ACCS Distinctive Schools Series

Classroom Management: Habits, Discipline, Integrity Codes, and Virtue

Why in such deadly earnest about making money while troubling so little about the sons to whom you are to leave it? — Socrates

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Now he is a man of just and holy life who forms an unprejudiced estimate of things, and keeps his affections also under strict control, so that he neither loves what he ought not to love, nor fails to love what he ought to love, nor loves that more which ought to be loved less, nor loves that equally which ought to be loved either less or more, nor loves that less or more which ought to be loved equally. No sinner is to be loved as a sinner; and every man is to be loved as a man for God's sake; but God is to be loved for His own sake. And if God is to be loved more than any man, each man ought to love God more than himself. Likewise we ought to love another man better than our own body, because all things are to be loved in reference to God, and another man can have fellowship with us in the enjoyment of God, whereas our body cannot; for the body only lives through the soul, and it is by the soul that we enjoy God. —Augustine of Hippo (On Christian doctrine, Bk. 1, Ch. 27)

Education without values, as useful as it is, seems rather to make man a more clever devil. — CS Lewis

Water in moderation will make a plant grow, while a flood of water will choke it. In the same way, the mind will thrive reasonably under hard work, but will drown if the work is excessive. — Plutarch

The entertainment model of education wants the students to enjoy themselves; the older classical model wants students to be disciplined so they come to enjoy their work. — Doug Wilson

The object of education is to teach us to love what is beautiful. — Plato

We are what we repeatedly do, excellence then is not an act, but a habit. — Aristotle

The task of the modern educator is not to cut down jungles but to irrigate deserts. — CS Lewis

The good student, then, ought to be humble and docile, free alike from vain cares and from sensual indulgences, diligent and zealous to learn willingly from all, to presume never upon his own knowledge, to shun the authors of perverse doctrine as if they were poison, to consider a matter thoroughly and at length before judging of it, to seek to be learned rather than merely to seem so, to love such words of the wise as he has grasped, and ever to hold those words before his gaze as the very mirror of his countenance. — Hugh of St. Victor

Is it wrong for teachers to place marbles in a jar for good behavior? What about fastening clothes pins with a student's name on to the red light of a laminated traffic light sign? What place should behavior charts and modern classroom management technologies that track student behavior have in the classical Christian school?

The classical Christian educator knows well children will misbehave as a consequence of their fallen nature. The Westminster Shorter Catechism answers Question 6 thus, "Sin is any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, the law of God," which theologian John Murray helpfully explains as, "(Sin) is the violation of the category of *ought*." Thus, it is no surprise that students will not do what they

ought at school; the challenge before the Christian educator is how to respond wisely, which means biblically, emphasizing virtue formation.

When teachers emphasize conduct at the expense of character, they fall into the modern psychology of 'behaviorism.' This is the idea that children are educated through conditioning. A student's behavioral response can be manipulatively conditioned through punishments and rewards to act in sociable ways. Whether this be through marbles in a jar for a pizza party or using laminated traffic lights, these experimental approaches to education have more in common with John Dewey and the behavioral psychologists than the liberal arts tradition of education.

If a student's primary motivation is to "end the day on green," the underlying message of our teaching is, "If you obey me, I will give you what you want." The classical Christian teacher focuses on the student's character, not merely on conduct. Thus, behavioristic practices do not belong in classical Christian schools because they ultimately teach selfishness.

Habit Formation and *Paideia*

Paideia is more expansive than mere schooling and refers to the all-encompassing formation, or enculturation, of the child while they are under their parents' roof and in the halls of our schools. If one looks to the medieval schools from which we are patterned, teachers instructed students not just in the areas knowledge and the domains of skill, but also simultaneously promoted virtue and curbed vice in the students. In modern education, there is a false dichotomy between the so-called "neutral" information that is imparted at schools and the morals that are taught at home. CS Lewis wrote in response to this false dichotomy, "Education without values, as useful as it is, seems rather to make man a more clever devil." A true recovery of classical Christian education means that every teacher, not just those that teach theology, see the cultivation of student virtue as a major part of their job description, that Christian virtue is integrated rather than separated.

