

#18 The Rotation Schedule

My husband and I and a couple of our kids went to an Escape Room for the first time awhile ago. If you don't know what that is, there are usually three or four rooms you can choose from. You're given a scenario and then you have one hour to escape. We chose the Fire Escape room and here was our scenario:

The smell of smoke causes you and your family to evacuate your home. While outside, your father tells you his precious family heirlooms are going to be destroyed. Without thinking twice, you tap into your hero instincts and rush back into the house. Can you find all the items and escape before time runs out?

There was a list of about 18 items on the wall for us to look for. Now, we had no idea at all what this was going to look like. I can't give away any details, but I can tell you that the room we were in was very sparsely furnished—a bed, a couple dressers, a few pictures on the wall. At first glance, we thought, what on earth? What are we even looking for? None of those items were in plain sight and it didn't appear there was anywhere to look.

So we just started opening drawers and looking behind things and under things, looking for anything that might give us a clue and we started telling each other random things we were seeing, not knowing if they meant anything or not. Now, we were told that if we got stuck, we could call down to the desk two times and they'd give us a clue. After about 20 minutes of finding nothing, we decided we better ask and he said, "Did you find such and such item" and told us where to look for it. Suddenly seeing that mad us see how the clues fit together and it got us going. Now we understood what we were looking for and it started getting exciting as we scrambled to look for hidden clues and solved puzzles and there were all kinds of surprises along the way.

We finally got down to the last 5 minutes with one more heirloom to find. We had all these pieces of puzzles that didn't make any sense and didn't seem to fit together and we thought, Oh, darn, after all that, we're not going to get out in time. We didn't think there was any square inch that we hadn't searched. Then my husband said, 'uh, guys, did any of you look her?' and he held up an item that suddenly brought all the clues together and we frantically worked a combination and got out of the room with one minute to spare.

It was exhilarating! We were elated! We kept saying We did it! We did it! Afterwards we went to dinner and kept reliving how the clues came together and how we solved the puzzles and all the unexpected surprises. We can hardly wait to do it again!

Now let's revisit the Escape Room curriculum style. First of all, you are not there by choice. Someone has compelled you to be there. You are usually not even given the reason why you're in the room, rather you're handed a stack of tasks to be completed before the hour is over. And if you don't, you can't go out and play.

So the Fire Escape room, curriculum style, might look like this. Open the third drawer down in

the dresser. You will find a locked box. Here is the combination of the box. When you open it, there is another assignment inside.

And now imagine reporting to the same room, day after day, with a new stack of tasks to be completed.

True, no child will be left behind. They will probably all eventually get out of the room. But at what cost? I guarantee, there would be no Escape Room franchises. Who would go back? There would be no thrill.

But isn't that what learning by curriculum looks like? Every day we give our children a list of tasks to be completed. Define this word. Spell that word. Answer this question. Read this story. And tomorrow, we'll do it again. And the next day and the next day.

How many children do you hear out in the backyard saying, "That was so cool when we copied the definition of refraction." "Yeah! Hey! I can spell it!"

Designers of curriculum have already made all the connections. They have solved all the puzzles. Your job is to simply complete the tasks they have given you. There is little room for the ah-hah moments when pieces come together. There are few Archimedes in the bathtub moments where he shouted "Eureka!" when he figured out a problem he had been working on.

It reminds me of a community I saw in China where everyone was given employment. Everyone had their meals provided for and their housing. They were even given clothes to wear. All their needs were met. They finally had to seal off the balconies because too many were jumping to their death. What was the point of living?

We are designed and hard wired to learn by discovery and exploration. It's finding the clues and the patterns and making the connections for ourselves that keep us coming back for more.

My hope and desire is that you, at some point, will have the courage to relinquish your role as taskmaster and embrace the fun of loading the rooms with clues and getting out of the way while your children explore and discover for themselves. It's up to you to tell the story and light the fire to get the process going. And just like the guy at the desk downstairs, you're there to answer questions when they get stuck. You get to join in the conversation when they start telling you about what they are learning. In the end, it makes life a whole lot easier for you because you are not burdened with a million facts you feel you need to hammer into your children. When your children learn by exploration and discovery, they'll keep coming back for more. And they'll find hidden treasures of knowledge you may not even know exists.

