

Notes for the Pre-Preparatory Level

Here are some notes about the nursery or Pre-Preparatory Level for this curriculum. Charlotte Mason and the parents and teachers of the PNEU referred to this level as the Nursery level, but I have updated that name for this curriculum.

These notes are rather eclectic as I'm just putting together ideas for this level. There are many *Parents' Review* articles as well as notes that could be taken from Charlotte Mason's books about this level-enough that a whole book could probably be written about it. This will have to remain a goal for the future. I will add new articles to the blog for this level as I am able. Hopefully, these notes will be a little helpful in getting started with this level.

Caveat: The Pre-Preparatory and Preparatory Levels are not required, since the formal education need not begin until age 6+ (Year One). The books included on the Pre-Preparatory Level Booklist are merely suggestions of what might be used. Please adapt as needed for your family.

Let's start with play! Play is absolutely essential to these ages. Here are some interesting quotes from the Parents' Review article "Our Children's Play: Their Toys and Books" by Mrs. C. Hatchell:

On Play –

Do we mothers sufficiently realize the importance of our children's play, in the unconscious training and developing of certain moral qualities and powers, far more than they can be by any mere words of ours on the subject; what potent factors their games can be in teaching lessons of self-control, self-reliance, unselfishness, patience, courage and energy?

She goes on later to say:

...if the children reflect so much of their environment in this spontaneous play, and it takes such hold of their minds, that they are able to reproduce it in this way, and live it over again, let us see that these "thought-pictures," and all that makes their childish environment, is such that will give them high ideals, and stimulate to all that is noblest and best.

On Toys -

Ms. Hatchell explains that toys can be divided into two categories: finite and suggestive. She defines the former by stating, "Finite: Nothing is left for the child to do, or for its imagination or ingenuity to supply" (Hatchell). These are toys which

have been fully realized as they are. For example, a jack-in-the-box will provide only limited entertainment and use, since there is nothing to do with it but wind it up, watch it pop up and start over again.

The latter toys, suggestive, are toys which can be molded and adapted into whatever fits within the scope of the child's imagination at the moment. They can be reused over again as each new idea presents itself. Some suggestive toys included in the article: sand, clay, empty doll-house (or one made from available resources such as boxes, packing crates, etc.) and dolls. Additionally, this would include scarves, blankets, blocks, Legos, child-sized dishes or toy food, small plastic animal figures, etc.

On Books –

Ms. Hatchell also shares her thoughts about books:

In choosing books, let us be careful not to give merely “pretty books,” but those that have a distinct literary flavor, and that the children will read and re-read many times. It is not the quantity they read that does the good, but the, quality, and what they are able to absorb.

I cannot do better than quote from Miss Mason on this subject: “Guard the nursery; let nothing in that has not a true literary flavor; let the children grow up on a few books read over and over, and let them have none, the reading of which does not cost an appreciable mental effort. This is no hardship. Activity, whether of body or mind, is joyous to a child.”

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“In Living Books for the Nursery”, the author, Mrs. Crump further adds to our understanding of the role that books should play by stating:

*What is it that we want books to do for our children? We want them to find friends in books, that wonderful company of friends to be found in history and fiction. We want to widen their small world with some knowledge of the great and marvelous worlds around them—worlds past, worlds distant, worlds of nature, worlds of imagination. We want them to gain some power of fitly and nobly using the language which is their birthright. We want to bring them into a habit of so using books that they may all their lives turn to that silent company of helpers, who never refuse, never grudgingly give.*

Mrs. Crump continues with:

*What we parents have to do is to put as large and as varied a choice before him as we can. But although we concede freedom of choice to nursery children—that is, I take it, to children up to the age of ten years—still we must exercise some preliminary power of selection among the multitude of existing books. To do so wisely we need to think out certain broad principles by which we may secure the best book-friends and playmates, the best influences, not only in right doing but in right speaking—the best subjects "to stretch and stimulate their little minds," as Dr. Johnson put it.*

Mrs. Crump finishes her article with a summary of main points:

*In our search for Living Books our broad principles then are these:*

- ***Clearness*** in picture books
- ***Plenty, variety and freedom*** of choice in reading books
- ***Access to those great writers*** whose influence will be all the greater and all the more dear because linked with memories of the nursery

## **On Imagination –**

In the article by E. A. Parish, “Imagination as a Powerful Factor in a Well-balanced Mind”, Ms. Parish defines imagination:

*The word imagination means “to face”—to visualize an image, to almost make the thought concrete from within.*

She goes on to explain that solitude and independence are needed in order for children to have unhampered access to their imaginations.

*For the right use of the programs two things are necessary—**solitude** and **independence**. Children must have these. Nursery children come off fairly well in these respects; they get time when they can wander and dream alone in the garden. But this happy state often ends where school-room life begins. Lessons, walk, and lessons again, always in company, and always something that must be done now.*

She reminds parents that overscheduling their children will lead to problems later in their development. It may seem that you are providing them with the very best in instruction and opportunity, but it’s important to remember that children need free time and space to think out their own ideas.

*The parents marvel and say, "But we are giving him the best education that can be procured, we are neglecting no opportunities." Kind, generous parents! You are giving your child every opportunity but one, and that is self-development; by your generous care, you are safeguarding him from ever using his own mind, ever relying upon himself in any way. The child who at first found interference irksome, later depends on it so much that he is unable to work without constant prodding from his mentor.*

She reminds us not only of how profoundly necessary the imagination is to a child's development, but also how a richly stoked imagination sparks a child's interest in other people, other things and other ideas. This interest is the foundation upon which later subjects will be built.

