



Lingua Latina Liberis: Four Models for Latin in the Elementary School

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FORUM

LINGUA LATINA LIBERIS: FOUR MODELS FOR LATIN IN THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

At the 2000 meeting of CAMWS Southern Section at the University of Georgia, the Committee for the Promotion of Latin sponsored a pedagogy panel on the teaching of Latin to elementary school students. At this panel four different models for teaching Latin to elementary school students were presented. The panelists were Alice Mulberry of the William H. Ray Elementary School in Chicago, Illinois; Patrice Reaves of the Murphey Traditional Academy in Greensboro, North Carolina; Elizabeth Kann of the University of Georgia in Athens, Georgia; and Barbara Bell, author of *Minimus* and Director of the Primary Latin Project in Bristol, England. The profiles and histories of each of these institutions are reflected in the pedagogical approach taken by each instructor.

An Independently-funded Elementary Latin Program in Inner-City Chicago

Mulberry teaches at the William H. Ray Elementary School, a Chicago public school located on the South Side of the city in Hyde Park. The school serves a diverse student body of 800, 65% of whom are African-American, almost 20% white, almost 10% Asian, and close to 6% Hispanic. Many come from a wide range of foreign countries. About 8% come to Ray with little or no English. Although it is basically a neighborhood school, it serves a good many children from other parts of the South Side, as well as many children of professors and students of the University of Chicago, the Lutheran School of Theology, Mc Cormick Seminary and other institutions of higher learning. There are several classes of hard-of-hearing students who, along with other special needs students, are mainstreamed as much as possible. Because only about 36% of the students are considered low income, Ray receives very little discretionary funds. As a result, the Ray Latin program has a unique history of independent funding.

The Ray School P.T.A. started the Latin program at Ray School in the fall of 1984 as part of a before-school language program paid for by student tuition, without funding from the Chicago Board of

Education and administered by the P.T.A. Foreign Language Committee. Mulberry was one of the four original parent/instructors offering Latin, French, Spanish, and German to students in grades 5-8. Initially only one sixth-grade student signed up for Latin, but when the Committee opened the class to any interested fourth graders, over twenty students eventually registered for Latin. In the following year a number of these students continued in the program along with a new class of beginners. These events marked the launching of what Mulberry calls the reading program, now in its seventeenth year.

Ray School was designated as a regional gifted center in 1986 and a program of foreign language instruction was introduced. The original plan had been to give the students Spanish but the principal could not find a Spanish teacher, so Mulberry was hired, this time by the Chicago Board of Education, to give the top language arts groups in grades three through six and their teachers an introduction to oral Latin twice a week. The first and second grade teachers were only supposed to send their top reading group in each homeroom for the Latin session but one second grade teacher, Mrs. Rosalie Fruchter, insisted that all her students were gifted and brought her entire class. These students performed just as well as the other, more "gifted" students and Mrs. Fruchter became a quick convert to the second grade Latin cause.

In the fall of 1987 the gifted program at Ray came to an end because of a change in educational philosophy but Mulberry remained on the Board payroll so, with the help of a third grade teacher, this second grade teacher persuaded the principal and their colleagues that Mulberry should teach Latin to all second and third graders. When Mulberry left the Board payroll, these same teachers got the P.T.A. to agree to pay for her work. Since it was agreed that parents could not be asked to pay for a program which was not part of the required language arts curriculum, the Foreign Language Committee took on the responsibility for raising money to pay for the Latin program. The Committee asked for voluntary parental donations and spent a lot of time researching and approaching foundations for support. The program was expanded to include the fourth grade for several years, but this practice was discontinued because of staffing and administrative problems and because fourth graders still had the opportunity to do Latin through the Early Morning Program.