In practice, *paideia* often takes the form of specific classroom habits that are expected of all students. Charlotte Mason writes, "Education is the introduction of ideas and the formation of habits." A habit is simply a behavior that has become automatic due to deliberate practice over time. In order for students to recover the tools of learning through both the trivium and the quadrivium, students must embody four keystone habits. Although Mason lists out more in her books, the four following habits of the heart are the gateway to all of the others:

- *Attentiveness*: listening with eyes, ears, and heart
- *Obedience*: responding to authority with a happy heart
- *Respect*: valuing others more than self
- *Responsibility*: doing what I've been entrusted to do

These habits are expansive enough to cover others but also definitive enough to actually shape behavior. The first habit, Attentiveness, is perhaps the most countercultural and difficult to acquire. In an age of digital distraction, an atmosphere of attentiveness is what makes the other three habits possible. Without attentiveness in the student body, directions will be repeated, students will be overly-dependent upon visuals, and there will not be much substance in classroom discussion. A habit of Obedience to earthly authorities is what prepares the student's heart to joyfully respond to God's authority. If the Kindergarten class can say "yes, yes" when the teacher says, "class, class," this begins to form the habit of responding to authority submissively and joyfully, so essential as the student grows older. Respect and Responsibility go hand in hand; students begin to see that the world does not revolve around them, yet they have a part to play within their classroom.

In order to make these four habits of the heart evident in lower *and* upper school culture, it is critical that administration models to the teachers how to enculturate students into attentiveness, obedience, respect, and responsibility. During Matt Whitling's ACCS Conference Talk, "Covenant Discipline," he describes the centrality of modeling and imitation with showing students how to line up correctly as well as how to transition between classes. Children need to be shown the correct way to perform a particular procedure in explicit fashion for them to do it with excellence. Whether it is turning in homework, or waiting in line for the restroom, or listening during a socratic discussion, teachers must name the behaviors and repeat them for students to begin to embody them. The

goal of habit formation is the cultivation of the cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, courage, and temperance as well as the theological virtues of faith, hope, and love. The link between mere information and meaningful transformation towards these virtues is habit formation.

Why Children Misbehave and What to Do About It

In article entitled, "Death to the Behavior Chart," educator Justin Minkel writes, "Students…need to be taught how and why to do the right thing, not just bribed and threatened into doing it. We need to teach them how and why to listen, to resolve their own conflicts, to calm down when they're angry, to set specific goals and work toward achieving them." It is an observable but unfortunate reality that most teachers respond to student misbehavior in the way their parents and teachers did to them. Yet, as our goal is to order the disordered loves of our students, simply repeating or reinterpreting our past with the next generation is most likely not the best strategy (unless you yourself went to a classical Christian school).

While it is obviously truncating an enormous field of study, it is evident that students typically fail to be attentive, obedient, respectful, and responsible for at least three different reasons: ignorance, weakness, and rebellion. One should also be aware of the impact of ability, work ethic, and ill-fortune as discussed by Hugh of St. Victors in the Preface to *Didascalicon*. While it may be tempting to attribute all inattentive and disobedient behaviors to a student's pride, idolatry, or rebellion, the simple fact is that children usually misbehave, because they are weak-willed and undisciplined. Often times, the best consequence for a middle school boy not turning in his homework is to say, "It seems like you struggle with self-control and are weak in the habit of responsibility. Is that something that I can help you with?" Rather than threatening the child or immediately punishing the child, a wise teacher can rightly diagnose the underlying problem and address it.

To help students grow in the habits of attention, obedience, respect, and responsibility, the teacher must be like a stake next to a plant. In an essay entitled, *On Bringing Up a Boy*, Plutarch writes, "As farmers put stakes beside their plants, so the right kid of teacher provides firm support for the young in the shape of the lessons and admonitions, carefully chosen so as to produce an upright growth of character." A behavior chart gives teachers a false sense of control, because it makes them feel like they have a set sequence of consequences to match certain sorts of misbehavior. While there is certainly prudence, and as the Micado would aver, humanity, in providing consistent punishments that fit the crime, teachers must remember that all consequences should be redemptive and restorative and aligned to whether the "crime" was weakness, ignorance, or rebellion.

