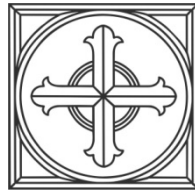


# Adopting Classical Christian Education:

Helping Christian Schools Transition to  
Classical Christian Schools



April 29, 2013

## Introduction

A growing number of Christian schools are showing an increased interest in adopting the classical Christian model for their school because they see the value in the principles reinforced by this method. ACCS has canvassed some of ACCS schools that have successfully made the transition from Christian schools to classical Christian schools. Their stories are available in this document so that other Christian schools may benefit from their experiences.

ACCS acknowledges its deep appreciation to Dr. Timothy Sierer, headmaster of The Christian Academy of Brookhaven, Pennsylvania, and to Sharon Miller, a founder and one of the administrators at Trinity Christian School of Opelika, Alabama, for providing ACCS with their helpful accounts in the interest of serving other Christian schools.

The plan adopted by each of these schools is different in the exact implementation of the process each employed, but there are still some general similarities between the two which can be modified locally at other Christian schools to help them develop their own plan.

For other Christian schools that have successfully made the transition to the classical Christian model, ACCS is very eager to receive your story and consider it for possible inclusion in this document. Please forward a version of the adoption process your school used to: [patch@accsedu.org](mailto:patch@accsedu.org) along with appropriate contact information and authorization to include your account on the ACCS website.

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# The Christian Academy

*Acquiring a Christian Worldview through a  
Classical Education*

**What is a classical approach to education?  
What methodology is used in a classical approach?**

There are three stages of learning:

1. Learn the words, vocabulary, and facts.
2. String vocabulary and facts in meaningful ways.
3. Demonstrate proficiency in completely expressing what was learned.

## The Trivium

**GRAMMAR STAGE:** Concrete thinking (acquisition of factual knowledge)

**DIALECTIC STAGE:** Analytical thinking (understanding)

**RHETORIC STAGE:** Abstract thinking (wisdom)

*Grammar stage* (grades K–5th) would find students gathering facts, storing up large amounts of knowledge, dealing with concrete information, learning standards of truth, memorizing lists of basics from each curricular area.

Students would primarily use these methods: memorization, recitation, games, oral drills, practice, written and oral exercises, flash cards.

*Dialectic stage* (grades 6–8) would find students gathering information into proper relationships, learning to reason, studying formal logic, putting parts together to form the whole, shifting from concrete to analytical, doing cross-curricular projects, discovery, experiments.

Students would primarily use these methods: questioning, debate, investigation, research, literature, and discussions.

*Rhetoric stage* (grades 9–12) would find students using abstract thinking, delving deep into curricular materials, using knowledge and understanding in application to life issues, writing and presenting research.

Students would use these methods: essays, oral presentations, debate, defense papers, cross-curricular projects and written expression.

**Why change? Considering the success we have had and the tried experience of our teachers, why make significant changes in curriculum?**

1. This is in response to the invasion of progressive theories of education—theories that claim to teach children *how to think*. Because of the lack of training in basic facts and the lack of training in formal logic and common sense, we develop students who question moral authorities and undermine traditional values. It is unwise to encourage students to "share their feelings" and draw strictly from their own experiences when students lack knowledge (facts), understanding (logic) and wisdom (rhetoric) first.

There must be content not just process.

2. This is in response to a call from the faculty and the school community for vision and leadership in taking TCA to a higher level in both academic standards of excellence and Christ-centered instruction.
3. This is in response to the faculty's desire to present curriculum that is as challenging as was presented 5 to 10 years ago.
4. This is in response to our desire not just to be better than the local public school but to be excellent as Christ is excellent.
5. This is in response to the call to be true to our mission and vision and train students to be able to skillfully and radically impact their communities for Jesus Christ using truth in knowledge, understanding, and wisdom.
6. This is in response to our frustration in knowing our graduates are not fully equipped to hold firmly to a clear biblical worldview.
7. This is in response to the cry from parents who want their children to be better equipped both spiritually and academically.
8. This is in response to the cry in our society to train young people to become mature responsible citizens, able to analyze and discern right from wrong.

