer provide support.

Considering the speed at which we must adapt these days, my suggestions will be at best a working model offering an approach and suggestions that individual schools can consider. The Lord will give talented people out there direction on how to best serve their people.

I suppose it would be a daunting task to actually rethink and retool our approach in all “subject areas” at once with a complete, from the ground up *school at home* program. We naturally think out of our current operating systems—our methodologies. It’s hard for us to grasp how our same end purposes and goals might be achieved via different means. But it seems clear that our means that have become workable classroom traditions will not achieve the ends we desire if we try to export them to the home setting without extensive modification. Many methodologies that “work” in a classroom setting with daily teacher interaction may actually serve to frustrate both pupils and parents if exported to the “kitchen table.”

It will be best to work first on the most critical areas: the ones that are most important for life, and the ones that cause the most frustration in the home. Some traditional classroom approaches may well be continued until a better way to achieve those ends is found, if necessary. And some traditional classroom approaches may actually fit as well or better in a home setting, such as routine use of flash cards for learning essential math facts.

The model I outline focuses on levels 1-8 (ages 6-13), although many of its aspects can also be adapted to the secondary level.

***Story***

One of the most powerful approaches to learning that naturally fits the home setting is ***story****.* Storytelling is an ancient art for good reason—it fits all places, times, people, ages, and situations. It comes naturally to most people, is of interest to everyone, and is one of the most effective—and memorable—ways of learning. One who has **heard** a good story can often repeat it easily—down to the details.

One who is full of stories could be called ***storied.*** Were you to prompt a *storied* person, he could tell you stories of all kinds. Bible stories about Abraham, Joseph, and Jesus. Stories about Marco Polo and Mansa Musa. About Isaac Newton and Conrad Grebel. About paper wasps and Bernoulli’s principle. About the advantage of using dependent clauses rather than mere phrases. About the efficiency of the metric system and the workings of fractions. About the *Little Red Hen* and *Sour Grapes*. About Isaac Watt’s and William Cowper’s hymn writing. About the inspirational character of Rembrandt’s art. About the record journey of the bathyscaphe *Trieste* and the first moon landing. About Machu Picchu and Angkor Wat. You get the idea. None of these stories in itself is essential. But together they supply tremendous potential for synergy. Together they illustrate how broad knowledge of all types of stories can furnish our hearts and minds with understanding—with understanding that in turn can undergird the wisdom we need to serve the Lord in the world in which we find ourselves.

Because we are accustomed to thinking about schooling in more or less discrete categories which we call “subjects,” it will be easiest to think about a workable *schooling at home* approach out of that mode. So the following outline has been developed under headings which resonate to some extent with our traditional subjects. You will note, however, that the activities suggested in relation to these “subjects” would result in a more integrated approach to learning than we are accustomed to.

1. **Biography**

Where to begin? Of first importance is the lives of people—biography. God’s crowning creation is man. Reading/hearing/learning about the lives of men and women of note is inherently interesting and richly instructive. The events of the world, past and present, didn’t just happen. They are actually deeds. Deeds of real men and real women, individually and collectively. Men and women “of like passion” as we (Acts 14:15).

Some biographies are good stories; others are sad or tragic. But the humanness of them makes them inherently understandable; the reality of them makes them believable; the outcomes of them make them instructive. Recall the catalog of Bible characters in Hebrews 11, which summarizes some of the insights to be gained from knowing the stories of Old Testament characters. Or the list of failures Paul noted in I Cor. 10: 1-11. “All these things happened unto them for examples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.”

So, I propose that the first and leading “subject” for *schooling at home* be biography. I’m not going to develop a list of people for various levels. I’ll make some suggestions and leave it up to people out there who are interested to adopt/develop a plan that works for them, and for entrepreneurs who are interested to collect sets of biographies for sale to schools that want them but don’t have them in possession. I’ll list some ideas for you to work with:

1. Develop, find, or adopt a list of people (biographies) that includes a variety from various categories (such as missionaries, inventors, famous world leaders, explorers). Decide who “everybody” should know about by age 13. Find a book or some other way that your children can learn about these people and their lives.
2. Consider age level. While children of any age could study the life of Hudson Taylor, Fanny Crosby, George Washington Carver or Marco Polo, learning about the lives of men like Descartes, Einstein, or Johann Arndt would fit better with older students.
3. Some sets already exist, such as the “Childhood of famous Americans” series. Some of these include books with patriotic emphases; discretion must be used in considering biographies with a particular slant, such as a book on General Robert E. Lee that presents him as a model noble Christian.
4. When the list has been compiled, the books can be made available in a variety of ways, such as…

--The school purchases and provides sufficient copies for the year. Books can circulate among families; they need not be read in a certain order. This would cut down on the total number needed.

