

Ambleside



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Discipleship

The Father has a beautiful inheritance for each of us. And to enter that inheritance, we must become the persons He intends us to be. Such a becoming requires discipleship.

Thus, there is no greater responsibility of parent and teacher than this...

“

It is by doing, that we learn to do; by overcoming, that we learn to overcome; and every right act which we cause to spring out of pure principles, whether by authority, precept, or example, will have a greater weight in the formation of character than all the theory in the world.

— CHARLOTTE M. MASON —

This edition is dedicated to that end: that we may rightly guide children to

fullness of living.



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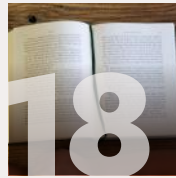
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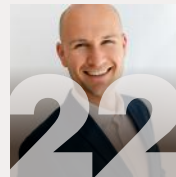
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Member Schools

Dear Friends of Ambleside,

I'm pleased to present this third edition of the Ambleside Magazine, rich with stories of impact and practical applications of a Charlotte Mason education in Ambleside schools worldwide.

God's Faithfulness in Our Growth

We rejoice in God's faithfulness and celebrate the many ways He has blessed our Ambleside member schools this year:

- Two new schools have launched! **Ambleside School of the Rio Grande** and Ambleside Ocala's second campus, **Ambleside Magnolia**.
- **Rocky Mountain Christian Academy** is back in their original classrooms after a burst pipe and resulting damage from last year.
- **Ambleside School of Boerne** is in the process of moving to a new, larger campus.
- **Ambleside School of Marion** has nearly doubled in size in the last three years.
- **Ambleside School of Colorado** is planning to launch a second campus in 2026 and a third in 2027.
- **RiverTree School in Minnesota** will launch a second campus in 2026.
- One new member school will launch in 2026 in **Seminole, FL**.

Looking Ahead with Intentionality

As we celebrate these wonderful developments, we are also engaged in important work for the future. Our leadership team is currently focused on succession planning and organizational development to ensure the Ambleside movement continues to flourish for generations to come. This intentional preparation reflects our commitment to stewarding this mission well beyond the present moment as we work daily for **the renewal of Christian education**.

How to Start an Ambleside School

The Ambleside movement is spreading across the globe. If you are inspired to start an Ambleside school in your area, go to amblesideschools.org/why-start-a-school to learn more.



Standing beside you,

Dean Peterson

DEAN PETERSON
Executive Director



A publication of Ambleside Schools International

Dean Peterson | Executive Director
Maryellen St. Cyr | Founder, Director of Curriculum
Bill St. Cyr | Founder, Director of Training

Contributors
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Copywriting, Editing, & Production
Bloom Messaging LLC, BloomMessaging.com

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P.O. Box 2976 | Fredericksburg, Texas 78624
Office@AmblesideSchools.org | 855.338.5433

AmblesideSchools.org

A LIVING EDUCATION

TO DISCIPLE IS TO LEAD ANOTHER IN ONE'S WAY OF LIFE, AND THE ONLY WAY OF LIFE ONE CAN IMPART IS THAT WHICH ONE LIVES. ONLY A KIND ADULT CAN LEAD A CHILD TO KINDNESS. ONLY A HUMBLE ADULT CAN LEAD A CHILD TO HUMILITY. ONLY AN ADULT WHO DELIGHTS IN LEARNING CAN LEAD A CHILD TO DELIGHT IN LEARNING. WE CAN ONLY GIVE WHAT WE POSSESS. WE CAN ONLY IMPART WHO WE ARE. CHILDREN ARE SHAPED FAR MORE BY WHAT THEY EXPERIENCE IN US THAN BY THE CLAIMS WE MAKE.

The Art of Discipleship

Discipline for the Children's Sake



By Bill St Cyr
*Founder, Director of Training,
Board of Directors
Ambleside Schools International*

Anyone with the clarity of eye and purity of heart to make an honest assessment will see in every child a great wonder. Unless something has gone terribly wrong, all children bring light, life, energy, curiosity, and affection in a manner that far surpasses most adults.

But at the same time, children are impulsive, selfish, greedy, passionate, cruel, deceitful, and in many ways more open to blame than their elders.

A little girl loves with the passion and devotion of a woman, but she is demanding in return and is jealous of anyone given more attention than she. The sweet boy is quick to help in any way, but equally quick to distract himself and others. An older boy is a natural leader; generally benevolent on the playground; he becomes a tyrant when his will is crossed. There is the timid, affectionate girl who will even tell a fib to shield her sister; and there is the high-spirited girl who never lies, but who does, now and then, bully; and so on.

All are beautiful, precious children; all have what Charlotte Mason called “defects of their qualities.”¹

From Disposition to Character

At Ambleside, we know that a child brings with him into the world, not character, but disposition. Disposition is the set of tendencies (some virtuous and some vicious, some life-giving and some life-depriving) that a child inherits by genetics, gains by

imitation, and establishes by experience. **For a child to become what he is intended to be, some tendencies will need to be strengthened, some will need to be diverted, and some will need to be transformed.**

A child's character – the fullness of virtue that he is created to manifest – is “original disposition, modified, directed, expanded by education; by circumstances; later, by self-control and self-culture; above all, by the supreme agency of the Holy Ghost.”²

Discipline Rightly Defined

Most of my generation grew up in homes where discipline was punishment for being bad. Get caught doing what you ought not be doing, and you got punished (which often meant something painful happened). All of it was done in the hope of preventing future offenses, and usually, what was true at home was also true at school.

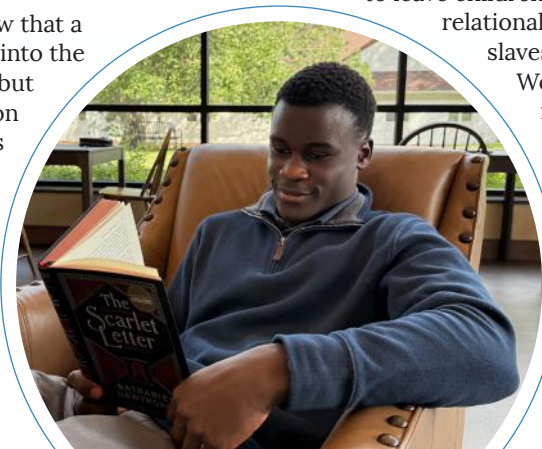
While remnants of this approach remain, few now advocate for the old methods of “train by pain.” Over the last decades, most have sought a kinder, gentler approach to the raising of children. One recognizes “children are persons” and must be treated with the dignity and respect due all persons.

But does this mean abandoning the disciplined bringing up of children, leaving them to their own dispositions? Absolutely not. To do so is

to leave children emotionally immature, relationally incompetent, and slaves to their chance desires.

We do not abandon the responsibility of discipline, but we do renew it.

To discipline is not to punish. Rightly understood, it is to disciple.



Discipline as Discipleship

It wasn't until the 16th and 17th centuries that "discipline" began to carry the sense of enforcing obedience through punishment. The words discipline and discipleship come from the Latin root *disciplina*, which means "instruction" or "training," and from *discipulus*, meaning "learner" or "follower."

As is the case in the Gospels, a disciple is one who follows and learns from a teacher. Originally, discipline referred to a system of teaching and training given to followers.

The Art of Discipling Children

An Invitation to Follow

To disciple is to lead another in one's way of life, and the only way of life one can impart is that which one lives. Only a kind adult can lead a child to kindness. Only a humble adult can lead a child to humility. Only an adult who delights in learning can lead a child to delight in learning. Only an adult who manages emotional distress well can lead a child into managing emotional distress well.

