Creating Thriving Latin Programs

Over the past two decades, pre-collegiate Latin programs have continued to disappear. The vast majority of Latin teachers at this level, like their colleagues in other fields, are still primarily white adults who work in public schools which today are at least 50 percent students of color. Traditional programs have focused on students from affluent and usually white families who are already being encouraged to aim for university, graduate school, and careers in law, medicine, and business. Their family legacies encourage these students to think of Latin on the transcript as part of their necessary resume toward those goals. The traditional approach to teaching Latin (and to be clear, almost all other languages) focuses on memorizing the grammatical structures of the language along with vast amounts of vocabulary. To be sure, this concise and presumably efficient way of learning a language has convinced many that learning languages is for the gifted. By that standard, if learning languages is for the gifted, then learning Latin must be for the most brilliant. As this paper will briefly explain, traditional programs create effective screens that ensure that privileged, brilliant students are drawn to these courses. Yet, depending on a pipeline of elite students perpetuates educational inequity, and can ultimately contribute to the demise of one's program.

An increasing number of Latin teachers are awakening to these realities. Indeed, I will briefly survey the demographics of my large urban public school and how the traditional program was transformed to embrace all kinds of learners resulting in a 500+ percent increase in size. The means by which this was accomplished is the main topic of this paper. Teachers like myself have turned to recent research and pedagogical approaches to change the way we teach Latin (Issue 20 of the *Journal of Classics Teaching* focuses on the work being done by 10 of these teachers), and a key aspect of this change is the application of Comprehensible Input

(hereafter CI). To be clear, CI is not a method. It is a set of tested and proven principles of language acquisition from which teachers are continually developing practices into a method. Stephen Krashen's principles (Krashen, 1982, 2003) succinctly articulate how human beings acquire languages--all languages, including Latin, too often unfairly referred to as a dead language.

This paper will give examples of some of the core practices that are transforming dying programs into those that are thriving. I will describe powerful methods, such as free voluntary reading, extensive reading, how to provide input that is understandable and compelling, transitioning from a traditional program to CI, using practices such as Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling, Personalized Questions and Answers, and Circling. Changes in approach that welcome and support all kinds of learners has meant finding new ways to structure learning for students, addressing management issues as well. Transformations in pre-collegiate programs using CI can both change the substance of what Latin students encounter and re-shape local and district notions of what it means to have a Latin program.

The same can happen at the college level. These transformations also provide the potential for students to arrive at university classics department who engage Latin differently and know Latin language skill sets less familiar to traditionally taught, college-bound students. It may also be the case that more students of color (than our programs have traditionally received) will be interested in taking Latin at the college level. Students who have learned Latin via CI methods will have acquired significant ability in Latin, but because the approach has been through non-traditional means, they may too easily be dismissed as not prepared for Latin at the university. The suggestions offered here will be helpful to college instructors who wish to encourage all newly arriving students in their classics departments.

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