



## WHAT IS A CLASSICAL MODEL OF EDUCATION?

Generally speaking, educational philosophies distill into one of two basic models: The **cognitive-developmental model** and the **behavioral model**. The **cognitive-developmental model** teaches a core of knowledge in a way that challenges the student's thinking. The imparting of wisdom goes beyond the assimilation of facts to the teaching of values, truth, decision making, and critical thinking. This model was perfected in the 15th and 16th centuries and educated most of the great thinkers and artists of the Renaissance and early Reformation periods. It was used almost exclusively in schools until the early to middle part of the last century.

The model that most influences our country's schools and teacher training today is the **behavioral model**. Developed early in the last century, this model is built upon the principle of communicating information to the students and measuring their "learning" by how they recall and report that information on a test. Practical application and depth of understanding are not as strongly emphasized with this model. This model of teaching has been said to create "technicians" designed to produce good test scores rather than students equipped with knowledge, wisdom, and truth.

**PCS** uses a **cognitive-developmental model** commonly referred to as the **classical model**. It best respects the developmental stages of a child's learning abilities and teaches in such a way as to take advantage of and build upon those natural stages of cognitive maturation. Teaching and learning, therefore, follow a pattern from the more concrete to the more abstract. The classical model is built upon the **Trivium** used in the Middle Ages. This **Trivium** consists of three parts: (1) **Grammar**, which involves the memorization of basic facts about a subject, is taught to younger children who naturally love to chant, recite, and memorize. (2) **Dialectic**, or **Logic**, is the study of argumentation and formal logic. This emphasis fits well with the middle and early high school years when young people begin to question, to challenge, and to test things for themselves. The Logic stage will teach them how to integrate facts into a coherent system that reflects biblical truth. In the study of (3) **Rhetoric**, the student learns how to express what he thinks in a manner worthy of the Truth. Obviously, rhetoric includes teaching speech, debate, essay writing, etc. Style and clear-minded expression are important. All three elements are, to varying degrees, present at each grade level, but more emphasis, by necessity, is placed on the element that fits the student developmentally. By way of practical example, consider a study of George Washington under the two models. In the **behavioral model**, facts are memorized such as his date of birth and major accomplishments with all of the information provided from one or two sources followed by a test of the memorized facts. By stark contrast, the **classical model** would focus more on understanding the factors that led to Washington's accomplishments, who his contemporaries were, who or what most influenced his thoughts, and where he fits in the time line of history. Information would be gathered from two or more sources, including biographies, with a report or project to give the student a "hands-on experience" with something that Washington did. A test would look for the student's understanding of the man, his views, and his relevance in history. Grading would also take into consideration such things as neatness, proper grammar, and effective punctuation since all subjects are part of an integrated orderly whole under the Lordship of Christ.



The basic teaching style would supplement or replace lectures in the higher grades with exhibits and experiments where the students are given information and/or materials and instructed to observe, critique and discuss their findings. Again, by way of example, an upper-grade science class would be taught to predict, test, measure, observe, think and conclude; to find out about God’s world for themselves. In literature, students study the significance of the author, what influenced him and what he was trying to communicate, not just what he said. Rather than avoiding “How the Grinch Stole Christmas,” for instance, because it omits the story of Jesus’ birth, students would be taught to enjoy its rhyme and pattern, but also see how it differs from a Christian viewpoint.

Please consider the following quote by Gary Watt as he summarizes the essence of classical education:

“The classical model excels in an understanding of the normal phases that students go through and relies on disciplines that have proven successful in ages past such as logic, Latin, and debate to best educate the child. It is the most successful application of the cognitive-developmental model throughout history, and was the standard for education until the advent of the behavioral model in this country. Utilization of this model in Christian education is not a venture into uncharted territory, but a return to the model with the best track record in history!”

### **HIGH ACADEMIC PREPARATION**

This classical model is a major departure from the behavioral style of learning that makes a student and his parents proud because of consistently high test scores and grades, when in fact, the student is actually gaining little understanding or practical application of the subject matter. Teaching at PCS will not sacrifice the mastering of a core of knowledge--just the opposite: Providence Christian School emphasizes this mastery, but adds a higher goal to expose the student to such a depth and breadth of knowledge and understanding that those who are so equipped and inclined would graduate as Renaissance people. These Renaissance men and women will have the opportunity to be creative and influential for Christ with the ability to think in an innovative, independent, and wise manner while understanding a broad range of subjects.



There is no dichotomy between imparting to students a Christian worldview and biblical truth on the one hand and the highest levels of intellectual development in many fields on the other. They complement one another perfectly; but some Christian schools have seen Christian faith and intellectualism as being mutually exclusive. Achieving high academic goals through the encouragement of teachers and peers will be focused upon rather than through competition and undue pressure. As one looks at the vision for all twelve grades, a quality liberal arts education will be provided and grounded upon the mastery of a broad range of academic topics. It will draw deeply upon the rich heritage of western civilization and culture. **Language Arts** at PCS will emphasize intensive phonics, reading, writing, grammar, spelling, and Latin. The study of **Latin** reinforces a student's understanding of our traditional English grammar, builds their vocabulary skills, and starts a foundation for learning other Romance languages. Students will come to understand the flow of **history**--the causal relationship between ideas, individuals, and events of the past. They will see how successive generations build, for better or worse, upon what has been done before. **Literature studies** encourage students to read from a broad spectrum of writings and to recognize the characteristics of great works. Opportunity is given for students to express creativity through **art, music, and drama**; and, particularly in the higher grades, the study of **art and music history** will be supplemented.

The **math and science studies** are designed to demonstrate God's order and wonder in creation while preparing students to participate knowledgeably in the scientific and technological arenas of the modern world. **Math studies** emphasize the mastery of basic concepts and principles that allow for further study in later years of numerical and spatial relationships. **Science** is taught to expand students' practical knowledge of the world around them; to develop their God-given curiosity of His general revelation--the universe and all that is in it; to expand their powers of observation, deduction, and conclusion; and to cultivate appreciation for the value of life.

In conclusion, it is your parental responsibility, not **Providence Christian School's** or the church's, to see that your children are educated and brought up in the "discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4). **Providence Christian School desires to build upon a firm foundation of faith that is practiced at home, and to cultivate a proper relationship between home, school, and church.** ✚

*Timor Domini principium sapientiae*  
The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom  
Proverbs 1:7