



Philosophy of Education

At Providence Christian Academy, our mission is to assist parents in the covenantal education of their children. We instruct students from a Biblical perspective, within a confessionally Reformed and classical framework, teaching them to exalt Christ by pursuing truth, beauty, and goodness. We desire that the students may be equipped for the present and the future to take their place in the home, the church, society, and their vocation in a manner that is covenantally faithful and honoring to God.

Therefore, the foundation of our school must be the infallible and inerrant Word of God. We are built upon the historic Christian faith that is revealed in the Bible and summarized in the confessions of the Reformed tradition. Those Reformed creeds which the school recognizes as accurate and reliable summaries of the Christian faith are the Westminster Confession of Faith with its Larger and Shorter Catechisms, the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort.

The Christian faith is the foundation of the school's entire existence. It is the intention of the school to integrate this faith with all aspects of its mission and specifically to teach all subjects from a distinctively Reformed Christian perspective. The school aspires to exalt Christ, the Creator, Redeemer, and Ruler of all creation, in all aspects of knowledge and learning. It is essential to see God's one story told throughout Scripture with the recurring themes of Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Kingdom.

In the Bible, "truth" and "knowledge" are not abstracted from life but determine and shape our lives. We are to be not only "hearers of the Word," but also "doers of the Word" (James 1:22). Therefore, the educational process is not only to teach the children information and skills, but also to equip them with a Christian world and life view in order to fulfill our responsibility in God's kingdom. It is to give them opportunities and encouragement actually to use those skills to serve God and other people.

Below are the most important philosophical elements that we believe distinguish our approach to education:

- A. We believe that the Bible clearly instructs parents to "bring children up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord." Therefore, under the delegation of the family, we seek to teach and discipline in a manner consistent with the Bible and a Godly home environment.
- B. We believe that God's character is revealed not only in His Word but also in every facet of the creation. Therefore, we teach that all knowledge is interrelated and can instruct us about God himself.
- C. God wants us to love Him with our mind as well as with our hearts, souls, and strength (Matt. 22:37). Therefore, we seek to challenge children individually at all levels and teach them how to learn.
- D. We want to teach children that all they do should be done "heartily, as unto the Lord." Therefore, we seek to encourage quality academic work and maintain high standards of conduct. This necessarily includes Biblical discipline principles.

- E. Parents can be confident that their student, throughout his development in school, will be loved with Christ's love at our school.

While there are many methods of delivering an education, we have deliberately strayed away from the progressive models where children are thought of as products to be developed. In stark contrast is the Christian view of education that all children are image-bearers and that God has a purpose in each child's life. We have a fundamental belief that all children can learn. We grow through doing difficult things. This necessitates a strong work ethic in the children which often must be developed. It's also important to steer clear of misunderstandings about education. For instance, learning is not about data acquisition. The information learned is a part of the outcome of education, but true learning has to do with growing the skills of how to learn.

The best educational system we have found is the classical model. Classical Christian education is an approach to training children that features the integration of all subject matters from a Biblical perspective. This includes the study of traditional liberal arts, the use of primary texts, an emphasis on the great cultural works of western civilization, and language study, which includes Latin and Greek. In its methods, classical Christian education seeks to tailor instruction to the natural inclinations of children at different stages of their development to maximize learning and the pursuit of truth, beauty, and goodness. Virtue is also essential which is why we emphasize truth, beauty, and goodness. Nourishing the growth of virtues develops us to be the human beings He intended in the Creation order.

There are several basic fundamentals of classical Christian education that are over-arching across the school. The first of these is that the students are taught to grow a love of learning. Beyond the foundation of the trivium, the classical method inspires learning. Because classical education cuts with the grain through the developmental phases of the trivium, it naturally appeals to students. Rather than "bawling words into the ears" (Montaigne) of students, classical education engages their minds. Gifted classical teachers inspire students to investigate, contemplate, debate, and pursue knowledge. By encouraging students to love learning, a lifelong gift is communicated.

Secondly, there is explicit training in how to think. In training a pianist, one does not lecture to them for nine months and then have them take a final test about the piano. Rather, the student is practiced and coached in the actual playing of the piano. To become a good thinker, students must be practiced in thinking. Our Socratic "table" brings students to a daily conversation that challenges their minds with ideas posited by the greatest minds in the history of the world.

Finally, integration between subjects presented with a Christian worldview ties the world together. Math, science, philosophy, and history are interwoven in a way that relates all subjects to a whole. As students integrate subjects, Scriptural truth is integrated as well. This affects students deeply. The continuity between a student's faith and his rational mind is a reward more Christians should enjoy. Classicism provides this perspective unlike any other form of education. The peace of knowing Christ's truth as it integrates with His world provides a powerful shield against the hostile questions posed in college and later in life.

The educational system called "classical education" was developed over two millennia with the goal of developing young minds to be wise and hearts to be virtuous. The foundation of classical education is the trivium. The trivium's three phases of learning are adapted to three phases of development in children - grammar, logic, and rhetoric. All three phases of the classical curriculum incorporate grammar, logic, and rhetoric, but in each stage the primary emphasis among those three depends upon the grade level of the students. While any one child may exhibit qualities across these

categories, we still see that a pattern forms over many children in comparison. The following are examples of this pattern.

