FOUNDERS CLASSICAL ACADEMY PEDAGOGY

A Brief Guide on Teaching Practices at Founders Classical Academies

By Jason Caros



Background

The purpose of this primer is to provide school leaders and instructors with a general and quick guide to *pedagogy* in our schools, and to give some examples appropriate to various academic disciplines, rather than a fully comprehensive teaching guide. With this in mind, it is important to pursue further study and to start I strongly recommend a couple of excellent and quick reads that are consistent with classical education. Both offer wise and practical examples for classroom teachers. The first is ***Elements of Teaching*, 2nd Ed.** by James M. Banner and Harold C. Cannon. This work emphasizes the kinds of dispositions and moral character traits found in effective teachers; these help to make a teacher a classroom leader worthy of students' respect and affections. The second is **Tried & True: A Primer on Sound Pedagogy** by Daniel Coupland, a short and practical work that provides advice on lesson planning, class rules, assessments, classroom orderliness, communication with students and their parents, and more.

Before listing examples of classroom practices (often referred to as methods or strategies), it is essential to underscore our Founders telos, or high purpose, as it drives everything that we ought to be doing in our schools. Our mission is forthright and unwavering—that we will *provide a distinctively classical education that pursues knowledge, promotes virtue and prepares students for prosperous lives in a free society*. In a nutshell, we will classically educate our students and promote *Scientia, Virtus et Libertas*, or Knowledge, Virtue and Liberty. Why? If you need answers to the question, watch the Founders podcast episode, What is Classical Education?, and read the essay The Heart of Classical Education.

For now, it is important to emphasize that our practices ought to serve our mission, which means that we should provide a **knowledge-rich, morally formative** education that stresses **responsible citizenship and civic virtue** that is not influenced by education fads or guided by utilitarian interests. This means that rather than preparing children to become economic and mechanical units or proverbial clogs in the machine, we must always aim to educate boys and girls who will better understand their humanity and the world around them, so that they can live well in it. We should help our students to not only be consumers of the things they learn and experience, but contributors in the classroom and in life, in general. Learning should not be passive nor self-centered, but active and beneficial to the common good. Founders educators do all of this by teaching and modeling goodness, truth and beauty and by using practices that are tried and true—qualitatively and quantitatively (i.e. supported by confirmed and replicated research).

Virtue Formation

At the heart of the Founders mission is the cultivation of virtue in students. Educating students is not solely about promoting the "life of the mind," as some people say, but it is about *ennobling hearts and minds*. The former, often referred to as the affections by the ancients, is actually more important in the order of loves. With that said, virtue is formed in children through example, the development of good habits, and through the teaching of precepts. Rather than fostering character by using a program in a box, our teachers promote virtue when they model good character traits each and every day in their classrooms, when they habituate students in academic, civic, and moral behaviors such as studiousness and regard for rules and procedures, civility or politeness, and perseverance in the face of challenges, to name a few. But they also help students to develop virtue through the stories and nonfictional texts they read and discuss in class, and through the artwork and music they experience that promote a sense of wonder, stir the moral imagination, and cause them to reflect upon and grapple with important elements of the human condition. Effective and loving teachers can be guides and midwives for students, birthing good thoughts and actions, as they grow to love those things which are worthy of affection, namely the good, true and beautiful. The souls of students at Founders should be formed in the various aspects of their school experience, inherently in the daily lessons, not through an artificial and contrived process. Nor should our teachers try to inculcate virtues by moralizing, or by forcing a lesson of virtue into every reading and activity.

Before moving into specific teaching practices, it is important to emphasize that every effective teacher maintains a **well-ordered classroom** with good, just and *consistently applied rules and procedures*, *daily rituals*, and *routines* that promote a healthy classroom culture, that also includes both *rewards and consequences* for students who go above and beyond, or beneath, the classroom standards. This guide will not speak specifically to this aspect of teaching, but it is important to highlight that without these in place, lessons will not go well, and students will not learn if they are off task or misbehave, thereby disrupting the learning of others. Maintaining a well-ordered classroom is a precursor to effective teaching and learning. For more on this aspect of instruction, refer to the books noted above as well as to content from the Founders Teacher Initiative (FTI) summer institute.

Big Ideas and Lesson Plans

Prior to teaching lessons and afterwards, it is important to reflect and assess how and to what extent your instruction contributes to the Founders mission. That's the first thing. Thinking about the big picture with regards to year-long content, planning for a course means that you have a master plan of some sort. Developing a course outline with at least a rough timeline for instruction, with an order that is rational and systematic is important to ensure that the appropriate content is taught within the course of each marking period or quarter.

