

A Blended Approach to Teaching Intermediate and Advanced Latin Students

How do we accommodate students who have learned Latin with a variety of different methodologies? At my institution, students come to us with different backgrounds, different learning styles, and different pedagogical experiences in the Greek and Latin classroom. Our task is to meet them where they are and make them all feel welcome and successful. And if they feel part of a community of learners who can all contribute in ways that match their strengths and their experience of classroom methodologies, they will be more likely to continue their study of Greek and Latin.

My response to the diversity of my students is to employ a blended approach that foregrounds the reading of texts in the classroom. So what do I mean by a blended approach? First, I want students to be able to explain how the grammar in a sentence works, but I don't necessarily expect them to rattle off all the technical terminology. Second, I want students to be comfortable reading for meaning and feel comfortable if they do not know every single vocabulary word or every construction in a text. And third, I want students to be able to talk and write about a text in Latin, provided they are guided in their conversation and their composition.

What do I mean by foregrounding the reading of texts in the classroom. Isn't that the opposite of what I just said about being able to talk and write about a text? Richard Kern explains, literacy (reading and writing) always takes place within a community of readers, readers who ask questions, collaborate to answer them, and argue about interpretations, who respond to texts through words, pictures, poetry, or theater. A traditional approach to assigning a Latin passage is to ask students to read it at home with little guidance except for dictionaries and commentaries. They are divorced from the community of readers who might help them understand a text. And they have little choice how to prepare except to feel under pressure to

translate the passage perfectly. Yet all words are not equally important for understanding a passage, not all syntax is equally important. They can benefit from the guidance of their peers and more experienced reader (Vygotsky).

My response to this dilemma—to the absence of community and the absence of autonomy—is to keep the first reading of a text in the classroom where there is a community of readers and for homework to ask students to review, respond to, and elaborate on what they read in class (post-reading activities) and to prepare specific vocabulary, review key grammar, and explore cultural norms and attitudes (pre-reading activities). Thus, when everyone comes to class, they have already activated schemata (vocabulary, grammar, cultural context) that helps them disambiguate a text, compensate for what they might not know, and organize the information they are reading (Lee and VanPatten). Rather than feel anxiety about not knowing every single word and construction, they feel invited to share that knowledge and to contribute to the understanding and interpretation of the text with their community of readers.

Over the past several years, I have developed a host of pre-reading and post-reading activities for reading Plautus, Petronius, and Vergil. These activities range from an interactive reading journal (Redmann), cloze exercises, grouping vocabulary by semantic field (e.g., trickery and deception) and asking students to write how they might trick a roommate, writing comprehension questions or rewriting a passage from a new point of view. In the remainder of the presentation, I will share samples of these activities and then demonstrate how they can be used to create a classroom with more spoken and written Latin while insisting on a high level of comprehension.

Bibliography

- Kern, Richard G. 2003. "Literacy as a New Organizing Principle for Foreign Language Education." In P. C. Patrikis, ed. *Reading Between the Lines*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Lee, James, and Bill VanPatten. 2003. "Comprehending Written Language." *Making Communicative Language Teaching Happen*. 2nd ed. McGraw-Hill.
- Redmann, Jennifer. 2005. "An Interactive Reading Journal for all Levels of the Foreign Language Curriculum." *Foreign Language Annals* 38.4: 484-93.
- Vygotsky, L. S. 1978. *Mind in Society*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.