

THE  
WELL-TRAINED  
MIND

ALSO BY SUSAN WISE BAUER

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THE  
WELL-TRAINED  
MIND



*A Guide to Classical Education at Home*

*Fourth Edition*

SUSAN WISE BAUER

JESSIE WISE



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*For Christopher, Daniel, and Emily,  
for Ben, Lauren, and Siobhan,  
for Dot, Linus, and Newton,  
and for Brooke*





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—*Jessie Wise*

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—*Susan Wise Bauer*



WHAT  
*THE WELL-TRAINED MIND*  
DOES: AN OVERVIEW

If you're fortunate, you live in a school system filled with excellent, well-paid teachers who are dedicated to developing your child's skills in reading, writing, mathematics, history, and science. The teachers at the elementary school have small classes—no more than ten students—and can give each student plenty of attention. The elementary school sits next to a middle school that is safe (no drugs, guns, or knives). The middle-school teachers train their students in logic, critical thinking, and advanced writing, and plenty of one-on-one instruction is offered, especially in writing. And in the distance (not too far away) is a high school that steers older students through world history, the classics of literature, the techniques of advanced writing, high-level mathematics and science, debate, art history, and music appreciation (not to mention vocational and technical training, résumé preparation, and job-hunting skills).

This book is for the rest of us.

After a combined total of over forty years in education—Jessie as an elementary and middle-school teacher and administrator in both public and private schools, Susan as student, graduate student, and college teacher—we have come to one simple conclusion: if you want your child to have an excellent education, you need to take charge of it yourself. You don't have to reform your entire school system. All you have to do is teach your own child.

Never mind educational rhetoric about the years of specialized training necessary for teachers. Forget everything you've heard about the need for classes in child development and educational psychology. These things are indeed necessary for the teacher faced with thirty squirming first graders or twenty-five turned-off adolescents. But you have an entirely different task: the education of your own child, one-on-one.

You probably feel that you don't have the skills to teach your child at home. You aren't alone; every home-schooling parent has felt this way (see Chapter 1). But we have consulted with scores of parents—some college-educated, some without high-school diplomas—who have successfully guided their children's education. At conferences and seminars, we've met hundreds more. Home-education magazines overflow with stories of parent-taught teens who excel at reading, writing, science, and math.

All you need to teach your child at home is dedication, some basic knowledge about how children learn, guidance in teaching the particular skills of each academic subject, and lots of books, CDs, posters, kits, and other resources. This book will provide you with everything except the dedication.

*The Well-Trained Mind* is a parent's guide to a do-it-yourself, academically rigorous, comprehensive education—a *classical* education.

What is classical education?

It is language-intensive—not image-focused. It demands that students use and understand words, spoken and written, rather than communicating primarily through images.

It is history-intensive, providing students with a comprehensive view of human endeavor from the beginning until now.

It trains the mind to analyze and draw conclusions.

It both requires and develops self-discipline—the ability to tackle a

difficult task that doesn't promise an immediate reward, for the sake of future gain.

It produces literate, curious, intelligent students who have a wide range of interests and the ability to follow up on them.

*The Well-Trained Mind* is a handbook on how to prepare your child to read, write, calculate, think, and *understand*. In the Prologue, we'll outline what a classical education is and tell you about our own experience with classical education and with various forms of school at home.

Part I tells you how to lay the foundations of academic excellence, from kindergarten through fourth grade. Part II outlines a program that will train the maturing mind of a middle-school child (grades 5 through 8). Part III covers high-school skills. Even if you're starting with an older child, though, consider reading through the earlier sections so that you understand the basic principles of classical education. Each section includes a grade-by-grade summary so that you can see at a glance what each school year should include.

The progression of learning that we describe in Parts I–III is a model—an ideal. Every ideal has to shift (often, in unexpected ways) when it comes into contact with real human beings. Make sure to read Chapter 37, which deals briefly with learning difficulties and points you toward additional resources.

Part IV is dedicated to the issues surrounding full-time home education—getting started, socialization, grade and record keeping, standardized testing, college applications, athletics, and other home-schooling matters.

