Quintilian: *Institutio Oratoria* 3.2-13

Quintilian (35-95 CE) wrote the *Institutio Oratoria* (“The Orator’s Education”) in first-century Rome, the height of the Pax Romana. His views have influenced educational practice ever since, especially in the Renaissance, laying the groundwork for rhetorical instruction until the emphasis in the field shifted from oral to written composition in the nineteenth century.

Rhetoric, or the theory of effective communication, was for Quintilian merely the tool of the broadly educated citizen who was capable of analysis, reflection, and then powerful action in public affairs. Oratorical excellence resulted from native skill as a speaker along with extensive background reading in philosophy and the liberal arts and intensive writing practice, with the goal of producing “a good man skilled at speaking.”

The cradle was not too early to begin this education, according to Quintilian. Supposedly cutting-edge early education approaches today, such as Baby Einstein and LeapFrog, only echo many of the principles this ancient teacher advocated. As the pupil progresses, each step is carefully laid out in his twelve-book instruction manual on how to grow a lawyer.

In the following excerpt, the author outlines the specific qualities a good boy (*probus*) must exhibit in order to become an ideal student. For instance, he must be able to be nurtured and shaped by the superior guidance and talents of a master-teacher, one like Quintilian himself.

**Text and Translation**

*Ingenii signum in parvis praecipuum memoria est: eius duplex virtus, facile percipere et fideliter continere. Proximum imitatio: nam id quoque est*

In children, the principal sign of talent is memory. (Its) quality is two-fold, to understand (things) easily and to retain (them) accurately. Next (is) the ability to imitate: for that is also a part


2. *percipere: percipio, percipere, -cepi, -ceptum: comprehend fideliter: adverb of fidelis, -e: faithfully; here, accurately proximum: proximus, -a, -um: next imitatio: imitatio, -onis, f.: imitation; here, the abstract quality of imitating quoque: (adverb/conjunction) also; placed after the word it emphasizes*
docilis naturae; nam probus quoque in primis erit ille verē ingeniosus.
of a teachable character; for a good boy also will be the one in his earliest years (who seems) truly
gifted.

Alioque non peius duxerim tardi esse ingeni quam mali: probus autem ab
And I would not consider (it) any worse of a problem that he is slow-witted than (that he is)
ill-behaved: however, the good boy

illo segni et iacente plurimum aberit. Hic meus quae tradentur non difficulter
will be very different from one (who is) slow and lethargic. This (student) of mine will absorb
without difficulty what will be taught (to him)

accipiet, quaedam etiam interrogabit: sequetur tamen magis quam praecurrret.
and certain things he will even ask about: nevertheless, he will follow (the teacher) rather than get
ahead (of the class).

3. docilis: docilis, -e: teachable
   probus: probus, -a, -um: good
   primis: primus, -a, -um: first; here with in, in the earliest years (of a student’s education)
   verē: (adverb) truly
   ingeniosus: ingeniosus, -a, -um: gifted

4. peius: comparative adverb; here with non, less of a problem
   duxerim: I would consider; perfect active subjunctive 1st sing. of duco
   tardi ... ingenii: gen. of characteristic, literally “of slow intelligence”; here, slow-witted
   mali (ingenii): here, ill-behaved

5. segni: segnis, -e: slow
   iacente: iaceo, -_re, iacui: be idle; here, (being) lethargic
   plurimum: (superlative adverb) very
   aberit: absum, abesse, afui: be far removed, be different
   tradentur: trado, -ere, -didi, -ditum: teach
   difficulter: (adverb) with difficulty

6. interrogabit: interrogo (1): ask
   sequetur: sequor, sequi, securtus sum (deponent verb): he will follow
   magis: (adverb) rather
   praecurrret: praecurro, -currere, -cucurri, -cursum: go on ahead
Mihi ille detur puer quem laus excitet, quem gloria iuvet, qui victus fleat.
Let that boy be given to me whom praise motivates, whom recognition encourages, who (when) bested, cries.