In the spring of 1992 a crisis developed when the Foreign Language Committee approached the P.T.A. for its annual grant to support the second and third grade programs and two of the third grade teachers and some of the parents questioned the value of the program. The other third grade teacher, the second grade teachers,

and other parents ardently defended the program. After much discussion the third grade program became part of the tuition-based Early Morning Program and the second grade teachers were given permission to seek funding for their in-school program on their own. With the support of the Replogle Foundation, a parent committee called the Friends of Latin at Ray now runs the early morning Latin program and raises money for the second grade program by selling student-designed t-shirts and notecards and holding the annual Latin gala. The French and German programs died some years ago and Spanish is now part of the regular curriculum.

At the present time the Latin program at Ray begins as part of the language arts program. After the winter holidays Mulberry meets with each of the three second grade homerooms twice a week for forty to forty-five minutes. She begins by teaching the students greetings: *salve, salvete; vale, valete;* and then orally introducing "classroom" vocabulary such as *puer, puella, mensa, fenestra, stilus, liber,* and *horologium*. She uses the black and white picture cards prepared for *First Latin* to introduce members of a Roman family and their clothing. After teaching the pronunciation of new words and their meanings, she asks the students *Quomodo scribitur?* and has them dictate the spelling to her on the board. Several months into the program the students are given folders in which to write the Latin words they have learned, classified by parts of speech and within the noun category by gender.

The students also memorize the numbers I-X and the "Philadelphia" dialogue (*Salve! Salve! Quid est nomen tuum? Nomen meum est —. Quid est nomen tuum? Nomen meum est —. Vale. Vale.*) They do oral arithmetic in Latin and sing the counting song, *Unus, Duo, Tres Romani*.

Each student is given a Latin name. In the process Mulberry comments on and explains the names and students learn something about the Roman naming system and the history of Latin.

Throughout the program English derivatives of the Latin words presented are discussed. Mulberry is often asked to comment on words that students meet in other subjects. An important feature of the program is the story of the Trojan War which Mulberry pretends to broadcast from Station WROMA. She begins with the wedding of Peleus and Thetis and ends with Aeneas' escape from Troy. In between the class talks about the Greek pantheon, Bronze Age warfare, and the *Iliad* from which Mulberry reads a few passages in Richard Lattimore's translation.

The third grade program is voluntary. The students come on Tuesdays and Thursdays at 8:00 A.M. and their parents pay tuition to the Friends of Latin at Ray. In the 2000-2001 academic year nine students were enrolled. For their first Latin test, a picture quiz, they

wrote Latin labels for a series of sketches provided by the instructor. Later on they worked on numbers and adjectives and wrote and translated simple sentences. Eventually they worked on the conjugation of verbs in the present tense and read some simple stories Mulberry wrote or adapted for them.

A special feature of the third grade program is the *Odyssey*, which Mulberry summarizes in her own words. She also reads part of it aloud in Lattimore's translation. Other activities for third graders include singing songs such as *Mica, mica, parva stella* and *Gaudeamus igitur*, discussing the geography of the Roman Empire (in Latin as much as possible), reviewing the Roman calendar, and, at the end of the year, studying Greek and Roman architecture through slides. This last activity is followed by a walking tour of the vicinity of the school to look for elements of classical influence on local buildings.

Students in grades four and up have the opportunity to learn to read Latin using *Ecce Romani 1*. The Latin 1 class meets Monday, Wednesday, and Friday at 8:00 A.M. The more advanced students are pulled out of class twice a week to continue their studies. In these classes there are written quizzes and tests, workbooks, homework, and report card grades that do not count for either promotion or honor roll. In Latin 1 seven or eight chapters are usually covered.

The reading program has several special features. One is the Archaeology Program at the Art Institute of Chicago for fifth and sixth grade Latin students in the Chicago Public Schools. The program consists of an illustrated talk by an archaeologist from the Oriental Institute, a tour of the Gallery of Ancient Art, and a session in a workroom reconstructing a reproduction of an ancient Palestinian pot from its sherds. Class time is also used to prepare for the National Mythology Exam which many of the students take.

In March most of the reading students participate in the Chicago Public Schools Latin Olympics for Latin students in grades four through twelve at the University of Illinois at Chicago. The program consists of machine-scored academic tests, art competitions, costume and modern myth contests, a guest speaker, certamen, and Latin and English oratory (see <http://cuip.net/~jay/olympics>).