You may decide to remove your child from school; you may decide to leave her in regular classes. Either way, this book will give you the tools you need to teach her at home or to supplement and reinforce what she's learning in the classroom. We have heard from parents all over the world who are choosing to “afterschool” their children—to work with them individually in the evenings and on weekends and over summers, either to remediate or enrich their classroom educations. If you want to keep your child in school but do additional work in grammar or math, you can use the curricula and methods we suggest in the evenings or during breaks. If your child wants to go above and beyond what she's learning in history or science, she can pursue on her own time the at-home programs we outline.

A word about resources. We find huge lists of resources overwhelming. When Susan had four children at home, she didn't want to sort through an extensive list of recommended books to find the best second-grade guide to ancient Egypt—she just wanted two or three of the best choices. For this reason, we've sorted through available resources and listed our top picks. There are many books, programs, and resources that are compatible with the goals of classical education, and we have made no effort to list them all here. The resources that appear in this book are those that combine academic excellence, ease of use for the parent, clarity, and (when possible) affordability. Other excellent programs may not be listed because they duplicate material in a program we've listed; because they seem unnecessarily complicated, especially for beginners; because they have grown hard to find; or because they are (in our opinion) overpriced. But you can substitute with confidence wherever needed.

Many of our recommendations have changed from edition to edition. In some cases, books and programs have simply gone out of print, forcing us to find new titles to replace them. But in many cases, new curricula have been developed that (in our opinion) supersede our earlier recommendations.

Finally, please visit [www.welltrainedmind.com](http://www.welltrainedmind.com), where we've provided additional resource pages: curricula for kids who don't fit the traditional progression described in these pages—because they have leapt ahead, are dealing with learning challenges, or simply process information differently; a continuously updated list of popular apps, web-based learning games, and online enrichment activities; alternative curricula that we found too complicated, expensive, specialized, or quirky to recommend in these pages, but which have enthusiastic support among many veteran home schoolers. And at [www.forums.welltrainedmind.com](http://www.forums.welltrainedmind.com), you can join thousands of home-schooling parents who are discussing learning challenges, sharing their curricula discoveries, swapping teaching tips, and much, much more.



PRACTICAL  
CONSIDERATIONS: USING  
*THE WELL-TRAINED MIND*  
WITHOUT LOSING YOUR OWN

**T**his is a very big book. *The Well-Trained Mind* provides information on teaching all the subjects in the classical curriculum for all twelve grades—literature, writing, grammar, history, science, math, Latin, modern languages, art, music, debate, and more.

It's a rare parent who will follow this program exactly. The freedom to tailor an academic program to your child's particular interests and needs, strengths and struggles, is one of home education's greatest advantages. We've explained the general philosophy that governs each part of the curriculum, but our specific schedules, texts, and programs are just *illustrations* of how to put this philosophy into practice. We think the texts and programs we've settled on are the best available, but you should always feel free to substitute, to pick and choose and adapt.

For example, in Chapter 17 we recommend that middle-grade history students spend time outlining their history reading, and we demonstrate

this process by quoting from the *Kingfisher History Encyclopedia*, one of our recommended texts. But you can accomplish the same goal using other good world history texts. And although we recommend that students use standard outline form (I, II, III; A, B, C; 1, 2, 3; etc.), our *purpose* is to teach students to distinguish between organizing ideas (“topics”), supporting statements, and additional details—to teach them familiarity with the structure of a well-written piece. So if the student has learned elsewhere how to do a spider diagram or a flow chart and those methods fit the student’s way of thinking better (and still reveal the underlying design of an essay), you can substitute one of them for the traditional outline.

You can follow one part of the program, but not another. If, for example, you’ve found a math curriculum that works well for your sixth grader, you can use the language resources we suggest without feeling as though you’ve got to convert to the math books we like. If your high-school student already has a literature list he’s reading his way through, you can still use our writing and grammar suggestions without adopting our reading list.

No student will do *all* the work we suggest—especially in the early grades, when learning to read, write, and understand arithmetic may take most of the child’s study time. In the classical tradition, reading, writing, grammar, and mathematics are the center of the curriculum. History and science become more and more important as the child matures. Foreign languages, music, art, and electives have to follow these foundational curricula areas. And many students have extracurricular activities (soccer, swimming, music lessons, serious hobbies, clubs, skills courses such as accounting or typing) that may bump art appreciation or French (or even Latin) from your schedule.

