

## Chapter 65

# Proposing Jig Saw Method to Teach Latin Literary Texts in Small Classes

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### ABSTRACT

*This chapter aims to investigate the opportunity of employing Jig Saw in teaching Latin literary texts, giving also an example of possible activity with Caesarian texts and concluding that, also in teaching Latin literature, Jig Saw (and Cooperative Learning - CL) could be usefully proposed to teachers attention. At the end of the chapter, the author reviews some web tools for Latin, in order to focus their usefulness for a CL activity and to evaluate their possible development strategies.*

### INTRODUCTION

I propose a CL activity in Latin in high school, with particular attention to the scientific school (Liceo scientifico). As it is commonly known, in Europe classical languages belong to optional subjects and they are taught as foreign languages and for cultural purposes<sup>1</sup> for a few hours in a week. On the contrary, in Italy, Latin is compulsory not only in classic and in scientific schools, but also in high schools for Social Sciences and Foreign Languages<sup>2</sup>: so, it is a prominent part of training of at least 40 percent of Italian students. Nevertheless, the situation is changing also in Italy. Recent

laws<sup>3</sup> have modified the model of Latin teaching and in Scientific school the number of hours of Latin has substantially decreased (losing 187 hours during the five years). In Liceo Scientifico Latin is now taught for 5 years, 3 hours a week, for an amount of 495 hours. Nevertheless, the contents of the national syllabi have not known a real change, while the number of students who study Latin does not know a real decrease. So, teachers have to work with less time, more students and the same goals of the past years. There are problems also from a cultural point of view: many students find difficulties to understand the cultural importance of classical languages and culture in contempo-

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rary world and classical disciplines must defend the reasons of their survival in schools<sup>4</sup>. Latin is perceived as boring or very difficult and teachers have to find methods to explain that this idea is not correct. In force of these statements, it is necessary to rethink teaching methods, investigating how to join appeal for Latin and scientific correctness of contents without any trivialization. The renewal of Latin teaching needs help of scientific research, pedagogical research and ICT<sup>5</sup>. In this context, I think that CL method can be a useful resource to give appeal to Latin without decreasing the level of knowledge and also improving students' results<sup>6</sup>.

There are some important objections to CL activity: a. lesson time is short and the topics are vast, b. classrooms are not fit for CL; c. traditional methods are better known by teachers. Nevertheless, these demurs are not unconquerable, if teachers are ready to re-think their role and teaching style in the classroom. The existing experiments concern mainly teaching of Latin language at a very basic level, as, for instance, Gentile & Ramellini (2000), that suggests a good experience in the context of first year of high school. Until today, I do not know any similar and more recent work concerning teaching both of Latin language and literature.

The experiment makes use of materials which have been produced by the author on the basis of his experience as a teacher both in high school (until 2004)<sup>7</sup> and in university (since 2004) and in the Scuola di Specializzazione per gli Insegnanti della Secondaria Superiore (SIS) of Turin (Italy)<sup>8</sup>. I want to highlight that this teaching experience is a project that I wish to submit to the attention of teachers of high schools. The activity should concern a class of year IV of scientific school (17-18 years old) with 25 students. It should last 7.5 hours.

A CL activity should have some general aims that have the goal to activate some social skills, as Comoglio (1996) and others underline: a. students have to understand that the group's goal can be achieved by the help of all members; b. all mem-

bers have to accept and share the group's goal; c. the target has to be complex and interesting, with the aim to suggest challenges that only a group can solve; d. a CL activity should create a fair atmosphere in the classroom, assisting students to solve problems, to share difficulties through a face-to-face interaction, individual accountability and personal responsibility to achieve the group's goals; e. a CL activity should help students to strengthen self-knowledge and self-control.

The specific aims of this CL activity are as follows: a. to widen textual comprehension; b. to develop the knowledge of Latin literary texts; c. to approach the comprehension of Latin authors' style, mainly of Caesar's one; d. to improve analysis skills of students; e. to enhance students' skills in translating Latin literary texts, that require more attention and sensibility than other texts; f. to improve students' skills in reading and understanding mother language

The basic requisites are essential knowledge of Late Republican Roman history, of Caesar's biography and works and of Latin morphology and syntax. In particular it is necessary to know enough the Latin subordination system, the use of particles *ut* and *cum*, the participial construction and the absolute ablative.

I suggest the Jig Saw<sup>9</sup> method. The experience requires that at least in the first and in the second year students have already known CL, also in other disciplines. In Jigsaw the topic of the lesson has to be divided into segments; the materials can be found in a textbook or in other written sources. The teacher divides students into groups (4-6 people). Every student receives one text and an expert worksheet that explains "how" the materials will be used. Students read over their text at least twice, becoming familiar with it. Afterwards, the teacher forms "expert groups" consisting in one student from each jigsaw group, who joins other students with the same text. New groups discuss the topic; then, they return to jigsaw group to explain their part to other members. The teacher checks the quality of work out in the groups, giv-

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