



# Elijah Academy Homeschool Handbook

## Forming a Philosophy of Home Education

Forming a Philosophy of Home Education .....	1
1) Homeschool is an Opportunity .....	1
a. Pursuit of Excellence .....	1
b. No Stop Signs.....	2
c. The Right Moral Foundation .....	3
d. Spiritual Growth .....	4
2) How Learning Happens .....	4
a. Motivation .....	5
b. Learning Styles .....	5
c. Maturational Limits .....	6
d. Learning Stages .....	7
e. Repetition over Time.....	8
3) Homeschool Instruction.....	9
a. Personal Attention .....	9
b. Good Study Habits.....	10
c. Early Reading Skills .....	10
d. Multi-Level Teaching .....	11
e. The Learning Environment .....	12
Bibliography .....	13



## Forming a Philosophy of Home Education

Your home school will reflect your “philosophy of education.” This phrase describes one’s beliefs about the best aims, forms, and methods to achieve your goals. In establishing an appropriate philosophy of education for your home school, it may be helpful to reflect on three things:

- 1) The **opportunity** to learn outside the box,
- 2) Understanding of **how a person learns**, and
- 3) Appropriate systems and learning environments for **homeschool instruction**.

The following sections describe these elements in more detail and suggest essential considerations and successful applications for home education.

### 1) Homeschool is an Opportunity

Not just homeschool, but all education is an opportunity. More than that, full-time education may be a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. While “lifelong learning” is a great mindset, never again - after entering upon marriage, career, and/or family life - will a person have such unrestricted amounts of time to put into learning. As parents, of course, we understand this, and we must make our children aware of what an opportunity they have. This opportunity should not go to waste!

It is proper to encourage and require that your child take advantage of this opportunity. It is a very good goal to provide your child with a rigorous and comprehensive, college-preparatory education as a foundation for lifelong learning, and to not limit your child’s God-given potential in any area. That doesn’t mean that your child will or should necessarily go to college, but you do not want them to be limited in that opportunity.

#### *a. Pursuit of Excellence*

The goal for any child should be for their school performance to be their personal best. Homeschool, in particular, is well-suited to fulfill this goal because precedence can be given to doing a job well with more flexible time constraints. A homeschooled student who is ready to move forward is not slowed down by the average pace of the class, and a student who is struggling with a concept is not left behind as the class moves on.

Because academic standards have degraded drastically over the last 100 years, it is reasonable to expect that an average child’s “personal best” will be above the achievement level of their peers in standard schools. Modern, grade-level curricula often do not put children anywhere near their maturational limits. This means you may need to work at curriculum design and seek to accelerate and supplement standard scopes and sequences to make sure that the child is performing at their personal best, not just consistent with their peer group. It is entirely appropriate to expect to accelerate the learning process for an average homeschool student.



## Elijah Academy Homeschool Handbook

Homeschooling may also be the best environment for the struggling learner who would otherwise be labeled by the school system and held back from their potential. We recommend “Homeschooling Your Struggling Learner” by Kathy Kuhl, published in 2009.<sup>1</sup>

God has given each child distinct potential and unique interests. A homeschool can give the opportunity for a student to discover and pursue those interests with passion. A broad curriculum celebrates that each child has various talents. It is helpful to be functionally literate enough to be conversant with specialists in many fields. But the main reason for a broad education is to help the child identify those subjects in which God has planted a desire for deeper knowledge. Some of these talents may not be discovered until a student has progressed far enough into a subject to begin to see the big picture. A special interest in Science, Engineering, Technology, or Mathematics (S.T.E.M.) subjects, for example, typically only develops after years of diligently studying the material at hand. Irresponsible educational approaches can short-circuit this discovery.

### ***b. No Stop Signs***

The road of knowledge in any subject area is a continuous path from start to finish. As the knowledge and ability of the student increases, the road gets steeper. The incremental goal is always simply to master the material at hand. But as the student’s knowledge base increases, they can handle more material at faster speeds. A student that continues down a particular road will master the body of knowledge on a subject and become an expert. At that point, they are able to contribute to improving or extending the body of knowledge.<sup>2</sup>

At the end of high school, we are still far from mastery in many subjects. The purpose of college is the mastery of a specialty subject, and few have the opportunity or time to master the more than a single subject. There is so much to learn about this fantastic world that God created! The purpose of primary and secondary education (high school and below) is broad exploration of the student’s interests and a foundation that does not limit the child in any area. An appropriate, additional goal is to accelerate the process and to progress as far down the road to mastery as the students’ interests will take them – even before college. There are many opportunities to earn college-level credit for courses in a rigorous high school program.

