

EFFECTIVE HOME SCHOOLING IS LIKE GOOD MILITARY STRATEGY

By Ronald E. Johnson, C.Ph.D.

Lt. Colonel Bushue (SAC) taught me a valuable life lesson: identify what you want to do, assess options, make a plan, outline your steps to get there, obtain needed resources, and focus on daily priorities that lead to goal achievement. That is the strategy for most successful military operations. An effective home school program follows a similar prescription. Without a clearly defined home school plan, life can quickly “turn south”, especially with teenagers.

Here are some practical strategies my wife and I applied with our seven children. Had these procedures not been in operation, my family would have experienced unnecessary stress and disappointment in our home school efforts...**especially during the extended times when I was required to be away from home.**

1. **First, decide how you want to conduct your home school.** You have five basic options:
 - a. **Virtual schools** These are via the internet and can be expensive and frustrating if you have multiple age-grade levels among your children who need access to the internet and computer. Some virtual school providers offer turn-key packages. Others offer basically on-line guidance and assistance for standard textbooks.
 - b. **Packaged programs** These are school-in-a-box products: everything you need to complete specified courses, some of which require a great deal of academic expertise from Mom. The range of “Mom friendliness” varies dramatically!
 - c. **Eclectic** This simply means that the parents pick and chose curriculum from a wide range of resources, including encyclopedias, literature books, magazines, CDs, unit studies, field trips, conferences, and hardback textbooks. The advantage is that students experience a great deal of emotional and academic stimulation. The disadvantage is that students are often victims of lack of parental organization and scheduling.
 - d. **Lock-step** This means that children are taught in grade level textbooks and/or computer software as in public schools. Mom prepares lesson plans for each course for each child (usually very late at night), and “teaches” lessons during the day. The advantage is availability of a planned scope and sequence. The disadvantage is that Mom has to give constant, step-by-step, hands-on, undivided attention to each child.
 - e. **Guided individualized learning** This approach allows the parents to plan the academic prescription for each child. Then, place them in curriculum that is designed to be completed with minimum parental, hands-on oversight. The advantages are that the mother is free to supervise multiple grade levels and subjects simultaneously, students experience accelerated learning, and Mom is relieved from the requirement to be an academic expert in subjects that are challenging to her

knowledge, skills and confidence. The disadvantage is that the students must exercise a great deal of self-discipline to stay focused on print or computer software that requires the students to “figure it out.”

2. **The second decision concerns values** you want to incorporate in the instructional materials for each child. Your options are basically these:
 - a. Secular textbooks/software, as used in public schools
 - b. Religious textbooks/software, as used in church schools
 - c. Virtue-based books/software, as used in both religious and secular schools.
3. **The third area concerns the system** you will implement in your home. Your options are these:
 - a. Hire a **service organization** to order your preferred materials and keep all student records for a fee.
 - b. Work with a **home school support group** regarding book procurement and records.
 - c. Set up **your own program** in which you order materials, keep records, provide guidance, and maintain transcripts.
4. The fourth concern is to **asses your strengths and skills** to implement an effective home school program that fits your home (rather than the homes of friends). You should consider the following questions:
 - a. Do you **feel confident and capable** of preparing and teaching daily lessons in all subjects for all the grade levels of your children? If not, select individualized materials.
 - b. Do you want to use **the internet**? If so, each child will need access to a computer.
 - c. Do you want to use programmed curriculum that does not require you to plan or teach each lesson to each child? If so, you may use the computer and/or individualized books.
 - d. Do you plan to provide **hands-on instruction** for each child every morning and/or afternoon? If so, be sure you are a person with great organizational skills and can multi-task without stress!
 - e. Do you want/need guidelines **for a daily system** that provides academic oversight of your children? If so, you must be prepared to pay for outside services that are either on a one-time or on-going basis.
 - f. Do you want/need to belong to a local **home-school support group** that provides assistance with book procurement, tutorials, field trips, graduation ceremonies, report cards and transcripts? (highly recommended!) Check the internet for “home school support groups” in your geographic area. These are usually listed under city, county or state classifications.
 - g. Do you want **an eclectic approach** in which you provide oversight while your children read specific books, participate in field trips, engage in tutorials, take

