# Parvoli Romani (Little Romans): Teaching Latin in Grades 2, 3 and 4

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# Abstract

This article describes an exploratory Latin program offered for children in grades 2, 3 and 4 in a small, urban elementary school in East Tennessee and the results of a research study conducted to investigate its efficacy. Results of the analysis of the qualitative data, collected from direct classroom observations and individual classroom teacher interviews, report that the pilot Latin program positively impacted the 66 children who received Latin instruction in a variety of ways including: stimulation of their higher-order thinking and reasoning skills; an appreciation for Roman culture, literature and language; and the interconnectivity of Latin and English. Implications of this study suggest that administrators and educators should consider the importance of Latin study, especially at the elementary school level, in improving academic skills in general and language skills in particular.

Keywords: Latin, FLES, teacher education, academic improvement, language skills

# 1. Introduction

Even though the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001(NCLB) designated the study of world languages (i.e., French, German, Latin, Spanish) as part of the core curriculum (along side of English language arts, math, science and other content areas), "educational policy makers at the state and local levels often opt to place greater instructional emphasis on content areas in which students, and ultimately the schools systems themselves, are held accountable through testing" (Taylor & Lafayette, 2011, p. 22). This seems incongruous in light of the fact that over the past few decades, empirical research studies have unequivocally documented the efficacy of second language study and its positive impact on academic achievement and basic proficiency skills as measured by established standardized tests (Cooper, 1987; Eddy, 1981; Olson & Brown, 1992; Timpe, 1979; Wiley, 1985). Additionally, although there exists a corpus of research studies that has focused on the positive impact of world language programs in the elementary school arena (Armstrong & Rogers, 1997; Davis-Wiley & Miller, 2010, 2013; and DiPietro, 1980; Garfinkel & Tabor, 1991; Rafferty, 1986; Saunders, 1998, Schuster, 2005; Taylor & Lafayette, 2011), few empirical research studies conducted in recent years have focused specifically on the study of Latin in the elementary schools. Research from the 1970s, however, investigating Latin FLES (i.e., Foreign Language in the Elementary Schools) programs, reported overall gains in reading, language skills and math skills (essential academic proficiency skills), as measured by the Metropolitan Achievement Test (Sheridan, 1973); reading achievement scores (District of Columbia Public Schools, 1971); English vocabulary (Hoffenberg et al., 1971) and reading skills (Masciantonio, 1977).

Along this same vein, although there is today a plethora of instructional resources available for teaching French, German and Spanish, and most recently, Chinese in the elementary schools, there is a veritable dearth of published information describing in general, introductory (i.e., exploratory) Latin programs for the lower grades, and in particular, related empirical research studies documenting their efficacy. This article, therefore, will describe a pilot Latin exploratory program, developed and implemented for grades 2, 3 and 4, and share the results from a qualitative research study conducted to investigate the impact of Latin instruction on the students in the program.

## 2. Description of the Current Study

## 2.1 Purpose of the Study

Even though LaFleur (1986) reported that, "during the late 1970s and the early 1980s considerable public interest in Latin was generated for its usefulness in improving English vocabulary and reading comprehension, as demonstrated in several research studies conducted during the period and widely reported..." (p. 75), there have been no remarkable published works focusing on the study of Latin in the lower grades since that time. Therefore, it was the purpose of the present study to explore the potential effects of Latin instruction, albeit short in duration, on children in grades 2, 3 and 4. This was accomplished through classroom observations focusing specifically on the types and levels of student participation and degrees of student interest present during Latin instruction, in addition to the collection and analysis of the children's classroom teachers' perceptions of the impact of the exploratory Latin program on their children.

## 3. Description of the Exploratory Latin Program

## 3.1 Venue for the FLES program

Mooreland Heights Elementary School (MHES), located 10 minutes away from The University of Tennessee, was selected as the locale for this program due to the openness of its principal and classroom teachers to explore ways in which their students could be enriched. (MHES was the site for two previous FLES empirical research studies examining Spanish and French FLES programs conducted in 2010 and 2013 by the two authors of this article.) There are approximately 291 students and 23 teachers in grades K-5 at MHES which is a Title I school (i.e., 80% of the students are on free and reduced-lunch programs), and a Tech 1:1 school (all students have access to personal electronic devices, and a Value-Plus, Art 360 school (i.e., art is integrated into all content areas.) Students from one classroom each from grade levels 2, 3 and 4, participated in the Latin exploratory FLES program conducted during the spring of 2014.