With this in mind, many homeschoolers have found it helpful to think outside the box and “pull out the stop signs” that are imposed by grade-level books along the road to mastery. If a child is ready to progress in math, music, or any other subject, why take a break for the summer just because a

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<sup>1</sup> HSLDA also has some helpful articles and resources including a 20-page guide entitled “You Can Homeschool Your Struggling Learner,” produced in 2013 and available for free on their webpage.

<sup>2</sup> A fascinating example of “no stop signs” is the family of Art Robinson whose children finished calculus at incredibly young ages. A video linked from his webpage provides a good look into his philosophy and methods of education. <http://www.robinsoncurriculum.com/> Accessed August 14, 2014.



## Elijah Academy Homeschool Handbook

certain book has been completed? The continuous and cumulative nature of some subjects lends itself to the removal of arbitrary grade-level roadblocks. This approach may not fit every curriculum. For example, traditional language arts curricula are carefully laid out over the normal 36-week school years, and a certain amount of repetition each year reinforces the concepts at the appropriate expected age range for each year's material. Thus, the summer schedule may be lighter and more focused on extracurricular activities and subjects of particular interest to the child. But it can help the homeschool dynamic to at least maintain the structure of schooling.

### ***c. The Right Moral Foundation***

As real as the academic opportunities are, the modern homeschooling movement is not driven by academics. It is driven by Christian parents who want to remove their children from the degraded social environment of the public schooling system.<sup>3</sup> But the goals of pursuing godly character development and academic excellence are not at odds. Character is the person, and knowledge is the tool. Without knowledge, the grown child will lack the tools necessary to impact the world. Without character, the grown child will be too spiritually weak to put the tools of knowledge to good use. (Waring & Waring, January 1, 1999) We must pursue both – adding to faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge (2 Pet 1:5). This verse shows it to be more than just a parallel pursuit. Faith is the foundation for evaluating right and wrong, truth and error. Indeed, the lack of this foundation is the cause of the social decay that homeschoolers seek to avoid.

Our culture has come to fully embrace the philosophy of moral relativism, the illogical presupposition that all beliefs and actions are of equal virtue. General acceptance of this idea has led to the redefining of an entire set of terminology – open-mindedness, tolerance, authenticity, judging, acceptance, and love. For example, to be “open minded” no longer means humbling intellectual pride to evaluate right and wrong by way of reason. It now means thoughtless acceptance of everything, rejection of reason as a means to discern right and wrong, and denial of the existence of right and wrong in an absolute sense. Similarly, *tolerance* no longer means willingness to let others lead a life different from one's own – accepting the fact that people have different beliefs, some of which are wrong. The new definition of tolerance is the denial of absolutes, based on the absolute that there are no absolutes. (Bloom, 1987) This contradiction results in actual intolerance toward those who understand that moral absolutes exist. Thus the objective of acceptance is not even justifiable on its own terms. It is not “values” that students of truth need to clarify, but “virtues.” These virtues must stem from the objective truth of immutable laws of nature and of nature's God, not normative cultural ethics.

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<sup>3</sup> This is the keen observation of Art Robinson as described in his philosophy of education video. <http://www.robinsoncurriculum.com/>



# Elijah Academy Homeschool Handbook

Homeschooling presents the opportunity to pursue education from the right moral foundation. An understanding of scripture leads us to a vision of academic excellence built on the foundation of godly character through the power of the Holy Spirit. Faith starts through hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17). On this foundation, virtue is built with further understanding of scripture informing doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness (2 Tim 3:16). Ultimately, wisdom is to understand that the pursuit of virtue is futile without the power of the Holy Spirit, as we see in Galatians 5:16, “Walk in the Spirit, and you will not fulfill the lust of the flesh.” Our goal as parents, then, is to call our children up into adulthood and into a relationship with their Maker. The goal is a relationship with God, an empirical knowledge that informs the character, conscience, and worldview.