After you read through Parts I, II, and III, you should have a good grasp of the principles that guide a classical education. As you put them into effect, take seriously our constant direction toward texts and curricula that are systematic and rigorous. Remember that a child *must* have a thorough grounding in the basic skills of grammar, spelling, writing, and arithmetic before he can proceed to more complex analytical work (more on this in Part I). But when you teach your child at home, *you* make the final decision on which books you’ll use and how much time you’ll spend on schoolwork. Our suggestions are simply that: suggestions, meant to guide you as you plan your child’s education at home.





SUPPLEMENTING YOUR  
CHILD'S EDUCATION:  
*THE WELL-TRAINED MIND*  
AND FULL-TIME SCHOOL

**N**ot everyone who uses this book will want to join the ranks of full-time home schoolers. Although much in this book (and most of the information in Part IV) will be useful to parents who are educating their children completely at home, the information on teaching each subject and the resource lists that follow each chapter will help you supplement the education of a child who's already in school.

Every involved parent is a home educator. If you're checking your child's compositions, talking him through his history homework, or drilling him in math, you're already teaching him. In this case, you're acting as a teacher's aide—helping to teach and reinforce material that has already been presented in the classroom.

You may find, though, that you want to move beyond this role and take on the job of organizing and presenting new material yourself. Your child may need extra tutoring and practice in a subject in order to master it. Or

he may be so interested in a subject that he wants to go beyond the prescribed curriculum.

Either way, we suggest that you read Chapters 1 and 2, which explain our basic theory of classical education, and the chapters that deal with each stage of the mind's development: Chapter 3, "The Parrot Years"; Chapter 13, "The Argumentative Child"; and Chapter 25, "Speaking Your Mind." These will give you an overview of the process of learning, no matter what age your child is.

Encourage your child toward absorption in grades 1 through 4, critical thought in grades 5 through 8, and expression in grades 9 through 12. She must have good, phonics-based reading skills. Use one of the phonics programs that we recommend to teach beginning reading skills; make sure she does plenty of extra reading in the early grades; and use the logic resources and primary source recommendations in Part II to help her think critically about middle-grade history, science, and math. In the high-school years, examine our rhetoric resources to improve your student's writing skills. Writing is a difficult skill to teach in a group setting, and most students need extra practice and individual attention to write well.

If you want to encourage your child to go beyond the classroom, use the information we present, and adapt it to his school schedule. For example, in Chapter 16, "Recognizing the Patterns," we describe a science program for fifth through eighth grade that requires the student to complete experiments, write reports, and sketch diagrams. You can use the science resources we recommend and key the child's study to what he's learning in the classroom. If he's studying fifth-grade biology and wants to know more, use our biology resource sections to provide your child with supplementary learning.

You can also use these chapters to guide a course of summer study. But bear in mind that a twelve-week summer course can't cover all the material listed in these chapters, which are designed to provide a school year's worth of study at home.

If you want to make sure that your child masters a skill area that's giving her trouble, you can use the books and programs we describe as systematic and drill-oriented. You shouldn't try to key these to classroom work, since each skill builds on what has already been taught. Instead, devote an appropriate amount of time to pursuing the additional study as an extracurricular activity.

If you're particularly unhappy with the way one subject is being taught, consider asking your school system whether your child can study that particular material with a tutor. Many schools will allow this as long as the child shows steady progress. You can then substitute one of the programs we outline, either acting as tutor yourself or hiring someone to work one-on-one with your child (see Chapters 44 and 45 for information on approaching your local school and finding reliable tutors). It sometimes happens that an excellent teacher and a bright student are unable to connect in the classroom because their learning styles conflict. And many children need one-on-one instruction in order to do their best work.



For we let our young men and women go out unarmed in a day when armor was never so necessary. By teaching them to read, we have left them at the mercy of the printed word. By the invention of the film and the radio, we have made certain that no aversion to reading shall secure them from the incessant battery of words, words, words. They do not know what the words mean; they do not know how to ward them off or blunt their edge or fling them back; they are a prey to words in their emotions instead of being the masters of them in their intellects. . . . We have lost the tools of learning, and in their absence can only make a botched and piecemeal job of it.

—Dorothy L. Sayers, “The Lost Tools of Learning”



THE  
WELL-TRAINED  
MIND





PROLOGUE



THE STORY OF  
A CLASSICAL  
HOME EDUCATION



1



UNCHARTED  
TERRITORY: JESSIE

The first day I taught my three children at home, I cleaned up the playroom and set up three desks. I hung an American flag at the front of the room and led them in the Pledge of Allegiance. I was shaking with nervousness.

