

CLASSICAL EDUCATION
THE MOVEMENT SWEEPING AMERICA

Gene Edward Veith, Jr.
and
Andrew Kern



CAPITAL RESEARCH CENTER

Acknowledgements

Gene Edward Veith, Jr. is Professor of English and Director of the Cranach Institute at Concordia University-Wisconsin. He is the culture editor of *WORLD* magazine and author of a dozen books, including *Reading Between the Lines: A Christian Guide to Literature* (1990), *State of the Arts: From Bezael to Mapplethorpe* (1991), *Modern Fascism: The Liquidation of the Judeo-Christian Worldview* (1993), *Postmodern Times: A Christian Guide to Contemporary Thought and Culture* (1994) and *Christians in a Dot-Com World* (2000). Veith is a graduate of the University of Oklahoma and received a Ph.D. in English from the University of Kansas.

Andrew Kern is director of CIRCE (Consulting and Integrated Resources for Classical Education), a consulting and research service to classical schools and those who want to start one. He helped establish two classical schools, Providence Academy in Green Bay, Wisconsin, and Foundations Academy in Boise, Idaho, and has taught every grade from third to twelfth on almost every subject. A sought-after teacher-trainer, Kern is a popular speaker at classical education conferences and workshops. He is a graduate of Concordia University. In the summer of 2001 Kern moved CIRCE headquarters to Charlotte, North Carolina.

The primary credit for this monograph belongs to the pioneers of the new classical education—the teachers, administrators, parents, and students who are experimenting boldly with an approach to education that is both very new and very old. Starting a school is a heroic task, and the founders of the schools described here—and the many more about to organize new educational institutions—are worthy of special honor.

In the course of our research, we continually came upon educators and schools that deserve to be highlighted, and it is certain that we have left many out. This second revised edition contains new chapters on Catholic schools and the homeschool movement, a new section on what classical schools need in the final chapter, and updated information in the appendix. We regret our omissions, emphasizing that there are many more educational success stories than we mention here.

We pay special thanks to the schools we visited, to the administrators, faculty members, and students who allowed us to join their classes, ply them with questions, and study their work. Thanks particularly to Douglas Wilson and Logos School in Moscow, Idaho, and Michael Eaton and the Geneva School in Orlando, Florida.

Thanks also to Robert Huberty and Jill Lacey of the Capital Research Center. And, of course, and above all, thanks to our families for their patience and their support.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	vii
<hr/>	
PART I: THE CLASSICAL ISSUES	1
Chapter 1 Educational Dead-ends	1
Chapter 2 The Elements of Classical Education	11
<hr/>	
PART II: MODELS OF THE NEW CLASSICAL SCHOOLS	16
Chapter 3 Christian Classicism: The Association of Classical and Christian Schools	17
Chapter 4 Democratic Classicism: The Paideia Group	27
Chapter 5 Moral Classicism: Norms and Nobility	37
Chapter 6 Liberating Classicism: Westside Prep	47
Chapter 7 Catholic Classicism and the Kolbe Academy	55
Chapter 8 Homeschooling and Classical Education	67
<hr/>	
PART III: HIGHER EDUCATION	82
Chapter 9 The Rise and Fall of the Liberal Arts College ...	85
Chapter 10 Models of the New Liberal Arts	97
Chapter 11 Conservative Academia	105
<hr/>	
Chapter 12 Myths and Realities of Classical Education	115
Appendix Resources and Organizations	123
Index	141

DEMOCRATIC CLASSICISM: THE PAIDEIA PROPOSAL

The two men most responsible for the revival of classical education in this century were Robert Maynard Hutchins, president of the University of Chicago from 1929 to 1951, and Mortimer Adler, leader of the Paideia movement. Hutchins' academic reforms and curricular innovations served as prototypes for colleges that wanted to establish a genuine liberal arts education. For Hutchins, classical education was no elitist affectation of the upper classes. Rather, the liberal arts—taught by “The Great Books” of all ages—would offer precisely the kind of education necessary to a democracy. Every citizen, he believed, needed to be equipped with the intellectual tools for self-government, personal success, and—in the original sense of the “liberal arts”—freedom.

Hutchins' program for colleges and universities will be discussed in our later chapters on higher education, but his theories also are applicable to primary and secondary education. This has been a project of the philosopher Mortimer Adler, perhaps Hutchins' most productive associate, who developed an approach to education he called “The Paideia Proposal.” Adler, with the help of other educators, has established a program to implement his theories in schools across America.