I think it was William Wordsworth who said one day that there was so much in life that he still wanted to learn, that if he lived 70 times 7 lifetimes, he couldn't get to all of it.

The friends of the great scientist Louis Agassiz wanted to gift him a trip to Europe. He said, "How can I take time to go there when there is so much in my own backyard I have not yet

discovered and learned about?” He stayed home and spent the next nine months exploring every inch of his back yard and thrilled at all he learned.

Is this the love of learning you want to see in the hearts of your children? Then it will require that you let go and trust the process.

Does it help you if I remind you this is God’s method of learning He uses with us? He created a beautiful world and loaded it with endless clues. But He has never assigned and compelled His children. His instructions are simply, “Seek. Ask. Knock.” It didn’t bother Him that it took us nearly 6000 years to discover electricity and put it to good use. It’s been there the whole time. We only figured out flying a little over a hundred years ago.

He knew to not allow the explore and discover process of learning would be to deny us one of our greatest joys. As Dr. Alan Stockdale wrote: “God gave to man the challenge of raw materials, not the ease of finished things. He left pictures unpainted, music unsung, problems unsolved that man might know the joys and glories of creation.”

That process of creation is to take matter unorganized and organize it into new ways. In our escape room, we organized pieces of information into a usefulness, and it was thrilling. Think of all the music that has been created from just 8 notes on a scale, all the art that has been painted with 3 primary colors, and all the works of literature written using 26 letters of an alphabet. And think of all that has yet to be created.

What a tragedy that we train our children to wait for instructions; that we rarely give them a chance to explore or discover something that excites them. As I said a moment ago, this ‘finish the tasks we assign’ mentality is turning out generations of students who want nothing to do with learning once they have a diploma in hand. And many other students don’t care enough about the diploma to even earn that.

Granted, there is risk involved. We checked and only about 30% make it out of the Fire Escape room on the first try. But even God knows the risk is worth it.

As a wise man said, “A child is ready to learn when a child is ready to learn. Not when we are ready to teach him.” Here at the well-educated heart, I will constantly encourage you to let go of the job of taskmaster and embrace the fun of learning the way we were divinely designed to learn. I’m not asking you to do nothing—your job is going to be to set up the rooms of discovery. The rotation schedule is really nothing more than setting up rooms to explore.

The same for the Mother’s University. I don’t give you an order of what you should read first or even tell you exactly what you should read or give you questions to answer. I don’t even tell you what to do or what conclusions you should draw. Rather, I set up rooms that I know are loaded with clues for you to look around and discover and begin to piece things together for yourself, which is the same process I encourage you to allow your children. It’s how I’ve been learning all the things I have been sharing with you about educating hearts of children. And the more I learn, the more I want to learn. My list grows bigger and bigger every day! It’s an exciting and joyful

way to live.

There is no one-size-fits-all to learning, although there are too many people out there trying to make it so. Learning the way I am trying to describe to you allows for individual circumstances, personalities, capabilities, aptitudes and interests. It's a very personal journey.

The Rotation schedule is a way to allow this kind of learning to happen.

When you understand the Developmental Levels, the why behind the rotation schedule becomes a little more apparent. I know many people use some sort of rotation schedule. The most popular one is a four year rotation schedule through history. My problem with that is that it doesn't take into account the differences in a child's ability to grasp things from year to year. If a child goes through Greece, for instance, as a six year old, he can only take in what a six year old mind can grasp, which isn't a lot yet. By the time he returns at age 10, so much time has passed by that he will have lost much of what he learned. And he'll miss out on what he could have learned as a seven, eight and nine year old. Maybe that tour at ten will be the last visit to Greece and he will have missed out on what his eleven, twelve and thirteen year old mind can take in.