Hic erit alendus ambitu, hunc mordebit obiurgatio, hunc honor excitabat, in
This boy will have to be nourished through his desire for achievement, criticism will sting him, admiration will spur him on,

hoc desidiam numquam verebor. Danda est tamen omnibus aliqua remissio,
in this boy I will never worry about laziness. There must be given to everyone, nevertheless, some leniency,

non solum quia nulla res est quae perferre possit continuum laborem, sed
not only because there is no matter which is able to withstand unremitting effort, but also

quod studium discendi voluntate, quae cogi non potest, constat. Modus
because the love of learning rests upon a willingness (to learn) which is not able to be compelled.

7. detur: let him be given; present passive subjunctive 3rd sing. of do, dare, dedi, datum
excitet: (it) motivates; present active subjunctive 3rd sing. of excito (1)
iujet: (it) encourages; present active subjunctive 3rd sing. of iuvo
fleat: (he) cries; present active subjunctive 3rd sing. of fleo, -ere, flevi, fletum

8. alendus: alo, -ere, alui, altum: nourish
ambitu: ambitus, -ūs, m.: desire for popularity; here, desire for achievement
mordebit: mordeo, -ere, momordi, morsum: bite; here, sting
obiurgatio: obiurgatio, -onis, f.: reproach; here, criticism
honor: honor, -oris, m.: a mark of respect; here, recognition

9. desidiam: desidia, -ae, f.: idleness
verebor: vereor, -eri, veritus sum (deponent verb); I will worry
remissio: remissio, -onis, f.: leniency, indulgence

10. quia: (conjunction) because
perferre: perfero, perferre, pertuli, perlatum: stand
continuum: continuus, -a, -um: unremitting

11. discendi: disco, -ere, didici: learn; genitive gerund (verbal noun); here, of learning
voluntate: voluntas, -tatis, f.: willingness
cogi: cogo, -ere, coegi, coactum: compel
constat: consto, -are, -stiti, -statum: rest on
modus: modus, -i, m.: limit
tamen sit remissionibus, ne aut odium studiorum faciant negatae aut otii
Nevertheless, there should be a limit to indulgences, lest either (when they are) denied, they create a
dislike of studies or

consuetudinem nimiae. Sunt etiam nonnulli acuendis puerorum ingeniiis non
(when they are) too frequent, (they create) the expectation of leisure. There are even some games
(which are) not useless in sharpening boys’ minds.

inutiles lusūs, cum positis invicem cuiusque generis quaestiunculis
(e especially) when they compete (against one another) with debate questions of every sort posed
back and forth.

aemulantur. Mores quoque se inter ludendum simplicius detegunt. 15
Character also reveals itself quite naturally in the course of (their) playing.

12. sit: there should be; present subjunctive 3rd sing. of sum
   ne: (conjunction) lest, not
   odium: odium, -ii, n.: dislike
   faciant: with ne, so that they do not create; present active subjunctive 3rd pl. of facio

13. consuetudinem: consuetudo, -tudinis, f.: habit; here, expectation
   nimiae: nimius, -a, -um: too frequent
   nonnulli: nonnullus, -a, -um: several
   acuendis: acuo, acuere, acui, acutum: sharpen to a point; here with ingeniis, in sharpening the
   minds

14. inutiles: inutilis, -e: useless
   lusus: lusus, -ūs, m.: game
   cum: (conjunction) when
   positis: pono, -ere, posui, positum: put, pose
   invicem: (adverb) back and forth
   quaestiunculis: quaestiuncula, -ae, f.: a little question (diminutive of quaestio, “question”)

15. aemulantur: aemulor, -ari (deponent verb): they compete
   inter ludendum: ludo, -ere, lusi, lusum: play; neuter accusative gerund (verbal noun); here, in
   the course of (their) playing
   simplicius: quite naturally; comparative adverb of simplex, simplicis (“simple”)
   detegunt: detego, -ere, -texti, -textum: reveal