There are significant differences between the ACCS and the Paideia schools. ACCS questions the validity of state schooling; by contrast, the Paideia proposal is specifically geared to the reform of public schools. Religion is foundational to the ACCS curriculum, and Christianity is the point of integration through which all knowledge is made complete. Paideia does not dismiss the importance of religion, but its approach is more secular, and its foundational value is democracy. If the approach of ACCS can be described as Christian classicism, Paideia's can best be described as democratic classicism.

Paideia educators, however, tend to avoid the term “classicism” because, says Adler, it “names the arid and empty formalism which

dominated education at the end of the last century. It emphasized the study of the classics for historical or philological reasons. It was interested in the past for the past's sake. It mistook drill for discipline." Adler adds, "Our program is not a return to the classics as that word is so often taken to mean, simply going back to Greek and Roman antiquities. We are concerned with classics where the classics mean anything of enduring value."²

Nevertheless, Paideia is indeed a classical movement. None of the classical education reforms presented in this book are mere exercises in antiquarianism. The term "paideia" is the Greek word for instruction, discipline, and upbringing. The Paideia school program of reading great books and discussing them in Socratic (that is, dialectical) seminars, as well as its underlying philosophy of education, are eminently classical. Terry Roberts, Director of the National Paideia Center, recognizes this when he states that, "We work hard at helping local educators adapt a classical model to their needs."³

Paideia's uniqueness arises from what Roberts describes as, "a synthesis of E.D. Hirsch Jr.'s call for a return to classical education and John Dewey's progressivist ideas about learning." He adds, "These seemingly contradictory ideas-intellectual rigor and equal access to a quality education-have become the bedrock upon which successful Paideia schools are built." We have seen that the contemporary classicist happily agrees with progressivism if one means by it "equal access to a quality education."

Mortimer Adler

In 1982 philosopher Mortimer Adler published *The Paideia Proposal: An Educational Manifesto*. This short book lays out in clear and well-ordered terms the ideas of the Paideia Group—a committee of scholars assembled by Adler including Jacques Barzun, Clifton Fadiman, Charles Van Doren, and TheodoreSizer—on what is necessary to save the American school system. That same year Adler published a more detailed treatment of his proposals entitled *Reforming Education: The Opening of the American Mind*. In the words of the manifesto's introduction, "Paideia is the culmination of Adler's lifelong, intense, loving, and often brutal struggle against the forces of utilitarianism, elitism, scientism, specialism, and any other dogma infesting American education."⁴

This struggle and its various controversies in the field of education illustrate an important chapter in America's intellectual history.

For more than sixty years Mortimer Adler has been among those who have fought what often seemed a losing battle for a liberal arts education in the nation's undergraduate colleges and universities. The University of Chicago, thanks in great measure to the curricular innovations of its president, Robert Maynard Hutchins, became a fountainhead of ideas for advocates of the liberal arts. Several generations of University of Chicago faculty members and graduates resisted the conventional wisdom of an age dominated by positivist and pragmatist models of learning. It was they who created what was, in effect, a renaissance in intellectual classicism.

Mortimer Adler taught philosophy at the University of Chicago from 1930 to 1952. He was an editor of *The Encyclopedia Britannica*, that magisterial modern example of the integration of knowledge, and he has written some thirty books, most of which aim to popularize knowledge of classical philosophy and demonstrate its moral and intellectual application to daily life. They include *How to Read a Book*, *Aristotle for Everybody*, *The Difference of Man and the Difference It Makes*, and *Six Great Ideas: Truth, Goodness, Beauty, Liberty, Equality, Justice* (the subject of a PBS series). Adler is perhaps most famous for his central role in selecting and editing the 54 volume *Great Books Of The Western World* and for tirelessly promoting Great Books course discussions in homes, schools and libraries across the country.

In 1979, Adler formed the Paideia group to bring the principles of liberal learning, as developed at the University of Chicago by Hutchins and Adler, to the primary and secondary school level. Their goal was not only to develop a better theory of education, but to form an organization to develop curricula, train teachers, and implement their ideas in actual classrooms. Instead of creating new schools, the Paideia program would bring classicism into existing school structures. Besides developing a liberal arts curriculum, Paideia also would establish a liberal arts pedagogy, a method of teaching children how to think modeled on the way Socrates teased thought out of teenagers in ancient Athens.

