

Can I really home school? (And do I want to?)

part of our Parent Education Literature Series



by Lisa Lewis

As you examine your choices for educating your child/ren you likely have considered whether or not you could possibly home school. You may not know anyone who is home schooling or you might and don't want to be like that family! Or you do know someone who is home schooling and you are amazed at all they do and wonder how they do it! Regardless of your current awareness of home schooling, we at SLO Classical Academy want to encourage you to seriously consider what it takes to home school a child so that you are able to make an informed decision. We believe that the home schooling partnership SLO Classical Academy offers can be a wonderfully rich choice for many families, but going in with both eyes open is helpful for all involved!

Often when we observe others doing something that raises our curiosity, we may hesitate to ask probing questions that are uppermost in our minds. More specifically, when you think about home schooling there is likely a myriad of questions that percolate yet you may feel hesitant in asking because the questions are too personal or seem too obvious. In reality, your questions are likely those of many others, and we'd like to explore some of the commonly posed questions to help you in your decision making process. There are three: how much time does it take to home school; how do I fit it all in; how do I know if I am doing enough?

How much time does it take? This is the number one question we get asked. Unfortunately there is not one answer that is accurate for every family, but there are averages and we can speak to what your time will actually be filled with to give a better understanding. A typical home school day will provide time for what are called core subjects: math, reading, spelling, grammar, composition, handwriting, geography, history and science. Additional subjects that need to be added into the week are fine arts, physical education, and additional elective courses your family might be interested in pursuing, such as foreign language, and life skills such as cooking or auto maintenance.

As you look over the list of subjects, if you are like others, you may gasp and say, "How do I fit it all in?" Home schooling can be done in an all-consuming manner — there are definitely those who have surrendered themselves to a subject-by-subject approach. These people are very weary and have no outside life or the opportunity for one! But this is not the only way to "do home school". There is a different approach to instruction of these subjects. The approach is called integrated instruction, and it is this ap-

proach that is highly encouraged at SLO Classical Academy — not only for your benefit, but for the benefit of the learning process as well — material becomes more meaningful and internalized with this type of instruction.

Integrated instruction is the art of presenting information through one common theme and tying other subjects to the theme. For example, at the Classical Academy we use history as our integration point and choose literature, writing, and science topics that coordinate with the point on the timeline of history we are studying. The integration of the various subjects actually shortens the overall time spent on the individual subjects because of the overlap of skills between

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history, reading, and writing. As the student is interacting with the topic in history they are given an opportunity to tell back what they heard (narration) first orally in the early years and through written form in the older years. They may be asked to demonstrate their learning by developing a piece of art from the period or by duplicating an experiment that was first discovered in that particular period of time they are studying. As you can see, this approach can easily

integrate penmanship, spelling, writing, art, science, and history!

Finally the third question, “How do I know if I am doing enough?” speaks to our desire as parents to provide what is best for our children. The early years of education are filled with the focus on basic skills, so it is essential to be systematic and thorough in the instruction of math, reading, and other language skills such as memorization, dictation, and narration. You might see these as all encompassing subjects yet 10 to 15

minutes daily per subject is what is appropriate for a child of 5 or 6. As the child establishes a foundation of skills in these areas the

coursework changes a bit and you can have them increase the amount of time you spend on any subject by 5 to 10 minutes per chronologic year. Let’s do the math: a 5 year old has three basic subjects to master plus physical education and fine arts (art, music) so 6 subjects times 10 minutes per subject is one hour of focused time, without breaks. It’s important to note that all children cannot be expected to sit and work from subject to subject without getting up and having a break, so please consider reasonable addition of time. Two hours total would give a 5 year old a very focused learning day.

If we follow the pattern of integrating subjects and the added time for increased attention and ability a 10 year old can be reasonably expected to work and learn for 3 to 4 hours. During this time frame there

would be math instruction and practice of new learning; literature reading; responding to the passage through oral or written narration; grammar instruction and practice; spelling through the practice of either the narration, grammar or a dictation piece. Handwriting practice is accomplished through one of these writing opportunities, and fine arts can be coordinated within the study of history. In addition, you will need to consider how best to add physical education (this is done in many creative ways — family exercise and team

sports are common), and/or any additional electives such as Latin. De-

pending on your child, there can actually be time left over for additional areas of study that especially interest your family or child, and we always encourage family reading of great books in the evenings in lieu of the normal course of homework!

There is, of course, much more to say about home schooling than these three questions cover, but our hope is that you will be stimulated to learn more through asking additional questions. People choose to home school for many different reasons — some want to spend more time with their children or have more of a say in their children’s education, some want a more family friendly schedule, and others desire more life flexibility. People also choose to enroll in SLO Classical Academy for various reasons as well — to provide structure and instruction in addition

to home schooling, to benefit from home schooling but maintain the time to work, care of little ones or take care of “life” on the classroom days, to provide a rich classical education for their children, and to allow their children to experience the wonderful benefits of our unique, small classrooms.

As you explore the options and your own reasons for home schooling and enrolling in SLO Classical Academy, please feel free to contact us anytime through email or through the school phone number. We encourage the discussion process! We also hope that you come away with the sense that the actual reality of home schooling, while it does require adjusting, is not really all that difficult and is something within your reach.

How do I know if I am doing enough?

Lisa Lewis brings 24 years of teaching experience in public, private and home schooling settings. She is widely respected as a teacher and is committed to her own lifelong learning. Lisa has spent hours becoming versed in classical education and has used classical methods in her teaching. Lisa is one of the founders of SLOCA, and continues to work hard as the Director of Education to keep the vision alive and improve the model and quality of education.

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