TEACHING LATIN IN PRIMARY EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

The teaching of the Classical languages has become a challenge in the contemporary era. This article examines the teaching and learning of Latin in primary school and discusses the importance of Classics, the content of a Classics curriculum, the preparation of teachers, the teaching methodologies involved, and the valuable component of culture in the teaching of the Latin language.

KEYWORDS

Latin; primary education; Latin teaching; Classics curriculum.

INTRODUCTION

Education is a crucial point especially in the first stages, not only through the teaching context but also by the daily routine, interacting with family and friends, and where the child experiences a maturation of the areas of the language in the left hemisphere of the brain[1] during the *analytics and computational* stage[2] which allow the child to acquire and to build solid linguistic bases as language structure. Languages are part of everyday communication. Through codes, we transmit information, knowledge and emotions. Communication is fundamental and necessary for human beings who have always had the need to interact with the surroundings and with the other being, where the context and the situation they live defines the necessity and use of a given code and where the interaction with the social word influences the learning of a language (Vygotsky). Thus also encourage the growth, offering those essential values for living in a community respecting the others and learning to share, to perceive the true meaning of communication between different people, cultures, religions, among others.

Studying a language, modern or classics, or to better identify them, a foreign language, has an importance in order to communicate with different people to understand each other or to get a certain message. As a matter of fact, we can learn from every discipline, without any discrimination, because knowledge - in its narrowest sense - gives awareness of the world, without geographical or ideological limits. The first time we had the chance to focus the research in Latin in primary education in Spain has been in 2013[3]. At that time, and still now, we were convinced that as Education has a wide range of meanings, introducing a classical language in primary education in Spain was

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[1] F. Fabbro, *Neuropedagogia delle lingue. Come insegnare le lingue ai bambini*, Roma, 2004, 45.

[2] The analitical and computational phase is between 20-37 months: F. Fabbro, *Neuropedagogia…* , 45.

[3] The research focused on teaching Latin language in Spanish primary schools and lead to the Ph.D research on *Latin in Spanish Primary Education: An Introduction. From Theory to Practice: An Experience* freely published at *http://hdl.handle.net/10045/56688*.

giving some more instruments to the children to understand with a deeper connection the Occidental world where they live. The studying and the work in progress toward the Latin language in primary education has seen different authors, such as Bell and Robinson in the United Kingdom who have been working with Latin in primary institutions for more than ten years now[4], and in the United States where the tradition to teach classics also in primary is well documented[5]. This can also be confirmed by the material published which most of them is in English language: such as *Minimus* by Barbara Bell; *Telling Tales in Latin* by Lorna Robinson; *Latin for Kids* by Carol Marsh; *Dino Lingua* or also *Latin for children* or again *Song School Latin Book* by Amy Rehn, just to name some of them[6]. Several books and manuals focus on the learning of the Latin language and classical civilization, but the bibliography would be wider if we take into consideration the classical civilization and mythology. What unified these different materials with different teaching approaches, however, is to gain some knowledge of classical languages and culture but giving the children the opportunity to have fun at the same time, to learn by enjoying some times reading a text, listening to a song etc.

LATIN IN PRIMARY: A PEDAGOGICAL PERCEPTION

The study of a classical language in primary school starts from some pedagogical bases, and for this reason identify the need to learn a particular language together with the culture, as well as highlight the most important stages in which a language need or should be taught, is vital. The study of a foreign language has seen many researches in these last decades but is relevant to distinguish two main different tendencies, in on side[7] it supports the theory that learning is an automatic and innate process because every person has some basic information in our genes about the structure of the language; on the other side we can recall the learning phenomenon[8]. Considering a child a learner with a great predisposition, taking into account the surrounding, the culture and the environment in general, when learning a classical language – which does not offer the same linguistic abilities present in other spoken languages – we know that there is no reason why a child does not have to start to learn and have fun with Latin, for example, or any other languages. Neurophysiology studies of the learning of a second language regarding the plasticity of the brain[9] underlines that

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[4] Barbara Bell is the autor of *Minimus* and former Director of the *Primary Latin Project*; Lorna Robinson is the Director of *The Iris Project* and the autor of *Telling Tales in Latin*.

[5] There are several programs offered in the United Stated to teach Latin and Classics in primary Education. One of this is *Ascanius: The Youth Classics Institute*, www.ascaniusyci.org.