The release of *The Paideia Proposal* in 1982 was accompanied by an arsenal of reading programs, teacher training manuals, and study aids. Educators were trained in the new methods and they in turn have conducted seminars and workshops for other teachers and school administrators. Schools in Chicago and Atlanta were the first to adopt the proposal. Initial responses were favorable. Albert

Shanker, president of the American Federation of Teachers believed that Paideia would "dominate educational reform for the next decade."⁶ Yet it wasn't until 1992 that Paideia established its roots. By then, the Paideia principles had infused and transformed the national debate over education, while there was a critical mass of schools to network and share resources. There also were support groups with a level of expertise and program development to assist new schools implementing the Paideia program.

Today two organizations, the National Paideia Center, on the campus of the University of North Carolina, and the Paideia Group, Inc., in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, offer teacher training, curricula, and support services for schools following the Paideia approach. The National Paideia Center, formed in 1988, serves over 100 schools in twelve states.

The Paideia Group Inc. was formed in 1991 by some of the first educators who worked with Mortimer Adler during the early days of the Paideia movement. Its fivefold purpose is to improve teaching and learning, guide Paideia development, foster networks of Paideia schools, offer workshops and on-site training. Over 100 schools have implemented at least portions of the Paideia program (usually the seminar method) with their assistance. Twenty-five schools have implemented the full program under the Paideia Group's guidance.

The Theory

In *Reforming Education* Adler lays out the fundamental principles of his theory of education. He asserts that "human nature is everywhere the same"; that man's capacities are not fully developed at birth; and that education is "the process whereby a man helps himself or another to become what he can be... the process whereby a man is changed for the better." Education has a twofold end: the development of man's moral and intellectual virtues, and happiness, or the "life enriched by the possession of every kind of good" to which these virtues lead.

The virtues can be described as "good habits." A habit is good when it perfects a natural power, bad when it weakens it. "The power of knowing, shared by all men, is perfected by habits of knowledge, not by habits of error or by that privation of knowledge which we call ignorance. Similarly, the power of thinking, shared by all men, is perfected by habits of thinking well, by the arts of thinking; it is

not perfected, but rather wasted or ruined, by habits of thinking poorly or inartistically." Adler goes on to describe the intellectual virtues as "the liberal arts, which are the arts of right thinking and correct speech."

Such concepts are drawn from classical philosophy, specifically from Aristotle. The attention to the purposes of education and the notion that education should cultivate habits of mind—that is, an ethos of learning—are foundational to educational theory as practiced by the Greek philosophers. The definition of the liberal arts to which emerges—"the arts of right thinking and correct speech"—has to do, in an Aristotelian way, with the purposes of the liberal arts, rather than their specific content. Adler thus takes them in a broader and more flexible sense than does Douglas Wilson and the A.C.C.S. approach. Paideia schools and the classical schools they have influenced do not follow the trivium and the quadrivium so literally. Nevertheless, for those who pursue the ends of right thinking and correct speech, the seven liberal arts and the methodology they assume have a way of manifesting themselves.

Though Aristotle and Plato were skeptical of democracy, Adler follows the neoclassicism of the American founders and grounds the Paideia theory firmly on the premises of self-government, social equality, and individual freedom. This may be Adler's signal contribution in the modern revival of the tradition of classical education.

The first chapter of *The Paideia Proposal*, entitled "Democracy and Education," makes the connection clear: "Universal suffrage and universal schooling," it begins, "are inextricably bound together."⁸ Elsewhere, Adler maintains that "The first and most important distinguishing characteristic of *The Paideia Proposal* is that it takes democracy seriously. It takes seriously the commitment of the democratic society to the objective of a high quality of basic schooling for all children."⁹

Education is essential in a democracy because if citizens are to govern themselves wisely they must be able to make informed judgments about policies, understand the complexities of public issues, and be able to contribute to the deliberations of the republic. They also must have the intellectual sophistication to avoid a mob mentality and manipulation by demagogues who have been the wreck of earlier democracies. These were precisely the concerns of the American Founders and the reasons they made education such a high priority in the new republic.¹⁰

Paideia opposes attempts to establish multiple education tracks for students of differing abilities. Committed to democracy, it insists on a single-track system that gives every student the same educational opportunities. Likewise, Paideia educators oppose schooling which is merely vocational. Such schooling leads to a slavish mentality—training to serve one's masters—if it is detached from a universal general schooling appropriate to free citizens.

