Juan Luis Vives on the Greatest Goods of Liberal Arts Instruction—Piety, Paper and Ink

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For centuries, Christian teachers have looked to the first-century pagan rhetorician Quintilian for instructional guidance in the liberal arts. James L. Golden, Goodwin F. Berquist, and William E. Coleman point out in *The Rhetoric of Western Thought*, “Quintilian’s comprehensive system of education, with its central focus on the ‘good man,’ appealed at once to ethical Christians: no matter that Roman and Christian ideas of morality failed to coincide. From the fifth century A.D. to the Renaissance, the educational concepts of Quintilian dominated Western thought” (60). Although a detailed examination of Quintilian’s influence on Christian teachers and their instruction goes beyond the bounds of this present study, a brief catalog of notable figures shaped by him will suffice.¹

The first and most notable Christian scholar to follow in the steps of Quintilian was Jerome (347-420), as demonstrated in his letter of catechetical instruction to Laeta, which reveals the unmistakable methods of the Roman rhetorician, converted for Christian purposes. Similarly impressed was the Bishop of Hippo, Saint Augustine (354-430), who “was himself a teacher of rhetoric in a school following Quintilian’s program” (Murphy, *Quintilian* xxxix). Professor James J. O’Donnell, corroborating the scholarship of Harald Hagendahl,² affirms that Augustine read many Latin authors from antiquity, including Quintilian (“Augustine’s”). Also in the early Middle Ages are references to Quintilian in the works of Isidore of Seville (570-636), Cassiodorus (480-575), and Alcuin (732-804). However, by the late Middle Ages, when the only

text of the *Institutio Oratoria* had become mutilated, not many scholars made reference to the work. One of the few, John of Salisbury (1115-1180), modeled his educational curriculum in the *Metalogicon* according to that of Quintilian.

A little more than a century later, in the early Renaissance, we find Petrarch (1304-74) paying Quintilian a great compliment in a letter, extolling the teacher of rhetoric with these words: “Thou hast performed the office of the whetstone rather than that of the knife, and thou hast had greater success in building up the orator than in causing him to excel in the courts; thou wert a great man, I grant, but thy greatest merit lay in the ability to ground and to mold great men” (quoted in Little, Vol. II, 21). Clearly, Renaissance thinkers believed in the importance of Quintilian’s educational aim to equip citizens in the supreme liberal art of rhetoric.

Indeed, Quintilian’s ideas became born anew when, in 1416, a papal secretary named Poggio Bracciolini investigated a dank tower of the abbey church in St. Gall, Switzerland. To his great surprise and delight, he made an amazing find, as he recounts in his correspondence to two friends, Leonardo Bruni and Niccolò Niccoli: “In the middle of a well-stocked library, too large to catalogue at present, we discovered Quintilian, safe as yet and sound, though covered with dust and filthy with neglect and age” (qtd. in Bowen 219). After painstakingly copying the entire manuscript, Poggio brought it back to Italy, where his own rendition was then reproduced and eagerly distributed among curious scholars.³

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² *Augustine and the Latin Classics*, 224-25.
³ Concerning the discovery, Thomas M. Conley writes, “The new version contained the parts of the work that had been missing in the manuscripts previously available—important parts, including the preface and opening chapter of Book One, the entire section on figures of thought in Book Nine, and the last half of Book Twelve. Scholars were now able to appreciate and contemplate the most comprehensive treatment of rhetoric ever composed. Quintilian’s reputation was considerably enhanced, and such key notions as that of the core relation between *virtus* and eloquence and that of the universal range of rhetoric took on a new significance. Together with the new picture of rhetoric as actually practiced, which the Renaissance humanists were able to get from the newly discovered speeches of Cicero, the *Institutes* provided them with new inspiration and increased motivation for total devotion to the study of Roman rhetoric” (112).
The almost immediate result, especially with the eventual aid of the printing press, was that Quintilian became celebrated for his educational wisdom once again. Vittorino da Feltre (1378-1446) revered Quintilian so much that he earned the nickname “Quintilianus redivivus,” or “Quintilian living again” (Quintilian, Murphy xlii). Likewise, Laurenzo Valla (1407-1457) became such a strong advocate for Quintilian that his first work, *De comparatione Ciceronis Quintilianique*, written when he was only twenty-one, “claimed greater importance for the rhetorical and philological studies of Quintilian than for Cicero’s” (*Oxford Classical Dictionary* 372). A mounting fervor for the *Institutio* during the middle of the fifteenth century explains why it was one of the first rhetorical texts to be printed (*Quintilian*, Murphy xlii). Thus, it is understandable that from the time Erasmus was born—fifty years after Poggio’s celebrated discovery—until the time of his death in 1536, nearly one hundred editions of the *Institutio oratoria* were published. Its popularity denotes the most obvious reason why Erasmus read the *Institutio*; and its sound wisdom explains why he based much of his educational theory on Quintilian’s ideas. Accordingly, Erasmus’s student and longtime friend, Juan Luis Vives, came to read the work with similar zeal.

