



Raising Orchids: The Dangers of Educating Children Using a Botanical Model

September 2021

If you are new to Prince, once a month you will receive a letter from our leadership team that focuses on a topic germane to our PreK-12 community. The purpose of these letters is to share issues relative to your investment in a Christian education with the objective of strengthening the bond between home and school.

Traditionally, I start the year off emphasizing the importance of our school's vision and mission statements and how adhering to them prevents schools from drifting off course and arriving at destinations their founders would never have imagined. A recent illustration of the adverse effects of mission drift is seen at Harvard University (founded, almost four centuries ago, essentially as a seminary) in the recent election of an avowed atheist as the president of their School of Divinity's Chaplains' Group. At Prince, we are deliberate to adhere to our vision and mission statements, which are prominently displayed throughout campus and documented in everything from our governing bylaws to our middle and high school course syllabi. This year, I'm breaking precedence by not delving into our mission and vision statements in favor of another topic: teaching students the importance of facing and working through adversity.



“As parents and teachers in partnership, we must be committed to preparing students *for* life and not protecting them *from* life.”

Let's talk about botany for a moment. Orchids are rare, precious botanical flowers that require a measured amount of care and feeding, which must be shielded from any sort of interference that might toughen and weather them. As parents, we have learned that some weathering is needed to successfully overcome the challenges life presents us; this is also true for our children using proportionate, age-appropriate

dosing. As parents and teachers in partnership, we must be committed to preparing students *for* life and not protecting them *from* life. We must be mindful we are not only seeking to make self-sufficient adults, but we are raising and educating the next generation of Christian families to conduct kingdom work within their respective circles of influence. Today's society and its unprecedented focus on legal, procedural, and cultural concerns has created a "culture of offendedness" with a *stronghold* in our undergraduate institutions and a *foothold* in K-12 education.



At Prince, we will continue to teach students the truth contained in God's word while the growing cloud of confusion in the world around us continues to remove the symbols and references to our Christian faith from the public square. While it is true that our campus provides a safe harbor from the presence of students with surly attitudes, the use of profanity in the hallways, and the prolific use of drugs and alcohol both on and off-campus so common in schools today, our children cannot afford to be raised as orphans. We are teaching them the importance of

"We can best help students by seeking ways to use setbacks, conflict, and adversity in a manner that prepares them for the life ahead."

a personal relationship with Jesus and to uphold the tenants of our Christian faith, and in so doing, we have placed them on a path with unavoidable conflict. Today's society has created a new inalienable mandate: "Never should I be offended." Yet, by itself, the presence of our Lord's cross is offensive to many. This new heightened sensitivity does nothing to promote social cohesion; *when did childhood get so stressful?*

Conflict and adversity in adulthood and childhood are a given, and we can best equip students by employing an approach that "normalizes struggle." Students must understand that everyone struggles, regardless of age, and that weathering a setback, picking oneself up, dusting oneself off, and driving on develops resilience and character. If we as a family-school community smooth out every rough spot on our students' journey in academics, fine arts, and athletics, all while heaping on excessive praises regardless of a student's performance, we are setting them up for failure. Most students will experience Bs, Cs (and other grades I prefer not to mention!), misunderstandings with friends, fail to make the production cast or athletic team (or "start" if they do), and as parents and teachers, we should examine each struggle in context. We can best help students by seeking ways to use setbacks, conflict, and adversity in a manner that prepares them for the life ahead. I believe one of the great predictors of a student's success is their resiliency, grit, and the capacity to fail and get back up. I have also learned this critical trait is one of the most difficult to quantitatively measure.

“Let’s focus on building well-rounded kids who love our Lord, treat their fellow Americans according to the “golden rule” regardless of faith, race, or ethnicity, and who know the importance of facing and overcoming adversity.”

The world has enough delicate orchids raised in botanical gardens. Let’s focus on building well-rounded kids who love our Lord, treat their fellow Americans according to the “golden rule” regardless of faith, race, or ethnicity, and who know the importance of facing and overcoming adversity. Our country needs Christ-centered leaders now more than ever in its history. If we cannot produce a few of tomorrow’s generals for Christ at Prince, then who can? Let’s continue to pray for God’s blessing upon our work as we prepare students for college and the kingdom!

With warm regards and in His service,



Seth Hathaway, Ed.S.
Head of School



Other letters by the Head of School:

[Education Constitutionalism and the Family-School Partnership](#)

[What Constitutes a Healthy Christian School?](#)

[Forward, Always Forward](#)