## **Why use a classical approach and classical methodology to address our need for change?**

1. People with a Christian worldview developed the classical educational system.
2. The classical approach coheres better with a biblical view of man. Secular educational theory views man as inherently good and, if left to his own devices, will choose the right thing. The classical approach inculcates information, how to think and how to communicate, rather than leaving the students to their own devices to discover their own truth.
3. The Trivium model of classical education passes the biblical test. The model is comprised of three phases of learning: grammar, dialectic, and rhetoric. These are but new labels for progression in biblical concepts, gaining knowledge, then understanding, and finally wisdom.
4. The classical Christian methodology acknowledges God as the source of all knowledge. The classical approach establishes Scripture at every point as the foundation on which to build all knowledge.
5. Classical methodology pays close attention to the developmental stages of a child's brain development and intellectual growth to maturity.
6. Classical methodology capitalizes on the strengths of God's creative work by requiring of a child what he is best equipped to do: memorization—grammar stage; argument—dialectic stage; analysis and expression—rhetoric stage.
7. Classical methodology is beneficial for the inner-city student because the meeting of high standards and expectations will build self-respect and develop confidence. Emphasis on character building provides strength and a source of hope for disadvantaged children.
8. Classical education's emphasis on mankind's common heritage is far more conducive to racial harmony than multicultural ideologies that segregate people into assorted categories.
9. The selection of classical is made after much reading, research, and prayer.
10. Classical education does not permit students to perform below their ability level and gives the instructor the tools to change the "who cares" tide.
11. Classical education provides a way for the learner to acquire information, grasp it intellectually, and use it purposefully. It teaches them not to simply learn a subject but how to think.
12. Present schools who have adopted a classical education approach cite great strides in the academic and cognitive abilities of their students as compared to a modernistic approach.

**What present TCA distinctives (strengths) must we safeguard as we develop a classical approach to education?**

1. The biblical foundation upon which the founding fathers established TCA must be maintained.
2. As a school we will continue to model the strength that can be achieved by a broad number of churches (approximately 90) functioning in unity as part of the body of Christ.
3. As a school we will continue to operate independent of any one specific church dogma and utilize Scripture as the only final authority for truth.
4. It is important for TCA to maintain a racially diverse student body that has become a model to others within the community.
5. Through the admissions process we will continue to draw from a large geographic area.
6. It is essential that as a school we continue to maintain a strong extra-curricular program in addition to holding to a high academic standard.
7. As a school it is important that we continue to recognize that there are legitimate differences in learning styles among our students and do our best to continue to meet their needs.

**What does this mean for TCA—its faculty, students, and parents?**

1. The switch to classical will require our faculty to maintain their high quality of instruction and creativity in the classroom.
2. The switch to a classical approach will require our faculty to carefully evaluate methodology and content to be sure it fits with the developmental stages of a child's physical growth, brain development, and the instructional stages of the Trivium.
3. Curriculum content will be clearly defined. Specific lists of requirements for each course will be written. Administration will oversee the completion of curriculum requirements in the classrooms.
4. The Shurley Method of teaching the elements of English grammar and basic writing will be used in grades K–8. This exciting English program is hands-on, visual, and auditory. It assists students in their development of creative self-expression while at the same time holding to a foundation of strong grammar skills.
5. Latin will be instructed in grades 3–6. Teachers will take the course along with their students.
6. Logic instruction in grades 7 and 8 will continue. In-service instruction in logic will be provided for teachers.
7. Lists of basic facts regarding science, Bible, and history will be adopted for the elementary grades. Students will be required to purchase printed flash cards that contain facts for memorization.

8. Teacher-directed instruction would be the primary method used in training youngsters of the grammar stage. Students will attain knowledge from truth given by fully trained teachers.
9. Elementary and middle school students will find that the nature of their homework may be somewhat different than before. Homework will consist of, among other things, an increase in the amount of memorization of factual information as it pertains to the different subject areas within the grammar stage.
10. Parents will need to assist their children in the studying of these lists of factual data.
11. As appropriate, high school students will be expected to apply all of the areas of logic and factual materials to their studies within the rhetoric stage.
12. Students will be required to give an oral defense of their senior paper before a faculty and peer review committee.