Born in the year Christopher Columbus set sail for the New World, Juan Luis Vives—a native of Valencia, Spain—acquired the nickname the “second Quintilian” because of his proximate birthplace to that of the ancient rhetorician (Corbett 551). Nonetheless, several noteworthy, yet overlooked, comparisons between the two men go beyond their common place of

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4 Gerald L. Gutek explains, “Following Quintilian’s admonitions, Vittorino’s methodology emphasized the recognition of individual differences among the students. A child was not to be forced into a line of rigidly prescribed study but was to be encouraged to develop according to his capacity and interests. As soon as he noticed a particular interest in a student, Vittorino adjusted the method of his teaching. The school at Mantua became a model for other humanist educators who sought to emulate the success of Vittorino” (106).
5 This calculation is based upon Murphy’s printing history facts (*Quintilian*, Murphy xlii).
origin. Both obtained a solid primary education; this included the rigors of grammar instruction in the classical languages, of which they became experts.\(^7\) Both left their home in their late teens to acquire advanced training in the liberal arts; Quintilian went to Rome, and Vives went to Paris. Both were shaped by several years of mentoring from prominent scholars of their day; Domitius Afer became Quintilian’s guide, and Erasmus became Vives’s. Both taught rhetoric; Quintilian at a publicly funded school in Rome, and Vives at Louvain and Oxford. Both received patronage from powerful—albeit ruthless—leaders; Domitian charged Quintilian with the job of tutoring his two nephews, who were heirs to the throne, and Henry VIII (to whom Vives dedicated his translation of Augustine’s *Civitas Dei*, at the behest of Catherine of Aragon), commissioned Vives to direct the instruction of their daughter, Princess Mary. Both teachers authored landmark educational tomes which promoted a distinctly moral approach to the goal of a student’s formation as a human being, employing writing as a central method of instruction—Quintilian wrote the *Institutio Oratoria*, and Vives the *De Disciplinis*. And finally, both thinkers, although their work has had a definite and lasting influence upon Western educational thought and practice, have largely been forgotten or ignored today.

Despite the similarities between the two men, Vives’ ideas should not be perceived as a simple repetition of Quintilian’s, just as it would be erroneous to consider Quintilian’s views to be a mere rehashing of Cicero’s. Vives translator Foster Watson, whom Carlos G. Noreña deferentially describes as “a tireless British erudite and enthusiastic hispanophile” (Vives Bibliography xi), warns against this reading of Vives for several reasons:

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\(^6\) The distance between Calagurris—the ancient birthplace of Quintilian, in what is now northeastern Spain, located on the river Ebro—and Valencia—Vives’ birthplace, situated on the Mediterranean coast—can be estimated to be within 250 miles.

\(^7\) Edward V. George reports that Vives studied grammar with two teachers, Daniel Siso and Jeronimo Amiguet, at the *Estudio General* in Valencia (xxix).
If the term “second Quintilian” were to be taken in the sense of reproducing the views of Quintilian or of authors of antiquity solely, a sense in which it was certainly not meant by the 16th century, it would be an inadequate description of Vives, and we should lose part of its complimentary import. For Vives was to the Europe of his time what Quintilian had been in the first century A.D. to Rome. He was the modern Quintilian, prepared to incorporate what was best and permanent in humanity from the ancients, but to use the ancient writers as a starting place, and not as a goal, in education and in all other “arts” and branches of knowledge. He had passed over the bridge separating the mediaeval and modern ages, and had entered on the “way-making” side of the modern world. He was the Quintilian of the Renascence, in looking forward towards the conceptions of the golden age placed in the future, not in the past. (On Education ci-cii)

Sensitive to many of Quintilian’s basic concerns about education, including questions regarding the ultimate aim of learning and considerations about the best methods to achieve that aim, Vives sought his own solutions, which in some cases extended or modified Quintilian’s ideas and methods.

