



Assessing Students Classically

with Christopher Perrin, Brian Williams, Robyn Burlew, Josh Gibbs, and Steve Turley Title Authors

Lesson 1: Assessment and the Classical Tradition

Outline:

Don't we always assess?

- We assess important affairs such as the teaching of mathematics, science, grammar, and rhetoric.
- We assess the daily and the mundane such as coffee.

We want to understand assessment *traditionally*, anthropologically, and in the context of other components of the classical tradition.

The master/apprentice relationship characterized so much past training.

- The master painter works with a junior painter in an ongoing assessment to impart a skill to the junior apprentice.
- We want a wise teacher to assess *us*, to help *us* to see the right, the good, the true, and the beautiful.

Teaching practices flow from our anthropology.

- We need to pay attention to cultivation of our students' souls.
- We need great ideas to be our assessors.
 - The true and the good and the beautiful ideals should be a standard for how we look at our own lives.
 - Any time a teacher is guiding, he must also be assessing, a teacher must know when we are stepping off the path (even if just stepping off a little bit).
 - Great masters can teach as they can see what we cannot see.

We need to know the larger tradition of classical education.

- Classical education is a traditional approach to education rooted in western civilization and culture employing the historical curriculum and pedagogy of the seven liberal arts in order to cultivate men and women characterized by wisdom, virtue, and eloquence.
 - If our goal is for men and women to be characterized by wisdom, virtue, and eloquence, we need to think about how we know if that is occurring?



- Foundational Questions
 - Whom do we teach?
 - Teaching practices follow from our anthropology.
 - Christian realism/philosophical realism is the idea that truth, goodness, beauty, and virtues are real, and they exist independent of our thinking.
 - We are made in God's image, this is why we have the gift of language and measurement. The gift of assessment lets us make judgements about what is true, good, and beautiful and about whether a human is growing in understanding and conformity to the true, good, and beautiful.
 - To what end do we teach?
 - What do we teach the students?
 - What do we assess? Ability? Achievement? Virtue?
 - Do we assess against a standard of mastery?
 - What is assessable, and what is not?

There are two main historic approaches in response to these kinds of questions.

- Assess according to a standard of mastery.
 - Assessing with the assumption that there is an understood mastery of art, skill, or ideas.
- Assess according to other students performance
 - This approach says you have distinguished yourself among your peers.
- There can also be a combination of mastery and comparison



History of Grading

<u>Ancient World*</u>	<u>Medieval Period</u>	<u>Renaissance</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No record of formal grading system • Reward/punishment was present • Competition/rivalry was encouraged • Teacher recommendations were primary means of assessment • Education was for elite and aristocratic classes only for many centuries • Small classes and tutorials • Designed to humanize 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No record of a formal grading system • cum laude, summa cum laude were give as assessment designations to describe good work with words (not numbers) • Recommendations were still important • Small classes and tutorials and small schools were the way educations was conducted • Education was often a mentor/apprenticeship 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Still no formal grading • Ad fontes, turning back to springs of knowledge from Greeks and Romans • Universities began to grow to become large institutions (not compared to today) • Small schools, small classes • Some designations used to describe what students needed to do (Jesuit designation: adequate and surpassing adequacy) • Periodic evaluations and final pass/fail assessments to qualify to be a master of the arts and qualified to teach in any of the seven liberal arts

* Augustine reflected on his education saying, “Who is there who would not recoil in horror and choose death if he was asked to choose between dying or going back to his childhood?”

Grading from 1800 – Present

- **1792** - William Farish, a chemist from Cambridge University, established a grading scale
- **1897** – Mount Holyoke College is where we find first use of A, B, C, D, E scale
- **1908** – Max Mayer – Education is just beginning to realize it is not merely an art but an applied science.
- **Late 1800s and early 1900s** – massive immigration into the United States, and we begin to think that we can turn education from an art to a science
- **1870-1910** – the number of public high schools increased from 500 – 10,000 and high schools began using both percentage and letter grades to evaluate students (high schools emulated colleges system of grading)
- Assessments became quantifiable, easily transferrable, machine readable (upon invention of computer)
- Rise of social science leads to thinking in metrics