

# CLASIS

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*Sine doctrina vita est quasi mortis imago*

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## The Particular Prospects of the Pre-Polly Stage

by Tom Garfield

*Part I of this article appeared in the December 2005 issue.*

Previously, Tom Garfield explained the need for identifying this “Pre-Polly” stage and began discussing the problems encountered with not studying the unique elements of these 5-7 year olds. Problems mentioned were: 1) denying the built-in, natural differences between these students and older counterparts, 2) not taking advantage of the unique characteristics of this stage, 3) disregarding the essence of Gregory’s Law of the Lesson, and 4) understanding that the results of a poor foundation won’t be seen for years. Historically, Western pedagogies began at age 7-8, so Mr. Garfield set aside the argument of whether or not we should begin formal schooling at age 5 and worked from the fact that schools do begin at that time. The article resumes as he was pointing out that Pre-Polly children rely heavily on their five senses to gain information, grow and change at a rapid pace, and still retain the “Amazement Factor.”

**Match teaching methods to the characteristics.** So let’s be consistent with the methods behind the Trivium; let’s cut with the grain. We’ve studied the direction of the grain, now to cut.

1. **Senses are there to use in guided discovery and exploration.** Some may react just to those last terms, especially if you’ve only seen them used in a humanistic, whole language situation. But just get over it, there’s nothing wrong with using what works. Consider it plundering the Egyptians if it helps, but frankly I believe good teachers have been doing these things since the Ark. Pre-Polly children respond wonder-fully (get it?) to discovering patterns in math, exploring the different combinations of sounds with phonics, discovering what happens when vinegar and baking soda are mixed (things are never old to these guys!) And remember, Gregory of the *Seven Laws of Teaching* fame, states that a child learns best what he learns on “his own” (guided discovery). For these guys, tangible makes it real.

2. **Integrate with all involved.** Integration of knowledge is greatly aided by using those active senses at this stage. In math, for instance, sorting, counting objects by name (which happens to start with the phonic blends they’re learning) and then writing the numbers derived illustrates the natural overlap or integration the students benefit from. Take science studies that correspond to the stories they are reading together, then use the animals, for example, for math practice. Have them write illustrated stories themselves to reinforce good hand-writing as well as the material. This takes a lot of planning by the teacher since

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## The Particular Prospects...*part II*

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few programs have the total practical as well as philosophical aspects teachers in the Pre-Polly need. That sort of activity also involves every child being involved, vs. many watching while one or two answer or go up front. This is also good practice for the full-participation in chanting and reciting that the poll-parrot students enjoy.

### 3. **Move from simple to complex.**

The law of teaching (Gregory again) regarding moving

from the known to the unknown is very critical for teaching these little ones. Beginning with what they understand and can relate to, usually something that they did yesterday, is the frequent starting point. Here again, planning is key, but so what else is new? But the goal is to move from, for example, the simple sounds of letters to the complex concept of actually reading. Relying only on the recitation of facts, as is appropriate in the poll-parrot, is inappropriate here because they need to get the foundation laid for so many areas. Reciting alone will not move them from simple tasks to a more complex practice. Recognition and use of the letters of the alphabet is frankly just a necessary concept, not sheer memory. They need to develop (and they will) a "feel" for the connection between the written symbol and the sound associated with it.

4. **Move from physical to abstract.** An example of this would be the simple identification of a pattern in beads, to the concept of written numbers representing a similar pattern. Here again the appeal to their senses works in moving them to understand that concrete objects having a relationship to written symbols.

### **Critical preparations for making the most of the full grammar stage**

Everything they learn is a preparation for learning more.

### **Conceptual/preparatory needs**

God designed these active little ones to learn from imitation, from being led to discover a truth, and just generally through their heightened senses. They are learning to make some order or sense out of the world. Even

though they don't grasp the greater cause behind the concept, it is important that they do learn some concepts. That is, they do need to understand HOW certain

things work the way do. The WHY isn't as important as HOW many beads make up 4, or HOW a paint brush is held, or HOW to form an H so it looks "right." It all leads to knowing HOW things are supposed to be done before you go on with the next step.

### **Strong foundations of building on previous knowledge**

As I have referred to before, the *Seven Laws of Teaching* make it clear that all learning and teaching needs to be inter-connected to be the most productive. To make the most of the full-grammar stage, a teacher must rely on the foundations of learning that the students have gained, at home or at school, before entering her poll-parrot classroom. Again, this is historically marked at about age eight or the third grade in most schools. We have seen the very real necessity of these students to read, write and cipher BEFORE they can do all we wish to do beginning at that level, not the least of which is learn Latin. Reading, writing, and math are foundational means to ends, not ends in themselves. The end goal being the obtaining of further knowledge. History, science, even studying God's Word all require a good grasp of the importance and skills of reading, writing, and math.

### **Setting patterns of learning—there is more**

Finally, one of the best lessons to be learned

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in the Pre-Polly stage is that the world is a very big place and that there is far more to what they have heard, touched, tasted, and seen than the teacher showed them, or that they learned "themselves." This idea can be impressed, and understood in a limited way, even by second graders, without overwhelming them. Then they are prepared to read more and listen more in third grade. The patterns of learning have started well, and are now ready to mature into the full Poll-parrot practices.

**Conclusion: To repeat - Don't waste/misspend this "wet cement" time**

**1. Repeat grades more often, appropriately in K-2.** There is no fire. Don't rush into teaching materials or methods the students as a whole are not ready for. Reading readiness, for instance, is affected by maturation, as well as instruction. Rushing boys into and through kindergarten or first grade, is often a sure-fire means to have them repeat second grade. On the other hand, repeats are necessary even when there was no conscious effort to rush. That's OK— better to take the time to set the foundations than to move on without them. Our record of repeats is very positive. Again, there is no fire.

**2. Set the tone for their view of school and learning.** The Pre- Polly stage should be an overall time of security, good memories of lots of wonderful experiences, steady growth in understanding things, and a love for school. This is a unique period of time, one of the significant stages children grow into and out of, and we must not overlook it or waste its potential for setting the joy of learning in the students' hearts.

**Tom Garfield is superintendent of Logos School in Moscow, ID. Logos is currently celebrating its 25th year of operation. He is married to Julie and they are the parents of four Logos graduates and the grandparents of a grandson.**

**In Memoriam****Joshua Nygaard***died November 17, 2005**Logos School alumnus, Moscow, ID***Clete Childs***died November 18, 2005**Caldwell Academy student, Greensboro, NC***Emily Law***died November 19, 2005**Logos School alumna, Moscow, ID***ACCS Accredited  
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