



Elijah Academy Homeschool Handbook

History of American Homeschooling

History of American Homeschooling	1
1) Children Held in Common – Ancient Philosophy Ever New	1
2) From Common Schools to Compulsory Funding	2
3) Progressive Education – An Establishment of the Humanist Religion.....	4
4) Foreign Reformers – Charlotte Mason and Maria Montessori	5
5) Classical Education – Three Different Concepts in One.....	7
6) Christian Education – Cornerstone of Western Civilization	9
7) The Christian School Movement of the Late 20 th Century	10
8) Homeschool Advocates – Christians and Hippies.....	12
9) Homeschooling Pioneers – Examples of Excellence	14
10) Public School Reforms – Essentialism in Full Bloom	15
11) The Nationalization of Education - Top-down Solutions	17
Bibliography	18



History of American Homeschooling

The modern American homeschooling movement is seen as a separatist struggle. In a real sense, however, it is the revival of a classic schooling paradigm. The four faces carved into stone on Mount Rushmore are a good illustration. They were homeschooled. This National Monument illustrates that within the great experiment of American self-government is another, more recent, social experiment – the experiment in public schooling.

To understand the modern homeschool, we must first review the philosophy and development of state-sponsored compulsory schooling in the 19th century. With this context, we will better understand the educational reformers of 20th century, including homeschooling advocates. The main and prevailing philosophies that influence our modern schooling paradigms, including homeschooling, are the work of a relatively small group of individuals. This paper is an introduction to these schools of thought.

1) Children Held in Common – Ancient Philosophy Ever New

From Plato to modern times, a common theme of educational philosophers is that parents and social influences will corrupt the child's innate, assumed goodness and that the solution is for children to be held "in common." By this they mean separated from their parents as early as possible. In Plato's *Republic*, c.380 BC, he expresses this ideal, "*Wives and children are to be held in common by all, and no parent is to know his own child nor any child his parents.*" (Lee. 1987) The notion of "children held in common" is echoed in the phrase "it takes a village to raise a child" more recently made popular by Hillary Clinton.

A prominent philosopher of the so-called Age of Enlightenment, Jean-Jacque Rousseau (1712-1778), recognized Plato's *Republic* as a treatise on education. He wrote in his book *Emile or On Education*, c. 1762, "*If you wish to know what is meant by public education, read Plato's Republic. Those who merely judge books by their titles take this for a treatise on politics, but it is the finest treatise on education ever written.*" Rousseau's ideal was to have state-controlled rearing of children. For Rousseau, this was not a theoretical proposition. All five of his children were abandoned at a state-sponsored orphanage. Although not orphans, Rousseau believed that politicians would know better how to raise his children than their parents. Ironically, he may have been right in his own case.

Rousseau's philosophy influenced Friedrich Fröbel (1782-1852) through his mentor, Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi. Fröbel, the Father of Kindergarten and a contributor to the Prussian System of education, wrote a book titled *The Education of Man*, in 1826. The book is full of many great observations on a child's acquisition of knowledge, but has a fatal flaw. As he states, "the nature of man is in itself good." Observing that children were corrupt at early ages, Frobel concludes that it is their parents and untrained educators that have a corrupting influence on the child's innate, assumed goodness.



Elijah Academy Homeschool Handbook

The thought follows: the sooner children can be removed from the corrupting influence of their parents, and put into the care of trained professionals, the better chance the child will have to develop or “unfold” into a good citizen. This is the recognizable motivation of all early education programs to this day, and the push continues for ever earlier separation of parents and children. In contrast, scripture affirms that children are born in sin, and that parents – not the state – are responsible for their upbringing.

C.S. Lewis foresaw the day when the government would shape posterity through educational policy, as he wrote in *The Abolition of Man*: *“Hitherto the plans of educationalists have achieved very little of what they attempted and indeed, when we read them — how Plato would have every infant ‘a bastard nursed in a bureau’, and Elyot would have the boy see no men before the age of seven and, after that, no women, and how Locke wants children to have leaky shoes and no turn for poetry — we may well thank the beneficent obstinacy of real mothers, real nurses, and (above all) real children for preserving the human race in such sanity as it still possesses. But the man-moulders of the new age will be armed with the powers of an omniscient state and an irresistible scientific technique: we shall get at last a race of conditioners who really can cut out all posterity in what shape they please.”* (Lewis 1943) The prediction seems eerily prophetic.

2) From Common Schools to Compulsory Funding

In the US, prior to 1840’s, there were no public schools. Children were taught at home or at common schools. These schools were quite similar to homeschool co-ops of today. Funding was not exacted from non-parents. Parents banded together to fund materials and instruction. Curriculum peddlers sold to parents – the true customers. The schools were multi-level, and the curriculum materials were not necessarily standard across the same level at the same school. The teachers taught intensively as parental agents and a birch rod made sure that their time was not wasted.

The teachers and curriculum developers were of a high caliber compared to today. For example, Noah Webster (1758-1843) was an educator and curriculum developer late in this free market education system. He wrote the dictionary and the Blue-backed speller. Besides these two prime examples, he was extremely prolific. One simply needs to read the writings of those educated under such a system to judge its effectiveness.

In 1841, shortly after the last state discontinued taxpayer funding of churches, the first compulsory schooling law would go into place.¹ In effect, the schools replaced the church as the official religious institution of American states. By 1900 compulsory schooling laws would exist in all states. A catalyst in this change was Horace Mann, who studied the Prussian model, and is considered the

¹ The last state to discontinue taxpayer funding of churches was Massachusetts in 1833. The Massachusetts board of education was formed in 1837.



