

THE ROLE OF CLASSICS IN THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
The Report of The Aeneid Institute Committee on Classics
In the Elementary School

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We have taught the Aeneid in elementary schools all over the nation. We have taught Roman and Greek mythology from Maine to Washington, from California to Florida. Consequently, children are teaching their parents, and their brothers and sisters. The Classics belong in the curriculum of every school. We owe students the knowledge of their civilization as surely as we owe them food or drink, or organized sports.

While we focus on Vergil's Aeneid since this classic initially brought us together, we have discovered no single right way to teach the Aeneid. We learn from each other, accept each other's styles, yet maintain integrity by pursuing our own goals.

The Aeneid addresses universal questions in its concern with particular events. Students who are frequently uprooted identify with the Trojans in their wandering. Students who have lost a parent mourn with Aeneas on his return to Sicily for funeral games. Children feel and understand a suicide in the community through the context of Dido's tragedy.

Our unique position in the world of Classics is threefold: we teach elementary students, we teach in translation, and (after an intense summer of study,) we have lived the Aeneid in our classrooms for an entire academic year — we know it works.

The enthusiasm among our students and their affectionate regard for the Aeneid and for the classical world have rewarded us and assured that we continue to teach the poem and the culture of ancient Greece and Rome. Parents and colleagues have noticed what the children are learning. Families have awaited eagerly the resolution of each dilemma challenging Rome's ancestors. Parents volunteered that our study of Romans and Greeks became the highlight of the entire year. We began to effect a new attitude towards ancient studies among students, parents, and other community members. We have brought the ancient world from a remote, arcane, somewhat useless perception to one of vitality and relevance.

When students debate the merits of the Trojan journey, whether Aeneas should remain with Dido, whether he may choose his fate to any degree, or whether the Trojan women had justification for burning the ships, they participate in the past. They identify with circumstances and characters. They become part of the spiritual civilization which continues in the present era. Our children mingle in good company, among giants of culture and imagination. Our children glimpse past and future. Some few, liking what they see, may aim above the time-worn, dull serfdom of narrow ideas, unthinking obedience, or thoughtless conformity.

We cannot claim too much. The decline of classical education in America, which began with urbanization before 1900 and prevails today, has many complex sources. In this post-McGuffey era we may hardly hope to recapture the attention of most scholars. What we have done, and can continue, is to open the door briefly on a glorious and gorgeous past. We can offer bridges

and arches to pass over and through a heritage which belongs to our nation and to all nations.

One year of study hasn't made us authorities on subjects classical, but has fit us to assist students who learn more than we know. We don't envisage a new order of learner, but rather we hope to help children find a new place in the order of learning.

In considering how Aeneas should act, each child becomes the actor and tests the ability to reason and choose wisely. Knowledge and experience of the Classics reassure the child, permitting entrance into society with dignity. The sorrows of Aeneas enhance the meaning of modern sorrows; as one child empathized: "I would be sad leaving my home town. But my home is really with my family, wherever we are."

We believe their experience will bear fruit in our communities. The children have grappled with questions of value in the family and in society. They have expanded their knowledge of history and geography, their understanding of time and tradition, even their conception of the connotations and derivation of language, through the Aeneid and related classical studies.

Because we teach in English translation, the culture, art and ideas are readily accessible to other teachers and students. We must begin to approach and remedy the insulation from classics and humanities which has pervaded training programs for our elementary colleagues. We must begin by breaking from the isolation in which we have worked this first year: forty individuals spread across so many states. As we sow the ideals of The Aeneid Institute we can be sure that everyone, from the Founding Fathers to our students' mothers and fathers, would or will appreciate the legacy which their descendants share.

One hope, expressed by all members of The Aeneid Institute, is for the continuation of our work. We dream for extensions beyond our walls. We plan now for implications in the future for elementary teachers everywhere.

To start, we need to support colleagues who risk teaching the Aeneid in difficult situations. Newsletters, networking, and affiliation with organizations can provide the touchstones for identity. Schools, parents and communities vary in the amount and type of importance placed on teaching of classics. We need to make materials available. We need a center to collect, publish, and disseminate curriculum implementations.

To this end, we must encourage The Aeneid Institute members to teach and train colleagues. This may be done through in-service courses, reading sessions (of Vergil, Homer, etc.) and talks given by classicists. It would be hoped that members who successfully conduct such courses would share with others an outline of their procedures.

