

Learning from the Past to Educate the Future:  
An Analysis of the Modern Classical School

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## Abstract

Classical schooling combines the wisdom of thousands of years of learning with the knowledge necessary to succeed in today's world. Despite the antiquity of some of these ideas, the movement has continued to grow in both number of schools and also number of students attending, measuring almost 100 new schools each decade since 1993. One of the motives for this growth is how Classical schools utilize a curriculum which includes the trivium, Latin, and the Great Books of Western Civilization. Together, these elements of the curriculum lead to improved test scores and general college readiness.

Learning from the Past to Educate the Future:

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### **Introduction**

Modern teachers often have attempted to teach their students all the skills they will need in the real world by focusing on integrating the newest researched strategies (Brahier, 2016). As different leaders proposed different educational goals, teachers have been expected to adhere to ever-changing ideals to ensure that lessons are continually updated to modern standards. Further, schools who still follow in the progressive tradition at the roots of America's public schools have encouraged students to pursue the study of topics they find interesting when possible (Knight, 2006). However, this pursuit of progress led education to a standstill as eventually classes were graduating high school with almost no ability to interact with topics on the deep level that would be required of them in college (Calhoun, 1999).

Classical education, whose roots go back to the very beginning of western civilization, has stood in opposition to these idealistic views since its American renaissance in 1980, when the first three modern classical schools opened across the United States. Each year since 2002, more and more parents choose to send their children to one of these schools or the many hundreds that have joined their ranks in the years since, where the goal of education is on teaching modern students truths and knowledge passed down through generations, especially in the ancient form of the trivium (Association of Classical Christian Schools [ACCS], 2017). There, parents expect their children to be held to a higher standard to the point that when they leave for college, they

are articulate and deeply knowledgeable about a variety of topics. This belief is supported by the test scores of classical students and their success in a variety of colleges and majors (ACCS, 2017). Further, even if the mentality of classical schooling may seem antiquated, many aspects line up with more modern educational theories. Altogether, classical schooling is a reliable method of schooling because it produces students prepared to succeed in today's world by combining the wisdom of many thinkers over the ages with the knowledge necessary for a student to succeed in the modern world, producing scholars knowledgeable about a variety of topics who are able to convey this information to others gracefully.

### **Background**

The Association of Classical Christian Schools reported that the average growth per year in the number of students attending one of their accredited schools was seven percent from 2002-2017. In total, over that period of fifteen years, the number of students grew by 189% (ACCS, 2017). Further, in that same time period, teachers and parents have invested time, energy, and money into founding their own classical schools such that since 2002 those interested have created almost two hundred new classical schools (ACCS, 2017). With the modern world of technology offering new products and resources constantly, why do people choose this classical, older model rather than more progressive schooling?

### **The Recent History Leading to the Modern Classical Movement**

The roots of classical education reach back to the very birth of Western Civilization. Given this, how has this mode of education changed to form the modern

classical school? Throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, most higher education followed this pattern (Denman, 2004). Then, the goal of this education remained the production of a “citizen-orator,” a person knowledgeable of and therefore involved in improving their community, able to break down important issues and persuade others to their cause (Denman, 2004). However, the education system changed in the nineteenth century to focus instead on more practical skills. Rather than the ancient ideal of a strong leader able to convey his or her thoughts clearly, the goal of education became for each citizen to be able to provide for themselves and their family (Clark & Halloran, 1993). Society was no longer in need of well-rounded scholars; rather, universities switched to prioritize the teaching of sciences and skills that served a function rather than dead languages like Latin or Greek. Additionally, schools and universities began to take advantage of written examinations over oral exercises because of the saved time. By the end of the nineteenth century, rhetoric was a subject relegated to English departments exclusively (Denman, 2004).

By the end of the twentieth century, the effects of these priority changes had taken their toll. A 1992 national report card from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reported that only seven to 25 percent of students were able to form a well-developed persuasive argument, with the vast majority of students only producing exceptional work if it directly addressed topics they were passionate about, like television or music (NAEP, 1992). Though specific curricula such as Writing Across the Curriculum and emphasis on critical thinking aimed to amend this shortcoming, both lacked the complete education offered by the trivium method, either focusing solely on

analysis of arguments rather than their formulation or neglecting to address a form of rhetoric applicable across many fields (Denman, 2004). Further, at the collegiate level, students were lacking the foundational knowledge of how to read text well and analyze literature to the extent that when college professors would show them a range of literature, the classes failed to learn or achieve what the professors intended (Calhoun, 1999).