A first step in developing an outline is reviewing the **Founders Program Guide** for the given grade level and/or disciplines (history, mathematics, music, etc.) and it is always a good idea to collaborate with grade level team members, department chairs and others who are also teaching, or who have taught the disciplines you teach, for guidance. Once you have a sense of what students should learn, it is important to develop effective lesson plans that follow a *Backwards Design*—knowing what students are responsible to know and do by the end of a given unit of instruction, you develop your big ideas or organizing principles for the content, followed by more detailed goals and hoped for outcomes, specific teacher and student activities, review, formative and summative assessments. For details on lesson planning, read Five Questions for Daily Lesson Planning–Keeping the End in Mind.

Classical School Practices—The Founders Way(s)

This section of the pedagogy guide provides a list of central teaching practices, but it is not meant to be all inclusive, hence the book recommendations at the beginning and the end of this guide. There are a multitude of practices that our teachers use, some more specific to particular disciplines than others, but after reading through the practices, one aspect of instruction should become evident—a Founders teacher is both a sage on the stage and a guide on the side, we emphasize the tried and true, but we do not dismiss everything new. The following list of practices is followed by more book recommendations about the art and science of teaching.

Mimetic Instruction (Imitation) is a foundational element of classical pedagogy as students learn by imitation and guided practice. All children and adults learn through imitation. Think about how an artist learns to draw and paint, a writer becomes a good writer, an historian becomes an investigator of the human condition, and a scientist an observer of nature, they start by imitating steps in a process of learning—by following the path of those that come before them. In short, *imitation precedes art*. There are different ways of expressing the mimetic process but one includes: invitation, presentation, comparison, explanation, and application. The "I do, we do, you do" practice often used in grammar or mathematics instruction is one simple expression of mimesis, imitation writing is another.

Multisensory Instruction (aural, verbal, and tactile instruction—images, sounds, and manipulatives) is essential to learning considering that humans are sensory creatures. We experience and learn by hearing, seeing, touching, smelling and tasting, although a couple of these occur less frequently in the context of school learning. Multi-sensory instruction should happen frequently in that students should often see and hear when teachers read a fairy tale and show corresponding pictures in a book, or when high school science teachers discuss photosynthesis and show an accompanying illustration. In some disciplines more than two senses are stimulated during lessons (i.e. during orthography lessons, music instruction or physical education). Nota bene: Multi-sensory instruction is not to be confused with the modern theories of Multiple Intelligences or Learning Styles, two education trends that are not supported by replicated research in cognitive science.

Repetition is an important aspect of classical pedagogy, whether it is practiced through **rote memorization** or via **distributed practice** and **interleaving**, it is well supported by cognitive science and is the subject of age-old truisms like *repetitio est mater studiorum* and *memoria est mater studiorum*. Rote learning includes efforts such as repeating poetry verses over time to prepare for recitations, practicing historical timelines or times tables and other math facts so they are automated, rehearsing spelling and grammar rules, expressed orally or written on mini white boards. It may be done in a variety of other ways, including through **songs, jingles and chants**, which help to make the content more memorable and enjoyable, depending on the content and age of students. **Distributed practice** means that content is repeated in some way or brought back over time (days, weeks, months), whereas **interleaving** involves blending related topics or exercises during a lesson rather than focusing on a single topic at a time. Sometimes, repetition is associated with the term "drill" or "drilling," and in some modern circles it has become synonymous with the phrase drill and kill. **Drilling**, when done properly and with enthusiasm is actually *drill and skill*. It is an essential means of increasing memory and improving skills.

Formative and Summative Assessments are necessary for effective instruction. Everyone knows to test or assess at the end of a unit of instruction, but not everyone schedules enough formative assessments. Checks for understanding, or diagnosing student progress, should come often and in a variety of ways such as oral and written formative assessments in order to determine whether students are 1) completing assigned tasks and 2) understanding the content and making progress toward mastery. Some checks involve quick quizzes, but many of these do not involve graded assignments (e.g. whiteboard practice, oral checks and other demonstrations of student knowledge and abilities). To prevent lack of mastery and reduce the need for after the fact interventions such as tutoring or additional practice, it is important for our teachers to use regular formative assessments throughout their weeks of instruction. Keep in mind that when formative assessments are used for grading, they should be low in weighting compared to summative assessments such as tests, essays, etc.