--Some books may be available online or in audio format.

--Some families might already have or desire to purchase their own copies.

--The school could purchase and provide each family with a complete (basic) set to keep and use as a family library. If teachers know that all pupils have access to a given set of titles, they could plan some activities that would draw from multiple books at the same time.

1. I’m attaching elsewhere a list of **Biographies to Consider** for a starter.
2. Assign your children to learn to know the lives of their own ancestors, relatives, and friends as much as possible: parents, grandparents, aunts, great-great’s, first immigrants, neighbors…

This model must work for all elementary ages and all skill levels of our children, including those who have been in “special needs” programs of some type. To accomplish this, I recommend that a (perhaps *the*) primary mode of engaging these books be by reading aloud, especially at the lower to mid elementary levels. Learning the *story* is best done by the ear gate. (In this respect, stories are similar to songs. They can be reduced to print and read from print, but their essence is *known* in the singing/telling). Being able to *read*, while an important skill that we certainly want all children to master, cannot be allowed to limit the child’s access to the *story.* We cannot allow a child’s undeveloped reading ability to limit his intake of learning. Developing reading ability and learning the *stories* as storiesare separate (albeit related) endeavors. There are many ways for those with limited reading ability to receive the story. Some suggestions of how to enable all children to *read/hear/learn* biographies include…

1. Silent reading on their own.
2. Reading aloud on their own, with or without audience. Some children read much better aloud.
3. Reading aloud to an audience: older or younger siblings, parents, grandparent, friend, neighbor, over the telephone or on a voice recorder.
4. Hearing the text read by one of the above or from audio book (with or without a copy in hand). Or hearing it read by a grandparent over the speaker-phone at a set time each day.
5. Reading *with* one of the above, taking turns alternately. This could be done over the phone if necessary and possible.
6. Reading and re-reading the same book (or at least parts of it) over and over. Really good books are often savored more in the re-reading than in the initial reading. It’s often the re-reading that makes it become really a part of us. Deep learning from fewer books of substance can be much more profitable than glib reading of many books. (In his childhood, Abe Lincoln had access to only a handful of books, including the Bible, *Aesop’s Fables*, *Pilgrim’s Progress*, *Robinson Crusoe*, an arithmetic book and speller. But, as Sandburg noted in *Abe Lincoln Grows Up,* Abe “made the books tell him more than they told other people.” Passages that prompted no questions in his classmates’ minds gave him food for thought. He’d wonder out loud for days, “Who has more right to complain: the Indian or the Negro?”) Consider for yourself: is *The Little Red Hen* worth a re-read?

To help pupils engage actively and/or deeply with biographies, teachers will provide activities for students to pursue such as:

1. Storytelling (sometimes called “narrating”) parts of the book to others—parents, friends, grandparents… Perhaps by making recordings of favorite sections of the book and sharing the recordings with others.
2. Doing teacher-designed activities to go along with the book. For example

--with story of Archimedes, watch the water level rise in a pitcher when you float a ball.

--with Noah Webster, find differences in usage between British and American English. (Does your car have a boot?)

1. Role-playing the character—preparing to be interviewed as though you were Thomas Edison. This will require good questions to be developed along with enough familiarity with his life to respond readily and believably.
2. Writing assignments of all types based off the book. Summaries of the whole or part. Questions you’d like to ask the person, along with what you think he would say. Comparisons of different people’s lives.
3. Assignments such as those listed under Part II below.
4. At some point, every child (around age 12) should be assigned to interview an assigned person and write a biography of him/her. See handout entitled Writing Biography for ideas.

In conclusion, the *school at home* plan would outline which biographies everyone is to read this year, and which are optional. For example, while everyone might be expected to read a given set of four biographies, they might also be required to read another four out of a possible set of 15 other choices. Extensive activities would be assigned for the core four, with only brief responses to the supplemental four.

In addition to reading a given biography about, say, Hudson Taylor, they might also learn about him from additional sources. Another consideration would be to focus on one person of the year to learn to know in detail while learning about others in less depth.

