



The Principles of Classical Pedagogy

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Lesson 2: Multum Non Multa

Outline:

Finally brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, if anything is excellent or praiseworthy, think about such things.

Philippians 4:8

Multum Non Multa, Much not Many

- In education we are tempted to take on too much, to give the child a full plate.
- When raising a child, you start with milk and then you begin to give them pureed food.
- Sometimes we ask too much of our children.
- It is better to do one thing well at a time rather than superficially cover and experience many things at the same time.

The Lioness and the Fox

- The lioness replied, “You produce a great many at a litter and often, but you should remember that this one is a lion.”
- One lion or many foxes?

Pleny the Younger writes to a friend about Multum Non Multa

- Pray remember to select with care the standard authors on each subject, for as the saying is, “though we should read much, we should not read many books.”
 - It is better to read a few of the best authors than to read many.

Modern distraction keeps us from paying attention to the proverbial wisdom of Multum non Multa

- Stress can be defined as a dysfunctional relationship with time.
- Smart phones, social media, and the internet are distracting.
- Siren calls (Odyssey): There is something attractive and compelling to attend to other things besides that which we should be attending to at the moment.

Variations of Multum non Multa

- Less is more
- Quality over quantity, stuff impedes us
- Better versus more



- Fewer versus more
- First things first
- Major on the majors
 - The rudiments are the first principles of something.
 - To be delivered from rudeness is to master the rudiments.

Depth as a means to breadth

- The way to breadth is one thing at a time.
- We want to dig wells and do deep diving with our students.
 - We are like jet skiers skimming over the surface of water, but we have lost the ability to do deep diving (Carr, *The Shallows*).
- In an oasis you can look around and see the surroundings. Some survey is okay.
- C.S. Lewis: We should teach fewer subjects. When we force a boy into mediocrity in a dozen subjects, we destroy his standards for life. (Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*)
- In C.S. Lewis' studies with the Great Knock in Latin and Greek, other subjects came in incidentally.
- By doing a few things well, we acquire a taste for mastery.

A Closer Look at Multum non Multa

- Studying fewer things deeply can result in something much greater than if we did the opposite.
- The slightest knowledge of a great book is superior to the greatest knowledge of a slight book. (Aquinas)
- We ought not to think of books as a checklist.
- Has the book possessed you, or have you covered the book?
- **Truly “free” time:** Time when we have a liberty while we are reading.

Mary and Martha, Luke 10

- Martha is preparing or cleaning up a meal. Mary is having a conversation with Jesus.
- Martha comes to Christ with frustration and asks Jesus to tell her sister to help.
- Christ replies, “Marth, Martha, you are busy and anxious about many things, but Mary has chosen the better part and it will not be taken from her.”
- In this context, the best thing is what Mary is doing. Martha is turbulent and anxious.
- How often are you like Martha in your preparation and teaching in your school or homeschool?
- We can be busy, but we ought not to be anxious.



- There should be a place where we can slow down and focus.

John 15, Vine Illustration

- The gardener prunes the vine.
- You are a part of this vine, if you abide in me you will bear much fruit.
- In order to produce fruit, you must be pruned.
- Fewer branches means that the fruit grows because the nutrients go to the fruit (multum/multa relationship).
- To what degree do you cut away things in order that you can have more fruit?
- When we prune, it is painful to keep things out. The new learners cannot take it all at once.

Personal Applications

- We need to personally embody this teaching.
- **First in prayer life:** Find time to go deep in your own relationship with God spiritually in scripture, church fathers, and integrating those things into your life.
- **Share what you're learning** with your family and spouse.
- **Curtail multi-tasking**, we really don't do many things at once.
- **Don't read poor literature.** Find the right things to read.
- **Don't skim** very often.
- **Don't hop about** from book to book.
- Apply to **friendships**, we can only have a few friends. Are you going deep with few friends?
- Apply to **possessions**. What quality things might you save for rather than just acquiring more stuff, which impedes.
- Apply to **accomplishments?** Are you a dabbler?
- You are **making a life**, not just a living.

School Applications

- Regarding subjects **generally we should teach fewer subjects.**
- **Block scheduling** is a way of going deeper in studies with students.
- **Trimester system:** Rather than so many subjects in a semester, you can do a trimester system, in which you manage fewer (four) subjects at a time.
- **Think about one thing at a time when you are going for mastery.**
- **Regarding particular subjects:** English: read fewer books in the year.
- Traditional arts that integrate learning:
 - **Latin** is a means of grammar, vocabulary, and spelling. Later Latin is a means of history, literature, philosophy, and theology.



- **Logic** enables good reasoning ability. Logic can be a study present throughout the curriculum. This makes a student better at anything that he will do.
- **Rhetoric** combines writing, history, English, and speech. Rhetoric is used throughout the curriculum.
- **History** can be combined with literature, science, philosophy, and theology. These become the Great Books.
- **Science**, nature study in lower grades and history of science.
- **Mathematics** can be combined with history and biography.
- Four major domains
 - **Lower school:** Math, Latin (grammar), Literature/Great Books, Music
 - **Upper school:** Math, Latin, Literature/Great books, Science, Logic, Rhetoric

8 Practical Strategies, Multum Non Multa from *Teaching from Rest*, Sarah Mackenzie

- Clarify your vision.
- Begin with a time budget. Order your time so that you have plenty of time to study the most important.
- Make your trade-offs intentionally.
- Read aloud more often. For younger learners, this is a great use of time.
- Pare back within your subjects. Choose what is going to be core, read fewer books.
- Don't get hung up on finding the "best". This can become its own distraction.
- Run everything through a Philippians 4:8 litmus test.