We can only give what we possess. We can only impart who we are. Children are shaped far more by what they experience in us than by the claims we make.

Furthermore, children will only follow those who are glad to be with them. Children experience those who are not glad to be with them as being unreliable and unsafe. And children will not follow those whom they have experienced to be unreliable and unsafe. **They may submit, but they will never follow.** (Fear can be a powerful means of control.)

We only follow those who build joy bonds with us, those who are with us and for us, both when we are strong and when we are weak.

The Potency of Ideas

Children live by what they know, both by what they have witnessed and the ideas they have assimilated. Ideas are not to be thought of as merely a set of propositions. One can affirm



a proposition as true without assimilating the guiding idea. To have an idea is to apprehend a set of relationships.

Such assimilated ideas guide us in determining our behavior and decisions. *I am tired and irritable. Is it like me and*

my people to "take it out" on others?

Or is it like me and my people to quiet myself, take space for myself, and be kind? Ideas that have been assimilated are potent. Long before modern talk of neuroplasticity, Charlotte Mason claimed that the brain "grows to the modes of thought in which it is habitually exercised."³

It is important to note that, as a rule, children do not assimilate ideas offered by lecture. They assimilate ideas sown lightly, intentionally, inspirationally as they walk daily with those to whom they joyfully belong.

The Training of Habit

If every picking up of a fork, every turning a wheel, every opening a door, or every smile required a conscious decision to act, life would be unmanageable. To relieve us, habits govern 99% of every person's life. **Habits are the dispositions by which we live. They are the rails upon which the locomotive of life runs.**

Thus, there is no greater responsibility of parent and teacher than to "consider well the tracks over which the child should travel with profit and pleasure; and, along these tracks, to lay down lines so invitingly smooth and easy that the little traveler is going upon them at full speed without stopping to consider whether or no he chooses to go that way."⁴

At Ambleside

At Ambleside, we are not content to leave ourselves or our students to the "defects of their qualities." We are convinced that the Father has a beautiful inheritance for each of us. And to enter that inheritance, we must become the persons He intends us to be. Such a becoming requires discipleship. 📖

¹ Charlotte Mason, *Parents and Children*, (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1989) 84. ² *Ibid.* 23.

³ Charlotte Mason, *Home Education*, (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1989) 116. ⁴ *Ibid.* 110.



“‘I am, I can, I ought, I will,’ must vibrate in every human breast, for ‘tis our nature to.’ The capable, dependable men and women whom we all know were reared upon this principle.”

— CHARLOTTE M. MASON

The Sacred Mystery of Childhood:

Born with Capacities that Defy Measurement, Yet Dependent Upon Adults to Guide Them to Maturity



By Maryellen St Cyr

*Founder, Director of Curriculum,
Board of Directors
Ambleside Schools International*

Throughout all time, adults have characterized children by their behaviors, both good and bad. Often this characterization takes on a life of its own as the child becomes labeled according to that behavior: a loving heart or a deceiving spirit, highly intelligent or academically weak.

Charlotte Mason became a beacon of light when she brought the truth of personhood to educators, be they parents or teachers. Charlotte Mason’s high consideration of personhood was informed by her varied opportunities to observe children and teachers across a wide demographic – from classrooms in mining towns to private lessons by tutors. These opportunities provided insight and practice, as well as a framework of foundational truths of what it means to educate.

I am: to “rise on stepping-stones of our dead selves to higher things.”

I can: “be conscious of the power to do that which we perceive we ought to do.”

I ought: “within me is a moral judge, to whom I feel subject to, and who points out and requires of me, my duty.”

I will: “determine to exercise that power with a volition which is in itself a step in the execution of that which we will.”¹

How much better it would be for our students (and each of us) to not only recite the motto, but to give conscious thought to the succession of truths, gaining both a greater understanding and application of the power of ideas as proclaimed in the motto.

What is the ideal? The ideal is the consistent active participation of both parents and teachers in the lives of the children before them. Children are often seen through the lens of their limitations. Both parents and teachers excuse and justify children’s weaknesses rather than supporting growth.

But it is poor training that keeps the child dependent upon the personal influence of the teacher or parent. It is the work of education to find another way of supplementing that weakness of will, which is the bane of most of us as well as of the children.

Bringing children up at home and in the classroom takes both wisdom and time. Charlotte Mason continues asking the educator “why the recognition of the potency of ideas, both the word and the conception it covers enter so little into our thought of education?”² And she continues further in stating:

“In effecting the renovation of a man, the external agent is ever an idea, of such potency as to be seized upon with avidity... The potency of an idea depends upon the fact of its being complementary to some desire or affection within the man. Man wants knowledge, for example, and power, and esteem, and love, and company; also, he has within him capacities for love, esteem, gratitude, reverence, kindness. He has an unrecognized craving for an object on which to spend the good that is in him. Now is it not marvelous that, recognizing as we do the potency of ideas!”³

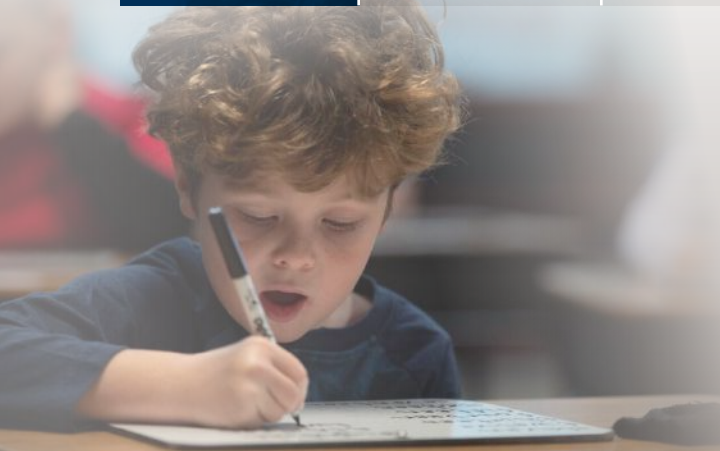
Children are sacred mysteries, born persons with capacities that defy measurement. And yet they are dependent upon adults to guide them in the path to maturity. And the path is “continuous and progressive, with no transition stage from the cradle to the grave, except that maturity takes up the regular self direction to which immaturity has been trained.”⁴

¹ Charlotte Mason provides both the inspiration and a commonsense application of the truths as presented in the motto. ² Charlotte Mason, *School Education*, (Charlotte Mason Research and Supply, 1989), 35. ³ Charlotte Mason, *Parents and Children*, (Charlotte Mason Research and Supply), 1989, 164. ⁴ Charlotte Mason, *School Education*, (Charlotte Mason Research and Supply), 1989, 60.