Weak students need oversight, training, and lots of repetitions to be formed in the habits of the heart. Rebellious students receive consequences aligned to their misbehavior, while Ignorant students, typically in the younger grades, must learn the expected habitual behaviors.

Lastly, remember that we act as educators, *in loco parentis*—in place of the parent. Whatever the frequency or character of the misbehavior, there are times when it is appropriate and even necessary to directly involve the parent. Plutarch writes, "Nothing is so fattening to a horse as the eye of the king." This suggests that a child's father, examining his virtues and habits and behavior regularly, will bring the best out in the child. While is certainly possible for parents to exasperate a child through unrelenting demands, it is more common that adults neglect children through inattention and assuming that no news is good news. Involving parents in habit formation will help create a school culture of attention, obedience, respect, and responsibility.

Grace: Love & Judgement

Matt Whitling, Superintendent at Logos School in Moscow, ID, says that we must maintain a "tight ship full of grace" in our schools. There is good precedent for Whitling's twofold vision in both the Scriptures as well as the tradition of liberal learning.

In the essay *On Anger*, Seneca, writing about the difficulty of regulating a boy's education, notes the importance of guiding the child between the two extremes of cherishing the habit of anger in them, and blunting the edge of their spirit. He warns, "nothing makes children

more prone to anger than a soft and coddling bringing-up. Therefore, the more an only child is indulged…the more will his disposition be spoiled. He will not withstand rebuffs who has never been denied anything, whose tears have always been wiped away by an anxious mother, who has been allowed to have his own way with his tutor." Children must grow up in an environment where if they do not work, they do not eat (2 Thess. 3:10). When children learn that they will stand or fall by their own efforts, they will be less dependent upon punishments and rewards from a teacher and see virtue as its own reward. If children need stickers, or a pizza party, or a grade to do the right thing, the school is neither biblically nor effectively painting a picture of the good life for its students. Doug Wilson writes, "The entertainment model of education wants the students to enjoy themselves; the older classical model wants students to be disciplined so they come to enjoy their work."

God's grace is not opposed to enjoyment or effort, it is merely opposed to earning. Plutarch also speaks to avoiding extremes of being too tough or too tender when he writes, "Water in moderation will make a plant grow, while a flood of water will choke it. In the same way, the mind will thrive reasonably under hard work, but will drown if the work is excessive." Similar to the Aristotelian Mean, Plutarch proposes that teachers pursue the 'middle course in all things.' This does not mean that a teacher only holds students accountable for failing to complete an assignment half of the time, or that the prudent decision is half-way between what one group wants and what another wants. Instead, teachers should seek to imitate God (Eph. 5:1) in how they discipline their students over the course of a year. On the whole, students should learn of both God's judgement and God's love through the aggregate of the teacher's responses to student ignorance, rebellion, and weakness. In the same way that God educates our ignorance, brings His strength to our weakness, and judges our rebellious misbehavior according to His revealed law, we should seek to do the same with our students. Avoiding extremes means that we embrace the truth that God is both just, holy, and wrathful towards sin while simultaneously cherishing that He is gracious, merciful, and pardoning of the humble who confess their sin.

Integrity Codes

James Madison famously wrote in Federalist 51, "If Men were angels, no government would be necessary." We might say, "If students were angels, they would be no need for integrity codes." But how comprehensive should a code of conduct be? For 150 years an all-male liberal arts college in Crawfordsville, Indiana, has had but one rule, "The student is to conduct himself at all times, both on and off campus, as a gentleman and responsible citizen." But does this simplified integrity code transfer over to K-12? Does it fit with the *paideia* that is being pursued in classical Christian education?