### 3.2 Selection of the Instructional Grade Levels

Due to the fact that initial licensure in World Languages (i.e., French, German, Latin and Spanish) is now a PreK-12 program in Tennessee (it was previously a 7-12 licensure program) starting in the fall of 2015, it was necessary for the coordinator of the WL ED program at The University of Tennessee (UT) to develop and initiate an elementary component (15 field hours) to add to the existing middle school experience (15 field hours) to take place during the 2014 spring semester prior to the 2014-2015 fall-spring internship for its rising interns. Since one Latin pre-intern needed to participate in an elementary field experience, and given the fact that there are no elementary Latin programs in Knoxville, TN, the coordinator of the program, in concert with the principal at MHES, created a unique field experience for the rising Latin intern. It was decided that the student would spend approximately 15 hours at MHES, beginning with observations in grades K-5, in classrooms whose teachers volunteered to allow these observations, followed by actual Latin instruction in three classrooms on different grade levels. The scheduled hours of observation in grades K-5 took place during the last 3 weeks in February. During her observations, the rising-intern took extensive guided field notes and then posted her notes and personal reflections on a wiki website (created by the WL ED coordinator at UT). Specifically, she reported: teacher strategies; pacing, instructional artifacts; travel patterns; technology used; teacher-to-student directions; types of questions asked; and classroom management. On the final day of her last scheduled observation, the rising intern was subsequently asked by the principal in which grades she would like to teach an exploratory Latin program; she selected grades 2, 3 and 4. An appropriate curriculum, consisting of three lessons, was then developed, approved and implemented during the first 2 weeks in March during which she taught three class sessions of 30 minutes for each grade level classroom on three separate days, within a 10-day time period. (See Figures 1, 2 and 3 for overviews of these lessons.)

# 3.2.1. Curriculum

It was decided that the Latin teacher would create one lesson plan for each day of instruction that she would adapt to reflect the content taught on each grade level and accommodate the developmental, social, emotional, and cognitive abilities of each group of children, ranging in age from 6 to 9 years old, in grades 2, 3 and 4. In this way, she would essentially only have to create one set of instructional materials for each lesson yet be able to differentiate the level of instructional delivery and student activities that would be appropriate for children on each grade level.

## 3.2.2. Instructional Strategies and Student Activities

Having already observed the three classrooms in which she would offer Latin instruction, the rising intern was able to draw from her extensive field notes taken during her observations as she planned the types of instructional strategies, student activities and classroom management plans she felt were the most effective with and appropriate for the children. These included modeling/repetition, guided questioning, hands-on activities with student choice and positive reinforcement of good behavior with awards in Grade 2. In the third grade classroom, she used direct instruction, modeling and guided practice. Student behavior was controlled by use of a timer and lights being turned on and off. For the fourth grade, the Latin teacher used review, modeling, and small cooperative learning groups, and reinforced positive behavior with oral reinforcement. Throughout each of the classes she taught on all grade levels, she also fully engaged the children with booklets, iPads, white boards, teacher-made manipulatives and art projects that kept them on-task.

## **3.3.3** Content for Instruction

Lessons for all grade levels started with *Salvete, Omnes*! [Hello, everyone!], and then led into a quick review (for lessons 2 and 3), which was reinforced with vibrant Power Point slides to support all facets of the three lessons. The Latin teacher incorporated Roman culture (e.g., "Who were the ancient Romans?" and geography (e.g., Where did they live?) throughout all three lessons; reinforced English parts of speech (i.e., "What part of speech is a name? Noun? Verb? Adjective?; and introduced *Daedalus and Icarus*, an authentic, classic Roman story which the children read and illustrated (Figure 4). During the third and final Latin lesson, the rising intern explained how Roman names were formed and guided the children on how to select their own Roman names. They were subsequently awarded personal certificates of Roman citizenship (Figure 5).

