

Teaching the Atalanta Myth via TPRS (text to accompany video)

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Instructional Context: I teach in an inner city fine arts magnet school with students from various socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds. Since we are a magnet school, our students live in all parts of our county. The school has students in grades 6th through 12th, so many of the students in high school have been together since the 6th grade. They know each other well and feel comfortable with one another. This class featured is Latin II. In this class of twenty, I have taught nine of them in my Introduction to Latin course, which is offered in our middle school, so this is the third year that I have taught them. There are three boys and seventeen girls. There are two Asians, two African Americans and sixteen Caucasians. There are students in grades 9th-12th, ages fourteen to eighteen years of age. Many of them are bused to and from school, so they are not always able to participate in activities before or after school.

This class works well in groups. I let them choose their own groups because in the past they have made good choices. They are loquacious, very comfortable with one another, and trust each other. Seven of the students excel in music and are in band, orchestra, or chorale. Four excel in dance, four in drama, and five in the visual arts. Some of them study more than one area of the arts. The musically talented students learn well with aural stimulation, and the dancers and actors learn well with kinesthetic activities. The art students prefer visual or hands on activities. Their artistic areas of interest reflect their learning styles. Since I taught half of them in Introduction to Latin and all of them in Latin I, I have had the opportunity to observe them in varying learning situations and know the types of lessons that best facilitate their language acquisition. I chose a lesson using the Total Physical Response Story Telling (TPRS) because it best fit the variety of learning styles represented in this class. When I had examined their guidance records, I noted that four of the

students had been diagnosed with Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), and they engaged well in this type of lesson.

Planning Instruction: My goals and objectives for this lesson were for the students 1) to acquire some fourth declension nouns, such as “casus,” “ currus,” and “cursus,” and some verbs, such as “spero,” “volo, volare,” and “pareo,” as well as the superlative adjectives, “maximus” and “plurimus” 3) to comprehend the myth of Atalanta and Hippomenes in Latin, and to acquire new vocabulary via comprehensive input from a story, 4) to provide oral, Latin responses to Latin comprehension questions based on the myth, 5) to gain cultural awareness of the female role, religion, types of games in classical society, and an increased understanding of Greco-Roman culture via mythology. Students will be able to make comparisons with classical culture and their own, to build their awareness of similarities and differences in the two worlds. 6) to communicate and increase cultural competence by drawing pictures and writing Latin sentences, which portray comprehension of the myth.

From my knowledge of language acquisition, I know that research indicates that language acquisition occurs when students are interested in the subject, and all of them in this class really like mythology. Since Atalanta is about the same age as the students in this class, they can relate her world with theirs. I chose Total Physical Response Storytelling (TPRS), so that the students could build upon their ability to communicate via comprehensive input by listening and then providing oral and kinesthetic responses. Krashen’s research on language acquisition has shown that this method lowers the affective filter and provides a safe environment suitable for acquisition. The students better comprehend the inflection of the language by hearing the different endings for nouns and for verbs. Using the interpretive mode will help the students to develop the ability to comprehend oral Latin.

Using my knowledge of language acquisition, I chose strategies in the lesson that would enhance the students' language acquisition by using repetition of words, reinforcement of words via kinesthetic activities, and visualization of the words via pictures. These strategies serve the aural, kinesthetic and visual learners in this particular class. I knew that an activity using motor responses to indicate the meaning of the new vocabulary would work well for my kinesthetic learners as they made gestures, and it would benefit the visual learners as they watched their fellow students' gestures. Many of the students had just begun studying mythology in their Language Arts class, and I have served as a mentor for their Language Arts teacher, since this is his first year in the classroom. He and I discussed interdisciplinary connections that we could make via myths with similar, cultural aspects. We decided that he would use the story of Polyphemus and Galatea, so that we could compare the cultural elements of the two stories, since each of them features a young girl about our students' age, who does not want to marry an old/unattractive man. Both stories show strong, positive, feminine role models, who attempt to control the future as best as possible in their native cultures, which makes these stories appropriate for the students at this stage of their language development.