1. **Reading & Writing**

My second recommendation is identical to #I biography above except that the books will span the whole field of knowledge—stories, all types of nonfiction, poetry, nature, history…anything about God’s world. Children should read/group read/listen to/share “real” books of all types. To achieve this, schools can create/adapt/adopt lists of book titles. Think: what books should ALL children read during their lower elementary, upper elementary, junior high, and high school years? Make a core list of a reasonable number and also a much larger list that students must choose a certain number from. Many stories or topics have been published in more than one level. For example, younger children can all read the *The Little Pilgrim’s Progress* and older ones the unabridged *Pilgrim’s Progress.*

Note the heading of this section is reading and writing. A major part of all reading should include well-articulated response activities, both oral and written. But here is where children WRITE. Whether a sentence, a list, a journal response, a parody, answers to questions, an essay—readings act as a springboard for all kinds of writing, and writing opens the understanding of what has been read. Teachers will develop writing assignments of all types. Not activities to be “done” to fulfill some academic hoop jumping, but activities that help the child to engage the piece actively, stimulate further thinking, draw on the pupil’s talents, enlarge his understanding, help him gain wisdom—and develop skills in the process. “Writing” might mean writing on paper, typing, dictating, recording—there are many forms—but it calls for arranging one’s thoughts in order and articulating them well in response to what has been experienced through the reading. They can read their writings and share them with others as possible.

A significant number of books chosen should be of solid literary quality, including some classics. Literature study, profitably pursued as part of schooling, is a primary way to grow in wisdom. A few further reminders about literature and its study:

***Teaching literature*** involves helping students to engage a literary work in a way that influences how they

live their lives from that day forward. Good literature throbs with the pulse of the human heart in its interaction

with God’s world. People who truly read literature grow a little with each piece they read. They may be

enlightened, inspired, encouraged, or warned. They may gain knowledge, insight, or motivation. Reading

literature of substance helps to ***form*** both the mind and heart. Reading well-written literature provides ***models***

that develop powers of expression.

Quality literature deals with ***themes*** of ***substance*** with excellence of ***form*** and ***expression***. However…

1. Pursuing timeless and universal themes does not assure that the work will be worth reading.

Trite expressions, foregone conclusions, and unimaginative story lines defeat the work.

Telling the reader *what* or *how to think* undermines the purpose.

Effective stories show *truth in action*.

1. Excellence of form and expression becomes “sounding brass” if it lacks significant, truthful content.

**Common themes in literature:**

1. Adventure
2. Ambition
3. Coming-of-age
4. Compassion
5. Coping with circumstances
6. Changing times
7. Differing points of view or perspectives
8. Faith
9. Fear
10. Friendship
11. Freedom
12. Honesty & integrity
13. Home
14. Hypocrisy
15. Love
16. Pride
17. Responsibility
18. Revenge
19. Risk
20. Rural vs urban life
21. Sin & its consequences
22. Submission
23. Tragic flaws
24. Value of the “poor” or “others”

**Classic** writings serve as a touchstones. They have enduring qualities such as excellence of form and engaging substance.

Classic works of art include:

1. Timeless & universal themes that maintain appeal and relevance over time and to all peoples.
2. Excellent use of form and expression to explore those themes.

Readers can judge their own discernment and writers their own skills by considering classics.

Evaluating classics:

1. Classic writings other than the scriptures were written by men and stand to be judged by men.
2. Excellence of expression and timeless themes alone do not assure worthy art.

Elements to study in classic works:

(Works of art offer us an *experience* by portraying a snippet of life whereby we may *perceive* what we *see*.)

**Characters**: how they think, act, speak, and react. The author presents them, but doesn’t control them.

**Conflict**: dilemmas, enigmas, paradoxes, ironies, clash of wills, hubris, or opposition that present themselves.

**Dialogue**: how it reveals & expresses character, thoughts, and ideas; how it moves the story forward.

**Plot**: the story line—its intrigue and ability to carry us forward to learn the outcome of a course of action.

**Setting**: particularity of setting lends validity—all life is lived in the particulars.

**Form**: parable, allegory, story, essay, monologue, journal, narrative, ode, lyric…

For a bit more outline and a small sample list of titles, see: Types of Reading. Note that this list includes books about *choosing books*, which would be a help in tailoring a list for your own school.

For a graded list of suggestions for literary type books, see: Good Reads Handout

Also peruse the hundreds of titles of books on a whole host of subjects available from Christian Aid Ministries, Christian Light, Rod & Staff and include many of them in your lists.

The school can provide a structured reading plan along with assignments based on books. I’m offering several attachments on other files with ideas for the school teachers to develop a plan that integrates writing assignments and other activities to do associated with reading these books.

See: Developing Writing Assignments Based on Reading

Writing Assignments Connected to the Curriculum

Several publishers that produce study guides for a variety of books are:

Prestwick House Inc.

P.O. Box 246

Cheswold DE 19936

1-800-932-4593

Progeny Press

PO Box 100

Fall Creek WI 54742

1-877-776-4369

Teacher Created Materials Inc.

6421 Industry Way

Westminster CA 92683

Another integral part of any *schooling at home* program is provision for development of oral skills. Children should learn to read and recite interpretively, with animated expression and energy. They should learn to articulate what they know, engage an audience’s attention, explain, report, recount, recite, and perhaps even regale. They should also be able to *hear* from others with attention (aural skills).