Finally in May the reading students perform the annual Latin play based on some classical myth which Mulberry writes. Several performances are given in the morning for invited classes followed by a special evening Gala performance for which admission is charged to raise money for the second grade program. At the Gala the second and third graders sing in Latin and the student winner of the design contest is announced and the recipients of the other special awards are recognized. In 2000 a special feature of the Gala was a slide presentation by a graduating eighth grader using pictures

she had taken in Rome and Chicago to show what the study of Latin meant to her. After the Gala the Latin play cast celebrated with a pizza party.

The history of Latin at Ray School illustrates how parents, teachers, and administrators can work together to develop a flexible program of before-school and in-school curricular activities funded from sources outside the regular school system.

Elementary Latin as a Required Literacy Program

Murphey Traditional Academy is a K-5 magnet school geographically set in a low-income area in Greensboro, North Carolina. Because students from across the county may attend this magnet school, there is a diverse mix of race and socio-economic class.

Students in grades three through five attend Latin classes twice a week for forty minutes per session. Basically, the program is currently designed to be an extension of the regular Language Arts curriculum, with an emphasis on word study and derivation. In addition, third graders learn about daily life of the Romans including special occasions and holidays. Fourth graders begin a study of Mythology while continuing their work with derivatives. Fifth grade lessons involve a more advanced study of Mythology in preparation for the National Mythology Exam while also incorporating a bit of Roman history. Overall, the current program is a cultural investigation of the ancient Romans with an awareness of their influence on the modern world.

At Murphey every student takes Latin. Because it is not an elective and certainly not reserved for the "advanced" student, the Latin teacher Patricia Reaves has felt it necessary to find a way to reach at-risk students through the study of Latin. She has found that many students who otherwise struggle in the area of reading and language are far more confident and successful in Latin classes. Because they know that they are behind in reading, they are often unwilling to take chances or even try by the time they get to the fourth and fifth grades. When they come to Latin class though, they are on the same level with everyone else. No one has studied Latin yet, so no one has gotten behind. Students who have become frustrated in their traditional classes feel as though they have a new opportunity. Because the study of Latin utilizes many of the same strategies that are essential for achieving literacy, Reaves argues that students can learn to read, perhaps at a more accelerated rate, by learning Latin.

Reaves suggests that learning Latin conforms with the developmental stages of literacy as described by Bear et al. (1996). At the first stage, called *Emergent Readers*, readers understand letter-sound correspondence and the concept of a word. They are able to recognize simple rhymes, and have begun to spell by simply sounding out words. Because Latin is a phonetic language, these phonetic skills are learned through Latin study. Latin has no silent letters. There are no "tricks". Students are able to learn to spell Latin words successfully. They are learning phonics as well as increasing their own confidence.

Students in the *Early Letter-Name Alphabetic Stage* are beginning to distinguish beginning, medial, and final consonant sounds, though vowels are still difficult for them to identify. At this stage students are spelling inventively with increased success. Aside from merely learning to read the Latin words, students begin to learn the meanings of them. Diagraphs are also be introduced through the study of Greek words and derivatives. While students continue to learn phonetic skills, they are progressively building a vocabulary bank. This is reinforced through journal writing wherein students incorporate these new words as well as practice forming them.

During the *Middle to Late Name-Alphabetic Stage*, students begin to read very short paragraphs orally in Latin while continuing to build the Latin word bank. The oral reading continues to reinforce the phonics while raising an awareness of patterns that will raise their skills to the next level. Students begin to recognize relationships between words. This can be practiced through word puzzles such as word searches and crossword puzzles. Color-coded flash cards arranged according to parts of speech are also effective at this level. Students are beginning to recognize categories and functions of words, and their work with flash cards clarify these distinctions.