Like his forbear Quintilian, Vives became renowned for his intellectual prowess as an explorer of diverse and expansive realms of knowledge, although with some controversy. After studying Latin grammar and Greek classics in his native Valencia, he traveled to the University of Paris in 1509, at that time considered “the academic center of the Christian world” (George xxix), where he threw himself into the study of scholastic philosophy at the College de Montaigu. Yet, to his dismay, the confining nature of deductive logic, the common staple of university learning at the time, became increasingly frustrating. As Vives bitingly explains in one of his earliest books, Contra pseudodialecticos (1519), “Who is not familiar with the current saying
that in Paris our youth are taught nothing save to rant and rave in displays of endless verbosity? Other institutions have their useless and futile branches of learning…only in Paris does one encounter the most idiotic and frivolous froth to the exclusion of all else” (quoted in Rummel 184). Vives had little patience for the dialecticians’ limiting course of study. In *The Humanist-Scholastic Debate in the Renaissance and Reformation*, Erika Rummel explains how Vives became firmly convinced that serious harm was done to the soul by a theological curriculum that contaminated religion with sophistry (185). Ultimately, Vives was faced with a choice between medieval scholasticism, with its emphasis on logic and dialectic, or Renaissance humanism, with its affirmation of grammar and rhetoric. As Noreña comments, “Vives repudiated terministic logic because it represented a wasteful and misdirected form of human energy and encouraged the wrong emotional dispositions such as contentiousness, vanity, and lack of concern and interest for the challenges faced by individuals in their private and social life” (*Passions* ii).

Once Vives rejected the life of a scholastic in favor of the life of a humanist, as a teacher and writer he became an important representative of the Northern Renaissance, winning the esteem and favor of several contemporaries, including Sir Thomas More and Erasmus. Corresponding with Erasmus in 1519, More asks, after reading Vives’ scathing diatribe against the dialecticians in *Contra pseudodialecticos*, “Who surpasses Vives in number and quality of his studies? . . . And who instructs with more clearness, with more pleasure, or with more success

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8 Some years later, in *The Causes of the Corruptions of the Arts* (1531), Vives continues to voice his concern for young boys debased by a steady diet of dialectic, writing that “even the youngest scholars (tyrones) are accustomed never to keep silence; they are always asserting vigorously whatever comes uppermost in their minds, lest they should seem to be giving up the dispute. Nor does one disputation or even two each day prove sufficient, as for instance at dinner. They wrangle at breakfast; they wrangle after breakfast; before supper they wrangle, and they wrangle after supper . . . . At home they dispute, out of doors they dispute. They wrangle over their food, in the bath, in the sweating-room, in the church, in the town, in the country, in public, in private; at all times they are wrangling,” (quoted in *Tudor School-Boy Life*, Introduction: x); translated by Foster Watson from *De Causis Corruptarum Artium*, Opera VI: 50.
than Vives?” (quoted in Watson xxiii). To this, Erasmus responds, “As to the ability of
Ludovicus Vives, I rejoice that my estimate of him agrees with yours. He is one of the number of
those who will overshadow the name of Erasmus. There is no one to whom I am better inclined”
(quoted in Watson xxiii).

Vives never did supplant Erasmus as a thinker or writer, adept and prolific as Erasmus
ultimately became within intellectual history; yet he did surpass him as a teacher who possessed a
keen awareness of the educational exigencies of his era, comparable in this regard to Quintilian
in his own time. Vives’ demonstrates his innovative instructional approaches most adeptly in the
De Disciplinis. Considered by many to be the most systematic and authoritative work on
education written in the sixteenth century, the De Disciplinis actually represents two works that
were printed together under one title. The first, called the De Causis Corruptarum Artium or
Causes of the Corruptions of the Liberal Arts, consists of seven books that examine various
factors contributing to the degradation of knowledge in Vives’ day. The second work, entitled De
Tradendis Disciplinis or the Transmission of Knowledge, contains five books that attempt to
remedy the problems presented in the first part. In the preface to De Disciplinis, Vives
expresses a purpose that is, in some ways, similar to Quintilian’s intentions for the Institutio
Oratoria. He begins,

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9 William Harrison Woodward rightly observes, “This comprehensive work, by far the most systematic of those produced by the Revival, is not only compiled (as is inevitable) upon the basis of Aristotle, Plutarch, and Quintilian, but also draws from the masters and writers of the fifteenth century, notably from Erasmus. But, notwithstanding this dependence, the breadth and the methodical presentation of the De Tradendis Disciplinis [the second of the two books that make up De Disciplinis] rendered it the standing authority to which authors and workers in the fields of education uniformly turned for a century or more” (184).