To increase my knowledge of language acquisition, I had read Strasheim's lessons using TPR and then attended a workshop by Blaine Ray on TPRS and knew that it would work well for these students. Richard LaFleur also advocates this method in Latin For The 21st Century, and he points its relevance to James Asher's language teaching research on kinesthetic involvement to improve vocabulary retention. It also employs Krashen's research that comprehensible input must be provided before any comprehensible output can be expected. The Atalanta story furnishes a lengthy amount of comprehensible input. Since often times Latin students do not actually carry on long conversations in Latin, I thought that this well documented approach would give them an opportunity

to actually listen to a long passage of Latin and respond orally and physically. Whenever I have used this approach, many of students, especially the dancers, increased their comprehension and felt good about their successes and boosted their self-esteem because it worked effectively for their learning styles. The students were already familiar with imperative commands that I use with them everyday, such as: “tacete nunc, aperite libros, sedete, audite, claude ianuam, attentite etc.” Therefore I used imperative commands in the lesson to again reinforce vocabulary via motions. Since language acquisition occurs subconsciously, it happens naturally and does not require tedious tasks. TPRS also works well in addressing the multiple intelligences. Their excellence in the comprehension assessments in former lessons confirmed that this formula worked well to produce positive learning gains, since it related to their learning preferences. The drama and dance students comprehend well via acting.

The lesson provided opportunities for students to communicate in and to demonstrate comprehension of the target language. First students looked at the Latin words with pictures on a PowerPoint that I had created, so they could associate the pictures with the Latin words. For example, I used the word “frango” with a picture of a broken plate. The word “currus” had a chariot, and the word, “volo, volare,” had a bird flying. The visual learners, like my artists, Anna, Camilla I, and Titus, in particular, have remarked that the pictures portraying the meaning of the Latin words really help them to retain the meanings. After they had looked at the PowerPoint, and we discussed how the pictures portrayed the meaning of the words, the students formed groups to benefit from the guidance and reinforcement of their peers, and groups work well to lower the affective filter. I assigned each group three Latin words to demonstrate via motions. This provided them a sense of ownership in the lesson, and it addressed the learning style preferences for the kinesthetic learners. I also told them that they could make sounds for the words, along with the action. This addressed

the aural learners and also provided another stimulus for retention in long-term memory. After each group gave gestures to depict the Latin words for their peers, they practiced the motions, as I said the words. As I assessed them, most of students were making the appropriate actions. Then I told them to put their heads on their desks, so they could not see the other students' motions, and I could again monitor and assess their progress.

Varying the kinds of activities allowed for the students to communicate and demonstrate comprehension of the target language, both through their physical responses and their oral responses in Latin. The modes of communication involved the interpersonal mode, as they worked in groups to find ways to express the vocabulary through actions. It gave them the opportunity to work cooperatively and to interact with the Latin words. They also used the presentational and interpretive mode as they extemporaneously acted out the story, as I read it in Latin. As the characters in the story interacted, they also interacted with their fellow actors and came up with appropriate actions, which served as an assessment for comprehension. They also verbalized to one another such expressions as “*eheu, eugepae, miserum/misera, minime, etc.*” which they had previously learned, and thus they were also building on prior knowledge. While eight of them were acting out the myth, the other students continued to give gestures, which expressed the meanings of the vocabulary words. I assessed their comprehension by observing their actions and noting whether they were appropriate. When I told the story in Latin and asked questions in Latin, they used the interpretive mode to give their responses.

In the last part of the lesson, students again worked in groups to create four cartoon pictures with a Latin sentence for each of the pictures. Each group had a different scene from the story to illustrate. They were to use at least four of the vocabulary words in the sentences as well as words they already knew, thus building on prior knowledge. They were using the interpersonal mode, as

they wrote Latin sentences to describe a scene. One of their cartoons had apples with wings to portray, “malum volat.” They employed the interpretive mode as they as they recalled the story from Latin, and the group decided what pictures to draw and what Latin sentences to use to describe the picture. Then they used the presentational mode as they shared their pictures and Latin captions with the class. In making the cartoons, they were using a real world task to retell the story and show comprehension of the cultural experience. They were adapting an ancient story, using art coupled with the Latin. This task was especially appealing to the art students and provided an interdisciplinary connection with their art classes. This activity allowed me to spiral the curriculum with communication and culture. As the groups shared their work with the class, it gave the students an opportunity to discuss the cultural experiences of an ancient foot race, love, Atalanta’s decision not to marry, Hippomenes invocation to Aphrodite, and marriage in classical times. They were able to discuss the differences between a young lady’s choosing a spouse during Roman times and the element of choice today. We then shared their work with their language arts classes to make the interdisciplinary connection.

Given their stage of language development, I focused on fifteen new vocabulary words, many of which the students had already encountered in earlier stories. In former lessons in which I had used TPR, I had used fewer new words, but at their level of language development, I knew that they needed more of a challenge. I repeated the words several times in the Atalanta myth, because repetition reinforces comprehension. I introduced several fourth declension nouns because they have been learning the fourth declension, and at this stage of their language development, they would be able to focus on these new words and the new case endings aurally. I chose a lesson that would allow my students to use their personal expression through gestures, to enhance their cognitive ability via a mythological story with new vocabulary, and to increase linguistic proficiency by asking

Latin questions related to the story. I found the story on the Internet and adapted the vocabulary and grammar to reflect their stage of language development.

