



February 2018

Student Centric Learning and the Changing Role of Teachers

Individualized instruction is critical to the teaching and learning process. Although our small student to teacher ratio of 11 to 1 has a direct, positive impact on student learning, it is only one of several essential elements necessary to efficiently meet the unique needs of today's students in what is an evolving, tailored, student centered approach to learning. Recently, I spoke to our faculty and staff about the importance of transitioning from a traditional teacher-centric educational process to one that is more student centered, and that such a change requires a fundamental shift in philosophy and pedagogical practices as the authoritative-passive roles of teacher and student are revised to reflect a more symbiotic relationship. Gone are the

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days for needing the “sage on stage” or a teacher reciting large tracks of knowledge from memory, especially in the upper grades; they have been replaced by powerful internet search engines and open curriculum repositories that have made knowledge “free” to any student with the intrinsic desire or extrinsic pressure to learn. While the necessity for students in the primary and elementary grades to memorize, recite, and identify facts and fundamental concepts (numbers, letters, phonics, days of the week, parts of speech, etcetera) remains largely undisputed among educational leaders, teachers, regardless of grade, must embrace exploratory learning that develops students' critical thinking skills in order to meet the demands of tomorrow's job market.

Equal in importance to a well-rounded, college preparatory education where students develop proficiency in both scholastic and cocurricular programming is a student's ability to solve problems to compete in the American workforce. As educators, we must continue to seek new ways to teach students how to use and manage information to solve problems. Unlike Prince Avenue, today's public schools continue to use monolithic structures designed by Horace Mann (the founder of the common school model - the forerunner to today's public schools) that places students in large class sizes in what administrators call “improved economies of scale,” which drives instruction to the most



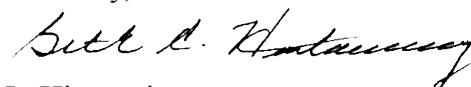
common denominator: “common school curriculum should provide the same basic knowledge and skills equally to all its students” (Guttek, 2011). Another factor contributing to the educational malaise in public schools is the politicization associated with documenting learning standards, selection of resources, metrics to evaluate students’ and teachers’ performance levels, and the overuse of standardized testing, etcetera. Simply stated, there are powerful economic forces in public schools that drive standardization binding teachers with legal constraints that take instructional freedom from teachers and time from students. This excludes the fact that the teachings of our Savior Jesus Christ, by law, cannot be discussed in public schools. Since children spend more time at school with their teachers than anywhere else, doesn’t it make sense that as believers we expose them to the truth of God’s word during this brief, impressionable window of youth?

Individualized, tailored instruction is central to what we do at Prince Avenue. God has woven each child uniquely, and one of our primary responsibilities is to discern which learning preferences work best for each child. Pundits are aplomb that children generally have a preference for three of eight primary learning preferences, and since children do not learn the same way, why would we put them in an educational environment that teaches them the same way? Customizing teaching to meet students’ needs is counterculture to public schools’ monolithic structures whose size are built to educate large numbers of students utilizing a dominate teaching pedagogy at the most cost-effective rate. At Prince, our smaller class sizes and the interpersonal relationships we make with our students and their families are critical to student learning. Include our emphasis on biblical integration in the classroom, on our athletic fields, and within our fine arts program, and students receive what is almost unique in this day and age: a complete education (mind, body, and spirit).

Not only do our students gain acceptance to exceptional schools that recently include Georgia Tech, Emory, West Point, and Duke, but more importantly they are exposed, daily, to the truth contained in God’s word to combat the relative morality and pluralistic influences that our progressive society uses to lay siege on our young people. But while a great deal of emphasis is placed on grade point averages, course rigor, and standardized test scores, these are temporal rewards.

At Prince Avenue, we are committed to a broader more strategic mission, which is to educate our students regarding on how long, wide, and deep is the love of Christ that through grace by faith they would accept life eternal. Thank you for your partnership in making tomorrow’s leaders for Christ!

Sincerely,



In His service,

Seth Hathaway
Head of School

References:

Guttek, G., 2011. Historical and Philosophical Foundations of Education, p. 238.

Other Head of School Letters to Parents
[Standardized Test Scores Are Up...Way Up! Families: Better Connected but More Alone Strategic Planning](#)
[It’s Not What You Know It’s Who You Know Embracing Change While Remaining Christ Centered](#)