10 Foster Watson first translated the second part of De Disciplinis into English in 1913, and its most recent printing has been titled Vives: On Education. I will refer to material from the Transmission of Knowledge from here on as coming from the latest title, On Education.
When I reflected that there is nothing in life more beautiful or more excellent than the
cultivation of the mind through what we call the branches of learning (disciplinae), by
means of which we separate ourselves from the way of life and customs of animals and
are restored to humanity, and raised towards God Himself, I determined to write on the
subject, as far as my powers let me, and to do so, if I am not mistaken, in a manner
different from what most of our predecessors have done. (8)

Locating himself in the Isocratic tradition, Vives also affirms the central role that the
disciplines or arts of knowledge play in distinguishing ourselves from the animals, just as
Quintilian does, stating in the same chapter of Book II, “In truth, the sovereign deity, the parent
of all things, the architect of the world, has distinguished man from other beings, such at least as
were to be mortal, by nothing more than by the faculty of speech” (II.16.12). As a Christian
theorist of liberal arts education and knowledge, however, Vives distinguishes himself from
Quintilian; he links the arts—constructions of language—with humanity and its Creator, whom
he believes to be the God of Israel, who ultimately fulfills his purposes through his son Jesus
Christ. Furthermore, Vives recognizes that the arts can be vehicles of grace to move humans
nearer to God and his ways. Thus, Vives gives a distinctly theological justification for his
exploration of, and reflection upon, the academic disciplines, a justification that builds upon the
notions of Isocrates and Quintilian, but points to the revelation of God as it is found in the Bible.

In his extensive bibliographic review of scholarship on Vives, Carlos G. Noreña writes, “Vives’

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11 In fourth-century Athens, the great rhetorician Isocrates wrote in the Antidosis, “Because there has been
implanted in us the power to persuade each other, and to make clear to each other whatever we desire, not only have
we escaped the life of wild beasts, but we have come together and founded cities, and made laws, and invented arts”
(327).
sincere Christian fervor has been minimized or denied by those who emphasized his commitment
to education and to social justice” (Bibliography ii).

In the De Tradendis Disciplinis, Vives claims that study, the exertion of discipline to
apprehend and employ the arts of knowledge, should ultimately provoke an important question:
“For what is the good of fatiguing oneself with this effort, if nothing is gained by desires except
fresh desires; if the end of one longing is the beginning of another; if we work continually, and
there is no end or rest?” (On Education 17). The question he raises is an old one. It echoes a
query found in Ecclesiastes, one expressed candidly by the text’s skeptical speaker, who says,
“For though someone toils with wisdom, knowledge, and skill he must leave it all to one who has
spent no labour on it. This too is futility and a great wrong. What reward does anyone have for
all his labour, his planning, and his toil here under the sun?” (2: 21-22 Oxford Study Bible).
Vives acknowledges that his question, like the question of Ecclesiastes, has perturbed thinkers in
the past: “[It] has exercised the greatest minds more than it has instructed them; in truth, because
the human mind, provided with its small lamp, is not able to attain to the conception of the
ultimate end, unless it has been enlightened by the end itself” (On Education 17-18).

And here a paradox presents itself: the beginning of real knowledge encompasses a
consideration of the end of knowledge. This is not a new idea, for Vives or for Quintilian, who in
Chapter XVII of Book II of the Institutio cites the common understanding of his day, that “all arts
have a certain definite end to which they are directed” (II.7.22), what he earlier describes by the
Greek term telos, or “highest and ultimate end” (II.15.38). For Quintilian the telos of the art of
oratory, which enlists the other arts12 to promote its great purpose, is the formation of “the good

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12 Quintilian recognizes three different kinds of art: first, “theoretic”; second, “practic”; and third, “productive,”
the category in which he places rhetoric (II.18.1-2).
man.” For Vives, the telos is not found in human goodness alone, but in the source of all goodness. The beginning and the end of knowledge are found in God, whom Vives describes as “the source from which we came, and towards which we are going” (On Education 18).

