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## Teaching Many

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Life is very busy in our home. Rick and I are the parents of 14 children, ages 31-7 years old. We only have nine living at home now, as four are married and Josh was promoted to heaven a few years ago. All of our married children still live in town and now we have four (soon to be five) grandchildren. Life, as I said, is busy, but very rich. We are very blessed.

We've been home educating since 1980. We've just completed our twenty-sixth year. I've been frequently asked how is it possible to home school so many at the same time? Our school day is generally a three hour period in the morning, although sometimes the older children will have reading to finish up in the afternoon. Presently, our house has three rooms in close vicinity of each other, which we utilize during the morning schooling time. The dining room table is where those writing do their work. The living room is where those sit who are reading and the kitchen table has traditionally been the center for the preschoolers and toddlers who are working on their projects. By the way, I have special learning activities for preschoolers, which I save only for use during school time, so they look forward to using them. They are things like flannelgraphs, learning puzzles, shapes to glue on paper, magnetic dolls, weather boards, shapes to outline, special markers and preschool workbooks, learning clocks, etc. I am the coach, assigner, corrector, and concept explainer. I juggle my time between those needing help. When one is doing handwriting, for example, I am free to help another with math. Halfway through school time, we take a snack break and I spend special time with my preschoolers. When someone is reading history, I'm helping another with grammar. Each child is allowed to proceed at their own rate in each subject. For example, one who is gifted in math might be a "grade level" or two ahead, age-wise, but slower in grammar skills. God created each child uniquely and what is right for them is right.

My oldest son, now holds a position on the county Board of Supervisors, was fascinated with history from the time he was a very little boy. In first grade, he read the fourth grade history book from cover to cover- eight times! Math, on the other hand, was never a big interest to him. He did it only because I required it. His desire is to be statesman- a godly politician who doesn't compromise on his stand for truth in government.

My now twelve year old son, Tucker, who was slow to take off with reading, will figure out extremely difficult math problems ... in his head! Then, when he gets the answer, he'll try to figure out how many other ways he can arrive at the same answer. He thinks and sees math. He never ceases to amaze me. His frustration, however, is the English language, which is not exactly the most logical language in the world. When he learns a rule, then come the exceptions. A couple of years ago, in exasperation, he stated, "Maw, the guy who made up the English language had a pencil in one hand and a jug in the other." He's reading now and sometimes he does it just for fun!! I thought the day would never come, but he is brilliant in math! That's how God made him. God made each one uniquely and it's part of His perfect plan to help them fulfill the special plan He has in store for each one in life. You have to learn not to fret arbitrary standards set for the "average child". Until his reading skill progressed enough, I would read his history and science to him each day, and he has great retention. He also listened to every G A Henty book on tape available as he would play and he has tremendous vocabulary skills. So, by the time his reading is up to his knowledge level, you'll never know he was ever "behind" in reading. He wasn't, just on God's time table for him.

Learn to master the books, instead of letting the books master you. Pick and choose and don't feel like you have to do every last problem. For instance, every math curriculum I've seen has too many problems each day. When I assign work, I will circle 10-15 problems to be done each day. If they can do them and understand them, there is no need to do 30 of the same thing. That just frustrates most kids. If they understand, we move on to the next lesson tomorrow. If they are struggling, we stay till they get it! When children are young, I will often let them answer questions orally. Kids can think so much faster than they can write. I do require some neat handwriting each day, but in small amounts when they are young, to learn neatness. If given too much, they tend to just try to get it done, instead of striving for excellence. Again, each child is different. My oldest daughter loved to write. She would begin each day just listing all her assignments, just because she enjoyed writing. In her spare time, she'd write lots of stories. She practiced different styles of handwriting just for fun. The point is, feel free to guide each one in what is right for them. Just because a curriculum says to do it one way, don't feel bound by it. Every child excels in something.

Maybe, it's even hands-on things like building or working with wood. With academics being done by noon, we use the afternoon for exploring their own interests. My second son who wasn't a book worm like his older brother, would be motivated to get his book work done so he could work on his bookcase building business in the afternoon. My oldest daughter was a Creative Memories consultant in her high school years. While some children will choose to read all day long, others will want to start a business, or build a treehouse, or raise chickens or rabbits. When those individual interests crop up, find an outlet to allow your child to pursue them.

Tuck will have a consuming interest in different subjects for a while, satisfy his interest, and then pursue something else. Two years ago, he wanted to do a science experiment every day!! Whew! Was it ever hard trying to come up with new experiments. We never did manage to do one every day, but he did a bunch. We have about every science experiment book out there. Then it was birds. He made bird feeders to suit certain types of birds, purchased the seeds that those kind of birds like to attract them and then watched them as they would build nests and raise families outside his bedroom window. This year, he's growing raspberries and has a very tasty crop. He also began a business making leather belts and nearly any hour of the day, you may here the boom of his tooling hammer as he creates a new design. Now, he's been after Dad to help him build a treehouse with all kinds of neat features and a barrel seat so he will have a quiet place to sit and read!! Gotta encourage that one!

One of the biggest joys of homeschooling is watching those God-given interests crop up and being there to supply the books, materials, etc to let your children pursue their interests. The academic bookwork is only a part of true education. Real education takes place all day long, our entire lives. The joy of home educating is the parent-child relationship and the child-family relationship. I love what my son Matt said when I was quizzing him about why he was glad to have been homeschooled. He said, "One advantage was getting to really know your family, instead of just meeting up with them in the evening. ".It's being together as a family, letting each pursue their God-given interests while instilling in them a sense of mission to strive to accomplish great things for God. It's walking through life with your eyes on Jesus and your arm around your kids. It's growing and learning and serving together. May God bless each of you as you invest your life in the treasures God has given you - your children.

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