Ages and Phases

Developmental Timeline of Children's Growth

	K-2	3-5	6-8	9-12
Personal	Lives in joy; delights in things, ideas, and work; receives well; returns to joy from distress; self-quiet; sustains attention; perceives the reality of God the Father, and God the Son.	Sustains joy when challenged, deepens curiosity; recognizes Captain Ideas; increases body mastery; grows in knowledge and trust in Jesus.	Develops clear sense of true, God-intended, joyful identity; delights in active engagement with Captain Ideas; sustains effort over time; dutiful; clear allegiance to Jesus.	Lives consistently out of true, joyful identity; thinks deeply and converses cogently on Captain Ideas; remains a source of stability for the community; initiates good works; conveys Christ in words and deeds.
Interpersonal	Trusts teachers; enjoys classmates; models strong belonging and peaceful obedience; plays well; asks for help.	Communicates, contributes, and attends to thoughts and feelings of others; works and plays collegially.	Appreciates and embraces the community; trusts leadership; clearly expresses thoughts and feelings while valuing those of others.	Joyfully bonds with peers and teachers; recognizes, serves, cares, and balances self-valuing and self-sacrifice.
Academic	Delights in varied story (<i>Aesop's Fables & The Lion, Witch, and the Wardrobe</i>), nature, Bible, music (Beethoven & Sousa), picture study (Fra Angelico and Audubon), poetry, and biography. Introduction to phonics, arithmetic, spelling, oral reading, and narration.	Delights in novels (<i>Black Beauty & The Yearling</i>), science (ornithology & geology), Bible, music (Vivaldi & Dvorak), picture study (Raphael & Rembrandt), poetry, and stories from British and American history. Handwriting and written narrations.	Delights in novels (<i>Robinson Crusoe & Fahrenheit 451</i>), science (entomology & human anatomy), Bible, music (Bach & Ellington), picture study (Van Gogh & Vermeer), poetry, and American history. Narration and formal composition.	Engages with complex texts (<i>Lewis's Mere Christianity, Dante's Inferno</i>); mature writing skills and research; systematic study of world history, American history, advanced sciences and mathematics, life skills and leadership, Bible, and spiritual classics.



* The Developmental Timeline is not comprehensive. It illustrates some of the varied studies and texts, not including formal art, music, physical education, geography, foreign language, drama, information technology, citizenship and community service.

* Captain Idea: a great, inspiring, or foundational truth of a particular subject; idea that plants a seed and produces growth

Ambleside Leadership Panel

*Discipleship is about positive change.
How have you seen lives changed at Ambleside?*



Melinda Boshears
Principal, Ambleside School of Boerne

True discipleship is about seeing others through the eyes of Christ. We walk beside others and assist with struggles, rather than view them as problems to remedy or solve.

We have a student who started in Pre-K and it was noticeable her first year that she struggled overall with academics; however, she lit up a room with an internal light that can only come from Jesus. Everybody gravitated to her, and she knew every student and parent by name in no time at all, along with details about each one.

Both the parents and grandparents are very active in her life and sought answers in order to help her. It turns out she has a chromosomal difference. Not long after the diagnosis, her grandmother came in to visit with me. She posed the difficult question of how long will Ambleside continue to accept this child?

The Holy Spirit's words flowed through me easily. I told her, "I don't put a timeline on relationships, and what (this child) brings to Ambleside is far greater than anything we could ever teach her." This chromosomal difference did not diminish who she was – a child of God made in His image, nor did it diminish her purpose on Earth or at Ambleside.



Jennifer Carlson
K-8 Principal, RiverTree School

When we walk alongside students in the work of discipleship, we see radical transformation in their lives and the lives of their families. Sometimes we witness these positive changes in small, simple places; some changes, however, are deeply profound.

Students who have previously looked at the ground when talking to others start to make eye contact. Students who used to rush through their work discover the joy of slow and careful

progress. Classes that have struggled with kindness start to soften and come toward each other in compassion. Students who have struggled with respect toward teachers grow to accept correction and enjoy doing as they ought.

We also see changes in families. Parents help in the work of habit training at home and discover their mornings before school are more orderly. Families have chosen to reduce or eliminate video games or screens in their home after good conversations about the impact these elements are having on their children.



Matthew Perkins
K-12 Principal, Ambleside Colorado

This summer, 17 Ambleside Colorado students and parents went on a weeklong mission trip to Poland, where we led a VBS, a sports camp for teenagers, and then a nightly English/evangelism program. The six high school students shared their testimonies and told stories about how Christ has worked in their lives.

Throughout the week, those students led many of the activities, prayer times, etc. and demonstrated what it means to lead humbly, showing Christ's love. At the end of the trip, the Polish church members shared what a special school Ambleside must be, as they were in awe of how the students led and interacted with the Polish children, many of whom were not believers. That is a direct reflection of the discipleship the students have received throughout their Ambleside careers. And now, they are the ones discipling.



James Price
*Head of School, Rocky Mountain
 Christian Academy*

The Ambleside educational philosophy and method states that education is an atmosphere, a discipline, and a life, but many parents have come from systems that only focus on the atmosphere, with the vague hope that it will somehow transform a life by osmosis. However, the parents who are drawn to our school have felt the lack of discipleship in other systems and want something different, but they do not know how to do it differently.

Thus my interactions with parents are built on a premise that I am not coming to them after the fault is found in order to lay blame, but I am coming alongside them in a positive manner to come up with a unified plan on how best to support their child together. You can see the relief in parents' eyes when they realize that they have come to a school that cares enough about their child to not only address weaknesses but to also bring them into the conversation early enough to create a solution as a team.

Education changes lives, but an Ambleside education transforms families.



Megan Krober, M.ED
*Principal/Founder, Ambleside of the
 Willamette Valley*

Ambleside has reoriented my own understanding of what true discipleship is: discipleship looks forward, has an orientation toward a growth mindset, and takes place before failure occurs, at times making failure less likely. Discipline, on the other hand, looks backward, has an orientation toward control, and takes place after failure.

Discipleship communicates *I am glad to be with you, I am not overwhelmed by this challenge, I know the way forward, and I am here to work through this with you.* Discipleship is the long game.

When teachers and parents are consistent in supporting growth through discipleship, positive change will occur.

A few years ago, a new student enrolled and had some well-formed habits from previous schools. These habits included interrupting lessons by blurting out, making unhelpful comments or jokes, and using a louder than typical volume. Over time, teachers brought the student into awareness with reminders, inspirational ideas, and parental support. Now, years later, this student contributes to class discussions, respects the atmosphere of the classroom, uses (mostly) appropriate humor, and is a leader in thought rather than the center of attention.



Rebecca Aidala
Head of School, Ambleside Concho Valley

Thinking of the oft quoted statement, "What we call them with, we call them to," gives us a higher calling in terms of discipleship. We see the obvious embodiment of discipleship between ASI and Heads of School, Heads of Schools to teachers, teachers to students, and great texts to students' minds and hearts, the Holy Spirit pervasive throughout.

However, the most inspiring discipleship occurs amongst the children. After several decades serving at Ambleside, I have seen students mentor, support, honor, and prefer others over self. There is a culture of acceptance here – a "it's good-to-be-me-here-with-you" atmosphere.

The most recent transformations are from two young men who have taken on leadership-by-default roles. Both students began here with a mistrust in authority. They soon learned, though, that they are seen; they are heard; and they are known. In the same way, they have taken this alignment to their peers and younger students. They are aware of others, opening doors, helping with others' chores, asking to serve at school during the summer.

Both have launched after-school clubs, and the littles adore them. The discipleship above them and around them has transformed them. This transformation has empowered them to call others toward them with love, respect, and dignity. Because these boys have changed; others are changing around them. Positive transformation is contagious!

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE WILL HAVE ITS USES IN THE DAILY LIVES OF THE CURRENT WORKING GENERATION AND LIKELY AN EVEN GREATER ROLE FOR THE NEXT GENERATION. THE DOWNSIDE IS THAT IT MAY CREATE MORE OPPORTUNITIES FOR SPECIFIC COGNITIVE SKILLS TO REMAIN UNDERDEVELOPED. THE PEOPLE WHO DON'T POSSESS THOSE COGNITIVE SKILLS WILL BE LESS FREE AND INDEPENDENT THAN THEY WOULD HAVE BEEN OTHERWISE.

Character Formation 20 Years After the iPhone

Technology, AI, and Our Children



With Russ York
Head of School, Ambleside School of Fredericksburg

One thing AI hasn't changed is the process of character formation and discipleship.