## ***d. Spiritual Growth***

People who do not homeschool may not understand this, but homeschooling is essentially just parenting in an extreme environment. Some may think that what makes homeschooling difficult is curriculum selection, teaching, or finding opportunities for social interaction. But those are just tasks. We research, make decisions, and move on from that. But the real hard part is keeping the peace day in and day out with a house full of family members that see each other all day every day! The hard part of homeschooling is the “extreme parenting.”

But, there is a flip side to that coin. In the pressures of the homeschool environment, parents have the heightened opportunity to see their children’s character flaws and address the underlying sin problems these point to. The hardship is not for nothing. It is an opportunity for spiritual growth in the homeschooled child! So too, the parents’ character is stretched. There is more sinful anger, frustrations, and hateful outbursts. We must be diligent to restore our children to right behavior in a spirit of meekness, taking care lest we ourselves fall into sin as we are prone to. Let us be careful to bring up our children in the nurture as well as the admonition of the Lord, Ephesians 6:4.

Homeschooling is just “extreme parenting.”

Homeschool parents, relying on the power of the Holy Spirit, can be some of the best examples to their children of the Christian adults they want them to be – imperfect people working as unto the Lord, worshipping him with our lives, and redeeming the time with a lifestyle of lifelong learning. What a great opportunity we have in front of us. It will not be easy. We will certainly need God’s help.

## **2) How Learning Happens**

There are many “learning theories” that seek to describe how learning takes place. It is helpful to consider the question of how learning happens in a student, and apply that knowledge to homeschool instruction. We will consider Learning Styles, Maturation, Motivation, and Repetition over time.



# Elijah Academy Homeschool Handbook

## **a. Motivation**

Learning comes from motivation. It has been said that a child will not learn something they are not personally motivated to learn. This may well be true, but motivation comes in two different forms: extrinsic motivation (external rewards, praise, testing, and/or competition) and intrinsic motivation (a love for learning and an interest in the subject material). Intrinsic motivation is the ultimate goal, but clear expectations and rewards along the way help the process of learning the material at hand until the “ah-hah” moment when it clicks and becomes fun. How can we best can we instill a love for learning? The student must come to recognize that learning adds quality to our lives – whether learning to walk or learning calculus.

## **b. Learning Styles**

When you begin to consider homeschooling, one of the first things you may hear people talk about is “learning styles.” There are various ideas and “models” developed to explain the process of learning. One common one is called the “V.A.R.K. Model.” V.A.R.K stands for Visual, Aural, Read/Write, Kinesthetic. These terms describe different ways in which something can be learned – by seeing, hearing, reading, outlining, or touching. As the theory goes, each person leans toward one or two of these styles, and if you can find the child’s main “learning style” it will be the magic key to educational success. It may be, however, that there is altogether too much obsessing about differences between learning styles in people. Most standard approaches, study methods, and habits will engage various learning styles. A popular quote of disputed origin that has been around since the 1940’s is that:

“We Learn . . .  
10% of what we read  
20% of what we hear  
30% of what we see  
50% of what we see and hear  
70% of what we discuss  
80% of what we experience  
95% of what we teach others.”

Whether or not these numbers are exactly correct, or based on scientific research, the progression rings true in practice. Notice that, as you move down this list toward “what we teach others,” more and more V.A.R.K. learning styles are being engaged at once. For example, in teaching something to others, a person has usually seen the subject matter exemplified (Visual), heard the concepts spoken by themselves and others (Aural), read extensively and written outlines or summaries of the subject matter (Read/Write), and reinforced the presentation of the material with certain gestures (kinesthetic). It is no surprise, then that retention for “what we teach others” is the highest magnitude. If you can get a child to overcome the sense of awkwardness and “teach” their course



## Elijah Academy Homeschool Handbook

materials to an imaginary audience, that may be the most effective way to learn. This mock teaching comes naturally when someone is motivated to learn something quickly. A recommended spelling curriculum, *Spelling Power*, suggests a twelve step memorization technique that engages all learning styles asking the child to read, write, visualize, speak, trace letters with their index finger, and repeat various steps. This engages multiple learning styles.