See Developing Oral Skills for some ideas.

In conclusion, for Part II, the school would…

1. Develop/adopt its list “master” list (or at least a “working” master list of core books and tier 2 books).
2. Choose a set number of core books for the year, such as 2 per quarter (in addition to biographies, above).
3. Develop learning/writing activities for each of the core books, based on age level of the pupils.
4. Children of several levels in the same family could, as much as possible, all read the same books in a given year with assignments tailored. Or each child could have his own books. Or a combination.
5. Direct how many additional books (tier 2) should be read each quarter from a given list, along with how pupils will respond to those readings with more brief assignments.
6. Teachers would support pupil work in any way possible in an ongoing way, and then collect and evaluate students’ work.
7. **History & Geography**

By choosing books well (see II, above), a wide variety of history and geography on the elementary level can be learned through the reading of well-chosen trade books. (Books intended for the mass market as opposed to textbooks that are specifically designed for classroom use.) Remember that history is best learned through story. If the above titles are chosen well, pupils will learn about many people, times and places through their readings.

This means that history/geography will be integrated in Part II, at least through mid-elementary years. Assignments would be those suggested for Part II.

In three of the upper years, (6-8), it would be ideal if possible to use a good American history, world history, and a geography text. All pupils in the same family in one of those levels can be grouped together, with only one of the topics covered in a given year. Several publishers have these available. Teachers will provide a plan for how they are to be used for *school at home.* They can be used in a somewhat traditional way, integrated with the readings of other books, or engaged in the same way as trade books, with writing responses.

1. **Arithmetic/Math**

For mastery of basics, provide

1. Flash card sets for all basic math facts that include addition/subtraction/multiplication/division facts, measurements, fraction/decimal conversions, etc. These are available from multiple publishers. They can be sorted/packed according to level for the children’s use. They should be mastered. Learning/drilling with flashcards provides an excellent opportunity for cross-age interaction.
2. Provide speed drills in some format for pupils to do regularly.
3. Provide additional directions & support on how to make and use hands-on materials for understanding math, such as fraction circles and geometric shapes.
4. Provide some traditional text (many are available) for individual pupils to use. Focus on the basics that all children should learn. Slow but steady incremental growth w/o undue pressure will contribute to cumulative mastery of math understanding and skills. Chosen textbooks and worksheets can be reviewed by the teachers before distribution to homes to consider modifications in their use to avoid frustration to parents and children. That means providing parents with a “parent guide” rather than a “teacher’s manual.”
5. Many lower grade math texts unnecessarily introduce and test concepts that frustrate most young children. For example, a second grade math text might introduce—and test—the concept that multiplying a set of two by four (and getting 8) is NOT the same as multiplying a set of four by two (and getting 8). So, while 2x4 and 4x2 is commutative and the child is to learn that both products = eight units, they are actually *different* operations. While this is quite true and interesting and significant to learn at some point, teachers will need to be alert to what is critical for 2nd graders to learn at home (and how they might learn it) and what can wait until later. A child’s (and parent’s) attitude toward “math” can be soured by such elements, sapping their energy from focusing on more basic concepts such as seeing that a fraction of ½ is the same as cutting a pie in two equal pieces.
6. Teachers can use a resource book such as *How Math Works* (Reader’s Digest, 1996) to provide families with occasional activities to DO to understand what math really is, how it works, applications, and curiosities. (How to walk through an index card, Zeno’s paradox, tangrams, patterns…)
7. **Science/nature study**

Begin by thinking about how to help children learn about the natural/physical world around them. A host of books (think of II above) are available that are highly interesting on a variety of topics. Consider DK books (although you’ll need to be aware of evolutionary slant in some of the topics).

Emphasize nature study. Find a good nature journal and use it. Design both a family and individual component for nature study. Consider use of *Keeping a Nature Journal* by Leslie & Roth.

Nature study provides endless opportunities for integration of various fields of science, journaling, observation, artwork, storytelling and more.

Provide books of the type written by Pablo Yoder: *The Work of Thy Hands* & *The Work of Thy Fingers* for family read-aloud. And to read through more than once.

A traditional textbook (such as Rod & Staff’s God’s Wonderful/ Inhabited/ Orderly World titles) on levels 6-7 could be used by all upper elementary children together. Numerous hands-on demonstrations are included in most chapters.

Select topics to study. Grafting. Mycorrhizal relationships between plants and fungi. Migration. Life cycle of common plants. Animal behavior—especially local ones: skunks, coons, groundhogs, chipmunks, squirrels…

Be sure to plan activities for children to **do** as much as possible. Consider the season. Collect insects, leaves, stones. Identify plants. Watch birds and learn to identify them by sight and song. Keep a record. Compare with what friends have found. Provide each family with a copy of *The Backyard Birdsong Guide* by Donald Kroodsma. It includes the songs of over 100 birds. Choose the one for the region you live in.