Adler frequently quotes his friend Hutchins, who insisted "The best education for the best is the best education for all."¹¹ Children's abilities do differ, but Adler, who is firmly committed to American equality, denies that this should influence the quality of education all receive. "Every child is educable up to his or her capacity.... Children are educable in varying degrees, but the variation in degree must be of the same kind and quality of education."¹² He concludes forcefully: "There are no unteachable children. There are only schools and teachers and parents who fail to teach them."¹³

The Practice

The Paideia approach maintains that education for living in a democracy should prepare students "to take advantage of every opportunity for personal development that our society offers," and should afford "an adequate preparation for discharging the duties and responsibilities of citizenship." A third objective is to give students marketable skills. But this point is carefully qualified: "The twelve years of basic schooling must prepare them for this task, not by training them for one or another particular job in our industrial economy, but by giving them the basic skills that are common to all work in a society such as ours."¹⁴

A universal liberal education gives all students the same education and rejects all distractions. "All side-tracks, specialized courses, or elective choices must be eliminated." A smorgasbord of options makes education haphazard and incoherent, and it deprives students of the benefits of a cumulative educational curriculum. (The choice of a modern foreign language is the only exception Paideia admits.)

To define how the mind can be improved and to describe their curriculum, Paideia uses a metaphor of three columns. The first column is the acquisition of organized knowledge; the second is development of the skills of learning (the arts of thinking); the third is the enlargement of understanding, insight, and aesthetic appreciation. The three columns of learning correspond generally to the three

phases of the trivium. However, unlike Dorothy Sayers and ACCS, Paideia does not arrange them in a progressive sequence or suggest that they represent a theory of developmental learning.

For Paideia educators, three methods of teaching correspond to the three kinds of learning: didactic method, "coaching," and Socratic method. The acquisition of knowledge requires a didactic teaching method that uses lectures and textbooks. Developing intellectual skills requires coaching: one-on-one tutoring, personal encouragement and correction, drill and practice. Enlarging understanding is done best by the Socratic method: discussion of ideas and experiences and ceaseless questioning.

Adler also divides academic disciplines into three groups or branches of learning: (1) language, literature, and fine arts; (2) mathematics and natural sciences; (3) history, geography, and social studies. "No one," the Paideia proposal asserts, "can claim to be educated who is not reasonably well acquainted with all three."¹⁵

Students taught by the didactic method learn basic knowledge in each branch. Mastery of content is achieved by lectures and reading. "The innovative aspect of the first column (the acquisition of knowledge)," Adler explains, "lies not in the choice of subject matter but in the concentration and continuity of the study required."¹⁶

Parallel to the grammar stage in the trivium, the didactic approach conveys essential factual knowledge, but does little to develop higher-order skills. Just as good athletes need more than lectures to play football well, building intellectual skills requires more than information. Like athletes, students need to practice and to be well-coached in the intellectual skills of reading, writing, speaking, listening, calculating, problem-solving, observing, measuring, estimating, and exercising critical judgment.¹⁷ Few students will do these well without good coaching, which insists on repetition to correct mistakes. Students who work one-on-one with teachers learn to overcome problems and realize their abilities.

Higher-order thinking depends on a prior mastery of knowledge and skills. But neither the didactic method nor coaching are enough to understand and express ideas and values. Enlarged understanding, Paideia's third column, arises from questioning and intellectual interaction. Adler claims that direct contact with works of art makes this possible. Literature, music, dance, drama, and painting engage the student's mind in a comprehensive way. They generate responses that compel students to agree or disagree, to defend an opinion and

unusually to go beyond superficial emotional reactions.

To enlarge the understanding, the teacher employs the Socratic or "maieutic" method. "Maieutic" comes from the Greek word for midwife. Socrates posed as a midwife who used questions to help the young men of Athens give birth to the knowledge that was within them. The teacher's role, says Adler, is to help the student give birth to an idea. This method

*stimulates the imagination and intellect by awakening the creative and inquisitive powers. In no other way can children's understanding of what they know be improved, and their appreciation of cultural objects be enhanced.*¹⁸

Socratic discussion draws on column two skills (reading, speaking, listening), which are sharpened by use and applied to real problems. It helps students ponder the ideas and values inherent in column one subjects (the acquisition of knowledge). And it prepares students for reasoned discourse, well-mannered debate, and for the participation in society demanded of citizens if democracy is to flourish.

