

Back To School Edition

From

Quo Vadis Therapy Center, LLC

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Quo Vadis offers therapy services to:

- Individuals
- Couples
- Families

For:

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Couples/family issues
- Grief/loss
- Marriage prep & enrichment
- Personal growth

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A New Year Begins

Daylight has noticeably decreased, leaves are falling, mums are blooming, football has started, and department stores soon will, if it hasn't happened already, have their Christmas wares on display. All of these signs are indications of autumn and the beginning of a new school year.

It may seem peculiar to talk about the start of a new year when there's still nearly a third of the calendar year remaining. Yet, for students, the sense of a start to things is clear. Even for the rest of us, we mark the passing of time by more things than just the sequence of months from January through December. Thus, the present time might hold new beginnings for any number of us.

These new beginnings, however, are not necessarily points in time when the whiteboard starts clean and everything that happened previously is now dated and left as pieces of the past. To the contrary, our educational theories, indeed our human nature, is designed to have us call on past experiences to reach new levels of understanding, insight,

and achievement. Thus, like our progression through grade school or beyond, many aspects of our lives are cyclical in nature. Per-



haps the trajectory of our individual and collective histories would be better thought of as a spiral rather than a straight line.

I remember homework assignments that were strictly for review of things I already knew, or so I thought. I would rush through them just to get them done, thinking I did not need to spend much time with something I had seen previously. Only as I got into my later years of formal education did I begin to see the benefit of review assignments, not to mention reviewing my study materials in general. I discovered that reviewing lessons helped me to better conceptualize the main ideas. It was then easier to analyze the concepts and synthesize new ones.

I may be predictable, but aren't there strong similarities between school and life in general? I mean, how much are we missing if we proceed through our days and years in a straight line without pausing to reflect on and consolidate the knowledge we have gained along the way? I understand that this process doesn't always seem necessary.

When times are good, we want to keep riding the wave. When times are bad, who wants to rehash or dwell on them? Yet, all of these times have something to teach us about ourselves, our relationships, our world, and where we need to go next.

With the start of a new school year, perhaps it's a good time to review what we've learned, see our life events in the context of a bigger picture, and be ready to learn more. To be sure, as in school, teachers do make a difference... and be prepared for any of this showing up on the exam.



Where are you going?

A Perspective from the Classroom

The classroom is a busy place. As someone who has spent a fair amount of time there as both a student and a teacher, I would say that the classroom is quite a bit more than a number of students taking in the teacher's lesson.

There are countless dynamics impacting classroom goings-on at any one time. The dynamics between the teacher and students, individually and collectively, among teachers and staff, and of course, among the students themselves create a sizeable portion of the classroom environment.

Still, the school and its classrooms are not a vacuum, sealed off from outside influences. As sure as students and teachers have families and associations outside the classroom, those connections inevitably must play a role in the classroom environment. All of these variables make for a room crowded with interpersonal variables,

leading to a lot of mental energy given to address this reality. With all the interpersonal dynamics that become part of the classroom setting, school is much more than reading, writing, and arithmetic. Of course, the overarching goal in the classroom is that students learn the subject matter of a given lesson, but school is also a social crucible.

It is a long known fact that students' achievement in school can be affected by non-academic factors at school. For instance, students face peer pressure of various kinds, social hierarchies can make students very sensitive to others' perceptions of them, and many students are under the threat of being bullied. Teachers are in a prime position to address these factors as they impact students' grades and relationships with peers. Teachers admirably do what they can to attend to these situations, but with significant

responsibilities to ensure the academic progress of many, many students, teachers often do not have the resources or opportunity to intervene most effectively.

Consider, then, how much more difficult it is for teachers to assist students who are troubled by variables outside of school. Take, for instance, a student of a single parent under significant stress that affects his/her child's performance at school. It may be quite difficult for an industrious teacher to reach out to the single parent in a way that gets to the root of the students' particular challenge. A similar thing might be said of a student whose family is affected by the loss of a loved one, unemployment, marital tension, divorce, etc. In such situations, a school staff member's best recourse may be to suggest therapy resources to the family to create a collaborative network of support that will relieve stressors in and out of school so students can thrive.



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A College Experience

Over the past 18 months, Kevin had given a lot of thought to starting college. Since the fall of his junior year in high school, he had been sorting through brochures he received from various colleges near and far, made a list of his preferred schools to attend, and visited a number of them during his senior year with his parents. Kevin applied to several colleges, was

accepted at most of them, and made his decision in the spring before his high school graduation.

Kevin looked forward to college. He was a good student in high school, and felt ready to take the next step in his education. Kevin also had a lot of friends in high school, and was looking forward to meeting new people at college. He was also ex-

cited about having more independence.

When Kevin got to campus, he found that adjusting to college life wasn't as seamless as he'd anticipated. First, he wasn't accustomed to sharing limited space with someone else, and his roommate seemed oblivious to the fact that Kevin lived there, too. Second, the number of people in his classes



were much larger than in high school, and he felt quite on his own as it came to learning the assigned material. He soon became overwhelmed at how much time he had to give to homework, not to mention the labs for his chemistry and German courses. Third, Kevin would hang out with a few guys in his dorm, but he missed his friends from home, and even his parents.

As the first weeks of college went by, Kevin found it more difficult to focus on his coursework, he spent less time socializing, slept as much or more than he was awake, and found much less fun in things he normally enjoyed. Kevin's parents became concerned when in their e-mails and phone conversations Kevin wouldn't talk much about classes or other things at college, aside from a few comments that college wasn't like

he thought it would be, and ended their conversations rather abruptly. Kevin's parents didn't know what was going on with Kevin, but he didn't seem his usual self.