In response to these shortcomings in the modern school, three different groups of parents founded schools of their own in three different states; one of those founders, Douglas Wilson, published the influential book *Recovering the Lost Tools of Learning* (ACCS, 2017). Much of this new classical school of thought traced back to a work by Sister Miriam Joseph (2002), an English professor, titled *The Trivium: the Liberal Arts of Logic, Grammar, and Rhetoric: Understanding the Nature and Function of Language*. In it, she described how the trivium specifically taught students how to think. In the next few years, more than a hundred similar schools joined them across the country, and the Association of Classical Christian Schools formed to unify the schools, distributing information and training for educators and parents interested in investigating the topic. Classical education represents a blend of the skills needed to succeed in the modern world with the wisdom passed down through generations. Founders of schools recognize that, even if the methods used in the past were effective, they are not guaranteed to work the same way if applied the same way. Rather, these schools look to the past for resources from which to modify modern methods (Lyday & Sharer, 2004).

## **History of Classical Education**

There are many aspects that together make the full Classical education. First, the education finds its roots in the concept of the Trivium, a relic of the original seven liberal arts which also included the Quadrivium. Second, schools will focus on the Great Books of Western Civilization. Last, students will study languages such as Latin. Together, these qualities can be used to identify most classical schools. So, where did these specific qualities originate?

### **The Seven Liberal Arts**

The Seven Liberal Arts are rooted in the very beginnings of Western philosophy (Wagner, 1983). The ancient Greeks sought to understand the world around them, and as scholars developed their own schools of thought; curiosity, or the worldview that reality is a question to be answered, formed the backbone of the first Greek educational mindset (Robinson, 2013). Here, the first four of the Liberal Arts, or the Quadrivium, were born.

**The quadrivium.** The quadrivium, which literally translates to “four roads,” includes music, astronomy, geometry, and arithmetic. Pythagoras and his students particularly embraced these studies, fitting them into the frame that everything can be understood in the context of numbers (Wagner, 1983). With geometry and arithmetic, the connection to numbers is fairly evident; however, Pythagoras also tied music to numbers, using math to understand why fourths, fifths, and octaves sounded pleasing to the ear. In the field of astronomy, he connected the order of the universe to numbers, saying that the arrangement of heavenly bodies reflected musical harmony (Wagner, 1983). For Pythagoras, these subject areas were not necessarily distinct. Rather, they represented a

sort of divine revelation because of their similarities and overlaps in the minds of both the thinker and his students (Robinson, 2013). These four studies represented the necessary scientific content knowledge that any scholar ought to know (Robinson, 2013). Together, they represented the necessary knowledge of matter (Joseph, 2002). However, as the study of matter became more complex with time, these subjects gradually changed to correspond with research and discoveries.

**The trivium.** The last three subjects of the Seven Liberal Arts are known collectively as the trivium. Where the first four studies focused on math and science, these three pursuits aimed to educate students in the verbal arts and are known as the arts which pertain to the mind (Joseph, 2002). Additionally, where the quadrivium focused mostly on what a student needed to know, the trivium focused on not just content, but also the necessary mindsets for how to think or complete tasks (Robinson, 2013). This focus is part of what allows the Trivium to remain timeless. Today, scholars remember the Greeks not only for their philosophy and scientific theories, but also for their literary achievements; even today students in most fields will study the ancient epics of Homer which originally would have been told and re-told orally by rhapsodes (Tomasso, 2016). The trivium, which literally translates to “three roads,” encompasses the stages of grammar, logic, and rhetoric. Usually, the grammar stage covers all learning until around age eleven. Then, from around ages 12 to 14, which cover the last years of middle school and first year of high school, is the logic stage. Finally, students learn rhetoric from ages 15 to 18, around which time they finish high school and are ready to enter college.

