

A Small Glossary of Educational Vocabulary

By Christopher Perrin, PhD

Adapted from a forthcoming book, *Learning from Rest*

Most of these words are Latin, a few are Greek and one (“wisdom”) is Old English. Because of the great fuzziness and ambiguity surrounding educational terms, I often resort to using many of the original Latin or Greek words for three reasons: 1) they usually cannot be adequately translated by a single English word 2) they impart a sense of freshness by connecting us more directly to the great, proven tradition of those that preceded us 3) they are very cool words. For example, as this book title suggests, I prefer to use the word *scholé* than a limited English translation of it.

Paideia: a Greek word meaning education in the sense of the full enculturation of a child from the about the age of seven to twenty, preparing and raising up a child by a collaborative effort of the family and entire city-state until the matured man was able and ready to deliberate in the Greek assembly and serve in the military. Paul uses this work in Eph. 6:4 when he says, “Fathers do not exasperate your children, but raise them up in the fear and *paideia* of the Lord.”

Education: from *educere*, “to lead out.” The Romans most often translated the Greek word “paideia” with the noun *educatio*. To the Romans, *educatio* also meant enculturation and the passing down of the Roman tradition of various distinctive virtues such as frugality, piety, gravity and constancy. *Educatio* thus meant the leading out or unfolding and development of a human being. Another Roman word for education was simply *humanitas* —the development or cultivation of one’s humanity. The ancient Christians adopted this word and infused it with several layers of meaning from the biblical tradition that included the ideas of mentorship, discipleship, worship and a growing up in the wisdom of Christ the Logos. Key biblical passages informing the Christian appropriation of *educatio* were Deut. 6, Luke 6 and Eph. 6.

Humanities: from *humanitas* meaning that which makes us human, or our humanity. The “humanities” or the “humanities subjects” still persist as words in our educational parlance, as those subjects you study if you don’t want a job (a joke stolen from my friend Andrew Pudewa). Now the “humanities” generally refer to English, history, philosophy and art. Apparently (to the modern mind) the study of math, science and education (as majors) don’t really humanize you. Traditionally all of the liberal arts (all seven of them) helped to cultivate one’s humanity, one’s capacities (such as language, thinking, math, calculating) that were proper to human beings—what only humans could learn to do. This means that even math is a humanities subject.

Classical: from *classis*, meaning a “fleet of ships,” and “order,” and *classicus* meaning “of first order,” and “rank.” The English word “classical” was not used generally to describe education until after about 1900 when traditional education was challenged and eventually replaced by progressive educators inciting on a new, scientifically-based paradigm of education. Thus, “classical education” before about 1900 was generally known as “education.” The word “classical” today can refer to anything of enduring value and excellence, but also to certain periods of time in historical and artistic studies—such as the classical period of music (that precedes the baroque period) and the classical period of history (normally meaning the civilizations of Greece and Rome) or the classical languages of Greek and Latin. “Classical educators” are not referring to a renewal of simply the study of Greek or Latin, or the recovery of the education just the way the Greeks and Romans practiced it. Rather “classical educators” generally advocate for the renewal of the traditional “liberal arts” education that characterized most of western civilization up until about 1900.

Classic: This English word is also derived from *classis* and *classicus*. A classic work or book is one of enduring excellence, that has proven itself by universal praise and commendation for generations or even centuries. The plays of Shakespeare are classic works in this sense. Note that we also use words and phrases like “classy” and “first class” and “class act” to

describe things we think are excellent. Perhaps less profoundly we can mention “classic rock” and “Coke Classic.”

Tradition: from *traditio*, something handed or passed down and related to the Latin *trado, tradere*, meaning “to hand over.” A tradition not mean something old-fashioned and worn-out, but rather something valuable and venerable that has been preserved and passed down to us. In this sense, something “traditional” represents the best things we inherit from those who have gone before us, something we should treasure, preserve and pass on ourselves. “Traditional education” in this senses should therefore be something very good indeed that we could never invent ourselves, and that will bless us and our children immensely.