The point is this: With regard to learning styles - don't obsess about trying to find your student's specific learning style. Instead, motivate and guide your students toward good study habits that seek to engage all styles of learning. People are different, yes. But people are not so different that standard approaches cannot be used with success in all cases. As a practical matter, it is true to say of academics that "knowledge is in books." That is, written materials. With this in mind, advanced reading skills are an essential study skill, and early reading skills are an essential aid to the learning process. But writing essays, discussing concepts, and gaining real world experience is more helpful than simply reading material. The consideration of learning style may be more helpful to consider the study habits of the student, than in evaluating the curriculum material itself. At college level, the student cannot control how the material is presented to them, and must rely on good study habits to engage with the presented material.

### ***c. Maturational Limits***

Another important concept that helps explain how children learn is maturation and brain development. Parents will understand the analogy to early childhood development and psychomotor skills. At about six months something clicks in a baby's brain and they want to learn to crawl. Before that, they are simply not capable of, nor interested in, learning how to crawl. Any amount of coaxing before they are ready is futile. However, once they are ready, encouragement and providing the right learning environment is crucial. Similarly, walking happens at about one year old, and talking at about two years of age with the right environment and stimulus.

Traditional progressions and sequences of cognitive learning are also based on normal, natural limits. Before 5 years old, a child may have difficulty learning anything more than the alphabet and short vowel words in reading; the rest will certainly come more easily in Kindergarten. A second grade child may have a difficult time with a spelling curriculum, but in third grade it starts to click. This is why spelling curriculums traditionally start in third grade. The point is that, notwithstanding the opportunity of home education, one can only push a child to their cognitive limit. Good things that can come out of challenging and understanding those limits, but sometimes it is better to be late



## Elijah Academy Homeschool Handbook

than to be early.<sup>4</sup> If an aggressive plan is running into a brick wall that seems to align with standard maturational limits, then take a break and come back at it in a few months.

It is important to note that slower progress for a given period of time is not an indication of eventual level of mastery. Toddlers who started walking at 9 months don't end up Olympians by virtue of the fact that they started walking 3 months before average. The children who talk earlier than normal are not destined to be great orators. In fact, it is often the case that later bloomers make up the difference and go farther with newfound enthusiasm and deeper understanding. Many who progress slowly through math and science lessons learn them better, and ultimately go farther. The expectation for accelerating a child's education can only go so far. Slow and steady wins the race.

### ***d. Learning Stages***

The classical education movement has contributed a model of maturation that describes stages of learning, rather than age-based grades. Classical Education's model of maturation is described in terms of the "Trivium." In medieval times, the Trivium were three "subjects" that were taught in sequence – grammar, logic, and dialog. In its modern adaptation, the "Trivium," has come to describe three stages of learning. Modern materials can still be taught in the same fashion, but the three stages provide a good model of the child's cognitive development and how the material is understood. The classical learning stages are as follows:

- Grammar** At the **Grammar Stage**, grades 1-4 (also known as "grammar school"), students are concerned with "the thing as it is symbolized" (they love to learn and memorize facts).
- Dialectic** During the **Dialectic Stage**, a student becomes concerned with how things fit together logically. This is "the subject as it is known to be." Students at this stage can be heard saying "Oh yeah, that's why..." a lot.
- Rhetoric** Students at the **Rhetoric stage** are concerned with "the subject as it is communicated." This correlates to the fluency that a student receives in high school subject matter.

However, this model is not something new. The Hebrew scriptures talk about three stages of learning as well. The sequential pursuit of knowledge, understanding, and wisdom is exactly parallel in concept – knowledge is the facts or foundation, understanding is the structure, and wisdom is the applications. This has been called the "Scriptural Trivium" (Bluedorn & Bluedorn, 2001). Indeed, the concept of maturation and stages of learning is scriptural. Isaiah 28:9-10 says "Whom will He teach knowledge? And whom will He make to understand the message? Those just weaned from

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<sup>4</sup> This is the basic point in Raymond Moore's "Better Late Than Early" book, that was well-read in the early homeschooling movement.