This lesson provided a range of meaningful, interesting, personally relevant instruction. In our textbook, the students had just read a story about Cornelia's engagement to Valerius, and her lack of choice in the matter, so the Atalanta story gave them another source for this cultural experience. Toward the end of the year, we stage a Roman wedding, so this story will provide a foundation for their further study of marriage in the ancient world. They also discussed religion in ancient times and compared Hippomene's role as a suppliant to Aphrodite to their use of prayer or advice from a column, like "Dear Abby." Having studied chariot races, they were able to make comparisons with the foot race in the myth, and they also made connections with their study of the Olympics last September. The story provided a rich foundation to compare and contrast these elements of ancient culture with today's world. In this way, this lesson built on and expanded the previously developed communicative skills and cultural knowledge.

Students had the opportunity to expand awareness of their own and other cultures. I used pictures that the students associate with today's world, such as a crowd at a basketball game for "turba," a man snatching a woman's purse for "rapere," Asterix in a chariot for "cursus," and boys playing checkers for "ludus." I also used a picture of a Greek vase with runners for the word "cursus." In this way students could expand their awareness of their own culture by relating the pictures with the Latin words and comparing the context of these words in ancient times, and the way they are perceived today.

I used realia to give another means of identifying the word. For example, for "ludus." I used a game board. I also used a pencil for "stilus." I used a replica of an Etruscan chariot and charioteer, which I had bought on a trip to Italy traveling with students, to represent "currus," and a golden apple

for “malum.” I passed the articles around, so that they could have tactile and visual stimuli to make connections with the words. The Etruscan charioteer not only provided a visual stimulus for the word *currus*, but also provided true realia from the ancient world.

The lesson encouraged students to appreciate the practices of the ancient world, as they discussed love and marriage in the Greco-Roman world and their own. The girls voiced their disgust at the idea of marrying an old man. They also discussed the relationship between the assistance Hippomenes sought from Aphrodite to help him “get the girl,” and compared it with girls today, who use perfume and cosmetics, and boys who use gifts instead of Aphrodite.

They were able to discuss the differences between a young lady’s choosing a spouse during Roman times and the element of choice today. As they listened to the story, responded to Latin prompts, interpreted the story, made motions and acted it out, drew pictures retelling it, and finally discussed the differences and similarities with their own worlds, they were adeptly spiraling the cultural and communicative experience of both worlds.

Before the video segment of the lesson, I had shown the students a PowerPoint with the new vocabulary words that I wanted them to focus on in the Atalanta story. Each of the pictures had the Latin word printed at the top. As I went through the PowerPoint, we discussed how each picture demonstrated the vocabulary word. For example, I had printed a picture of a bird flying for the verb “*volo*.” I also had printed out the entire PowerPoint, and put the 8 1/2”X11” pictures with the Latin words on the board, so that the students could see them throughout the lesson. I then had the students get into groups. I gave each group three of the new vocabulary words, and then the group decided what kind of action to use to provide the meaning of the word. Then the students presented their words and gestures to the class and practiced the gestures.

Videotape Analysis: I established a stimulating and supportive learning environment by giving the

students adequate time to practice the words as a group before I began the story, and I also let them initially look at other students for help. While I was assessing the students' gestures to depict the meaning of the new Latin vocabulary words, I noticed that Sulla, the boy in gray, was not making gestures for all of the words. He has been diagnosed ADD, and so I wanted to make sure that he was engaged in the activity. I first said "tu es fessa," then caught myself and said, "tu es fessus?" He replied, "I'm stressed." I said, "sum misera," to indicate that I was empathetic. Many of the students often get stressed because of stringent rehearsal schedules and numerous performances in the evenings. I try to stay aware of their schedules, so that I can help to reduce their levels of stress and still have them fully engaged in the lesson. As I looked around the classroom, it appeared that all of the students were making the correct motions, and Sulla was engaged. They were communicating in the interpretive mode as they gave the motions for the words. For example, for "vola," they flapped their arms as if flying. For "currus," they were holding the reins of the chariot, and for "frango," they acted as if breaking something and said, "crack." I often use Latin commands in my classes to prepare them for the next part of the lesson, and I said, "tacete, attentite," and the students promptly became quiet and refocused. They were able to understand the difference between these commands and the new vocabulary words that we had been using, which exhibited their comprehension of spoken Latin in the interpretive mode. I decided to shorten the segment where I called out the Latin words, as they responded with the appropriate actions because I observed that the students were adeptly making the correct motions for the words. As the students were making the gestures for the Latin words, they were using motions that they use everyday, so that were using real-world tasks to show comprehension.