### **Recommended Reading**

*Classical Education* by Gene Edward Veith, Jr. and Andrew Kern

*Repairing the Ruins*, Douglas Wilson, editor

*Recovering the Lost Tools of Learning* by Douglas Wilson

*The Lost Tools of Learning* by Dorothy Sayers

*The Seven Laws of Teaching* by John Milton Gregory



# The Christian Academy

*Acquiring a Christian Worldview through a  
Classical Education*

## TIMELINE FOR TRANSITION TO A CLASSICAL APPROACH TO CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

**GOAL:** To have a fully implemented classical approach to Christian education by the 2001–2002 school year

### **YEAR ONE** (1997–98)

- ❖ Revision of Vision and Mission Statements
- ❖ Investigation into how we can bring the vision for the school to fruition
- ❖ Prayer and consideration by the administration lead into a guided direction that the school transition into a classical Christian school
- ❖ Board and faculty read *Repairing the Ruins* for the philosophical background to a classical approach to education
- ❖ During the course of this school year numerous articles from the ACCS newsletter were also shared with the Board
- ❖ Aspects of the classical approach were discussed at length during the monthly board meetings

### **YEAR TWO** (1998–99)

- ❖ June: A few administrators and lead teachers attended the Association of Classical and Christian Schools conference in Kansas City, MO
- ❖ Board and faculty reading *Recovering the Lost Tools of Learning* for the more practical aspects of the educational process
- ❖ July: Purchased logic video series and committed to teaching it to the middle school
- ❖ September: Teacher in-service at the start of the new year watched the video *Classical Education Today*
- ❖ October: Administration and lead teachers met with a consultant for classical education to discuss timelines, strengths and weaknesses of the program
- ❖ Formal logic taught within the middle school



7<sup>th</sup> grade: Beginning Logic one time per week  
8<sup>th</sup> grade: Beginning Logic 2X per week first semester;  
Intermediate Logic 2X per week second semester

- ❖ October: Board of Trustees adopts a resolution to implement the classical approach
- ❖ October: Development office began revamping all promotional materials to reflect the classical approach to education, i.e., brochures, newspaper ads, radio ads, articles in quarterly school magazine
- ❖ October: Teacher in-service regarding major aspects of a classical approach to Christian education
- ❖ December: Teacher in-service regarding observation day at two area schools that are utilizing a classical approach
- ❖ January: Teacher in-service (two days) regarding highlighting the areas of
  - What is the classical approach to education?
  - Why change?
  - Why use a classical methodology?
  - What present distinctives must be safeguarded?
  - What does this mean for faculty, students, and parents?
- ❖ January: Taped 30-minute interview for airing on local Christian radio station
- ❖ January: Begin search for full-time Latin teacher
- ❖ January: Letter sent from the Board of Trustees to every school family regarding its enthusiasm for this new approach to educating their children. The letter was signed by each of the 16 members on the Board. This letter served as a cover letter to a six-page attachment detailing the same information shared with the teacher at their January in-service (sample attached).
- ❖ February, March, and April: Parent-Teacher Organization meetings devoted to explaining the classical approach. Copies of books for recommended reading are made available to parents for purchase.
  - February: General overview, introduction to logic, question and answer
  - March: Demonstration lesson in logic and Shurley grammar; implementation of rhetoric at the high school
  - April: Primarily will be given over to question and answer
- ❖ February: Order Shurley Grammar materials to give to teachers in preparation for training in March. This also allows the teachers to have the materials far in advance so that they can begin to acquaint themselves with the program.
- ❖ February: Send letter to all area pastors, particularly those represented by the student body, to inform them of the change to a classical approach and solicit their prayers for this important move.
- ❖ March: Teacher in-service with Brenda Shurley for teacher training

- ❖ March: Faculty and staff meeting held by the Board to further explain the “why” for the transition to the classical model. This also provided for a demonstration of the unanimity between the Board and administration in this decision. It also provides a “benchmark” that can be looked back upon and allows us to move forward with the “how” of implementation.
- ❖ Development of Christian Worldview Assessment and proficiency exams in logic and “grammar” of each academic discipline
- ❖ Consideration is being given to offering logic and Latin classes within the high school for those students who have not had the opportunity to take it in middle and elementary school, respectively.
- ❖ Teacher contracts for the ‘99–’00 school year will reflect an adherence to teaching a classical education in the context of the school’s present philosophy.