[6] For a detailed overview see Regagliolo A. *Latin in England's primary schools: the 2013 National Curriculum as a reflection point,* pp.1108-1114, 2015.

[7] N. Chomsky, Knowledge of Language: Its Nature, Origin, and Use, Ed. Praeger, 1986; J. Maherb – J. Groves, Chomsky for beginners, London, 1998.

[8] P. K. Kulh – J.E. Andruski – I. A. Chistovich – L. A. Chistovich – E. V. Kozhevnikova – V. L. Ryskina – E. I. Stolyarova – U. Sundberg – F. Lacerda, *Cross-language analysis of phonetic units in language addressed to infants*, Science 277, 1997, 284-687.

[9] C. Baker, *Foundations of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, Multilingual Matters, 1993; H. T. Chugani, "Neuroimaging of developmental non-linearity and developmental pathologies", in R. W. Thatcher - G. R. Lyon, J. Rumsey - N. Krasnegor, (edd.), *Developmental neuroimaging: Mapping the development of brain and behavior*, Academic Press, San Diego, 1996; J. M. Nash, *Fertile minds*. Time,

a child till the age of 7-8 years old has a greater chance to acquire proficiency in a second language. Furthermore, at this age they have gained a metacognitive competence and show more control capacity and pay attention to things and tasks they have to do[10]. At this stage they have an aware of the changings, correction and in a special way to memorisation[11] At this stage the child has the ability to learn several languages because up to pre-adolescent age, especially before the age of eight, thanks to the heightened neuroplasticity the brain allows to store and organize the grammatical elements of the second language in the same nervous system of the first language. Even though we cannot apply the same abilities for any modern language and we cannot proper call a person bilingual in English and in Latin, this help us to understand that especially in early ages the learning of a language has a different working system in our brain and thus could also help the child to build new structure and relation with other words. Beside this, the learning of Latin should be a meaningful learning where is possible to understand the values and the connections with the culture, past, tradition and similarities.

According to this, within the theory of Constructivism, Ausubel[12] with his study about the *Significant learning* – in contrast with the theory of the repetitive and mnemonic studying – underlines that learning should have a meaningful part for the children' learning. The concept of his theory says that the previous knowledge of the child is relevant in order to build new knowledge including a proper meaning to the new knowledge. The child is learning and this combining the discovering learning (Bruner) through curiosity and motivation. For this reason, even if we consider a classical language as Latin to be taught in primary education, the learning should be meaningful and it must be relevant not only for the *here* and *now* but must be able to enrich a cultural baggage and inspire knowledge, improvement, and curiosity and should be related to some previous knowledge in order to make it more significant. While with some languages – such as the modern one – the passage seems more direct (for example English or Spanish which are mostly related to the instrumental objective[13]), Latin, on the contrary, open the doors to a knowledge that goes beyond the simple daily pragmatic use. Latin builds bridges from present to past and past to present, and creates paths to walk through the use of the other languages, codes and cultures. In fact, as mentioned by Gruber-Miller in *When Dead Tongues Speak*[14] a language has relevance especially when taught with the culture. And it does not surprise that Latin has had a huge influence in different fields and it still has. With his words *the ancient word has produced artists, architects, historians, lawyers, mathematicians, philosophers, poets and scientists who first explored questions about friendship, ethics, gender, hierarchies,*

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[10] Brocki – Bohlin, "Executive Functions in Children Aged 6 to 13: A Dimensional and Developmental Study" cited in Anderson, V. Anderson–R. Jacobs–P. J. Anderson P., Executive Functions and the Frontal Lobes: A Lifespan Perspective; *Psychology Press*, 2010, 1.

[11] J. Valsiner – K. Connolly, Handbook of Developmental Psychology; Sage Publication Ltd, 2003, 386.

[12] D. P. Ausubel – J. D. Novak – H. Hanesian, *Educational Psychology: A Cognitive View*, New York, 1978.

[13] Studying a language with the purpose of some pragmatic gains, instead of social implication with the target language community (Gardner, 2010).

[14] P. Saffire, "Ancient Greek in Classroom Conversation", in J. Gruber-Miller (ed.), When Dead Tongues Speak: Teaching Beginning Greek and Latin, Oxford, 2006, 158-189.

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power, life and death, and our relation to the natural and spiritual worlds (Gruber-Miller, 2006:15).