# 3.3.4 Instructional Materials and Resources

In addition to her original Power Point slides, the Latin teacher punctuated her mini-presentations and animated interactive exchanges with the students with a variety of original ancillary colorful worksheets (i.e., for matching Latin vocabulary words and identifying correct Latin root words in English words), a glossary for the *Daedalus and Icarus* story, and an art project template to color and annotate. Additionally, lines of authentic Latin text were drawn from LaFleur's (1999) *Love and Transformation: An Ovid Reader* to demonstrate identification of English words from Latin; the website <u>http://www.primarytexts.co.uk/free resources/Myths17-21.pdf</u> provided a free download of the myth of *Daedalus and Icarus*.

# 4. Methodology

# 4.1 Research Questions

In order to access the efficacy of the pilot exploratory Latin program taught at Mooreland Heights Elementary, the authors of this article sought to answer the following questions:

- How do young children participate in an exploratory Latin class?
- What level of interest do the children exhibit during Latin instruction?
- What are the classroom teachers' perceptions regarding the impact of Latin instruction on their children?

### 4.2 Participants

Three classroom teachers, one each in grades 2, 3 and 4, volunteered to participate in the present study and gave the researchers written permission to do so following approvals from IRB Human Subject Research offices at The University of Tennessee and Knox County Schools. In addition, 66 students' parents signed permission forms, allowing them to be observed in class by the lead researcher for this study. All three classroom teachers were women and of the 66 students, there were 18 (11 girls and 7 boys) in grade 2; 28 in grade 3 (14 girls and 14 boys); and in grade 4, there were 20 students (10 girls and 10 boys).

#### 5. Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected from two sources for this research study:

- 1. observations of the 66 students during FLES lessons and,
- 2. individual interviews with the three classroom teachers (i.e., grades 2, 3 and 4).

#### 5.1 Observations

Over 30 pages of field notes were taken by the lead researcher during her observations of Latin instruction in which she documented the different instructional strategies used, the types and frequencies of teacher-to-student exchanges and the levels of engagement and interest by the students during class. Her personal reflections regarding what she felt the students gained from Latin instruction (e.g., new knowledge gained, impact on their basic literacy skills, and connections to previous knowledge) were added at the end of her scripted field notes for each observation.

#### 5.2 Interviews

One set of 30-minute individual interviews was conducted with each of the three grade level classroom teachers at the end of the week during which Latin instruction ended. An open-ended question format was used following a set of guide questions (Table 1) that had previously been sent to the classroom teachers. A digital recorder was used to capture the interviews after which they were transcribed for later qualitative data analysis (Hatch, 2002). The researcher subsequently manually analyzed the data in an attempt to identify reoccurring trends and themes.

#### 6. Results and Discussion

#### 6.1 Observations

After careful review of her scripted, guided observations and reflections, this researcher was inspired by the skills and natural teacher *with-it-ness* she observed in the rising Latin intern. The young educator followed her lesson plans religiously, managed to kept a good teaching pace, did a good job of classroom management, and was only tempted a couple of times to waver from her instructional plans. One instance occurred when a class was disrupted by a few over-zealous young boys in a fourth grade class, fighting over who was going to lay claim to a particular Latin *nomen* (name). Another *lectio interrupta* (interrupted lesson) happened in a third grade class when in order to take advantage of a *teachable moment* (Havighurst, 1957) when introducing the three genders for Latin nouns (i.e., feminine, masculine and neuter), the Latin teacher attempted to describe what the concept *neuter* meant, using the mule as an example. Several animated and interesting conversations subsequently occurred amongst the children, the gist of which truly escaped this researcher.

In all, the observed student activities carefully planned and facilitated by the Latin teacher were a testament to Halls and Moats' (1999) assertion that, "children's learning is interactive and multi-dimensional" (p. 28). Throughout the lead researcher's observations of the pilot Latin program, this notion was indeed validated by the enthusiastic responses and high level of interest exhibited in the students' creative and curious questions throughout their three Latin classes. Encouragement of the children's language development within a social learning context (such as in an exploratory Latin program classroom) is predicated on the idea that children's vocabulary development occurs along with their cognitive and semantic (meaning) framework (Vygotsky, 1978). This concept was witnessed in each of the three classroom lessons observed throughout the duration of the pilot program. One instance occurred in grade 2, when the teacher asked, "Who can tell me who spoke Latin?" One child responded enthusiastically, "the Romans, a long, long time ago." Another threw up her hand and added, "They were called the *ainshunt* [sic] Romans," followed by a third child who proudly shouted, "it's pronounced [spelled] a-n-c-i-e-n-t," after which the teacher complimented both children for being able to use this special new word they had just learned in the previous Latin lesson.