Elaborating further upon this concept, Vives states what he considers to be the greatest possible purpose for knowledge, and the means to attain it:

For who is there who has considered the power and loftiness of the mind, its understanding of the most remarkable things, and, through understanding, love, and from love the desire to unite himself with the things of knowledge, who does not perceive clearly that man was created, not for food, clothing and habitation, not for difficult, hidden and troublesome knowledge, but for the desire to know God more truly, for a participation in eternity, and in His divine nature? Wherefore, since that is the perfection of man’s nature, and the consummation of all its parts; and since piety is the only way of perfecting man, and accomplishing the end for which he was formed, therefore piety is of all things the one thing necessary. (On Education 18)

Vives modifies Quintilian’s teleological equation, exchanging the virtue of “goodness” with the distinctly Christian life habit that promotes an ever-increasing, intimate knowledge of God—“piety.”

In many ways, the formation of a “good” student may be similar to the formation of a “pious” student; however, the motivation for becoming pious deserves consideration. In the fourth chapter of the first book of the De Tradendis Disciplinis, entitled “Our Highest Good,” Vives asks, “What can we fix as the end of man, except God Himself? Or where can man more blessedly repose, than when he is, as it were, absorbed in God and changed into His nature? We must return to Him by the same way we came forth from Him” (On Education 28). The means by
which we “return” to God, as Vives immediately explains, involves the acceptance of God’s love for us—a love demonstrated by the very fact of our existence—and the release of our love back to our Creator in response. This interpersonal exchange of love provides joy, purpose, and meaning. “By that love we have been recalled and raised up, that is to say, by the love of Christ,” writes Vives; “By love, i.e. by our love to God, we are to return to our source, which is also our end” (*On Education* 28).

Our motivation of love for God should rouse us, directing our studies, but only to the degree that we respond to the weighty knowledge of God’s love for us, understood through living a pious life. As Vives stresses, “knowledge must precede love” (*On Education* 28). This is a central tenet to Vives’ pedagogy for liberal arts piety. This principle exists, basically, because our Creator, also, predicates His love upon knowledge. “God loved us before we were born,” insists Vives (*On Education* 28). Why? He offers a simple but profound reason: “He knew [my emphasis] that we had already proceeded from Him” (*On Education* 28-29). Similarly, we must possess knowledge before we can truly love. “We exercise love,” reminds Vives, “after we are born and have obtained the power and habit of knowing” (*On Education* 28). The Bible and the Holy Spirit serve as our primary sources of knowledge; as we exercise our faith, they help us to determine those things that are worthy of our time, energy, and love (*On Education* 28). “Faith will show what things ought to be loved,” declares Vives, “since the first and simplest elements of piety have been handed down to each person from God the Father of all and His Son Jesus Christ” (*On Education* 29). The pious life depends upon faith, regularly put into action, which yields knowledge of the divine life.
The knowledge of the divine life, which comes to us through pious living, creates the standard by which all other knowledge is interpreted and judged. Vives expounds on how this works in this lengthy but important passage:

This [knowledge of the divine life] ought to be the standard of other principles, just as God is of spirits and man of living creatures; so that every kind of learning may be valued to the extent that by its matter, its end taken as our end, its teachers, its method and its results, it agrees or does not agree with this standard. No subject-matter, no knowledge is, of itself, contrary to piety. I call that contrary which is at variance with faith and love, that namely which takes these virtues utterly away, or certainly lessens them by bringing into the mind wickedness and sin. For materials of study are taken from things which the good God has made, and therefore they are good. Neither is piety adverse to anything good, since it becomes itself the crown of everything good and nothing in us can be good without it, nor can anything be inimical to it, since its author is He whose worship and religion piety professes, and for which it prepares man’s will. Indeed, all things, the more exactly they are known, the more do they open the doors of entrance to the knowledge of the Diety, i.e. the supreme Cause, through His works; and this is the most fitting way for our minds to reach to the knowledge of God. (29-30)

The branches of knowledge, then, correlate to aspects of the world that God created, and, therefore, prove complementary to the pious life as long as they are studied with the proper end of loving God. So, with the same fervor of Quintilian, who affirms that all disciplines are beneficial in the education of the good orator, Vives proclaims that all realms of knowledge are efficacious for the pious learner.
It must be noted, still, that Vives does concede there are ways in which knowledge can be harmful, especially if the ends for which that knowledge is attained are incongruous with the standard that comes from the knowledge of the divine life through piety. He cautions, “There are some things which almost always increase vice, and detract from virtues, e.g. disputations, quarrelsome, contentious books, in which the intellect arms itself against truth, and by an impious affectation of commendation of the truth prefers to hide the truth, rather than to yield to it” (On Education 33). One wonders if Vives, when writing the foregoing description, was thinking about the dialecticians he encountered while at the University of Paris. No doubt his first-hand experience with them left a lasting impression of learning-gone-wrong that only served to deepen his own educational vision for Christian liberal learning.

