

The Growth of Latin Programs with Comprehensible Input

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*He has recently published an intermediate level novella, *Itinera Petri: Flammae Ducant* (The Journeys of Peter: Let the Flames Lead). The novella of 4600 words uses 330 distinct vocabulary and limits the verbs to the 50 Most Important Verbs list. It is available on Amazon.*

http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/069254416X?keywords=itinera%20petri&qid=1445343183&ref=sr_1_1&sr=8-1

Latin teachers for a little over the last 100 years have worked hard to convince themselves and others that Latin was “different” and “special” and was “not like other languages.” We have done so to our near demise.

You can’t really *speak* Latin, can you?

Can you actually have dinner conversation in Latin?

Don’t Latin classes just pore over boring Latin texts? Recite conjugated verbs in order? What could be compelling about that?

How could you write anything worth publishing—you don’t have any native speakers, do you?

The [MLA 2012 report just released](#) reports that ALL language enrollments have dropped and that they have hit Latin the hardest second only to Ancient Greek. We can no longer afford to teach Latin as usual if we wish to remain a viable language for our students.

The [SALVI organization](#) has been conducting, for the last 19 years, an event known as “Rusticatio” in which Latin teachers and other Latin enthusiasts come together at the Claymont Estate (Charles Town, WV and locations in CA as well) for a week of total immersion living, studying, cooking, eating and playing *Latine tantum* (in Latin only).

Confronted with the realities of dropping enrollments, and knowing my own positive experiences with Comprehensible Input, two years ago, I collaborated on beginning a new program known as

Pedagogy-Rusticatio in which Latin teachers train in methods that fall under the umbrella of Comprehensible Input. Jason Fritze and I co-led that first event.

This year, SALVI made the decision to redirect their Pedagogy-Rusticatio applicants to the National TPRS Conference, (Teaching Proficiency Through Reading and Storytelling) in Reston, Virginia outside of Washington, D.C. Lending SALVI's own program and influence, Latin teachers began signing up for NTPRS 2015. Three Latin teachers from SALVI presented five different sessions at NTPRS: *Detoxing from the Textbook; Speak Comprehensibly from Day One* (Keith Toda), *Three Lesson Plans with Compelling Comprehensible Input; Legere et Loqui: How to Generate Latin Conversations from Any Text* (Justin Slocum Bailey), and *Report from the Field: CI Latin From Start to Finish, and What About AP?* (Bob Patrick). Three years ago, there were three Latin teachers at NTPRS (Las Vegas), then only one in Dallas, 2013. In 2014 there were four at iFLT (The International Forum on Language Teaching – also a CI methods teacher training) and one at NTPRS. And then, this year—46 at NTPRS, Reston, Virginia.

Why would 46 Latin teachers register for and fully participate in the 2015 NTPRS conference recently convened in Reston, VA? Why would these same 46 teachers make reservations for an immersion dinner (known as *Cena Latina*)?

This is not a new phenomenon. Some of us have been involved in CI approaches for as long as 15 years. In the last five years, that number has reaching what some might call a tipping point. I created the largest Latin teacher listserv, Latin Best Practices, in 2006 with John Piazza (Latin teacher, Berkley High School, Berkley, CA). Today, LBP has over 1300 members with the vast majority of its activity devoted to sharing Comprehensible Input activities, successes, difficulties and innovations. Teachers on the listserv have worked collaboratively together to define the “fifty most important verbs” from which many are redesigning how they approach their work, and a [CI resource blog](#) where members stockpile “how-to’s”, links to CI blogs and other resources. In addition to the annual Pedagogy-Rusticatio sessions offered by SALVI in West Virginia, CI Latin teachers and one CI French teacher in Georgia’s largest school system, Gwinnett County Public Schools (Rachel Ash, Miriam Patrick, Bob Patrick, Keith Toda and Lauren Watson) have created an annual CI Training Workshop fully sponsored by the school system with stipends paid to all teachers who take the 20 hour training. Initially 40 teachers from all languages participated, and this past summer of 2015 there were 60 participants. This training is now an annual part of the GCPS continuing education offerings.

There are some things that we want our modern language colleagues to know about us.

- We do speak Latin, and it doesn't matter that there are no native speakers. There have been, continuously, speakers of Latin living in the world for the last 2500 years without any gaps. Those of us who speak Latin have learned from others who speak Latin, and we have done it without the support that comes to most language learners. All of us were taught Latin with a grammar translation approach. We have had to go against the professional grain to find speakers of Latin and learn from them. We have had to create our own immersion experiences at significant cost of both dollars and untold volunteer hours. There is **nothing** that one cannot talk about in Latin. Just like any other language, vocabulary is created when there is a need for it, and there is a long-standing tradition in

