

AROUND THE THICKET  
NEWSLETTERS

*Charlotte Mason*

AMY FISCHER





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# Letters from Around the Thicket

*Charlotte Mason*

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# Contents

<i>Preface</i>	iv
1 Why does educational philosophy matter?	1
2 The Truth about Charlotte Mason's Educational Principles	4
3 How Relationships Make an Education	7
4 Charlotte Mason and Conflict Resolution	9
5 No 'Kids' Menu' Education Needed	11
<i>About the Author</i>	14
<i>Also by Amy Fischer</i>	15

# Preface

I started my blog, Around the Thicket, in 2016 as a place to write about life as a mom of very young children. My blog has grown with me and my children and I now write about teaching those same boys at home, as well as my own self-education, as Charlotte Mason would put it.

As an extension of my blog, I have long sent email updates to subscribers. Only in this last year, however, have I started to focus on emails as ways to develop a writing habit and to communicate more casually with people interested in my thoughts and experiences. In each email I have hoped to give, at the very least, food for thought, and have often tried to give practical insight into practicing the Charlotte Mason philosophy.

The following chapters come from emails I sent in 2020. I have removed announcements and updates that were time-sensitive, but the content is otherwise the same. I hope they give you a taste for what I send to subscribers each week.

If you would like to receive these emails yourself, please visit <https://aroundthethicket.com/subscribe>.

# 1

## Why does educational philosophy matter?

Good morning!

Why does your philosophy of education matter?

I recently gave a talk on Charlotte Mason for the early years. I mentioned delayed academic lessons, lots of outdoor time, and allowing a child to learn through play and according to their own interests. A question that followed was: what's the difference between this and unschooling?

On the surface I can appreciate that the early years in a Charlotte Mason can look a lot like unschooling on the surface, and so I took some time to write up what I think [the essential differences are and put it on the blog](#).

Still, if you end up doing the same things, what difference does your philosophy make?

Personally, I find that educational philosophy forces me to step back from my immediate situation, and ask myself "Where am I trying to go?" and "What is the best way to get there?" When we forget the answers to

these questions, or if we fail to take the time to ponder them, it's like setting out on a walk in the wilderness with out a compass and a map. We'll end up somewhere, but we don't know where.

I've been reading about Johann Pestalozzi this week. He was a Swiss educational reformer, and Charlotte Mason, as a young woman, was trained in his philosophy and methods. His contribution to education was less about a particular method of instruction, but more about changing the *purpose* of education. Educating children for the purpose of a vocation or to go to university lead to dry teaching and dull students. He argued that instead that children should be educated 'for being children of God'.

Like Charlotte Mason, Pestalozzi wanted parents (specifically mothers), to step back and ask the big questions about education. Why must children learn? What should they learn? How should they learn it? When we have developed foundational answers to these questions, we are able to 'see our way', as Charlotte Mason writes. We have a compass to give us direction, and we have a map for navigating our way there. The way forward, while not easy, is much more clear.

Educational philosophy matters. It is essential that we ask ourselves where we are leading our children. Are we leading them towards being children of God? Towards becoming people who have many interests and who *care* about the world? Taking charge of our children's education can feel daunting, so I will leave you with this encouragement from Pestalozzi's *Letters on Infant Education*:

*Talk not of deficiencies in thy knowledge, -love shall supply them; -of limitation in thy means, -Providence shall enlarge them; -of weakness in thy energies, -the Spirit of Power himself*



## WHY DOES EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY MATTER?

*shall strengthen them:—look to that Spirit for all that thou dost want, and especially for those two grand, pre-eminent requisites, courage and humility.*

All the best,

Amy

## The Truth about Charlotte Mason's Educational Principles

Good morning!

A year and a half ago, I set out on a mission to blog through each of Charlotte Mason's Twenty Principles of Education with a twist. I wanted to inspire other moms with the idea that our opportunity to become 'educated' is not over. Just like our children, we are born persons. We have minds that need their appropriate nourishment, and to neglect this need leaves us smaller people, with less to offer our children, family, churches, and communities.

