

## MERIDIAN MAGAZINE

### Education Series, Part 12 To Homeschool or Not to Homeschool? 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](#) [Part 11](#) **Note:** *Darla Isackson will be speaking at the National LDS Homeschool Association Conference "Remember the Witness" to be held Friday, June 3rd from 9:00-4:00 at the Salt Lake Community College at Miller Campus 9750 So. 300 W. Sandy, Ut.*

I freely admit that when all five of my active and rambunctious sons were finally school age, I would have had a heart attack had someone suggested that it was my obligation as a parent to homeschool them all. (In reality, I didn't know a single soul at that time who was homeschooling, and was not even aware of it as an option.) At that point in my life I was dying for the opportunity to take a shower without a child knocking on the door, or to read an article without having to stop in the middle to referee an argument. Besides, I was not a marvelous disciplinarian, and I was married to someone who was out of town a great deal.

Doing a solo with the housework, child care, and hundreds of other responsibilities that come with caring for a large family active in the Church, scouting, Little League, and other things, kept me consistently in the "land of overwhelm." No, I kept myself there by constantly trying to do too much and be involved in too many things. But I honestly cannot imagine adding homeschooling to that picture.

Would I home school if I could go back and do it all over? Not unless I could go back to those days with what I know now and who I have become now. The idea of taking on the education of my children would surely have put me under given my physical, emotional and spiritual weakness at that time. I was definitely one of the parents who sang with gusto the line "And Mom and Dad can hardly wait for school to start again" from the song "It's Beginning to Look Like Christmas." School was the best baby-sitting service I could imagine, and I was well pleased with most of my children's teachers; they were dedicated, kind, and efficient. They were the "experts" and I highly respected them.

However, my oldest son started school thirty years ago! Have things changed? Have the public schools become less supportive of the values we cherish? No doubt. (And — since the subject of education has become prominent I have heard numerous complaints from my children about the difficulties they faced even then.)

### Words from the Brethren

Elder Henry B. Eyring said,

The world in which our students choose spiritual life or death is changing rapidly. When their older brothers and sisters return to visit the same schools and campuses they attended, they find a radically different moral climate. The language in the hallways and the locker rooms has coarsened. Clothing is less modest. Pornography has moved into the open. Tolerance for wickedness has not only increased, but much of what was called wrong is no longer condemned at all and may, even by our students, be admired. Parents and administrators have in many cases bent to the pressures coming from a shifting world to retreat from moral standards once widely accepted. The spiritual strength sufficient for our youth to stand firm just a few years ago will soon not be enough. Many of them are remarkable in their spiritual maturity and in their faith. But even the best of them are sorely tested. And the testing will become more severe ("We Must

Raise Our Sights," CES Address, August 14, 2001).  
Elder Dallin H. Oaks said,

A third concern is with what is being taught or not being taught in the schools that shapes the thinking and values of those who will be our future leaders. I refer to public schools, private schools, and ministerial schools. I fear that some of the values being taught or not being taught to the young people who will be speaking for us from the public and religious pulpits of our nation in a few years are significantly different from the values that have shaped this nation and its people. I have the same fear about what is being taught by TV programs, which command so much of our youth's time. After the recent election I read that one in five voters in nationwide exit polls said that moral issues were the most important consideration in casting their votes. Many of us vote on the basis of our concerns with the position of our public officials on moral issues, but what are we doing to register similar concerns with the values of some of those who are teaching our future leaders? Failure to give attention to this concern will lead us away from civic virtue, civic responsibility, and overall prosperity (*"Where Will It Lead?" BYU November 9, 2004*).

### **My Purpose is to Encourage**

My purpose in writing articles about homeschooling is not to convince those who are opposed to homeschool, or to put a guilt trip on those who absolutely cannot do it or simply don't want to. Rather, I wish to:

1. encourage those who really want to try, but have been reticent to do so
2. cheer and provide ideas for those who are already doing it.

I have received so many testimonials from homeschooling families who love what they are doing and feel that it is the best decision they ever made. So if your heart is drawing you in that direction, I hope these articles will help you. *Every situation is different, and each family must decide what is best for them. However, we all need to be increasingly aware of what is going on in our schools.*

### **How I Became Converted to Homeschooling**

I have not tried to hide my positive feelings about gospel-based, responsible homeschooling in our increasingly valueless world. I am into the second year of observing the homeschooling of my grandchildren and am becoming an active participant; I read with them, take them on a variety of field trips, take them to the library weekly, to my house for special activities, etc. I am intrigued with the possibilities, and thrilled that my daughter-in-law has the energy to do what she does. She converted me to homeschooling in just a few months by the books she gave me to read (see the bibliography at the end of this article) and by her example.