It has, however, diminished their occurrence in homes and schools. Human beings are creative, relational beings, created in the image of the God of the Universe. Our purpose is to know and love God and to love our neighbor – meaning we will find fulfillment in doing these things. Thus, proper use of any technology should contribute to human fulfillment, not detract from it.

The rapidly advancing pace of technological development presents an interesting and pressing challenge.

Even as we, as educators and parents, learn to navigate the never-ending cascade of “what’s next,” we also understand that how we interact with technology, including AI, carries significant consequences for the generation in our care.

We must accept that artificial intelligence will have a functional place in the daily lives of the current working generation and will likely play an even greater role for the next generation. However, understanding its negative consequences and positive influences is key to teaching our children how to think about it properly.

The downside of this tool is that it may create more opportunities for specific cognitive skills to remain underdeveloped. The people who don't possess those cognitive skills will

be less free and independent than they would have been otherwise. For this reason, among other ethical issues, AI usage in the home, school, and workplace must be guided by a strong set of rules based on a moral code.

Today's technology has no neutral setting and should always be assumed to be overly invasive to family life. Therefore, parents should always start with an intentional plan to control and monitor what they allow into their homes.

Parents should first familiarize themselves with AI, research its power and potential for abuse, and establish family usage standards based on what would be good for humans – not just what is easy.

The plan should have rigid boundaries that everyone adheres to, and it should never rely on the presumed and hoped-for character of the family's children. Hope is not a plan, and the burden of responsibility is too much for children, and most adults for that matter, to bear.

Humans need to have loving relationships with wise people who are willing to share their wisdom with us. Disciples need to read widely and develop skills that will better equip them to discern truth and beauty. Human-based educational models, where children spend their time with faithful adults and peers who love well and guide them to the truths of Christ, are needed now more than ever.

In a society such as ours, Christian education remains the greatest lever that the church has for “training a child in the way he should go,” which is why we must invest in these schools with our time, talent, and treasure.

How parents relate to AI will dictate much of what their children assume about its proper use.

As parents craft an intentional plan for each piece of technology in their home, they should include designated days, times, and locations for use. The plan should also incorporate 24-hour and weeklong breaks from technology. Preserve technology-free family times, such as meals, reading times, and family meetings.

To aid in this effort, choose to be a part of school, church, and social groups that share your thoughts on the proper place and use of technology. Your community will shape your child's habits as much or more than your home will.

The proper use of any technology should contribute to human fulfillment, not detract from it.

The work of a student is to learn how to communicate what they have learned. Any reliance on AI to generate work meant to represent what one has come to know is not to be tolerated, for obvious reasons.

Alternatively, suppose the student used AI to gather more information (that can be verified as true) as part of the learning process to write more effectively when the time comes. In that case, the student is using AI in the same way I used an encyclopedia, thesaurus, or dictionary when I was in school.

In this way, the acceptable use of AI can be discerned by asking one simple question before using it: *Am I using AI to do the work for me, or am I using AI to get what I need in order to do the work myself?*

AI doesn't need to be scary.

The consequences that AI holds, both good and bad, are speculative at this point, so the uncertainty surrounding all that comes with AI can cause a bit of anxiety.

It would be prudent for parents, teachers, and school leaders to remember that anxiety is one of the human emotions that can easily transfer to those around us. AI is largely a part of our children's future, and if the future is doom and gloom, then we are not exactly sowing seeds of hope for the good that God's children will be doing in the world of tomorrow.

Be careful with your words, take heart, and help your children navigate these uncharted waters.

For Further Reading

- The Book of Proverbs
- *The Tech-Wise Family: Everyday Steps for Putting Technology in Its Place* by Andy Crouch
- *The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains* by Nicholas Carr
- *The Collapse of Parenting: How We Hurt Our Kids When We Treat Them Like Grown-ups* by Leonard Sax

About Russ York Seventeen years ago, Russ was introduced to Charlotte Mason's philosophy by his wife, Heather, after she attended a transformative internship at Ambleside School of Fredericksburg. Then a public school history teacher pursuing a master's in American Studies, Russ was increasingly drawn to Mason's vision of a "living education" — one that he found himself unable to pursue within the confines of state mandates and objectives. In 2013, after completing his graduate studies at the University of Dallas, Russ and Heather moved to Fredericksburg, where he became Head of School at Ambleside. Now in his twelfth year of leadership, Russ is more eager to see this work go forth in the world than he was on day one.





Portrait of a Graduate

The Standards of an Ambleside Education are Different on Purpose

When we look at a child, we see a whole person, made in the image of God. They have endless potential, an innate desire to know, and a curiosity that propels learning for a lifetime.

Our primary concern is the kind of person each child is becoming.

Because we are constantly growing and changing as individuals, there is never an “end product” as the goal of an Ambleside education. Rather, we are working to develop specific, enduring qualities in our students that provide a foundation for a life well-lived.

- Thinking, open-minded individuals of godly character
- Demonstrating an ability to form healthy relationships
- Maturing in the art of living well
- Emulating the biblical example of leadership modeled by Jesus
- Pursuing optimal ways of relating to God, self, others, ideas, creation, work, and leisure
- Growing knowledge of and love for Jesus
- Showing a humble, proactive servant love of all persons
- Showing kindness and respect toward others
- Acting with a compassionate heart for weakness
- Committing to reaching their God-given potential in academics, ministry, and vocation
- Working with strong habits of excellence
- Demonstrating self-mastery
- Growing in a rich intellectual life filled with inspirational ideas

Ambleside does not seek to be an elite prep school but rather to provide a “living education” to children of varying backgrounds and abilities, where each child is guided and empowered to author a full and free life, one rich in relationship to God, self, others, ideas, and all of creation.

Thus, our primary concern is the kind of student each child is becoming, not the mastery of particular data or technique, for we are confident that the student who masters the art of learning will attain his full potential for mastering data and technique.

Students who master the art of relating well to God, self, others, ideas, and creation will attain the fullness of life for which they were created.



Alumni Snapshot



Reid Comstock
*Ambleside Fredericksburg,
Class of 2007*

After graduating from Ambleside, I earned a BA in philosophy from Wheaton and a PhD from the University of Notre Dame.

Current Role

Assistant Professor of Instruction, University of Texas at Austin

Education: The Awakening of Proper Loves

In his letters, Plato describes the process of education as a process of kindling one's proper loves. What are one's proper loves? For Plato they are three: love of truth, love of goodness, love of beauty. Plato believed that these loves are natural both in the sense that they belong to us by our nature and that we are born with them.

But these loves are feeble at first; their voices are present but crowded out by the demands of other more imperious masters like our desires for money, power, or status. That our proper loves at first are weak and feeble Plato intends by referring to them as mere sparks. But these sparks can be kindled into burning flames if nourished and cultivated in the right way. And that process – the process of strengthening our proper loves – is the work of education.

I often think of this image when I think of my time at Ambleside. Though I have never had the chance to speak with my former teachers about the pedagogy that lies behind the school, I imagine it is a pedagogy that boils down to the following thought: At the end of the day, all loves are alike. To nourish them, to help them grow, one must feed them. And all loves are fed by what they are desires for.

For instance, to nourish one's love of beauty, to kindle that spark into a burning fire, one must bring the soul into contact with beautiful things. *Mutatis mutandis* for truth and goodness. My memories of Ambleside are memories in which the truth of this claim is demonstrated again and again.