Most surprisingly, to this researcher, was the observation of the development of the students' linguistic proficiency in language and literacy development. One of the activities that the children thoroughly enjoyed was a hands-on exercise in which the *parvoli romani* (little Romans) were assigned to small groups, given a poster board and asked to categorize 11 Latin words, written on squares of paper, by their genders, placing each word under one of three identified gender columns. The students recognized each of the Latin words from an authentic Ovid reading in which they had previously learned that Latin feminine words end in *a*, masculine words end in *us* and neuter words end in *um*. Even though the second and third graders had no idea of what the concept *neuter* meant, all grade level students were able to categorize these words accurately.

The latter is an illustration of the children's cognitive development, a concept which has been studied, documented and reported by a number of researchers including Winne and Nesbit (2009) and Vygotsky (1978), in his social learning theory. The notion that, "To acquire new information, it must be connected to existing knowledge" (Filice, 2011, p. 35) was observed as the children discussed in small groups the reasons for classifying the Latin words under each gender column. They then participated in whole group discussion about how these Latin words are present in everyday English words, thus making the connection of classroom Latin to present day life.

Children in all three grade levels, participating in the pilot Latin program, appeared to be engaged, highly interested and motivated to participate in class discussions, small group and individual activities.

## 6.2 Interviews

The interviews with the classroom teachers, who were present during the three Latin lessons, yielded a generous amount of data, yet, only three typologies emerged, following qualitative analysis of the transcribed data, guided by the study's research questions. All three focus on the classroom teachers' perceptions of the children during Latin instruction, and are:

- The children's level of interest in the Latin classes;
- The children's level of participation in different student activities facilitated by the Latin teacher; and,
- What the classroom teachers felt the students gained from the exploratory Latin experience.

# 6.2.1. Children's Level of Interest

All three grade level teachers reported that their students were "fully engaged" during Latin class. When each of the teachers was probed by the principal investigator why each one thought that the students were so actively involved and interested in Latin class, the individual teachers attributed the high level of their children's interest to a variety of reasons. The second grade teacher volunteered, "The children loved being able to make up their own endings to "the story" (i.e., the Daedalus and Icarus myth that was taught in the first two Latin lessons). When the same teacher was asked specifically if the children gave their endings orally or in writing, she proudly exclaimed, "...in writing! They are used to being challenged...Common Core...and they rise to the occasion." The third grade teacher was delighted to report that her 28 children "just loved the personalized [Latin] names and went on to volunteer how the children insisted on being called by their Latin names not only the remainder of the day on which they had chosen their names, but even on the days following the end of Latin instruction. The fourth grade teacher, during her interview, echoed this same sentiment when she shared how her children loved changing their English names to Latin ones because it "met them on their level" and "...made it personal for them...it was important." This same teacher expressed the fact that the Latin teacher "made [the] most of her time" and "was able to keep them engaged." Thus, this researcher asks, could the full engagement of young students, in part, be due to the teacher's "appropriate pace, not too fast, not too slow" pace, or her ability to give "directions clearly," her "smooth, smooth presentation," and/or to her "extremely [well] laid-out lessons?" Additionally, could full student engagement be in direct response to a teacher, such as the Latin instructor in the present research study, who was able to take "...into consideration the age and stage [developmental and or cognitive] of the children?"

From all indications, it appears as though the rising Latin intern was able to not only plan a well-executed series of three scaffolded lessons, which engaged all students, even the large third grade class with 28 students in it, but also to encourage a high level of lively student participation.