Elijah Academy Homeschool Handbook

father of compulsory schooling in America. Taken at face value, his motivations were of the best intentions – the advancement of the human condition. But under the surface, the American compulsory school systems were modeled after, and motivated by, the same goal as the Prussian system – social control through state indoctrination. In America, however, this included noble, Christian-sounding objectives.

The Catholics, Lutherans, and Adventists were major groups that rejected the notion of public schools from the start. They had already established early parochial school systems. However, like today, most American Christians in the mid to late 1800's were convinced by the claims of Horace Mann that a spiritually neutral academic education could be created. In their defense, the first generation of public schools must have seemed like non-denominational Christian schools! As Horace Mann stated, *"our system earnestly inculcates all Christian morals; it founds its morals on the basis of religion; it welcomes the religion of the Bible; and, in receiving the Bible, it allows it to do what it is allowed to do in no other system,---to speak for itself."*² Moreover, this first generation of public school academics benefitted from the strong tradition of academic excellence and Christian morals in the free market educational system that came before it.

After compulsory funding laws were in place, some states tried to push further in their promotion of the majority's interests over freedom by outlawing private and parochial schools altogether. For example, statist leaders in predominantly protestant Oregon were concerned about immigrants, particularly Irish Catholics, not being indoctrinated into the state's version of "good citizens" by the school system. They sought to eliminate this parallel society by outlawing private and parochial schools altogether. Fortunately, the Catholic Schools were affirmed by the Supreme Court in the 1925 case *Pierce vs. Society of Sisters*. Parents are allowed pay for educational alternatives as long as they relinquish funds to support the public option they're actively choosing against.

The lesson here is that schools and tax codes can be weaponized to serve an ideology. Popularly elected bureaucrats will seek to protect themselves by disadvantaging and even eliminating the option to choose educational alternatives. Citizens who think for themselves can more easily recognize state aggression, and that is perceived as a threat by those who serve the interests of the state rather than individual liberty. This lesson of history should be of great interest to homeschoolers who are very purposefully (and at great personal disadvantage) creating a parallel society of students who think for themselves.³

² Horrace Mann, Reports "On Religious Education" pp. 710-730

³ The desire to stamp out "parallel societies" is not unique to the US government. The German government still enforces a nazi-era ban on homeschooling (a 1938 update to the original 1918 compulsory schooling laws). In 2008, in prosecuting the Romeike family for homeschooling, the German Supreme Court acknowledged the academic merits of homeschooling, but declared the purpose of their continued ban of homeschooling was that "The general public has a justified interest in counteracting the development of religiously or philosophically motivated 'parallel societies.'"



3) Progressive Education – An Establishment of the Humanist Religion

If Horace Mann is the father of compulsory schooling in the early 1800's, John Dewey is the father of modern American public education, as we know it. Around the early 1900's, John Dewey became a major influence in the philosophy of education in the compulsorily funded American schools. He implemented the philosophy of Progressive Education started by Rousseau and it has been the prevailing educational philosophy through the 20th and early 21st century. His secularist mission was religious in nature, as the very title of his book *A Common Faith* illustrates.

Dewey was an ardent secular humanist, an atheist, and an original signer of the Humanist Manifesto who accomplished a fanatical vision to displace the moral foundation of traditional education. His vision of truth was relative. For example, his ideas resulted in the replacement of the study of history with “social studies,” placing value on the present social consciousness as an ethic of itself. The effect was a radical reshaping of the compulsory school system into a vehicle for social engineering through age-segregated classroom structures. The pragmatic goal was to produce workers for an industrialized society to bring salvation to mankind. With this in mind, it is quite striking that homeschool critics often express concern with the socialization and indoctrination of home educated children. Rather, it is the children taught under the continuing influence of Dewey that are the real concern in this regard.

Since 1925, the removal of Christian influences from the classroom can only be described as systematic. This can be traced through a series of court cases culminating in the Supreme Court ruling June 25, 1962, that school prayer and Bible reading would cease in all public school systems. That an academic decline has progressed in parallel with the steady moral decline is readily apparent. This is not surprising. The laws of nature and of nature's God are the same. The affective domain of learning that informs character, conscience, and worldview is the foundation of learning in the academic domain. All education is essentially religious in nature; the question is – which religion? This is the basic philosophy behind Christian Education.

The decline of the humanist system, unmoored from the idea of absolute truth, is inevitable. Mankind is becoming more conformed to mankind. As the system declines, the humanism and group think becomes more explicit; this explains “political correctness” and the new definition of “tolerance.” Importantly, while Christians view this as a failure, it is evident success of certain stated objectives.⁴ The moral failure of the public school system is a clear lesson to the Christian. It proves that mankind is not innately good or able to save themselves from themselves.

The academic decline shows public compulsory schools to be unjustifiable on their own terms.

⁴ This is the premise of Samuel Blumenfeld's book, *Crimes of the Educators: How Utopians Are Using Government Schools to Destroy America's Children* which he demonstrates by quoting directly from Dewey and others.



Elijah Academy Homeschool Handbook

Knowing this, educators have succeeded in re-centering standardized test scores to hide the decline from parents. But the results are in. It is time for separation of school and state. We should not covet the public coffers, and we should not be forced to fund the propagation of ideas we find morally abhorrent.⁵ This results should not be a surprise. A state-run monopoly where consumers cannot “vote with their feet” is not an efficient means to produce any good or service, and education is no different.