**Teach the children how to garden**. Sprout seeds. Start sweet potatoes. Plant window boxes. Build and use cold frames. Make raised beds. Make compost. Plant raspberries and asparagus and rhubarb. Garden if possible: tomatoes, beets, onions, peppers, corn, potatoes, lettuce, kale, cabbage, beans, broccoli, cauliflower. Be sure your children learn from little up how to grow, harvest, and preserve food. Give each young child his own little plot. This is an excellent opportunity to involve other adults in any way possible—grandparents and all. Begin this in May 2020.

1. **Learning to Read** (for beginners)

Provide some type of learning to read materials and methods for parents to use. Find one from a publisher that might be a fit for *school at home.*

Because teaching the beginner to read appears a **very daunting** task to many (most?) parents, keep learning to read low-key and spread it over time. Note that with an emphasis on cross-age work and on read-aloud by older children/parents, there should be no pressure on the beginner to be able to read in order to have access to his learning—to his story. His reading ability must not limit his learning in categories I-V above during the lower to mid elementary years. Rather, it’s a skill that he will develop so he can eventually join others in being able to read, and to add reading-to-learn to his own repertoire of learning avenues. Maximize the interaction of older children helping younger ones as much as possible, both in learning to read and in learning arithmetic. Provide read-along experiences. Skills must be mastered, but keep at them slow and steady. Be sure limited skills do not slow the child’s learning (see I & II above for explanation).

Consider use of an old standby such as *Teach Your Child to Read in 100 Easy Lessons* by Engelmann. It’s an old copyright; I assume others like it are available in the home schooling market.

For practice reading, have the beginner read and re-read and re-read a book he really enjoys. He may be half reading, half reciting. That’s fine. Reading is more than decoding, anyway.

Another resource is a book with words grouped in lists by categories, becoming progressively bigger, such as the *Victory Drill Book.*

Beginners need plenty of practice reading aloud at a level that does not frustrate them. Find ways to have someone read with them, taking turns. Utilize grandparents.

1. **Memorizing**

Plan memorizing as an integral part of every subject. Don’t think of it as cramming. Memorizing is remembering. When we hold something in memory in memorized form, we possess it in a unique way. The elementary years—especially the upper ones—are a peak time for memorizing. Develop a list of material to be memorized for each year, broken down by quarter or month. Practically every subject has content to memorize, including…

1. Bible memory (balanced sets of scripture passages to memorize are available).
2. Math facts/information/formulas
3. Significant historical events/names/some key dates
4. Geographical facts: countries, rivers, mountains, deserts, oceans, lakes of the world
5. Hymns—choose a hymn of the month
6. Poems—all types. Short & long. Story poems. Inspirational poems. Humorous poems.
7. Science/nature: classes of animals, planet names, body systems, bones, muscles
8. Famous speeches
9. Famous quotes
10. Prepositions
11. **Bible**

Provide several good Story Bibles or Bible story books for families to read and discuss together. Provide ideas for how to engage the story. Read through the story of the Bible repeatedly from year to year, utilizing several books. Many are available. A couple suggestions:

*The Children’s Bible* by Golden Books.

*The Jesus Storybook Bible* by Sally Lloyd-Jones/ Jago

*101 Bible Stories* available from CAM

*Tell Me the Stories of Jesus* by Crider

Listen to recorded scripture readings. Find recordings by Alexander Scourby.

Provide some type of Bible handbook on elementary level with information on people, places, Bible times and geography, etc.

1. **Music/Singing**

Find the singing voice. Sing the scale. Sing. Learn songs. Sing along with recordings. If parents are not good singers, find some way to help them, such as voice recordings for sing-along for tone drills or new songs.

For elementary grades, find a book that introduces children to a variety of songs about the world in which they live, such as *It’s Music Time*, available from Prairie View Press.

To introduce rudiments, use a book like *Praise and Practice: Christian Music Reader* by EMP.

Something new on the market is *Heart Songs I & II*, available from Brooksong.org. Each includes traditional and new inspirational songs. To learn them, a phone number is provided for you to dial and listen to them sung in harmony. Dialing an additional code allows you to hear a single part emphasized, such as the alto in foreground, to enhance learning parts.

1. **Art**

Plan bi-weekly activities for art if possible. Find an art teacher that can help you plan lessons that can be adapted for *schooling at home.*

Integrate art with other subjects, especially nature study! Sketch all types of things from nature.

Make collections, arrangements, impressions, molds, sculpture…

Numerous “how to draw” books are on the market such as *How to Draw Animals* & *How to Draw Birds,* published by Blick. There are a number of good books on how to draw faces.

