The Twenty Principles of a Charlotte Mason Education

Orígínal Versíon (C.Mason)	Paraphrased Version
1 Children are bern persons	1 Children are not blank slates or
	"unfinished" adults—they are complete, unique individuals from the start. They come with their own thoughts, feelings, and potential, and deserve to be treated with the same respect and dignity as any adult.
2. They are not born either good or bad, but with possibilities for good and for evil. *see note	2. Every child has the potential for both good and bad. Education should nurture a child's ability to make wise, moral choices.
3. The principles of authority on the one hand, and of obedience on the other, are natural, necessary and fundamental;	3. Respectful authority and healthy discipline matter. Children thrive in an environment where teachers guide them with respect and consistency.

4. These principles are limited by the respect due to the personality of children, which must not be encroached upon whether by the direct use of fear or love, suggestion or influence, or by undue play upon any one natural desire.

Paraphrased Version

4. Education should respect each child as a unique individual. We shouldn't manipulate them through fear, excessive praise, or by playing on their emotions and desires. Instead, children should be guided with respect, given the freedom to think for themselves, and encouraged to grow in character and wisdom without coercion.

5. Therefore, we are limited to three educational instruments--the atmosphere of environment, the discipline of habit, and the presentation of living ideas. The P.N.E.U. Motto is: "Education is an atmosphere, a discipline, and a life." 5. Education relies on three key elements: the environment, habits, and living ideas. Children learn through the world around them, the habits they develop, and the meaningful ideas they engage with. These three elements work together to shape a child's character, knowledge, and love of learning.

6. When we say that "education is an atmosphere," we do not mean that a child should be isolated in what may be called a 'child-environment' especially adapted and prepared, but that we should take into account the educational value of his natural home atmosphere, both as regards persons and things, and should let him live freely among his proper conditions. It stultifies a child to bring down his world to the child's level. 6. Children learn best in a natural, rich environment—not in an overly controlled or artificial setting designed just for them. Instead of simplifying everything to a child's level, we should immerse them in real-life experiences, meaningful conversations, and a home or school environment filled with ideas, relationships, and challenges that help them grow.

Paraphrased Version

7. By "education is a discipline," we mean the discipline of habits, formed definitely and thoughtfully, whether habits of mind or body. Physiologists tell us of the adaptation of brain structures to habitual lines of thought, i.e., to our habits. 7. Learning isn't just about knowledge—it's also about developing good habits. Whether it's habits of thinking, focus, or character, these patterns shape a child's future. Science even shows that repeated thoughts and actions physically shape the brain. That's why intentionally building strong habits—like curiosity, perseverance, and self-control—is a key part of education.

8. In saying that "education is a life," the need of intellectual and moral as well as of physical sustenance is implied. The mind feeds on ideas, and therefore children should have a generous curriculum. 8. Education is more than just academics —it's about nourishing the whole child intellectually, morally, and even physically. That's why children should be given a broad, engaging curriculum that sparks curiosity, deep thinking, and character growth.

9. We hold that the child's mind is no mere sac to hold ideas; but is rather, if the figure may be allowed, a spiritual organism, with an appetite for all knowledge. This is its proper diet, with which it is prepared to deal; and which it can digest and assimilate as the body does foodstuffs. 9. A child's mind isn't just a storage bag for information—it's a living, thinking, and growing entity with a natural hunger for knowledge. Just as the body thrives on nutritious food, the mind needs rich, meaningful ideas to engage with, process, and apply. Education should provide a well-rounded, nourishing "diet" of knowledge.

Paraphrased Version

10. Such a doctrine as e.g. the Herbartian, that the mind is a receptacle, lays the stress of education (the preparation of knowledge in enticing morsels duly ordered) upon the teacher. Children taught on this principle are in danger of receiving much teaching with little knowledge; and the teacher's axiom is, 'what a child learns matters less than *how* he learns it.'

11. But we, believing that the normal child has powers of mind which fit him to deal with all knowledge proper to him, give him a full and generous curriculum; taking care only that all knowledge offered him is vital, that is, that facts are not presented without their informing ideas. Out of this conception comes our principle that,-- 10. Education shouldn't treat children's minds as empty containers to be filled with perfectly packaged lessons. When the focus is only on how a subject is taught rather than what is actually learned, students may end up with surface-level understanding instead of deep, meaningful knowledge. Instead, education should emphasize real learning —engaging with ideas, making connections, and fostering curiosity rather than just following a teacher's scripted lessons.

 Children are naturally capable of understanding a wide range of subjects when presented in a meaningful way.
Education should be rich and wellrounded, exposing students to a variety of knowledge that is engaging and connected to real ideas—not just dry facts.
Learning should inspire curiosity and deep thinking, not just memorization.



Paraphrased Version

12. "Education is the Science of Relations"; that is, that a child has natural relations with a vast number of things and thoughts: so we train him upon physical exercises, nature lore, handicrafts, science, and art, and upon many living books, for we know that our business is

not to teach him all about anything, but to help him to make valid as many as may be of--

"Those first-born affinities

"That fit our new existence to existing things."

12. Children have natural connections to many things and ideas in the world around them. It's not about teaching them everything there is to know about a subject, but rather helping them build meaningful relationships with nature, science, art, and literature. By doing so, we're helping them develop a deep understanding of how everything fits together in the world.

