

***Paideia, Wissenschaft* and the education of the whole person**

Ballarat Grammar School
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I wonder if any of you remember the campaign the Government ran years ago, which revolved around the tag phrase – “you never forget a good teacher”? It inspired me to begin a DipEd which I never finished, in no small part because there are three teachers from my own time at University High School that I will never forget.

I remember my fifth form European History teacher. He got me suspended for two weeks for making what was (in retrospect) a rather precocious and ill-guided stand about social justice in classroom pedagogy. We didn't have a word in those days for what he was doing to a fellow student whose homework was unfinished, but now we would call it psychological abuse, a completely unacceptable breach of professional standards.

And I remember Mr Thompson, my sixth form Latin teacher. He was American and exotic and erudite and witty and in love with knowledge just for the thrill of it and could recite whole slabs of the Tusculine Disputations from memory. He wore a bow-tie and he carried it off. He was genuinely more interested in what I thought of Cicero than what he thought about him. He was amazing. He was inspiring.

And, of course, I remember Miss Jackson, my fourth form Art teacher, or Sabrina as she preferred us to call her. She was fine! Like every other boy in the class, I was deeply in love with her, at least, that's what my church youth group leader told me it was. Even now, twenty-seven years later, I can still recall the frisson that we all felt watching her walk around the art benches, leaning over to point out this or that thing in our artwork, although I won't expand on it, as Anglican clergymen are quite properly forbidden adolescent experiences of this kind. Because of her, I took art and not typing that year, and have been handicapped in the computer age ever since. Even so, it was worth it.

I hardly remember anything that they taught me, but I remember them. And you will have your own memories of teachers who taught you. It is unlikely that you, any more than I, remember them because of what they taught. I bet that you remember them for how they taught, for who they were as people.

The well-known quotation by American psychologist Karl Menninger is right on the money: “What the teacher is, is more important than what he teaches.” I remember my History teacher because he was a bully, an anti-type. Every school has them, and they often provide the most lasting and valuable lessons in what kind of person *not* to be. I remember my Latin teacher because I wanted to be just like him when I grew up. I remember my Art teacher, because... well... because I never felt more fully alive at school than when I was in her class.

It's sobering how quickly we forget. I am a teacher now myself just like you. I teach New Testament Greek and textual criticism, the principles by which the 5,000 or so fragments of early manuscripts and papyri are reconstructed into the most probable text of the New Testament that can be recovered.

I don't think about what kind of person I am in the classroom; I have a job to do. I've got to get these students over the line come exam time, and because the honour of my School demands it, I have to get them over the line better than Melbourne's other theological Colleges do. So, I arrive at every class with a big, fat syringe full of content that I am going to inject into the students whether they like it or not. In fact, to be brutally honest, better that they don't like it. That's a sure sign that it's doing them good. Yes, this is much more work than modelling your inner self out of clay or whatever you do in those other practical theology classes you take, that's because it's real scholarship, so knuckle down and get the work done. I'm sorry you stuffed it up, but no, you can't sit that weekly test again. You're not going to get any extra marks in this class for doing extra community service or parish work instead of your homework, you should get your priorities sorted out. And so on. I guess this happens in classrooms across the land, maybe even here in this school.

How has it come to this? Why do our own memories and experiences of education tell us one thing, but our classroom practice is determined by other standards?

One popular explanation among educationalists is that we are trapped between two competing models of education and don't know which way to turn. On the one hand, there is the ancient model of education in which all Western Civilization is steeped. Because it was the picture of schooling celebrated in the culture of ancient Greece, let's call it the "Athens" model. It stands for a type of schooling in which the Greek concept of *paideia* is the heart of education. *Paideia* means a process of "culturing" the soul and understands schooling as a kind of "character formation" in which students are schooled in the virtues and, as Plato puts it, are taught to seek the Good, that is the underlying essence of the moral and intellectual virtues, the highest principle of the universe, the divine. Long before Christianity, in Plato, *paideia* was understood to be an education whose goal is in some way religious as well as moral.

It is the oldest picture of education to be found in Christianity. It lies at the heart of the English tradition of Grammar Schools. In half an hour, I can only crudely sketch this, but it is a model of education that focuses on process not content. It focuses on the virtues as tools of analysis and critical thinking that can be applied to whatever content comes to hand, or as we say these days, it is a skills-based education model that is discipline-independent". At its best, it's respectful of the student's innate gifts. So, Socrates describes himself in his teaching as a "midwife" someone who brings to birth what is already present in the student in embryonic form, not someone wielding a huge syringe of content, injecting something not already there. Less palatable to some, it is also deferential in spirit and explicitly acknowledges the need to submit to authorities like God, the philosophical school or Christian community to which the student is

seeking admission, and the master to whom the student is apprenticed to gain the character formation that *paideia* offers.

However, it is also flexible. Education is often compared in Ancient Greek and early Christian culture to medicine. Just as doctors prescribe different remedies for different people, so the gift of teaching is knowing what kind of medicine is right for each student. These days, it is sometimes described with the slogan “the education of the whole person” or the conviction that it is not just the intellectual needs of students that need to be met, but also their emotional, physical, psychological and spiritual development. So, for example, Gregory of Nazianzen, a famous early Christian theologian speaks of the real theologian, by which he means the really-educated person, not as the one who knows a lot, but the one whose prayer is true. Which is his own shorthand for human being who displays that kind of human flourishing which is open to God and spilling over in joy and love and service to others.