After briefly cataloging the divisions of knowledge at the end of Book I, and carefully elucidating the vital importance of good books, good schools, good teachers and good pupils in Book II—all in a manner resplendent with the aura of Quintilian—Vives continues the De Tradendis Disciplinis with a thorough examination of “Language Teaching,” which is the subject Book III.

The preeminence Vives gives to language, in the context of the many disciplines of knowledge, is shown not only by his devoting a whole book to it in the De Tradendis Disciplinis, but also by the first chapter’s beginning sentence: “The first thing man has to learn is speech. It flows from the rational soul as water from a fountain” (On Education 90). Vives immediately provides three reasons why spoken language carries such primary import as a discipline of knowledge: first, it distinguishes us from the beasts; second, it is the “instrument of human

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13 Indirect references to Quintilian abound, with more references to him than any other ancient author cited by Vives.
14 The second part of this quotation comes from Aristotle, Politics 1:1.
society” that allows people to communicate and commune with each other; and third, it is a “gift of God” (On Education 90). Consequently, language must be taught both at home, by parents, and at school, by teachers, where students should be afforded proper models to imitate “chaste words,” free from “faults of pronunciation” (On Education 90-91). Of course, Vives draws his sound advice from the very start of Quintilian’s Institutio Oratoria, right down to his admonition that both parents and caregivers become learned in the art of speech for the wellbeing of the child.  

Vives encourages students to become multilingual, but at the same time he affirms the supremacy of Latin. “Language is the shrine of erudition, and as it were a storeroom for what should be concealed, and what should be made public. Since it is the treasury of culture and the instrument of human society, it would therefore be to the benefit the human race that there should be a single language” (On Education 91). The advantage to this, especially for Christians, would be a shared language by which people could worship God, improve world commerce, and increase basic knowledge. Reflecting upon the fall of the human race and the proliferation of languages due to sin, Vives conjectures that Adam probably spoke Latin—the most perfect of languages—before he ate the forbidden apple; in Latin he may have named the animals in the Garden of Eden (On Education 92). “It [Latin] is rich in words on account of its cultivation by so many men of intellect in their writings,” writes Vives, “for they have increased its vocabulary. It is of sweet sound and is weighty in utterance, neither rough nor crude, as is the case of some other languages” (On Education 92). Just as Quintilian asserted the priority of Greek study before Latin, which was the vernacular in his day, Vives argues that Latin should take precedence as a

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15 See Institutio Oratoria I.1.4-11.
16 In this regard, some linguists believe that English may fulfill the role that Latin once did.
study over the vernacular languages of his own day (*On Education* 98). Vives assures his reader, “If anyone should consider the matter with close attention, he will see that my view of teaching and that of Quintilian are alike” (*On Education* 98).

Culling additional wisdom from the *Institutio*, Vives offers the language teacher sage advice. “Let him accustom himself to sociability and friendliness,” writes Vives, making sure to remain “affable to his pupils, as a father”18 (*On Education* 101). Clearly, Vives and Quintilian both believe that teachers should promote trust and goodwill in their classrooms so that their students will be free to take risks and to learn without undue fear of failure. Furthermore, Vives proposes that in addition to knowing the vernacular completely, “The teacher should have an ample and copious equipment of Latin words so that his boys may be truly able to draw from him as from a fountain”19 (*On Education* 103). It is not unlikely that Vives’ suggestion, here, comes also as a result of his study with Erasmus, whose *De Copia* Vives surely would have been familiar with. And lastly, Vives, citing his ancient compatriot, writes these words of admonition:

> Let the teacher remember that very apt image by which Quintilian describes the boy’s mind, viz. that it is like a vessel with a narrow neck, which spits out again the too large a supply of liquid which the teacher attempts to pour in. Let instruction therefore be poured in gradually, drop by drop. Similarly let the teacher offer his pupils in the beginning few and easy matters of instruction; then the boy may become accustomed so as to understand further, greater, and more solid topics. In the first beginnings let the teacher often ask questions, and let him often supply the reasons for what he has got in answer. (*On Education* 106)20

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18 See *Institutio Oratoria* II.2.4-5.
19 See *Institutio Oratoria* II.2.8.
20 See *Institutio Oratoria* I.2.28.
The graduated method of instruction, described above, reflects Quintilian’s adherence to the *progymnasmata*, with its series of carefully coordinated exercises that build, one on another. Vives, too, is convinced that this accretive approach establishes the greatest guarantee of the student’s facility with words.