# 6.2.2. Children's Level of Participation

Throughout her observations with the Latin program students, the principal researcher took special note of the types of activities that appeared to elicit the highest level of voluntary participation. Activities in which the students (second through fourth grade) could express their own creativity (i.e., when they colored the wings for the *Icarus* art project, were asked to write their original alternative endings to the *Daedalus and Icarus* story, and were invited to select their new special Latin names), elicited the greatest amount of enthusiasm amongst the children and evoked a happy, classroom ambiance. They just "loved their [Roman Citizenship] certificates and insisted on keeping them next to their English name cards in the …classroom," reported the third grade teacher." The second graders especially enjoyed "getting a little of the [Roman] culture," according to their classroom teacher who went on to comment upon the unsolicited types of questions her students asked the teacher.

One example given occurred following a lesson on Latin roots when one child asked, "Why were some of the Latin words similar to some English words?" The classroom teacher went on to say, "That was cool, noticing the match-up between Latin and English words." In addition to the aforementioned, the classroom teachers reported that their children loved working in small groups on the Latin gender project, playing Latin bingo (with root words), and learning about where and when the Romans lived.

### 6.2.3. What the Students Gained from the Latin Experience

When the classroom teachers were asked what it is that they felt that their children actually gained from this introductory Latin program, consisting of only three 30-minute Latin classes, they appeared to be in total agreement. According to them, the students enjoyed learning: how many English words are derived from Latin words ("*aero* and *geo* come from Latin"); how Latin sounds ("the Latin teacher read in Latin to them from a book"); where the ancient Romans lived; and that, "they could translate a few words from Latin to English." Additionally, it was reported that the young Latin scholars appeared to be highly motivated to fully participate in all class activities, enthusiastically ask and answer questions, take notes, and willingly complete all projects during Latin instruction. It was also noted by all classroom teachers that after the Latin teacher had left, the children would engage the regular classroom teachers about the content covered in Latin class ("Did you know that the Romans…?) and inquire when their Latin *magistra* (teacher) would return.

### 7. Limitations

Given the extremely brevity of the exploratory Latin program, the small number of students it involved and the highly-focused albeit only two-prong qualitative nature of the study (i.e., classroom observations and individual teacher interviews), it is not possible to generalize the findings of this research study to other languages, venues or larger student populations. These were all inherent limitations of the research study presented in this article. Yet, are not the findings of the present study indicative of the potential positive impact of similar pilot language programs in Latin on early language learners in other venues? Will this initial exploratory study of Latin have a longitudinal impact on the 66 children who participated in the short, albeit intense program? The researchers predict that the students at Mooreland Heights Elementary will long remember their work with identifying Latin roots from the basic sight and academic language words they manipulated in class. They trust that these young Latin scholars will remember the times of the ancient Romans, where they lived, what they looked like, how they spoke, what they wore and ate, and how their names were derived. Surely these *parvoli romani* will long savor the rhythmic cadence of the drumming on their desks as they recited in unison, with their Latin *magistra* (teacher), the myth of *Daedalus and Icarus...* and that they will continue to dream of new endings to the ancient story.

### 7. Conclusions and Recommendations

Exploratory programs in modern world and classical languages are not new to the educational arena, yet, there exists a paucity in the published literature describing pilot/exploratory Latin programs for the lower elementary grades. Thus is the importance of the present study and others yet to follow, which hopefully will continue to investigate the potential efficacy of these unique programs by carefully and thoughtfully gathering and analyzing empirical research data in both qualitative and quantitative platforms. With the current emphasis on the importance of high stakes assessments in today's educational arena, in which the core content areas appear to be valued more than the arts (including second language study), it is imperative that administrators, classroom educators and others explore how to return the study of Latin to its rightful place, in the curriculum, along side of the other content areas, starting in the early elementary years.

Why study Latin? Why, not, indeed, when its study has a direct and irrefutable link, documented by empirical research, to a propensity for academic success in general and linguistic proficiency, specifically. What better time to include Latin as a content area then in the early grades? Latin study in the lower elementary school arena, as documented in the literature and reported in the present research study, has a direct impact on children's linguistic proficiency and literacy, for, "as children's understandings of words and use of words improves, so does their ability to reason, which further enhances their ability to use the words in more complex settings" (Hay & Fielding-Barnesly, 2012, p. 26),... and perhaps score higher on standardized assessments. Therefore, the researchers would like to strongly suggest that administrators and educators should consider the importance of Latin study, especially at the elementary school level, in improving academic skills in general and language skills in particular.

