

An Educational Model Proposals from a Notable Essentialist/Perennialist

Summarized by Leslie Owen Wilson

Mortimer Adler's *The Paideia Proposal*

This material has been summarized, condensed, and melded from a number of sources. See references below varied entries.

Adler's Ideas: *The Paideia Proposal* - There are several different pronunciations of paideia - (py dee a, or py day a). It is from the Greek meaning *the upbringing of a child*.



Mortimer Adler was at the University of Chicago when he conceived the idea of an educational system based on the great, unchanging themes and works of human kind. These are topics and works that are timeless, endless, classic - they are the big ideas contained in great works of art, literature and science. It was Adler's belief, and that of the Paideia Group, that education should perpetuate democracy in that all children, regardless of class, social standing, or ability or disability, should be exposed and have access to the same classical education so that they could exchange ideas and ideals.

To this end The Paideia Group (a group of notable folks) was formed with Adler's help and in association with The Encyclopedia Britannica, and put forth an educational proposal, design, and syllabus in three works: *Paideia Proposal* (1982), *Paideia Problems and Possibilities* (1983), and *The Paideia Program* (1984). These works put forth a vision an educational system that is classically based and excludes all extraneous subjects like teen living skills, driver's education, family and consumer, or physical education, etc.

And From <http://eastwood.cps-k12.org/questions.html>

Paideia focuses on helping all students to acquire, remember, and understand basic ideas, skills, and facts.

How does Paideia encourage student to think?

One of the Paideia teacher's skills is the use of the Socratic dialogue. The Socratic dialogue is a discussion developed by the teacher through the use of one question that is followed by further questions that focus on students' responses. This is to identify the students' logic, reasoning, and understanding. Some examples of follow-up questions are:

- *Why do you say that?..*
- *What do you mean?..*
- *What is your support?*

How does a teacher blend the three modes of teaching into a class plan?

All teaching modes can be used for different lengths of time. The Socratic dialogue can occur in five-minute interaction or be an hour and a half session. It can occur in the middle of a lecture or a coaching session or be developed into a full-length seminar. Consider the following examples:

The lecture: When the teacher is giving information. No student should have to sit in a bell-to-bell lecture. It is boring, nonproductive, and yields poor results in learning. The lecture is biologically demanding for students making it difficult to maintain interest and attention. The

Socratic dialogue can be inserted after a short period of time lecturing (e.g. ten minutes) to interrupt the pace and focus attention. For example the teacher can say, "What was most important in what I just said?...Why do you say that?".

The coaching session: When the teacher is getting the student to do something. The coach helps the student over hurdles of difficulty. As a result, the coach needs to know what is not clear or confuses the student. The Socratic dialogue yields information about the student progress in understanding the skill. For example, the teacher can ask in a math session, "How did you solve the problem?...Why did you use that strategy?".

The seminar: When the teacher is facilitating an educationally oriented discussion focused on a primary source. The Socratic dialogue is the heart of the seminar as the teacher focuses the students on the important words, points, and ideas in the primary source. There may be several Socratic dialogues or one that is developed over a period of time. For example, Mortimer Adler once led a seminar on Hamlet for an hour and a half that was developed from an initial question, "Do you like Hamlet?". This was followed by "Why?...Where in the play did you see that?...Who else agrees or disagrees and Why?".

The educational design is simple and contains 3 primary activities:

Didactic	Coaching	Seminar
		
The Acquisition of Organized Knowledge	Development of Intellectual Skills	Increased Understanding of Ideas and Values
10-15%	60-70%	15-20%

<p>The Didactic Mode - The Acquisition of Organized Knowledge information is acquired from textbooks, manuals...teacher monitors learning through drills, exercises, and tests...instruction takes the form of lecturing by telling, explaining, pointing out difficulties to be overcome, problems to be solved, connections and conclusions to be learned</p>	<p>The Coaching Aspect - The Development of Intellectual Skills - the core of the program, it is the way students actively gain intellectual skills that are necessary for further learning.</p> <p>Here teacher functions as a coach considering the most important kind of doing is intellectual or mental doing...learn to read, write, calculate by reading, writing, and calculating...to learn how</p>	<p>The Seminar Component - The Enlargement of Understanding, Insight, and Aesthetic Appreciation - a way for students to deepen their understanding of the ideas they have been and apply them to their own lives and values. The seminar process has the greatest capacity to transform the nature of school for students so the seminar is generally the method first introduced to schools</p>
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<p>tempered by questioning back and forth between the student and teacher...sitting in rows w/teacher at front, designated time periods, and reasonable class size are okay</p> <p><i>Didactic instruction assessed by traditional tests</i></p>	<p>to do any of these things well, one must not only engage in doing them, they must also be guided in doing them by someone more expert in doing them than oneself...teacher needs to be able to move freely from student to student with flexible time periods and a manageable able number of students/class</p> <p><i>Coaching intellectual skills assessed through traditional testing and project construction.</i></p>	<p>In this portion the teacher teaches by asking not telling and using materials other than textbooks or manuals...during discussion students ask and answer questions...teachers role is to keep discussion going along fruitful lines, moderating, guiding, correcting, leading and arguing...teacher must be very aware of the way insights occur to accomplish goal of enlarging students' understanding of subject matter...pay close attention to what is happening in the student's mind as he/she asks questions as well as the order in which they're asked...calls for longer class periods, seating around a conference-type table</p> <p><i>Seminars assessed through writing and discussion and through projects</i></p>
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Comment: If you have had training in The Junior Great Books Program then you have experienced the Socratic process and Paideia techniques.

References:

<http://www.coe.wayne.edu/TSC/paideia.html>

<http://www.hickory.k12.nc.us/CVH/Paideia.htm>

http://www.thegreatideas.org/adlerbio_short.html