Regrettably, most American Christians, do not acknowledge the dire situation we find ourselves in. Some would deny that secularist schools are an establishment of a humanist and statist religion. On the other hand, many professing Christians would decry the number of grown children abandoning the faith. In truth, ideas have consequences.

4) Foreign Reformers – Charlotte Mason and Maria Montessori

Two foreign educational philosophers around the early 1900’s have a continuing influence in the modern homeschooling movement, and other schools to some extent. These are Charlotte Mason and Maria Montessori. These two are alike in that both contributed to the body of knowledge in educational theory and practice, particularly in the area of early childhood development, education, and the learning environment. Montessori was an Italian educator, and Mason was British. Both are outside the main stream of their contemporary and today’s modern educational philosophy. They are also very different in many fundamental respects.

Charlotte Mason wrote six volumes proposing an educational methodology based on her observations of children in a boarding school environment.⁶ Her applications mainly focused on early childhood – although her last book, *Towards a Philosophy of Education*, broadens the scope. Her methods were comprehensive and complex⁷. Charlotte Mason’s works are a joy to read because she references many scriptures, and paints an idyllic vision of easily accomplished educational rigor.

Her ideas were re-introduced to the homeschooling movement in 1984 by Susan Schaeffer McCaulay, daughter of renowned theologian Francis Schaeffer, with her book “For the Children’s Sake.” The McCaulay framework of application for Mason’s work is the philosophy currently understood under the name of the earlier reformer, but it is not entirely the same.

A Charlotte Mason education was a rigorous education. She gave week-long terminal exams to all

⁵ Thomas Jefferson said “To compel a man to furnish contributions of money for the propagation of opinions which he disbelieves and abhors, is sinful and tyrannical.” (Jefferson 1779)

⁶ Charlotte Mason’s volumes are now in the public domain, and can be found in their entirety on <http://www.amblesideonline.org/CM/>

⁷ Her ideas included many specific methodologies for environmental and habitual controls for educating a child including: instilling good study habits, mental focus, daily calisthenics (Swedish Drills), striving for perfect execution, having a broad curriculum, real “living” books (reading-intensive approach), hands on nature study, and cultivating a love for learning.



Elijah Academy Homeschool Handbook

her students, with answers covering 20-60 pages of written work. She recounts a ten year-old student's term paper with an impressive list of over 100 substantive nouns and proper names recounted in context from memory.⁸ On the importance of testing and recordkeeping she stated "The terminal examinations are of great importance. They are not merely and chiefly tests of knowledge but records which are likely to be permanent. There are things which every child must know."⁹ In this and advice on the selection of reading materials, she shows herself to be an essentialist, not the advocate of child-directed education that many consider her to be. The rigor of her methods is often lost in the modern version of her ideas and methods.

Her methods are a system of environmental and habitual controls for awakening an interest in good subject matter. The goal of her methods is intrinsic motivation. Her conclusions on the ease of instilling a power of attention and avidity for knowledge without extrinsic motivators may be limited by the managed school environment in which she observed. In such an environment, extrinsic motivations such as illustrations, instruction, evaluations, rewards, praise, and punishment are pervasive whether intentionally designed as motivators or not. These external stimuli hold a child's attention - despite their natural tendency toward sloth - until they can understand the material enough to be intrinsically motivated by it. A modern home school that reproduced the controlled boarding school environment and complex web of habit-forming routines would be a very unique home indeed.

A few portions of her work give cause to consider errant doctrinal leanings that imply the "unfolding" of an innate, presumed goodness. Her description of the "personhood" of the child walks that line. Although she explicitly acknowledges a human sin nature, she also states that a parent's suspicion of sin is what causes children to be sinful.¹⁰ Yet, scripture says that foolishness, not wisdom, is bound up in the heart of a child. Charlotte Mason did not have any children of her own. Perhaps if she had the benefit of raising her own children, she would have understood better that sin is our nature from birth, not something learned from parents. Lastly, Mason seemed to believe that habits would translate into lifelong character; but scripture teaches that without the Spirit of God, our efforts to pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps are vain legalism. Of course, good habits are helpful for the learning process, but they are not a cure for our spiritual condition.

Maria Montessori, an Italian educator, contributed similarly to our understanding of stages in early childhood development and education. She was one of the first to focus on a prepared learning environment and her observations and descriptions of preschool developmental stages will strike an observant parent as remarkably accurate. Similar to Mason, her ideas were developed around pre-

⁸ Charlotte Mason, Volume 6, Page 241-243

⁹ Volume 6, p.272

¹⁰ Volume 5, p. 398 - "we must believe that chivalry and chastity are there, and are not foreign ideas to be introduced by our talk."



Elijah Academy Homeschool Handbook

school and early elementary grades and are less applicable to later stages of learning.

Her influence died down in the United States in 1914 after a critical review, *The Montessori System Examined*, was published by William Heard Kilpatrick. Kilpatrick was a proponent of progressive education and protégé of John Dewey. His paper has some astute observations on her incorrect views of a child's nature at birth containing all that the child is to become, and the educator presiding over the "unfolding" of this nature as a gardener tends a plant.