It was 1973, and my husband, Jay, and I had just done something radical. We had removed our children from school.

I was terrified, which was ridiculous. After all, I was a state-certified teacher. I'd taught public school for six years; I'd taken postgraduate courses in education from Tulane University, the College of William and Mary, and the University of Virginia. One year, I'd managed thirty-eight second graders from dawn till dusk—no lunch break, no recess break, and no teacher's aide.

Yet I was completely intimidated by those three little children, certain that I couldn't do an adequate job of teaching them myself. All my teacher

education had brainwashed me. I was convinced that parents couldn't possibly teach their own children—certainly not at home. It had to be done in an institutional setting, run by professionals, with their resources and specialized training and expertise.

Unfortunately, the professionals had let us down.

I wasn't a stranger to failures in the system. The last year I taught public school, I had in my sixth-grade class two sixteen-year-old boys who had not yet learned to read. I'd never even heard of home schooling, but I remember thinking: If I ever have a child, he will know how to read before he goes to school. I will not have my son sitting in sixth grade, unable to read.

So when my oldest child turned four, I said to him one day, "Bob, would you rather take a nap, or would you like to learn how to read?" He chose reading (not surprisingly), and I started him on the old-fashioned phonics I'd been taught when I was a child. I'd lie down with him on his little bed after lunch and work on his letters (since I also had a two-year-old and a thirteen-month-old, I was always glad to lie down). We practiced vowels and consonants, and sounded out new words that year. We called it "doing kindergarten." By the time my middle child was three, she wanted in. "My do kindergarten, too," she'd say, and I would boost her up and let her repeat the sounds after me.

I was proud of myself. I was preparing my children for school. Kindergarten, when it came, was uneventful and purely social. Bob loved to play at school. At home, I went on reading to him and teaching him his language and number skills.

But when Bob reached first grade, he didn't fit in. He already knew the material, and he was bored. The school—a well-regarded private school—was cooperative and moved him into second grade. He was bored there, too. The class was working on early reading skills, and we'd already done that. The second graders didn't like him because he was a little upstart invading their turf. The administration moved him back to first grade, but now the first graders were hostile. He was a big shot who'd been thought worthy of second grade, and they wouldn't play with him. They were jealous because he was well prepared.

So here he was, in first grade, already feeling that doing well in school made him unpopular. He started to change. He had been an excited, exuberant, curious child. Now he was a behavior problem. He stopped doing well in school. His papers had always been meticulously done, but sud-

denly his writing became sloppy. The teacher complained to us that Bob was always questioning her in class. And the bus ride to school was horrendous: the older kids made the younger ones sit on the floor, stole their lunches, and dirtied their clothes so they'd get demerits from the teachers at school. Every day, Bob got off the school bus with a handful of bad papers, and he was either fighting mad or crying.

At this point, Jay and I realized that we were spending most of our time with this child trying to undo what was happening to him when he was at school. And we were afraid that our second child, Susan, would go through the same metamorphosis. Susan had just started kindergarten, and the teacher was already protesting to us that she would be a social misfit because she wanted to read during free time instead of playing. We were experiencing firsthand the terrific leveling pressure applied in so many schools: the effort to smooth out the bumps by bringing well-prepared kids down to the level of the rest.

This still happens in some schools. Not long ago, the best private preschool in our area agreed to stop teaching four-year-olds beginning reading skills. Kindergarten teachers in the local public schools had complained that the children turned out by this preschool were bored in kindergarten because they already knew the material. The schools demanded that the preschool quit turning out such well-prepared five-year-olds so that all the kindergartners would start at the same level of ignorance. I was appalled when the preschool buckled and went back to teaching colors and "social skills."

Back in 1973, no one told me to stop teaching phonics to my preschoolers. And we didn't know what to do with these academic misfits I had managed to produce. So we took our two school-age children to a psychologist in the local mental-health system. He tested both of them, and I found out what my careful preparation for kindergarten had done: Bob, the second grader, was reading on a seventh-grade level; Susan, the kindergartner, was reading fifth-grade material. The psychologist called us into his office afterward. "Listen," he said, "if you keep those children in school, they are going to become nonlearners. They're bored to death. You've got a teacher's certificate. Why don't you take them out of school and teach them yourself?"