Before students enter the grammar phase, children in Kindergarten through 2nd grade need to develop some basic skills. Reading, writing, and math are the obvious ones. Of greater importance are the habits of order, cleanliness, self-control, manners, and living in community. Classical Christian education trains young children how to sit still, listen, be kind, follow our code (respect, order, unity, diligence, and honesty) and our rule (Obey right away, all the way, and with a happy heart every day.).

The broad foundation of the trivium is the grammar phase which can be as wide-ranging as 2nd – 6th grades. New parents are often impressed and surprised with the amount of memorization and the depth of learning that goes on in our classrooms. We do this because, as Dorothy Sayers points out in her essay “The Lost Tools of Learning,” young children are wired to memorize. In grades K – 6, we memorize Bible verses and chapters, classic poems, lists of historical events and their dates, states and capitals, the periodic table of the elements, zoological taxonomy, . . . and the list goes on. Some parents wonder why we do this.

First, as children learn to read and write, they begin to rely less on their memory. If you can make a list, why remember it? Consequently, they use their memory less and less after the 2nd grade. As with anything else with our bodies, if you don’t use it, you lose it. By exercising children’s memories, we are establishing a life-long capacity for them to memorize.

Secondly, when you memorize at a young age, you retain your memory much better. Most of us recall the rhymes and chants we learned when we were in grade school. “I before E,” “I pledge allegiance,” and “She sells sea shells,” are all things we probably can recite off the top of our heads. Wouldn’t it be great if we had the Preamble to the U.S. Constitution or the 13th chapter of I Corinthians memorized so that it could roll off the tongue?

Finally, before the logic (middle-school) phase, children need to have a collection of facts from which to draw conclusions. By using their innate ability to memorize at a young age, we get them ready for the logic phase.

Children in the grammar phase also learn mastery of the core learning skills—reading comprehension, writing, and arithmetic—as well as strengthening their speaking (rhetoric) and independent study skills.

In the later grammar years of 5th and 6th grades, we encourage students to stretch beyond facts to gain a greater understanding on their own. Learning is optimal when it is inspired and intrinsically motivated. One way we do this is through reading and literature; we use appropriate thematic truths in a story or work that contains important, higher meaning, which encourages students to discover the power of story. When done properly, this enables children to be better prepared for the logic phase.

As Christians, we are people of the Word. God reveals His truth to us through the Bible. It contains history, stories, poems, songs, prophetic writing, parables, unique story-telling formats (i.e. synoptic and non-synoptic Gospels), theology, epistles, and even specialized forms of writing such as apocalyptic literature. To understand the Bible, students need more than a simple understanding of language. True literacy involves knowing how to read these forms to obtain their intended meaning. We call this learning transcendent or poetic truth—truth that transcends the world around us. As they get closer to the logic phase, we emphasize this imaginative and exciting form of reading, writing, and understanding.

Early adolescent children (grades 7 & 8) can become argumentative. Their ability to draw conclusions from a series of facts begins to develop. This is called the dialectic or logic phase. Most modern educators overlook this phase, except with regard to higher math. Classical schools teach formal logic, logical fallacies, and reasoning skills through tools like the Socratic method and Aristotelian logic. These subjects are foreign to most of us unless we learned them in college. They practice students in the science of accurate thinking. In this phase, the subject matter is not as important as what conclusions the students may draw from knowledge. Whereas in the grammar phase, children are saturated in truth, logic students begin to examine beliefs of the world.

In grades 9 & 10, learning begins to transcend the perceptive world, to the poetic and philosophical. Students have learned to love transcendent truths through metaphor, types, allusions, and the deeper why, and now we introduce/shift to an evaluation of multi-layered philosophical or theological works, those works' points of view, and the philosophies which they contains. They are guided in analyzing world philosophies for the significance they contain while also examining the detriment they may have caused. Also, these students can learn the fundamentals of argument, debate, and thesis. These rhetorical skills are developed to prepare the student for leadership and the rhetoric phase.

Rhetoric is a core skill in leadership. Leading others requires the ability to see the big picture, think clearly about the facts involved, and persuade others to follow. Classical Christian education's long history has been attributed to the effectiveness with which it trains leaders. In high school, students begin to develop a sense of how others perceive them. They become self-conscious about fashion, vocabulary, mannerisms, and various other forms of expression. Classicists called this the rhetoric phase. Students in this phase learn to speak and write well. They learn to relate to their audience with clarity and persuasion. Without the ability to communicate, the best ideas go unheard and are impotent.

Rhetoric students learn how to defend their faith. They research, write, and defend a senior thesis. Most importantly, they begin to understand how to take their place in the world in order to fulfill God's purpose for them in His Kingdom.

Throughout a child's education at Providence Christian Academy, the child should grow in loving the Lord our God with heart, soul, mind, and strength and in loving his neighbor as himself. There should be a clinging to the Word of God, the providential authority of God, and the Reformed doctrines of the faith. Through the classical model, the child should have grown to be a life-long learner, to be wise of mind, and to be virtuous of heart. As the child moves on from these halls, we pray it will be to a life of service to God and to others.

Excerpts taken from the Providence Mission Statement, the Providence Constitution, the Parent Handbook, and the Curriculum Guide.