Liberal Arts: The word “liberal” derives from the Latin *liber*, which means “free.” *Liber* itself could also mean the inner bark of tree (or “book”)—that which the ancients sometimes used as paper on which to write contracts and such. Only the educated, literate man was therefore “free” to engage in the most important civic activities that required the ability to read and write. In the ancient world, a liberal education was that kind of education that only the free man could obtain—someone with the luxury and wealth (the free time) to study something other than skills for particular tasks (job training). The free man (generally only the aristocracy of Greece and Rome) would study the liberal arts (*artes liberales*)—those arts becoming of a free man (and not the class manual laborers, often slaves). Those arts gradually accumulated to be the seven arts of grammar, logic, rhetoric, arithmetic, geometry, music and astronomy. They were called arts (from the Latin *ars, artis*) because they enabled man to become a maker or creator, using language and mathematics. The arts made the man into a maker, such that his humanity (*humanitas*) was cultivated and perfected so that he could do the best he could do at what was proper to human beings, what only human beings could do—write, read, speak, narrate, versify, argue, reason, persuade, measure, calculate, estimate, predict. Such a “liberal education” prepared man for any vocation or profession and alone enabled one to truly lead in the most important realms of culture (politics, governance, education,

military leadership, architecture, medicine, engineering, poetry).

Science: This word comes from the Latin *scientia*, which simply means “knowledge.” It is related to the common Latin verb *scio, scire*, “to know.” The liberal arts help us to attain knowledge and collections of related, known facts that become “bodies of knowledge” or “a science” like biology or chemistry.

Curriculum: This is a Latin loan word (spelled the same in Latin and English) that means “course, race course.” Thus our educational *curriculum* originally meant the course of studies or the educational pathway we set foot upon. It did not mean published materials and textbooks. Thus in this sense, curriculum is not something you buy, but something you do (as Sarah Mackenzie likes to say). In this sense *Latin for Children* is not your curriculum, but rather Latin itself; not the *Art of Argument*, but logic. Published materials will come and go, but the classical curriculum should abide forever...

Scholé: *Scholé* is a rich Greek word that no single English word can capture, though “leisure” is the most common English translation for *scholé*. In brief, *scholé* means undistracted time to study the things most worthwhile, usually with good friends in a beautiful setting. It was considered the highest form of human activity by Aristotle, and that which was fitting for free people. The concept of *scholé* was harmonized with the biblical idea of rest and contemplation and incorporated into Christian classical education, especially in the monastic schools. Josef Pieper’s *Leisure the Basis of Culture* is the classical study of *scholé*.

School: From *scholé* we get the Latin word *schola*, the German word *schule* and our English word school. We need to put the *scholé* back into school.

Academic: This word has acquired a wide semantic range meaning virtually anything to do with teaching, learning and education. It derives from Plato’s Academy (which some call the first university), but he apparently named it after a grove of olive trees among which he started his school. The grove of trees was named after an legendary Greek hero named Akadēmos who saved Athens from destruction.

Pedagogy: This word comes from the Greek *pais, paidos* (child) and *agein* (to lead). In ancient Rome a pedagogue was often a slave (of an aristocratic family) who would lead the Roman student school and ensure the student did his academic work. The English word pedagogy now refers to the methods of teaching that should “lead” a student to understanding and knowledge. A pedagogue today simply refers to a teacher skilled in teaching methodology.

Student: from *studeo, studere*, “to be zealous and eager for.” The Latin word *studere* is related to the noun *studium*, which means “zeal, eagerness, fondness.” Thus, ideally, as “student” is someone full of zeal and eagerness to know the true, good and beautiful, or a zeal for knowledge, virtue, understanding and wisdom. Traditionally speaking, if a student does not possess *studium*, he is not properly a student at all.

Pupil

Study: Given the meaning of “student” above, we might guess that “to study” means to zealously and eagerly seek understanding and knowledge.

Diligence: This word comes from the Latin *diligo, diligere*, which means to esteem, prize highly, or have fondness for. When Jerome translated John 3:16 (“For God so loved the world...”) into Latin he chose *diligere* as the Latin word for love. To a Latin speaker it read something like, “For God so prized/esteemed the world that he sent his only Son...” Thus we are diligent to study—that which we love. Diligence—a chief student virtue—is founded and animated by that which we love. This recalls Augustine’s maximum that education is largely a matter of helping students to love that which is lovely.

