

## MERIDIAN MAGAZINE

Education Series, Part 11

**Mom Schools and Co-ops** By Darla Isackson Click here for [Part 1](#) [Part 2](#) [Part 3](#) [Part 4](#) [Part 5](#) [Part 6](#) [Part 7](#) [Part 8](#) [Part 9](#) [Part 10](#)

Let love, and peace, and the Spirit of the Lord, kindness, charity, sacrifice for others, abound in your families ... Teach to your children these things, in spirit and power, sustained and strengthened by personal practice. Let them see that you are earnest, and practice what you preach. Do not let your children out to specialists in these things, but teach them by your own precept and example, by your own fireside. Be a specialist yourself in the truth. Let our meetings, schools and organization, instead of being our only or leading teachers, be supplements to our teachings and training in the home (President Joseph F. Smith, *Improvement Era*, December, 1904, p. 135).

Many LDS parents are attempting to follow President Smith's counsel by providing a major part of their children's education at home. I've been hearing from some enthusiastic homeschooling moms who band together a few hours a month to give their children a greater variety of experiences, and to take advantage of each others' areas of expertise. They often call their efforts "co-ops" or "Mom Schools."

### **What is the Difference Between a "Mom School" and a Co-op?**

Joyce Kinmont, president of LDS Home Educators Association, [www.ldshea.org](http://www.ldshea.org) says, "A Mom School happens when a mother is homeschooling a child who wants to do something that can be done best in a group, so she invites other homeschooling families to join her. The mom is the teacher. It is different from a co-op which happens when a group of mothers and their children get together and each mom chooses something to teach, [with responsibilities equally divided]."

### **School without Walls**

Mom Schools are especially useful for projects and activities that require group participation, such as Statesmen clubs, choirs, and drama groups especially if they want to produce plays. Group classes can broaden the experiences of older children, giving them important opportunities to interact with their peers in constructive ways. Group classes are also beneficial when any adult is willing to share a specific interest or area of expertise with a group of young people.

Joyce Kinmont says, "Is there a mom who can gather up a group of teens and help them with classic literature, art, or constitutional studies? Moms are not the only ones who can help. Is there a dad or a grandpa who will help a group in his neighborhood with science projects or physics? Is there an empty-nest couple who could mentor a group of teens through their BYU correspondence courses?"

"In a world that is falling apart, teens need a peaceful, gospel-centered education. Private schools are far too expensive [for most families.] The simple solution is homeschool, augmented by mom-schools, dad-schools, empty-nester schools, businessmen-schools, doctor-schools ... a school-world without walls.

Classroom teachers can only tell children about how plants grow or what a policeman does for

the community. Mothers and other interested persons can *show* them and give them hand-on involvement. This 'teaching by immersion' — that includes 'doing' and application and practice of skills — can be so much more effective than book learning alone.

### **Moms Who Are Leading Out**

LDS homeschooler Aneladee Milne started what she calls a commonwealth school. Her teenage daughter wanted to do drama so Aneladee got a group together and taught Shakespeare and did a Shakespeare play (which she chose because there are no royalties). The group grew to 45 families. Currently another person teaches beginning Shakespeare and Aneladee, a theater major, teaches classical acting. The Shakespeare plays she produces are shared at elementary schools around the area. The students are required to read a number of plays (as many as 17) before they can be in one. For more information, contact her at: [aneladee@yahoo.com](mailto:aneladee@yahoo.com).

Aneladee and Tiffany Earl (who has a master's degree from George Wythe College) have co-created LEMI (the Leadership Education Method Institute) from their own group school experiences. LEMI has teacher training for the Shakespeare, constitutional history, and leadership classes. They charge for the great ideas in their program but many Mom School proponents, such as Cyndi Hampton (who is quoted below), find it significantly better than re-inventing the wheel. (see [www.lemiinstitute.com](http://www.lemiinstitute.com)).

Another Mom School is run by Diann Jeppson. (She wrote in her e-mail that the greatest joy of her life is homeschooling her four daughters.) She formed a Statesmanship Club for them. The students study the life of a Founder each year and then she has an event where each student gives a speech. She also invites some adult speakers, and a keynote speaker. One year she had a Benjamin Franklin impersonator come (a college professor). Last year's keynote speaker was John Harmer, former Lieutenant Governor for California under Reagan's administration. This club also holds classic book colloquia, an annual education forum, training for homeschooled youth to participate in the state mock trial competition, an annual, five-day constitutional convention simulation at the Utah State Capitol, workshops on parliamentary procedure, and various leadership-oriented seminars and field trips. More than 200 youth in fifteen chapters experience a variety of opportunities to build character and leadership skills, as well as providing volunteer staffing for numerous community events. Diann Jeppson can be reached at [kdjeppson@yahoo.com](mailto:kdjeppson@yahoo.com)

Joyce Kinmont reminds us that moms can get together just for fun too! She said, "Especially when the children are all young, homeschooling moms I know get together and have park days; the mothers visit and share ideas and the kids play. It requires no preparation and is a great activity that provides a break from the sometimes overwhelming load."