Listening, reading, writing and speaking, as in Quintilian’s classroom, operate in conjunction with each other in Vives’ classroom. “The boy should listen intently to the teacher and fix his look on him except when he has to look at his book, or when he has to write” (*On Education* 107), he explains. Since hearing represents the dominant “medium” of learning, students who fail to listen carefully, fail to learn well (*On Education* 107). Consequently, students should consider the teacher, poetically speaking, as a “pure oracle” offering an unusual display of words in the classroom; and as students observe the proper use and function of words, they will imitate their master and attain his “virtues,” and even, he warns, his “faults” (*On Education* 107).

As for instruction in writing, Vives adheres to several of the principles found in Book X of the *Institutio*, although he adds his own innovations here and there. “Let the pupil learn to write correctly and quickly” (*On Education* 108), he begins, affirming Quintilian’s belief that “by writing well [Vives puts it “correctly”] we are brought to write quickly” (X.3.10). Agility becomes secondary to accuracy; it only merits appreciation when the other results simultaneously. And how does the student writer achieve accuracy? Vives answers: “The foundations of writing ought to be laid while pupils are being taught to read; they must know what letters, what syllables, what sounds ought to be separated or combined, and keep them ready for use” (*On Education* 108). On this point Vives assumes that his reader will make a connection with Chapter VI of Book I, where he argues for selective reading of the “heathens.”
“Here avail the instruments of truth, of discovery, of judgment, which help us towards practical wisdom. . . . The heathen. . . possess every ornament, grace, elegance, and splendour of discourse” (On Education 49). Notwithstanding the benefits of reading such writers, Vives forewarns the Christian reader that at times “the sweetest wine is mixed with poison” (On Education 49); and yet, sometimes “skilled physicians use poisons against poisons” (On Education 51). It all depends upon the subject-matter, the reader, and the reader’s disposition. Therefore, Vives advises the use of discretion.

Agreeing with his ancient Roman writing teacher, Vives asserts the primacy of writing in the work of learning across the disciplines, but more emphatically so. Whereas Quintilian writes that “writing itself is the principal thing in our studies, and that by which alone sure proficiency, resting on the deepest roots, is secured” (I.1.28), Vives writes, “Let them [students] be convinced that nothing conduces more truly to wide learning than to write much and often, and to use up a great deal of paper and ink” (On Education 108). It is not sufficient to simply believe in the centrality of writing as a teacher of the liberal arts, according to Vives; the students in the class must be “convinced” of this as well. Part of the task of the teacher, then, is to persuade students that writing not only matters, but that it proves to be the most effective, and therefore most important, skill that a student can employ in the learning process.

On a related note, the production and distribution of paper and ink in the fifteenth century made it possible for Vives to promote “using up a great deal” of the two. According to Henri-Jean Martin, in The History and Power of Writing, the explosion of words and images from the fifteenth century through the eighteenth century occurs because of advanced methods of paper production. “The history of the paper industry shows that paper mills constantly increased in
number throughout Europe. Gradually, every region attempted to produce enough paper to meet the demands of local consumption” (Martin 283). Vives himself writes about paper and ink in his School Dialogues. Regarding paper, he states, “Get for your own use the best paper from Italy, very thin and firm, or even that common sort brought over from France” (73). Without paper and ink, the notebook, the teaching tool that resides at the center of Vives’s pedagogy, would not have been possible.

To support his theoretical convictions about liberal arts education, Vives offers a pedagogical approach that provides students with the opportunity for regular, meaningful learning-through-writing in the classroom: composing in a notebook. The idea, standard fare in today’s college classroom, was innovative at the time Vives promoted it (Noreña, Juan 100). Keep in mind that the purpose of this teaching tool, as Vives intends it, is first to allow students to write regularly and much, and second, to persuade students of the efficacy of writing as a transdisciplinary skill. “Therefore,” suggests Vives, “let each boy have an empty paper book divided into several parts to receive all that fall from his teacher’s lips, since this is not less valuable to him than precious stones” (On Education 108). In addition to encouraging the practice and valuing of writing, the notebook, maintains Vives, also functions as a repository for rare or costly things. In the modern sense, it functions as a sort of safe to house for the “precious stones” received from the teacher, which the student can secure and, on occasion, retrieve for examination, pondering their worth.

