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Character Scholarship Community



Welcome to our fifty-third 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.

## Paideia: The Virtuous Citizen

The first article in a multi-part series on MCA’s understanding of citizenship

WE at MCA first know the word “paideia” as it relates to Paideia Seminars, those student discussions based on the classical Socratic Seminar that feature a collaborative, intellectual dialogue with open-ended questions about a text.<sup>1</sup> Paideia is that... and much, much more.

“Paideia” is a wonderful term—rich and ancient—yet quite accessible. Basically it means “education.” From the Greek pais (child), paidos, paideuein (to educate, to develop the child), it is essentially the upbringing, the rearing, of a child. Those Greek words are also related to “propaedeutic,” (providing introductory instruction), and “pedagogy,” and “pediatrics.”<sup>2</sup>

Paideia is the Greek word for instruction, discipline, and upbringing, but more specifically it is a notion born out of ancient Athens. There, in Athens, paideia became the means to produce the kind of person who could take an active part in the affairs of the *polis*, the city-state. Collectively these people would make the decisions about domestic policy, foreign relations, and the appointment of military leadership. These people would ultimately determine the quality and fate of the community as a whole.

Therefore, any Athenian who hoped to persuade his fellow citizens would need a strong grounding in rhetoric. But more than that, it was one thing to be persuasive, and another to judge soundly concerning what one should be persuaded of. This kind of wisdom required a sound knowledge of the history and customs that made that community what it was, that is, Athenian, as distinct from Egyptian or Persian or Macedonian, Theban or Spartan. It also presupposed knowledge of the outcomes of previous decisions. And still further, it required the ability to examine and to digest that historical knowledge so that the historical knowledge would yield insights about what works and what doesn't, what is desirable and what isn't, what should be and what shouldn't be. That knowledge of history had to be challenged dialectically.<sup>3</sup> It required one to become wholly involved (body, soul, and spirit) with the investigation, thinking logically and morally. It would not allow a distant and cold analysis as is often touted today.



How did that work out in more recent times? At the founding of this nation, before writing the Constitution, James Madison poured over crates of books that Thomas Jefferson had sent him, books about history, philosophy, and former republics. Whatever this country would become, he would do his best to see that we learned from the past—from human experience and from sound thinking—so that we would not repeat the same errors that caused *all* previous republics to collapse.

So, the richness of the word “paideia” originated during the Greek and later Greco-Roman world. It was the rearing and education of the ideal member of the community. This process included the subjects of liberal arts: grammar, dialectic, rhetoric, and philosophy, as well as scientific disciplines like arithmetic and medicine. An ideal member of the polis— a citizen, if you will—would possess intellectual, moral, plus physical refinement, so training in wrestling and other such areas was valued for its effect on the body alongside the mental and moral.<sup>2</sup> (Now, I am glad to say that not only do I have a selfish reason to have an MCA wrestling team (that’s what I used to coach), but I can now argue historical and philosophical reasons!)

Paideia in the Greek sense aimed at the creation of a higher type of man. The Greeks did not idealize the subjective self, but realized the universal laws of all human nature. Paideia meant the process of educating man into his true form, the real and genuine human nature. Paideia starts from the ideal, not from an individual. This ideal of humanity was the pattern and model toward which all Greek educators and poets, artists and philosophers always looked. It was this universal ideal, the model of humanity, which all individuals were to imitate.<sup>2</sup> This ideal was to be embodied in the community, and the goal of education was to make each person in that ideal image for his sake as well as for the sake of the community.



Paideia had as its goal political man “both beautiful and good,” the servant of the polis. Paideia denoted the culture of the mind, the civilized life, and the influences, processes, and techniques for the making of such a man. The developed mind and heart in a superb body was the goal, the union of moral perfection, intellectual excellence, artistic harmony, and physical beauty. For the Greeks, then, education had to do with the *making* of men, not *training* men to make things.<sup>2</sup> Werner Jaeger, a Prussian classicist who died in 1961 in the United States, said paideia is “the process of educating man into his true form, the real and genuine human nature.”

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<sup>1</sup>“Paideia Socratic Seminar”. *National Paideia Center*, National Paideia Center, [www.paideia.org/our-approach/paideia-seminar](http://www.paideia.org/our-approach/paideia-seminar). Accessed 14 July 2019.

<sup>2</sup> Naugle, Davey. “The Greek Concept of Paideia.” DBU Summer Institute. Handout.

<sup>3</sup>Baker, Lyman. “Baroque and Enlightenment.” Introduction to Western Humanities. Kansas State University. 2003. Handout.