Kevin's parents looked into the services that the campus counseling office offered and what counseling services



were available near campus. When they passed that information to Kevin, he initially seemed offended by the suggestion his parents were giving to him. Yet, he eventually decided to talk with a counselor on campus. Kevin and the counselor discussed what was go-

ing on and developed a plan together to help Kevin make some helpful adjustments to college life. After several visits with the counselor, Kevin was managing his coursework better and getting more involved with campus groups and social activities. Toward the end of his first semester at college, Kevin was looking forward to the beginning of spring semester.

This account is purely fictional, but many people find adjusting to college to be challenging. If you or someone you know at college is struggling academically, emotionally, socially, or in other ways, professional help is often available at little or no cost as a service provided by the college. Many students find counseling to be very beneficial.



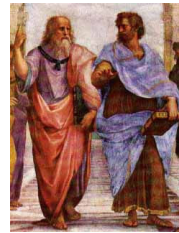
The Most Important Thing I Learned in School

What is the most important thing you learned in school? Learning to read is a very valuable skill, so is adding, subtracting, multiplying, or dividing. These skills may seem very basic to many of us that they're easy to overlook. What about American or world history? Certainly having knowledge of people, places, and events from a time gone by gives a certain perspective on and appreciation for the past and present, if not also the future. There are, of course, many branches of science that also lead us into particularly useful knowledge and understanding. How might we have anything from handy gadgets to life-saving devices and procedures, among many other very useful catalogs of information without the sciences? With all there is to learn and know, it's not easy to settle on one particular area of knowledge as the most important.

Deciding upon the most important thing to learn in school is not a new pastime.

In the 4th century BC, the Greek philosopher, Aristotle, taught at the renowned Academy in Athens, which was directed by fellow philosopher, Plato. Aristotle greatly influenced centuries of thought in many cultures, including Islamic, Christian, and Jewish cultures. Aristotle asserted that political science is the subject of most noble pursuit. Aristotle prized political science above other subjects because it was concerned with ordering society so as to ensure the happiness of its citizens. Aristotle's thoughts on this subject entailed lengthy discussions of the ethical dimensions of human behavior.

Let's assume for the sake of this article that Aristotle is correct. Let's also agree to think of school as a kind of society that is ordered to a particular end. Often the explicit purpose of this kind



of society is to assist its citizens toward academic achievement. However, there are various other implicit expectations of this society. For instance, there is a lot of social formation that happens in school, and as a result, many lessons on ethics are taught and learned directly and indirectly. That is, school provides us with a real-time learning experience of how we are to relate to others.

There are, of course, many ways in which we can relate to others depending on our aims, so to what end should we order our interactions with others? What I learned in school, which happened to be a Catholic school, was that we ought to learn what is good for our neighbor, and actively pursue obtaining that good for her/him. This ethic is one of charity. I can't help but think, is there anything greater we can learn in school... anywhere?

The Emotional Wellbeing of Students

Students of all ages may encounter difficulties that can stem from or contribute to situations related to school. It is not uncommon for students to experience anxiety and/or depression from such things as taking difficult classes, falling behind with assignments, getting lower grades than desired, having a learning disability or medical condition, having trouble in social situations with peers, not being selected for an athletic team or other school sponsored activity, difficulty juggling a busy schedule, family problems, etc. Professional help is available for students and families overwhelmed with feelings of anxiety and/or depression. Identifying signs of anxiety and depression can help school staff and faculty make a helpful referral to professionals who can assist students and their families.

Signs of anxiety can include:

- excessive worry/difficulty controlling worry
- feeling restless, keyed up, on edge
- difficulty concentrating
- irritability
- muscle tension
- trouble falling/staying asleep
- worry about being away from home/parents
- impairment in social, academic, work settings

Signs of depression can include:

- near daily depressed or irritable mood
- diminished interest in most/all activities
- marked weight loss/gain or change in appetite
- not meeting expected weight gains (children)
- near daily under or oversleeping
- fatigue or lack of energy nearly every day
- feeling worthless or excessive guilt
- difficulty thinking, concentrating, deciding
- impairment in social, academic, work settings
- recurrent thoughts of death and/or suicide

These lists of symptoms of anxiety and depression are not exhaustive, and should not be used to diagnose a condition. Anyone suspected of struggling with anxiety or depression should be seen by a mental health provider or physician for proper diagnosis and treatment. Anxiety and depression can often be treated relatively simply through therapy, medication, or a combination of both.



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Where are you going?

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About Quo Vadis Therapy Center

QVTC is the private psychotherapy practice of Joseph W. Pribyl. Joe is a licensed associate marriage and family therapist (LAMFT). Joe received his master's degree (MA) in counseling psychology with a concentration in family psychology from the University of St. Thomas. Prior to that, Joe worked in parishes and schools of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of St. Paul & Minneapolis for several years, and also earned a master's degree in Catholic Studies from St. Thomas.

Joe currently has openings for individuals, couples, and families interested in receiving therapy to address difficulties such as depression, anxiety, family and marital stress, grief/loss, and personal growth. Joe also works with couples on pre-marital counseling/education and marriage enrichment.

Joe gives presentations on mental health and relationship dynamics to various groups in the Twin Cities and is a regular guest on Relevant Radio's "On Call" program. See www.qvtherapy.com for upcoming presentations.