

## Finding the *Crustula* in Comedy: What Ancient Comedy Can Teach Teachers

*Ut Pueris Olim Dant Crustula Blandi Doctores, Elementa Velint Ut Discere Prima*

Thus Quintus Horatius Flaccus describes himself and his rhetorical style of satire, comparing himself to *doctores*—teachers—in his *Sermones* (I.25). Aristophanes likewise in his *Ἀχαρνῆς* describes himself as τὰ βέλτιστα διδάσκων (658), directly calling himself “one who teaches”. The plays of Terence and Plautus survived through ecclesiastical inquisition because they were viewed as didactic (on what not to do) (Conte 1999). Other ancients also saw the important pedagogical effect comedy holds. For example, the ending of Aeschylus’ *Ὀρέστεια*, is more comic than tragic which emphasizes the *lesson* of new procedural law (Herington 1963). Today, studies continue to focus on the beneficial impact humor can have in the classroom (Beavers 2011; Inam 2010), even focusing on modern stand-up as a resource for better pedagogical approaches (McCarron 2008). But before Bob Hope and Jerry Seinfeld, there was Aristophanes and Juvenal. Comedy and humor, in particular those of the ancient past, have long been seen as tools for pedagogy, and many of their authors have described themselves using the *persona* of teacher. These ancient comedians, as well as their contemporary equivalents, have provided a significant amount of teaching material. But can they provide *teacher* material as well? Can the *personae*, the style, and the subjects of ancient comedy provide lessons on how to teach as well as they provide lessons on politics, society, and humanity? What can ancient comedy teach us about teaching?

By reading ancient comedy, from the Old Comedy of Ancient Greece to the Imperial Satirists of Ancient Rome, educators—*doctores magistrique*—can learn, relearn, or be inspired by the skills, qualities, and characteristics of those that first mastered the art of capturing and

enlightening an audience. This paper will explore what teachers can pull from ancient comedy that directly applies to pedagogy, focusing on three categories: the sphere of the teacher, the sphere of the student, and the sphere of the classroom. I define “sphere” as an area of action and thought distinct yet related to the other areas within the overall school setting. For each category, there will be a discussion on what qualities or characteristics from ancient comedy apply, how to apply them within pedagogy and the classroom relationship via both general and specific mechanisms, and how they relate to current pedagogical discussions, studies, and methods. Whether a *peritior* or a *tiro*, a *doctor* or a *doctus/a*, it is always important to (re-)evaluate how we are approaching the classroom and the role we play, the *personam* we wear, and whether we are performing to the best of our abilities and for the betterment of the audience. Taking advice from ancient comedy not only allows us to consider those things, it also provides us some humorous reprieve. As Mary Poppins so eloquently and iconically paraphrased from Lucretius and Horace, “a spoon full of sugar helps the medicine go down”.

#### Bibliography

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