

**Do you observe, Meno, that I am not teaching the boy anything, but only asking him questions; and now he fancies that he knows [...] does he not?**

- Socrates

Socrates, ancient Greek philosopher, is well known for his method of questioning pupils and his refusal to lecture to them. The Socratic method of questioning and dialogue has been studied, discussed, and exemplified in a variety of ways throughout history.

### *HISTORY OF PAIDEIA*

In the early 1980s (1979-1985), Mortimer J. Adler – a lifelong philosopher and educator – met with a select group of other educators with the intention of discussing and changing education reform. They referred to their group as The Paideia Group, naming themselves with the Greek word, παιδεία, meaning *the training and teaching of a child*. The Paideia Group published three books in the course of two years, which proposed a different method and standard to be implemented in all classrooms throughout the United States. The main concerns that the Paideia Group attempted to point out and address were all centered on the relationship between a student and teacher and the style in which learning and development of the mind ensued:

[Students] have spent hours in classrooms where they were talked at, where they recited and took notes, plus hours (often too few) of homework poring over textbooks, extracting facts to commit to memory. But when have their minds been addressed, in what connection have they been called

upon to think for themselves, to respond to important questions and to raise them themselves, to pursue an argument, to defend a point of view, to understand its opposite, to weigh alternatives? (Adler, 1982)

The books piqued an interest within the general public; and, as a result, The Paideia Group Inc. (PGI) was formed “to monitor and guide the development and spread of the Paideia concept of education (PGI, 2005).”

### *PRINCIPLES OF PAIDEIA*

In 1991, The Paideia Group declared twelve principles, prefaced by “We, the members of the Paideia Group, hold these truths to be the principles of the Paideia Program (Adler, 1982).” Some of the principles stated are as follows:

- That all children can learn
- That the three callings for which schooling should prepare all Americans are, (a) to earn a decent livelihood, (b) to be a good citizen of the nation and the world, and (c) to make a good life for one’s self.
- That the desire to continue their own learning should be the prime motivation of those who dedicate their lives to the profession of teaching. (Adler, 1982)

The principles of the Paideia Program, again, are focused around the relationship between the student and the teacher. The principles make it clear that it is the duty of the teacher to act more as a guide through one’s learning and educational process, as opposed to a tyrant and ruler of one’s thoughts.

In order to ensure that a teacher is most beneficial to the student's learning process, three main elements of instruction were implemented by the PGI, and have become an integral part of the entire Program.

### *INSTRUCTIONAL ELEMENTS*

The Paideia classroom operates through three different, but complementary teaching techniques: Coaching, Seminar, and Didactic Instruction. All of the techniques must be used within the classroom in order for the most beneficial and productive learning to occur; however, depending on the classroom age and size, each technique may be used for a varying amount of time.

The first of the three teaching techniques is *Coaching*:

A coach does not teach simply by telling or giving the learner a rule book to follow. A coach trains by helping the learner to *do*, to go through the right motions, and to organize a sequence of acts in a correct fashion. He corrects faulty performance again and again and insists on repetition of the performance until it achieves a measure of perfection. [...] Only in this way can the ability to think critically – to judge and to discriminate – be developed. (Adler, 1982)

Coaching is a particular interaction between the student, the teacher, and the material. The teacher's duty is to force the student, through questioning, to think about the material, and about what the material is saying, or showing. If discussing a math problem, the teacher should ask questions such as, "Why does it work?" and, "could you solve this problem another way?" Or, when working with a group of student's on a math problem, "Jenny did not get the same answer as Freddie. Let Jenny and Freddie both explain how

they solved the problem, and then show them why they did not get the same answer.” Thus, coaching acts as a way for student’s to learn to think for themselves and as a way for them to discover where they have made mistakes in their logic, as opposed to a teacher or textbook telling them everything that is correct and incorrect, without ever giving the student a chance to find out *why*.

The second teaching technique employed by the Paideia Program is *Seminar*:

Paideia Seminar is a collaborative, intellectual dialogue facilitated by open-ended questions about a text. The goal of Paideia Seminar is for students to expand their understanding of ideas and concepts, and values about the curriculum. (PGI, 2005)

Once a student has coached through a text, either independently, one-on-one with the teacher, or within a group of students, a seminar on that particular text is usually the next step taken within the Paideia classroom. The seminar is an open conversation, usually started by a question from the teacher, which is then discussed by the students. The teacher acts as a sort of guide, again, helping to steer the students clear of any unwanted tangents, and to lead them down a beneficial and meaningful path. The goal of the seminar is to get students thinking about the material they have coached, to be able to defend their understanding of the material they have read, and to hear other interpretations and understandings of the material that had not even occurred to them on their own. Thus, student’s are not only learning to think for themselves, but they are learning to listen and be open to improving their own thoughts through what another offers in conversation.

Within the seminar, the students are also the most active part of the lesson. Having a dialogue allows for the student to become interested in what he/she is learning, and to actually take part in the material. This interest in what the student is learning is one of the primary goals of The Paideia Group.

The third, and final, teaching technique is *Didactic Instruction*:

Didactic Instruction is either written or oral, addressed either to the eyes of readers or to the ears of listeners [...] The best didactic teachers are those who manage to force their students to listen actively as well as to read actively. When students say that teacher so-and-so “makes the subject come alive,” they really mean that he has somehow compelled *them* to come alive. (Adler, 1984)

Another, perhaps more commonly used, term for Didactic Instruction may be Lecture. However, the Paideia Program makes a great deal about separating *talking to* a student, and *showing* a student. A Paideia teacher does not act like a textbook, asking the students to take notes, memorize equations, and fill out busywork; a Paideia teacher shows the students what they are learning, explains the why, who, what, where, and when of what they are dealing with. If memorization is necessary, the teacher explains *why* it is necessary, giving the students an actual reason to do work and be interested in their own education (Adler, 1984). The Paideia teacher cannot become a machine when lecturing to the students, but must be so aware of the student that he/she can relate to and understand everything being explained and demonstrated by the teacher during that time.

### SUCCESS OF PAIDEIA

The Paideia Project has had an ever growing influence since that group of educators met in 1979. Today, the three books have been translated into six different languages, and distributed throughout the world – sparking interest in school systems outside of the U.S. Also, every kind of institution – private, public, primary, University, etc. – has adopted the Paideia Program in some shape or form. If we look around today, we see public school programs such as “school-within-a-school,” or private schools adopting the Socratic Method within all of their classes. Certain colleges within the U.S. boast of their seminar and conversation based curriculum, and even kindergarten and pre-school teachers have begun to employ the method of questioning and showing rather than telling, finding that it creates a more successful learning environment.

On a final note, let me leave you with, perhaps, the largest indicator of success for the Paideia Program:

I am a sixth grade student. Every Thursday morning we have seminar. We read a story or a poem and we talk about it during seminar. I like seminar a lot because I have people who will listen to me and my ideas right in my own classroom. Usually I don't say much in class, but seminar makes me want to talk. I like that you can disagree with others and still be friends. Seminar makes me feel important, too, because we read books by famous authors and the class cares about what I think about the books. Seminar is good at home, too, because when you read your story to get ready for seminar, your family might read it with you. (PGI, 2005)

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