I now put the new, Latin vocabulary words in the context of the story. I gave a short introduction to the myth. Two girls, one in white and one in black, sitting with the girl in the green

sweater, had come into the classroom late, so they had missed the initial part of the lesson and did not know what gestures to make for the words. When they had come to their desks, I had asked their group to help them and noted that their fellow students were explaining the gestures and vocabulary they had missed. This is a prime example of students' working together and helping each other in a supportive environment. The girl in the green at the front of the class is very shy, and she seemed to be having some difficulty keeping up with the story and the actions. Several of the students missed "cursum maximum." Since the two new words were right together, they had a hard time going from one motion to the other. After monitoring the students' gestures, I slowed down my narrative. When I said, "spectate me (mihi) omnes," I was impressed that they were able to differentiate between the story line and my command. This indicated that they were ingesting the comprehensible input from the story, and at the same time knew the difference in the vocabulary from the story and my command. I used several items of realia as props for the story. I used a replica of an Etruscan charioteer and chariot to model the word, "currus." I also used the game board from "By Jove," as realia for the word "ludus." I also used an apple for "malum" and threw it to a student for a dramatic effect, and the students thought it was humorous. Their laughter is a good indicator that they were engaged in the lesson and having a good time learning. This action also gave the visual effect of "malum volat" in the story. Earlier in the lesson some of the students had mistaken "volo, volare" for "volo, velle" Thus I thought that this would be a good way for them to remember the difference by seeing the flying apple. I assessed the students' gestures as I told the story, both with their heads up and with their heads on their desks, so that I could see if they knew the words, or were merely mimicking their classmates. When I finished reading the story, I asked about the moral, and I realized from the video that I never readdressed that issue. When I heard Lanisha, one of the students, who had come in late say, "I didn't get it," I asked for a volunteer to

give a synopsis, and Anna, the girl with long hair by the window, gave an excellent summary, and all of the students were attentive. As she interpreted the story, she was performing a real world task.

The girl in the brown sweater and long brown hair, at the front of the room, is very shy, and I noticed in the video that she seemed to be having a hard time acting out all of the words. I should have given her more positive reinforcement. As I continued to monitor her, I did notice that she was using the correct motions for many of the words, but just had a hard time changing actions quickly, so again I slowed down the pace. The next segment of the lesson involved telling the story in Latin and asking Latin questions, which they in turn would respond to in Latin. Initially I did not call on any one person, but allowed them to raise their hands, thus making them feel more comfortable, and it lowered the affective filter. After reading the Latin, I asked, “Quid Atalanta visit?” Camilla I and several others answered “oraculum,” correctly. When I read the sentence, “Vir debet currere minimum cursum contra me,” substituting “minimum” for “maximum,” I asked verum aut falsum. Even though true/false questions are normally easier, I realized that it was a really long sentence, and so I repeated it and several of the students answered correctly, After reading the Latin, I asked, “Quid plurimi viri sperabant facere.” No one responded, so I repeated the question, and Ariadne, the girl in the white blouse, answered correctly, “rapere.” She is a dancer and said she loves this type of activity. I complimented her and gave her a “high sign,” to let her know that I was impressed. After reading the sentence, “Viri non poterant vincere ludos,” I asked, “qui non poterant vincere ludos?” Titus answered “ludos,” I used different case endings for the new nouns in the story, like “ludos,” so that they could recognize the word with different endings. I also changed the verb forms, e.g. for “spero,” I used “sperare,” speras”, “sperabat,”and “sperabant.” I also presented various forms for other verbs. The students were using the target language creatively to communicate, as they answered Latin questions in Latin, and as they interpreted the words and communicated with

gestures. Gestures are such a part of our language experience. We commonly use gestures as we speak in our native language, so they were communicating in Latin while performing gestures they use in the real world.

As I assessed the students' comprehension of the Latin questions, I decided to discontinue reading the rest of the story and ask Latin questions later because some of the students seemed to be having a difficult time answering the questions without using a script. I sometimes have a Latin passage that they can look at, as I read and ask Latin questions.