What happened to me when I went outside on Wednesday afternoons for nature study? Yes, I learned facts – many of them. Facts about monocots and dicots, evergreens and deciduous trees, etc. But something more important than the mere uptake of information was at play. The humble works of nature – the buds, leaves, roots, etc. of little plants and shrubs – are beautiful. And by attending to these, by painting them and describing them intricately and in detail, I came to love them.

But this love, as educational theorists would say, is 'transferable'. It is not merely the small and easily overlooked works of nature that I came to love. In coming to love these little things, I was being trained to love beauty wherever I might find it – in a well-wrought sentence, in a virtuous deed, in a great work of architecture. The small spark was being protected, fed, and allowed to grow. And in the same way, by being brought into contact with what is true and good – through the study of Shakespeare, Thoreau, Thomas a Kempis – I found myself learning not simply about truth and goodness but to care for them.

That, I take it, is what Plato thought education was for: not the mere accumulation of knowledge, but the awakening of our proper loves. My time at Ambleside was a testimony to that conviction, and I like to think that I carry those kindled sparks within me still.

WHEN WE DIRECT THEIR NATURAL HUNGER FOR KNOWLEDGE TOWARD QUALITY MATERIALS AND TAKE THE QUESTIONS THEY ASK SERIOUSLY, WE ARE GUIDING THEIR CURIOSITY TOWARD A LIFELONG LOVE FOR LEARNING BY AFFIRMING THE KNOWLEDGE-SEEKING PROCESS, WHICH ENGENDERS MORE OF THE SAME BEHAVIOR.

Cultivating Curiosity, the Hallmark of a Lifelong Learner

How to Encourage a Love of Learning Through Ages and Stages



With Monica Sutton

***Principal, Ambleside School of
Fredericksburg***

Curiosity is a buzz word in Charlotte Mason education.

It's not that we teach curiosity to our students – Charlotte Mason believed that curiosity is an innate desire for knowledge that every child possesses from birth. The responsibility that we as teachers and parents carry is that of developing a child's curiosity. It is not something we can impart to them; it is a desire they already possess that we can and should direct.

Like all hunger, it can be satiated with either a heavy portion of sweets, or with a balanced, nutritious meal. Healthy curiosity must be cultivated, or else the hunger for knowledge will eventually die off altogether and reject the hard work of real thinking.

Poorly directed curiosity can become inward-focused, creating children who are self-absorbed, self-inflated, and self-interested. Healthy curiosity, on the other hand, ends in magnanimity – an ability to empathize with others, and to act sacrificially for the good of the whole.

Healthy curiosity draws us outside of ourselves and awakens us to the fact that there is a “special work” set aside for each one of us. It becomes a God-Hunger that yearns to know Him and understand one's place within the divine plan.

When we direct their natural hunger for knowledge toward quality materials and take

the questions they ask seriously, we are guiding their curiosity toward a lifelong love for learning by affirming the knowledge-seeking process, which engenders more of the same behavior.

Cultivating Curiosity in Pre-K Learners

Parents can begin fostering curiosity in their homes before their children are ever enrolled in a school program by setting aside time to be outside together. Children are naturally curious, and without a device to distract them, they will naturally attune to the wonders of the world that they encounter as you explore together.

Pay close attention and let your child lead. When they shout with joy because they see a frog sitting on the side of a curb, don't walk past it. Pause and ask a lot of questions. Watch as animals dive into their holes and burrows, build nests, lay eggs and nurture new life. Write down your child's questions each time you visit, and take time to read their questions back to them.

Cultivating Curiosity in Elementary Students

As students progress into their early elementary years, you can expand this practice by sending them on scouting missions at natural areas or parks.

Set parameters for their mission, saying things like, “Do you see this Mexican Sycamore and that Pecan tree? Do you see all the plants between them and the space where the ravine drops down to the creek? Take five minutes and go explore in that area. Make as many observations as you can and then bring one

specimen back to me that you are curious to learn more about.”

When they come back with their curiosity specimens, ask lots of questions. Encourage your older elementary students to write down their questions and observations and to draw a picture of their specimen.

When you are done scouting for the day, pay a visit to the encyclopedia section in your local library to see if your children can find answers to any of their questions, or invest in a stack of bird, mammal, tree, flower, and insect guides for them to consult.

Cultivating Curiosity in Pre-Teens

As children mature into their early teen years, they become naturally curious to know more about their friends, family members, and teachers. At the same time, their imagination strengthens as they yearn to know what lies in the future: they are full of questions about where they will live one day, what their impact will be in the world, and who will be a love worthy of their forever promises.

Pay attention. Notice how much of your child’s dialogue each day is centered around themselves. Notice the tone they use when they talk about friends and acquaintances. Can they say something nice about the person in class with whom they have little in common? Are they curious to find the good in others, or are they quick to make judgments?

Pay attention and ask lots of questions. “If your friend were here right now, would they appreciate you telling that story?” Regardless of your child’s initial response, you have laid the seed for them to ask themselves these same questions later when they are alone with their thoughts.

Cultivating Curiosity in Young Adults

As teens enter into high school, they have a sense that the world they have known is small and the gates to a wider world are about to open wide for their exploration.

In her book, *A Place to Belong*, Amber O’Neal Johnston discusses the need to make sure that we build our family homes with both mirrors and windows. Through their early years, your child has likely encountered many storybooks that are mirrors to their own lives: the children in the stories they read look like them and the heroes are people living out principles that



you hope your child will one day embody.

Johnston suggests that living libraries need to include both stories that are mirrors, and stories that are windows – stories that provide the opportunity to gaze out into the world from within the safety of the home.

These stories portray people who look and think differently from us and live in ways we might not consider best for our own families. These windows are especially important in the teen years. Let your soon-to-be-adult read, but pay attention and ask lots of questions.

While Charlotte Mason acknowledges the reasonable desire to protect our young people from harmful knowledge and people of bad character, she also acknowledges that young people are more likely to seek out bad companions if they are given no point of reference for the things of the world. If you will not share your experiences, they will seek out and revere bad companions who are full of worldly experiences and are eager to share what they have learned.

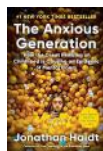
In *Pride and Prejudice*, Wickham and Kitty are important characters for your teen to meet as much as Darcy and Elizabeth.

The goal in all of this is that we are providing substantive materials and making room for students to observe, discover, ask questions, answer questions, and share in the joy of communal learning that is theirs to experience in all its fullness.

About Monica Sutton Monica grew up as a student at Ambleside School of Fredericksburg. After graduation, she pursued a career in teaching and now serves as Principal at the same school. Throughout her eight years as a teacher at Ambleside, Monica has served as lead teacher for grades 4, 5, 6, and 9 and completed the ASI Master Teacher Training Program, allowing her to pursue one of her greatest joys: training teachers. She spends her days observing teachers, providing sample lessons and feedback, building relationships with parents, teaching, leading student discussions, and developing plans to help students feel successful in their classrooms. Monica enjoys early morning chats with students about butterflies, inspecting student-built fairy houses and forts at recess, and helping to foster a love for learning in the entire community.