It is not until the *Within Word Pattern Stage* that students typically begin using words of more than one syllable. They start to recognize that words consist of meaningful chunks that can be broken down. Reaves suggests that in this stage study of Latin really begins to pay off. Because Latin words have been illustrating this all along, the student will have reached this level concurrently with the lower ones. They should now work with longer Latin passages, and careful comprehension checks should be put in place. The foundation that is already in place should continue to be built upon.

It is clear to see how the study of Latin benefits students in the final two stages of reading development. The *Syllables and Affixes Stage* and the *Derivational Relations Stage* are directly related to the study of Latin. Obviously students at this level are learning Greek and Latin affixes and roots. Because derivative study has been incorporated all along, students achieve this success at an

accelerated rate. They do not have to work up to this level, because they use skills throughout the entire process. At this level students also begin working with different genres and incorporating literary analysis. Mythology, history, and fable are only a few examples of the wealth of material that can be used in Latin study. Techniques such as the Paideia process and Bloom's Taxonomy are particularly useful in this area. Students reach a high level of critical thinking through interesting texts that open a world of cultural riches.

In Reave's experience Latin can be an effective tool for promoting literacy in low-achieving students. The same skills achieved in a typical reading classroom are developed through the study of Latin. Additionally, she believes that the rate of achievement will be accelerated because of the intensive vocabulary study. Latin provides the basis of many English words which become more recognizable more quickly than traditional methods will allow. Reaves argues, however, that the most important benefit of this method is, perhaps, the increased self-esteem of the students involved. Latin gives these students the opportunity to learn without the feeling that they are already behind. They know that they are already supposed to know how to read in English, but no one expects them to already know how to read in Latin. They are learning to read by means of a route typically reserved for the "brighter" students. They get to feel smart. The ability to read affords students opportunities without limits. Latin can give this gift to students who might otherwise be left behind.

Elementary Latin as a Graduate Student-based Enrichment Activity

During the spring semester of 1999, two graduate students at the University of Georgia, Elizabeth Kann and Todd Tomason, introduced the Latin language and Roman culture to the fifth grade gifted and talented class at Oglethorpe Avenue Elementary School in Athens, Georgia. This experience was not a part of their regular course of graduate study and arose almost by chance.

Because a student from UGA's education school had done several introductory Latin lessons for this class the previous semester, Eunice Tritt, the teacher for the gifted and talented at William's school, contacted Dr. Naomi Norman, coordinator of the UGA Classics graduate program to ask if any of the grad students would be interested in volunteering to develop and implement a Latin program for these children. Six grad students (more than half of the total at UGA!) expressed interest in the opportunity and brainstormed together about materials, basic format, and goals for

the proposed class. They decided they would like the students to be able to hear and speak, read and write basic Latin sentences and segments of connected prose, while acquiring an appreciation for ancient Greek and Roman culture. Therefore they divided most class sessions into two roughly equal segments: one primarily focused on language and the other on a cultural topic. They chose *The Phenomenon of Language* as the base text for the language portion, and pared down their wish list of culture topics to fifteen, one for each week they expected the program to run. In the end, two students, Kann and Tomason, alternated as instructors in Mrs. Tritt's classroom once a week.

The program was a success from the first day, when they began with the standard *Salvete* and *Quid est nomen tibi* and moved on to a discussion of Latin names. They practiced pronouncing a list of Latin names, talked about how Latin and English names indicate gender, and then related Latin names to their counterparts in English and the Romance languages. Each student chose a Latin name. After a short explanation of the baby naming ceremony, each student made a *bullae* out of decorating foil and inscribed it with his or her new Latin name. The fifth graders were both engaged and engaging, asking thoughtful questions and related Latin names and Roman naming customs to their own experiences without prompting.