LATIN AT SCHOOL: CROSS-CURRICULAR SUBJECT

Presenting Latin subject at school sometimes, especially when Latin is not in the Curriculum, could be somehow problematic. But on the other hand if the principals, teachers and mentors want to start offering this subject it could be offered as extra-curricular activities when is not possible to include the subject within the regular daily academic schedule, or as well as cross-curricular subject[15]. In Spain, for example, there is a huge place for extra-curricular activities but usually are focused on sport and physical education programme, which is by the way still positive for the health and well-being of the students. The DCSF, however, underlines that *language learning should be planned as an integral part of the whole curriculum, adding a new dimension, rather than as a 'bolt-on' extra* (*Ibid*). As a matter of fact*, a cross-curricular projects can cover a number of objectives at once and for this reason save time to the curriculum*[16]. Moreover, the use of multidisciplinary is a good strategy in learning, as has pointed out the research *The Successful Curriculum in Primary Schools*[17]. In addition as stressed by Regagliolo[18] it enables *children to make connections between the different subjects and topics and develop new skills; it can offer a flexible approach to the National Curriculum, and can positively contribute to the child's learning with the purpose to extend the perspective of each discrete subject and compliment it with other teaching proposals. In this case, pupils can discover new relations between one and more subjects and understand new processes that correlate what they study every day but also in daily file.*

METHODOLOGIES AND WAYS TO TEACH LATIN

In reference to the teaching methodologies, for decades we put the focus on the grammar-translation method, where, following the regulation of the language, students translate the text from the native language to Latin and *vice versa*. It is an approach very common till the 70s and 80s but it considers the language just as a combination of rules and words. However, we also have to stress that one of the aim of a classical languages is to get the meaning from it because the survival of a classical language promotes interpretations of the later literature, in which themes, archetypes, myths and topics remain, as do the valuation of the nature of aesthetic texts and the love for literature[19].

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[15] DCSF, *Department for Children, Schools and Families, Key Stage 2 Framework for Languages – Parts 1, 2 and 3*, 2005, 8.

[16] DCSF, Department for Children, Schools and Families, *Independent Review of the Primary Curriculum: Final Report;* Ref: 00499-2009DOM-EN; 2005, 42.

[17] Ofsted, Office for Standards in Education, *The Curriculum in Successful Primary Schools*; HMI 553 London, 2002, 7.

[18] A. Regagliolo, *Teaching Latin in Spanish Primary Education. From Theory to Practice: An Experience*, Universidad de Alicante, Alicante, 2016.

[19] EMECD España - Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte, *Boletín Oficial de Estado*, 293, 2006, 727-729. Translated into English by the author.

On the other hand, other method used is the *Reading Method* mainly excludes the competence of oral competences and focus on the reading ability with the teacher that has the rule of facilitator or the *Structuralistic approach* which considers the only mnemonic of the structures and the learning as results of several exercises such as pattern drill. In modern languages, very common has been the *Communicative approach* where see the language as the instrument for interaction and action and use role-plays and realistic situation in order to practice the language. Finally we find the *Natural approach* is an inductive method and the language is spoken and alive and the focus on the grammar aspect is secondary. It is a contextual-inductive method[20] and uses the language in action with the aim to understand and learn the grammar structures[21].

Teaching a classical language in primary education requires a combination of methodologies with an approach that includes several elements such as games, reading stories and other activities in order to make the subject attractive and to make children having fun while they are learning through playing and reading stories. In fact, play is recognized as a factor of development and learning[22] and involves the child in different abilities such as cognitive and sensomotors[23]. Furthermore, children learn in a specific dynamic way where they easily learn through dramatization and with the help of stories. Dramatization is also related to game as mentioned by Vygotsky[24] and drama itself as theatrical workshop *is a social microstructure: the theatre group and the company*[25], creating with the approach of play and dramatization a unique possibility to create a spontaneous approach to learn a language[26]. At the same time, learning a classical language with classical civilization it means also being inspired by some by stories, nursery rhymes[27] but also creatures, mythology and myths. They have the power to capture the children's attention and to bring and transfer them in another and parallel world where they can learn and be fascinated by great stories and morals. As a matter of fact, in the learning process, especially in children, a focus on stories has a great relevance because, especially with classical languages, they can be a powerful stimulus to the imagination and raise awareness about morality and truth[28]. Furthermore, myths, stories and legends *can encourage pupils to interact in different formas such as: drama, roleplay, expressive arts, creative writing, among others*. Considering the powerful part of stories, game, dramatization and mythology, children learn to stay connect with the past and the important part of culture by learning awareness of how live today in our society. But learning a classical language includes also the opportunity to get in

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[20] H. H. Ørberg, "Naturae Ratio: Méthod Directe Inductive pour l'Enseignement du Latin", in Actes du 9. Congres: Rome,13-18 avril 1973, Association Guillaume Budé, Vol. II, Paris, 1975, 916.