Reading and Listening for Parents

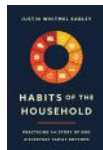
What We Recommend in 2026



The Anxious Generation

BY JONATHAN HAIDT

Explores the impact of digital technology on children's mental health and development



Habits of the Household

BY JUSTIN WHITMEL EARLEY

Practicing the story of God in everyday family rhythms



The Story of Charlotte Mason

BY ESSEX CHOLMONDELEY

Complete biography of Mason's life as told by one of her devoted students



Rembrandt Is in the Wind: Learning to Love Art Through the Eyes of Faith

BY RUSS RAMSEY

How art and artists illuminate something about God, people, and the purpose of life



Praying Like Monks, Living Like Fools

BY TYLER STATON

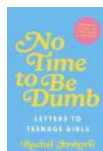
Deepening your prayer life and bringing you closer to God through scripture and development



A Place to Belong

BY AMBER O'NEAL JOHNSTON

How to build a living library in your home through which children can gaze safely into the world



No Time to Be Dumb

BY RACHEL JANKOVIC

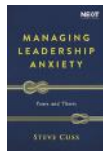
Mother-daughter read with good and true ideas to think about for teen girls coming of age



Relaxed: Walking with the One Who Is Not Worried about a Thing

BY MEGAN FATE MARSHMAN

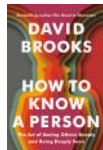
How to stop trying so hard and start resting in Jesus



Managing Leadership Anxiety

BY STEVE CUSS

Spiritual and practical responses to anxiety in ourselves, our families, and organizations (not just for leaders)



How to Know a Person

BY DAVID BROOKS

Timely book about how to communicate with curiosity and respect



The Collapse of Parenting: How We Hurt Our Kids When We Treat Them Like Grown-Ups

BY DR. LEONARD SAX

Newly revised for parents seeking to help their children fulfill their potential in a toxic culture



Building Bounce: How to Grow Emotional Resilience

BY MARCUS WARNER & STEFANIE HINMAN

Train your brain to grow your emotional capacity and parent your children in ways that build joy



The Tech-Wise Family

BY ANDY CROUCH

How to set up healthy routines and boundaries with technology



The 4 Habits of Raising Joy-Filled Kids

BY MARCUS WARNER & CHRIS COURSEY

Raising kids who know how to work for and wait for what is truly satisfying in life

Podcasts



Uncommon Knowledge

BY PETER ROBINSON

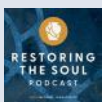
Interviews scholars, economists, journalists, political leaders, and other thinkers on their views of the world



The Holy Post

BY PHIL VISCHER & SKYE JETHANI

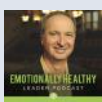
Creator of *Veggie Tales* discusses living a thoughtful Christian life in an increasingly post-Christian culture



Restoring the Soul

BY MICHAEL JOHN CUSICK

Becoming whole by cultivating deeper connection with God, self, and others



The Emotionally Healthy Leader

BY PETE SCAZZERO

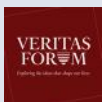
Paradigms and practices leaders need to transform their church culture and multiply deeply changed disciples



The Allender Center

BY DR. DAN ALLENDER

Stories, interviews, and conversations about the deep places of heartache and hope



Veritas Forum

Believing that generous dialogue is essential for universities and the Christian faith alike



Trueface

BY BRUCE MCNICOL, JOHN LYNCH, & BILL THRALL

Practical and helpful applications of grace and truth so we can live beyond the mask

What Does Charlotte Mason Say About...

With **Maryellen St Cyr**

Founder, Director of Curriculum, Board of Directors
Ambleside Schools International



Scheduling

"In the first place, there is a time-table, written out fairly, so that the child knows what he has to do and how long each lesson is to last ... this idea of definite work to be finished in a given time is valuable to the child, not only as training him in habits of order, but in diligence; he learns that one time is not 'as good as another'; that there is no right time left for what is not done in its own time; and this knowledge alone does a great deal to secure the child's attention to his work."¹

When students come into an Ambleside classroom, a timetable of subjects for the day is on the left side of the classroom board – minus the times. The teacher monitors the time and is diligent in keeping the time allocated for each subject.

Hence, students are aware of the daily schedules and what comes next. The day is authorized by the teacher, not a system of bells or anxious students. A peaceful atmosphere pervades in the classroom with both students and the teacher.

Spiritual Growth

"We hold that all education is divine, that every good gift of knowledge and insight comes from above, that the Lord the Holy Spirit is the supreme educator of mankind, and that the culmination of all education (which may at the same time be reached by a little child) is that personal knowledge of and intimacy with God in which our being finds its fullest perfection."²

Education, as it was intended, is to provide nourishment and insight through the nature

of ideas³ in what it means to know God within the created world, through ideas in the Scriptures, and in various genres of fiction and nonfiction.

This progress in character and conduct is not attained through conditions of environment or influence but only through the growth of ideas,⁴ given and received with conscious intellectual effort. A gamut of persons⁵ present these ideas to each of us intentionally and unintentionally, through mediums which garner our attention and shape us.

Our Children's Friends

"None of us can be proof against the influences that proceed from the persons he associates with. Wherefore, in books and men, let us look out for the best society, that which yields a bracing and wholesome influence. We all know the person for whose company we are the better, though the talk is only about fishing or embroidery."⁶

True worth is in being – not in seeming or in dreaming of great things to do – but in doing some little good each day that goes by. Remember that in every person there are two selves; seek for the higher in your child and help them to overcome the lower. We have each of us the mightiest weapon in the world, which if wielded rightly, may be an instrument of blessing to those around us – that is our influence.⁷

Educate your children in the beauty of friendship through scripture and literature. These are happy mediums to engage in conversations regarding persons, their behaviors, and their motives.

¹Home Education, 183. ²School Education, 95. ³Gaining Insights through the connecting of ideas with other ideas. ⁴Ideas are live things of the mind. ⁵Various persons, i.e., family members, teachers. ⁶Ourselves, 163. ⁷Elsie Kitching, "Influence."



WE ASSUME THE ONLY ALTERNATIVE TO BEING STRICT IS BEING PERMISSIVE, AND NEITHER OPTION FEELS QUITE RIGHT. BUT THERE'S ACTUALLY A THIRD WAY.

Beyond Strict or Permissive: The Third Way of Parenting

The Charlotte Mason Way That's Grounded in Stewardship



With Kimberley Lorden
Co-founder, Ambleside School of Colorado

I used to think I was a strict parent, and that strict was good. Looking back now, I realize my strictness was often based on my own convenience. If I wasn't tired, I'd be okay with my kids staying up later to play a game, especially if their dad was on a business trip.

But if I was exhausted? Then they really needed to go to bed at 7:30 sharp. My children could sense that my directions were arbitrary, which actually meant, "Mom does what she wants." Then they began to wonder why they couldn't do what they wanted, too. This is the genesis of power struggles between parent and child.

What I thought was firm parenting was actually creating conflict. A consistent bedtime shouldn't be about my mood; it should be a decision based on their best interest, on what is right and good. They simply need adequate sleep, as do I.

Many of us feel trapped between two extremes when it comes to parenting. We don't want to be dictators, but we fear that if we relax our grip, chaos will take over. We assume the only alternative to being strict is being permissive, and neither option feels quite right. But there's actually a third way.

The Authoritarian Parent

The authoritarian parent believes they are the source of authority and that, whether consciously or unconsciously, they answer to no one. The child must obey them, certainly,

but the parent's decisions tend to be arbitrary, based on their own whims and moods. This kind of parenting can feel like strictness, but it's really just inconsistency wearing a stern face.

When parenting is based on convenience – when we enforce rules when it suits us and let them slide when it doesn't – our children pick up on that immediately. They sense the arbitrariness, and they push back against it. They're not actually rebelling against good boundaries; they're reacting to the unfairness of rules that seem to exist only for the parent's benefit.

The fruit of this kind of parenting is fear, difficulty in making decisions later in life, and an unhealthy relationship with authority. Often, it produces exactly the rebellion it was trying to prevent, because children end up pushing against the parent's arbitrary decisions rather than learning to govern themselves.

