



Triad of Learning

by Francesco Perruli

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Princeton Latin Academy, founded on the conviction that there is no substitute for knowledge, has placed its focus on the child as a student. The Academy, first and foremost interested in the child's intellectual development, provides a structured ambiance where true learning, because of discipline, occurs.

At Princeton Latin Academy, there are three important tasks the children must learn to do in order to become students; namely, class work, homework and taking tests. For the most part, children pay attention and accomplish their class work, which in reality, is the bulk of their learning. Test taking is an on-going skill they must practice on a regular basis. Of the three tasks, homework is the weakest link in the triad on the part of the children. I do believe this activity has not been

aptly named in English. For example, in Spanish the word is “tarea”, which simply means a task taken upon oneself. In French the word is “devoir”, meaning that which is owed in return for having been taught. Both words emphasize the responsibility of the individual. What strikes me most about the purpose of homework is to see what children can do on their own. It is not a time for learning, but rather a practice time for what has been taught. It is my conviction that parents should not help children with homework. Many children forfeit their time in class, by saying that they will wait for their mothers or fathers to explain the material at night. I believe this fosters an intellectual dependency that is counterproductive to the children's becoming students and autodidactic. In Russian, the expression “to learn” is the reflexive of “to teach”: therefore, to learn in Russian is to teach oneself.

Can they really work, having been born into a society that no longer values it; into a society that asks that everything be done for it? Personal responsibility ebbs quickly. People of little talent make big bucks. Sports are overemphasized. Music and the arts are dropped from curricula, seen as not pragmatic in comparison to math and science. Self-esteem is lauded at the expense of achievement. I prefer self-

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confidence for a child. Because of all that I have mentioned above, the children are less able to initiate any productive skills, whether they be linguistic or ratiocinative. Passivity has been inculcated by the push of a button and any task beyond one-step is now perceived as too difficult. Even their playtime is passive.

Remember the word for student comes from the Latin meaning to be eager. Children who do not feel an urgency to know will not learn. In addition, children are on the way of becoming students. It is not an easy road. This is the pedagogy of Princeton Latin Academy.

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