

Grace and Truth Co-op Philosophy of Education

I am so excited to share with you about Grace and Truth Co-op. We are a group of families who have pooled our resources in order to disciple our children and prepare them for University and Life with classical Christian curriculum. Yes, I know it is not the usual way of getting into University in South Africa, but I will explain how it is possible.

We use Tapestry of Grace materials for grades 0 – 9 and Veritas Press Omnibus curriculum for grades 7 – 12. That means that students in grades 7 – 9 have the option of two different curriculums to choose from. Let me explain to you why our families choose this unusual but exciting path of education.

My name is Michelle Cantrell. I have been home schooling since Evan was born in 1999. I now have five children ages 19 down to 9. I love home schooling. It is the hardest thing I have ever done and also the most rewarding. I remember when my friend first gave me a Rainbow catalogue. I felt sick to my stomach. My five-year teaching degree in Christian Education had not prepared me to have any idea what books to pick to educate my children. I was overwhelmed. So I started asking questions of mentors. I realized that I first had to develop my philosophy of education. I first had to determine where I was going, before I could decide how to get there.

I read books like [When You Rise Up](#) by R.C. Sproul Jr., [Educating the Whole-Hearted Child](#) by Clay & Sally Clarkson, [The Well-Trained Mind](#) by Susan Wise Bauer, [Teaching the Trivium: Christian Homeschooling in a Classical Style](#) and I wrote out my philosophy.

First, I believe that education is **discipleship**. I am teaching my children to follow me as I follow Christ. God made them to glorify Him and enjoy Him forever. I want to help them to see His beauty and worth and worship Him in all that they do. The character of my children is my first concern.

Education is studying God's **general revelation**—the world He created which shows us what He is like and how much we owe to Him. We see order and beauty in Math and Science because they show us how great the Designer is. God gave us dominion over His creation. He wants us to study it, to name it, to cultivate it, to create wealth. Solomon's wisdom and breadth of understanding was displayed by his wealth of proverbs and songs and his ability to describe plant life, from the cedar that is in Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of the walls. He taught about animals and birds, reptiles and fish (I Kings 4:29-34). Our children should learn to observe and label and experiment and become masters in their fields.

Education is studying God's **special revelation** in His Word. We teach our children to read and study the Scriptures from infancy because they are able to make them "wise unto salvation" (II Tim 3:15). The closer they get to reading and interpreting it in the original languages, the more equipped they will be to recognize errors and steer their own lives, their families and their churches in the right direction. They must build their lives on the solid rock of obedience to God's Word so they will not be like the man who built his house on the sand.

Education is **comparing** every other truth claim to the Bible to see how it measures up. We must teach our children to be in the world but not of it. They must learn to think critically and to give a defence for the hope that is in them, yet with gentleness and reverence (I Peter 3:15).

Education is **preparation for a life calling** of service to others in fulfilment of the second greatest commandment, to love your neighbour as yourself.

I believe that the best way to give my children this kind of education is through the rigors of a Biblical Education in the Classical Style. Let me explain:

I. What is a Classical Education?

A classical education follows the philosophy of Child Development and education that was developed during the Middle Ages. Education was not conducted by drilling government-determined-age-appropriate information into students until they could spit it out in a test (and forget it the next day). Education was carried out according to stages of development not ages.

The Scholastic Method had three stages called the Trivium. At the Grammar Stage children learned to read in Latin. At the Dialectic or Logic Stage they learned to argue in Latin. At the Rhetoric Stage they learned to persuade in Latin. Then they were ready to go to University where they would study the Quadrivium (Arithmetic, Geometry, Theology, Music). At University, Master Teachers would stand up and argue in front of the students (only paid if they argued well). Students saved one year's wages to buy their curriculum of three books. After doing their reading and listening to the debates, students drew their conclusions by wrestling with both sides of the argument.

