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Greg's Choice of Foreign Language—My choice of foreign language would be Spanish learned in conjunction with its Latin roots. This offers many of the benefits of Latin but with the practicality and availability of a *spoken* language. Knowledge of Latin is the most effective way to build and retain vocabulary, both English and Spanish, because the strong influence of the language of the Roman Empire produced many related words or "cognates" in each language. About 50-65% of English words are derived from Latin (90% of English words having more than two syllables) and about 80% of Spanish words are derived from Latin. Thus, most Spanish words are related to some English word. Knowledge of Latin opens the door to vocabulary like a master key in the same way that phonics unlocks reading skills.

To see these connections, even minimal Latin is beneficial. I found an interesting article showing how certain Spanish letter combinations originated from Latin. For example, the Spanish words *leche* and *ocho* are derived from Latin *lact-* and *octo* as the *ct* was adopted into Spanish as *ch*. Thus, seeing the Spanish word *dicho*, I can recognize the Latin *dict-*, which has the following English cognates: dictate, diction, dictionary, abdicate, addict, benediction, condition, contradict, edict, indicate, indict, interdict, jurisdiction, predicate, predict, and valedictorian (from *dicere*, meaning to speak). You will also find that nearly every Spanish word beginning with a silent *h* resulted from a Latin word beginning with a corresponding *f*, thus, the Spanish word *horca* is derived from the Latin *furc-*, meaning fork. In like manner, the Spanish word *puerta* (meaning door) comes from the Latin *port-*, as the sound of the letter *o* in Latin commonly morphed into Spanish *ue*. I wish my high-school Spanish teacher had taught me these things. Search for this article by title on the internet: "Spanish for Speakers of Latin." Even for those (like me) who do not speak Latin, the article is a great help in mastering Spanish vocabulary. To find the Latin origin of a specific Spanish word, go to the website www.RAE.es, click *diccionario*, and type the Spanish word in the box. One can then use *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary and Thesaurus electronic edition* to find all the English words whose etymology contains this Latin word. (This inexpensive dictionary must first be installed on your computer.) Try making linguistic connections to related English words. This facilitates learning another language by establishing, so to speak, a peg upon which to hang a new vocabulary word so that it can be retrieved later, even after short-term memory has faded.

Proficiency in a foreign language requires *thinking* in the language. Avoid a "translation mentality" that must convert each foreign word into English before it can be understood. Many foreign language programs are so absorbed in making sure that verb conjugations and noun declensions are impeccable with each word spelled correctly, that they delay the real accomplishment of foreign language study, namely, learning to hear, understand and speak the language. Compare the traditional approach of foreign language study with the way our children learn English. Who would try to teach a child to write a language, spelling each word correctly, without *first* accomplishing fluency in *speaking* the language? The traditional textbook approach to foreign languages might be as difficult as teaching a child profoundly deaf from birth to write English using perfect grammar and spelling.

Hear, understand and speak the language—make this your number one goal. The first order of business should be to build an extensive vocabulary, which any baby could tell you (if he could talk) begins with nouns, the names of things. Make opportunities for immersion in the spoken world of the new language. Listen to it even when it doesn't seem to make sense. (Remember, it worked for the baby.) Even if you can't travel to a distant country, it is possible to listen using audiotapes, CDs, videotapes, websites, etc. (see www.FamilyRadio.com).

Life at Our House—Jessica, our oldest daughter, graduated from high school in 2000 and has been teaching piano and guitar lessons at our home since then. She recently decided to take some classes at the university nearby and found that she had to retake the ACT because more than three years had elapsed since she took the test. I was pleased that three years after high school graduation she matched her previous score. After completing her second semester, she has done well in all her college classes (4.0). Her English composition teacher was quite impressed with her writing ability. I wish I could take some credit, but the writing that I taught her was limited. In her own words, here are "Nine Ways to Improve Yourself and Become a Better Writer": 1) Watch people, 2) Observe everything, especially details that other people don't notice, 3) Analyze people and thoughts and ideas and mannerisms and methods and behaviors, etc.—but don't judge, 4) Take it all in, 5) Listen, 6) Read (Information must be gathered so that it can be processed and reintroduced to the world as new ideas and fresh perspectives.), 7) Think about things from different perspectives, different angles, 8) Ask lots of questions—at the appropriate time, 9) Write. (In addition to her ideas, I might add number 10, Edit what you've written and write some more.) She jots down titles of articles she'd like to write. For example, "Please Be Shallow: The Importance of Using Tact and Diplomacy in Everyday Situations," and "The Retail Conspiracy: How Everyone is Out to Get Your Money" (after working a few day at a clothing store in a mall).

Russell, after a long battle with the math monster, graduated from high school this past December. (I am proud of him.) Then, Elliot and Jeffrey both graduated from high school in June. Jeffrey, though only sixteen, has kept up with his brothers in all their studies. His math score on the ACT was only 22, but his composite of 27 gained him a half scholarship to the University of Memphis (which is about seven blocks from our house). Update: He retook the ACT in April and just received his scores. His composite improved by one point, science reasoning stayed the same, reading fell three points, math gained two, and English six. (I attribute some of his gain in English to the Institute for Excellence in Writing, a program that my wife has done with some neighborhood homeschoolers. This program combines video instruction and writing exercises (see www.writing-edu.com for more information).