Set against this is the second, much-newer model of education which has its roots in the Enlightenment. Let’s call it the “Berlin” model in contrast to the “Athens” model, because it first gets formed in the early nineteenth century at the newly-founded University of Berlin. And because there is something deeply Teutonic about it.

This model is far more radically critical than the Athens one. It begins by requiring justification of all alleged authorities or truths. Neither the antiquity of an opinion, nor the esteem of persons who hold the opinion, nor the community that teaches it nor alleged divine inspiration alone justifies any authority. It is rigorous in scientific method, usually empirical method, and it is orderly. It’s what your fifth form physics teacher was trying to get you to understand about the importance of hypotheses, and of testing them, and about the conviction that only the results of these critical, empirical, rigour and disciplined inquiries can count as knowledge. It not about *paideia* or virtues or character or the whole person, it’s about *Wissenschaft*, scientific knowledge. And it is above all, about content, it is, in the end, about the results of inquiry more than the process of inquiry itself. It is the model that dominates in every Table A public university in Australia, and which inevitably also trickles through to other sectors as the only intellectually respectable canon of academic endeavour. For many people it is the Liberal Western Intellectual Tradition. Trinity College, where I work, has a blossoming trade in offering a foundation studies programme to secondary school students from Asian countries who want to get into the University of Melbourne. It’s a kind of finishing school. And this is what it teaches them, because a lack of exposure to the rigours of this Berlin model and the liberal Western intellectual tradition is what the University believes in lacking in its overseas students. It is preparation, not for life like the Athens model of *paideia*, but for exams.

Almost every educational institution is trapped between these two models. You might think that a theological school has a better chance of embodying all that’s good in the Athens-*paideia* model, but you

would be wrong. Bishops set minimum academic goals for those who are training for ministry in the Church, but they do not set—and are not interested in—the wider outcomes of character formation. This is why the question of the person whose prayer is true is completely irrelevant in my classes. I’m not interested in character. I’m interested in who can conjugate the future perfect passive, who understands the key points of the middle voice, who remembers that neuter plural subjects take singular verbs in the indicative.

I do not know for sure, but I imagine that it is the same here. Just as we do get interested in character formation, the education of the whole person on Fridays in the Theological School in an extra-curricular program of ministry formation, so many of the things that were once central in the *paideia* model are now extra-curricular activities in school—drama, debating, sport, musical performance as opposed to music theory, worship, Bible study. They are valued, of course, but the very label “extra-curricular” dooms them forever to a second-class existence.

I do not have a solution to this problem, I’m afraid. In fact, no one has cracked the problem of how to combine the best elements of the Athen-*paideia* model and the Berlin-*Wissenschaft* model. Some say it cannot be done by the programs a school offers. You can only do it by hiring lots of Mr Thompsons, lots of teachers who have the Right Stuff, and that Socratic midwifery can’t be taught. The former Federal Government tried to do it with an injection of values education in schools through its *National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools* and the new nine virtues which it feels create an excellent Australian citizen. One of my doctoral students is doing some excellent work on the actual implementation of this program in Queensland and Victoria, interviewing teachers and bureaucrats, and it doesn’t look like this is the answer either.

The dilemma remains. Each model contains things that cannot be sacrificed. A school that is all *paideia* but no *Wissenschaft* runs the risk of becoming one of those faith-based schools, as they are called, mainly in Queensland but also in Victoria, where creationism, or intelligent design as it now branded is taught as a credible alternative to evolution, or a school where the Koran or the Bible cannot be questioned. That is not the kind of faith-based school I want my children to attend.

A school that is all *Wissenschaft* and no *paideia* becomes a kind of content-focussed exam factory where no Anglican ethos—probably no ethos at all, properly understood—can survive. And it is clear that parents want this *paideia* or at least they want the idea of it. Around 33 per cent of Australian children now attend non-government schools - and that percentage is even higher in NSW and particularly in Victoria where around 40 per cent of year 11 and 12 students attend non-government schools. That’s double the numbers of 40 years ago, and is said to be the result of parental choice. It is clear that students want it. Now, just as much as when you and I were at schools, students could detect—and value—teachers who allowed relationship, trust, communication, good humour, flexibility, two-way feedback, all

that's best in the *paideia* tradition. And if it is true, as Irenaeus of Lyons says, that the “glory of God is a person fully alive” (“Gloria Dei vivens homo”—*Adversus Haereses* 4.20.7), then God wants it too.

How you manage—as individual teachers, as departments, as a school—to combine the idea of the teacher as a mentor, as a “midwife” or practitioner of *paideia*, with all that is good in the Berlin-*Wissenschaft* model is what will determine how you are remembered, a role model (like my Latin teacher) or as a villain (Like my History teacher). And when you—and I—have finally cracked it, finally got the balance right, then we will be able to sleep soundly at night, proudly knowing in truth, what is we often claim for ourselves “ touch the future. I am a teacher”.

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