We must establish connections among education divisions. One good way is to create a mentor relationship between elementary teachers and high school or university teachers of humanities and classics. It is noted that mentor relationships engendered by The Aeneid Institute were mutually beneficial, and in some cases produced heightened and extended work. In addition, our attendance at regional and national conferences opened windows to the world of classics. In turn, it provided a view into the lives of elementary

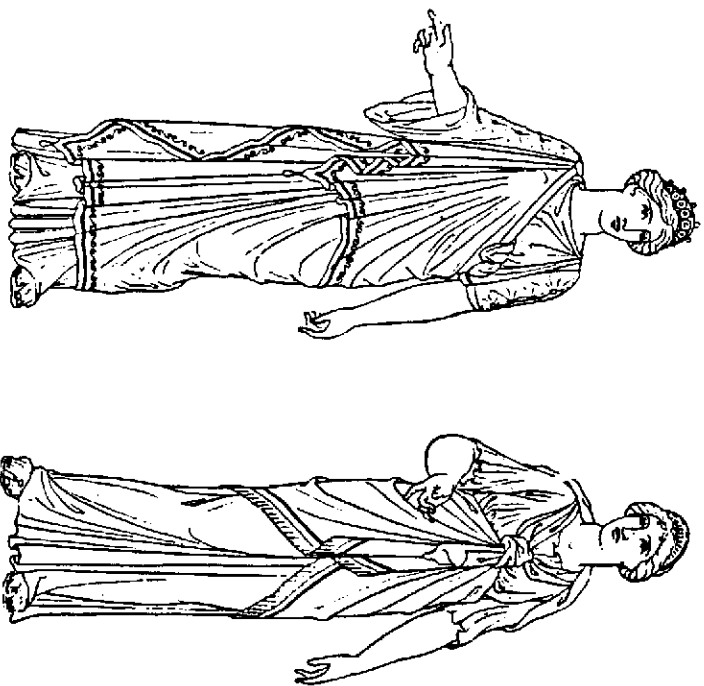
students and teachers for members of secondary and university levels. We will move forward by continued activity in the sphere. Our participation and willingness to serve on a panel or give a presentation, or read a paper, will expand our growing experiences.

We can lobby government agencies in our towns, cities, states, and regions. We can use news media. The successful short coverage of elementary teachers of Latin on ABC Evening News with Peter Jennings (April 22, 1987) demonstrated effectiveness. Federal agencies, such as NEH, give financial aid and encouragement.

Finally, on Saturday, May 30, 1987, at Miami University, Oxford, Ohio, a national organization to promote the teaching of classics in the elementary schools was formed. Named ETC (for Elementary Teachers of Classics), the organization is open for membership at all levels of educational involvement and to the general public. It will be a source of information, provide support for elementary teachers, and establish a meeting ground for articulation among educators.

Editor's Note

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THE CLASSICS IN AMERICAN SCHOOLS

Mary Ann T. Burns and Joseph F. O'Connor

Editor's Note: Reprinted with permission from the special APA brochure announcing the publication of *The Classics in American Schools*.]

The Classics belong in the education of every American. They need to be found in the curriculum of every school as early and as often as possible. Every student should have access to them.

* As many students as possible should learn about the Greeks and the Romans through the study of Latin and Greek.

* Classical subjects included in the standards of learning should be taught and taught well. Where they are not included, the standards should be modified to include them.

* Classical subjects should be introduced across the curriculum in grades K through 12.

The study of classical culture is sympathetic to the study of all cultures. America gains when its citizens come to understand the diverse cultural strands which comprise it as a nation. Such a broad view encourages tolerance, perspective, human sympathy, and cooperation.

The Romans and Greeks Across the Curriculum

Greek and Roman culture touches every aspect of American life. It underlies our literature, art and architecture, political ideals, values, and sense of history. Every American child must be given the means of understanding this connection between ancient and modern, not only factually, but with the critical judgment to put it to use.

The Classics should therefore be solidly represented in the school curriculum. In most cases, this means:

- * a commitment to good instruction where the Classics are included in the standards of learning.
- * an infusion of classical material into existing curricula.
- * the development of high-quality and useable materials at all levels.
- * a coordinated program of pre-service and in-service teacher education.

Latin: A Solid Educational Investment

Latin solidly repays the effort of a few years of study. Its dividends include heightened language facility, immersion in a basic western culture, and introduction to the literary treasures of the Romans.

Latin should be fostered at all levels of American Education:

- * Foreign language instruction, and Latin in particular, should be encouraged in the elementary school to accelerate language skills, especially among students with English language deficiency.

* Latin instruction should be more widely available to the middle school student and be better articulated with secondary foreign language programs.