*Rightly taught, every subject gives fuel to the imagination, and without imagination, no subject can be rightly followed. It is by the aid of imagination that a child comes to love people who do not belong to his own country, and as he learns the history of their great deeds and noble efforts, he is eager to learn something of the country in which they lived, of its shape and size, of its mountains, woods and rivers, of the causes that made the people what they are.*

### **On Outdoor-Time -**

Charlotte Mason believed strongly that all children, especially very young children, should spend a great deal of time outdoors. She believed it was good for them physically, academically, mentally and socially.

In *Home Education*, Ms. Mason tells us that children should spend many hours each suitable day outside and that a parent should accompany them. She writes "...here is the mother's opportunity to train the seeing eye, the hearing ear, and to drop seeds of truth into the open soul of the child, which shall germinate, blossom, and bear fruit, without further help or knowledge of hers (Vol. 1).

She goes on further in Volume One to explain the educational purposes behind these outdoor excursions:

*This is all play to the children, but the mother is doing invaluable work; she is training their powers of observation and expression, increasing their vocabulary and their range of ideas by giving them the name and the uses of an object at the right moment,—when they ask, 'What is it?' and 'What is it for?' And she is training her children in truthful habits, by making them careful to see the fact and to state it exactly, without omission or exaggeration.*

She also writes that children should be encouraged to observe and study life in the natural world:

*Children should be encouraged to watch, patiently and quietly, until they learn something of the habits and history of bee, ant, wasp, spider, hairy caterpillar, dragon-fly, and whatever of larger growth comes in their way.*

## **On Narration –**

What role, if any, does narration play in the younger years of a Charlotte Mason education? Narration for children under six is not necessary, but since children typically have a natural affinity for sharing their thoughts on what they see and hear, narrations are often informally given.

In the *Parents' Review* article, "Some Thoughts on Narration" by Helen E. Wix, Ms. Wix addresses this question:

*Very young children, in the nursery class, are not expected to narrate, but often they insist on doing so because of this instinct to "tell all about it" to somebody. How many of us can refrain from telling that good story we heard yesterday? And anything that must be remembered, do we not repeat it even if it is only "First turning to the left and third to the right"? Narration is extraordinarily satisfying to the narrator, though, alas, a little boring sometimes for the listener since he is getting it at secondhand. And second-hand knowledge is ... but that is another story.*

*So the youngest children begin, con amore, to tell Mummie or baby sister all about it. At about six years old, narration in the school is expected. The stories are such that hardly a child can bear to wait his turn and no tiny detail may be left out. This is, of course, the result of "involuntary" attention and for some two years little conscious effort to attend needs to be fostered because the child's power of attention is growing all the time and becoming habitual. But is narration, even at this age, always merely "telling back"?*

*It must be, we know, the child's answer to "What comes next?" It can be acted, with good speaking parts and plenty of criticism from actors and onlookers; nothing may be added or left out. Map drawing can be an excellent narration, or, maybe, clay modeling will supply the means to answer that question, or paper and poster paints, or chalks, even a paper model with scissors and paste pot. Always, however, there should be talk as well, the answer expressed in words; that is, the picture painted, the clay model, etc., will be described and fully described, because, with few exceptions, only words are really satisfying.*

## On a PNEU Nursery -

In “A PNEU Nursery School” by Hilda Eleanor Breckels, Ms. Breckels gives us a look inside of a typical day at a PNEU nursery school. The rough outline of this day below is based on this article.

1. The day opens with a free play period. It is recommended that children have access to adults who are interested in what they have to say and who readily encourage them to share their thoughts. Conversation as goal all of its own is needed, especially for these younger ages, in order for children to develop in speech and thought.
2. After free play, follows a quiet time. In the PNEU Nursery School, this time is often spent on hymns, prayer and stories from the Bible, but this time could also be used for poetry, folk songs, listening to classical music and short, uplifting and thoughtful stories.
3. After quiet time, the school moves on to group activities. These activities usually focus on literacy and numeracy.

*Besides being training time for skills in speech, these activities in small groups give carefully graded steps in the preliminaries to reading, word-building and number.”*

She continues with:

*That is all done through play. The knowledge is threaded, as it were, through a game, by means of the appropriate teaching aids. If the children are ready, they will learn the little lesson. If they are not, they just enjoy the game. They usually do both”.*

She reminds us that these activities will help to develop their minds, but that young children should not feel any stress while participating in them.

*Being a PNEU Nursery School, we do no more than help the children to play the game. We leave all else to the children's powers of attention, imagination, reflection, judgment and so on.*

*We ask no questions, give no praise or blame, make no comparisons.*

4. The children then move on to music and finish the day with picture-making.

*Besides the daily routines I have mentioned so far, we have a daily dose of music. We have singing, music and movement and glorious percussion. I dare not start talking about our appreciation of music.*

*The same applies to free picture-making. A group of children busy picture-making with paints or Chubbies' non-toxic crayons, never, never stops babbling!*

5. A snack time is referenced, but the specific time is not given in this article.

*The same at milk-and-biscuits time. In each case, the grown-ups in charge join in and add more words and more general knowledge to the stores of these under-fives.*

6. A story-time is included for slightly older young children (ages 4.5-5) and, again, the specific time period this takes place is not given in this article.

*In time, say between four-and-a-half and the fifth year, and during story reading periods, all this training in speech skill, skips quite naturally into narration.*

**PLEASE NOTE:** While Literacy Games and Numeracy Games are included on the Pre-Preparatory Level suggested weekly schedule, their inclusion is not meant to signify that a homeschool teacher should try to replicate a typical classroom approach of group games, but is meant to convey the idea that literacy and numeracy at this level should primarily occur through play and through games, whether independently or together with a teacher or siblings.