

Splitting Priorities the Productive Way

It is the inevitable consequence of growing a Latin program where there is either none to begin with or only a small program: *you will teach split level classes*. There is no way around it. To combine what you are teaching into one class is never ideal, with perhaps the exception of having Latin 4 and 5 in one room for AP Latin, with authors alternating each year (thus providing the difference between Latin 4 and 5—although if College Board has its way this will no longer be an option). What I am talking about are the more difficult combinations of, say, Latin 2 and Latin 3 in the same room.

How do you provide consistent, quality Latin instruction specific to the needs of each group—including those students who are less able or just learn differently? I personally feel that there are several things that must be in place for instruction to continue in a productive manner. First, classroom routines that foster learning and independence must be developed. Then, students must be taught how to support each other via “accountable talk” and other means. There must be a greater concern in making sure that everyone understands than in everyone simply completing the assignment. If possible, there should be independent reinforcement via written or, perhaps better yet, online drills or similar. (I myself have developed innumerable drills at quia.com which my students find invaluable.) Finally, all of these things must embody, at least for me, the philosophy that being able to read Latin with accuracy is at all times our goal.

The Structure: Warm-Ups, Vocabulary, Pre-Reading, and Reading

How you structure your classes is, I believe, the key to productive Latin instruction and worth our discussing in some detail. My current level 1 and 2 Latin classes use the *Cambridge Latin Course*. Latin 3 uses *Ecce Romani*, which the previous teacher had chosen. I feel that the structure of my class routines supports the Cambridge philosophy of inductive learning. A typical day in my classroom begins with a warm-up (*praeparātiō*) that focuses on some aspect of the grammar or morphology. For instance, when in Latin 1 we are learning datives, I present students with a list of nouns to metaphrase using the placeholder sentence “Someone verbed something to someone.”:

- *servō*: Someone verbed something TO THE SLAVE.
- *discōs*: Someone verbed THE DISCUSES to someone.
- *hospitibus*: Someone verbed something TO THE GUESTS.
- *amīcum*: Someone verbed THE FRIEND to someone.
- *dominus*: THE MASTER verbed something to someone.
- *ancillae**: THE SLAVEGIRLS verbed something to someone; OR
Someone verbed something TO THE SLAVEGIRL.

I will purposely throw in something that leads to discussion about how to disambiguate identical forms such as *ancillae* (nominative plural) and *ancillae* (dative singular) when one is *reading* Latin. From here, I typically drill vocabulary with large flashcards, stopping to review forms of new words, discuss declensions, and other such topics as necessary.

These two activities ready the brain for the process of synthesizing vocabulary and morphology in the context of reading. But even at this step, I will seldom assign a story for written translation. We are learning to read Latin, not to decode it into good English (or, more often, really horrendous English). Therefore, we spend time with pre-reading activities, including reading and talking about the title of a story, reading/repeating the glossed vocabulary beneath the story, and then reading through the whole story, at least once if not twice, before looking at it more closely. A close examination of the story could be: translating it together, answering Latin questions in Latin orally (which I use to work specific aspects of new grammar or question words, or nuances of grammar—such as tense, *quid fēcit* versus *quid faciēbat*), a handout of reading comprehension questions in English or Latin or both to be worked on with partners, or a cloze exercise where the blanks are usually verb tenses or new grammar I am targeting. There are the occasions when we act out a story, and if student actors aren't doing a certain aspect of the story correctly, I will instruct them in Latin until they produce the correct action (which provides me with opportunities to use imperatives, to ask more questions in Latin, and such).

So this is Latin 1. It is constructed to insure achievement for a larger number of students (if not all students), and not just the students who can go home and memorize anything. It addresses multiple levels of Bloom's Taxonomy of cognitive development, not just knowledge level at the

bottom and synthesis and analysis at the top. I try to stretch students to see how all parts—root meaning, morphology, word order, and the like—are interrelated and thus all equally important for the ultimate goal of studying Latin: *to read Latin*. Even my vocabulary quizzes, which are in context, emphasize this goal.

Consider the change for students entering Latin 2 or 3, discovering they are in a split-level class. It is imperative for you, the teacher, if you are to keep your numbers up, to continue striving toward the goal of reaching all students and not just those who could learn anything independently. Therefore the structure and routines that support all aspects of language acquisition must be continued, starting with warm-ups. Currently I use an overhead for Latin 2 and one of the white boards for Latin 3. In the past I have also used a daily PowerPoint which I was able to prepare during my conference. The advantage of using PowerPoint was that I could not only pose the warm-up exercises, but I could also, at the click of the button, provide feedback for the students. Thus, that group of Latin 3's were able to work with greater independence.

I will still have similar sorts of things on warm-ups, emphasizing how Latin fits together as a language, and not just focusing on new forms in isolation. For instance, when working on participles, I gave them not single words but phrases to paraphrase:

- *mīlitēs, ā centuriōnibus iussī*: THE SOLDIERS, ORDERED BY THE CENTURION, verbed something.
- *Agricolam castra intrans*: Someone verbed AGRICOLA ENTERING THE CAMP.
- *Salvius Agricolam intrans cōnspicātus*: SALVIUS HAVING CAUGHT SIGHT OF AGRICOLA ENTERING verbed something.

This once again reviews not only the morphology, but also the context and phrasing. I spend a fair amount of time discussing how compact Latin is, or how sentences in a Latin narrative will develop in a chronological order. That is, in the sentence, *mīlitēs, ā centuriōnibus iussī, multa et varia faciēbant*, the soldiers don't begin doing the many different things until after they are ordered to do so. Likewise, in the sentence, *subitō Salvius, Agricolam intrans cōnspicātus, ad eum festīnāvit ut salūtāret*, Salvius can't catch sight of Agricola until Agricola first enters, and he

can't hurry to Agricola until he's caught sight of Agricola, and he can't greet Agricola until he's first hurried over to him.