**Grammar**

Grammar is a topic still taught in school, though the term “grammar” has changed slightly in meaning from how it is used in this context. The study of grammar was the study of language as a medium for messages of many sorts. In medieval minds, these messages would typically only be varied to the fields of literature, philosophy, and theology (Wagner, 1983). By the end of the grammar stage, students ought to have learned an enormous quantity of information. In medieval times, this stage represented disciplining the student’s mind and soul (Huntsman, 1983). By itself, this stage does not prepare a student to succeed in the world quite yet. However, it does cement a firm foundation for the rest of the student’s education.

**Logic**

After the student has finished mastering the basic information of all these different fields of study, they are ready to begin the logic stage. Also known as dialectic, this stage represents the process of ordering all the information learned during the grammar stage. Some great minds have proposed that logic, not grammar, ought to be the first stage of the trivium, including Milton, who said, “Of all the arts the first and most general is logic, then grammar, and last of all rhetoric, since there can be much use of reason without speech, but no use of speech without reason,” (Fontainelle, 2016, p. 177). After this stage, students not only will learn to organize their own thoughts and those which they read, but also how to differentiate between truth and fiction. Students will understand how to pick apart arguments and find fallacies and other faults in logic while also learning to piece together their own statements to clearly convey facts. Specifically,

students will need to learn how to assemble syllogisms and propositions along with all the rules that must be followed to ensure that they are valid (Joseph, 2002). As is the case at the end of grammar school, at the end of learning all this organization, the student will have laid a strong foundation for the next stage of learning.

### **Rhetoric**

With the basic information mastered and ordered clearly, the student is ready to move on to the next step of learning. This stage is the rhetoric stage, where the student learns to convey these logically sound statements to others effectively. The famous champion for rhetoric education in Rome was Cicero. Educated in Greece, his stirring speeches and general oratorical success spurred Roman educators to pursue the subject (Robinson, 2013). Historically, the term rhetoric has applied to many different contexts; even by the time of medieval schooling the term applied to pure stylistic ornamentation and the formation of appealing sentiments as well as the more Christian focus on morally upright contents. These different definitions each have their own renowned scholars behind them. For those who believe it is imperative that students do not learn how to persuade only to use this ability to sway others to make immoral choices, Aristotle himself says, “we must be able to employ persuasion, just as strict reasoning can be employed, on opposite sides of a question, not in order that we may in practice employ it in both ways (for we must not make people believe what is wrong), but in order that we may see clearly what the facts are, and that, if another man argues unfairly, we on our part may be able to confute him” (Aristotle, trans. 2004, p. 5). To be fair, Aristotle realized that his methods could be used for good or evil purposes; he believed that in an

even contest between two rhetoricians, the one arguing in a morally correct manner would emerge the victor and hoped that the rhetoric he taught would be used as an instrument of truth. At the roots of this tradition, however, Isocrates, the teacher responsible for preserving much of these ideas into the middle ages differed from his contemporaries in some key ways, namely his lack of care whether his students used their learning to achieve morally correct goals. Isocrates was the student of Gorgias, one of the original educators responsible for encouraging the teaching of rhetoric around Greece, but both of them were condemned as Sophists by thinkers such as Plato and Aristotle for their lack of educational moral foundation (Joseph, 2002). Credited by some as the *educator of Europe*, Isocrates founded a legacy of schools which used the liberal arts to great success (Muir, 1998).

This entire system of the Seven Liberal Arts embodies the ideal of what a Greek scholar needed to know to succeed as a good citizen: the ability to think critically about a variety of subjects, to analyze mathematically, and to communicate clearly and persuasively. By the time of the middle ages, learned scholars such as John of Salisbury viewed the Seven Liberal Arts immensely highly, even writing, “The liberal arts ... enabled [our ancestors] to comprehend everything they read, elevated their understanding to all things, and empowered them to cut through the knots of all problems possible of solution” (John, trans. 1955). This model lasted through the Middle Ages and represents the solid base upon which modern classical educators form their own curricula.

