

POGIL in the Language Classroom

As teachers of classical languages expand their pedagogical tool boxes in the quest to facilitate active learning, interest in collaborative and inquiry-based methods of instruction has started to grow (see Bayerle 2013, Argetsinger 2006, and Abbott 1998 on collaborative methods; see Kvapil 2009 for inquiry-based learning). In this paper, I would like to discuss an instructional strategy that is both cooperative and inquiry-based, called Process Oriented Guided Inquiry Learning. POGIL was originally developed in Chemistry and is widely used in the physical sciences, but despite its broader applicability (not to mention its well documented results; see pogil.org/about/effectiveness for data from peer-reviewed studies) it has been slow to make inroads into non-STEM fields (see Johnson et al. 2011 for a German example).

A POGIL lesson is based upon a “model” (a bare set of examples that illustrate a concept, but without explanation) accompanied by a series of questions that require the students to interpret the information in the model using prior knowledge and logical analysis, and in so doing to “invent” the concepts being taught. The model-based questions very carefully guide students through each deductive step necessary for them to generate the relevant concepts in discussion with each other, while the teacher moves around the room facilitating the groups’ progress rather than providing direct instruction. Each student in a 3-4 person group plays a carefully delineated role, and students rotate roles regularly. Working together through a complete learning cycle—from exploration, to “concept invention,” and finally to application—, students must leverage both their prior knowledge and their problem-solving skills to meet the lesson’s objectives. Putting forth the effort to construct the lesson’s content without direct instruction increases their comprehension and retention of the material and enables them to develop their “process skills,” such as communication, analytical thinking, and perseverance.

This presentation will show how POGIL can be applied in the Latin classroom to introduce new material, from grammatical concepts to forms to practical skills like scansion. I will walk through a sample POGIL lesson, using a piece of curriculum that I have written, used, and revised in order to illustrate what does and does not constitute a “robust” model (a key to POGIL success) and quality questions that are actually capable of leading students through a whole learning cycle effectively. I will also discuss POGIL group member roles, how they can be adapted for the language classroom, and strategies for helping to ensure that students perform them to the best of their abilities. Finally, this paper will also include discussion of ways to use polling at key points within a POGIL lesson to determine if students are progressing properly and successfully meeting the objectives of the lesson.

One of the goals of this paper is to generate interest among Classicists in POGIL, with the hope of eventually developing the kind of POGIL resource-sharing community in Classics that exists in other disciplines. Published POGIL curriculum for Latin does not currently exist, and my hope is that interested classical language teachers will learn how to write and facilitate POGIL lessons which can be shared among a community of practitioners. Fostering our students’ acquisition of the diverse aspects of language learning requires the employment of a variety of pedagogical techniques. Just as, for example, oral practice strengthens a student’s memory of and facility with forms, and reading extended passages develops his or her ability to use context to make interpretive choices, so POGIL naturally seems to corner a particular learning niche: the introduction of new concepts. This paper aims to show that both secondary and post-secondary instructors can profitably incorporate POGIL into their repertoires, and to encourage further exploration of this technique among teachers in our discipline.

Bibliography

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