By switching to a twelve month rotation schedule, there are fresh and new topics to visit every month. I've heard children complain when they have to spend long periods of time on one subject. They're inquisitive when they're young! It's not a time to go deep. Learning and understanding needs to layer in, line by line, here a little and there a little. The twelve month rotation allows for lots of overlapping and repetition. For instance, you may discover some Spanish explorers in month one when you talk about explorers and then you'll see them again in month 2 in a study of Spain and again in Month 9 when they're seen from the Latin American's point of view. In month two, you see the Spanish Armada from Spain's point of view and in Month three, you see the Spanish Armada from England's point of view.

But—I hear it said—history needs to be laid out chronologically. Not so. This was clearly taught by the heart educators. Our minds and hearts have to sift through tons of information every single day. It has to be weighed out by importance and placed in a correct file in our brains. We are very equipped to do that. In the early years, we're simply giving them puzzle pieces that will come together over time. These puzzle pieces are going to be in the form of fine art and illustration, poetry, story and even music— all tools that are long lasting. Like Rudyard Kipling taught: “If history were told in the form of stories, it would never be forgotten.” The more your children can see and feel history, the more they will want. Facts and information kill a love of history.

Most learning through curriculum is linear—it's presented as though a child just has to be taught a fact, tested to make sure he got it, and then you move on. Most learning that happens in this way goes into the pile of ‘Who cares?’ and is forgotten. But for deep and lasting learning, I see a spiral- returning over and over to a topic, expanding and rising each time it's visited. Have you ever read a book and then read it again a few years later and it's like reading a new book? You see so many things you missed the first time around. It's not that the words on the pages have changed—but you have. You bring more to your reading. That's the same principle at work with

the rotation schedule—a child returns to the same general topic every year—maybe even re-reads a book he read earlier—but the next time, it is seen with wider vision.

We have a huge subject on our hands! We want to learn about the whole world – not only of all the people who have lived here, but we want understand the physical world in which we live. In fact, while we have many subjects we study: History, Science, Social Studies, Geography, Literature, Music, Art and so forth, I only see two subjects: a study of people and a study of nature.

We learn about people through literature, art, music, history and even Geography. Where we live and how we build our homes and adapt our lives is very much tied into Geography. The subject shouldn't be isolated. We learn about nature through science and math. So I have a 12 month rotation based on history, or more correctly, a study of people and one for nature, which is understanding the world in which we live. Eventually the two spirals start spiraling together into one whole.

Each month you'll lead your child into a 'room' which you have prepared with clues and let them look around and start gathering clues from a nation's literature, art, songs, fairy tales, histories, biographies, scientific discoveries, architecture, landmarks and cultural heritage. What they are drawn to will be according to their developmental level. And you can help facilitate that. All the subjects we typically study separately are drawn together under one history umbrella.

A young child may pick out the imaginative tales of the land, the fairy tales and mythology. They may enjoy sharing in that country's holiday celebrations or their music and songs. An older child will begin to want to get to know some of the stories of the people of that land and will take an interest in events. A study of the great classic literature and poetry teach us much about the hearts of the people we are studying. All ages can enjoy looking at the paintings and the architecture of the buildings, and in time, they will begin to see for themselves the lessons gifted from each nation.

In this way, families can all be studying the same general topic, but at different levels. It makes it possible for all family members, regardless of age, to join in the conversation. As you rotate back each year, older siblings will share favorite stories with younger ones. Maybe they'll even volunteer to read favorite books aloud to them—and they'll gain new insights their second time through.

I hope this begins to paint a vision of possibilities to you. The website has an option where all the resources can be accessed through the rotation schedule to make it very convenient to use.

So let me briefly describe the reasoning behind the choices. The people side of the rotation is organized around America as the spine. You may be from another country and be inclined to use your home country as the spine. Of course you love your own country and you want your children to love it. But let me explain why I think you may want to reconsider allowing America to be the spine.

