

Workshop—Advocacy and Curricular Innovation: Helping our Latin Programs through Action Research

As many Latin teachers look to improve enrollments and the learning outcomes of their students, they are often not sure how to go about improving their Latin program. This workshop will provide participants with concrete examples of action research by three high school teachers and a guide to doing action research. According to Nunan and Bailey, action research is a “systematic, iterative process of 1) identifying an issue, problem, or puzzle we wish to investigate in our own context; 2) thinking and planning an appropriate action to address that concern; 3) carrying out the action; 4) observing the apparent outcomes of the action; 5) reflecting on the outcomes and on other possibilities; and 6) repeating these steps again” (227). Participants will have the opportunity to work in small groups with other teachers and the facilitators to lay out a plan of action research to answer a question that would help their own Latin program achieve greater success.

The workshop will be divided in two halves. In the first portion of the workshop, after a brief introduction to the workshop by the organizer, three high school teachers will describe specific projects that they have developed to start a new Latin program, to increase enrollment, or to answer pressing concerns within their programs. Each Latin teacher will speak no more than 8-10 minutes since the purpose is to give the attendees ideas. The fourth facilitator, a distinguished colleague active in ACTFL and an expert on advocacy and curricular innovation in the high schools, will give a presentation on how to carry out the nuts-and-bolts of action research.

In the second half, the attendees will be divided into small groups, each group led by one of the presenters/facilitators. Each group will share particular concerns at their school, pose a question to be answered, and formulate a research plan to improve the dilemma or respond to the

challenge. By the end of the workshop, each participant will have a clear research question and research plan so that when they go back to their school they are ready to implement action research of their own that will address how they can make Latin more relevant to one or more constituencies (students, parents, other teachers, administrators) or improve student learning outcomes in the classroom.

Organizer (5 minutes)

The organizer of the workshop will introduce the purpose behind the workshop, how action research can help teachers become more effective advocates for their program and develop curricular innovations that help improve learning outcomes.

Facilitators (50 minutes)

Facilitator 1, High School Teacher/recent MAT graduate student, will discuss two projects (10 minutes): Designing and Implementing a 10-Day Introductory Latin Course for Junior High and Improving Latin Language Ability through Increased Reading Fluency.

Facilitator 2, High School Latin teacher at a suburban school, will discuss two challenges (10 minutes): negotiating schedule conflicts and counteracting misperceptions about the study of Latin.

Facilitator 3, High School Latin teacher from a small town, will discuss of a number of challenges he has faced (10 minutes): maintaining curricular rigor, increasing enrollment, expanding students' worldview, and creating bonds with the wider Latin community.

Facilitator 4, Chair of Foreign Language and ESL Education at a major Midwestern university, will present an overview of action research (20 minutes). In this session the participants will be guided through the process of posing an appropriate question to research and gathering data to help improve and support their Latin programs. The facilitator will provide

materials and examples of how classroom teachers can through surveys and record keeping help improve their curriculum and advocacy at the local level.

Break Out Session (60 minutes). Participants will form small groups, each group guided by one of the facilitators so that they can develop their own action research plan.

Note: if this workshop can be presented on Saturday, it may attract more high school teachers from local schools.

Works Cited

Nunan, David, and Kathleen Bailey. *Exploring Second Language Classroom Research: A Comprehensive Guide*. Heinle, Cengage Learning, 2009.

Facilitator 1

This Facilitator, a High School Teacher and recent MAT graduate student, will discuss two projects (10 minutes). The first project, Designing and Implementing a 10-Day Introductory Latin Course for Junior High, was to introduce Latin to students at a private Catholic high school through their 8th grade course on Church History and Morality, titled *Via de Christo*. The Latin program is thus integrated with one of the Church History modules. Since each class had ten days of Latin instruction, he decided that each lesson should be fairly brief and self-contained, spanning no more than two of the class periods. Emphasis was on reading Latin without much formal discussion of syntax (although he did not shy away from formal analysis when discussing texts). Each lesson ideally related a larger cultural, historical, or linguistic theme (school/home life, games, calendars and names, poetry, warfare, etc). Each teacher suggested topics of particular interest to her students, so no two classes had the exact same curriculum. The *Via de Christo* coordinator wanted all of the students to be able to read the *pater noster*, and so he spent the last two lessons working with them on that and discussing topics like word choice and impact in translation.

He will also describe an action research project titled, ‘Improving Latin Language Ability through Increased Reading Fluency.’ In a class with little emphasis on oral Latin (the combination of Wheelock’s shortcomings as a reading text and his own tendency as a teacher to favor the written word over the spoken), he set aside time each day for students to perform brief, prepared readings of text that is below their current ability level can help improve students’ overall performance. He did a trial run over a 4-6 week period and saw positive improvements in student fluency and in their assessment of their abilities.

Facilitator 2

A High School Latin teacher at a suburban school will discuss two challenges (10 minutes). The first was losing students due to schedule conflicts with other single section courses (e.g., choir). The parents' involvement in the process is really what made the change finally happen almost a year later. Networking with administrators is also critical in the scheduling process. If you know when some of the other single section classes are offered it is really helpful to request a different schedule. Last Spring, 94 students were enrolled. Today he still has 92 after 2 weeks of school. He saved 3-5 students in the 9th grade group simply by changing the period it was offered from 7th to 8th.

The 2nd overall problem he sees is misinformation about what is the study of Classics and Latin. Responses range from Latin isn't useful to only the smartest students will be able to succeed at Latin. A huge resource to promote not only Latin but what happens in class is through the Classical Cultures Club (Latin Club). Last year he started off with 30+ students at meetings of which about 10 were not Latin students. This year he has increased the number of leadership positions and defined student responsibilities much more. There are 15 currently campaigning for different positions. In addition, parents will support Latin when their students are talking about Vocabulary connections, Roman History's lessons for our world and Classical references found today. The important part is that students are excited and talking to their parents about it. The community of parents is the strongest asset a Latin teacher can have.

Facilitator 3

High School Latin teacher from a small town, will discuss of a number of challenges he has faced (10 minutes).

1. Curricular rigor and pacing affected by student demographics. Since he teaches at a small/semi-rural high school with no foreign language requirement and many students enter the workforce or military directly after high school, what is the role of Latin at our school? Should he attract only the college-bound? If not, what is the expectation for those students?

2. Numbers-Enrollments always fluctuate, but how can he keep a steady stream of students interested in the language? How does he attract the middle and junior high students from the area? His predecessors have instituted a Classics Bee to showcase the benefits to this constituency and he has kept it going and built it up from there, but that is only one part.

3. Worldview-One of the great benefits of studying the Classics is to look forward, backward, and around. What opportunities are available to foster this worldview? What kinds of trips/experiences can he offer students that will make them students of the world with Classics as a background?

4. Collegiality-How does he get in touch with other Latin students in his state? What opportunities exist for his students to make a difference with other Latin students?

Facilitator 4

The Chair of Foreign Language and ESL Education at a major Midwestern university, will present an overview of action research (20 minutes). In this session the participants will be guided through the process of posing an appropriate question to research and gathering data to help improve and support their Latin programs. The facilitator will provide materials and examples of how classroom teachers can through surveys and record keeping help improve their curriculum and advocacy at the local level.