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Welcome to our forty ninth edition of "The Academic Journal," a bimonthly bulletin in which you can read about MCA's educational philosophy, instructional methodology, and the various viewpoints and positions of our faculty, staff, students, and families.

Classical Education: Pedagogy

In this penultimate issue on MCA's classical education, we offer explanation and insights into MCA's pedagogy.

From our Vision: "...a devotion to intellectual and moral integrity, including an ability to fashion credible ideas and to argue logically..."

Once we have established the true end of education—the formation and liberation of the individual, the wise and virtuous citizen—then we must teach with the end in mind. Classical education is an education of ideas. While content and skills are important and necessary components of education, they are means and not ends. Refined skills and robust content give students the ability to fashion credible ideas and to eventually articulate those ideas logically and eloquently.

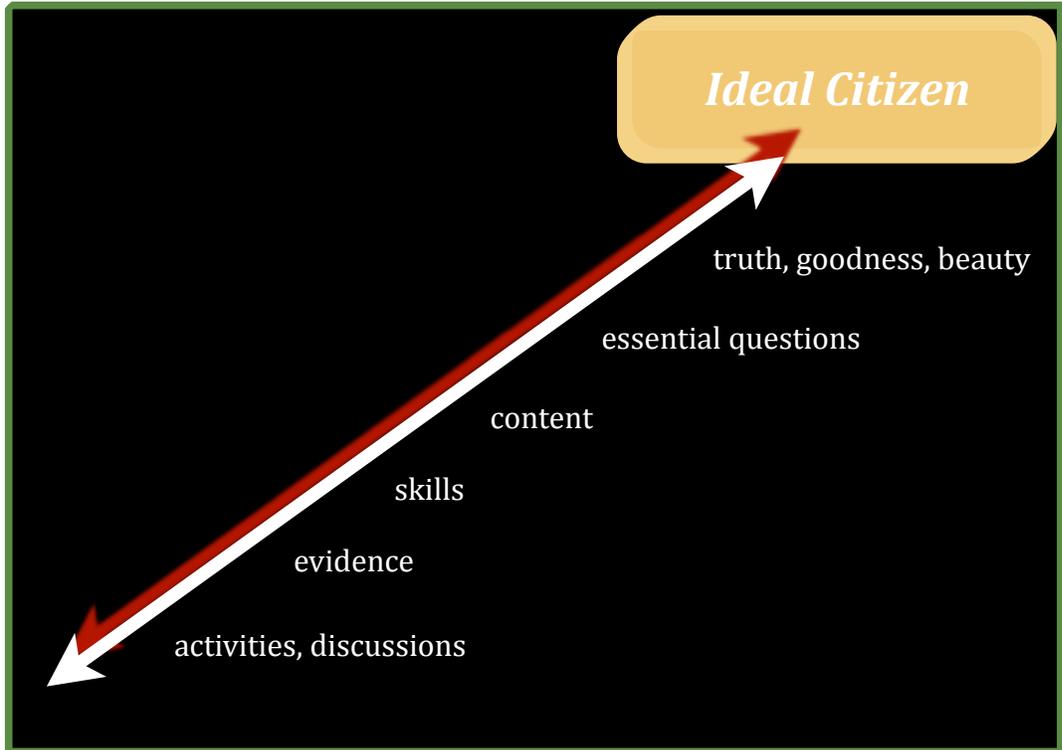
For teachers, lesson planning begins with asking life's big, formational questions—questions that unite curriculum areas into a meaningful whole, questions whose hard-sought answers help students make sense of the world. They begin with the big ideas, and then determine the content that helps students contemplate the big ideas. The next



step comes when they determine the skills necessary for students to access the content. Once they have those pieces in place, they decide how best to evaluate the students' acquisition of skills and content, and more importantly, understanding of the big ideas. Assessments include, but are not limited to, numerical data. Teachers use rubrics, essays, speeches, projects, and works of art, and many other ways to allow students to demonstrate the knowledge they have internalized. Lastly, having this clear end-goal in mind, they plan learning activities and experiences that will move students toward the goal.

At the heart of classical learning stands inquiry, which stimulates thinking and provides impetus for seeking answers. Much of classical teaching is Socratic in nature with teachers asking key questions and encouraging students to ask intelligent, probing questions. Lessons often begin with students exploring the answers to important questions in conversation with the teacher. The teacher then is able to lecture wisely to minds that are already tuned to the topic. Ultimately, as students enter the rhetoric stage, they participate in the Great Conversation of the Western tradition. Rather than offering unsubstantiated opinion, students learn through inquiry, logic, and argumentation to bring to bear the thoughts of the great authors they have studied throughout their education.

Lower school classes discuss fairy tales, fables, poems, works of historical fiction, and fascinating science concepts. Upper school classrooms are rich with discussions of the ideas of Aristotle, Homer, Dante, Milton, Shakespeare and other important authors who speak to the human condition and the larger questions of life. Classical pedagogy is a pedagogy of desire.



In his ancient wisdom, Plato said, “Education is teaching our children to desire the right things.” Augustine used the term *ordo amoris*, the ordering of the affections, to describe the goal of pedagogy.

We design curriculum and instruction in a way that not only provides meaningful information, but also helps to incline students’ desires toward the good, the true, and the beautiful. As human beings, we are all makers, so we guide students to internalize and reshape the content they are taught to make something of it that becomes their own, whether through writing, music, drama, storytelling, or many other means. Our hope is that this pedagogy of desire will spur our students to go out into the world to make virtuous families, charitable associations, honest and compassionate businesses, and carefully crafted products. We teach with the end in mind.

Pamela J. Braley, Upper School Director