* Secondary school Latin instruction through the advanced level should be available any student wanting it.

Teachers: The Key to the Classics

Educators and Classicists must collaborate

* to meet the serious teacher shortage, particularly in Latin.

* to strengthen the background of all those who will be teaching classical culture--prospective elementary teachers and prospective teachers of Latin, English, and social studies in particular, but teachers in other fields as well.

* to provide in-service and continuing educational opportunities to teachers seeking to strengthen their command of the Classics.

University/school collaboration will also lead to development of new and improved materials, particularly in classical culture. Quality materials--textbooks, supplementary units, packets, and audio-visual aids--in the hands of talented and well-trained teachers are the key to an effective program of classical studies.

Recommendations

Today's educational environment presents an exciting challenge to Classicists and educators to strengthen the Classics in American schools. This challenge can only be met through immediate, common action and a commitment to resolve problems in curriculum, materials, and teacher training:

* At a national level, a Steering Committee should be established to coordinate, stimulate, and support projects in the Classics.

* At the local level, cooperative initiatives should be undertaken by administrators, teachers, and Classicists.

A national Steering Committee can provide direction, resources, coherence, but effective action must occur within individual school systems:

* School administrators, with the help of teachers and Classicists, should provide in-service training for teachers and resources for acquiring or developing useable materials.

* Curricula in language arts/literature and in social studies should be reviewed to provide a fair and sequential representation of the Classics and cross-disciplinary connections wherever possible.

* Latin in high school should be available through the advanced level to every student who seeks it.

* Schools should investigate elementary and middle school Latin programs which foster general language skills in reading, vocabulary, and comprehension.

* Teachers and Classicists should work with curriculum developers to produce up-to-date, high quality, and accurate materials for teaching units on the ancient world.

* The educational community should identify, encourage, and seek financial support for future teachers of Latin and provide opportunities for teachers retraining to teach it.

With energetic and creative leadership, the Classics will thrive in America's schools. Now is the time for coordinated, realistic action. The beneficiaries will be the nation's students.

Copies of full Conference Report, "The Classics in American Schools: Teaching the Ancient World," may be obtained from: The American Philological Association, Department of Classics, Fordham University, Bronx, NY 10458-5154. (price \$7.50 per copy, plus \$.50 postage and handling; ACL Member Price, \$5.00, plus \$.50 postage and handling).

THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CHILD

Editor's Note: This excerpt from *The Classics in American Schools* has been reprinted with permission.¹

In the early grades, presenting challenging materials means piquing the curiosity of children, appealing to their sense of adventure and their fascination with remote and fantastic worlds, and building on their powers of imagination, narrative, and dramatization. For example, a Philadelphia kindergarten teacher, convinced that puzzles help develop hand-eye coordination, constructed wooden puzzles representing major world myths and fairy tales. In addition to exercising fine motor skills, the children retold the stories as they worked. In another case, fourth graders' notorious ability to remember details and their fascination with the interpretation of puzzling physical clues was turned into an unit of archaeology. The children learned something about how to comprehend a culture from its physical remains while at the same time they applied their imaginations to problem solving. So too, literature with a strong narrative or dramatic line (Homer's *Odyssey*, Vergil's *Aeneid*, Euripides' *Iphigenia at Aulis*, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and others - provide the elementary teacher with abundant opportunities for reading aloud, for discussion, and for dramatization. Examples of these creative exercises abound at the elementary level.