#### **Table 1: Interview Question Protocol**

#### Guide Questions:

- 1. What teacher strategies were used?
- 2. How did the teacher pace her lessons?
- 3. What teacher travel patterns did your observe?
- 4. What teaching materials/artifacts were used?
- 5. What types of technology were used? How often?
- 6. Please comment on the directed student activities you observed.
- 7. How were the teacher's directions to the students?
- 8. What types of questions did the students ask the teacher?
- 9. What type of activities did the children enjoy?
- 10. What activities did the children find easy to follow?
- 11. What activities did the children find difficult to follow?
- 12. What potential classroom management challenges did the teacher appear to have?
- 13. What did the children learn in their Latin classes?
- 14. What have the children shared with you about their Latin lessons?
- 15. If you were to give the Latin teacher any suggestions, regarding her lessons, what would they be?
- 16. Other comments:

#### Figure 1: Latin Lesson One

Goals:	* Goal 4: Develop Insight	Student Activities:
<ul> <li>Students will read the story of Daedalus and Icarus in English and Latin.</li> </ul>	into Own Language and Culture Instructional Methods: * Repetition	<ul> <li>Read aloud.</li> <li>Answer questions.</li> <li>Write answers on vo-</li> </ul>
<ul> <li>Students will identify</li> <li>Latin root words.</li> </ul>	<ul><li>Repetition</li><li>Direct Instruction</li></ul>	cabulary handouts. * Create sound effects.
Standards:	* Q & A * Read Aloud	Materials: * Picture booklet
<ul> <li>Goal 1: Communicate in a Foreign Language</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>* Jigsaw/Cooperative</li> <li>Learning Groups</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>Background Story Handout</li> </ul>
<ul> <li>Goal 3: Connect with</li> <li>Other Disciplines and</li> <li>Expand Knowledge</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>Scaffolding</li> <li>Anticipation Guide</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>PowerPoint Slides</li> <li>Vocabulary Handouts</li> </ul>

#### Figure 2: Latin Lesson Two

Goals: standing of Greco-Coloring activity. Roman Culture Students will demon-Write Latin theme strate and under-Goal 5: Participate in word. standing of key Wider Communities of Write alternate endthemes and events in Language and Culture ing. the story of Daedalus Instructional Methods: Play Bingo vocabulary and Icarus. Review review game. Students will identify Q&A Materials: \* Latin root words. Modeling \* White board \* Students will create Rewards an alternate ending to Dry erase marker \* \* the story. Student Activities: Coloring page \* Standards: Answer questions. Coloring utensils Goal 2: Gain Repeat vocabulary Bingo cards Knowledge and Underorally.

#### **Figure 3: Latin Lesson Three**

#### Goals:

#### Standards:

- Students will recall facts about the Latin language and definitions of vocabulary words.
- Students will compare proper noun characteristics in English and Latin.
- Students will classify Latin common and proper nouns into different genders.
- Students will differentiate the tria nomina of Latin names (praenomen, nomen, cognomen)
- \* Students will formulate and write their own *tria nomina*.

- Goal 1: Communicate in a Foreign Language
- Goal 2: Gain Knowledge & Understanding of Greco-Roman Culture
- Goal 4: Develop Insight into Own Language and Culture
- Instructional Methods:
- \* Review
- \* Discussion
- **Direct Instruction**
- Compare/Contrast
- \* Mnemonics
- \* Cooperative Learning Groups

Student Activities:

- \* Respond to questions.
- Participate in class discussion.
- \* Create their own *tria nomina* with name certificates.

#### Materials:

- PowerPoint Slides
- Poster boards
- \* Cut outs of Latin words
- Name tags/certificates



## Figure 4: Grade 2 Student Art Project



"Icarus was falling then Daedalus saw him, and he **inventio** a super speed cape and ran across the water, gave him the cape, and flew up. **Finis**. The End."

-Eliot, 2nd Grade

### Figure 5: Certificate of Roman Citizenship

CITIZENSH	IIP	N N N
ROBERTUS		
SMITHUS		
ATHLETICUS		
KNOXVILLIA		
	CITIZENSE THIS CERTIFICATE IS AN ROBERTUS SMITHUS ATHLETICUS	SMITHUS ATHLETICUS KNOXVILLIA

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