See *articulations.online* for a subscription-type art curriculum.

1. **Penmanship**

Several books are on the market that can be provided, such as *Pentime,* available through numerous sources. While penmanship books introduce correct form for writing, most pupils will only use the writing skill they develop in penmanship class if they are consistently required to write neatly in all their work. The discipline of writing neatly carries across into many other forms of character development. What’s worth doing is worth doing well. Insisting on neatness in writing will benefit your pupils in multiple ways that seem unrelated to their writing.

1. **Spelling & English**

If *schooling at home* becomes necessary, these topics can be minimized. Spelling lists are readily available; it’s good to spend some time weekly on learning the spelling of words. Spelling does not merit (as compared to other really important, life-formative subjects) more than an hour in a week at most, broken into several shorter study/test periods.

For the “English/grammar/usage” component of language arts, find a way to introduce children to the basics: parts of speech, phrases, types of sentences… Due to the highly abstract conceptual understanding required to really understand, for example, what a clause is and how it functions (and how it is different structurally from a phrase while sharing many of the same functions), analytical grammar can await the upper levels of elementary years. At that level, choose a work-text (such as *Climbing to Good English* by Schoolaid) or some other program/approach that covers the basic elements and have the children work through it over a two year period. Have them memorize key sets of terms: prepositions, helping verbs, conjunctions. Be sure that children do not confuse the study of English grammar with the depth and breadth of learning the content of categories I & II above. Analyzing the structure of language, naming its elements, and using that knowledge to logically deconstruct sentences is a more or less discrete skill from being able to read, write, and speak articulately.

1. **Projects**

Projects should be planned for pupils to pursue individually or along with siblings. (Or pursued parallel or collaboratively with other pupils in other families involved in the *school at home* program.) Pupils can pursue multiple short-term projects in a year or one long term project.

Many short projects can be integrated with studies in some way, such as making a series of dioramas to illustrate a book being read or measuring the height of backyard trees by using angles and shadows.

Projects can be stand-alone (identifying and naming every growing plant on your home’s property: tree, bush, weed, herb, bramble…)

Projects vary in type and purpose:

1. Some develop skills and produce practical, repeatable, useful results: cooking, baking, woodworking, designing and growing a flower or herb garden. Cut a scrap piece of wood exactly square, with each side measuring exactly 1 ¼” (with a hand saw).
2. Some produce original material: biography of a grandparent, a family tree, portrait of a parent, results of a survey, local or family history.
3. Some provide a service (making a recording for a shut-in, weeding an elderly neighbor’s garden, supporting a community relief program). Families could choose service projects that fit their circumstances from a list of suggestions provided by the school.

**Service** should be embedded in various parts of the *school at home* plan on multiple levels and various ways: Helping siblings. Assisting in family chores. Accepting an individual responsibility. Writing to shut-ins. Helping neighbors. The list could be endless. Cultivate a servant’s heart.

1. **Hobbies and Crafts**

Provide ideas, choices, materials, and support for every pupil to engage in one or more hobbies and crafts. Collections. Photography. Knitting. Macramé. Woodworking. Woodcarving. Indoor/outdoor flower gardening. Although related to projects, hobbies are something that children pursue out of their own interest in an ongoing way. They may need ideas to intrigue them, prodding and help to get started, and encouragement to continue. The focus of a hobby helps the child develop and pursue a specific interest in ways that benefit him for life. Eventually, his success in pursuing his life’s vocation will benefit from his hobby experiences.

1. **Play**

Children play. Children must play. Daily. Play of all types. Encourage and allow time for both spontaneous and directed play as part of the *schooling at home* plan. Even though we might think play needn’t be included in the plan since children routinely play at home, we can’t assume that they will. If they do, fine. But the schedule should have space to confirm that they in fact play.

The plan should include categories of play along with specific activities for each category. Some things all children should learn; others they could choose from options. A few ideas for starters:

1. Agility & movement: jump rope, hopscotch, skipping, Frisbees, hula hoops, jungle gym, swings…
2. Free outdoor play: sand box, romping, exploring, playing house…
3. Group/team games: ball games, tag, base games
4. Memory/mind games: memory cards, word games
5. Puzzles, cutting & pasting
6. Building with legos or other stick-together sets
7. Board games of all types.
8. Encourage specific skills or stunts. Juggling. Pogo stick use. Stilt walking (make your own).

Hacky sack with others. Jump over a stick you are holding in both hands. Limbo under a lowered stick.

See attachment labeled The Role of Play in Growth for more insight and ideas.