Her occult leanings, influenced by contemporary mystics such as Rudolph Steiner, reveal the basis for her belief that the child's reincarnated nature need simply to "unfold" or "awaken" to reveal the adult spirit inside. In her book "Education for a New World" she says "The world was not created for us to enjoy, but we are created to evolve the cosmos" – a humanist and occult vision contrary to the teaching of scripture. Not surprisingly, her methods made resurgence in the 1960s, and have been with us since in one form or another.

We should be careful to take from these and any philosopher only that which is good and holds true against scripture as an objective standard of truth externally validated by the improbability of fulfilled prophecy, and empirically by the Spirit that bears witness. 1 Thessalonian 5:21 says "Test all things, and hold fast to that which is good." These reformers made good contributions to the modern understanding of childhood development, the learning environment, and educational science. We should not feel as though our home schools must be approved by a specific philosopher or precisely follow any single educational model. As British-born statistician George E.P. Box once humorously wrote of empirical models, "Essentially, all models are wrong, but some are useful."

5) Classical Education – Three Different Concepts in One

The concept of "classical education" started before the modern homeschool movement as a positive reaction against progressive education. It's founding as a philosophy can be traced to an essay by English writer Dorothy Sayers entitled "The Lost Tools of Learning" first presented as a lecture in 1947. She outlines the basics of the classical model which is three separate points of educational philosophy:

- 1) A model of maturation with "stages" rather than grades,
- 2) A reading-intensive curriculum approach, and
- 3) A style of curriculum design that favors ancient things (classics).

The failure to deconstruct and separate Classical Education into these three component philosophies has led to confusion around the term.

As a model of maturation, classical education is based on three stages of learning – grammar, logic, and dialog. These stages hearken back to the medieval "Trivium" of these three subjects taught in



Elijah Academy Homeschool Handbook

sequence. This model has been applied to sequence curriculum materials in a cyclical fashion with three groups of four years. The entire scope of the humanities and literature is covered in each set of repetition, but the focus changes from learning facts, to understanding relationships, and finally communicating the subject fluently. This forms an effective cycle of repetition, roughly aligning with the normal maturation of a child.¹¹

The concept of learning stages is the basis of the multi-level instructional approach. In this approach, the same subject can be covered by all students in a home with each reading about the subject at their own level. This is a very helpful method for larger homeschool families.¹²

A deep study of the humanities necessitates a reading-intensive curriculum approach must be taken. But we should note that a reading-intensive approach can be used with more modern texts as well. That is, curriculum scope – the materials and content - is different than curriculum approach – the means and methods planned for facilitating the interaction of the student with the material. With regard to approach, a classical education is reading intensive - at least in the humanities. Although the sciences were not a part of the classical Trivium subjects, modern “Classical Education” has come to mean a broad-based education in the sciences - even though a traditional textbook approach is taken in the subjects of math and science.¹³

Lastly, there is a classical style of curriculum scope. Classical-styled schools and curriculums lean toward ancient texts and languages such as Latin and Greek as the choice in foreign language. It is appropriate to note that, when classical education was contemporary, the materials they used were the latest and greatest texts available in each subject. So they read from Homer’s works, learned to think from Aristotle, and studied Cicero for public speaking. (Bluedorn and Bluedorn 2001) These choices should certainly be examined on their own merit, but there is a pseudo-intellectual aura – a presumption of rigor and usefulness - that has developed around ancient materials. With 500 years of classic texts in the English language, one does not have to go into deep antiquity to uncover engaging and intensive reading materials that fit the rigorous ideals of classical education. The reading-intensive or “real books” curriculum approach is independent of classical-styled curriculum materials.

“Classical Christian Education” has played a prominent role in later implementations of classical education, starting with Douglas J. Wilson’s 1991 book *Recovering the Lost Tools of Learning: An Approach to Distinctively Christian Education*. He subsequently edited the book *Repairing the Ruins:*

¹¹ Four even years does not match perfectly with the proposed model of maturation with a shorter middle (dialectic) period, but this implementation is convenient and common. The classical model of maturation is further discussed in our monograph on “Forming a Philosophy of Home Education” under the subject of “How Learning Happens.”

¹² Multi-level learning is further discussed in “Forming a Philosophy of Home Education” under the subject of “Homeschool Instruction.”

¹³ This is further discussed in our paper on “Curriculum Approaches.”



Elijah Academy Homeschool Handbook

The Classical & Christian Challenge to Modern Education. These works were seminal in the Classical Christian Education movement, and proliferation of many private and charter schools in the classical model. A subsequent contribution in the area of classical education is *The Well Trained Mind* by Susan Wise Bauer and her mother, Jessie Wise, first published in 1999. This book is a manual for applying the classical education philosophies directly within context of home-based education. (Bauer and Wise 2009)

The key to understanding classical education and how it may apply in your homeschool is to break it into the three component points of educational philosophy that roll up into this single term, and to consider how each of these ideas may apply in each subject.

6) Christian Education – Cornerstone of Western Civilization

As a philosophy, Christian education is as old as Christianity. With roots in Jewish education, the principles of Christian education date back to the time of Moses. In America, Christian education pre-dates public schooling by two centuries. In fact, the first law pertaining to schooling in America set up a system of Christian schools in the commonwealth of Massachusetts in 1647.