As I got started, I noticed something funny as I looked for other resources based on Charlotte Mason's principles. Many other people started writing their way through these twenty ideas, *but hardly any of them finished.*

While this surprised me, I didn't stop to think about why until I started writing the posts for my own series. And then it suddenly made sense. Here are some truths about Charlotte Mason's principles:

1. **They aren't sequential.** When you look at a list like the principles, you expect each principle to follow on from the idea before it in the list. This isn't how Charlotte Mason's principles work, though. Some principles are more important than others. Some are logical conclusions based on the previous principles. Others introduce completely new strains of thought.
2. **They are repetitive.** Some of Charlotte Mason's principles are there to sum up the principles before it. Others communicate very similar ideas in not-very-different ways.

As I found out for myself, these qualities make it challenging to write through Charlotte Mason's principles *sequentially* and *individually*. There are so many connections between each of the principles that it is almost impossible to pull one out and consider it on its own, without becoming repetitive and wordy.

This put something of a damper on my enthusiasm for my blog series.

However, I'm not one to give up, even if it takes me more than a year to complete something, which is why I am so excited to share that the Mother Culture Road Map is *written* and will be published in weekly instalments over the next several weeks. I hope you'll enjoy these insights into how these principles (however challenging they are to write about) can inform and encourage our own self-education as mothers.

If you'd like to read a brilliant book that manages to write about Charlotte Mason's principles, do get a copy of *In Vital Harmony* by Karen Glass. She solves the problem that I and so many others have had by *not* trying to write about Charlotte Mason's principles in order, but rather by their two captain ideas.

## LETTERS FROM AROUND THE THICKET

The next installment in the Mother Culture Road Map will be available on my blog this Sunday. In the meantime, [catch up with the series here.](#)

All the best,

Amy

# 3

## How Relationships Make an Education

Good morning!

After several weeks' break, we started school this week! My theme for this term is 'light-hearted'. To me, homeschooling is serious business, but sometimes, I take it too seriously. In practice, this means my patience gets short, I feel cross, and I get grumpy with my kids.

As I've meditated over our first two terms of 'formal' homeschooling, I quickly came to the conclusion that going forward, I want to be careful about my attitude. It's ok to take homeschooling seriously (it is serious!), but I don't want my low-reserves of patience to damage relationships.

Relationships are essential in a Charlotte Mason education. After all, Miss Mason herself says that 'Education is a science of *relations*'. These relations grow in many directions.

First, we see our children develop a relationship between themselves and the material they study. Our children 'get to know' the characters in their books, the birds and trees in their garden, the men and women

of history, as they would get to know a friend in real life. Part of the vital nature of education is that our children develop a vibrant, personal knowledge with these people, animals, and ideas.

Second, our children see relationships between their different areas of study. Our children will recognize that a certain book took place during a period of history you have studied. They will see the outlines of a fairy tale they read come to life again in a novel. They will notice mathematical patterns within nature. As they make these connections, their world becomes more complex, interconnected, and rich.

Third, our children develop their relationship with us. As we come alongside our children and *enjoy* their studies with them, we have the joy of partnering in this pursuit of knowledge. In our shared experiences learning together, we develop a common language, share the same stories, and deepen our relationship with one another.

My goal, which I will not achieve with perfection any time soon, is to approach each homeschool day putting my focus where it needs to be, on relationship, and take every opportunity to put that first.

Education isn't just a science of relations for our children. It's a science of relations for us, too. You might enjoy [reading my latest blog post on this topic!](#)

All the best,

Amy

## Charlotte Mason and Conflict Resolution

Good morning!

My husband likes to tease me by saying I have a Charlotte Mason quote for everything. He even has a specific look that he gives me to communicate the question, 'Did Charlotte Mason say that?'. Of course she did! Charlotte Mason seems to have had something to say on nearly every topic.

Even when she didn't write something directly on a topic, there are usually connections to be made. This is what happened a few months ago when I read an article (that I can no longer find) about effective conflict resolution.

The author of this article gave the advice that when tempers are starting to rise, we can lower the tension and resolve arguments by using reflective listening. When we listen reflectively, we hear what the other person has to say, refrain from judgement, and *tell back to them what they told us*.

That's right: in order to resolve conflict, we need to narrate. Miss Mason wins again!

Why does narration lead to conflict resolution? Because in order to faithfully tell back something you've heard or read, you must quiet your inner voice. You must pay attention to what is said. You cannot be mentally occupied with making a judgement, crafting your rebuttal, or deciding how to make your point. In short, in order to narrate, you must make yourself humble, ignore yourself, consider the other person as more important, and *stop* doing all the things that escalate an argument.

