

Classical Christian School vs. Other Educational Models

Content and Methods

I send my kids to classical Christian school so that they become mature men and women who are flourishing and equipped spiritually and academically to serve in God's kingdom. I want my kids to know what is true, follow what is good, and love what is beautiful. I want them to be able to walk in corridors of modernity with confidence and eloquence, able to oppose this world's onslaught of lies. I want my kids' passions to be formed in godly ways because what we love directs our lives much more than mere knowledge or skills.

Besides merely avoiding the problems of public education, classical Christian education offers significant benefits over other educational models:

1) Academic Excellence

Traditional Christian schools tend to underperform independent, non-sectarian private schools academically.¹ That's where Classical Christian education comes in which combines the importance of the Christian worldview with academic excellence. Specifically, the class of 2015 for the Association of Classical Christian Schools (the governing body for classical Christian schools in the US) outperformed other religious schools by 191 points on the SAT, and all independent schools by 138 points.²

2) Training in Logic

In a world of misleading messages and public discourse that is extremely polarized, our children need to know how to evaluate and process competing claims. Students in classical Christian schools are trained in logic which will help them for the rest of their life in spotting errors of argument. I was captain of my debate team in high school at one of the nation's leading prep schools and yet learned no logic that could help me identify a logical fallacy when it came my way. Knowing how to categorize and label erroneous arguments is the first step in resisting those errors.

3) Ability to speak persuasively

The high school years in classical Christian school are focused on the art of rhetoric--cultivating students' ability to communicate winsomely and persuasively. All schools attempt to teach persuasive writing, but classical Christian schools have a unique emphasis on public speaking. Starting in kindergarten at the Regents School of Charlottesville, students memorize and recite something individually to a large audience each year. This blossoms in high school to 15 minute presentations to a public audience. The student who graduates from classical Christian school will be the one everyone looks to when a group needs to present.

¹ Pennings, Ray and Wiens, Kathryn. Cardus Education Survey: Phase I Report (2011). Aug. 16, 2011.

² Association of Classical Christian Schools. Measure It - Ideal Education, Practical Results. Statistics for the Class of 2015. Available at: <https://classicalchristian.org/measure-it/>. Accessed Oct. 25, 2017.

4) Latin

Classical education is best known—and perhaps most ridiculed—for its Latin instruction. How could learning a dead language be an important attribute of a child's education?

Latin is the mother tongue of over 50% of all English words and an important tool for in-depth mastery of language.³ It is the language of science and law. Of students taking a SAT subject test and the standard SAT, those taking the Latin exam had the highest standard SAT scores of any subject test group.⁴ This effect holds in college, with the highest-scoring major on the GRE the classics department by over 10 points.⁵

Why does Latin develop the intellect so superbly? It is systematic, with a structure that obeys logic. "Classical languages—Latin and Greek—are so different from modern languages that they seem strange to students. They open up a whole new world and give students the ability to think about language—a very difficult task since students use language naturally."⁶

If you join a sports team, you will be asked to do drills. No one thinks that you will ever need to dribble two basketballs in a game—however, by dribbling two basketballs in practice, you develop the ball handling skills you need to excel in a game. This is the logic behind learning Latin. No, your child is not going to ever take a trip where he can guide you around a city with his fluency in Latin. However, his mind will be fundamentally changed by the process of learning what language itself is.⁷

5) A Factual Approach

Literary criticism today has evolved from asking what the author meant to asking what the book means to you. These are very different questions. Graduates of classical Christian school are able to read a text and tell you what it said - not what they were thinking about when they were reading it. Believe it or not, this is a rare skill in today's world⁸.

6) Direct Instruction Model

³ Perrin, Christopher A., 2004. *An Introduction to Classical Education; a Guide for Parents*. www.ClassicalAcademicPress.com

⁴ National Committee on Latin and Greek, 2014. *Facts, Figures, and Resources*. Available at: <http://www.promotelatin.org/why-latin-and-greek/facts-figures-resources>.

⁵ National Committee on Latin and Greek, 2014. *Facts, Figures, and Resources*. Available at: <http://www.promotelatin.org/why-latin-and-greek/facts-figures-resources>.

⁶ Lowe, Cheryl. "How Latin Develops the Mind." Memoria Press. Jan 13, 2017. Available at: <https://www.memoriapress.com/articles/latin-develops-mind/>.

⁷Merke, Rebekah. *Classical Me, Classical Thee*. Moscow, Idaho: Canon Press, 2017.

⁸Merke, Rebekah. *Classical Me, Classical Thee*. Moscow, Idaho: Canon Press, 2017.

The excellence of the classical model is supported by other types of educational research as well. One of the most extensive educational studies ever conducted in the US was called Project Follow-Through, which tracked over 200,000 kids in 178 communities from 1967 to 1995. It compared 22 models of instruction, and found that the more child-centered the instruction model was, the worse the results. The hands-down winner in effective learning and teaching was the model Project Follow-Through called “Direct Instruction” where the teacher is the “sage on a stage imparting knowledge to a whole class of listening children - about as opposed to progressive ideas as a method could be.”⁹ Another name for the direct instruction model is classical education.

Conclusion

Paying for a classical Christian education is expensive and its benefits are not in the same currency as its costs. Its costs are in dollars and time today, but its benefits are who your children will become, the legacy you (and they) will leave on this world, and the welcome that they receive into eternity. Classical Christian school is beautiful and enduring and worth the cost. As Erasmus wrote over 600 years ago, “He does not die who leaves a living likeness of himself.”¹⁰

⁹ Duff, Anna Bray, 1999. *Failure of Progressive Education*. Investor’s Business Daily, November 12, 1999. Available at: <http://news.investors.com/111299-491753-failure-of-progressive-education.htm#ixzz3nuNVwG1Q> =

¹⁰ Quoted in Gamble, Richard, Ed. *The Great Tradition; Classic Readings on What It Means to be an Educated Human Being*. Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2007. Pg. 366.