



The Principles of Classical Pedagogy

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Lesson 3: Repetitio Mater Memoriae

Outline:

Repetitio Mater Memoriae: Repetition and the Recovery of Memory

- This is not just about rote memory, but about requiring a possession of truth, goodness, and beauty in the soul and mind of the student.
- We want to possess a treasure forever.
- This means to seek something again.
- Repetition is about memory and memory is about acquiring virtue.
- How do we teach in such a way that students will truly remember the things we want them to remember?

We Leak

- We don't remember well without some effort.
- We are like a leaky bucket.
- We forget in a variety of ways. You might recognize something that you can't recall.
- There is a connection between wonder and memory. We remember the things that enchant us.
- The small child wants to do something repetitively until it becomes permanent.

G.K. Chesterton

- This proves that even nursery tales only echo an almost pre-natal leap of interest and amazement. These tales say that apples were golden only to refresh the forgotten moment when we found that they were green. They make rivers run with wine only to make us remember, for one wild moment, that they run with water. –G.K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*
 - We remember, by virtue of the fairy tale, some of the most important things about human existence.
- We have all read in scientific books, and, indeed, in all romances, the story of the man who has forgotten his name. This man walks about the streets and can see and appreciate everything; only he cannot remember who he is. Well, every man is that man in the story. Every man has forgotten who he is. One may understand the cosmos, but never the ego; the self is more distant than any star. Thou shalt love the Lord thy God; but thou shalt not know thyself. We are all under the same mental calamity; we have all forgotten our names.



We have all forgotten what we really are. All that we call common sense and rationality and practicality and positivism only means that for certain dead levels of our life we forget that we have forgotten. All that we call spirit and art and ecstasy only means that for one awful instant we remember that we forget. –G.K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*

- There is this proneness in us as human beings to forget things that are important, to forget even what it means to be a human being.
- What does it mean to be human after all? What is a human for? What does it mean to raise up a small human?

Mnemosyne and the Muses

- Mnemosyne is the mother of the nine muses.
- The nine muses were those which inspired us to knowledge in the way of wonder.
- Do we have the muse? Are we inspired to study and to know because the muses have struck?
- Mnemosyne, the mother of all of the muses, means memory.
- A mnemonic device is a device that aids us to memory.

Modern Memory

- We don't memorize well, because we rely on technology.
- Chesterton would quote from memory, so he didn't always get it quite right. He thought if he didn't quote it from memory, he couldn't cite it at all.
- Google interrupts the conversation. The information that you Google doesn't really belong to you, you will forget it shortly yourself. The information can't really speak to you at other times (no integration and synthesis).

Repetition: Seeking Again

- There should be fresh and different ways to circle back to what we love and want to know.
- Science is showing how the brain works when it comes to memory, and is confirming classical methods.
- 5 Canons of Rhetoric
 - Invention, find the material
 - Arrangement
 - Style, decorate the things to be beautiful
 - Delivery, learn how to make a speech
 - Memory, a good stylized speech should be given from memory
- Memory Palace: this technique was used to memorize speeches, connecting parts of speech to visual imagery.

Memory is for virtue

- Memory is to cultivate virtue.



- Psalm 1: The blessed student will be fruitful. There is beauty and truth flowing by in the river, and he is accessing nourishing waters and bearing fruit.
- What will nourish but truth, goodness, and beauty? How will it nourish him unless it is in him?

Thomas Aquinas, Ante Studium, “Before Study”

- Grant me keenness of mind, capacity to remember, skill in learning, subtlety to interpret, and eloquence of speech. May you guide the beginning of my work, direct its progress, and bring it to completion.
- He prays for the ability to remember.
- Could this prayer be water to your student’s soul?
- What if you had prayers like this in your own memory to guide you and to guide your students?
- We typically pray in rather casual ways with made up impromptu prayers that often aren’t that meaningful.

Aquinas and Einstein

- Both had a quite a memory. Both were quite imaginative.
- Aquinas was able to dictate to scribes passages that were publishable right out of his mouth. He had cultivated memory. He sought to synthesize insights in a comprehensive resolution.