The Permissive Parent

Permissive parenting might look gentler, but it's often done for the benefit of the parent just as much as authoritarian parenting. The permissive parent doesn't want to disappoint or frustrate their child. Sometimes they want to be friends with the child, or to be the favorite parent.

Other times they're afraid of inflicting trauma by being insensitive to their child's feelings. They may feel what the child feels to such an extent that they give in to their child's wishes, even when their adult brain knows the outcome won't be good. Something may be broken or the child won't get proper nourishment, or the sleepover seems risky, but the parent gives in anyway because it seems easier. It keeps the peace.

The fruit of permissive parenting is often resentment, once a child realizes they've become slaves to their own desires and that their parent wasn't really acting in their best interests. These children are likely to have poor habits, struggle more in life, and disrespect authority because they never learned to respect it in their own home.

The Authoritative Parent

There is another way, which I learned from reading Charlotte Mason. The authoritative parent understands they are deputized – that their authority is given by God for the long-term good of the child at all times. They see their child as fully a person, created in the image of God, with infinite value and potential. They feel the responsibility to mature themselves, and to act as they ought, even when it's difficult. And they feel the responsibility to train their child to do the same.

Authoritative parenting is consistent, gentle but firm, and trustworthy. It asks different questions: *What is best for my child? What would teach them to do as they ought, rather than as they want? What will make him or her a better person? What habits am I instilling so their life will go smoothly?*

Somebody once told me, "It doesn't matter what they do. It just matters what you do." Children will occasionally make foolish choices or disobey, or even do something embarrassing to us – I cannot control what they do. But it matters greatly how I respond. I am teaching them at all times. Will my response be appropriate? Selfless? Consistent? Aimed at their long-term good?

But it is also important to prepare, and as a spontaneous person, that took me a while to learn. When going to a doctor's office with little ones, for example, I learned to prepare ahead of time. I'd say, "We're going to be sitting in a waiting room for maybe 30 minutes. I have a few books and toys for us to use quietly, and we'll have lunch at the park afterward. Now, how do you think we can be thoughtful to other people in the doctor's office?"

This approach prepared and informed them. Parents need to think of their children's needs, and help the children think of others. If you set an expectation, you're much more likely to have peace once you get there. That's very different than the anxious, fussy, always-trying-to-get-my-way kind of battle we see too often between parents and children. I have seen this same approach beautifully demonstrated in Ambleside classrooms. A child would do something they ought not do, and the teacher would have

such a gentle but clear way of correcting them, maybe just a touch on their shoulder or saying something quietly, but it was so gentle. And then the child would adjust and there was still a positive atmosphere in the classroom.

I would observe and think, "That's how I need to do it at home. That should be my posture." These teachers ask themselves: *Does the child know what they ought to do? Are they weak to do as they ought (and then how can I support them)? Or is this really rebellion?*

And even if it seems to be rebellion, perhaps later we can take one more step to wonder if something is going on with that child that we don't understand, something that requires a few gentle questions. Often when my children were acting their worst, it was actually that they had been deeply hurt by me or others. If I dug deeper, I would find a pressing issue to be addressed, or a misunderstanding to be corrected. Most of the time when a child is treated as a person, they don't act in rebellion. These questions and assumptions provide a much more peaceful atmosphere where children can learn and flourish.

The fruit of authoritative parenting is peace. First, the parent must commit to doing as they ought, rather than what they want. And this is the hardest part, because we are also weak. But when we parent from principle rather than convenience, when we act consistently rather than arbitrarily, and when we recognize our authority to be deputized by God for our children's best long-term interest, we help them mature while keeping a healthy relationship with them. And the fruit of that growth is sweet, abundant, and enduring.

About Kimberley Lorden Kimberley has an MBA in Finance and a BS/BA in Business Management from the University of Denver. She worked as a Financial Analyst for Shearson Lehman between those degrees, and afterward she worked in Washington, DC as a Legislative Director and 'Ways and Means Committee' staff member for a Member of Congress for six years, until her first child was born. After that child enrolled in an Ambleside School in Virginia, her focus changed to education. In 2003, she began service on the Board of Trustees of Ambleside School in Herndon, VA. In 2006, the Lordens moved with their four children to Colorado, and in 2010, Kimberley and her husband, Greg, co-founded Ambleside School of Colorado, where she served as Director of Admissions and a board member for 10 years. She now serves on the business board at Wellspring Church, and delights to meet with women, host many guests, explore dirt roads, read, write, and spend time with her growing family.

Alumni Snapshot



Jadon Thomson

*Ambleside School of Hout Bay –
South Africa, Class of 2013*

After graduating from Ambleside, I earned my Bachelor of Commerce in Actuarial Science at University of Cape Town. After working in insurance in South Africa for a time, I moved to Ireland where I qualified as an actuary at the Institute and Faculty of Actuaries in the UK. I worked for seven years doing actuarial work in a large agency before taking my current position.

Current Role

Head of Underwriting at a startup insurance agency

The Long-term Impact of an Ambleside Education

My grandfather is an actuary, and when I was young, he would explain his work to me until eventually I became very interested in doing it myself. I've also always loved math, and it just so happened that one of my math teachers at Ambleside was an actuary. She took me under her wing and nurtured that love of mathematics to the point that I went and studied it on my own.

Because of the way teaching was done at Ambleside, I cultivated the ability to learn by myself. So after I completed my three years of actuarial studies, I was able to study and take the exams independently of the university while working, which is a two-year process that most people undertake as a full-time student.

Ambleside gave me a deep-rooted love of learning. I left school with this natural drive to keep discovering; whether that's refining a loaf of sourdough, understanding how my

body changes through endurance training, digging into complex statistics at work, or noticing little details in nature with my son. Only later did I realize this mindset was intentionally cultivated.

A Habit That Endured

The habit of attention is something that I have taken on as a lifestyle. When I was studying at university, I realized I would study for a short, intense period and then take a walk or listen to classical music. That was very different from what my fellow students would do, spending six hours at a time studying at the library.

At work, I do 45 minutes of focused attention where I shut off everything around me and focus on one thing. Or when I'm playing with my boys, I'm solely focused on them. All other distractions are put away so I can focus on the task, relationship, or idea at hand.

This rhythm is something I try to cultivate in my children. When I was in school, we'd go out into nature and pay attention to one specific thing. I loved this and now I do it with my son. We go for a walk every weekend, and we'll pick one thing to focus on, like the bark of a tree. The silver birch has bark that we can pull off, and he brings it home as paper. So now he can identify the silver birch, and he notices the different types of trees. He says, "Look, it's an acorn, Dad. This must be an oak tree."

Many people can't sit down and read a book these days because it's not that stimulating and you have to pay attention for an hour at a time. I want my kids to see me reading and want to do it themselves. Reading a book is one of the most effective things you can do to become a better person. That is a gift I want to give them.

“

Who can take the measure of a child? The Genie of the Arabian tale is nothing to him. He, too, may be let out of his bottle and fill the world. But woe to us if we keep him corked up.

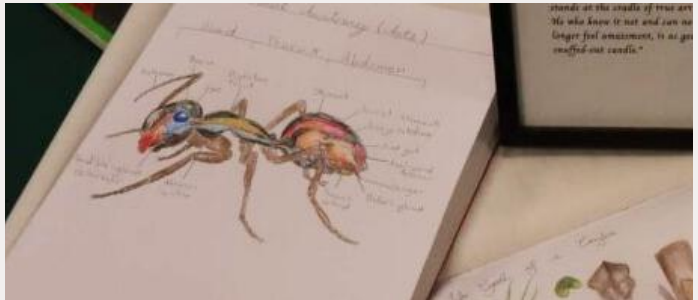
—CHARLOTTE M. MASON



Ambleside School of Ashland
Cosmos flower in watercolor.



