

Charlotte Mason's Philosophies Alive at Signal Mountain Christian School

My copy of **Susan Schaeffer Macaulay's** book "For the Children's Sake: Foundations of Education for Home and School" wouldn't make it past inspection at a used bookstore. Torn, with writing and highlighted phrases on each page, it would be tossed into the "free books" pile at first glance. However, to me it is a treasure—"The Velveteen Rabbit" of books.

As a parent, I have laughed at the notion that almost everything in life comes with an instruction manual *except* my children. "For the Children's Sake" is as close to an instruction manual as I have found.

Macaulay's book captures the down-to-earth yet brilliant philosophy of revolutionary British educator **Charlotte Mason**, who lived in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Her educational philosophy is as relevant today as it was for parents and educators during her lifetime. She believed that education was an atmosphere, a discipline and a life—about finding out who we are and how we fit into the universe that God created.

Charlotte—who never had children of her own—saw children as thinking, feeling human beings. She expected a lot from ordinary children and respected their minds and capabilities—and the children in her care lived up to her expectations.

English children in the 1800s were educated according to social class, but Charlotte envisioned a liberal curriculum for all children, regardless of social class. "It is the person who has read and thought on

many subjects who is, with the necessary training, the most capable whether in handling tools, drawing plans, or keeping books," she said. "The more of a person we succeed in making a child, the better will he both fulfill his own life and serve society."

She promoted ideas such as reading literature ("living books," she called them) to children to teach various subjects; the use of narration to organize thinking; the importance of free play for the imagination; and the helpfulness of developing good habits such as attentiveness and responsibility. One of Charlotte's greatest passions was nature study.

Charlotte believed that children should spend as much time as possible outdoors exploring, watching, and developing nature-knowledge through personal interaction.

"(A child) must live hours daily in the open air," she said. "We were all meant to be naturalists, each to his degree, and it is inexcusable to live in a world so full of the marvels of plant and animal life and to care for none of these things."

Charlotte's Christian faith is also woven joyfully throughout her work. She warned parents of compartmentalizing Christianity, excluding all parts of life. "True spirituality covers all of life," she said, emphasizing that all segments of life are part of the whole that God has created.



The visionary educator, Charlotte Mason



Signal Mountain Christian School students nature journaling next to a creek in Sequatchie County on Signal Mountain in 2010—an example of the Charlotte Mason philosophy at work at that school.

For me, Macaulay sums up Charlotte's educational philosophy best with these words: *Wonder together*. She places the joy and responsibility of educating children for life in the hands of parents and the home, regardless of where a child attends school.

"The question is not how much does the youth know when he has finished his education, but how much does he care, and about how many orders of things does he care?" she challenged parents. "In fact, how large is the room in which he finds his feet and, therefore, how full is the life he has before him?"

Although Charlotte's teachings fell out of popular use in the 1940s, there has been a resurgence of interest in her work in recent years.

While home-schoolers are the largest group of followers, many private schools across the nation are incorporating her philosophy. Signal Mountain Christian School is one of those schools.

Sherry Moss, a board member and founder of Signal Mountain Christian School (SMCS), explains how the school incorporates these techniques into the curriculum.

"Signal Mountain Christian School views school as an extension of the home, teaching the whole child—body, mind and spirit," she says of the private kindergarten-fifth grade Christian school located on Fairmount Pike on Signal Mountain. "Through Charlotte Mason techniques, SMCS seeks to build on children's natural curiosity and imagination by focusing on big ideas and the interrelationship of all subjects. The use of nature studies, rich literature, history timeline notebooks, and early introduction to great composers and artists fuels children to be lifelong learners."

Parents and families can also incorporate Charlotte Mason techniques at home. To learn more, visit the [Simply Charlotte Mason website at www.simplycharlottemason.com](http://www.simplycharlottemason.com).

Susan Schaeffer Macaulay books are another great way to learn about Charlotte Mason. In addition to "For the Children's Sake," she has written "For the Family's Sake: The Value of Home in Everyone's Life" and "Books Children Love: A Guide to the Best Children's Literature," as well as numerous other books.

by Jenni Frankenberg Veal

May 2011

The Signal Mtn. Mirror