

Latin Pedagogy for a Secondary Cohort with Learning Disabilities

Teachers of secondary students with learning disabilities may initially find it difficult to respond to these students' needs in the Latin classroom. As the options for pedagogical techniques in the classics continue to grow, encompassing teaching styles ranging from grammar/translation methods to methods focused on comprehensible input, teachers may feel a sense of whiplash as they decide how to best teach the students in their classrooms. Declension charts and synopses can be confusing at best to our students with dyslexia, while spoken Latin methods can sometimes exclude our students with auditory processing disorders. How, then, do we approach the wide range of students and their learning needs in the Latin classroom?

I respond to these challenges in this paper, which reports on my experiences with a cohort of secondary students I have taught since the 2016-2017 academic year, their freshman year of high school. They are now entering Latin III. These 18 students are in a class specifically designed for students with learning disabilities or major academic achievement gaps as determined by psycho-educational testing and standardized test scores. Their diagnoses include expressive language disorder, dyslexia, dysgraphia, anxiety, auditory processing disorder, and ADHD. They receive accommodations such as extended time, note-taking assistance, preferential seating, and use of audiobooks when available. The class also includes two Latin III students who were moved from the "on-level" track after Latin II and the addition of seven Latin IV students, making the class a combined, split-level class. Finally, another student is re-joining our class after a six-month absence due to complications from a disorder she developed in 2017 which paralyzed her from the waist down.

In short, this is a class with highly diverse needs. This paper details lesson plans and assessment strategies that have proven successful in helping my students to make strides in their Latin interpretive reading proficiencies. I have developed these strategies by focusing on reading comprehension and emphasizing my students' strengths, such as their social intelligence and artistic abilities. I present assessments like video projects, a perennial favorite among my students, who thrive in a setting that lets them demonstrate their understanding of Latin in a creative way. While I share strategies for maximizing student success on traditional pencil-and-paper tests, I also offer alternatives to this type of assessment, such as the Pluto and Proserpina soundtrack project I developed as a capstone to a unit on the Underworld. Finally, I detail how I build my curriculum, day-to-day activities, and classroom space to comply with the requirements of my students' accommodation plans.

Of particular interest to teachers of students with learning disabilities will be my discussion of free voluntary reading (FVR), a research-supported strategy that provides differentiation both in interest and difficulty level. Students choose from a wide range of over 75 short stories, novels, comic books, and choose-your-own-adventure stories – all written in Latin for novice-to-intermediate learners – and read silently for five minutes every Monday, Wednesday, and Thursday. With my support, they monitor their own reading progress throughout the year using the ACTFL interpretive reading proficiency descriptors and a reading habits rubric. They set specific goals for themselves, ranging from “I want to move up a proficiency level” to “I want to be able to read an entire page without using the glossary,” and we use in-class conferences to develop strategies to help them reach these goals. FVR has become a cornerstone of my teaching of students with learning disabilities because it increases

their confidence in reading, provides valuable Latin reading practice, and helps them to develop metacognitive and reflective skills.

While my students face many challenges in the classroom, they have become strong readers of Latin due to the environment I have built for them in response to their needs and strengths. This paper will present practical long-term and “try tomorrow” tools and strategies for teachers of all students of Latin. My desire is to help other teachers achieve the same success that I have found with my students.