## Elijah Academy Homeschool Handbook

milk? Those just drawn from the breasts? For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, here a little, there a little.” The common three-level model for stages of learning, understood by different cultures through time implies that maturation is based on our created nature.<sup>5</sup>

Traditional approaches in natural and social science also follow a three-level model of maturation – facts, understanding, and application. Mathematics, the basis of the sciences, is divided into “primary mathematics” (working with “math facts” until they are second nature at the Grammar school stage), and then learning to understand the applications of arithmetic in middle school and Jr. High, until this can be used for practical purposes (natural and social sciences) in high school and beyond. The focus of science also switches from simple nature study in grammar school (facts), to an understanding of the nature of science, and finally to operation and applications in high school once the appropriate mathematical foundation has been laid. The development of these similar structures supports the idea that three stages of learning is part of our created nature.

These three levels form a very effective framework for curriculum design. For example, Tapestry of Grace is a humanities curriculum that is divided into four years of study aligned with periods of ancient to modern history. The cycle of four years is repeated three times with materials that progress in difficulty at each level, focusing on facts, relationships, and fluency as the cycle plays out. The concept of stages being more natural than grade-levels is also the basis of the multi-level learning instruction. This is discussed in a later section on Homeschool Instruction.

### ***e. Repetition over Time***

Repetition is a powerful concept in discussing how people learn. It has been said “repetition is the key to learning.” Drilling, or “massed practice” is a form of repetition that has a place, but repetition over time, or “distributed practice” is particularly powerful. If you grew up in a church that sang hymns, you probably remember quite a few. You may not have sung these hymns very many times in total, certainly you did not sing them over and over in a single sitting. It is the repetition over time, the distributed practice that has made them stick with you, not drilling or singing them many times through in a short period of time.

The concept of repetition over time is built into many curriculums, but it is important to understand the importance of this application. Grammar curriculums, for example, come back to the same fundamental concepts and build on them each year until the body of grammar knowledge is firmly cemented into the minds of the students by the end of high school. Further use of grammar handbooks and reference materials will reinforce grammatical concepts throughout the student’s adult life. Math curriculums introduce a new concept and may drill it heavily for a period. But, as

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<sup>5</sup> As hypothesized by Bluedorn & Bluedorn, 2001.



# Elijah Academy Homeschool Handbook

the lessons progress, the time increment of repetition becomes longer, as the curriculum spirals outward from the concept, drilling less and less on it. As time goes on, the concept is reinforced naturally as the student uses it to solve more advanced concepts.

The memorization of facts has gotten a bad reputation of late. However, such exercises, although they start with massed practice give a student confidence in the facts. Once the facts become rote, the structure of the problem can be understood. Without math facts, for example, long division is an impossible task. However, once multiplication facts are mastered, the structure of the problem is quite simple to understand; and the solution is quite simply a matter of time. <sup>6</sup>

### 3) Homeschool Instruction

The homeschool teacher is a facilitator. If you imagined homeschooling means a parent stands in front of their children and lectures for 6 hours, then you have the wrong idea. In the homeschool environment, really the only way it can work, especially with multiple children, is the way it worked in the little one-room schoolhouse on the prairie. The teacher's role is to facilitate and stimulate learning. You will instruct and tutor on many things, but also anticipate that your homeschooled child will surpass your knowledge in many areas. As they begin to discover depths of knowledge in subjects you have not explored as deeply, you must become more of a facilitator than a teacher. The best preparation for your students is to start from the beginning to:

- Instill proper motivations,
- Help them form good study habits, and
- Sustain a good learning environment.

Homeschool instruction is also about implementing appropriate systems, motivations, and environment for learning to happen. Curiosity is the engine of learning, and to stimulate and motivate the learning process is the goal. This would be perfectly accomplished if the child could see and comprehend the quality of life improved by the learning at hand. However, this cannot be always accomplished, and children are not reliably enthusiastic about learning everything that they need to know for life. Nor are their brains mature enough to understand the consequences of their inherent tendency toward sloth. It is a guarantee that at some point your child will need extrinsic motivation to get them through the point where they can understand.