13. In devising a SYLLABUS for a normal child, of whatever social class, three points must be considered:

(a) He requires much knowledge, for the mind needs sufficient food as much as does the body.

(b) The knowledge should be various, for sameness in mental diet does not create appetite (i.e., curiosity)

(c) Knowledge should be communicated in well-chosen language, because his attention responds naturally to what is conveyed in literary form. 13. When designing a curriculum for children, it's essential to provide them with plenty of knowledge, just as the body needs sufficient food. The learning should be varied to keep their curiosity alive, as a repetitive or monotonous curriculum can dull their appetite for learning. Additionally, the knowledge should be communicated in clear, engaging language, as children naturally respond better to ideas presented in a thoughtful, literary form.



Paraphrased Version

14. As knowledge is not assimilated until it is reproduced, children should 'tell back' after a single reading or hearing, or should write on some part of what they have read. 14. Children understand and retain what they learn only when they are able to express it in their own words. After reading or listening to something, they should retell the information or write about it to ensure they've fully grasped the material.

15. A single reading is insisted on, because children have naturally great power of attention; but this force is dissipated by the re-reading of passages, and also, by questioning, summarizing. and the like.

Acting upon these and some other points in the behavior of mind, we find that the educability of children is enormously greater than has hitherto been supposed, and is but little dependent on such circumstances as heredity and environment.

Nor is the accuracy of this statement limited to clever children or to children of the educated classes: thousands of children in Elementary Schools respond freely to this method, which is based on the behavior of mind. 15. Children have an impressive ability to focus and retain information from a single reading, and their attention is actually weakened by repeated readings, constant questioning, or summarizing. By understanding how the mind works, we realize that children's capacity for learning is much greater than previously thought. This approach has proven effective with all types of children, not just those considered "clever" or from educated families.

16. There are two guides to moral and intellectual self-management to offer to children, which we may call 'the way of the will' and 'the way of the reason.' 16. Children can be guided in two key ways to help them manage their own actions and decisions: through the will, and through reason.

17. The way of the will: Children should be taught, (a) to distinguish between 'I want' and 'I will.' (b) That the way to will effectively is to turn our thoughts from that which we desire but do not will. (c) That the best way to turn our thoughts is to think of or do some quite different thing, entertaining or interesting. (d) That after a little rest in this way, the will returns to its work with new vigour. (This adjunct of the will is familiar to us as diversion, whose office it is to ease us for a time from will effort, that we may 'will' again with added power. The use of suggestion as an aid to the will is to be deprecated, as tending to stultify and stereotype character. It would seem that spontaneity is a condition of development, and that human nature needs the discipline of failure as well as of success.)

17. To help children build willpower, they need to understand the difference between what they *want* and what they *will* themselves to do. When faced with a task, if they struggle, the key is to shift their focus away from what they desire but can't have, and instead, engage with something enjoyable or interesting. After a brief mental break, their ability to focus and act with determination returns stronger. This process encourages selfdiscipline without relying on external suggestions, allowing children to develop character through both success and failure.



Paraphrased Version

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18. The way of reason: We teach children, too, not to 'lean (too confidently) to their own understanding'; because the function of reason is to give logical demonstration (a) of mathematical truth, (b) of an initial idea, accepted by the will. In the former case, reason is, practically, an infallible guide, but in the latter, it is not always a safe one; for, whether that idea be right or wrong, reason will confirm it by irrefragable proofs. 18. We guide children not to rely solely on their own understanding, as reason has its limits. In areas like math, reason can be a reliable guide. However, when it comes to initial ideas shaped by their will, reason can be misleading—it will validate whatever idea they hold, whether it's right or wrong. Therefore, children must learn to question and evaluate their ideas carefully before trusting reason to confirm them.

19. Therefore, children should be taught, as they become mature enough to understand such teaching, that the chief responsibility which rests on them as persons is the acceptance or rejection of ideas. To help them in this choice we give them principles of conduct, and a wide range of the knowledge fitted to them. These principles should save children from some of the loose thinking and heedless action which cause most of us to live at a lower level than we need. 19. As children mature, they should learn that one of their most important responsibilities is choosing which ideas to accept or reject. To help them make informed decisions, we provide them with guiding principles and a broad range of knowledge that is appropriate for their age.



20. We allow no separation to grow up between the intellectual and 'spiritual' life of children, but teach them that the Divine Spirit has constant access to their spirits, and is their Continual Helper in all the interests, duties, and joys of life. 20. We teach children that all truths are God's truths, and that secular subjects are just as divine as religious ones. Children don't go back and forth between two worlds when they focus on God and then their school subjects; there is unity between both because both are of God and, whatever children study or do, God is always with them.

*Note

• Principle 2 should not be understood as a theological position on the doctrine of original sin, but as a belief that even poor children who were previously thought incapable of living honest lives could choose right from wrong if they were taught. Charlotte Mason was a member in good standing of the Anglican Church of England, whose Thirty Nine Articles includes this statement: "Original sin stands not in the following of Adam, but it is the fault and corruption of the nature of every man that naturally is engendered of the offspring of Adam, whereby man is very far gone from original righteousness, and is of his own nature inclined to evil."