

## **Home Schooling--Cooperative Style: A New Option in MK Education**

*Diane Morris*

What are parents to do when they have young school-age children and live in an area where the nearest MK school is two hours away, the international school is too expensive, and the local school cannot meet their children's educational needs? Correspondence school or home schooling are possible options. Although some people are under the impression that these are different names for the same thing, they are two different programs. A correspondence school provides the curriculum and materials, and also evaluates the students' work and progress. Home schooling programs provide the curriculum and materials with perhaps some help in evaluating, but work is not sent to a central place for evaluation. In both programs, the parent does the teaching, but home schooling parents have the responsibility for evaluating their children's progress.

There is much to be said in favor of either of these alternatives. Parents who feel uncomfortable and tense in stepping in and out of the parent/teacher role and who see this as a hindrance to the kind of relationship they desire to maintain with their children, find difficulty with either choice. Having other children around with whom their children can interact (both academically and socially) is a felt need for many families.

On a recent trip to Asia visiting our missionary families, I found a small missionary community who had addressed this issue in a creative, yet professional, way. Three mothers with concerns for their own families are working together to reach their own and one another's children. A little two-room house, adjacent to one family's home, serves as the school for the first-through-third graders. An upstairs "attic" room houses the kindergarten. Ten students in grades kindergarten through three and their mothers have put together an educational

program which any professional educator would admire.

Although none of these mothers is a trained teacher, one is what we used to call a "born teacher," even though her training is in accounting. Barbara Hagelberg, a missionary wife with OC International in Yogyakarta, Centra Java, Indonesia, loves working with curriculum as well as teaching children. Under her guidance, the kindergarten, first grade and combination second and third grades have developed into challenging, exciting classrooms. She has researched curriculum, depending mainly on the catalogs available for home schoolers. She chooses, experiments, and adapts materials which best meet the goals set for these students. "I want my children to learn to think," Barb told me when I visited with her in Yogya in April 1992.

She is also concerned that the curriculum be international in content so that it will be applicable, not only to the American children, but to other nationalities as well. Of the ten children currently enrolled, four are Korean. Two of them are from a Korean-American missionary family. This mother took over the teaching for the first grade when the teacher gave birth to her own future first-grader. Besides one of her own daughters, Mrs. Oh has two other Korean children in her class. The garage has been set up for the first grad class, furnished and decorated in such a way that visitors would never know it had not always been a classroom.

When I arrived, Barb was thrilled to have a teacher with whom she could talk "school things." We discussed methods, motivation, special learning challenges for both advanced learners and children with learning difficulties, as well as curriculum and methods of evaluating student progress. She

showed me her materials and the catalogs from which she was ordering. We discussed what she felt was good and not so good in various materials. I could tell she was wisely selective in her ordering and planning. Her philosophy of education is based on the ideas put forth in Bloom's Taxonomy, teaching children to go from the basic observation stages of thinking to the more complex evaluative stages. The reading program is based on children's classic literature. Both oral and silent reading are emphasized along with discussion, sharing and writing. Students are encouraged to analyze what they read and evaluate the ideas it expresses.

### **School's History**

This school began eight years ago as a result of four missionary moms in Indonesia who were challenged by the need to provide for their young children's education. There was no appropriate schooling alternative in their area at the time, so they began sharing the task of educating their children. The idea was so well received that the study group grew into a full-scale international school. When the business community began taking the lead in the school, it priced itself out of the reach of missionaries' pocketbooks. This led to the need to start the cycle over again with a new generation of students and teach/moms now know as the Malati Study Group.

Well-meaning parents sometimes have the impression that education consists simply of reading and completing assignments. They think that all a child needs in order to learn are textbooks, workbooks and progressive assignments. Some rote learning can take place in this way, but that is not education. Children need opportunities to use what they learn, to use that information to solve real

*“With the entrance of missions into so many newly opened areas of the world today, I see the potential of this kind of (satellite) school as an encouraging possibility for missionary families who are pondering this issue.”*

problems, and to ask questions as well as to answer them. Children with sharp minds need other children with sharp minds with whom to interact, “as iron sharpens iron.” Christian character is developed by learning to give and take with others who think differently than you do. The Malati Study Group provides that atmosphere and the children are happily

thriving. Although the advantages of community are not available to all missionaries, this is an example of what can be done with limited resources, a few students, untrained teachers, but lots of creativity, commitment, love for children and, most of all, dependence upon the Lord for wisdom and guidance.

*Diane Morris has served as Special Assistant for Member Care - Personnel Division with OC International in Colorado Springs, CO, since 1991. Previously, she spent 28 years at Faith Academy in Manila, Philippines, 12 years as a primary grade teacher (grades two and three) and 16 years as elementary school counselor.*

## **ESTABLISHING A COOPERATIVE HOME SCHOOL**

*Janet R. Blomberg - based on interviews with  
personnel at a Cooperative Home School in Asia*

When is cooperative home schooling an educational option for a missionary family?  
How does one find other families and begin the joint venture of educating their children together?