#### ***a. Personal Attention***

Personal attention is one of the biggest benefits of homeschooling. It is easy to see that even a homeschool mom with a large family will be able to spend more individual time with students than a teacher with 20 students will. The benefit of individual time is not just for subjects that the student

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<sup>6</sup> In Defense of Drilling – E.D. Hirsch.



## Elijah Academy Homeschool Handbook

is struggling in. More importantly, subjects that the student is doing well at gain an incredible benefit from personalized attention. This latter portion is definitely something that school teachers do not get to focus on. Classroom teachers instruct to the norm, and spend most of their individualized attention on the lagging students. This leaves the more interested students in a peer-segregated classroom bored and held back from their potential. Homeschooling removes the effect of schooling which tends to bring advancing students down to the level of the norm in each subject.

When we say “personal attention” however, we don’t mean helping the student with their work. In fact, this is often counterproductive. Rather, what we mean is mentoring, motivating, and supporting. Anything great accomplished by anyone was done with the help of a mentor who encouraged them and spurred them on to greatness. The mentoring process for homeschool is first and foremost about good study habits. Mentoring also includes introducing them to good instruction and materials that will sate their appetite for learning and not bore or patronize them with busywork. The job of homeschool parents is a full-time responsibility if care is given to the mentoring aspect of homeschool instruction.

### ***b. Good Study Habits***

Good study habits are the foundation for success in homeschooling. Once the discipline of learning is a habit, the homeschooled teacher’s task becomes much easier. Academic knowledge is in books. And education is the process of transferring that knowledge from the books to the person’s head. To be clear, there are other types of knowledge in education – spiritual awareness, physical coordination, social interaction to name a few. But the bulk of schooling is about academic knowledge, and academic knowledge is in books. The earlier a child can read fluently, the earlier they will have the chance to start down the road of knowledge.

Beyond good curriculum materials, essential skills, and learning environment, the process of learning requires only focus, motivation. These are character traits that parents, who know their children better than any professional every will, are best equipped to instill in their own children through appropriate encouragement, discipline, and instruction. If you child can’t sit still for a math lesson, you have a problem, but is it not a problem with the math. It is important to set the example in this discipline. If your habit is being distracted by media all day, then it should come as no surprise that your child doesn’t find interest in his books.

### ***c. Early Reading Skills***

Until a homeschooled child learns to read, the teacher must read everything to the child. A kindergarten “science” curriculum is a very thin book, written at an early reading level. Any first grader who has learned to read well can breeze through it in 30 minutes, and understand the content. Yet we struggle week after week through the kindergarten level “science” book. We should give ourselves a break and focus where the most impact can be made – with reading.



## Elijah Academy Homeschool Handbook

Reading can start in preschool, although there is a maturational limit that may be hit after learning the sounding out of short vowel words. There is no rush, the main thing is to choose a systematic phonics-based reading program and carefully work through it to mastery. Your child will learn to read. In Kindergarten, the primary goal should be early reading skills so they can hit the ground running in first grade. The rest of what is done in kindergarten is busy work. Stuff they will do more of at home with mom than in a school setting - art, coloring, nature study, focusing on fine motor skills before they're ready for it. At this age, they are ready to learn reading and that should be the primary focus.

At third grade, a world is opened up to the student. Books at this level include the likes of *Robinson Crusoe*, *Black Beauty*, *Swiss Family Robinson*, *The Jungle Book*, *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*... These books are the classics. They are classic for a reason – because they are riveting and high quality. They are well-written, engaging, and wonderful reads. This is where early reading skills are so important. These books are written by the best authors in history. If you give a child an abridged version of a classic, you have robbed them of the opportunity to read the whole thing. They will get the essential story line, but miss the beautiful writing and rich vocabulary that made it a classic. It may be better to wait until they can read the real deal rather than expose them to an abridged version.

### **d. Multi-Level Teaching**

One approach that works for large families is the concept of multi-level learning. This concept is a switch in thinking for those used to traditional school; but the approach is no different than the approach that worked well in the one-roomed schoolhouses of old, long before modern curriculums.

The concept applies to pre-K – middle school content subjects like Bible, history, elementary science (nature study), art, and music. Each student will see, hear, read, and understand the topic at an appropriate level, but the homeschool teacher will only have to be prepared for a single lesson. Skills subjects such as math, science, reading, grammar, spelling, and writing do not lend themselves well to multi-level learning because these courses are cumulative in nature, and tied more strictly to age-level maturation.