1. **Specialty?**

Consider having each child choose a topic to become an “expert” on. He would pursue multiple aspects of his topic, For example, studying honeybees would suggest investigating their use in history, how they live, work, and survive. Honey and its properties. On and on.

Other illustrative examples: ships, flags, bridges, rivers, dogs, tea, maps, silk, oceans, inventors, rats, snakes, clocks, food preservation.

By combining elements of hobby and project, a child’s pursuit of his special topic would span years.

**Is This Possible?**

To begin with, a Plan B should be introduced in substance (in its approach) but not with an overwhelming quantity. A *way* that works well if used moderately may very well crash in its inaugural weeks if it’s too extensive. Not because it isn’t workable, but because it’s too much all at once. Better to start with a few key things, chosen from the first things, to do well, and add other elements along the way, adjusting as necessary. *The quality and the style of the learning is more important than quantity.*

Envisioning a program such as outlined above looks daunting. But it is the type of work teachers do—planning and envisioning how children can learn. It’s not as daunting to them as is the task that many (most?) parents feel at being given a traditional school curriculum that they must try to teach as an add-on to their already full life.

What would a *school at home* day look like under a plan like this? Each week, the child would spend time in whatever order is deemed advisable engaged with

1. Biography study/activities
2. Book A for Part II
3. Book B for Part II—on a different topic, but similar activities
4. Math (note that much math can be integrated with nature study and projects)
5. Nature/science study/project
6. Beginning reading, if a beginner
7. Bible
8. Memory
9. Singing
10. Art
11. Project(s)
12. Play
13. Hobby

It would probably work best to spend larger chunks of time on some topics only once per week. For example: a, b, c, e, and j could be pursued only one day per week while some activities such as d, f, g, h, i and l should be daily. K and M could be pursued as fillers in any time that’s available.

**The Role of the Teachers**

For a **Plan B** to develop, teachers, as directed by their boards, would develop a plan of study, as described above. They will need to think in terms of topics, units, themes, chapters, and activities rather than in terms of individual daily lessons and objectives. It will work best to plan for weekly or monthly chunks of work for *schooling at home.* Families should have an outline of what would ideally be covered in a month. Some work could be turned in weekly; some monthly. Students can develop portfolios of their work. After the plan is designed under board oversight by the designated teachers, the individual teacher’s work will include:

1. Gathering the materials for the levels he/she is responsible for, reviewing the content, and outlining parent-user-friendly directions. Specific activities will need to be chosen and produced to accompany the various books and materials for each subject. For example, if 3 pupils in one family, in grades 2, 4 & 7 are reading *Amos Fortune, Free Man* together, the teacher will consider what they should do with it. They might…

--work together to act out a particular scene in a chapter, such as Amos crawling on the floor to retrieve the coins someone threw there for payment; re-enact the auction in which Amos purchased Polly Burdoo; or the scene where Violet hides Amos’s special money supply.

--each could have an individual writing assignments a bit tailored to age (see list of ideas in another document). Perhaps a journal entry of Violet, a composition about the meaning of *freedom,* and a summary of part of the story.

--they can produce an audio recording of a reading from the book, an imaginary conversation between Amos and some neighbor, or a prayer of Amos.

--they can research Amos’ home town of Jaffrey, New Hampshire. Or how tanning is done. Or do a study of leather and its uses. Or even tan a piece of leather.

--they can discuss and write some thoughts illustrated in the book such as prejudice, fairness, patience, hatred, fear, or kingship.

--they can come up with ten maxims based on the book. *Hatred is a slow-burning fire. A slave can live free. A free man can be in bondage.*

b. Teachers will need to collaborate with each other, because the nature of cross-age activities will mean that if a family has children in grades 2, 5, and 8, they might relate to three teachers. If the *Amos Fortune* book is used by all, each teacher will need input. They will decide what all the students will do together and how those things will be collected and evaluated. Each “level” of teacher will also decide what specific activities she wants “her” pupil (say a second grader) to do that the other two pupils do not do.

c. As much as possible teachers should be involved in the daily work of their students. Technology can be helpful as available. Phone appointments can be made, with different time slots for different homes. Things of first importance will get priority. The teacher might read something aloud over the speakerphone, or listen to the child read over the phone. She might ask some questions, give a bit of oral drill, explain some concept, and answer questions. But the model should be designed to continue in style and substance without communication technology. Availability of communication technology should be considered a bonus if it’s available.

d. Evaluation/grading. The urge to evaluate a pupil’s growth in knowledge, understanding and wisdom by measures that can be converted to digits will have quite limited value in *schooling at home.* Primary scores should be based on significant assignments that represent fruits of the pupils’ study. Examples include evaluation of completed writing assignments and completed projects. Parents could sign off on a chart to verify that the child completed his routine daily practices and drills. Credit can be given for following a schedule: working the recommended amount of time on various topics. Much of the evaluation can be based on what a child produces for his portfolio. Some traditional tests can be given, especially for arithmetic.