### **Mom Schools that work like Co-ops**

I've received some interesting e-mails from Cyndi Hampton about her Mom's School. Several mothers are involved teaching various classes, so it runs more like a co-op. With her permission I have structured the information she sent me into a question and answer format.

#### ***Are only LDS students involved in your school?***

Our co-op is not exclusively LDS. We have several kids involved who are not members, although they join with an understanding that most of the participants are members of the Church and that we will be discussing our beliefs very freely. We are just ourselves extremely devout members

and the biggest part of our lives revolves around the gospel. There are no "social" Mormons in our group or "social" Christians, for that matter. We do [agree to] seek learning out of the best of books. We have an outstanding group that ... compliments the efforts of the families. We focus a lot on the classics and consequently attract parents who are excited about the classics.

***How many students participate?***

We have 27 students in our group this year, up from 18 last year, with 18 families participating.

***Why did you start the group?***

I believe that once a child hits age 12 or so he really needs friends; our purpose is to give our children a peer group that will inspire them to do great things and have some good clean fun along the way. The best part is that it inspires the entire family to really reach beyond themselves, to study and improve their talents.

***What ages will we be talking about here?***

First, about our older group — 12 to about 16. (By age 16 many have gone on to advanced or specialized education). We also run a group for our children 8-12 that I'll mention later.

***What do you call this older group?***

Polar Star — in honor of President Hinckley's frequent references to that heavenly body. We open each week with a devotional that includes a thought (often from *Stand a Little Taller* or *Way to Be*), patriotic song, reading of the mission statement and a prayer. Our mission statement is, "I am discovering the best within me. Great leadership found in scripture, literature and history will become as a Polar Star to me and to others. My attitude, actions, convictions, service and scholarship will make a tremendous difference in my life, my family, and my world." We also have a written constitution that we use to govern our group. It can be found at our website, <http://polarstaryouth.org>.

We do not call ourselves a co-op but a Mom school, because by and large it is moms who are running it. Each mom has ownership over her own class. Unlike a co-op, each parent is not expected to be an equally contributing member. We have elected officers. Parents volunteer to plan parties, be mock trial coaches, help with the play, etc. [Everyone helps but individual stewardships are respected.] We meet in homes, libraries and other public places such as parks. We only charge enough money to cover the costs of the class. This generally runs about \$5 per month per class. Teachers of the classes get to have their own children in the class for free. There is a great article about the idea of Mom Schools in a past newsletter published by George Wythe College. Find it at their website [www.gwc.edu](http://www.gwc.edu) under "newsletters."

***How do you determine what classes will be included?***

Each of the different classes is headed up by a different mom who decides on her own to do it to meet a need of her own child. Classes are chosen by four criteria:

the topic uses classics and will be important in developing leadership skills,

there is a parent who is excited about the topic to the point that she will go to extreme measures of volunteerism to make sure it happens,

there is a group of youth that want to take it, and

the group setting would be better than what we could do as individual families.

We don't try to cover all the core subjects. Each individual family is responsible for these.

***Why did you decide to pursue this form of education?***

As the guardians of the hearth and home, I believe that education is where we as women of the Church can begin to take a stand and make a difference. As I taught math at a public high school I became concerned about the lack of enthusiasm for learning. Many, many students didn't want to be at school at all, some would work hard for good grades, but not many would learn just because they loved to learn. I wanted to avoid this for my own children if possible. I start researching, and ended up deciding to homeschool. I moved toward the Mom School idea when I became convinced that some of my daughter's needs could be best met in a like-minded group.

***What part does application play in your schools?***

You can study all of the wonderful things in the world, or have classes about the most interesting topics out there, but if you don't have application in a real world situation there is no point to all of your study. That is why we study Shakespeare and then put on one of his plays. We study the Constitution and then participate in a Constitution Bowl or a simulated Constitutional Convention or Peace Conference. We study parliamentary procedure and then use it in our own meetings and attend city, county and state functions where it is used to control our government. We study history and the law and then participate in a mock trial, etc. We teach writing and speaking, then have each student enter writing and speech contests. The application part is what many people miss in their education.

***Tell me about your book club.***

Our book club is called a Colloquium, and is a monthly activity. The kids vote on the books they will be reading from a list selected by the parent mentor. Once a month they have a discussion and a party afterwards. A parent leads the discussion through thoughtful questions, not by doing very much talking herself. It is amazing the classics these kids read so they can go to the party! In past years they have read books such as *Oliver Twist*, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, *Laddie*, and *The Alliance* (by Gerald Lund). They do this activity of their own choosing no one has to read, they just can't come to the party if they don't. We also have a parent program. The parents select their books from the "Great Books of the Western World" reading list. Their party is a wonderful date night (and only one of the couple has to have read the book to attend).

***Tell me about the service aspect of your program.***

Each year we do a service project, generally making items for the Humanitarian Aid Center.