Modern scientists have confirmed that these stages correspond with child brain development pre-puberty, puberty, post-puberty. One example is that pre-puberty the brain is sorting out sounds. After puberty you cannot learn new sounds.

1. Grammar/Knowledge Stage (generally Grades K – 6, pre-puberty) Memorize Facts. Every subject has a grammar stage—rules and facts. Language, Math, Science are all about rules and facts at the grammar stage. At this stage you should do lots of singing and chanting and hands-on learning.

2. Dialectic/Understanding Stage. (Grade 7,8 puberty) Age of Connections. Arguing. Questioning. Pointing out Inconsistencies. Invitation to Humility for the Parent.

At this stage you need to teach your child to argue with logic. Every subject has a dialectic stage. In languages you do sentence diagramming. In math you do Algebra. In history you do debates and make connections.

3. Rhetoric/Wisdom Stage (Grade 9-12 post puberty) Analysis and Synthesis. Do formal essay Writing –Break down a problem . Make a proposal. Support it. Persuade! In Languages do translation. Write poetry. Learn apologetics. Listen to the arguments of opponents.

At this stage a young person's worldview is solidified. He is asking, "Is my parent's faith mine? Who do I want to listen to? Who am I and what do I think about the world around me?"

This is the most important stage to home school! They need guidance. They need you at their side, helping them talk through things biblically, listening, arguing... And yet this is the age when most families stop home schooling. Why is this? Just when we have given them the tools to study and form convictions, we stop choosing what they will study and who will shape their convictions. Jesus reminded us “When a student is fully taught, he will be like His teacher.”

A Classical Education uses the tools that are developed in each stage to then interact with the Classic Literature that has shaped western civilization. There is an actual Canon of Western Civilization—books proven worthy over time. Students in the classical system learn about ancient civilizations by reading the Bible, Homer, Aristotle, & Plato, the original sources. They understand what shaped the Communist regime by reading Karl Marx. They experience Elizabethan England by reading Shakespeare. They confront the abuses of the Catholic Church with Erasmus and Luther. How does that help a Christian today? Won't they be carried away and confused by all of this pagan philosophy? Won't they be defiled by all the sin they read about? Won't they be puffed up with knowledge? Not if they have a guide! This is where we see the need for a Biblical Classical Education.

II. What is a Biblical Classical Education?

Where do we look for a guide? The Bible is our guide. We can train our children to be like the noble Bereans, who examined these things daily to see if they were true (Acts 17:11). There is a real battle going on for the souls of men. We can try to shield our children from it and then they will leave our homes defenceless. When they hit university they will be confused by Darwinian, or Reductionist, or Post-modern philosophies. Or we can take the time that we have now to show them how the wisdom of the Bible is superior to the greatest philosophies of man. As they listen compassionately to the opponents of the gospel and as we train them to analyze their theories and compare them to Scripture, they will be prepared to give a defence for the hope that is in them before anyone (I Peter 3:15). As they read the great theologians who clarified the truths of the gospel, they will be equipped to combat the same errors that are recycled in our day. The apostle Paul said in II Cor. 10:4,5 “The weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ...” Let's use the Classics to teach our children how to take every thought captive. Most importantly, we can use every story to illustrate mankind's sin and need for a savior which drives us all to Christ.

III. Tapestry of Grace

You may be saying, “A Biblical Classical Education sounds great but how am I going to guide my children through the stages of a classical education? How will I know which books to pick? I've never read the classics? How can I teach them? This will just be the blind leading the blind.

This is where I say, “Praise the Lord for the body of Christ!” We don't have to do it alone. We can't do it alone. Ephesians 4:14-16 says, “...we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine by the trickery of men,

by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which *every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part*, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.” God has given pastors and teachers and gifted people to His church. In fact, every person has a part to play.

In 2008 an acquaintance put the Tapestry of Grace curriculum in my hands and said, “I think you might be interested in this.” As I cautiously slugged my way into it, I realized that this is what I had been looking for for fifteen years. Here was a home school mother of six with the same theology and philosophy of education who had spent years choosing the best books, organizing assignments and writing 8000 pages of curriculum so that I could teach with ease.