There is certainly precedent for simplifying rules in Scripture. If Moses could summarize the 613 laws of the Torah into 10 commandments, and Jesus can further reduce those 10 commandments into the twofold command to love God and neighbor, perhaps there is a pattern of wisdom that Wabash is preserving. Wabash College's simple code of conduct provides enormous freedom while also encouraging an environment of responsibility. A simple and straightforward integrity code seems to have merit in that it assumes that those who are to abide by it know what it means inherently and do not need laborious explanation. But will what works for one small college necessarily work for another? Codes of conduct must fit with the overall *paideia* of the institution. An integrity code must match with the ethos of the faculty, the traditions of the institution, and the academic goals of the educational program.

What works at this singular liberal arts college is likely not a good fit for most classical Christian K-12 schools, because it provides too much freedom, and it is not distinctly and consistently Christ-centered and classical. Because the K-12 school is operating in loco parentis, the school's authority does not extend beyond its walls, so the code of conduct should be limited to the actions that impact the student's engagement with the school's regular activities. A good code of conduct is the right balance of liberty and responsibility, fitting the stage of life of the school's students.

At one school, the students say the following 'creed' on a weekly basis,

> I am Coram Deo. I live before the face of God. My life is given to me to honor Him, and I will honor him with it. I will be a gentleman/lady and a blessing to those around me. I will not lie or cheat or tolerate those who do. I will strive for excellence and should I fail, I will do so nobly and with grace.

This is more of a creed of intention and aspiration than a traditional code of integrity. Another school uses the following language for the upper school code of conduct:

> Students of (ABC) Classical School are expected to follow a standard of conduct in accordance with Christian principles.
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> As a (ABC) student, I will endeavor with the help of God and the encouragement of my parents and teachers to:
> 1. Cooperate respectfully and obey willingly those in authority.
> 2. Appropriately accept and respond to Biblical correction from staff…
> 14. Refrain from bringing guns or knives on the school grounds.
>
> I agree with the above Student Conduct Agreement and will follow it to the best of my ability. I recognize that lapses in my ability to do so may result in discipline from teachers and leaders at (ABC) Classical School as they lovingly strive to cultivate moral, spiritual, intellectual, and physical virtues in me. In situations which constitute serious breaches of this agreement, I understand that expulsion may be necessary.

The student and a parent witness are then both expected to sign the document. Obviously, this upper school code of conduct is more expansive than the singular Wabash College rule, but it aligns with the *in loco parentis* ideal of a classical Christian school and the behavioral standards are stated in a concrete and understandable language. By communicating in this concrete manner, the administrator has clear grounds for holding student accountable to the code of conduct.

Cultivating Virtue

Salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone does not entail that Christians need not strenuously pursue a virtuous life. Peter writes, "For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith virtue, and virtue with knowledge" (2 Pet. 1:5). Paul writes,

> Whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

Paul commends believers not only to think about these things but also to practice them. Though sinful students are not saved *by* good works, they are saved *for* good works and for living a life of faith, hope, love, prudence, justice, courage, and temperance (Eph. 2:10).

The word "virtue" as opposed to "value" has been intentionally chosen in the ACCS Accreditation Standards, because a virtue is an objectively praiseworthy human quality that has been honored throughout time. Typically, these have been codified via the theological virtues of faith, hope, and love, and the cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, courage, and temperance.

The word "value," or "core value," has become prominent in our modern vocabulary because "values" like empathy, diversity, citizenship, and tolerance permit of subjective definition. In the modern age it seems, for a behavior to be valued, its worth must be established through a psychological study or some other empirical observation. It is no longer sufficient to appeal to the authority of tradition or some other meaningful source.

Uniquely in K-12 education, classical Christian education seeks to the transformation of the student through exposure to great works, including primarily of course the Holy Scriptures, that shape what they love. It is not enough for students to "know stuff" but they must love what they know. A student's "moral imagination" is shaped by fable and myth, custom and tradition, history and song,

and stories about a society's heroes. Thus, they learn to love that which is virtuous, what is true and good and beautiful.

The serious study of the Great Books as well as the Greatest of Books, the Holy Scriptures, opens the imagination of our students to see beyond the present and immanent to the future and the transcendent. In an age where children are encouraged to be their own heroes, our students are shown the great men and women who have gone before them, and inspired how to imitate them.

Such is the classical Christian education that will sustain a student throughout his life.