**Great Books of Western Civilization**

In addition to the trivium, a general trait of classical schooling is the teaching of the Great Books of Western Civilization. Mortimer Adler, a scholar and proponent of the study of the great books, argued that reading allows modern students to engage in conversation with great thinkers of the past (Bauer, 2003). Reading is a discipline valued highly in the classical mindset; to graduate from a classical school, students must become accomplished readers who are able to interact with a text deeply. To facilitate this goal, students explore ancient epic poems, philosophical treatises, and literary cultural cornerstones, some of which will be difficult to understand completely for a student on his or her own, but can be understood with the help of a trivium mindset.

Mortimer Adler (2000) describes the process of reading a book as a conversation. So, how do classical educators decide which books are worth conversing with? Here, the classical movement and neo-scholastic movements of education are of one mind. Students should experience the development of literature of different sorts throughout history.

**Epic poetry.** Usually, these books are studied in high school. In the realm of epic poetry, students will begin by studying the works of Homer, reading the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Then, students will proceed to the major work of Virgil, the *Aeneid*. Dante's *Inferno* is usually included, even if the other parts of the Divine Comedy are left out. Finally, students will study the most well-known poem of Milton, *Paradise Lost* (Denby, 1996).

**Theater.** Much of the most influential works from Greek Civilization still studied today are the plays written over the years. The works of Aristophanes, Aeschylus, and Sophocles together represent a reflection of the best of Greek thought, from the very first trial by jury to a brief picture of what the Greeks thought was extremely humorous. More recently, Shakespeare is an author renowned for his impact on the English language and many globally read plays, so students ought to study at least one of his histories, one of his comedies, and one of his dramas (Denby, 1996).

**Philosophy.** Key to the understanding of Western Civilization is the reading of major philosophical texts from ancient Greece. From the works of Plato, including *Symposium*, *Apology*, or the *Republic*, to Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* or the *Poetics*, a modern scholar benefits from studying the groundbreaking works of the past. Into the more recent past, modern scholars need to study the works of scholars such as Augustine, Aquinas, Machiavelli, Descartes, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Hume, Nietzsche, and Kant. Even if the curriculum does not include all these philosophers, understanding their various perspectives on the world will help scholars develop their individual worldviews (Denby, 1996).

### **Latin**

Finally, a key element of classical education involves the teaching of Latin. The teaching of Latin originally lent meaning to part of the grammar school curriculum since students would learn Latin grammar in the years after Greek was no longer the language of the educated. Of course, on a surface level from a modern perspective, this seems an arbitrary choice at best, and at worst, a downright terrible one. The simple fact is that

Latin is a dead language, so at first it is easy to think it would be useless to learn.

However, Latin is useful in the curriculum for several reasons.

Latin itself is a very organized language with fixed endings that make meaning clear even if syntax is arranged oddly. This fact demands students' attention to details that would comparatively be minor if studying some other languages. This demand will pay off when students begin to study subjects like math or science where details are immensely important (Bauer & Wise, 2015). Additionally, English itself derives around 50% of its vocabulary from Latin roots. Studying this dead language gives students an advantage when dealing with obscure words where they may be able to see Latin roots (Bauer & Wise, 2015). This even traces back to the scientific community in Europe from the Middle Ages through the Enlightenment, when scholars would use Latin to communicate with each other even if they shared no other languages. Even today, Latin remains a unique medium for the spread of scientific information because of its status as reliable and unchanging, so modern scientists can still use the language to communicate internationally and interculturally (Filgueiras, 1997). Therefore, students of Latin will have an advantage in the fields of medicine and science, where many words trace back to this Latin origin (Bauer & Wise, 2015). Further, the study of Latin facilitates the study of other Romantic languages, such as French, Italian, Spanish, or Romanian (Bauer & Wise, 2015). First, the experience of learning a language will aid students in picking up a new one, but specifically the fact that these languages are descended from Latin will help students pick them up with relative ease. Additionally, the study of Latin helps students

understand English grammar better since a firm grasp of grammar is essential to apply correct endings to each word in a Latin sentence.