With the help of her co-op she was able to write this curriculum so that the whole family can be learning together in a biblical and classical way. Many families can easily join together for a co-op each week to share the load of the hands-on activities and unit celebrations. They also provide “Pop Quizzes” which are an overview of the content of each week for Dad so he can lead discussions at home.

IV. What are the Advantages of a Co-op?

I have been doing a co-op since 2009. We have had between 2 and 22 families at a time in our co-op. It is the highlight of the week for my children. They are so excited to be with their friends and do the activities and discuss what they have learned. Even when it is play time with their friends they are busy acting out the stories that they have all read.

Without the co-op I know I would not make time for the hands-on activities and field trips. This way we share the load as moms. It feels more worth it to make a weather station or weave a placemat if you are doing it for the whole group and you don't have to plan it yourself and get the supplies every week.

You may think these hands-on activities are bonus, optional extras. But I think they are the cement that locks in these learning experiences. What do you remember best? What you have only read about or what you have experienced?

The co-op provides the opportunity to do exciting Unit Celebrations. Before each term we plan how we will conclude the term. We've done things as simple as an international dinner with the children giving their reports on different countries, to a medieval feast complete with costumes, speeches, special music and games. We have done Greek Dramas and a 50's Diner. The children are making life-long memories. With a co-op, school work isn't something everyone does individually and you as a mom just crack the whip to make sure they all get it done. Family life is coloured by what you are learning as you are constantly reading books aloud together, discussing what you are learning and celebrating it at Unit Celebrations.

The weekly co-op is even more essential for the dialectic and rhetoric students than it is for the grammar level. At this stage children need to learn to make connections, to debate, to persuade, to listen to the opinions of others, to analyze and synthesize. They need a knowledgeable teacher to walk them through their evaluation of classic literature. With the Tapestry Curriculum we as moms can take turns reading the teacher's notes and preparing for the weekly dialectic discussion. As our Omnibus students contribute financially, we are able to hire an experienced teacher to lead the dialectic and rhetoric discussions of the Veritas Press Curriculum. The students prepare all week for their 2 ½ hours of discussion on Friday. In this way our children are spurred on to read the most influential Literature of all time, to give excellent speeches, to write persuasively and to become leaders.

V. How Will This Prepare My Child for University Entrance?

So, you may be wondering how you will get your children into a South African University with this American Curriculum. Yes, you are taking a risk when you pursue an international qualification. Families that are using Cambridge are taking the same risk and putting out the same extra effort. It is harder for universities to know how to weight your qualification and they may not see the superiority of the education your child has received until they see his work. Our parents take that responsibility seriously and keep a portfolio of each child's high school work. They register with HomeLife Academy. They help their students study hard for the SAT and the NBT. They communicate with the university and field of choice to see that they keep up with the entrance requirements. So far, we have seen success with entrance into Monash, WITS, UJ, UNISA and American Universities. Our students have excelled in university and in the workplace because they know how to think and how to communicate well.

Of course we don't have a guaranteed entrance into every university and every field of study. But we can be confident that our chances are very good. Proverbs says, "Do you see a man skilled in his work? He will stand before kings. He will not stand before mean men."

This is the process that has worked for us:

1. You register with homelifeademy.com for grades 9-12. They do accept international students. The parent must have a matric certificate to be considered the registering teacher. You submit grades twice a year. When you meet their requirements, they give you an official high school transcript and a diploma.
2. You take the S.A.T. exam locally (<https://collegereadiness.collegeboard.org/sat>). This is a three hour standardized test that covers math, reading and logic (with an optional writing test). Kahn Academy provides free online test preparation or you can order an SAT Prep book. After you have completed Algebra 1, you can take this test as many times as you like to improve your score and make sure you get the minimum needed for acceptance into the American university you are applying to.
3. As soon as your student has completed grade 11 and taken the SAT exam, you apply to an American University. The American education system is not a test-based system but more of a portfolio system. American Universities are looking for a certain GPA or grade point

average which comes from the letter grades you recorded on their HomeLife Academy transcripts in grades 9 – 11. The SAT score validates those grades. Then they are also looking for extra curricular activities on the transcripts that the student is a well-rounded person. This system gives a lot more freedom to parents and students to choose the content of their high school studies.