Narration is powerful, even outside of homeschool lessons. For this reason, I am pleased to share about the [role of narration in a mother's education on t](#) Humility, listening, and forgetting self are central to learning, so we shouldn't overlook this simple educational tool.

All the best,

Amy



## No 'Kids' Menu' Education Needed

Good morning!

Have you ever held a kids' menu side by side with the regular menu at a restaurant and felt a little sad? I have. A kids' menu, at most eateries, enshrines a multitude of ideas about children.

Kids' menus communicate ideas like, "All kids want to eat are simple, fun foods, like burgers and fries. And that's ok!" They tell our children, "Food for adults isn't nice, or interesting, or worth your consideration." Kids' menus say, "Your tastes and interests are immature, you *couldn't* like this other food, so don't try it."

Now to be honest, my kids love burgers and chips and pizza, and are excited to eat out at a place that has these foods that don't make it into our home-cooked rotation as often as they would like, and when we do eat out (which isn't often), I let them choose from the kids menu. My concern isn't with my kids enjoying some slightly greasy food every now and then - it's with the tacit communication that they *wouldn't* enjoy the adult menu.

Charlotte Mason, when writing about the educational code of the Gospels in her first volume, calls this ‘despising the children’. We (or in this case, the creator of children’s menus) think little of our children’s potential to like and enjoy what is good and wholesome for them, and consequently offer them limited options. The consequence is that our children start to believe that they can’t and won’t like these foods, and that they never get enough exposure to the foods to help them develop a taste for them.

Most of us offer our kids a wide variety of wholesome, nutritious foods that our children mostly like and eat. They get the opportunity to try out and learn to like what is good for them. The odd children’s menu meal isn’t such a big deal. But we must be very cautious of applying this mentality in our homeschools.

“My children don’t like to read old books, so we only read new ones.”  
“My boys don’t like books where the main characters are girls, so I’m substituting our curriculum.” “We really don’t like nature study, or poetry, or classical music...so we’re swapping, opting out, doing something else.”

The feast of a Charlotte Mason education is broad, and we are limited beings. Sometimes a subject or activity has to take a hit for a season, but that is a far different reason to axing books because we don’t think our children can learn – or *should* learn – to like them. We should not despise our children by giving them a children’s menu education.

Leah and I talked through Charlotte Mason’s educational code of the Gospels on a recent episode of the Thinking Love Podcast. If you’d like to hear more about how to “offend not, despise not, hinder not one of these children”, **I hope you’ll take some time to listen!**

## NO 'KIDS' MENU' EDUCATION NEEDED

All the best,

Amy

## About the Author

Amy is a wife and a mom of three boys. Originally from Indiana, she now lives in the northwest of England. She holds a BSc in Applied Mathematics and an MA in Education. She worked for a number of years in higher education before leaving the workforce to care for her children. Her hope for her children is that they grow to be curious, thoughtful, self-motivated problem solvers, who can teach themselves anything they want to know.

Amy shares the practical working-out of her parenting and education philosophies at her blog, Around the Thicket. She regularly writes about mother culture, parenting, and the Charlotte Mason philosophy of education.

You will also find her on the Thinking Love podcast, where she is a co-host on the show, chatting about Charlotte Mason, the early years, and more.

**You can connect with me on:**

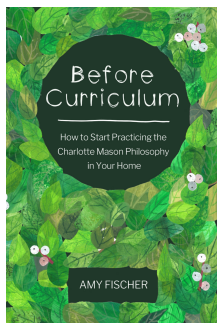
 <https://aroundthethicket.com>

 <https://thinkinglove.education>

**Subscribe to my newsletter:**

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## Also by Amy Fischer



### **Before Curriculum: How to Start Practicing the Charlotte Mason Philosophy in Your Home**

<https://aroundthethicket.com/before-curriculum>

*Unsure where to start. Overwhelmed with options. Spinning your wheels.*

Bring simplicity to your Charlotte Mason journey and root yourself in the essentials: deep principles of education that will set your focus, build your confidence, and give you practical tools to educate the Charlotte Mason way.

Instead of tick boxes and to-do lists, Charlotte Mason's broad principles show us how to give our children a beautiful, well-rounded education. With this book, you will learn some of the most action-oriented of these principles: the educational 'tools' of atmosphere, discipline, and life.

You will be able to apply these tools in your home right away and build your confidence as a Charlotte Mason educator – even if you are just starting out.