Though Latin is not a unique language in this grammatical application, it is unique in its relationship to English vocabulary (Holliday, 2012). The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) supports this idea, drawing support for this idea from a multitude of studies which show that the study of a foreign language helps students test higher on standardized tests, develop reading abilities, develop linguistic awareness, understand how to hypothesize in science better, and even higher academic performance at the college level (ACTFL, 2018). Specifically, the study of Latin correlated with great gains in English studies when compared to different control groups made up of students studying French and Spanish or students studying no foreign language (Masciantonio, 1977).

### **Terms Defined**

Classical education in the form of the trivium, Great Books, and Latin have an extensive history in Western Civilization and continue to enlighten learners in modern classical schools. How, then, are these schools becoming more popular in today's society? The answer to that may hide in what today's society sees as a successful school. To determine that, several terms must be defined.

#### **A Classical School**

*A classical school* refers to an accredited school which utilizes the resources from the past in ways unique to the modern age.

**Grammar stage in the modern classical school.** When viewed from the perspective of the trivium as used in modern classical education, “grammar” denotes much more than just nouns, verbs, and dangling participles. Rather, it should be understood as the knowledge of the constituent parts of a variety of subjects, subjects which today include much more than just literature, philosophy and theology. So, while the knowledge of the parts that make up English sentences would be learned in the grammar stage of the trivium, so too would the knowledge of the building blocks of mathematics, the basics of the various sciences, and a general timeline of history. The goal of this stage is for students to be able to understand these various subjects’ essential parts before they begin to try forming their own thoughts about any of these subjects (Bauer & Wise, 2015). In English, the use of language ought to be second nature before students have to worry about making their sentences logically sound; the grammar student simply asks whether a sentence is correctly formed (Holley, 2016). The study of history requires students to be able to form a general timeline of important events and can understand their place in the story of human history. Students must learn to think mathematically, developing the number sense necessary to learn more complicated subjects like algebra, geometry, and even eventually calculus. In science, students must understand the basics of astronomy and the planets, how to classify organisms using Carolus Linnaeus’ methods, and even the beginning of physics and chemistry (Bauer & Wise, 2015).

**Logic stage in the modern classical school.** In the terms modern education prefers, the logic stage represents the beginning of teaching critical thinking. Where

students before learned only the facts of various subjects, now it is time to think about why these facts are true and why the reasoning behind each fact is important, or if it even is (Bauer & Wise, 2015). This stage builds upon the foundation of the grammar stage in that it is assumed that each student will be fluent in the basic skills of each subject.

Instead of memorizing dates in history, now students should begin to consider why the important events happened. Are there important patterns to notice? Do certain ideas have relationships with other facts? The mindset of looking for patterns and being able to apply these to ideas of the student's creation represents the essence of the logic stage (Bauer & Wise, 2015). Students will also still learn the ancient skills of traditional logic, forming arguments in the form of syllogisms, enthymemes, and propositions, while also learning how to identify and counter flaws in reasoning such as fallacies and other mistakes in constructing a valid argument.

**Rhetoric stage in the modern classical school.** Applied to the modern Classical school, students going into high school will be desperate to learn how to effectively express themselves, whether through their hair, clothes, or tastes in music and television. Therefore, the teaching of effective expression is well-timed. Building upon the factual knowledge of grammar school and the analysis of what is truly believable or valid in logic school, the rhetoric stage allows students to begin to understand how to present their own ideas in beautiful and persuasive ways (Bauer & Wise, 2015). The sad reality of the world is that, no matter how factually accurate an argument may be, most audiences will ignore the truth of a speaker's statements if they are not presented eloquently and persuasively. Zeno, the ancient thinker credited by Aristotle with the

creation of the logic stage, viewed that stage as a closed fist, able to punch the truth out of an argument impartially; rhetoric, however, could be represented by an open hand, desiring to reach out to others with effective communication (Robinson, 2013). This last stage of learning ensures that not only will students know themselves how to identify true statements, but also that they will be able to affect change in their communities, elevating their status from mere scholars to leaders.