Recently, I had the opportunity to see first hand an excellent example of cooperative home schooling in Asia. These parents have worked hard to develop an educational option for their children which provides a sound academic foundation, nurtures their spiritual growth, is financially affordable and serves the needs of these missionary families.

Currently, these parent/teachers educate their 22 school-age children. The majority of these children from missionary families representing America, Finland, Korea, Thailand, Singapore, Australia and the Philippines. The school is a cooperative effort in which parents share both the teaching responsibility and the policy decisions. The school's administrator and its board chairman, each of whom has children in the school, shared with me their perspectives on when families should consider a cooperative approach to home schooling and how to begin such an activity.

### **Starting a Cooperative Home Schooling**

They identified six factors that families ought to consider as they think about cooperative home schooling. First, they suggest a family must look at what demands and stresses home schooling will put on them, but especially on the wife. How much time will home schooling take -- not just in the actual classroom teaching role, but also in preparation? How many different grade levels can a mother (who is an untrained teacher) successfully handle? How many different hats can she wear?

Second, a family must consider the number of children will be home schooled. If there is more than one child to be educated, a cooperative approach may have merit. If there are three or four families working together, each mother teaches only one grade level instead of four different grades.

Third, parents must consider the needs of the children when considering home schooling as an educational option. By drawing several families together, each child has the opportunity for interaction with children other than his or her siblings. It gives the child greater opportunities for socialization. It also provides the child with exposure to teachers other than his own mother and a greater variety of teaching styles. This becomes very important if a child goes to an MK school later on in their educational career.

Fourth, cost factors may justify a cooperative approach to home schooling. It becomes expensive for each family to provide their children with the computer, library, and supplementary resources. Some costs may actually be reduced because materials can be ordered in greater quantities, while other costs are simply shared by all the families rather than just one family.

Fifth, most families want to provide a broad range of experiences for their children. The cost savings produced by cooperative home schooling may help parents make this a reality. It enables many families to provide extra educational resources or opportunities for their children.

Sixth, practical issues may create the need for a cooperative approach to home schooling. Parents currently home schooling their own children should ask: Are there families here with children of similar ages to our children? How close are they to us geographically? Do their parents have skills, expertise or interests in areas that are different from mine that can enhance the educational process?

Parents also need to investigate if there is a third site available which could be used as a school. It usually is of great help to the child (as well as the parent) if home and school are separate.

### **The Three Cs**

The experience of this Asian cooperative home school emphasizes the important things that must be done to establish this type of school. A specific, clear statement of focus and purpose is essential. This school began 12 years ago in response to parents' concerns about the expense and atmosphere pervasive in the existing educational options. The school was established, according to its statement, "by a group of concerned, Christian parents for providing a quality Christian education."

The families emphasize three Cs in their home schooling: Christian, correspondence and cooperative. The school's goal, like that of the parents', is to provide an education that is distinctly Christian, seeking to foster the integration of Biblical truth in the classroom and helping its students to develop a Christian world view. They seek to nurture students' spiritual growth through daily Bible classes which stresses both knowing and applying God's truth.

In developing its curriculum, the school received help from the International Institute (located in White Lake, WI). This group, composed of Christian teachers, selects materials from secular, American publishers. Textbooks are chosen based on their overall quality as well as their compatibility with a Christian worldview. Along with the student and teacher books, the Institute provides a folder of resources which includes course objectives, recommendations for the number of hours to be spent on that subject each week, etc. It does not give daily lesson plans, but does give the parent/teacher parameters within which to operate. Although this school has not done this, student work can be sent to the Institute for grading. Curriculum changes come from the head teacher and then must be approved by the board, not because of academic concerns, but because these changes require the expenditure of funds. During its 12 years of operation, there have been some curriculum revisions, but not many.

The school functions as a cooperative effort involving parents in every facet of the school's operation from its governing board to the classroom. Moms, who are full-time

teachers, spend four or five mornings in class and are expected to put in 16-20 hours each week. Mothers, who are part-time teachers, spend ten hours each week at school. Although they may share a class with another parent, they teach the same subjects. Apart from day-to-day classroom responsibilities, parents serve as teacher's aides or substitutes. Some parents, often fathers, teach extracurricular subjects (such as music, art, PE or computers). Other parents coordinate field trips or parties, supervise lunch, recess or the playground, or perform other administrative duties. Since there are so many jobs to be filled, they can be flexible and supportive in accommodating the school needs and schedules of each missionary family due to ministry, language school, etc.

#### **Questions to Ask When Considering Cooperative Home Schooling.**

1. What stresses will home schooling put on the family (especially on the wife)?
2. How many children are going to be home schooled at one time?
3. How will home schooling impact the needs of each child?
4. What are the costs involved?
5. What additional educational opportunities can be provided by cooperatively home schooling?
6. Are there other families in the geographic area who are also home schooling their children?
7. Are there separate facilities available (outside the home) that could be used for a classroom or school?

As the parents clearly state to anyone interested in joining their school, "the cooperative depends solely on parents' participation in the teaching roles. Without parents doing the teaching, there are no teachers, which means no learning. While we do not want to discourage any parent who needs the school, we do want to emphasize full involvement." The school is open to any Christian expatriate family who agrees with the statement of faith and whose child is a native-English speaker.