### **YEAR THREE** (1999–2000)

- ❖ In-service middle and high school teachers so they will be able to hold the students accountable for application of logic in the writing of papers, essays, etc.
- ❖ Implementation of Shurley Grammar in grades K–8
- ❖ Begin Latin instruction in grade 3–6 and 9; have teachers take the classes with their students so they can hold the students accountable to use their Latin roots, etc., in their study of vocabulary, spelling, etc.
- ❖ Begin use of Bible and history flashcards published by Veritas Press
- ❖ Formal logic instruction to be increased to two times per week in both 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades

### **YEAR FOUR** (2000–2001)

- ❖ Discontinue Latin instruction in 9<sup>th</sup> grade
- ❖ Final implementation of classical approach within the “rhetoric” division
- ❖ Formal logic instruction to be taught in 8<sup>th</sup> grade only (4 times per week)
- ❖ Examine what criteria should be used to accept transfer students who have had no classical background
- ❖ Develop “Summer Orientation” program for new students transferring into TCA
- ❖ Rubrics developed for the grading of all high school writing projects and coordinate the cross-curricular assigning of these projects

### **YEAR FIVE** (2001–2002)

- ❖ Develop “Senior Thesis Assignment” and tailor assignment for those students not having had the benefit of the logic training

# The Christian Academy

## Board Letter to the School Families

January 25, 1999

Dear TCA Family,

*The vision of The Christian Academy is to be a life-giving oasis in the desert where every student is Biblically trained in body, mind, and spirit so they will radically influence their communities for Christ and His glory.*

Over one year ago, the Board of Trustees and the administration began discussions regarding how the school might best carry out this lofty goal. Following much prayerful consideration, the Board has enthusiastically supported the adoption of a classical approach to education. This approach will be utilized in the training of our students beginning with the fall '99 semester.

Every curricular area is being examined to see how instructional methods can be tailored to suit the developmental characteristics of the students. In the elementary grades "grammar," or fundamental rules of each subject (who, what, where, and when), will be taught utilizing the child's innate love for memorization, recitation, and organization. Within the middle school, students will be stretched to consider the ordered relationship (how and why) of the particulars in each subject. Also at this level, formal logic becomes a part of their routine course of study that channels the early adolescents' desire to argue and question in light of God's Word. At the high school level, young men and women will be trained how the grammar and logic of a subject may be clearly and persuasively expressed through structured training in rhetoric. This method of education is not new but was the method used for centuries to produce extraordinary thinkers, speakers, and achievers.

Our motive for this transition has come from our hearts, to help us better train the young minds that God has entrusted to our care. It is not a preconceived "gimmick" to bolster enrollment. This move is a true answer to prayer as we enthusiastically look ahead to what God would have us be. Please pray for the faculty and staff as we eagerly implement this exciting approach to equipping your children with a biblical worldview.

Plan now to attend one of the upcoming PTO meetings in February, March, and April to learn more about this program.

Sincerely in Christ,

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Board President

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Board Vice President

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Board Secretary

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Board Treasurer

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# Trinity Christian School

TCS is an ACCS-accredited school

December 17, 2012

Trinity Christian School began as a Christian school in 1978.

The school began looking at classical Christian education seriously from 1996–2003/4.

The school board drove the effort through their interest.

- The board did not want to throw out all that they had done and start over.
- In conjunction with this, they wanted to avoid the pitfall of looking like the school was just doing something new each year as per the typical Colleges of Education.

The board first heard about classical Christian education from a Ligonier Ministry conference at which Douglas Wilson spoke on classical Christian education.

- The board members and administrator visited several classical Christian schools.
- They invested 2–3 years of research.

The school had been started hiring teachers who could teach from a Christian worldview.