This had never occurred to us. After all, education was the domain of schools . . . and these were *our* children! We didn't know anyone else who

was home-schooling. The whole idea was odd and radical, and we weren't sure it was even legal; Virginia law was fuzzy on this point.

But we had no other choice. The local public school was a terrible environment socially, and test scores ranked our county at the bottom of the state year after year. The private school had been our solution. So, quaking in my boots, I set up the desks and the American flag and started to teach my children at home. I worried the whole time. I worried that my children weren't going to get into college. I worried that the school system was going to come and take them away from us for neglect and truancy. I worried that their social development would suffer.

Those worries didn't come true. Bob, my early reader, went on to excel in math and sciences. He studied computer science at the College of William and Mary, earned his master's degree from the University of Virginia, and went into a high-profile career in technology; he's worked with innovative start-ups in Seattle and has also held executive positions with HP and Samsung. Susan went to college at seventeen as a National Merit finalist, and then completed three graduate degrees, ending up with her Ph.D. in American Studies. She taught literature and writing at William and Mary for a number of years, has a thriving career as a writer, and also runs her own publishing company. Deborah graduated from the University College at the University of Maryland; she achieved certification as a forensics evidence technician, and then became a Maryland police officer. After an on-the-job injury, she retrained as a paralegal and joined a Baltimore law firm.

As I look back on the education I gave these children, I can see that it follows a pattern that has mostly disappeared from public education. To begin with, I filled their heads with facts when they were small. I taught them to read early and kept books everywhere in the house; we had books for presents and rewards, and I was known at the local public library as "the lady with the laundry basket" because I took my children in every week and filled a laundry basket with their books. On each library visit, I had them check out the following books: one science book, one history book, one art or music appreciation book, one practical book (a craft, hobby, or "how-to"), a biography or autobiography, a classic novel (or an adaptation suited to age), an imaginative storybook, a book of poetry. They were allowed to choose the titles, but I asked them to follow this pattern. And they were also allowed to check out other books on any topic they pleased.

Furthermore, I made them memorize. They could recite multiplication tables, lists of linking verbs, dates, presidents, and Latin declensions.

As their thought processes matured, I taught them how to fit knowledge into logical structures. I spent a lot of time in one-on-one discussion and interaction. We learned spelling rules, mathematics, and basic logic; we followed an unfashionably strict grammar book and diagrammed sentences of increasing complexity; we kept science notebooks and time lines so that we could organize their growing knowledge of facts into logical and chronological order. I taught them how to organize a paragraph, an essay, a research paper. We studied Latin grammar, took music lessons, carried out science experiments (including one memorable dissection of a cow's eyeball, acquired from a farmer neighbor). They learned how to follow custom-made schedules, balancing academics and personal interests like music, programming, and creative writing. And they continued to read.

As they moved into high school, I spent more time working on skills in writing and self-expression. They wrote critical essays and research papers, studied the principles of rhetoric, read widely—and, most importantly, began to develop their own special interests. Bob spent much of his study time learning to program on his brand-new computer. Susan had a bent for words; she wrote two novels, researched early British history and literature, and taught herself Welsh and Gaelic (certainly nothing I would have come up with). Deborah studied art and also became an accomplished violinist.

I didn't know until later that I had followed the pattern of classical education called the trivium. I did know that what I was doing worked.

Susan will write about the trivium in the next chapter; it's the classical theory of education, which organizes learning around the maturing capacity of the child's mind. It no longer exists in public education. *I* didn't learn by this method when I was educated in the county public schools back in the 1940s and '50s. But I was raised by elderly relatives who had been taught by classical methods popular before the turn of the century. Meme, as I called her, had only finished eighth grade in a one-room schoolhouse, and Uncle Luther hadn't even gone that far. But by eighth grade, Meme had learned Latin and algebra, and Uncle Luther had learned advanced practical mathematics and how to think and write. They taught me to read before I ever went to school. The first-grade teacher was our neighbor, and when she heard that Meme was drilling me in phonics, she made a special

trip over to warn us that I'd be ruined for life if Meme used such an out-dated method. Meme was undaunted, and when I did enter school I was put straight into second grade because of the skills I'd already acquired.