4. You submit your HomeLife Academy Diploma and American University acceptance letter to the South African Universities Board in Pretoria to apply for a foreign conditional exemption based on your American qualification <https://mb.usaf.ac.za/united-states-of-america/>
5. This conditional exemption will then become complete when you are accepted by the South African University.
6. If you have a South African I.D. book, you pay local school fees not international school fees.

Be encouraged by the success of our Home-Life Academy Graduates in Gauteng:

- Caleb earned a BTech at UJ as a Paramedic.
- Joseph earned an electrical engineering degree from WITS.
- Tarryn is in her third year studying Physiotherapy at WITS.
- Nathan is in his second year doing Bio-Medical Engineering at WITS.
- Evan scored in the top 4% on the SAT and is studying BCom Law at WITS.
- Titus got a full-ride scholarship to attend The Master's University in CA and is studying Business.
- Shalyn is studying Psychology at WITS.

All of the above students currently studying are in the top 10% of their class at their universities.

VI. What Will It Cost Me?

1. Registration with Homelife Academy for (grades 9-12) <http://homelifecademy.com/enroll-nowregistration-fees/> Please note the additional \$50 fee for international families. The parent must have a matric level education. The parent must submit an educational plan with list of books and number of hours that will be devoted to studying each subject. The parent must submit attendance and grades twice a year. The website shows you what classes your child needs in order to get university entrance in the U.S.
2. You will need to prepare your child for the SAT exam which can be taken locally for \$93 (2019). <https://collegereadiness.collegeboard.org/sat/register/international/fees>
3. You will then need to apply for entrance at American Universities (application fees run about \$80).
4. Tapestry of Grace Curriculum (which our co-op is using for grades 1 – 7) costs \$189 (for the digital version) per year for the first four years. http://www.lampstandbookshelf.com/ZC/index.php?main_page=guide You then have all the teacher's notes you will need. Each year you add the recommended books for your children depending on what learning level they are in and what you already have in your library. <http://bookshelfcentral.com/> Add in the cost for books for your own Science, Math, Foreign Language or Grammar and Electives.
5. One parent from each family with students doing Tapestry of Grace volunteers to help lead activities or be on a teaching roster and contributes R150 per month for facilities.

6. The Omnibus Curriculum (which our co-op uses for grades 7-12) costs about \$100 per year for the Omnibus Textbook which contains essays about each piece of literature and the student's assignments. Most of the other 30 classic books can be downloaded free on the internet or obtained second hand or online for less than R100 each, or you can buy the set from veritaspress.com. This will count for history, theology, & literature. You will then add in the cost for books for Science, Math, Foreign Language & electives.
7. For a highly qualified high school teacher to lead 2 1/2 hour discussions weekly and grade assignments—**R13600 per year** for non-volunteer families (payable in 10 monthly installments) or **R9000 per year** for volunteer families (payable in 10 monthly installments).
8. It will take commitment. Our children need to learn from us how to be faithful to commitments. A co-op works best as each family contributes from their strengths and loves and serves each other through the good times and the difficult times.
9. Grace and Truth Co-op is not a school and we as home schooling parents retain the full responsibility for the education of our children.

What a blessing to be able to give our children a top quality Biblical and Classical education at a fraction of the cost of sending them to school!

VII. Application Process:

Contact Michelle Cantrell: michellecantrell97@gmail.com for details on the Application Process for our co-op.

VIII. For Further information see our website: www.graceandtruthco-op.com