See the attachment Grading Difficult Subjects for ideas to adapt.

e. Because any Plan B *schooling at home* will be a new venture, it will require continual review and adjustments for improvement.

**The Role of the Parents**

A major goal will be to avoid having the pupils think of *schooling at home* as a daily drudgery of “doing books” that is to somehow be quickly “done” to fulfill some kind of requirement so they can get on with life. That doesn’t mean it will be easy. It is in the nature of children to want the easy way. They commonly resist the disciplines of daily chores and keeping things in order. But they do sense, more or less, that these chores are important for life. They should likewise sense that *schooling at home* is an integral part of life; not a series of “hoops” to jump through to satisfy some requirements.

It will be important for parents and children to have common interest in the *school at home* topics and activities even though the parents spend a minimal amount of daily time involved in them as compared to their children. This will require parents to be aware of their children’s topics and types of assignments so they can identify routinely with what the children are doing.

A few specific suggestions for parents…

1. Follow the daily and weekly schedule (which your school should provide—and you might adapt) that includes a checkoff component for things your pupils need to do every day such as…

--memory practice, math drills, etc.

--time spent on each separate assignment

--how well the child performed (how much prompting needed; how neatly; willingness, etc.)

The schedule should also have some end-of-week sections to check off on.

It should include provision for the child to evaluate himself, such as how punctual/focused he worked.

It should include space for updates on larger projects.

1. Develop genuine interest in what your children are hearing, reading and learning. Encourage them to tell you something from their learning that you did not know. Share little things with them that you yourself recently learned. Demonstrate the deep satisfaction that can come through learning/experiencing something new and fresh about God’s world. (Note that there’s a huge difference between vain chasing after knowledge as a form of idolatry (II Timothy 3:7) and rejoicing in the truth (I Corinthians 13:6).
2. Learn to engage your children in conversation “along the way” while washing dishes, eating supper, or going on walks. (Deut. 6:7)
3. Plan for an end-of-day connecting time, perhaps with each individual child, but definitely with all the family together. This could be done over the evening meal time, or perhaps before evening worship time. Do not review the whole day, but vary the review. Discuss something. Reread a paragraph. Recite some memory. Tell stories. Make it a show, tell, share, and bonding time. Grow together. Enjoy each other.
4. Remember to take advantage of the involvement of the extended family as much as possible—grandparents, aunts…

**The Role of Technology**

A *schooling at home* plan should be designed to work without the use of digital or telephone technology. Any availability of either should be considered a bonus. Use them as carefully controlled tools if you can.

Much has been written in recent years about the problems of technology. Suffice it to say that its presence is a huge temptation for distraction and diffusion of attention. Watching a pupil deeply engrossed in its use can give an illusion that real growth in learning must be happening. Few children are capable of using it as a tool to accomplish something. Rather, it takes control of them by captivating them with its addictive qualities. The threat of its seductiveness overwhelms any meager benefits it offers if children are given free rein in its use. Children spending additional time at home in a *schooling at home* arrangement must be carefully protected from its threats. For *schooling at home*, avoid using anything with a screen as much as possible.

**Concluding Comments.**

Children thrive when their learning experiences are multi-faceted. It’s often been said that every child, every day, should have something to **think** about, something to **care** about, and something to **do.** Keep these three goals in mind as you plan a program.

A successful *schooling at home* program will enable children, with the school’s direction and support, and under their parents’ supervision, to grow in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man. They will mature in *ways* that will serve them to live fruitful lives.

But the program will also accomplish something much more profound. If pursued well, it will instill a pattern of learning by cultivating a tradition that fits naturally with the home. By its very nature, it will not only provide for a way for the children to learn, but it will also prepare the parents to continue in the same *mode* if the school for whatever reason is no longer able to function in its support. If the school’s ability or freedom to support the home stops as abruptly as our schools closed in March 2020, the parents will not helpless. They needn’t wonder how to do or what to do. They can use the materials they currently have on hand to follow the established tradition of *home* learning as circumstances allow. The operating Plan B *schooling at home* program would by default become a Plan D—a *right way* for our parents and their *little ones* if they must indeed proceed without the availability of support from the school. Read this again.

**Mutual Aid**

Although each school needs to consider its unique circumstances, such as size, geographical location and spread, resources, available staff, existing program and more, every school does not need to re-invent the wheel. Some are likely to develop programs they are willing to share; others will likely collaborate. We’re in this together.

There is at least one publisher in the homeschool market that offers a packaged curriculum similar in arrangement to what is outlined above. To see its content, check out sonlight.com.