A note about **test reviews**—Founders teachers should provide a review for students prior to each summative assessment that includes some formal review of key content and time for Q & A. These reviews can be accomplished through a variety of means, but students and parents ought to be notified about summative assessments at least one full week beforehand and they should be given some type of review sheet that indicates what students are responsible for knowing and doing and how they will be assessed—by objective items, paragraph length responses, essays, etc. Assessing is meant to determine levels of mastery and to provide assessments that are just, there should be no mystery or surprises associated with an assessment, and students should have enough time to prepare for them, especially considering all of the responsibilities they have in all of their classes and with outside obligations.

Timely and specific teacher feedback on student work and assessments is essential. Effective teachers provide timely and specific feedback to their students; however, teachers should only provide written feedback on about a quarter to a third of

individual student work (the formative work); more than that is not a good use of teacher time. In other words, instructors can review or collect student work but do not need to mark or comment on everything that is assigned to students (e.g. class notes, questions, problems, etc.). Rather than always marking papers, specific feedback on assignments can sometimes be given to the entire class based on certain merits, repeated errors or trends found in student work. For example, a teacher may read and add comments to all the student paragraphs in one instance, but in the next he or she may read all the paragraphs and note common errors or ways to improve paragraph writing and then present them to the whole class via notes projected on a screen or printed on paper. Note that there are some instances where more frequent markings are part and parcel of the instruction (i.e. orthography).

Questioning is one of the most important teacher practices. *Socratic Instruction* is a foundational element of classical pedagogy characterized by **Socratic Questioning**, a dialogue between a teacher and students, where the teacher asks a series of questions (clarifying, probing, etc.) meant to help students to stimulate or clarify thoughts and arrive at conclusions about given topics by thinking through topics or ideas rather than by simply receiving directly imparted information. Founders teachers in earlier grades will generally ask fewer types of Socratic questions of students whereas teachers of older students will ask a fuller array of them. Types of Socratic questions include *clarification questions, questions about the question, assumption probes, reason and evidence probes, origin or source questions, implication and consequence probes, viewpoint questions*, etc. Teachers of older students will also facilitate regular **Socratic Seminars**, especially in the humanities, that include a structured class discussion led by students (facilitated by teachers), focused on a text or idea that allows for deep and thoughtful discussion and exchange of ideas. *Socratic Circles* are helpful in large classes.

Another type of essential questioning is called **scaffolding** that involves the use of **leveled questions**. Leveled questions may include three primary types, what are called *Level 1* or single factual questions, *Level 2* or inference questions, and *Level 3* or more abstract questions related to the topic at hand, building in order of complexity to help students understand the fundamentals before getting into more complex thought (i.e. scaffolding the questions). It is important to note that questioning is one of the most important daily teaching practices, when used well.

Other questioning practices common at Founders campuses include **Call and Response, Chorale Response**, and **Chorale Response/Analysis**. The latter is often used in orthography, grammar or music instruction whereby students express the components of something as part of the response.

Storytelling is an essential practice among Founders teachers as it is in our human DNA, so to speak, everybody loves a good story, and we learn well through stories (e.g. fables, parables, tall tales, origin stories, etc.). Storytelling is an essential and regular aspect of our history and literature lessons, but storytelling is certainly not limited to those disciplines. Effective teachers must learn to become good and engaging storytellers. Related to storytelling is an important practice called **Narration**. In this practice, teachers tell a fable, tall tale, a portion of lengthier story, etc. and then ask

students to tell the story back in their own words (not a summary); sometimes students are asked to write down the story after they've heard it. Narration improves students' listening, memory, thinking, speaking and writing skills.

Reading includes **read alouds** where our teachers read to students who listen, reflect and engage in discussions of a given text. **Small group readings** often occur in early grades, especially in grades K-2, where students practice reading and teachers move around the classroom and monitor students. ***Whole class reading*** occurs in grammar, middle, and high school levels whereby a teacher reads out loud, and students follow along in their text sometimes being asked to read passages aloud in place of the instructor, and class discussion follows—with the teacher using a Socratic and scaffolding process of questioning. Finally, all of our students are assigned **independent reading,** and for students beginning in second or third grade, this generally includes assigned comprehension and discussion questions and/or *text annotation*—instruction in **Close Reading** is imperative.

Research takes place when students prepare a Science Fair exhibit, a research paper in history, or a Senior Thesis paper, to name a few examples. This research often involves books and other primary and secondary resources, including those found online. Research may be done in and outside of class time. Founders students should be instructed about effective research practices, the use of proper citations and avoiding plagiarism.