Over the next seventeen weeks, using a combination of readings, plays, Q and A in the target language, and inductive grammar exercises, the class covered the nominative and accusative singulars and plurals of the first three declensions, agreement of adjectives, direct objects vs. predicate nominatives, ablatives and accusatives as objects of prepositions, and the present tense and imperatives of verbs. Although Kann and Tomason relied primarily upon material excerpted from *The Phenomenon of Language* for the sequencing of the grammatical material and for the introduction of vocabulary, they supplemented liberally with material they pulled from other texts, especially *First Latin* and *Latin is Fun*. They also tried to integrate the cultural information with the language section in some way as often as possible. For example, because their language session on adjectives was followed by a culture on the Circus Maximus and chariot racing, they described the Circus with Latin adjectives and practiced Latin colors while learning about the racing factions. Other cultural topics included school, baths, gladiatorial contests, dress, food, Roman landmarks, Roman houses, famous Romans, gods and goddesses, and various mythological stories.

Although time did not allow Kann and Tomason to hold all events they had planned, including a Roman banquet, two special classes were held. At the first, on the Ides of March, some aspects of the Roman calendar were introduced and the assassination of Julius

Caesar was acted out with the help of a script adapted from Shakespeare. April 21st was the occasion for a birthday party for Rome, during which the stories of Aeneas and Romulus and Remus were told, happy birthday was sung in Latin and brownies decorated with a Capitoline wolf made of confectioners sugar were eaten. Finally, at the elementary school graduation special Latin certificates were distributed to each member of the class.

Kann emphasizes that there was nothing elaborate about the program at Oglethorpe Avenue Elementary and suggests that calling it a program implies a degree of planning and organization that is probably not commensurate with the reality of those visits to that fifth and sixth grade gifted and talented class. At the same time Kann notes that the activities were successful in teaching students how to read substantial sections of simple Latin prose with accuracy and gusto, to make connections between the structure and vocabulary of their own language and those of Latin, and to draw comparisons and contrasts between Roman and modern cultures concerning many topics, including slavery and attitudes toward violence. Their enthusiasm was evident each day as the fifth graders made way for the third and fourth graders at the end of these sessions—the younger children would invariably ask questions about notes left on the board or extra handouts, and the fifth graders would start explaining what they had learned. After a few weeks, third and fourth graders wanted to have their own class.

Kann notes that the presence and guidance of Mrs. Tritt, Oglethorpe Avenue's teacher for the gifted and talented, made all the difference to the success of the program. Tritt advised her graduate student volunteers on pacing and offered suggestions when they were unsure how to address subjects in age-appropriate ways. She helped shape discussions with thought-provoking questions and drew comparisons between Latin topics and material the students had been covering in their regular classes. Most of all she was a warm, welcoming and enthusiastic presence throughout.

Kann also notes that this partnership did not just benefit the students. It was also a rewarding experience for both her and Tomason, and for other UGA students who filled in for them on occasion, as well. Preparing for these classes provided a much-needed break from the minutiae of graduate school obligations, and watching these students opening up to the ancient world invigorated their own love for the classics. While Kann would be the first to admit that this was not the ideal elementary school program, she suggests that if these two inexperienced grad students, with the help of a committed elementary school teacher, were able to implement it while carrying full academic loads, others can too. Classics Departments are an under-utilized resource for primary and

secondary schools, and local schools provide an excellent opportunity for Classics graduate students to have fun, to connect with their communities through service, and to explore an alternative career path in the process.

Minimus—A British Model for Latin for Elementary Students

Barbara Bell, the author of *Minimus—Starting out in Latin*, describes how a simple introduction to Latin is used in British elementary schools to teach children aged 7-10 English grammar, to serve as a language awareness course, and to make a connection with Roman history and culture in the period of the Roman occupation of Britain. An additional goal of this textbook is to give students some basic tools with which to tackle modern foreign languages at High School.

Bell says that she wrote *Minimus* because she was concerned that her pupils at High School had such a poor understanding of their own language and a relatively limited English vocabulary. Since she had acquired most of her knowledge of English through Latin and since children in British Elementary schools usually study the Romans, it seemed a sensible idea to write a book that would complement their studies in both English and History.

Minimus is not what most people expect to see when they pick up a Latin textbook. It involves simple Latin written in a full-color cartoon format. In its twelve chapters pupils are guided by Minimus, the family mouse, to an understanding of nouns, adjectives, verbs, and other grammatical points. In each chapter students also enrich their English vocabulary by means of "Latin roots" exercises. In addition, a Greek myth is told, in English, in each chapter.