[21] P. Saffire, "Ancient Greek in Classroom Conversation", in J. Gruber-Miller (ed.), *When Dead Tongues Speak: Teaching Beginning Greek and Latin*, Oxford, 2006, 158-189.

[22] G. Freddi, *Azione, gioco, lingua. Fondamenti di una glottodidattica per bambini*, Liviana Editrice, Padova, 1990.

[23] G. Gullì – M. G. Zappia, *Didattica della lingua straniera a bambini. In contesto di italiano LS, italiano L2 e inglese LS*, Cosenza, 2011, 34.

[24] Vygotskii, Immaginazione e creatività nell'età infantile (trad. dal russo). Roma, 1972, 105-106.

[25] G. Guidi, "Il teatro, spettacolo e laboratorio", in G. Guidi – M. Mignola – T. Russo Augusti, *Insegnare tra le quinte*, Firenze, 1998, 23-48.

[26] G. Freddi, *Azione, gioco, lingua…*, 177.

[27] V. Medda, "Come insegnare italiano L2 ai bambini? L'uso delle filastrocche", in *La NUOVA DITALS Risponde 1*, 2017, 12-20.

[28] DfESC, Department of Education and Science, *HMI Series: Curriculum Matters, n. 12, Classics from 5 to 16*, London, 1988, 10.

connection with a different language, a different system which allows the children to make some reflections on part of their own language and the past one, but also to make some progression on the *literacy* ability. For this reason, grammar is part of the learning considering the *significant learning*, when possible. Different are the elements that could be offered in primary education[29] from the nominative singular case (*a, us*); the agreement noun-adjective; the present of the verb *esse*; some preposition, greetings, numbers, colours, the imperative form, among others.

LATIN LANGUAGE MENTORS

An issue concerning the teaching of Latin language in primary education is the preparation of the teachers in order to offer a program of classical language in early stage of primary. At the moment, in fact, there are no university programmes that prepare to teach Latin in primary education, but only for Secondary and at University level. To clarify this point, however, we have to mention that the level of Latin that can be offered in primary education is for obvious reasons a lower than university or secondary studies. In a previous study, has been highlighted that *primary teachers have a pedagogical training that allows them to be able to teach different subjects throughout the years of primary education and even if teachers did study Classical Philology he/she should be able to cope with other subjects and with classical civilization*[30] because at this point is not necessary to have a in deep knowledge of the subject. In addition, to teach Latin in Spanish primary schools, *it is also possible to be flanked by university students with some knowledge of Latin and previous training in teaching* (Ibid) or to run extra classes by experts.

ELEMENTS TO BE TAUGHT

Finally we would like to present the different materials which have been analysed. With this regard, we would like to point out that there should be a minimum programme in order to build a very basic knowledge of the subject throughout some stages in primary education. Here as a summary example, minimum contents include:

- Feminine and masculine singular nominative (*a, us*);
- The subject and adjective agreement (*parva puella);*
- The present tense of the verb to be (*esse*);
- The imperative form with the singular and plural such as *veni—venite;*
- Some proposition such as: *ad, e, ex, circum, cum, in, post, pro, sub,* and *super*;
- Derivatives;
- Greetings (*salve, salvete, vale, valete*);
- Numbers (usually from I to XX);
- Colours;

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[29] For a detailed overview see Regagliolo A. (2016:147-163).
[30] A. Regagliolo, Teaching Latin in Spanish Primary Education. From Theory to Practice: An Experience, Universidad de Alicante, Alicante, 2016.

- Story: mythology;
- Roman civilization: Rome and the Romans (families and slaves); soldiers' life; feasts and food; the bathrooms; houses, games, and instruments (wax tablets, games, and jewels) and Gods.

CONCLUSIONS

The introduction of Latin language in primary education answer to the desire to make a significant change in the society through the rediscovering of a classical language. For this reason, Latin in primary education is a big challenge especially for English non speaking countries where the action to introduce Latin language and classical civilization is still at the beginning of the process in a world where there is still likely some space, time and willing, from some people who believe in classics and in a better and complete education and to enrich our knowledge in connection with some past traditions.

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