

CLASSICAL EDUCATION OVERVIEW

It is a shame that measurement tools like the SAT's continue to predominate our educational landscape. Too often, youth simply do what it takes to get by, which means memorize, memorize, memorize and then regurgitate. What are we doing to help our children learn how to think, after those myriad vocab lists and equations are but a dim recollection in their minds? The classical education system is one answer. As old as Socrates himself, it has been experiencing a renaissance among home schools and private schools across the United States and elsewhere.

Classical learning is shaped around a unique trifold pattern called the Trivium which consists of grammar, dialectic, and rhetoric. Students first study the grammar, or "particulars", of a subject. Following, they learn the dialectic, or the relationship of these particulars to one another. Finally, they engage in rhetoric, which is the art of expressing the latter knowledge effectively and coherently. The aim throughout teaching this pattern is to form a "habit of mind" so that students can continue to use a proven method of thinking and processing information long after they have graduated.

It is interesting to note, as Dorothy Sayers (friend of C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien) did in her essay, "The Lost Tools of Learning," that the three stages of the Trivium correspond well to the developmental stages of growing children. Thus, as they focus on the "grammar" of particular subjects (basically, the facts), students are roughly in grades K-6 when they delight in learning new information and memorizing data. During the "dialectic" stage, roughly 7-9, they begin to ask "why" and so they study the relationships and causalities between things. Finally, in the "rhetoric" stage, 10-12, students begin to form their own opinions and are given the chance to express themselves in a logical and coherent manner.

Furthermore, the classical model provides youth with a means to sift through the information and deeper ideologies of our culture and help youth to evaluate and respond to them in a more thoughtful and systematic way. And finally, classical education helps root children in the foundations of our culture (both good and bad) and learn that it did not create itself overnight.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. What do you see as the current problems with the public education system?
2. What appear to be the strengths of this model of education? The weaknesses?

IMPLICATIONS

* Our youth need to learn more than just facts; they need to learn how to decipher those facts, analyze them and respond to them. We need to give them the tools through education to do this. The classical model seems to be one such way.

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