As Latin becomes more difficult for students at level 2 and 3, it is more important than ever that such warm-ups and reviews take place. Students who have taken Latin in a split level or independent course are often not lacking in their knowledge of morphology, but in their understanding of phrasing and context—in their knowledge of the big picture. Therefore, I try to discuss such aspects of Latin before sending students off to work on their own, before letting the *Cambridge Latin Course* continue what I start. The interesting storyline combined with the repetition of new forms in context reinforce what I am teaching without my being present 100% of the time.

After the warm-ups, class inevitably must split. We usually alternate days in which one group will work together in the hallway while I work with the other in the classroom. For the group working independently, I assign on a rotating basis a *Magister Hodiernus* or *Magistra Hodierna* who is in charge of insuring that other classroom routines get done, especially vocabulary drill and prereading activities, before moving on to the main assignment.

Peer Teaching: Accountable Talk

Students are encouraged to ask questions or to teach each other as opposed to copying answers. In educational terminology this is referred to as “accountable talk”—talk that is accountable to learning. Students will not learn if they are simply after answers. Having a correct translation of the story on paper is not learning Latin, nor is memorizing that translation for an exam. Understanding phrasing, focusing on the details of tenses, disambiguating identical endings used for different cases, and from all that creating meaning and understanding—*that* is the goal. Students must learn to ask not just *what case* a word is but *how* you know and *how* it fits into the larger phrase, clause, and sentence.

In a split-level class this is, of course, where things can fall apart and where adjustments must constantly be made. The students' determination to “get the assignment done before the bell” can

often outweigh approaching the assignment in a productive way. Combine this with an unevenness of quality among the students and you have the pitfalls of the split-level class.

*The question then becomes: **How** do you combat this?*

First, you have to be honest with yourself regarding what is happening with your class, considering carefully what you can fix with a little creative thinking and what you can't. My current Latin 2's had a difficult time adjusting to a split-level class, and instead of coming together as a cooperative group, I had several who were falling further and further behind. To remedy part of the problem—consolidation of the ever increasing number of morphological endings and grammatical concepts—I compiled grammar cards on particular topics such as nouns, verbs active indicative, passive indicative, subjunctives, participles, etc, which I then laminated so I could write on them. In advance I mark up the cards, circling things that they will meet in the story. I then distribute the cards to the students who are then in turn become the “expert” on one particular concept. The students have said that this has helped. Each group of students will have its own unique problem, one which you, the teacher, will have to troubleshoot.

Independent Accountability and Computer Reviews

I am able to complement the work the students do cooperatively and our limited time together in class with computer review materials I create at www.quia.com. These range from simple flashcard drills to vocabulary quizzes in context and a multitude of other games in between. Because I can provide additional information along with the answers to explain WHY a certain answer is so, students are able to receive essentially one-on-one feedback—immediate feedback, which I feel is critical in learning. I typically use quia reviews before quizzes and tests to help students develop an appreciation for the kinds of details I require them to know, the same kinds of details they will encounter on AP Latin exams. In addition, the quia reviews can act as a tutor for students who cannot come in for tutorials in the morning.

Organization and Preparation

Some of you may be asking how much time to I put into my split level class. In all honestly, it is the class I must be the most organized and prepared for, the one I can least “wing” because one group must always have work to do independently—meaningful work, supporting my philosophy that being able to read Latin with accuracy is at all times our goal. I have to have two warm-ups prepared in advance, two set of flashcards that must—unlike my Latin 1 cards—have English on the back so that students who don’t know what they mean can still lead the vocabulary drill. In fact, I spent a significant portion of last summer making detailed flashcards for Latin 2 that include sentences with the word in context on the back, the word declined or conjugated, and derivatives. I like to also have a small white board with instructions for the *Magister Hodiernus* written up. Because this is my first year teaching Latin 2 using the *Cambridge Latin Course*, I’ve had to create all my quia materials from scratch. These things take time, but are well worth the investment if it means that your students continue to progress in their acquisition of Latin.

CLOSING

There is no magic answer to how to manage a split level class. Much will depend upon your own philosophy as a teacher. Whatever your circumstances, I feel it is key to do these things:

1. Set up valid routines that build knowledge
2. Teach students how to work well cooperatively, adjusting as necessary to meet the needs of students.
3. Create a means for independent learning and feedback, via computer or some other method.
4. Be organized and prepared.

And above all, never lose sight of your goal of reading Latin—real Latin. To do so you must make sure that as many students as possible in these small classes move on, and that when they move on they have mastered the skills necessary to succeed, to be able to pick up and read—*tolle*

lege—whatever you have next in your curriculum. READ, I emphasize, and not parse to death, one slow word at a time, the flowing lines of Vergil. I don't want students to just decipher and understand a great scene such as the one with the sea serpents in book 2, but to experience with wonder the fantastic scifi on offer by reading it line by line, sentence by sentence, image by image:

Ecce autem geminī ā Tenedō tranquilla per alta—
horrēscō referēns!—immēnsīs orbibus anguēs
incumbunt pelagō pariterque ad lītora tendunt;
pectora quōrum inter flūctūs arrēcta iubaeque
sanguineae superant undās, pars cētera pontum
pōne legit sinuatque immēnsa volūmine terga.
Fit sonitus spūmante salō; iamque arva tenēbant
ārdentēsque oculōs suffectī sanguine et ignī
sībila lambēbant linguīs vibrantibus ōra.

Our priority is truly keeping Latin alive by reading it and performing it, because only then can we understand it as the Romans did. We can say we are splitting priorities when we have to divide our time between two levels of Latin in one room, but really we are only splitting is our time, not our priorities, if we never lose sight of our true goal.