



The Principles of Classical Pedagogy

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Lesson 1: Festina Lente

Outline:

What is Classical Education?

- Classical Christian education (CCE) is a traditional approach to education rooted in western civilization and culture, employing the historic curriculum and pedagogy of the seven liberal arts in order to cultivate men and women characterized by wisdom, virtue, and eloquence.
- Pedagogy is one piece of the puzzle of classical education.
- What principles lead to practices that help us form human beings?

Festina Lente - make haste slowly

- Master each step
- We master things by spending ample time with what we want to possess.
- Even gifted students need to travel with ideas, concepts, and skills to make learning permanent and to see that learning in integration with other arts, disciplines, and skills.
- It is rarely a good idea to speed on without mastery.
- Contemporary studies reveal it takes about 10,000 hours to master a skill.
- We have students for 10-13 years with students. Mastery comes slowly.

Erasmus on Festina Lente

- “In the kingdom of the blind the one eye man is king.” Erasmus
- “When I get a little money, I buy books, and if any is left, I buy food and clothes.” Erasmus
- Erasmus thought Festina Lente ought to be carved on columns, written on archways of churches, painted on gates, engraved on rings, chased on the scepter of kings, on all monuments everywhere.

Amousia

- This meant to be without inspiration or wonder,
- Wonder causes us to be a lover of learning.
- We get the word “amusement” from amousia.
- Postman thinks we are amusing ourselves to death. He sees the television as thief of our attention.

Modern Witnesses



- Great performance is the result of deliberate practice, coached practice. The coach gives immediate feedback to a learner who practices with feedback (Colvin, Talent is Overrated).
- We need to engage in restful learning if we are going to deeply possess and understand ideas (Pieper, Leisure the Basis of Culture).

Human Growth/Acorn

- Humans grow rather slowly. The potential in an acorn is to become a mighty oak.
- It is not a very exciting thing to observe a tree growing.
- You might not notice change, but they are growing.
- The acorn has to develop a deep root system.
- The tree is a blessing which provides shade and fruit in time.
- “A certain ripening of action and moderation blended together from both wakefulness and gentleness,” is the result of Festina Lente, “You will find very few great men who followed our proverb and mingled a timely speediness with a thoughtful slowness.” (Erasmus, Adagia)

Matura Lente

- Matura means: I ripen, I hasten
- The mature student matures over time, slowly.
- Things that ripen prematurely are wont to suddenly grow limp. What grows slowly and steadily can endure. (Jerome)
- The fame of Marcellus grows like a tree as time passes unobserved. (Horace)

Festina Lente and Virtue & Vice

- **Constancy** means to continue to stand despite the winds that might blow you down.
- **Diligence** is to study what you love.
- **Perseverance** is the idea of moving through something even when there is pain involved
- **Temperance** is the idea of giving an appropriate or apportioned time to something.
 - When it comes to the life of a student, studying too little is intemperate, but so is bounding forward with excessive ambition.
- Inconstancy, sloth, laziness, and excessive ambition are overcome through employing Festina Lente.

Festina Lente Emblemized

- Coin: the crab (lente) and the butterfly (festina).
- Augustus was committed to Festina Lente in speech and letters, he thought this should be widely employed as the “dispatch of efficient business” and “the slowness of careful reflection”. (Erasmus about Augustus)
- Plato articulated the same idea. “He who hastens too much at the beginning, comes to the end too late.”



- “...The passions of the mind should be restrained by the reason as by rein.” (Erasmus about Plato)
 - There is a need for us to slow down. There are so many things in teaching that are like galloping horses. What is going to rein in the activity that is not leading to mastery?

Other great minds on Festina Lente

- **Aristotle:** Once you have decided on something, you should do it quickly, but that you should make decisions hesitantly.
- **Cato:** Fast enough if done well enough.
- **Sallust:** Before you begin, think; when you have thought, you need to act quickly.
 - Do we give adequate time to our students to think and reflect?
- **Publianus:** You should make long preparations for a war, so you can win it more quickly.
- **Quintillian:** That type of mind which develops too early hardly ever comes to bear fruit.
 - He speaks about education. This should challenge our thinking.
 - Some can develop early and still bear fruit, but it is not wise to assume this is going to be the case with any student.
- **Bias:** Be slow to put your hand to affairs, but once you have started see them through vigorously.

The Dolphin and the Anchor, Festina Lente

- This emblem appeared on the coin of Emperor Vespasian.
 - Anchors (Lente) were used to slow down or stop the ship from moving.
 - The fast dolphin is Festina.
- This symbol was picked up 1400 years later by a well-known Italian printer (Aldus Manutius), who was trying to release well edited books.
- You will go faster to do it right the first time.
- Each step in sequences of learning should be mastered before we move on.

Festina Lente in Various Disciplines

- **Math:** It would be foolish to move students into long division if they haven't master operations and facts.
- **Science:** You are not going to start mixing things together, you would train them on the rudiments of the lab and elements of the periodic table.
- **Literature:** There are rudiments of literature (plot, theme) that students need to know.
- **History:** In the beginning it is helpful for students to have an overview (Timeline). It is helpful to know basic geography.
- **Reading:** Teach students to decode words until they can sound out and decode any word they see.



- Language: Vocabulary
- Music: Pitch, Tempo
- Sports: It is important to master the fundamentals until it becomes second nature.

Festina Lente Across Disciplines

- Fluency happens when a student does not have to stop, but they can continue the conversation.
- A treasury of memory has been built up, which keeps them fluent and moving.
- The result of training to mastery yields “second nature” of knowing what to do and when.
- A student has a clear sense of orderliness in learning that have imparted fluency and capacity and ability. He begins to think, “I can do that in any area of learning.”
- You begin to generalize and imagine that the skills have application outside of the discipline that you have been studying which leads to an integration with other arts.
- There is a kind of contentment that settles in, a confidence and delight that comes that you know that you know. Peace.

Implications of Festina Lente

- Teach to mastery.
- Know what is core and what is peripheral, we have to keep some things out.
- Don't skip. Don't bounds ahead. Be wary of acceleration.
- Embrace review.
- Slow learning may be the best learning.
- Recall how you learned. You may have forgotten them time it took for you to master the skills and the knowledge. If you could remember how you learned, it took longer, and it took practice and review. Beware of the “Curse of Knowledge”.
- We have to give a new learner the time to truly master the ideas, concepts, skills, and knowledge that they will need to move on and continue growing. They are going to grow strong and tall, but they are going to grow slowly, Festina Lente.