When I came home from school in the evenings, Meme and Uncle Luther sat me down and made me learn. Meme would point at the lists in the books—multiplication tables, parts of speech—and say, “Memorize those.”

“But the teacher said we don't have to memorize them,” I protested. “We just have to be able to use them.”

“I don't care what the teacher says,” Meme insisted. “These are things you have to know.”

I had been trained to be obedient and disciplined, so I memorized the lists, even though memorization was difficult for me. I learned my algebra and grammar. I went on to college and a professional position; I was the only girl in my high-school class to graduate from college. When I had children of my own, I used Meme's method and found that the three-part process of memorization, logical organization, and clear expression put them far above their peers.

In the middle of this century, Dorothy Sayers, author and creator of Lord Peter Wimsey, told an audience at Oxford University that education had given up on the trivium and was now running on what she called the “educational capital.” We no longer teach our children the process of memorization, organization, and expression—the *tools* by which the mind learns. The leftover remnants of those methods have carried us through several decades of schooling without catastrophe; I made it through public school at the top of my class because my guardians taught me from *what they had learned*. But sooner or later, the capital gets used up. My own children were faced with teachers who brought them down to the level of the class; teachers who thought it was more important to teach social skills than academic subjects; textbooks that had abandoned grammatical rules and mathematical logic in favor of scattershot, incidental learning. They were surrounded by peers who considered anyone good at learning to be a geek. They spent seven hours every day sitting in desks, standing in lines, riding buses, and doing repetitive seatwork so that their classmates could learn what they already knew.

I wanted something better for them. As I've watched home education develop over the last decades, I've become convinced that any dedicated



parent can do what I did. My own education didn't stretch to Latin or Gaelic or calculus or computer science or art or violin, but my children learned all of these things. With the help of resources and support groups now in place throughout the country—and with the principles we'll give you in this book—you can provide your child with a classical education at home, even if you've never glanced at Latin or logic.

You can do what my guardians did and, on your own time, teach your child the basic skills she may not be learning at school. Your young student may need particular help in math, science, reading, or writing. Even the best and most diligent teacher (I speak from experience) is often prevented from giving necessary individual attention by the growing size of her class. If you use the resources we've collected in this book and invest in some one-on-one time with your child, you will be capable of educating him.

When I taught school, I was convinced that parents couldn't teach their own children. But forty years later, I can look back and say: The experiment was a success. I was the best teacher my children could possibly have had *because* I was their parent.

I happened to have a teacher's certificate. But during my years of home schooling, I learned more academic material, more about how to manage individual relationships with children, and more about how to teach than I did in any of my teacher-education courses. Teacher-education courses gave me a great deal of good information on how to manage large groups of children. I needed that in schools, but a parent doesn't need it to teach at home.

I happened to have a college degree. But in the forty years since I first became involved with the home-education movement, I've seen parents who only finished high school lead their children successfully through twelfth grade, and I've watched those children thrive in college.

You shouldn't be afraid to take your child out of school, if necessary. This is a radical step for most parents; it means a change in schedule, in priorities, in lifestyle. And apart from academic concerns, many parents ask, "What about my child's social development? Doesn't he need peers?" Children need friends. Children do *not* need to be surrounded by large groups of peers who inevitably follow the strongest personality in the crowd. The question for any parent is: Do I want my child to be like his peers? Or do I want my child to rise above them?

Finally, if you're accustomed to sending your child to school every

morning and allowing the professionals to worry about what he learns and how he learns it, the idea of supervising an entire education may overwhelm you. I sympathize. When I started, I was convinced I could never do it. But if you feel your child is being shortchanged in school, we can give you a plan to fix that. In this book, not only will we introduce you to the trivium method, but we'll give you resources to carry it out and a plan for the entire twelve years of school.

I discovered that home education has a great advantage I knew nothing about when I started. Home education teaches children to *learn* and eventually to teach themselves. By the time my children were twelve or so, I did less and less actual teaching. I supervised; I discussed content with them; I held them accountable; I graded; I bought books and organized coursework and found tutors for their advanced courses. But by early high school, they had been trained in the methods of learning. From this point, they began the process of educating themselves, with some help from tutors and correspondence courses. As adults, they continue to educate themselves, to widen their intellectual horizons. Certainly, this should be the first goal of education.