

Do You Like What You See?

By Thomas R. Garfield

True confessions: as with too many things, it took us (Logos School), a lot of years to discover that there was more going on at our school than academic rigor and emphasizing biblical patterns of behavior. It slowly dawned on us that we needed to re-think everything we do and present to the students in light of truth, goodness, and particularly **beauty**. What we came to realize was that the very culture of the school was being shaped, not by us, but by whatever was currently hip in American culture. It was sort of like, after putting up with the foul smell and look of your backyard for years, you actually investigate and discover that your neighbor is using your property as his personal land fill! Gross. That's actually not a bad allegory.

In short, we determined that we had a lot of clean-up work to do. Then we needed to decide, how did we want our "backyard" to look anyway?

Your school **WILL** have a culture. The only choices you have are: who will set the culture and how will it look? By "culture" I mean all the elements that affect the lives of the kids while at school, e.g., the look of the halls and rooms, the music they learn and hear, the way they and the staff dress, the kinds of programs the school has—their content and point, etc. Will truth, goodness, and beauty be unchangeable principles? Where do we start in setting priorities?

Delight in students—a welcoming aroma

Not to be crass, but kids are a

lot like horses—they know who's in the saddle and they know whether or not that person is in control or not. They also know if the rider is relaxed, confident, and enjoying the ride. Do you really delight in the kids, or have you allowed a government school attitude of "us vs. them" to creep in? One litmus test is the kind of talk that teachers exchange about

every single thing you do and have in your school can be traced easily, with no twists or breaks, back to one of your philosophical statements. This means you don't have programs just because every other school does them, you don't have rules that don't tie to scriptural principles, you don't even have classrooms decorated arbitrarily. An anomaly, by the

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certain kids in the staff room or after school. Yes, we all have knuckle-headed boys and clueless girls at times. We can and should recognize their issues, but do we seek their best interests or just get upset with them or even mock them behind their backs? Believe the Word: you can't have fresh and salt water coming out of the same faucet (your mouth) very well. The kids know in the halls, in the classrooms, on the playground, even in Macy's after school, which teachers really love them and which don't. Love expressed well permeates the school like the aroma of newly baked bread fills a home.

A clear purpose for all things, tied to philosophy—no anomalies

Your school's philosophy should be so well constructed that literally

way, is anything (e.g. a program, tradition) floating out there, unattached to any written purpose.

For example, speaking of room decor, we've done some radical re-thinking since we began. When we first moved into our own place, I was of the mind set that literally everything in the rooms—walls and even ceilings—should teach/remind the students. What this really led to was a profusion of clutter and distractions. We were sending conflicting signals to the kids: "We want you to pay attention to the teacher, but there are lots of really neat things hanging around to look at if you want." In addition, the vast majority of purchased display materials, particularly for the younger set, are done up in blaring primary colors (red, yellow, blue), with a great emphasis on the cute factor. Don't get me wrong, I am a fan of teddy bears (considering their origin), but let's leave them at home.

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Instead, how about decorating a room to feel more like a pleasant study area? Use muted neutral tones (vs frosty white) on the walls along with a few, framed art prints (I strongly suggest N.C. Wyeth, Vermeer, Rembrandt, Monet, etc.); as much natural light as you can get; quality carpeting, and attractive (albeit functional) furniture. We determined to remove the ugliest furniture in the high school classrooms, i.e. the metal desks, and replace them with stained oak tables and chairs. Yes, they are much more expensive and easy to vandalize. However, the message the students get speaks volumes: we want them to be surrounded by beauty and we trust them to care for their school's furniture properly.

No apologies - men and women are different, delightfully!

Delighting in and loving the students and having them show consideration for each other in the details of living, highlights the God-ordained differences in men and women. Do not accept, at any level, the lie our culture tells us that men and women are essentially the same and should be treated accordingly. Delight in and honor the differences! That's why girls' football teams or guys'

baby care classes are so repulsive.

A great practical example of promoting these differences through a program is dancing. Dance in your school! Every student should learn to waltz—what a great way to illustrate men's leading and consideration, and women's respect in following a good man. Younger students learn various dance steps (Virginia Reel, polkas, etc.) during elementary and junior high PE classes. Balls are held by older students for younger ones as fund-raisers. Dancing is an important and greatly anticipated part of what we call our Knights' Festival during the winter—three days of celebrating, feasting, giving thanks, speeches, chess, baking, sword fights (guys), archery (girls), and singing.

Not just “no”, but “yes” to edifying, beautiful alternatives

This idea of dancing in school, under adult guidance and instruction, is also a great way to say “yes” to a wonderful alternative to what the world offers our kids. Christian schools have been way too quick and efficient at saying “no” to many things. Often that is the correct response to the modern culture. But our Father

seldom says “no,” without saying “yes” to something better. We need to imitate Him in that.

For instance, as with many Christian schools we say “no” to all that goes on in a typical prom setting (run the mental video tape). Instead we say “yes” to an evening we call Protocol night. The high school students are given special times of instruction (during several class periods) in everything from how to use the right fork to dressing well, to the right way to escort a young lady, or to be escorted. Then they are released from school early on the big day, they go home, put on tuxes and formals, gather for parental photo times, then head off to the big city for a tasty and tasteful meal at a fancy restaurant, followed by attending a musical production or play. Even our elementary kids look forward to the time when they can go on Protocol nights. There are many other examples, but you need to be creative in how to say yes, while explaining an appropriate no.

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