Forget-You-Not

- There is a biblical tradition to remember.
- The things we love are what we want to remember.
- From the time children are young, they want to know the names of things.
- We have commands to remember God. We are told not to forget and to remember (Deuteronomy 8).
- The Passover celebration comes with a call to bring to remembrance to our children what God has done in the past.
- Psalms are filled with this reminder to remember.
- Proverbs 2 tells us to store up the wise commands, to write them on the tables of your heart.
 - The metaphor of the tablet is a way of describing memory.
- We should do more to use our own minds as memory tools.

The Memory Palace

- Metaphors for memory: wax tablets, seal, storehouse, bins, strongbox, pigeon coop
 - Strongbox: we want to put ideas in a safe so they can personally enrich us.
- Ancient memory techniques
 - These involve a lot of visual and fantastical imagery.



- The wilder the images, perhaps the better (flying books, dragons that speak) to call forth what you are memorizing

Memory for contemplation and virtue

- Psalm 1: The virtuous person is meditating on the law day and night. Daily and regular review is repetitio. For student to really memorize, it is helpful if they treasure (delight) it. We as teachers have the burden of showing them things as things that delight their souls.
- How did learning it for the test work for you in your own education?
 - Cram, pass, and forget is a poor substitute for the classical idea of Repetitio Mater Memoriae
- Psalm 19: The delight and love the psalmist has caused him to hide it in his heart. Delight propels and inspires memory.
- We have a problem of selective memory which is tied to what we love.
- Ars Memorativa → Meditatio → Virtus
 - What is stored in us, we can linger upon, and that creates virtue in us.
 - In God's word stored in our hearts, we find the capacity to turn away from sin.
 - The word of God hidden in my heart, upon which I meditate, leads me to holiness.

Psalm 1

- He will be like a tree.
- Set the idea before your students that they will be like a tree that is well-rooted, will bear fruit, and be a blessing to others.
- The cultivation of memory is for a prosperity of mind and prosperity of soul.
- Could we cast a vision for being a blessing to others where you yourself are also delighted?
- Will I decide to love something that is lovely?

Learning Theory

- Encoding: We take in information and we are able to put it into the working memory of the brain. The working memory holds what we have to be holding in order to work with it. We can't hold things there for very long.
- Storing: We remember what is stored in long term memory, but things that we once knew can be forgotten.
- Retrieval: We need to store well in order to retrieve well. The better that you encode and store information, the better that you will be able to retrieve well.
- We can use cues to do this well. Visual, kinesthetic, auditory cues help to store information well in a student's mind. This is supported by science in terms of what is happening neurologically.



Implications

- In the *Seven Laws of Learning*, John Milton Gregory sites how important repetition is in attaining mastery, otherwise learning is “potency rather than a possession”.
- We should not cover material, or do a lot of material that we cannot teach to mastery.
- We have to choose what is most important, and review those things until they are mastered.
- Seek again the things you would really want to know forever.

Permanent Learning and Beauty

- Beauty slows us down and causes reflection.
- Beauty causes us to linger, gaze, and ponder.
- We need to bring the beautiful before our students to help them to remember.

Ways of Making Learning Permanent

- There are layers of ways to teach children for them to remember besides to learn by rote:
 - Sing it, chant it – silently, loudly, quickly, slowly
 - Hand motions
 - Use the word in a sentence
 - Use a diglot weave
 - Teach them in the language (in Latin)
 - Draw, write sentences, build it
 - Bring in fresh specimens, fresh examples.
- Give fresh conceptions and new associations of the same idea.
- Learn over time. Review at the beginning and end of lesson, week, unit, and year.
- We want to impart understanding by constantly circling and re-seeking that beautiful thing that we want to possess.
- To commonplace is to write down and respond to the cherished thing that they study such that they would memorize them.
- Florilegium means book of flowers. If you treasured the book, what you put in it is treasurable.
- In the classical tradition, the students would write their own math books from what they learned from their teacher. We could have students recreate their texts that they archive.