Ambleside Southern Africa
Daffodils in oil paint.



Ambleside School McLean
Anatomy of an ant in colored pencil.



Fifth Grade Handwork
Mosaic in tile.



Calvary Schools of Holland
Birds of Paradise plants in watercolor.



Ambleside School of Marion
Butterfly life cycle in nature study.



Eighth Grade Art
Tiger art on scratchboard.

A BRAND NEW PARENT OBSERVING A CLASSROOM MIGHT ASSUME THE TEACHER IS NOT DOING VERY MUCH, BUT IT'S IMPORTANT TO UNDERSTAND THE TRUE ROLE OF A TEACHER: TO POSITION THEMSELVES AS A BRIDGE AND A SUPPORT SO THE STUDENTS LEARN TO DO THE WORK THEMSELVES.

Cultivating Independence and Self-Discipline in Children

Charlotte Mason's Masterful Alternative to Helicopter Parenting



With Leesa Waliszewski
*Former Principal, Ambleside
School of Colorado*

When a child struggles with a math problem or grapples with a challenging assignment, every adult must decide whether to intervene or not. Do I step in or step back?

Our society is filled with opportunities to observe how adults answer this question, and it's common to see approaches on both ends of the spectrum. At one end of the spectrum is "helicopter parenting," where adults are ready to rescue their children from every struggle. At the other end is neglect, leading to trauma.

What is the right balance? Charlotte Mason would say, "It depends on the child."

The concept of "masterly inactivity" practiced in Ambleside classrooms is an art that helps teachers navigate this question dozens of times a day. Because it's an approach both paradoxical and countercultural, it requires some exploration as to how it can be applied well in the classroom and at home.

What It Isn't

In many classrooms today, you will often see teachers working hard to keep children's attention. Much depends on the use of voice, personality, and shiny objects to talk children through each and every step of learning.

So the student learns to become dependent on the teacher. We tell them the answers to the questions that we decided ahead of time are important for them to know. We teach them that we're going to do the work, digest the material for them, and then basically spit in their mouths like a baby bird, if you will, and tell them to spit it back to us on a test.

Students are not required to engage with the learning process, and thus, classrooms are full of apathetic students.

The teacher's motives to keep them moving forward are good, but the methods can have a counterproductive effect. This approach actually tears down a child's self-confidence in many ways because they never learn to do the work themselves.

This is the end of the spectrum where we're intervening too much, to the point that children are crippled to do any thinking for themselves. Yet on the other end of that spectrum, it's possible to intervene too little, leaving children in despair and loneliness that leads to trauma.

What It Is

The art of "masterful inactivity" is the balanced approach between the two extremes that you will observe in an Ambleside classroom. This supportive role builds a bridge from the student to the text and provides the scaffolding needed to help the student engage with the text themselves.

This requires keen observation, knowledge of each individual child, and awareness of how

the child is growing. The teacher is coming alongside each student and helping them continue to grow. They are not quick to rescue. They know when to guide and direct, and when to pull back.

Contrary to what the terminology might convey, there is nothing inactive about it. The teacher stays intensely aware, actively processing what each child needs, but controlling their own actions to avoid overdoing. They're not afraid to let children struggle, understanding that's where growth happens. The key is knowing the difference between productive struggle and despair.

A brand new parent observing a classroom might assume the teacher is not doing very much, but it's important to understand the true role of a teacher: to position themselves as a bridge and a support so the students learn to do the work themselves.

In Practice

Consider a phonics lesson. One teacher talks through every phonogram card, every rule, every word – focused entirely on the lesson plan. Another teacher watches the learners. When she sees that students know the material, her voice disappears. The students carry it forward themselves. She remains acutely aware, noticing when individual students need support, but she doesn't insert herself unnecessarily.

Or picture a high school literature class where students carry nearly the entire discussion themselves. The teacher offers a brief introduction, asks two questions, then listens attentively. Students turn to each other and wrestle with ideas together. This kind of learning process is the fruit of years of masterly inactivity: students who can

engage deeply with text without waiting to hear what the teacher wants them to know.

Freedom in Restraint

Masterly inactivity is ultimately a partnership – both parent and teacher recognize that they are co-laborers with the Holy Spirit in a child's life. We don't have to do it all, and we don't have to control every outcome or rescue children from every struggle.

We can learn when to help guide and direct, and then just as wisely, when to pull back.

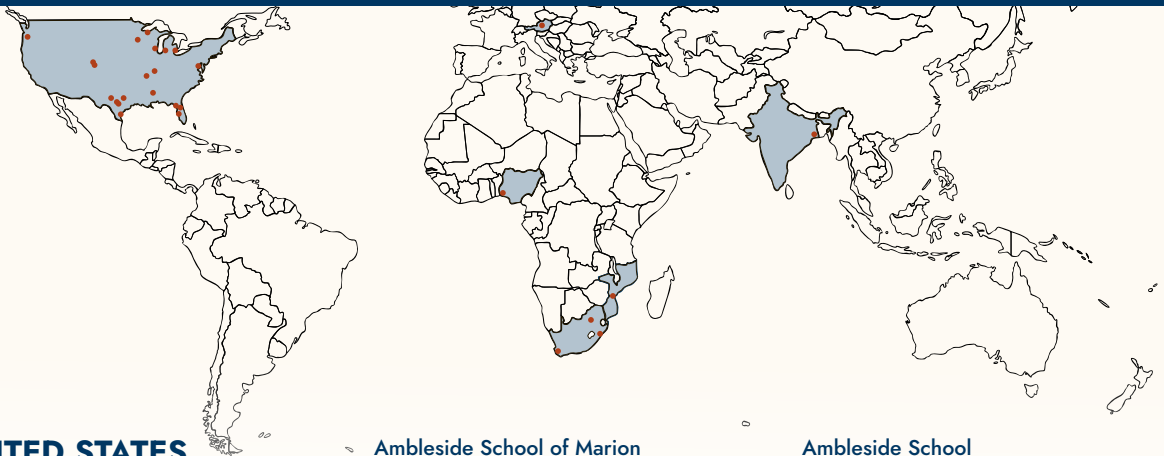
God has given our children remarkable minds, and the Holy Spirit is at work in their lives. Sometimes the most powerful thing we can do is step aside and let them grow. 🐦



About Leesa Waliszewski Leesa has been involved in the education of children for more than 35 years. Two decades ago, she experienced a renewal in her approach to bringing up children that aligned more fully and beautifully with her faith and love for Christ. It began with a visit to the Ambleside School of Fredericksburg, after which she incorporated many of the ideas she encountered in the school where she was then working and later in helping to start Ambleside School of Colorado. She now resides on the Big Island of Hawaii with her husband, enjoying visits to her now-grown children and three granddaughters wherever the Army moves them. Continued part-time work with Ambleside Schools International and tutoring sessions with local kids still bring her great joy.



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Three-Day Internship



March 9–11, 2026

Fredericksburg, TX

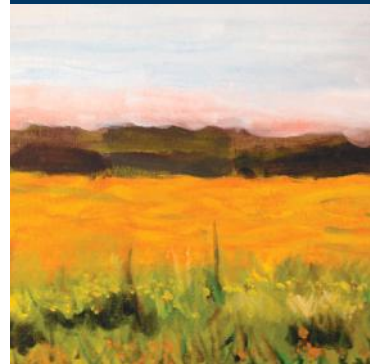
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January 6–9, 2026

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