I remember one day being mobbed upon arrival by little grandsons excited to show me the butterflies and moths they had been coloring and hanging from the ceiling. They wanted to share all they had learned about them. Another day they showed me books and videos on caves, and proudly told me the difference between stalactites and stalagmites. (The oldest is not quite seven.) I see my grandson's enthusiasm; they've never considered that it might *not* be fun to learn. I listen to young voices tell me more than I ever learned about varieties of fish, parts on a train, and categories of animals. More importantly, I hear my grandchildren reading from Bible and Book of Mormon storybooks, and see them learning to write by copying vital scripture verses. I listen to the children's prayers and Primary songs at the beginning of their school day; they warm and lift me.

I started the Book of Mormon over again the other day, and the first verse hit me in a different way than before. Nephi said "having been born of goodly parents, therefore I was taught

somewhat in all the learning of my father." I felt quite certain that meant that his parents had taught him true principles. In 2 Nephi 28:14 we read, "That in many instances they do err because they are taught by the precepts of men."

All too often in today's schools, Thomas Jefferson's words ring true:

We are now trusting to those who are against us in position and principle, to fashion to their own form the minds and affections of our youth ... This canker is eating on the vitals of our existence, and if not arrested at once, will be beyond remedy (Thomas Jefferson to James Breckinridge, 1821. ME 15:315).

I like the thought that my grandchildren, during their early years, are being grounded in correct principles and not having to sort out the false from the true before they are even accountable.

### **Challenges of Homeschooling**

Of course, all is not lightness and joy in the homeschooling arena. Though most of this article focuses on the positives, here is a quick summary of the challenges:

- The multitude of decisions that must be made initially, such as which homeschool situation to adopt, which curriculum to use, how many books and materials you need to buy and which you can borrow from the library, which homeschool philosophy best fits your situation and personality and your children's needs, how to structure your days, how to find a good balance between rigidity and permissiveness, and so on.
- Power struggles between parent and child. If this is already a problem, it won't suddenly disappear, but will likely be intensified.
- Falling into the comparison trap with other homeschoolers who do things differently.
- The temptation to get overly involved in outside activities to prove that your kids aren't socially inept.
- The pressure of having the children prepared for necessary testing.
- Trying to keep the house straight.
- The distractions that occur when everyone is home.
- Having precious little time for oneself. (Some mothers find this an insurmountable obstacle. However, Joyce Kinmont, who homeschooled all of her children, discounts this problem. She says, "I found that if I gave my attention to my children in the mornings, they had plenty of activities of their own to do in the afternoons, and I was surprised at how creative they were. I had plenty of time in the afternoon for my own projects. I soon found that I loved being at home with my children — and I still do.")

However, for all of the homeschoolers I've talked to and heard from, the benefits seems to far outweigh the problems. Otherwise, I don't suppose they'd still be homeschooling!

## Does the Church Have an Official Position on Homeschooling?

What about the position of the Church on homeschooling? Some think their recent statement making official their position of no homeschool activities in LDS church buildings was a statement against homeschooling. Actually, the First Presidency did not at all discourage homeschooling, but recognized that "some members of the Church teach their children at home rather than sending them to public or private school" and stating that "the church strongly encourages education." Their purpose was to standardize their policy to avoid the insurance implications when non-church sponsored activities take place on church premises.

In Nov 2000, a letter from the Church Education System (CES) stated that "The Church is neutral regarding home schooling. The manner of education of children is considered to be the parents' decision." (16 Nov. 2000 Clarification of LDS Church Educational System (CES) Seminary Policies on Home Schooling). Over 30,000 children in Utah alone are now homeschooled, and the number is growing as more and more parents become concerned about less than optimum conditions in many public schools.

## Voices of Experience

In this first homeschooling article I want to share Tamary Shoemaker's enthusiastic e-mail. She does an excellent job expressing the reasons she continues to choose homeschooling. She begins with an excellent disclaimer that I echo:

First of all, let me say that I feel strongly that parents should be able to choose the type of schooling that they feel is best for their children and family, without coercion or criticism. So my comments are not meant in any way to criticize those who choose public or private schools. That said, I have found some fantastic advantages to homeschooling and it has been a great blessing to our family and to me personally.

I have three children, ages 9, 6, and 3, and we have homeschooled from the start. My 9-year-old sails through difficult reading material but has a hard time with handwriting. My 6-year-old has so much energy that her body is always moving; she loves soccer and math but is a slower reader than her sister was at her age. My 3-year-old didn't start talking until after he was 2, but is catching up now, and I'm sure he will develop in different ways than his two sisters. My point is that every child is different. In our school of three, I have the freedom, the time, and the motivation to tailor my teaching and help to each child's needs. (And I know homeschool families with many more children who do this even better.) They can learn at their own level and at their own pace, without the stigma of being "behind" or — just as important to me — the artificial comparison of being "ahead." That's a very big advantage I'm thankful for in homeschooling. In the public schools I went to, the system ensured that everyone knew who was "ahead" or "behind." One teacher even seated us according to our grades on the most recent test. Now, all of this did help motivate me to get good grades. I learned the system well. I was good at taking tests and figuring out what the teachers wanted. I started to base my sense of self-worth on being "smarter" than others. It was only later that I realized I had missed out on a lot of real learning. For example, I took history classes, crammed for the tests, then promptly forgot everything.