This law was named “The Old Deluder, Satan, Act” – a title derived from its introductory paragraph stating: *“It being one chief project of that old deluder, Satan, to keep men from the knowledge of the Scriptures, as in former times by keeping them in an unknown tongue, so in these latter times by persuading from the use of tongues, that so that at least the true sense and meaning of the original might be clouded and corrupted with love and false glosses of saint-seeming deceivers; and to the end that learning may not be buried in the grave of our forefathers, in church and commonwealth, the Lord assisting our endeavors.”*

The law went on to require that towns of a certain size should hire a single schoolmaster. The schoolmaster’s wages were funded by the parents who voluntarily chose to use his services. As described in “The Old Deluder, Satan, Act,” the dual purposes of Christian education are academic knowledge (that learning not be buried in the grave of our forefathers) and personal discernment (that we might not be deluded by Satan through lack of knowledge). In short, the philosophy of Christian education is that scriptures are to be studied as a systematic and personal theology.

With similar Christian motives, Robert Raikes started the Sunday School movement in England in the 1780s. In Sunday Schools of today, well dressed children of the faithful are instructed for perhaps an hour in the single subject of Bible; but the original Sunday School was a free Christian School system for children who did not get academic instruction during the week. These Sunday Schools spanned from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. with an hour long lunch, and integrated biblical studies as the foundation of academics. This was the only way that children of the working class in this place and time could get academic instruction, and it was rightly based on the foundation of truth and justice. Sunday Schools today are very different – a form of babysitting staffed with volunteers rather than apt teachers.



Elijah Academy Homeschool Handbook

While Biblical Studies can be considered a separate subject, the model of Christian education from Deuteronomy 6:6-7 is that all of education is a Unit Study of God's interest in mankind. Christians have aspired to great works on behalf of our Lord - in whatever "Year of Our Lord" (A.D.) they find themselves. Francis Bacon, the father of the scientific method stated in his seminal work, *"For man, by the fall, fell at the same time from his state of innocency and from his dominion over creation. Both of these losses however can even in this life be in some part repaired; the former by religion and faith, the latter by arts and sciences."* (Bacon 1620)

Two who understood this were Isaac Newton and James Clerk Maxwell, the greatest physicists in all of history. These Christian men developed their scientific contributions under the Lordship of their acknowledged Creator. Isaac Newton, who invented calculus so that he could invent physics, stated, "This most beautiful system of the sun, planets, and comets, could only proceed from the counsel and dominion of an intelligent Being. ... This Being governs all things, not as the soul of the world, but as Lord over all; and on account of his dominion he is wont to be called "Lord God" παντοκράτωρ [pantokratòr], or "Universal Ruler" ... The Supreme God is a Being eternal, infinite, absolutely perfect." (Newton 1687)¹⁴ Victorian-era physicist, James Clerk Maxwell, is best known for "Maxwell's Equations" which describe the physical phenomenon of electromagnetism in mathematical terms. As a Christian, Maxwell was a fervent opponent of the new theory of evolution. This is seen in his lecture on Molecules, but the best place to understand his perspective is his fascinating poem "Molecular Evolution." (Maxwell n.d.)¹⁵

No other civilization in history has developed technology as advanced as what Western Civilization developed on a foundation of Christian scholarship. The inherent future-focus of Christian doctrine is the foundation of learning, a cornerstone that has been rejected by the humanist state schools, and also by some mistaken Christians. A Christian education is not isolationist or monastic one; it is not spiritual in denial of our fallen condition; it seeks dominion over creation and seeks the good – the true sense and meaning of revealed truth and an expanding body of knowledge to be used for God's glory.

7) The Christian School Movement of the Late 20th Century

In the latter half of the 20th century, more and more Christians were recognizing public schools as establishments of the humanist religion. In the early 1960's, theologian and historian R.J. Rushdoony began to advocate against public schooling based on Christian conviction. Rushdoony castigated the public school system in his book *Intellectual Schizophrenia*, followed by a more well-known book *The*

¹⁴ This statement is made in General Scholium, an essay appended to *The Principia: Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy*, his greatest work which formulated the science of physics (Newtonian Mechanics), based on the mathematics of calculus (rates of change).

¹⁵ This poem can be found online on poetry sites, for example: <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/175047>



Elijah Academy Homeschool Handbook

Messianic Character of American Education. He makes a cogent case that education cannot be “neutral” but that all education and law is essentially religious and the only related question is what religion is being taught. Rushdoony makes the astute observation that the founding philosophers of American public education, actually set up a procedural system that does not explicitly define a basis for right and wrong, and has been used to engineer a social order in the absence of Christian doctrine. He concludes that this sort of system is itself anti-Christian, and ultimately doomed to fail. (Rushdoony 1963)

The claim that anti-Christian religious dogma is pervasive in modern public schools is easily tested. The National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers – the two largest teachers union in the nation - both publish annual resolutions that outline their collective vision.¹⁶ Based on their own creeds, these public school teachers are religious zealots who believe it is their role to right social wrongs, rather than teach subject matter. More alarming is their perception of social wrongs. Cutting through the politically-correct jargon, their resolutions reveal an alarming collection of anti-Christian dogmas. This is not to say that all represented teachers support these resolutions, but those that don’t are impotent to change the systemic agenda that is funded by their mandatory union dues.

That these doctrines are allowed to be preached through state-sponsored institutions, funded collectively and by compulsion, is enough to make one ask: what about Separation of School and State? Is it morally neutral to force people to pay for schools teaching ideas that they would not voluntarily support? Thomas Jefferson said “To compel a man to furnish contributions of money for the propagation of opinions which he disbelieves and abhors, is sinful and tyrannical.” (Jefferson 1779) The question of a morally neutral education system starts with the question of funding. We should not covet the public coffers to help fund a responsibility that belongs to us as parents and Christian church members.

