

## Historic & Modern Application

Modern public education does not look like the trivium. But in order to understand why, we have to understand from whence modern education has come. For, if one takes a cursory glance through [Classical America](#), we find that even 200 years ago things were very different in American education than they are today. How did we get so far away from the classical tradition in education?

In order to approach an answer, we must understand the rise of government-sponsored education, and with it, the [public school nightmare](#). [Richard Mitchell](#), professor of classics at Glassboro State College, deftly details the not-so-subtle shift in educational philosophy that accompanied that change from classical education to modern education in [The Graves of Academe](#). You must read the whole work, it is a thoughtful and considered piece of scholarship, elegantly written with humor and insight. In it, he follows the rise of the pseudo-science of "educationism," and its rejection of academia in favor of the unmeasurable and untestable nebulous principles of behavior modification and "humanism:"

Over and against the overweening demands of scholarly intellectualism, the teacher-trainers have set the presumably unquestionable virtues of what they call "humanism." They use this term in so many different contexts and to characterize so many different kinds of acts and ideologies that I will not attempt to discuss it fully here. It will just have to grow on you. It does not, as you might think, denote as usual a particular school of thought or slant of philosophical or religious speculation connected especially but not exclusively with the Renaissance, although many who use the term have heard of the Renaissance. This is something closer to "humaneness," as that word is used by what used to be called the "Humane Society," an organization that publically deplored the cruel treatment of horses. One of the aims of "humanistic" educationism is to deplore the cruel treatment of children subjected to the overbearing demands of knowledge, scholarship, and logic by the traditional powers of authoritarian intellectualism.

And so here we are today, as far away from traditional scholarship and training in the rigorous demands of the trivium that underpins it, as one can get. It is a far cry from the tested and proven methods of nurturing the intellect, drawn from the classical tradition, required by historic American education:

[The] NEA task force that had been made up largely of scholars, the Committee of Ten, [was] called together in 1892 and chaired by Charles W. Eliot, then president of [Harvard University](#). That committee had come out in favor of traditional academic study in the public schools, which they fancied should be devoted to the pursuit of knowledge and the training of the intellect. But what can you expect from a bunch of intellectuals? The Eliot Report of 1893 was given to things like this:

As studies in language and in the natural sciences are best adapted to cultivate the habits of observation; as mathematics are the traditional training of the reasoning faculties; so history and its allied branches are better adapted than any other studies to promote the invaluable mental power which we call judgment.

Obviously, the Eliot committee did its work in the lost, dark days before the world of education had discovered the power of the bold innovative thrust. All they asked of the high schools was the pursuit of knowledge and the exercise of the mind in the

cause of judgment.

Richard Mitchell, The [Graves of Academe](#).

**Historic & Modern Application © 2005 by Christine Miller**  
<http://classical-homeschooling.org/v2/index.php?page=45>