**Great books in the modern classical school.** The study of the Great Books is by no means an easy one, but in the context of a classical education, it becomes manageable. Even when considering an enormous treatise that may be above the student's reading level, the trivium mindset will help the student undertake this challenge. To try to analyze a work by Plato, for example, would be near impossible for a student to try unless they had first established that they knew the basic content of Plato's writing, the grammar stage of reading the text. Next, in the logic stage of his or her reading, the student may pick out the arguments contained in the work, testing the parts for validity and inspecting the supports. Finally, the student will be able to express his or her thoughts and reactions to what they have just read, using their rhetoric skills. Many readers and even some teachers may be tempted to skip the first steps of this process, instead asking a young reader, for example, what they liked about a book they have just finished reading. If the young reader had not understood what they read, asking him or her to respond to the book is confusing for students, and can lead to a form of a short cut which readers can use through even higher level education, where readers react to something they have read before stopping to analyze the very topic they are discussing (Bauer, 2003).

**An Effective School**

An *effective school* today can be determined in two main ways. First, the resources consulted by researchers and lawmakers tend to be statistics in the form of test scores on several key tests throughout each student's education. The second way would be to see how many successful students each school produces. For this purpose, a *successful student* can be determined based on their success getting into college, if that is what the student wishes to pursue, and success in various majors or careers.

**Efficacy and Relevance of Classical Schools**

An effective school is a school which produces students who are ready to succeed. So, do classical schools produce students who are ready to succeed? The first way to compare students from classical schools with other schools would be to compare test scores. Often in the educational world, standardized test scores are the best way to see whether a school or a specific class is adhering to standards as well as to see where the students may need extra help.

The Association of Classical Christian Schools publishes their amalgamated data compared mainly to public, independent, and other religious schools. When comparing SAT scores, ACCS students in 2015 scored an average of 297.7 points higher than the national average. In terms of ACT scores, in English ACCS students averaged 6.8 points higher than the nationwide average, in science 4 points higher, in math 4.2 points higher, and 5.7 points higher in reading (ACCS, 2017).

Veritas Academy, a classical Christian school in Beaumont, Texas, argues that these test scores simply reflect the different goals of education at a Classical school;

classical curricula are not planned with the goal of their students passing standardized tests. Rather, they teach with the goal of producing students who can think and reason well, as well as students who are able to express what they know to others (Veritas Classical Academy, 2018). Further, as has been discussed, the study of Latin throughout Classical students' school careers will aid them in the areas of English and reading, major topics on the standardized tests taken.

Students do not prove their merit by their test scores alone; rather, these test scores allow classical students to attend a variety of universities. The ACCS includes in its statistics a selection of nearly one thousand students, listing how many attended America's top institutions. Of the students, 27% attended either one of the top fifty national universities according to US News and World Report or elite Christian Colleges (ACCS, 2017). In 2011, the Association of Classical Christian Schools found that 98.3% of their students continued their education at the college level. These facts lend themselves to the idea that classical students are indeed prepared and encouraged to attend college, and the education students receive at classical schools allows them to succeed in getting there.

In the modern educational setting, it can be easy to think that the ideas of the trivium are dated and therefore more difficult to integrate with modern educational practices. However, without direct consultation, there are many ways the modern psychology of learning aligns with the classical model. For a great example, examine the theories of Jean Piaget, an enormously influential thinker considered by many to be the leading child psychologist of the modern age. His theories are still studied today by

psychology majors and education majors alike not only because of their impact but also because of their practical use in the classroom (Singer & Revenson, 1996). Thinking purely as a psychologist, Piaget defined his stages of cognitive development in a way that aligns with the trivium almost perfectly.

Where students would be in grammar school aligns with Piaget's second stage of development, the preoperational stage. Here, the students are intently curious, asking all sorts of questions. This corresponds with the grammar stage because the student in this stage will receive answers to their questions at a level appropriate to them; they are not yet able to think logically, so instead they will feel satisfied in their knowledge on a topic after learning the basic facts.

In the next stage, Piaget stated that children until the age of about eleven are in the concrete operational phase and would therefore comprehend most things on a factual level. Where before, students were able to count from one to one-hundred, now they begin to connect that one-hundred does not exist in a vacuum, but rather represents one-hundred of a thing. Further, the goal of the grammar stage, which is to fill the student's head with as much information as they need, aids the student in developing what Piaget called a *schema*, a pattern of organization to understand the world (Singer & Revenson, 1996). This development is only possible because of the increased ability for students this age to think about things in a general whole rather than only in specific part. As the students learn more, they will be ready to begin questioning the reasons behind why the facts are the way they are in the next stage.