This isn't completely the fault of the school system. [Of course] my teachers wanted me to learn, not cram. I'm just saying the system let me get away with being lazy. Now I have the chance to provide my children with what I think is a better system. They aren't graded according to some preset scale; they're encouraged to put in *their* best effort and progress beyond *their* previous level. When we read and discuss together, I can tell that their understanding is growing and they remember what they've learned. And I hope they can learn to base their self-worth on their identities as children of God, not on their strengths or weaknesses as compared to other people. I do realize that eventually they will need to learn to take multiple-choice tests, fill in bubbles with

a number 2 pencil, and jump through the hoops that are part of many job, college, and other life experiences. I just believe they can learn that later, when they have a solid grounding in doing their best and when they can understand that those things are *not* the goal of education or a judgment of who they are.

Another great thing about homeschooling is that my children have time to learn what they're interested in. We go to the library at least weekly, and the nonfiction area is their favorite. There are great children's books on just about every subject, and one book leads to another.

Here's the wonderful, magical bonus for me: I get a second chance to learn the things I missed or forgot! We're currently working our way through a world history book. In reading and discussing this with my children, and going further to find more information on things we're interested in, I have learned a huge amount of history. It's exciting! I'm learning even more than my children are, and I love it.

Let me quickly list a few of the other advantages I see:

- We can structure our day in a way that works for our family.
- If my husband has a day off work, we can go on an outing or do an activity together.
- When someone is sick, we can still have our school time (if they're not *too* sick) or cancel it for the day without "getting behind."
- No long evenings of homework, trying to figure out what the teacher wants. We often use our evenings to read aloud together, work on projects, or talk about what we've learned that day — but we do it because we want to.
- Homeschool is very adaptable to my children's changing needs. If one way of approaching math isn't working, we can try a different way. We can make a game out of it. We can put it aside for a little while. They're not penalized for not being ready to learn something.
- With the large number of families homeschooling these days, and with many community classes and sports available, it's easier than ever to find activities, playgroups, discussion groups, and all kinds of opportunities to enjoy doing things with other children. We've had to pick and choose activities so we don't get too busy away from home! The stereotype of children sitting at home all day with no social interaction is definitely not true for any homeschoolers I know.
- Our devotional time is part of school. I truly believe this has helped our family to be centered on Christ. Instead of scrambling to find time to read the scriptures together or discuss the gospel before school, it's the first and most important thing we do for school each day. Also, we are free to integrate gospel principles and teachings into every other subject we study.

I feel homeschool is a great option for those who are concerned about their children having a great education, but who don't have the money for expensive private schools. Yes, I'd love to have thousands of dollars to spend on homeschool supplies and books---the thought makes me drool!---but the fact is, after the bills and basic needs, we don't have a lot left over. Hence our passionate love for the public library! A homeschooling parent can provide an excellent school experience for children, even with very little money. As you can see, I can go on and on about how much I love homeschooling! (You can contact Tamar Shoemaker at [tders801@yahoo.com](mailto:tders801@yahoo.com).)

Joyce Kinmont, president of the LDS Home Educators Association ([www.ldshea.org](http://www.ldshea.org)), pioneered homeschooling in Utah in 1975 and has been totally immersed in it ever since. Some of her children are now having a positive experience of homeschooling another generation.

She said,

The most effective teaching is done in quiet conversations between children and their parents, whether they are cuddled on the couch reading from the best books, sitting at the table working out a math problem with beans or blocks, or in the kitchen fixing dinner together.

Quality conversations require quality preparation. The more parents know, the more they have to share with their children. The more time parents spend with their children, the more teaching opportunities they will have. Homeschooling gives families something of substance to do together and to talk about together. This is how we can give our best efforts to the family.

President Faust recently said, "I encourage our Saints ... to stand more often in holy places. Our most holy places are our sacred temples ... In addition to temples, surely another holy place on earth ought to be our homes. The feelings of holiness in my home prepared me for feelings of holiness in the temple." (General Conference, April 2005)

Since small children don't attend temples, our homes are their temples, their "holy places" of peace and learning. Children need to spend more time in holy homes.

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Bibliography of a few of the books that have influenced my views on education:

*Revealed Educational Principles & the Public Schools: A look at principle-centered education through the Prophets and LDS educational history*, by John D. Monnett (LDS Archive Publishers)

*Teach the Children: An Agency Approach to Education* by Neil J. Flinders

*The Rewriting of America's History* by Catherine Millard

*The Majesty of God's Law* by Cleon Skousen

*Thomas Jefferson Education: Teaching a New Generation of Leaders for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*(a Collection of Speeches by Oliver DeMille)

*Dumbing Us Down: The Hidden Curriculum of Cumpulsory Schooling* by John Taylor Gatto

*Education for Human Greatness* by Lynn Stoddard

*A Charlotte Mason Companion: Personal Reflections of the Gentle Art of learning* by Karen Andreola

*Charlotte Mason Study Guide: A Simplified Approach to a "Living " Education* by Penny Gardne

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