As American public schools continue to preach anti-Christian doctrines of secular humanism and moral relativism, more Christian parents are seeking out providers of Christian education – whether a classroom or at home. This is largely a pragmatic decision, rather than strictly philosophical. Observing the academic and moral decay of the public school system, many parents want better for their own children. The purchase of educational alternatives is often a great personal sacrifice. However, at some point in decline, a tipping point is reached where the perceptible risks outweigh the material benefits of a free public school. More and more Christian parents, who rightly value the spiritual aspects of learning, are at this point of recognition.

¹⁶ These two unions together represent 4.7 Million teachers. Their current resolutions referenced at the time of writing were found at the following addresses: <http://www.nea.org/assets/docs/nea-resolutions-2014-15.pdf>
<http://www.aft.org/about/resolutions/>



Elijah Academy Homeschool Handbook

Unfortunately, while Christian homeschooling is growing, Christian Schools seem to be in decline. The 1980's and 1990's were a heyday of Christian Schooling – with new church schools opening everywhere. Now they are shutting down with a lack of funds and lack of support from their host churches. Too often, the vision of Christian education was not supported as a mission of the church. Teachers at Christian schools are often the largest donors to Christian schools – donating tens of thousands annually in salaries foregone. Does your church have a vision for supporting Christian education? If so, this can be a great boon to the Kingdom. If not, the onus is all on you to fulfill the purpose of Christian marriage recognized in traditional wedding vows – that of raising a family in the Lord. Public schools are militantly anti-Christian. Churches should be doing everything they can to support Christian education and keeping the children away from public schools – an establishment of a different religion.

8) Homeschool Advocates – Christians and Hippies

The modern American homeschooling movement is not the vision or brainchild of any single individual or group. It developed naturally from the failing public school systems in the later 20th century, with many advocates and practitioners drawing on the philosophies of earlier reformers. The major philosophers and advocates that contributed to the function of modern home education are discussed below.

It is not surprising that, as homeschooling emerged as a viable alternative in the 1980's, the ideals of Christian Education were a driving force behind the modern homeschooling movement. For example, Christian Education proponent, R.J. Rushdoony, whose writing in the early 1960's influenced the Christian School movement, would become a key advocate of homeschooling. Through his involvement with the Rutherford Institute, he became involved in early court cases that advanced the legal protection of homeschoolers.

Rushdoony holds a special place in Texas homeschooling history, because he was the key expert witness for *Leeper vs. Arlington Independent School District*, Case No. 17-88761-85 (Tarrant County 17th Judicial Court, April 13, 1987). His scholarship under cross-examination absolutely destroyed the arguments of the school district's attorney.¹⁷ This case established the standing homeschool requirements in the state of Texas, and Rushdoony's terms and definitions for what constitutes a "school" can be seen echoed as minimum requirements that are applied in Texas to this day. Furthermore, after the Texas case was completed, similar cases nationwide were dropped. All those who enjoy the benefits of homeschooling freedom owe a debt of gratitude to R.J. Rushdoony. Rushdoony is from the reformed Presbyterian theological perspective, and the outworking of his faith and scholarship is bearing fruit to this day. His scholarly work ethic in pursuit of the Kingdom is

¹⁷ The transcript can be found online, and it is quite fascinating to read. <http://rushdoony.sitewave.net/rushdoony-leeper-transcript-texas-homeschool-trial/>



Elijah Academy Homeschool Handbook

something we can all learn from and emulate.

Secular critics of the public compulsory school movement developed as the Christian predictions of the inevitable result of a godless education came to pass. These social critics noted that the system resulted in disaffected youth, starting with Paul Goodman writing *Growing up Absurd* (1962) and *Compulsory Miseducation* (1964). John Holt, who quit a career as an educator, would argue for homeschooling in *How Children Fail* (1964) and his follow-on *How Children Learn* (1967). Other notable, influential books in this vein are *Deschooling Society* by Ivan Illich (1970), *School is Dead: Alternatives in Education* by Everett Reimer (1971), and *No More Public School* by Harold Bennet (1972). These counter cultural philosophers led a homeschooling subculture in the philosophy of unschooling. This solution stems from a wrong view of human nature, but their observation of the problem is sound.

Raymond Moore was an early influencer who is credited with introducing many to homeschooling from a Christian perspective.¹⁸ Having written many articles on the topic of early schooling since the early 1970's, Raymond Moore with his wife Dorothy, gathered their thoughts into a book in 1975 entitled "Better Late Than Early." The basic premise of the book is that early schooling is largely ineffective – that later learning will eclipse early progress so that, say by age ten, those who started reading at age five will be indistinguishable from those who read at age seven. Also, the book takes an intellectually honest look at the fact that boys are different than girls – that girls tend to read earlier than boys, and boys tend to understand math concepts earlier than girls.

The homeschooling movement burgeoned in the 1980's. In 1981, the Moores published "Home Grown Kids: A Practical Handbook for Teaching your Children at home." Dr. James Dobson became interested in the Moore's work from the perspective of childhood psychology, and the natural differences between the sexes. As a result, Dobson interviewed Raymond Moore twice on his radio program in 1981. This exposure and the knowledge that there were homeschool resources with practical advice were seminal in the spread of homeschooling in Christian circles. The demand for market alternatives in education was high, and tax laws had priced out many who otherwise would have chosen private Christian schools. Homeschooling is a market solution that met this demand.