Yet Paideia is no quick-fix. The National Paideia Center has developed a three-phase process for schools. Phase I prepares the school for the Paideia seminar by leading the teacher through an eighteen hour course on Socratic teaching. Phase II prepares the teacher in developing units for Paideia Coached Projects that implement the three columns. Phase III combines assessment with long-term planning to perpetuate the vision.

The Paideia Group works to reorient schools so they can teach the three types of learning, develop an integrated curriculum, focus on skills and ideas, and nurture an enjoyable learning environment for teachers and students. But it has not been easy. As its newsletter *Paideia Progress* remarks: "A quick fix or a test does not change our schools. We must change our schools by focusing on what is happening in the classroom."¹⁹

Perhaps the biggest obstacle to classroom progress is inadequate teacher development. Because they have limited resources and lack foresight, many schools don't have staff-development plans. Teachers are under-trained in methods and unfamiliar with materials suitable to the classical approach. They don't know how to develop and use the great ideas. In response, the Paideia Group has developed an on-site teacher training program. It also helps select reading materials, provides starter sets for sample units, sponsors a national

conference for teachers and principals, a newsletter with sample curriculum plans, and a certification program for Paideia teachers. The Group also has produced two sets of school guidelines: "Paideia Stages of Development" and "Essential Elements of Paideia Schools."

The Paideia Group offers no specific curriculum; it provides a framework to help schools design their own curriculum to fulfill their goals and requirements. The Paideia Group presents ideas and sample curriculum plans, but teachers trained in its philosophy select their own materials for all three columns of instruction. They fulfill the lofty ambitions of the Paideia program while focusing on their own curricular goals and their students' needs.

Results have been positive. Since 1988 formal reviews of Paideia's effects have appeared in doctoral dissertations, the scholarly *Journal of Negro Education* and the Department of Research, Evaluation, and Planning for the Chicago Public Schools. Test scores are up, discipline and attendance problems down, and there are reports of better staff and student morale, more and better reading and writing, more courtesy, listening, and respect for others' opinions.²⁰

Students seem to share these opinions. The Center for Educational Research and Evaluation at the University of North Carolina, Greensboro, looked at Paideia during the 1997-1998 school year. It determined that the program produced measurable improvements in the quality of teaching as perceived by students: teachers were judged to be clearer, more demanding, and better learners. Students reported improvements in classroom climate, self-concept, even "self-strategies"—they seemed better able to overcome the futility and negativity of social comparison.²¹ When Chicago's Goldblatt School students found out there was no Paideia high school in their area, they volunteered to attend seminars on Saturdays.

The Paideia approach combines personal instruction with in-depth engagement with the great books and works of art. It inspires fierce loyalty from teachers, students, and parents in the program and outside observers have been amazed at its breadth and richness of content and on its impact on children. *Washington Post* syndicated columnist William Raspberry, an African-American social critic, looked at six public schools in Chattanooga, Tennessee, that use the Paideia method. His conclusion: "By all accounts it works."²² In the first edition of this book, we suggested that Paideia's impact on public education has been minimal. Despite reports of its effectiveness,

Paideia still has been adopted by just over 100 public schools. Mortimer Adler's optimism about its potential value for public education may be misplaced. Still, the charter schools movement, which allows local school boards to set up independent alternative schools, has helped boost the number of schools experimenting with Paideia. Even so, the education establishment—the national lobby groups, schools of education, state licensing boards, teachers' unions, and an entire curriculum industry – are alert to challenges to the status quo. Their self-interest may not welcome the changes in curriculum and pedagogy that Paideia schools favor.

What cannot be measured is Paideia's impact on the thinking of education reformers. Paideia's influence is evident in the private schools and home schools that have adopted "great books" programs and recognize Adler's contribution to classical education. What's more, if "it is difficult to name a leading educational reform program that has not been influenced by Paideia principles," as Terry Roberts suggests, then we may be near the tipping point. The education establishment may find prophetic the title of Roberts's article—"The Paideia Movement: An Idea Whose Time Has Come."