- The school then began focusing on training these teachers to teach from a classical Christian perspective.
- The school board put a lot of effort into this training, including donating money to provide their teachers with the opportunity to attend the annual ACCS conference and ACCS approved teacher training.
- When parents first saw the application of the grammar stage methodology in the classroom, they loved it!
- That started the education of the parents.
- The school began giving entrance exams to new students and telling the parents of new students about classical Christian education at length; the new parents were actually better informed at the start.

The school soon learned that those parents who were not onboard with classical Christian education were not really all that committed to Christian education either.

- The school began inviting more parents to come and observe the classroom instruction.
- The school began to send notes home that started to use the terminology of classical Christian education.
- The school used parent/teacher meetings to further train the parents about what the school was doing.
  - When teachers were supportive, the parents were supportive.
  - When a teacher was not supportive, the parents became alarmed; if the teacher didn't believe in it, then why was the school doing it?
  - Only one teacher had problems and was terminated for not buying into the classical Christian approach, among other things.
  - Many teachers had graduated from state teachers colleges—they had to be re-educated as far as what was of value and what was contradictory to the classical Christian approach.
  - One parent asked if the school's teachers were state certified and if the school was state accredited.
  - This had to be explained to parents: "Why would you want your teachers to try something new each year?"

- Several parents transferring their children to the school felt their children were well-equipped to handle the new methodology, after all, their kids had been in the advanced instruction and “brilliant student” classes in the public schools.
  - The principal would gently try to disabuse these parents of this misperception during admission interviews.
  - Parents would visit the classrooms and observe; later they came out crying, lamenting that they had not enrolled their children in this school earlier in their education.
  - Some of the new parents felt as if their children were being asked to do more than was possible, and complained to the administration.
  - The administration asked if their children came home cheerful or distraught in the evenings; invariably the answer was cheerful, but parents felt any negative effects would compile over time.
  - After a year, and still not distraught children, the parents began to realize that these children could learn far more than their parents gave them credit.
  
- The school did not want to give up any of its strengths in adopting the classical Christian approach. We had always been blessed with a very strong music program and wanted to keep it. In addition the school had a strong biblical underpinning.
  - The classical Christian approach only enhanced the music program
  - The classical Christian approach wrapped all of the instruction around the biblical model of instruction, understanding, and wisdom.

Today, the school’s secondary program is going to three trimesters to lengthen out each grading period. The amount of information is not reduced any, but the intent is to alter the pattern of each class having an exam each week—trying to get out of the grammar exam style of testing which relies on asking regurgitation types of questions (which is fine for the grammar stage).

- In the new arrangement, teachers may not give more than three tests in a grading period
- Teachers assign a daily grade for class discussion and debate – this shows if a student has read the assignment or not.

For teachers, this was the most time-consuming aspect of making the transition.

- Some teachers thought they were already using the classical Christian approach in their classrooms.
- The school sent their teachers to an ACCS annual conference—none of the teachers came back feeling as though they were doing it. It was an eye-opening experience.
- The school made use of the annual ACCS conference, ACCS-endorsed teacher training, and sent their teachers to other ACCS schools to shadow their peer at that school.
- The school started with the grammar stage first so that everyone was on the same page; the school only went up to the 8<sup>th</sup> grade at the time.
- The school used already developed curriculum initially.
- The grammar stage had a lot of peer encouragement.
- The school grew into the rhetoric stage over time.
- There was only one logic teacher and one rhetoric teacher to start with, and they did not have peer support initially at the school.
- The school greatly benefited from the help of other schools.
- The ACCS annual conferences were a great resource for making friends and connecting these teacher with their peers at other classical Christian schools.
- ACCS accreditation is also a benefit if your school is willing to help other schools.

Key take-away points

1. The school invested a lot of time to develop a strong philosophical commitment to classical Christian education (especially at the board level) before working to adopt it in the school.
2. The board must lead in this regard. The administration and teachers need the backing, support, and encouragement of the board members to move forward and make this transition.
3. Some teachers were hesitant because it was a new process, but they need to be learners themselves if they are to train their students to be lifelong learners.