Another influence who helped shape current homeschool methods in the 1980's is Gregg Harris. Gregg is the homeschool dad of seven children who did many homeschooling workshops in the 1980's. In 1988, he wrote *The Christian Homeschool*. His philosophy advocates for delight-directed approach from a Christian perspective. He separates his approach from unschooling in that it takes a Christian approach to parenting and discipline.

¹⁸ HSLDA Founder Mike Farris, and attorney Christopher Klicka credit Raymond Moore with personally convincing them of the merits of homeschooling.



Elijah Academy Homeschool Handbook

Homeschool magazines were also influential in spreading knowledge of homeschooling. After writing his denunciations of modern educational methods, John Holt became acquainted with some early homeschoolers. Inspired by what he saw, Holt started the first homeschool newsletter in 1979 entitled *Growing without Schooling*. The homeschool magazine paradigm opened up the door for many more contributions of thought and the bringing of resources to likeminded homeschoolers. Christian school curriculum developers started offering their materials to homeschoolers. Homeschool Magazines such as *Practical Homeschooling*, *Homeschooling Today*, *The Old Schoolhouse Magazine*, *Home Education Magazine*, and *The Teaching Home* carry on the tradition of homeschool periodicals. Each of these aligns with earlier philosophies to one degree or another.

Other influences up to the present day align with these earlier philosophies to one degree or another. John Taylor Gatto's eloquent thoughts are in similar vein to John Holt's philosophy and tend toward unschooling. (Gatto 2010). Ruth Beechick wrote some practical guides and encouragements for homeschoolers that echo sentiments and approaches of earlier philosophers including Raymond Moores' thoughts on relaxed early education, and a reading-intensive, real books approach. Mary Pride, publisher of *Practical Homeschooling* magazine, wrote *The Ultimate Guide to Homeschooling*, that distills many years' worth of homeschooling advice from a distinctly Christian flavor. Clay and Sally Clarkson put together a noteworthy model for Christian Home Education which is a good synthesis of various philosophies and what subjects they help with in their book *Educating the Whole-hearted Child*. The modern home education movement continues to grow on various adaptations and implementations of these philosophies.

9) Homeschooling Pioneers – Examples of Excellence

Some notable influences on the modern homeschooling philosophy and curriculum approach are successful first-generation homeschoolers. For example, Art Robinson, a physicist and homeschool dad, contributed a remarkable example of excellence in homeschooling and a packaged curriculum of electronic books. Finding himself a widower with six young children, he continued to homeschool his children "because public school was unthinkable,"¹⁹ and developed a self-teaching method that relied heavily on daily discipline, diligence in mathematics, feeding children's interests with extensive reading of good books for other subjects, as well as setting an example model of learning with your home life. His children excelled such that they were completing calculus as young as 14 years of age. His curriculum includes a paper on his philosophy of education, and he also contributed a series of articles to *Practical Homeschooling* magazine in the late 1990's. These articles can be found online.

Another example is David and Micki Colfax who wrote their philosophy down in *Homeschooling for Excellence: How to Take Charge of Your Child's Education and Why You Must* (1988) and *Hard Times*

¹⁹ A YouTube video with his incredible story, remarkable results, and sagacious points on educational philosophy can be found at www.robinsoncurriculum.com



Elijah Academy Homeschool Handbook

in *Paradise* (1992). Similar to the Robinson children, the Colfax children all performed astonishingly well on college entrance exams, were accepted into Harvard with full tuition scholarships, and attained advanced degrees. That their two youngest children were adopted proved that it is their methods rather than some genetic factors that produced the uncommon results.

Three common factors of note in these academically exceptional families are: (1) the involvement of the father in leading the educational process and selection of curriculum materials, (2) the absence of electronic media in the home, and (3) the use of simple systems and methods that were rigorous for students and easy for parents to implement. The average child spends more time on electronic media than they do on schoolwork, so it is simply unsurprising that with extra time for reading good books and working, children learn much more.²⁰ The simple methods they shared include such things as having the students to write an essay each day for their father to read. Homeschoolers today could learn from their example. The quintessential homeschooling goal is: simple systems that are rigorous on the student, and as easy as possible on the parents.

10) Modern Public School Reforms – Essentialism in Full Bloom

The pervasive public school educational philosophy since the early 20th century public education has been progressive education. John Dewey is perhaps the most famous promoter. Part of this philosophy is the de-emphasis on classic methods of early American education. This philosophical basis led to implementation of such disastrous experimental ideas as the “look-say” approach to reading that abandoned traditional phonics. Equally terrible is the emphasis on educating for “social responsibility” or “democracy.” This idea extends an open door to brainwashing with theories and group think rather than a fact-based approach to critical thinking. The 1960’s populist philosophies of socialism and moral relativism walked right through that open door. Students in primary school now focus attention away from the basic concepts of science and nature study in order to be programmed with political opinions on public policy in the name of science. This is the foundational humanism of progressive education.

A comparison of modern tests with their counterparts from the turn of the century (1900) indicates that education has regressed by four years during the 20th century. We are at the point where it can be considered a true statement that “college is the new high school.” Although Progressive Education is a clear enabler of long-term declines in educational outcomes, it continues to prevail to this day.