Vives recommends that the student divide the notebook into sections that correspond to the different aspects of learning in the liberal arts disciplines. For example, he writes,

21 Similarly, Quintilian writes later in the Institutio that “Practice in writing, which is attended with the most labour, is attended also with the greatest advantage” (X.3.1).
In one division let him put down separate and single words. In another proper ways of speaking and turns of speech, which are in daily use; and again, rare expressions, or such as are not generally known and explained. In a separate division, let him make history notes; in another, notes of anecdotes; in another, clever expressions and weighty judgments; in another, witty and acute sayings; in another, proverbs; in other divisions, names of well-known men of high birth, famous towns, animals, plants and strange stones. In another part, explanations of difficult passages in the author. In another, doubtful passages which are still unsolved. (*On Education* 108)

The kinds of writing activities specified here are far from mere busywork. For Vives, the notebook should function as a heuristic device, a tool to draw upon, especially for the invention of ideas and arguments, allowing the student to organize *topoi* creatively, with authentic intention.

Vives is so convinced of the value of his notebook approach to writing and learning that he endorses not one, but two notebooks for each student: “…a larger book in which he can put all the notes expounded and developed at length by the teacher… [and one for] what he reads for himself in the best writers, or the sayings which he observes used by others” (*On Education* 108). As Vives describes it, the notebook clearly encourages the student to *observe* and *judge*. These are the two functions of the mind that, Vives argues, are fundamental to learning (*On Education* 37).

Keeping a notebook—and writing, in general—not only helps a student to creatively organize information and to sharpen the powers of observation and judgment, it also enables the student to recollect what has already been learned, as Vives explains: “It is a very useful practice to write down what we want to remember, for it is not less impressed on the mind than on the
paper by the pen, and indeed the attention is kept fixed longer by the fact that we are writing it down” (*On Education* 109-110). Once again, the powers of observation and judgment are heightened by the act of composing, forcing the student—in the span of a moment—to process sensory data and cognitive deliberation, resulting in a meaningful—and more memorable—expression on a page. On the subject of writing and memory, Noreña makes an insightful connection between Vives and Quintilian:

Vives often recommends the use of notebooks, a significant departure from the medieval stress on oral learning. Vives joins Quintilian in rejecting Plato’s claim that the use of written characters is a hindrance to memory, and he is convinced that the very effort to put into orderly writing the material to be remembered is a powerful way of engraving it more deeply on our memory. (*Juan* 100)

The notebook to this day—in paper and computer media—continues to serve as a locus for reflection and retention of graphic material, and the question remains open to debate as to whether or not it serves to increase or decrease memory.

On a related point, in his introduction to *De Tradendis Disciplinis*, Foster Watson laments the fact that Vives’ original thinking on the improvement of student writing through use of paper notebooks has largely been forgotten. Considering the “conservative methods” of the Middle Ages, which involved “the learning by heart of intricate grammars,” Watson emphasizes the “startling” nature of the notebook in the first half of the sixteenth century, insisting that such “written methods were revolutionary” (xxxvii). Watson observes that long before Vives wrote *De Tradendis Disciplinis*, in 1531, the paper notebook idea was in his head. The evidence Watson refers to comes from *De Ratione Studii Puerilis*, of 1523, wherein Vives provides detailed instructions for a pupil to make a notebook and complete various writing exercises. At the end of
the passage, which Watson translates from the Latin, Vives states, “Then will thy book alone know what must be read by thee, to be read, committed and fixed to the memory, so that thou mayest bear in thy breast the names thus handed down, which are in thy book and refer to them as often as is necessary” (xxxix). For Watson, this passage provides positive proof that Vives deserves credit for the innovation.

If Vives has not gotten proper recognition for his employment of the writing notebook, then Quintilian, also, has been slighted; for he was the one, with his mandate for teachers to make their students write often and much, that inspired Vives toward pedagogic ingenuity. It was Quintilian who challenged Vives to consider the aims and ends of a liberal arts education, and writing as a vital ingredient in the mix. Still, neither of the two, if they were alive today, would likely be overly concerned about getting any credit. Self-effacing and altruistic, they taught and wrote for greater purposes than themselves. In the words of Vives,

Certainly there can be nothing more pleasant to Him, than that we offer our erudition and whatsoever of His gifts we possess to the use of our fellow men, i.e. of His children, for whom God has imparted those great goods that to whomsoever they are allotted, they should be of use to the community at large. God wishes us to give freely of that which we have freely received. (On Education 283)