The stories are based on the activities of a real family, which lived at Vindolanda, near Hadrian's Wall, at the beginning of the 2nd century A.D. A good deal about this family is known from the famous Vindolanda writing tablets—thousands of small, thin, muddy pieces of wood uncovered on the site by archaeologists. When cleaned and exposed to infrared light, these turned out to be the camp records, written in an early form of Latin in the cursive script. The museum at Vindolanda also contains a wonderful assortment of unusual artifacts, excellently preserved underground in unusual anaerobic conditions—a child's shoe, a Roman sock, a lady's hairnet and thousands of soldiers' sandals. Every story in *Minimus* is based on something real, either one of these artifacts or material suggested by a writing tablet.

Teachers of *Minimus*, who need not be Classicists, are supported by a Teacher Resource Book that contains much information

regarding Vindolanda and the historical background, translates all Latin and provides cross-curricular teaching suggestions. Based on the book's main intention of making Latin fun, the Teacher's book contains such activities as games, songs, a wordsearch, dot-to-dot ("find out what unusual creature the Romans loved to eat for dinner"—answer: roast peacock), etc.

One game that works particularly well is a card game designed to teach adjectival agreement. In the first chapter of *Minimus* students learn what a noun is and are introduced to the family that lived at Vindolanda near Hadrian's Wall. They learn to introduce themselves to each other in Latin and to make their names Roman. Even at this initial stage they become quite used to the idea that masculine names end in *-us* whereas feminine names end in *-a*.

The linguistic target of the second chapter of *Minimus* is learning what an adjective is and the concept of adjectival agreement. This grammatical feature can be taught by means of a game, as mentioned above, the necessary worksheets for which are in the Teacher's resource Book to *Minimus* and can be copied freely.

The immediate context of the adjectives game is that the governor of Britain is coming for dinner. Each member of the family gives his/her reaction to this important news. During this picture story pupils meet a series of nouns and adjectives in short sentences (*eheu! villa sordida est* or *eheu! hortus squalidus est*, etc.). In the grammar note, the mouse Minimus explains and names what an adjective is. Then comes the best moment to play this reinforcement game in which a set of nouns and a set of adjectives are photocopied for each group of children onto different-coloured cards; e.g. nouns yellow, adjectives blue. No more than six children should share a set of cards. Children place the nouns in the center of the table, spread out, faced down.

Around the nouns are placed the adjectives, also face down. The object is to collect as many correct pairs as possible. The pupil with the most pairs gets a sticker 'housepoint/merit point'- whatever the system is. Each child picks up in turn both a noun and an adjective. To make a pair the cards must agree in sense and gender. The children should not be underestimated and are very quick to spot an incorrect pair, especially with an element of competition. Cries of "No, you have an *-us* and an *-a* so that's not a pair" can soon be heard. The older, more able pupils may even use terms like "The noun is masculine but the adjective is feminine."

This activity needs careful planning. The teacher must give very clear instructions: e.g. who starts on each table; which way the game moves around the table; when to begin, etc. The teacher has the final word on whether a pair is allowed or not. Most children manage to get at least one pair in a 30-minute session. Prizes can be given in

various ways—the winning table, the boy and girl with the most pairs, the overall class champion or a sticker for everyone who gets at least one pair. The winning child receives a sticker saying *callidissimus* or *callidissima*. When he/she chooses his or her sticker, gender is again being reinforced.

Further reinforcement of this activity can be provided by "Describe your Friends" a sheet in the *Minimus* Teacher's Resource Book, in which pupils are invited to make up simple Latin sentences describing their friends or teacher with one point for each correct sentence. They enjoy insulting each other. E.g., *Davidus sordidus est*. Bell reports that activities like this one have worked well with children of a wide range of ability and ages and enable participants to learn a useful linguistic concept and to have fun while learning it.

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ELIZABETH KANN AND BARBARA BELL