Around the time the student reaches seventh or eighth grade, though, they will be ready to start thinking about ideas on a more conceptual level. According to Piaget, after the age of eleven, the student will be ready to learn and interact with subject material of a less concrete nature. Where before students were expected to memorize and learn concrete facts and were able to explore topics by physically completing activities designed to reinforce them, now, students are capable of understanding topics of a more theoretical nature (Singer & Revenson, 1996). This means the students are ready to progress from the grammar stage to the logic stage, where the knowledge is mostly learned conceptually. Further, after the students have mastered the art of logic, they will be ready to move on to rhetoric and apply that knowledge.

Though the tenets of classical education can seem to lend themselves to the field of English best, students with a classical background flourish in a variety of different fields. Sister Miriam Joseph (2002) argued that the liberal arts represented the best preparation for work in a variety of professions because those arts teach students how to think and communicate well. The heart of the trivium involves teaching students how to write and speak well, skills which apply to a variety of careers besides the obvious English. Further, the fact that students are taught how to think well lends itself to almost any field. It can be easy to think that, since the core of classical education is the trivium, a structure deeply tied to the subject of English, it may be harder for students who wish to pursue a scientific career in college and beyond. However, the various aspects of the classical education prepare the future engineering, premed, or biology major just as much as the future English professors (Bauer & Wise, 2015). In the grammar stage, students

memorized the basic facts of the various fields. In the logic stage, students learned how to break down complex arguments and pay attention to detail, skills very useful when attempting to understand a long math word problem or identify variables in a scientific experiment. Rhetoric, as mentioned above, helps students learn how to communicate clearly and concisely. Latin will aid students as they learn new vocabulary, especially in the scientific fields where Latin origins are prevalent.

### **Opposition to Classical Education**

As with any philosophy of education, there are people who disagree with the assumptions and mindsets behind classical education. In general, it is easier to find critics of perennial schooling who prefer a more progressive focus on the child, viewing today's world as ever changing; if the world is changing, why would education not change as well? Progressive schools of thought tend to believe that the student should actively participate in their own education, whether by simply investigating topics actively or by thoroughly devising their own scheme of learning.

The issue is that these views which oppose the more traditional aspects of classical schooling were the very same ones which allowed public education to decline from 1940-1980 (ACCS, 2017). The public school system had embraced the progressive model popular at the time of its birth, where students would have more freedom of choice to pursue the subjects that interested them, but as is stated above, the numbers reflect how the schools influenced by this philosophy only encouraged educators to look for an alternative way to teach. This is not to say that progressive education is all evil, though. Adler and Weismann (2000) argued that the concept that "all genuine learning is active"

(p.194) was partially true and partially false; education can not be passive, so in that sense, the student must actively participate in order to learn something. However, if the idea is that all learning must purely involve the student doing things, the student's education will miss the important steps of their learning how to think. This philosophy, then, will result in a student population who is able to graduate having only learned via rote memorization (Adler & Weismann, 2000).

It also would be a false dichotomy to believe that only the more progressive school of thought believed in involving the learner actively or vice versa. Even if the pure focus is not on the student actively exploring different topics, it is critical for a classical student to engage with the subjects he or she encounters; whether engaging with a human teacher or a source of knowledge in the form of a book or computer, it is critical for both teacher and student to be actively participating in communication (Joseph, 2002).

### **Conclusion**

It can be surprising in today's society to hear that many parents are choosing to send their children to schools which use ancient methods like the trivium. No education model will be the best fit for every single student. However, the combined efforts of the trivium's three different stages, the teaching of Latin, and the study of the Great Books of Western Civilization all together prepare a classical student with the tools he or she will need to succeed in higher education and further into life. The evidence of this can be seen in the increased test scores, evidence of readiness for college, and the applicability of this curriculum across college fields. After examining each part of the classical model of the trivium along with the other aspects of the traditional curriculum, it is clear that modern

parents trust classical schooling to enable their children to learn about a wide variety of information, analyze it, and report their opinions and arguments about that same information clearly and gracefully.

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