- Latin for how that is done. If you can talk about it in Mandarin or Spanish, we can talk about it in Latin.
- Latin is a highly inflected language, and so our experience is probably more like CI teachers of Russian, German, Japanese or Polish than Spanish or French even though Spanish and French are Latinate languages. Each of our nouns have 30 different possible endings, for example, and some of us are noticing that most of them tend to be acquired later than other items of the language.
 - While we have 2000 years of literature of every genre, we have few comprehensible, compelling, graded readers for our novice and intermediate students. Most of us are writing such materials on the fly, sharing them with each other and doing the best we can, but it's never enough. We love embedded readings (which I first learned from [Lauri Clarcq](#)) and began teaching to other teachers at various conferences (both Latin and modern language teachers). We are creating embedded readings from all eras of the Latin literature, but that is time consuming. We are doing it, and sharing it, but there is never enough. Most recently, a small cadre of us created embedded readings of the entire AP Latin syllabus. Add to this that most of us are the only Latin teachers in our buildings, as are many teachers of less commonly taught languages, and the work load becomes overwhelming. We are in public schools, private schools, and charter schools. We teach elementary, middle and high school students. A few of our number even teach at the university level, but that is a realm where CI in Latin, like CI modern language, is still moving slowly.
 - We deeply value what you are doing in your CI classrooms, and we want to learn from you. We are doing some significant work, too, and we want to share that with you. We want to find our way into the heart and activities of this community and make good contributions to it.

So, we know that people find it hard to believe that we are doing the work of Comprehensible Input, that those of us doing it are experiencing not only a new kind of joy in teaching but expanding programs.

At the beginning of the 2015-2016 school year the Latin program in my school (Parkview High School, metro Atlanta) will have 600 students in 5 levels. In 2005 when I took over the then very traditional program, there were 130 students in 4 levels. Using nothing but CI approaches over the last 10 years, the program has increased by over 400% and has shifted from a fairly academically elite program to a program that more closely resembles the demographic of our entire school population. I am now joined by three other CI Latin teachers for a total of four. Latin has become the second largest language in our school, which offers French, German, Latin and Spanish. Many of us are experiencing the pains of growth, of changing perceptions about Latin, and are doing the difficult work of convincing administrators and our own colleagues that CI work is powerful and that it matters for our students and the future of Latin in our culture. As a foreign language department chair, I am enjoying the privilege of encouraging CI work in my entire department among all languages.

The reader might wonder why anyone should bother with Latin in the first place. It's a dead language, right? I will offer a very practical reason and suggest a framework within which to understand it. There is no profession that any student in any school will go into—whether a student wants to “do hair” or do surgery—in which the professional language is not almost

entirely Latinate. The professional English that is used for tools, processes, chemical, systems, relationships, organization and philosophical understanding (business models, mission statements, etc.) are all created from Latinate English. In fact, we know that the more educated one's English is the more Latin based it is, reaching a 75% saturation level. We used to assume that students headed for medicine and law should take Latin for these reasons, but the same holds true for the hair stylist, the auto-mechanic, the retail salesperson, those in janitorial services, financial planners, plumbers et al. There is no profession in this country where this is not the case. Latin students have a jump start to understanding the verbiage that they will encounter in their higher education, skills training and professional work.

Professional vocabulary, though a very practical reason for studying Latin, is really a subset of a much larger reason that we must ensure the health of Latin programs. There is no language in existence that connects all of the dots of culture in Western Civilization, as does Latin. Latin students begin to have insight into all seven of the components of culture (family/social organization, customs, religion, language, literature and art, government and economic systems) simply because they are studying Latin. This is true for cultures expressed in Western Civilization as expressed in Europe, parts of North Africa, and in all of the Americas. Students living in the western part of the world have a right to access the connection that Latin makes to the entire fabric of culture. While each language does some of that in their respective cultures, no language does that like Latin does for the entirety of the West.

Why bother speaking Latin? Any teacher who has even begun to grasp Comprehensible Input knows the answer: all kinds of students can acquire the language when we deliver understandable messages in the target language, and we deliver those messages in two ways: by speaking and by reading. If Latin really matters for a fully engaged life in the West, then we have to teach it in a way that all kinds of learners can acquire it. Otherwise, it becomes a relic that our elders reminisce about and a language that offers help to no one.

46 Latin teachers did, indeed, show up at NTPRS 2015. NTPRS 2016 is in Reno. Latin teachers are already talking about being there. If Latin is a “dead language”, CI is resurrecting it.

RESOURCES

SALVI—The North American Institute of Living Latin Studies www.latin.org

Latin Best Practices—A listserv with 1300 members sharing best practices with each other <https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/latin-bestpractices/info>

Teaching Classical Languages—The peer reviewed, online journal of the Classical Association of Midwest and Southern States. [This Spring 2015 issue](#) is devoted entirely to “oral Latin” articles including those that focus on CI methods. Bob's article, [Making Sense of CI in the Latin Classroom](#).

ACL 2015 CI Presentations—Presentations offered at the American Classical League 2015

Institute all of which focused on CI methods. Five presenters offered 7 workshops totaling 12 hours of instruction. <https://aclreadingplus2015.wordpress.com/>

AP Latin readings recreated with embedded readings—

<http://lapis.practomime.com/index.php/698> created largely by the work of Caroline Miklosovic, Kevin Ballestrini (whose group hosts the works and makes them available to all), and Bob Patrick.

Blogs:

Latin Best Practices CI Resources

<https://latinbestpracticescir.wordpress.com/>

Rachel Ash and Miriam Patrick—Pomegranate Beginnings

<http://pomegranatebeginnings.blogspot.com/>

Justin Slocum Bailey—Indwelling Language

<http://indwellinglanguage.com/blog/>

Lance Piantaggini—Magister P

<http://magisterp.com/>

Keith Toda—Todally Comprehensible Latin

<http://todallycomprehensiblelatin.blogspot.com/>

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