To illustrate the concept, consider a Bible curriculum could be designed based on reading a chapter per day of actual scripture rather than moral tales and summaries (imagine that!). The Bible reading could be done aloud with all reading children following along. Older children will, of course get more out of the chapter, and may need supplemental materials such as commentaries and exegetical teachings that align with the text. The instructor will also engage with students at different stages differently. Core humanities curriculums like *Tapestry of Grace* and *My Father's World* are specifically designed for multi-level family learning with a reading-intensive approach. In addition



# Elijah Academy Homeschool Handbook

nature study series such as Apologia Science and Real Science 4 Kids are specifically designed for a multi-level approach.

### ***e. The Learning Environment***

A good learning environment is also an essential part of learning. Practically speaking, it is best that each child have their own large desk space and a comfortable chair. It is possible to homeschool at the kitchen table, but it is not optimal. It is also motivating for each student to start the day with a clear desk surface. Thus, the good habit of clearing the desks each afternoon is an effective way to maintain an optimal learning environment.

If the child is focused on learning something, they will naturally seek a quiet environment. It is only natural because it is an effective and good environment for learning. A home with media playing constantly is not a good learning environment. In fact, one common trait of successful homeschools is the absence of time spent on mindless media, and a focus instead on books and good reading materials. It is clear that, if education is the goal, money should be spent on books, not entertainment. If this is done, you will accumulate a home library. As the table below shows, the number of books has been correlated with learning. This should be no surprise.

**Table 1: Average Test Scores by Number of Household Books, Grade 12 (2005-2006) <sup>7</sup>**

<u>Reported number of books at home</u>	<b>Average science score</b>	<b>Average civics score</b>	<b>Average history score</b>
100+	161	167	305
26-100	147	150	289
11-25	132	134	275
0-10	122	123	265

It is easy to calculate that a 6-hour school day for 180 days of school for 13 years is 14,000 hours. A surprising amount of that time is spent on organizational management, not study. But let’s ignore that for now. During that same timeframe, estimates seem to converge around 15,000 hours as the average amount of “screen time” in front of some sort of mindless entertainment for K-12 students. That seems to be a fair estimate – working out to about 3 hours and 15 minutes per average day. Thus, even by conservative estimates, the average child spends more time in front of the mindless media being entertained than on learning.

Every now and then a homeschooled child will do so well it becomes newsworthy. The headlines read “A 16-year old homeschooler in Florida graduates from college” or “10 year old homeschooler

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<sup>7</sup> Source: National Endowment for the Arts, To Read or Not to Read: A Question of National Consequence, November 2007. <http://arts.gov/sites/default/files/ToRead.pdf>



## Elijah Academy Homeschool Handbook

in California passes G.E.D., wants to cure cancer.” These children are promptly declared geniuses as everyone reassures themselves that this is abnormal. These children are not geniuses, they are simply studying in an environment that was the norm 100 years ago, and their results are on par with the results of their peers in that time period. Homeschoolers only look exceptional relative to the steep decline of the public school system.

When people argue for technology in schooling, there is a point being missed. First, if technology is a worthy pursuit, the goal is for the student to have the skillset of a producer of technology, not a distracted consumer of content. Second, the inventors of the technology grew up without it. A common trait of highly successful people like Steve Jobs and Bill Gates is that, although their interests coincided with perfect market timing and consumer demand, they also all spent more than 5,000 hours of extra-curricular time pursuing a productive passion through their teen years. Extra-curricular activities and free study time have a significant effect on learning and lifelong skillsets in many domains of learning. Unfortunately, this aspect of learning is effectively displaced by mindless media entertainment.

The scriptural principle of “redeeming the time” (Ephesians 5:16) applies to the design of the homeschool learning environment. It would be a shame for students to be unprepared for the “good works God prepared in advance that they should walk in” (Ephesians 2) because they were allowed to waste time on mindless entertainment. Moreover, the question of protecting our homes from inappropriate content doesn’t even come into play if the cultivated learning environment leads the students to productively pursue positive passions rather than mindless entertainment.

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