From the Heart—Unlocking the mind. Little children seem to have an insatiable desire for knowledge. They explore their world and seek out the treasures of knowledge. They ask a million questions and seek even more answers, as if they had an inborn sense that words unlock the world. It has been said that knowledge is power. If so, this power is locked up and guarded by ignorance. Learning is the mastery of the keys that unlock this treasure. A key is such a simple yet marvelous invention, but how easily lost. The doors of knowledge can be unlocked by a teacher, but it remains for the student to retain the keys, go through the portals of learning and make use of the pathways of knowledge. The responsibility of the teacher is to convey to the student the *usefulness* of the knowledge learned so that it will be retained. In the words of Alfred N. Whitehead, "The result of teaching small parts of a large number of subjects is the passive reception of disconnected ideas, not illumined with any spark of vitality. Let the main ideas which are introduced into a child's education be few and important, and let them be thrown into every combination possible." Let the *use* of what is learned be so frequent that it becomes to the student as house keys—the most important kept readily available and connected together so that they are not easily lost. If the meanings of words are doors that can be unlocked by education, memorization of definitions is one way to open these doors. With this method, however, each door requires a separate key, the passages seem to go nowhere, and one's collection of keys is diminished with time. Why is it that after years of schooling, so much of what was once known is no more? Perhaps because keys that are never used are burdensome, even though potentially useful. They slip from the key chain and no one cares to put them back—they are dropped by the wayside. They are left behind along the unseen pathways of the mind and remain hidden in dark recesses seldom traversed.

One peculiar inhabitant of this world of the mind is named Learning. He delights in the exploration and discovery of new things (as well as recovery of old things). He is *led* by the joy of discovery, but will not be mastered by compulsion. He will rather die than be coerced. He treasures the world of reading and rejoices to find a master key that opens doors to vocabulary. In the realm of word *meanings*, how marvelous to realize that nearby and within reach, can be found such master keys in the form of word roots. What a fantastic discovery when locked out of one treasure room, to find that there are secret passages linking it to an array of neighbors. This world is deeper than the surface roads of traditional schooling, where many of the travelers and even the tour-guides are unaware of secret passages that connect hidden treasure rooms. Learning has quite a desire to explore such a world laced with the subterranean corridors extending into many languages, traversing centuries and paralleling the history of civilization. These explorations are like linguistic spelunking (a.k.a. cave exploring). Linguistic pathways take many surprising turns and twists; they extend farther than the eye can see. In this world, the most skillful navigate, not by sight, but by ear. This is because words, throughout history, have been transmitted from one language to another, not primarily by the way they were written, but by their sound. Learning relishes the stories they tell.

Try this art of linguistic spelunking (also known as etymology). Consider a multi-syllable word. Mark off prefixes and suffixes; trace the root back to its Latin or Greek origin. Speak a word and listen for reverberations. For example: *Project*, . . . *rejected*, . . . *injector*, . . . *objective*, . . . *ejecting*, . . . *interjection*, . . . *dejected*, . . . *abject*, . . . *adjective*, . . . *conjecture*, . . . *trajectory*, . . . *subject*, . . . *jettison*, . . . and even *adjacent*. Discover amazing connections. Follow the passages that diverge. One might appear to be a dead end, only to open great expanses beyond the realm of English speakers; others continue extensively, branching widely. Narrow passages can open into great chambers if you go beyond the limits of exploring only English-speaking territory. Who would have thought? Look around. By means of word roots, related words can be used to unlock the meaning of a new, unknown or forgotten word, just as RAID-configured computer hard drives allow a failed drive to be removed and replaced and the missing data automatically restored by comparison with that remaining. Study of word roots amasses an educational tool kit that can be used for a lifetime to build and rebuild the understanding.

In contrast, learning to read by the sight-word method, acquiring math facts by drill and rote, and improving vocabulary and spelling by memorization of lists, all lack the ability to rebuild what has been lost or to discover what is unknown. Remember, rock-solid bits of *unconnected* knowledge are as sand and building upon such a

foundation is the epitome of foolishness. Even if sand particles are arranged in a nice order (e.g., alphabetically), the lack of connectedness would doom whatever is built on such a foundation. Memorization does not hold up as a glue to bind isolated facts. Do not settle for unconnected education.

Consider building a statue as one model for education. A structure already built elsewhere is to be reconstructed in the mind of a student. It must first be disassembled to pass through the portals into the territory of the new owner. Building cannot proceed until the foundation is completed. This mindset of conventional education begins with a foundation of memorized facts and then successively builds up the entire structure. How familiar. At first glance, this looks like the ideal model for education.

But wait. Consider for a moment an alternate model—not an inanimate statue, but a living, developing mind into which new knowledge is incorporated like scions grafted into the healthy stock of an established tree. Historically, academic disciplines were not conquered by starting with a foundational understanding and proceeding to the individual details. Rather, the details, the particulars, the elements, the peculiarities, and the unique features invited the discoveries that led to the establishment of foundational understanding. Try this method with your children. Begin with stories and biographies, experiments and eyewitness accounts. When enough of these have been incorporated into the working knowledge of the student, the discoveries, the inventions and the lives of historical figures will help build and reinforce the foundational understanding. Living sprigs of learning, transplanted or grafted into a curious mind become solid—as integral as the fiber, the warp and woof, of a tapestry. May you learn the joy of unlocking, discovering, exploring, and connecting the details of the awesome world of God's creation in everything you learn.

Unlocking the Truth,

Greg Stablein