Cultivate: This word comes from *colo, colere, colui, cultus*, “to till the soil,” but also by extension “to care for, to cherish, to adorn.” It even refers to what the worshipper does, expressing care for and cherishing God. The traditional, chief aim of classical education is the cultivation of virtue or virtues. When we view the teacher as a cultivator, we are using a gardening or agricultural metaphor—the gardner must patiently till, weed, water and care for his plants and flowers. The process is long for both teacher and student.

Virtue: This word derives from the *virtus*, meaning strength, power, ability, worth. Because it is also related to the word *vir* (man), *virtus* also has the connotation of manhood and courage. Think of our English word “virile” and “virility.” In the classical tradition there are various collections of virtues. The four “classical virtues” are justice, temperance, prudence and courage. The three “theological virtues” are faith, hope and love, often added to the first four to become the “seven virtues.” There is also a collection of student virtues—or virtues proper to being a student. These virtues are sometimes called educational or intellectual virtues. They are constancy, diligence, patience, temperance, courage, love and humility. Synonyms for constancy and diligence are perseverance and industry. These student virtues essentially define the character and disposition of a student. They are the capacities that enable a student to acquire (over time) knowledge, understanding, and wisdom.

Intellect: Since we have defined the student or “intellectual virtues,” we should stop and define “intellect.” This word is derived from the Latin word *intellectus*. It does not mean “smart;” rather it means “understanding” or “perception.” It is related to the Latin verb *intueor, intueri*, “I gaze,” “contemplate,” “consider,” “admire”

Reason: This word comes from the Latin *ratio*, which can mean many things: “calculation,” “affair;” “respect,” “consideration,” “procedure,” “method;” “reasoning,” “thought,” “cause,” “knowledge.” Medieval educators thought of the human mind as comprising both *intellectus* and *ratio*. *Ratio* represented the way we come to know things by observation, calculation, classification, and categorizing. The *intellectus* represented the way we come to know things by receptive attention and intuition—by gazing, wondering and contemplating something true, good or beautiful.

Vice: We get this word from the Latin *vitium*, meaning “fault,” “flaw,” “defect.” The student virtues were opposed by corresponding student vices, that needed to be overcome. They were: sloth, excessive ambition (both forms of intemperance), fear, despair, and pride.

Correct and Direct: To correct the the flaws of a student, means to set them on the “right path,” since to correct (from *corrigo, corrigere, correxi*,

correctum) means to set one back on the right path, as *rectus* means “right” or “straight.” To direct (from *dirigo*) a student means to lead him along the straight path. An *incorrigible* student is so captive to his vices that he cannot be corrected.

Discipline: This word derives from the Latin word *disciplina*, meaning “learning,” “habits,” “training,” “teaching,” and... “discipline.” The word *disciplina* is related to the verb *disco*, *discere*, which means “to learn.” It is also related to the word, *discipulus* which means “learner,” “pupil,” or “apprentice.” From *discipulus* we get our English word “disciple.” The disciples of Christ were not just his followers, but his learners.

Temperance: This word comes from the Latin *tempero*, *temperare*, “to mix in due proportion.” A temperate student, therefore, will neither be lazy (not exercising his capacities) nor excessively ambitious (seeking work beyond his capacities).

Assessment: This word comes from the Latin *assidere*, “to sit beside.” In the medieval world, this was related to taxation when one would “sit beside” a judge who would determine or “assess” the tax one owed. But note that the root meaning of assessment is personal and not abstract. To assess a student suggests that the teacher come beside him and offer personal, thoughtful judgment.

Wisdom: Our English word comes from Old English and is related to Old Norse (*visdomur*) and German (*Weistum*). The Latin word is *sapientia* and the Greek word is *sophos*. All of these words for “wisdom” connote discernment, knowing what is true and right, and knowing the proper thing to do in various situations. It also contains the ideal of a comprehensive understanding of how reality or the world truly works — both the world of men and the natural world; ultimately it means approaching (though never fully reaching) the understanding that God himself has of reality.

Philosophy: This word comes from two Greek words, *philos* (“friend,” “lover”) and *sophos* (“wisdom”). Thus at root, philosophy is “the love of wisdom” and a philosopher is a “lover of wisdom” and a seeker of it.