

The *Paideia* Proposal for School Reform

The Greek word "paideia" and its Latin equivalent "humanitas" stand for general, humanistic learning—the learning that should be the common possession of all.

Mortimer Adler's *Paideia Proposal* for reforming basic schooling would require all students to take the same course of study for 12 years with no electives except for a foreign language.

The Proposal's three objectives for basic schooling are that schools should provide opportunities for students' personal development and prepare them to be good citizens and to earn a living.

Adler's proposal consists of three types of teaching and learning running through the 12 years progressing from the simple to the more complex as children grow older (Figure 1).

The first type of teaching and learning—the "know that"—is devoted to acquiring knowledge in language, mathematics, natural science, and history through textbooks and lectures.

The second type is devoted to developing intellectual skills through coaching. The "know how" requires working with one student or small groups giving individual attention and feedback on performance.

Adler's third type of teaching and learning has students engage in the process of individual enlightenment in which they come to appreciate better all the human values embodied in works of art and literature. Adler suggests that this be accomplished through the Socratic method of questioning and discussion. Students would sit around a table at which the teacher sits as their equal, though older and wiser.

The last year or two of schooling would introduce students to the range of occupations available to them. If, at the end of this 12-year curriculum, students want training for a particular occupation, Adler suggests they ob-

tain it in two-year colleges, on the job, or in technical institutes.

Acknowledging that all children are not equal in abilities to learn, Adler recommends pre-school tutoring for at least one year or as many as three for those who need it.

"We know that to make such a pre-school tutelage compulsory and at the public expense would be tantamount to increasing the years of compulsory schooling from 12 to 13, 14, or 15," states Adler, "but it is so important that some way must be found to make it available."

The heart of Adler's proposal is the quality of teaching and learning that occupy the school day. The curriculum, he states, is nothing but a series of channels or conduits. Teachers must view their role as aiding students to engage in the process of discovery. ■

A Conversation with Mortimer Adler

O. L. DAVIS, JR.



Davis: Mr. Adler, you call for the same curriculum for all children. In American schools, however, the process of choosing electives is well established.

Adler: We are running against the stream, no question about it. We recommend eliminating all electives except one: the choice of a second language, be it French, German, Italian, Spanish, Russian, or Chinese. Otherwise, we think the curriculum should be the same for all.

We are cognizant of individual differences in ability, but we think those differences must be taken care of by remedial instruction. Here remedial means individual attention, not making up for deficiencies in teaching.

Davis: As you point out, schools currently emphasize column 1 (See Figure 1, page 580), the acquisition of organized knowledge.

Adler: Almost to the exclusion of development of intellectual skills and improved understanding of ideas and values. If schools don't do the kind of coaching I'm talking about, they cannot possibly hope to cultivate these skills.

Davis: You refer to the type of teaching in column 2 as "coaching."

Adler: Without a doubt, there is little coaching done now. That is understandable when many classrooms in big city schools have 35 or more students. The teacher doesn't have time to do

what is required for coaching.

By the way, we don't mean to add coaching to what is already going on; we mean to substitute it for what is going on. Small groups are required. A great deal of individual attention is involved in helping students acquire any of these skills.

Davis: One fact of American life, which your proposal will run up against, is the emphasis on learning to earn rather than learning to be fully educated persons.

Adler: That is probably the chief obstacle to this reform's being widely accepted: parents who think that basic schooling is primarily or exclusively for learning how to make a living are making a mistake.

We think earning a living is important but so is living well. We are concerned that schools do both, not one. We propose that students be given, in the last two years of high school, a general introduction to the world of work and a career perspective so they will know what jobs are out there. In some sense, then, they will be initiated into the world of work without being given specialized job training, which is never successful in our rapidly changing society.

Davis: You propose to introduce the world of work to everyone?

Adler: Everyone. And there would be at least eight years of basic manual training, sewing, cooking, for both boys and girls. It is as important to think with your hands as it is to think with your mind.

I was absolutely astounded to find that American Telephone and Telegraph interviews 15 high school graduates to find one who can read and write well enough to be a telephone operator. This is not academic; this is job training in the general sense. These skills are common to all jobs; they apply to earning a living as well as to being able to handle ideas and values.

It is important that we all make as much of ourselves as we can, fulfill our potentialities, realize our gifts, and lead as deeply human lives as we can lead. ■

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Figure 1. The Paideia Curriculum.

	Column One	Column Two	Column Three
Goals	Acquisition of Organized Knowledge	Development of Intellectual Skills —Skills of Learning	Improved Understanding of Ideas and Values
Means	by means of Didactic Instruction Lecturing Textbooks	by means of Coaching, Exercises, and Supervised Practice	by means of Maieutic or Socratic Questioning and Active Participation
Areas Operations and Activities	in the four areas of subject-matter Language, Literature, and Fine Arts Mathematics and Natural Science History, Geography, and Social Studies	in the operations Reading, Writing, Speaking, Listening, Calculating, Problem Solving, Observing, Measuring, Estimating, Exercising Critical Judgment	in the Discussion of Books (Not Textbooks) and Other Works of Art and Involvement in Artistic Activities —Music, Drama, Visual Arts

Note: The three columns do not correspond to separate courses, nor is one kind of teaching and learning necessarily confined to any one class.

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