As you look at how long it has taken for freedom to find a home, America, conceived in liberty, is the culmination of centuries of strivings of people everywhere. The story of freedom is one of the most important stories that can be told, because only in freedom can we attain our highest potential. America's story is the story of freedom. Already we see people trying to replace it with systems that have failed repeatedly throughout history. A study of nations will help your children see that. From America's earliest beginnings, the main facts were well established for us to study. There is no 'dim twilight of myth and legend' such as you find in the majority of other nations. We can see its growth unfold line upon line from simple huts to vast networks of cities through a historical record that is complete, authentic and reliable.

And probably the most important reason to make America the spine of study is the fact that America's story is the combination of the stories of all nations. We are the children of England, of Scotland, China, France, Spain, India, Africa—each one weaving its heritage into the fabric we call America.

Because of our roots, the study of America easily lends itself to the study of all nations. So here is how they are connected.

Because of our roots, the study of America easily lends itself to the study of all nations. So here is how they are connected. America's history is divided into 10 chronological monthly studies, with Months 11 and 12 left open for review and for revisiting favorite topics. Each of these monthly topics then tie into a nation or a geographic area. For instance, in Month 1 when you study the early explorers like Columbus, it leads you into a study of China and India because that is where he was trying to go. The Vikings came from Scandinavia, so we want to know their story. In month 2, when you study the Pilgrims, you can visit Holland because that's where they sought refuge before coming to America. And in learning Holland's story, you'll see its similarity to America's story. Just as we freed ourselves from England and set up a Republic, 200 years earlier, Holland fought to free itself from Spain's rule and set up a Republic. So you'll want to know Spain's story, too. In Month 3, we are the colonies of the British, so we turn to a study of our Mother Country. Month 4 takes a look at George Washington, who is likened to the great Roman leader Cincinnatus which leads us to a study of Rome which cannot be separated from a study of Greece. In month 5, with the study of Lafayette, the young Frenchman who came to fight for liberty in our Revolution, it leads us back to France. Month 6, the new nation of America is born, conceived in liberty and built upon the rock of the teachings of the Bible, which leads us to a study of the Holy Land and the early Hebrews and their neighbors. Month 7 is for a study of the expanding American frontier, and is tied into the study of the expansion of another world frontier under the teachings of Islam. The study of Lincoln and slavery in Month 8 leads us back to Africa. Grant and Lee and the Civil War are the focus of Month 9. Both Grant and Lee fought in the fight against Mexico and so leads us into a study of Mexico and our neighbors down south in South America. Month 10 brings a study of World War I and leads us to take a look at Russia and Germany.

The nature rotation takes you through the Stars, the Ocean and Rocks – those subjects that pertain to the physical sciences of creation—followed by Insects, Plants, Birds and Animals—all the Life sciences. The same plan of study is in place for them. There are four months left open

in the summer for extra exploration of nature and applying the stories they've learned throughout the year.

Notebooking provides a way to start to sort and organize the clues they will find. And if they get to the end of the month and haven't covered all the books you had planned, no worries. You'll be back around the next year and the year after that.

This rotation schedule is meant to be a servant, not a master. It brings a little order and rhythm to your learning so that you aren't trying to pull something out of the whole world every single day. If you get to the end of the month and you are in the middle of a great book or exploring a line of study, you don't have to abandon it just because a new month has started. There is plenty of room for flexibility and adjustment. You can even study in a different order. The only thing in an order is the American history spine, and really, the first half is colonial and the second half is post-Revolution. So you can rearrange it easily.

It will take time to learn and apply the lessons. A lifetime, really. When you see your child walk across the stage in cap and gown, it's not called a Conclusion Ceremony. It's called a Commencement. This is the Commencement of life but I also think of it as a Commencement to a lifetime of learning of which you have but laid a foundation. Remember the thrill when seemingly unrelated things suddenly start clicking and connecting and taking life? It will happen. If you don't interfere with the process and if you are a fellow traveler on the journey, delighting in your own discoveries and sharing them, all with a purpose of helping your children discover the rules for happy living, individually and as societies. As we tend to the inner kingdom of our children's hearts, it will be from the treasures there that they will begin to build a new world.