"**Interactive" Lecture** is an organized talk given to students that includes periodic pauses filled with questions at various points of the lecture to increase active listening and student engagement. Lectures regularly include anecdotes or stories, and students beginning in third grade often take notes during lectures. Socratic and leveled questions are used by Founders teachers to improve memory and to stir students' thoughts and imaginations about given topics.

Slideshow Presentations using Google Slides, Keynote or PowerPoint are helpful when displaying content-related images such as artwork, photographs, historical paintings, political cartoons, charts or graphs, but instructors should ensure that these slideshows are targeted and avoid what has been called "death by PowerPoint," a slideshow that contains lots of text on slides. If our students are going to copy notes, it is better for teachers to hand-write them on the whiteboard or on paper that is projected onto a screen by a document camera. Older students ought to learn to take notes with fewer written cues from teachers, especially upperclassmen in high school.

Note-taking (i.e. Cornell Notes) is often associated with lectures or presentations but is also important in the context of reading. Founders students, beginning in third grade should learn to take Cornell Notes, a notetaking method that provides for easy-to-follow organization and an important culminating review and synthesis activity—the three-sentence summary. For more on notes, review the note-taking comments in the Slideshow section just above.

Turn and Talk is a practice that enables a pair of students to briefly discuss and share thoughts about a question provided by a teacher during a lecture, following a reading or another part of a lesson. After each pair throughout the class discusses the topic for a short period of time, the teacher asks individual students from around the classroom to share their responses out loud. This practice encourages listening and student engagement. It also prepares students for class discussion and enables students who might not otherwise speak to do so. Turn and talks should be limited to pairs of students, except in a case where the class numbers necessitate one group of three. Avoid putting students into larger groups as it often results in uneven effort and contribution as well as off-task discussions or actions.

> **Note Bena:** Beyond turn and talks, labs, and scripted performances, group work and cooperative learning should be minimal and infrequent.

Teacher demonstrations and student labs ought to take place regularly in science lessons to either introduce concepts or provide application experiences for students. Students should also participate in **nature study** through outdoor activities and field studies so that they can observe and understand the natural world firsthand.

Penmanship is emphasized in our schools, first by teaching students how to properly hold a pencil, to be seated in a scholar position, and how to print during orthography instruction, followed by instruction in cursive beginning in second grade. Students should be expected to write in cursive throughout their Founders experience, although it does not have to be required on every student assignment.

Composition begins in kindergarten and continues in early grammar school as students begin to write words, sentences and paragraphs, and it continues in earnest in every grade level and in every discipline or course. While students begin to learn the fundamentals of writing in the context of English lessons, writing is a skill that should be used and enhanced in all disciplines. Emphases in composition should include practice in *narration, imitation writing*, the various classical writing exercises that are part of the *Progymnasmata, academic essays, lab reports*, etc. culminating with concentrated *rhetoric activities* and *Senior Thesis* in high school.

Student demonstrations often involve scholars coming to the whiteboard to complete a mathematics algorithm or theorem, parsing or diagramming sentences while explaining the steps along the way. They similarly demonstrate and describe to their teachers and fellow students the steps in a science activity or model, they describe their artwork or explain an athletic exercise or activity. These types of demonstrations should occur regularly in our classrooms.

Performances and plays enable students to demonstrate their singing and instrumental abilities in music and acting in theater, individually or with other students. In some instances, scripted performances take place in Literature settings where students have roles in a play that is read in class.

Exercise, nutrition and sports are important for Founders students, as they should be well formed in mind, body and spirit. Children should be engaged in stretches, exercises, organized sports, games and dance activities that help them to develop motor skills, fitness, athletic abilities, communication and character traits that relate to teamwork, civility and perseverance, among other virtues. Explicit health and nutrition studies are integrated into Physical Education with the aim of promoting healthy habits and overall student well-being. Unlike daily recess in grammar school grades, which is unstructured time for free play, Physical Education lessons include specific goals and objectives and have as their end the development of student knowledge, skills and dispositions.

Recitations begin in kindergarten and continue through twelfth grade as our students memorize and recite nursery rhymes, sayings, poems, portions of historical documents and speeches, and other discipline-related content. While the majority of recitations take place in the context of Literature lessons, they also occur in other humanities and foreign language classes, and to a lesser extent in other disciplines such as mathematics and science. Recitations also provide opportunities for teachers to promote effective speaking skills including good posture and appropriate gestures, eye contact, elocution, and voice projection, all important elements of rhetoric.