But the progressive’s methods have never been without critics. As a result, the decline has not been wholly unchecked. As early as 1955, Rudolf Flesch wrote *Why Johnny Can’t Read* which criticized the

²⁰ In *Homeschooling for Excellence*, the Colfax’s point out the average child at the time watched 15,000 hours of television, while only schooling for 11,200 hours. (Colfax and Colfax 1988)



Elijah Academy Homeschool Handbook

methods developed under progressive philosophy for reading that abandoned the principles of phonics. As a result, the “look-say” method that impacted the reading abilities of so many baby boomers is no longer accepted. The modern homeschooling movement can be viewed as a reaction to the effects of progressive educational philosophies in the late 20th century. As the decline continued, other educational reformers redoubled their efforts to change the philosophy of education in the public schooling system.

A new philosophy that has taken root as a reaction to progressivism is called Educational Essentialism. This philosophy is a “back-to-basics” movement that arose in the later half of the 20th century. Educational Essentialism is focused on the scope of the curriculum, with strong emphasis on the basics of what should be taught. In 1956, Dr. Benjamin Bloom chaired a committee of educators who defined *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives: The Classification of Educational Goals*. A pedantic pedagogue’s dream, “Bloom’s Taxonomy” as it has come to be known, defines categories of learning along with knowledges, skills, and attitudes for each objective.

The underlying principle behind Essentialism is good: students should be thoroughly exposed to the accumulated body of knowledge in each of the traditional subjects. However, much to the dismay of many good teachers and administrators, this new philosophy is being implemented by further centralizing the control over local schools.

One prominent advocate of Educational Essentialism was E.D. Hirsch. He wrote a book called *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know* (Hirsch Jr. 1988) and followed it with a *Dictionary of Cultural Literacy* which identifies exactly what is - in his view - essential knowledge. A follow-on series of books such as *What your 1st Grader Should Know* have found a place in many homeschools. E.D. Hirsch started a foundation called the “Core Knowledge Foundation.” This group works on defining content-rich curriculum based on principles of essentialism.

Another philosopher, Allan Bloom, promotes a similar educational philosophy of “perennialism.” This differs from essentialism only on the nuances of what is “essential” – making much ado about principles vs. facts and other differences in focus. Allan Bloom, a longtime college professor, was dismayed by the steady decline of his incoming freshman students. This drove him to write a fascinating book on his observations called *The Closing of the American Mind* in 1988. As it pertains to education, this book argues a liberal approach to education based on the great books of western civilization. (Bloom 1987) This runs in the same vein as classical education movement’s ideas on reading primary source materials that have withstood the test of time. This is fundamentally essentialist, but the focus is on the ideas presented in classic works of literature and philosophy rather than knowledge and facts. Bloom’s ideas may have had more impact in the political sphere, as he beautifully articulated the effects of educational decline on society and culture, he influenced conservative political thought.



11) The Nationalization of Education - Top-down Solutions

The current question of public school reform isn't about philosophy of education; essentialism seems to be accepted by all. The current debate is about who gets to define the body of "essential knowledge." The trend seems to be one of nationalization, and solutions that shift with each new administration.

As late as 1996, the Republican Party platform included the abolition of the Federal Department of Education (formed in 1979), and a return to the constitutional concept of state control. When George W. Bush was elected to a second term, rather than abolishing the DOE, he gave it the biggest increase in funding and power in history with the *No Child Left Behind Act*. The nationalization of education is now a bi-partisan effort; no one in national politics is arguing for decentralization.

The latest wave of national educational reform, from Washington D.C., brought with it the Common Core standards. These are national sets of requirements for curriculum content for adopting states to set in place. He who pays the piper calls the tune, and states stand to lose substantial amounts of top-down funding if they don't adopt common core standards. This level of national control over local schools is unprecedented. Common Core testing and ranking requirements include a push for measurable results in the short term. An unintended consequence of this policy is the adoption of curriculums that "teach to the test" and produce the measured "results" as required. This is much to the dismay of good teachers and educators who sense what is happening. The effect is the exact opposite of what essentialists, and – to an even greater extent – perennialists advocate for! The solution isn't further centralization and bureaucratization. The solution is also not a return to the failing philosophies that instigated the reforms, but one or the other is happening across the US.

To be clear, the concept of core knowledge and a "broad curriculum" that exposes students to the accumulated body of knowledge in each of the traditional subjects is a good one. This is exactly what homeschool parents and private schools are achieving with their children. On the other hand, nationalized core knowledge, defined by the pragmatic needs of industry and implemented in a top-down approach will surely fail, as all socialist systems eventually do. A lack of freedom and educational choice is bad policy and will continue to have terrible effects on children. We should assess the alternatives honestly. Despite the economic disadvantage of being forced to relinquish tax dollars to schools they are actively choosing against, responsible homeschoolers continue to prove - by the results - that freedom and parental choice in education is the correct policy.

To date, any significant challenges to the favored monopoly status of public schools have been



Elijah Academy Homeschool Handbook

defeated after stiff opposition by entrenched special interests.²¹ Efforts in opposition seem futile in the face of powerful unions acting in self-interest rather than in the best interest of children. As a result of continued educational declines, more and more will choose to teach their own children. The results of this modern homeschool movement look great in comparison to the extremely degraded public school system results. The goal of every church should be to help each member family achieve excellence in Christian Education, not just relative success.

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²¹ The most striking case is that of Utah, in which the national arm of the NEA, the largest teacher's union in the nation, spent significant sums on negative ad campaigns to defeat vouchers at the ballot box. That they were successful in family-focused Utah does not bode well for similar initiatives in other states.



Elijah Academy Homeschool Handbook

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