

Friday Focus

From Emory

What is a School?

“Modern man is not modern but momentary.” C.S. Lewis

As we begin to settle into another school year here at PCS, it causes one to think about how we might answer the question “What is a school?” The reality is that we answer this question every day in the decisions that we make, what we value and emphasize in the classroom, in what and how we teach a subject and the students, and in how we handle student (and adult) deviation from school policy and perhaps even from what we view as ‘proper.’

A recent newspaper article interview with secular school students reiterated to me the degradation of the values our culture now has in regard to language. Not only was it irritating that students would use the adjectives that they did to describe their displeasure with a local system’s move to uniforms (that look amazingly like PCS standardized dress), but the more significant issue is how far our culture has slipped into not only accepting that our youth openly use such words, but that our local newspaper would actually publish them verbatim on its front page!

But do we embrace an education that is different only on a visceral level, championing the cause of our school as *Christian* due to the fact that we have yet to have one of our staff or students speak in inflammatory terms openly in the newspaper? And, do we believe that some (many?) of our students don’t use some of those same words in casual conversation (or on Facebook, twitter, etc.)? Is that what sets us apart and if so, is that the most significant attribute to which we cling?

This summer, I was inspired by several speakers at the ACCS Conference. The following thoughts are a plethora of inspiration from a few of the presentations, largely those of Douglas Wilson and George Grant.

Modernity in education has embraced the pragmatic. The more practical the education, the ‘better’ according to current thought about education. America has a vo-tech approach to everything dealing with education, as most of our families, and our staff, were educated with this line of thinking in regard to schooling. Vocational being the term, not for specific skilled hand-labor, but for training toward a specific vocation with little regard for an overall understanding of empirical or liberal knowledge.

The type of education we received and the mindset it supports greatly influence our reaction to situations, as our thought process can easily influence decision-making. This is especially true if we are not guarded to measure them in light of a classical educational model mindset and of a Biblical approach to each question.

If our school is doing its job, we will likely rub some the wrong way in regard to how we operate the school in general, and to the importance with which we assign priority of certain things. The classical model comes to challenge this mindset of pragmatism and the entire paradigm that current education espouses. *Modern* education clings to change that is in reality often a re-packaging of old concepts embraced as new ideas, with an over-emphasis on the visceral at the expense of the thorough.

However, I am not an advocate that anything new is useless, but I have found in coaching that fundamentals work and that people have a pre-set pattern in how they learn, retain, and understand information. Mixed with a variety of interesting and stimulating approaches, the volume and the level of concepts that our students can understand and digest is quite often unbelievable. When mixed with an opportunity allowing them to ponder not only the inner workings of these concepts, and done in a manner that applies what our Lord says in regard to them, we have the beginning of a true education that is not simply a collection of information, but is truth in accordance with wisdom.

This applies not only to the use of the classical model, but perhaps even more boldly in view of the application of a Christian worldview. Nothing is perhaps more misunderstood and undefined than how to operate a school ‘Christianly.’ One needs only to sit before a disgruntled or disillusioned parent a short time before hearing, “they were exposed to _____,..... and you call yourself a Christian school?”

Wilson stated it well: “As classical and Christian educators, we should be: Christians first, thoughtful, insightful and educated second, and employed third. Our lives should reflect these priorities. We should not simply be a stricter version of what others are doing or drowning them in academic rigor or scripture verses.”

Good teaching is a residue of relationship building that personifies the Godhead and Lordship of Christ holding a true respect for the authoritative structure given by the Bible and the parent of that child. Great teaching is caught as much or more than it is taught; great teaching comes only from the thread of enthusiasm and joy from the subject in the books and the *Subjects* in the seats.

Our parents are good people who have entrusted us to take leadership in one of the most important parts of parenting--teaching their children. Yet, they have likely been educated in, and are influenced and bombarded by a culture that is extremely pragmatic, demanding instant and measurable results. As a CCE school, we are in direct contrast to this mindset; and we are on a collision course with a mindset that runs counter to our approach.

Make sure your airbags are functioning and then, as George Grant says: “run toward the roar,” seizing the opportunity to be a proponent of a type of an education that very few of us were afforded.