lessons from other teachers (music, art, chemistry lab, archery, etc)? If so, be prepared to make adjustments for inefficiency, lack of self-discipline, and boredom. The eclectic approach is sometimes beneficial for specific periods of a child's development, but if it is the primary system, it often results in students not being prepared for the rigors of college studies. Nor does it allow the student to transfer course credits to regular schools in the event the home school experience is no longer an option.

5. **The fifth concern (and perhaps the most important one) is selection of curriculum.** Be sure you select curriculum appropriate for each student in the home. One size and format usually does not fit all children! One will need almost constant hands-on attention. Others need only to be pointed in the right direction and turned loose to complete academic prescriptions. Children are usually predominately choleric, sanguine, phlegmatic, or melancholy, and either right or left brain-dominant. Thus, they will perform more effectively when allowed to learn from the curriculum and a system that "caters to" their temperament and brain dominance. Right brain students tend to do better in hands-on systems that allow a variety, mobility, and freedom to set some priorities. Caution: sanguine and right-brain children tend to get side-tracked easily and often, therefore need/require parental oversight that ascertains completion of specific daily lessons. Phlegmatic children tend to be laid back and easy going...never getting too concerned about completing daily school assignments. Left-brain dominant students (often choleric and melancholy) usually do well with structured curriculum that allows the student freedom to set specific daily pages, projects, lessons and assignments with minimum parental oversight. Thus, one particular type of curriculum may not be adequate for all the children in the family.
6. **Another concern is that of keeping students focused.** Most children need at least four hours per day of focused learning. Stretch and/or "chore breaks" of ten to fifteen minutes every hour help break up the day, and avoid the tendency for boredom and fatigue. Soothing instrumental music played softly in the room reduces anxiety and impact of distractive noises (vacuum cleaner, highway traffic, crying baby). Loud talking or media noise should be avoided. Using an academic contract and daily goal chart helps the student learn to set his/her daily pace to ascertain that course work is completed by pre-determined times and dates. Parents should be available to monitor student behavior and progress, and to teach or tutor specific lessons or subjects as needed or scheduled. A good reminder is "A child left to himself will bring his mother shame."

My boot camp sergeant taught me a valuable sequence that has kept me focused throughout life. Here are his requirements which I recommend that parents establish in their home-school program:

- a. Get up at a set time each morning,
- b. Make your bed immediately after the feet hit the floor,
- c. Put away sleeping attire and then dress appropriately for the day,
- d. Line up shoes under the bed and hang excess garments on the clothes rack,
- e. Report to breakfast at a set time, participate in appropriate discussions, eat quietly, put away dirty dishes, and write down orders for the day,
- f. Report for duty promptly, fulfill responsibilities and address needs that develop.

These concerns are legitimate. However, they are not to be viewed as barriers to parents who are tired about attempting to home educate their children. My wife and I home-schooled our seven children at various times during their lives. We have not regretted that decision to be in control of their education. Every day was not necessarily easy or even pleasant. But the final result was worth the effort. #

Dr. Johnson served with the Strategic Air Command in Arizona and Alaska. He graduated from the University of Arizona with a BA, M.Ed, Ed,S., and earned a C.Ph.D. from the International Institute after completing post-graduate studies at the University of Illinois and Southwest Texas State University. He and his wife, Nancy, live on their ranch in Zephyr, Texas. He is founder and president of Paradigm Accelerated Charter Schools and Curriculum.

For more information about Paradigm home school curriculum and programs, visit www.pacworks.com or correspond with Dr. Johnson at Learn@pacworks.com, P.O. Box 3159, Early, Texas 76802 or PH:325-649-0976.