I then gave individual and whole group commands to reinforce the new vocabulary via the interpretive mode. This gave them a chance to work with the oral Latin with simpler comprehensive input. I decided to use real world commands, so that the students could spiral the Latin and English cultures. These commands were appropriate because they were using the new Latin vocabulary words in their real life settings. They were connecting Latin words like "stilus" and "librum" with items like the pencil and book that they use everyday. I gave Aurelia, the girl in the denim jacket, the command, "frange stilum," and saw that neither she nor other students in the class remembered the word stilus. I then grabbed my realia, the pencil, to portray the meaning, and many seemed to remember the word, which they had learned in Latin I. I told Sulla, "rape librum," and he responded by grabbing his book. I then addressed the class with "rapite libros," and the class responded with zeal. When I asked Juno, "pare magistrae," at first she felt a little awkward shaking her finger at me, but did it anyway. They had earlier chosen the motion of shaking the finger to indicate "obey." The class thought it was funny, as did I. This indicates their sense of security in my classroom and the joint support that the student have for one another. They were hearing the imperative singular and plural endings and the accusative singular and plural, thus not only building vocabulary competence, but also grammatical structures by listening and giving appropriate gestures. I used the command,

“frangite stilos,” to assess that the students’ remembered the meaning of “stilus,” and they did. Andromeda and Helena, the girls at the front of the class are shy, but when I said to Helena, “vola,” she flapped her arms. I said to Andromeda, “vola,” for repetition of the word earlier confused with “volo, volare.” After saying, “tu es vetus,” I used the plural, “vos estis veteres,” so the students could hear the difference in the endings. The students seemed to comprehend well and began to act like old people. I assessed the students’ progress by observing individuals and the whole class, while I was giving the commands. Some of the students were also performing the actions I had addressed to an individual, which indicated that they understood the Latin and liked the activity.

I ensured that the students were using the target language creatively to serve their communicative needs by observing their physical actions, which indicated that they had interpreted the Latin correctly and were responding appropriately. When giving the Latin commands, I could give immediate feedback, by saying “bene” or “ita vero.” Students had used the interpretive mode when they made gestures for the words and the interpersonal mode as they observed the other students’ gestures, and again used the interpretive and interpersonal mode as I read the story in Latin, and they responded to Latin questions and made appropriate gestures. As I gave Latin commands they used the interpretive mode to communicate via the correct gesture. I allowed students to volunteer as actors for the roles from the story and used two actors for each role, so that more students could actively participate and then not only act out the new vocabulary, but also provide appropriate actions for the entire storyline. Thus they were using the interpretive mode to act out the myth and the interpersonal mode to interact with the other characters in the story.

Reflection: I often take time to talk with the students after a lesson to find out how well it worked for them, because their feedback is vital. Two students, who are musicians and very analytical thinkers, stated that it was easier just to learn vocabulary, rather than using actions to depict the

word. These are my logical, mathematical learners, who love grammar. They said it was hard for them to understand the story and preferred to use a Latin script. I had let students use scripts in earlier lessons and will give them the opportunity again. Anna, the girl who gave a synopsis of the story, loved TPRS and said she actually was able to comprehend the story better with gestures and preferred not to have a script. It was obvious that she was learning during the lesson and provided a lot of positive energy for the rest of the class. Overall the students, who are kinesthetic learners, really liked the motions, acting out the story and felt that they would better remember this vocabulary, which reflected that the lesson addressed their learning styles.

All the students found the PowerPoint and pictures, expressing the Latin words, most helpful in making connections between Latin vocabulary words and pictures from our culture today. I will use the same activity again to enhance vocabulary acquisition and communication. I should have been more encouraging of the two students at the front of the class, who are shy. After viewing their performance on the video, I could see that they were doing well with the aural activity, which makes sense, because they are both musicians. Overall most students really liked the lesson. Even though they do not study Latin to speak it, this lesson provided a natural, communicative means to increase comprehension of oral Latin. At the same time they were able to comprehend the story line and understand this cultural experience. I did adapt the story to focus on appropriate vocabulary and grammar to meet the needs of the students. Telling the story in Latin with voice inflection, appropriate pronunciation, and dramatic effect did provide excellent communication. Aurelia, who is a writer, said that she really picked up on verb and noun endings from the spoken Latin.

The realia worked well, especially the Etruscan charioteer and flying apple. It would have worked well to have students hold up the word pictures when that word was used in the story. The realia in the pictures also worked well, and students asked me to put the PowerPoint on my Internet

site, and I did. I think the Latin questions were too long, and I should make some of the questions simpler, but also have some that are more challenging to serve all the students' needs.

The part of the lesson where the students were acting out the myth gave them a chance to express the story with movement and interaction with the other students. This interpersonal exercise also allowed the students observing it to absorb their movements and learn from this visual means of communication. The students' diverse reactions to the lesson also served as a strong reminder that I need to focus the lessons to reach each of the eight intelligences.