***Do you join with any outside groups?***

This year we are going to join the American Statesman Club of America (started by an LDS homeschooler, Diann Jeppson, and mentioned earlier in the article). Through a class another mom is teaching we are going to have as many kids as possible become registered parliamentarians (17 are taking the test). We will be participating in some mock trials and hope to take our team to the state competition. We study the Constitution in depth and run Constitution Bowls ... Our students have participated in the county and state conventions; it has helped them understand how our government works and what they will need to do if they want to make a difference in our country today and in the future. We also will have a writing class that will focus on the six basic elements of writing. We had about half of the kids enter the Veterans of Foreign Wars writing contest, and our group won every prize they offered at our post.

### ***What subjects do mothers teach in your Mom School?***

This year we had Shakespeare/drama, constitutional history, writing, parliamentary procedure, logic, leadership and great statesmen. We also ran two mock trial teams and are putting on the play *As You Like It*, set in the 1920s.

In my Shakespeare class we study a tragedy in depth, reading it outside of class, discussing it in class, and writing essays on topics that relate the youths' lives to Shakespeare's observations on human nature. Each youth gives a presentation on an Elizabethan theme, which they choose from a list I give them. They can do the typical science fair board or get creative and do skits, games, multi-media —< anything they want. The second half of the year we stage a complete Shakespeare play (not a children's version). The kids do all of the jobs costuming, scenery, props, stage crew, makeup and hair, besides memorizing lines and blocking.

In the constitutional history class we focus on the founding period this year, reading documents and biographies from this time period and relating it to current events. Group presentations were given here. In the past we have also focused on colonial, Civil War and WW I and WW II periods. The history class runs very much like what David McCullough said about history in the Meridian Magazine article "Knowing History and Knowing Who We Are"  
<http://www.ldsmag.com/ideas/050412knowing.html> .

The parliamentary procedure class really makes a huge difference in how much we all understand official meetings. Students run their own meetings, elect officers, form committees and give assignments all according to correct procedure. Eighteen of the youth took this class last year and they all passed the test to become registered parliamentarians.

The mock trial experience was really amazing for how much better we all understand the workings of our judicial system.

In the great statesman award class, students study 12 different statesman by reading a biography, writing a paper, and completing two projects that are completely designed by the student that somehow tie into the statesman. For example, my daughter studied George Washington, made a replica of his copy book with his 110 rules for decent behavior, and completed a geography project. The teacher, Jillayne, is adding 12 stateswomen to her list this year. We will be holding a Mount Vernon etiquette dinner, where students will participate in the formal dinner, learn the minuet, and display their projects.

### ***Tell me what you are doing with the younger children.***

The younger kids' co-op is for 8-12 year olds. We meet every other week for two hours ... Our

mission statement is, "To raise up a righteous peer group for our children, to learn to love to learn, to provide opportunity to learn from the best books, to support one another in our efforts to educate and train our children to be the leaders our Father in Heaven sent them to be so that they may be, indeed, as the Army of Helaman."

To make sure we are all on the same page, every mom must read *A Thomas Jefferson Education* and think that it's a good model. If they do not, we encourage them to start their own group to preserve the integrity of our group. We limit the number of children in the group to 20. (Currently, about 10-12 families are participating.)

The cost is \$4 per month per child; the money barely covers the costs of the activities but keeps everyone committed. We have a president, treasurer and secretary all elected positions. We meet in libraries, parks, homes, field trip destinations and other free public places. I believe it is important for us to use our community resources and to be part of the community at large whenever possible.

In this co-op, every mom is supposed to contribute equally. We expect every mom to (1) be in charge of one event or to lead the study and discussion of one of her favorite life-changing classic books, and (2) be on two other committees. Each book suggested by one mom is voted on by all the moms. (Examples of those chosen: *The Secret Garden*, *Heidi*, *A Wrinkle in Time*). Once her book is chosen, that mom has a committee to help plan four hands-on activities that illustrate important aspects of the book. For example, I was in charge of an activity for *The Lost Prince* (which is a totally amazing book based on the travels of two boys). We played a latitude and longitude bingo game, musical chairs with national anthems. Each country's flag was on a chair, and if you sat on the chair with the same country's flag as the anthem playing you were out of the game. Once out you went for treats from the countries shortbread from England, eclairs from France, chocolates from Germany, and so on. It was so much fun — as all of our ending activities are! Each mom brings in different ideas using a classic book she loves; it really inspires us all to do great things.

In the spring we have a choir and we go and perform at nursing homes. We have a service project done with the whole family usually for the Humanitarian Aid center. We also have the basic parties a harvest party, a family dance Christmas Party (everyone comes to this one, and our Polar Star youth love participating), a Valentine's day party and an end of year party. All family members attend the play.

What we are really attempting to do is to create a community one built of people who will support us in our efforts to educate our children and to do what the Lord wants and needs us to do.

For more information visit Cyndi Hampton's website: <http://polarstaryouth.org> or e-mail her at [cshampton7@msn.com](mailto:cshampton7@msn.com).

Brigham Young said, "What is [education] for? The improvement of the mind; to instruct us in all arts and sciences, in the history of the world, in the laws of nations; to enable us to understand the laws and principles of life and how to be useful while we live" (*Journal of Discourse*, Volume 14, p.82). This quote seems to summarize well what a lot of these Mom Schools and enthusiastic homeschoolers are doing.

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