Not only does the school have a clear focus concerning its purposes, it also has clearly defined the services it can, and cannot, provide for its students. The parents have chosen to limit the class size to seven students. If a particular grade is full, families must educate their own children until space becomes available. They are free to write for and use the materials that the cooperative school is using. The school also recognizes that it cannot be all things to all people. The school goes through the

sixth grade because this is the level the teachers feel they can handle well.

The school recognizes that it cannot provide the special help that is needed by students who are gifted, learning disabled or are not native-English speakers. Not only would it be difficult for the child, but the parents might not be able to fulfill their teaching responsibilities.

These parents have not only taken the time to think through the purposes and procedures for the school, but they have defined them on paper as well. They have clearly articulated the school's legal status and operation in terms of membership procedures and

enrollment; administration -- its selection/powers; finances; curriculum issues; student conduct and discipline and even closure of the school. As we discussed the creation of the school, the board chairman and head teacher reminded me that there is not a substitute for careful planning and defined responsibilities from the start. Clear statements of purpose, policy and procedure are mandatory. Proverbs 29:18 says, "Without vision, the people perish." Likewise without consensus on these important and fundamental issues, it would be difficult, if not impossible, to maintain a cooperative approach to education.

### **Structuring and Operating a Cooperative Home School**

One advantage of this approach is that it builds in greater accountability and structure than traditional home schooling. Academic classes meet from 7:30-12:00 with a break for recess. Students participate in some extracurricular activities (such as swimming, PE, music, local language instruction and computers) daily from 12:30-1:00. In addition, standardized testing is conducted annually for each student to assess their progress. Thus far, students have scored well above average on these tests.

Although this school is parent operated, it has established a school board. Each family has one vote. Members of the school board serve a one-year term. Elections are held each April to select board members: chairman, treasurer, and secretary. Since elections are held in April, this creates a brief overlap period and makes for a smoother transition. The board has responsibility for facilities, safety, expansion and finances (budgets and tuition). The school determines its fees by dividing the budgetary expenses among the number of families in the school. Once the basic tuition rate is established, a sliding scale is then applied to determine each family's rate. Missionaries, who are paying the cost of their children's education themselves, pay 85 percent tuition. Families whose mission funds the education of their children pay 100 percent tuition. None-missionary families pay 115 percent tuition.

### **Pitfalls to Avoid**

In reflecting on their experiences, personnel from this Asian cooperative home school identified several pitfalls that other families may face in starting such a program. Many of these potential problems can be avoided by having a clear focus and by carefully planning. First, there is often a dangerous tendency to rush the start-up process. Amidst the initial pressures of readying facilities, developing curriculum, ordering resources and establishing policies, schools often make decisions that will save time or minimize

#### **Pitfalls to Avoid in Cooperative Home Schooling**

1. Divisive and critical attitudes
2. An unbalanced work load
3. Accepting families who do not share a common commitment with other families
4. Rushing the start-up phase
5. Not accepting the school's limitations
6. Losing your focus
7. Becoming ingrown
8. Failing to check local governmental regulations
9. Poor communication among teaching staff
10. Having only a short -term perspective.

expenses. It is essential that a cooperative school take time to define its purpose, establish its structure and set its policies in order to minimize the likelihood of future problems or disputes. For example, it is easy to start gathering books, but stop short of organizing them into a working library. A second and related pitfall a school can fall into is failing to fully investigate the laws and governmental regulations of the host country. Expansion creates several potential pitfalls for cooperative home schools. Third, families must guard against the development of divisive or critical attitudes. A cooperative attitude is essential and must be protected.

If there's one family with deep concerns and constant criticisms, it may be necessary to re-evaluate whether or not the family belongs in the school for everyone's sake. Fourth, do not let the work load become unbalanced. Obviously, someone must assume the administrative duties inherent in any school setting regardless of its size or structure. However, the remainder of the work load should be divided evenly. Fifth, do not let the school become stagnate and ingrown, but accept new families. In this sense, turnover, which is a negative in many educational settings, can actually become a positive factor within the life of the school. As new families enroll or furlough transitions occur, the school gains new teachers and fresh perspectives. However, it is important to ensure that each new family joining the school shares a common commitment its purposes and programs. This is a sixth pitfall which can easily develop as a school expands. Expansion may also cause a school to lose sight of its original identity as a cooperative school established by parents. Instead, the school may begin to see itself as a business. A cooperative home school must guard against the pitfall of trying to do more than it realistically can. It must also seek out avenues of accountability whether through standardized testing or the supervising umbrella of an existing MK school. It is better not to accept a family, then to have them leave because the school could not meet the needs of their children. The last pitfall that a cooperative school may faces is difficulty in communication. Since there are many teachers involved in the school and each one is not there every day, it is essential there be clear communication on important issues such as school policies, expectations, student discipline, etc.

With careful planning, a defined focus, clear communication and accountability, a cooperative home schooling is an educational option that may effectively serve the needs of today's missionary family.