

**Some Thoughts Concerning Education**  
**by John Locke,**  
**1693**

**§ 123 Sauntering**

Contrary to this busy inquisitive temper, there is sometimes observable in children a listless carelessness, a want of regard to any thing, and a sort of trifling, even at their business. This sauntering humour I look on as one of the worst qualities that can appear in a child, as well as one of the hardest to be cured, where it is natural. But, it being liable to be mistaken in some cases, care must be taken to make a right judgment concerning that trifling at their books or business, which may sometimes be complained of in a child. Upon the first suspicion a father has that his son is of a sauntering temper, he must carefully observe him, whether he be listless and indifferent in all his actions, or whether in some things alone he be slow and sluggish, but in others vigorous and eager: for though he find that he does loiter at his book, and let a good deal of the time he spends in his chamber or study run idly away, he must not presently conclude that this is from a sauntering humour in his temper; it may be childishness, and a preferring something to his study which his thoughts run on; and he dislikes his book, as is natural, because it is forced upon him as a task. To know this perfectly, you must watch him at play, when he is out of his place and time of study, following his own inclinations; and see there, whether he be vigorous and active; whether he designs anything, and with labour and eagerness pursues it, till he has accomplished what he aimed at; or whether he, lazily and listlessly dreams away his time. If this sloth be only when he is about his book, I think it may be easily cured; if it be in his temper, it will require a little more pains and attention to remedy it.

§ 124 - If you are satisfied, by his earnestness at play, or any thing else he sets his mind on, in the intervals between his hours of business, that he is not of himself inclined to laziness, but that only want of relish of his book makes him negligent and sluggish in his application to it, the first step is to try, by talking to him kindly of the folly and inconvenience of it, whereby he loses a good part of his time, which he might have for his diversion: but be sure to talk calmly and kindly, and not much at first but only these plain reasons in short. If this prevails, you have gained the point in the most desirable way, which is reason and kindness. If it prevails not, try to shame him out of it, by laughing at him for it, asking every day, when he comes to table, if there be no strangers there, "how long he was that day about his business?" And if he has not done it, in the time he might be well supposed to have despatched it, expose and turn him into ridicule for it; but mix no chiding, only put on a pretty cold brow towards him, and keep it till he reform; and let his mother, tutor, and all about him, do so too. If this work not the effect you desire, then tell him he shall be no longer troubled with a tutor to take care of his education: you will not be at the charge to have him spend his time idly with him; but since he prefers this or that (whatever play he delights in) to his book, that only he shall do; and so in earnest set him to work on his beloved play, and keep him steadily and in earnest to it mornug and afternoon, till he be fully surfeited, and would, at any rate, change it for some hours at his book again: but when you thus set him a task of his play, you must be sure to look after liun yourself, or set somebody else to do it, that may constantly see him employed in it, and that he be not permitted to be idle at that too. I say, your self look after him; for it is worth the father's while, whatever

business he has, to bestow two or three days upon his son, to cure so great a mischief as is sauntering at his business.

§ 125 - This is what I propose, if it be idleness not from his general temper, but a peculiar or acquired aversion to learning, which you must be careful to examine and distinguish, which you shall certainly know by the way above proposed. But though you have your eyes upon him to watch what he does with the time he has at his own disposal, yet you must not let him perceive that you or any body else do so. For that may restrain him from following his own inclination, and that being the thing his head or heart is upon; and not daring to prosecute it for fear of you, he may forbear doing other things, and so seem to be idle and negligent, when in truth it is nothing but being intent on that which the fear of your eye or knowledge keeps him from executing. You must therefore, when you would try him, give him full liberty; but let some body whom you can trust observe what he does. And it will be best he should have his play-day of liberty, when you and all that he may suspect to have an eye upon him are abroad, that so he may without check follow his natural inclination. Thus by his employing of such times of liberty, you will easily discern whether it be listlessness in his temper, or aversion to his book that makes him saunter away his time of study.

§ 126 - If listlessness and dreaming be his natural disposition, this unpromising temper is one of the hardest to be dealt with, because it generally carrying with it an indifferency for future things, may be attributed to want of foresight and want of desire; and how to plant or increase either of these, where Nature has given a cold or contrary temper, is not I think very easy. As soon as it is perceived, the first thing to be done is to find out his most predominate passion, and carefully examine what it is to which the greatest bent of his mind has the most steady and earnest tendency. And when you have found that, you must set that on work to excite his industry to any thing else. If he loves praise, or play, or fine clothes, etc., or, on the other side, dreads shame and disgrace, your displeasure, etc., whatever it be that he loves most, except it be sloth (for that will never set him on work), let that be made use of to excite him to activity. For in this listless temper you are not to fear an excess of appetite (as in all other cases) by cherishing it. 'Tis that which you want, and therefore must labour to stir up and increase. For where there is no desire, there will be no industry.

§ 127 - If you have not hold enough upon him this way to stir up rigour and activity in him, you must employ him in some constant bodily labour, whereby he may get a habit of doing something. The keeping him hard to some study, were the better way to get him an habit of exercising and applying his mind. But, because this is an invisible attention, and nobody can tell when he is or is not idle at it, you must find bodily employments for him, which he must be constantly busied in and kept to; and if they have some little hardship and shame in them, it may not be the worse, to make them the sooner weary him, and desire to return to his book. But be sure, when you exchange his book for his other labour, set him such a task, to be done in such a time, as may allow him no opportunity to be idle. Only, after you have by this way brought him to be attentive and industrious at his book, you may, upon his despatching his study within the time set him, give him as a reward some respite from his other labour; which you may diminish, as you find him grow more and more steady in his application; and, at last, wholly take off, when his sauntering at his book is cured.

<http://www.socsci.kun.nl/ped/whp/histeduc/locke/locke123.html>

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