Debates and Speeches should take place in an increasing manner as students progress through the grade levels. In the middle grades, as learning becomes more dialectical, teachers facilitate informal and formal argumentation during discussions and scheduled debates. Founders students should be given plenty of opportunities to speak in front of their teachers and classmates in daily lessons, seminars, and scheduled presentations. In high school, speeches and presentations of varying lengths should be a part of multiple class experiences in the humanities and sciences, culminating with Rhetoric and Senior Thesis.

Video resources can be used by instructors in a variety of effective ways such as illustrating science concepts or principles, showing a well-made scene in a Shakespeare play that students are reading in class, depicting a seminal historical event or showing a real person delivering a famous speech. Video clips like these should be short and not used frequently. Whole-length videos or films should not be shown without permission of the headmaster and should be rare, as class time is precious and movies eat up a great deal of time.

Culminating Activities are regular part students' experiences, especially in grammar and middle grades, as classes wrap up instruction in rich and extended units of instruction (e.g. Greek Olympics, Roman Triumph, Medieval Feast, Alice in Wonderland Tea Party, etc.).

Homework is important and necessary. It should be targeted and not assigned simply for the sake of giving homework. Homework is important as it 1) provides time for our students to practice newly learned concepts, 2) prepares them for what the class will do in the next day's lesson, and 3) enables them to continue work on long-term assignments. Sometimes teachers can provide sufficient time in class for practice as well

as for reading and other preparation for the next lesson. Whenever Founders instructors can do this, they should. They ought to aim to complete as much in school as possible so that students' homework time is moderated; however, teachers cannot always get it all done in class, or they may wish for spacing out practice, so they assign homework (note: extra homework should not be assigned to make up for poor teacher planning; rather than assigning extra homework due to planning missteps, improve teacher planning). To read more about the philosophy and merits of homework, as well as to see an example of a campus' homework policy, read this Homework: Philosophy and Practice document used at one of our Founders campuses (note that it includes separate K-5 and 6-12 guides).

SLANT pertains to both student dispositions and readiness to learn. SLANT is an acronym that stands for **S**it up, **L**ean forward, **A**sk and answer questions, **N**od, and **T**rack the speaker. Founders teachers emphasize SLANT with students to promote positive learning dispositions and to create a more academic classroom culture.

Examples of practices we avoid at Founders Campuses

- Daily use of student technology (computer-related)
- Teaching to the test
- Overemphasizing so called "critical thinking" and "creativity" at the expense of foundational knowledge (instead, we promote a knowledge-rich experience as well as an education in logic, dialectic, and rhetorical expression)
- Treating academic disciplines in silos or in isolation from other disciplines
- Egalitarian decision-making in the classroom
- Project-Based Learning (note that this doesn't mean students do not create little "p" projects from time to time).
- Gamification (this does not refer to periodic competitive review games or encouragements teachers use to motivate students to outperform a previous performance)
- Flipped Classrooms
- Theory of Multiple Intelligences, Learning Styles, Group Work and Cooperative Learning appear in the Multisensory Instruction and Turn and Talk sections

Review page 10 for further recommendations.

Book and Video Recommendations

On Classical Education:
Articles and Essays on the Founders Website and Founders Youtube page beginning with episode 1, *What is Classical Education*?

On The Art of Teaching:
The Elements of Teaching, *2nd Ed.* by James Banner and Harold Cannon

Tried & True: A Primer on Sound Pedagogy by Daniel Coupland

The Scholé Way: Brining Restful Learning and Teaching Back to School and Homeschool by Christopher Perrin

The Good Teacher: Ten Key Pedagogical Principles That Will Transform Your Teaching by Carrie Eben and Christopher Perrin

Tending the Heart of Virtue: How Classic Stories Awaken a Child's Moral Imagination by Vigen Guroian

Arithmetic for Parents: A Book for Grownups about Children's Mathematics by Ron Aharoni

The Emperor's Club (film), with Kevin Kline as the lead actor

On The Science of Teaching:

Seven Myths About Education by Daisy Christodoulou

"Principles of Instruction: Research-Based Strategies That All Teachers Should Know" in American Education (Spring 2012) by Barak Rosenshine (available for free online)

Why Don't Students Like School? A Cognitive Scientist Answers Questions about How the Mind Works and What It Means for the Classroom by Daniel Willingham

Make it Stick: The Science of Successful Learning by Brown, McDaniel, and Roedigger

What Makes Good Teaching: Review of underpinning research, Sutton Institute et al, 2014 (a review of 200 studies, available for free online)

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