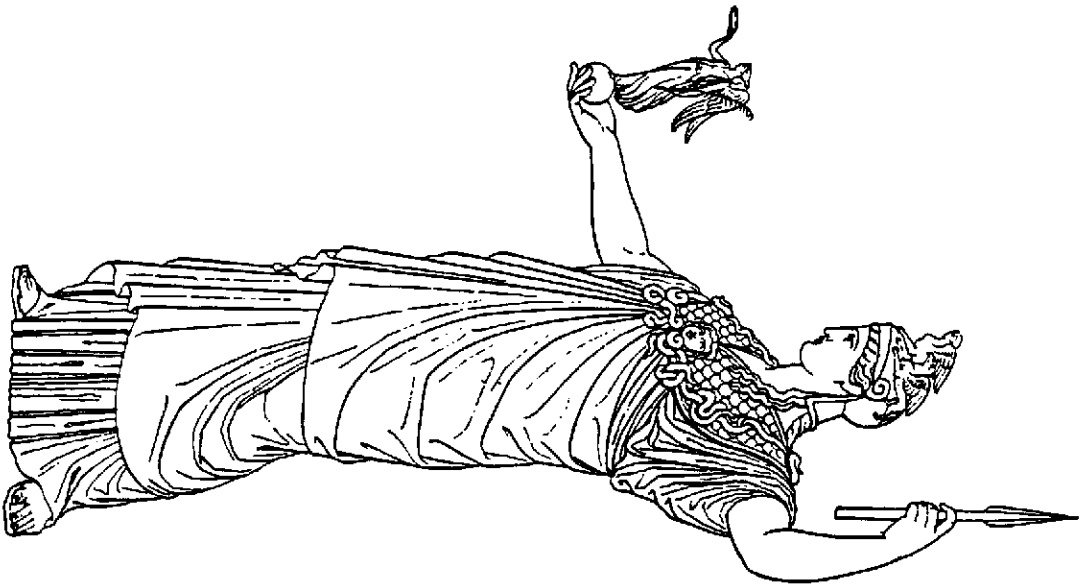
The contribution of the elementary teacher to the strength of the Classics in America is enormous. At the elementary level, the teacher is often a cultural generalist who, because of the flexibility of the curriculum at that level, can connect components into unifying themes that imaginatively stimulate the children's curiosity and thought.

Recent reports emphasize the special vigor of American elementary education and stress two fundamental objectives that go beyond reading and computing. The first is the acquisition of a broad base of knowledge upon which to build. If this base is missing from a child's elementary background, it is very difficult to construct later. Second, further academic success very much depends on attitude and excitement towards learning which are especially associated with the elementary years. This zest for learning is an extraordinary accomplishment when it occurs. It must be based on those singular strengths so apparent in the elementary child: openness, interest in communicating, inquisitiveness, sense of play, and creativity. It needs to

provide the child with space to wonder, to express feelings and thoughts, to appropriate ideas personally, to seek relationships and connections.

Materials and approaches that seek to reach elementary children through the Classics, therefore, ought to do three things:

- reinforce the development of skills
- enlarge the knowledge base
- stimulate and excite.



LATIN IN THE ELEMENTARY CURRICULUM

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The last two decades have seen revived interest in what was once a standard subject for the upper elementary school student—the Latin language. Faced with declining English language skills, educators are turning to foreign language instruction in the hope of sharpening general linguistic ability. They believe, along with the Russian child psychologist L.S. Vygotsky, that “a foreign language facilitates mastering the higher forms of the native language. The child learns to see his language as one particular system among many, to view its phenomena under more general categories, and this leads to awareness of his linguistic operations. Successful elementary Latin programs in Philadelphia, Washington, D.C., and Indianapolis have produced impressive results statistically significant improvement in general language skills as well as in some other areas of the curriculum. Dr. Marion Polaký, working in New York, has created and used in her work with elementary students some very interesting materials for the teaching of Latin, and last summer the Fellows of The Aeneid Institute were privileged to hear her explain the details of her methods.

The case for Latin in the elementary school of today is put largely in terms of the use of this language to stimulate general intellectual development as well as the improvement of specific skills in English vocabulary, syntax and grammar. As Nancy A. Mavrogenes states in *The Effect of Elementary Latin Instruction on Language Arts Performance*: “Experience with two languages at the elementary school level enables students to improve their divergent thinking abilities such as fluency, flexibility and originality. . . . Latin stimulates linguistic awareness because its complex and precise declensions and conjugations reveal clearly its syntactic structure.” (*Elementary School Journal* [March, 1977] p. 269)

Some teachers also feel strongly that the materials used in the study of Latin have intrinsic interest for the elementary student. Classical myths, fables, legends, and stories from Roman history still carry rich meaning for the student and increase the range and depth of a child's thoughts about the meaning of life.

The Committee on Latin in the Elementary School sought to find who of The Aeneid Institute Fellows had attempted the teaching of Latin in the elementary classroom, and in what way. A questionnaire was sent to the thirty plus classroom teachers from the Institute. Almost half of these responded that they had used the Latin language in some way during the school year. Eight had taught Latin as a school subject during all or part of the school year. The remainder introduced Latin in various ways while teaching other school subjects.

For those teachers who brought Latin into the teaching of other subjects, the most common use was of Latin word roots during the Language Arts periods. All elementary grade levels were represented. One teacher taught her remedial reading class of Grade I and II students “a few choice phrases from the Aeneid” in Latin. Several teachers taught well-known Latin expressions like *tempus fugit* and *Delenda est Carthago*, or words like *furor*, *infelix*, or

neto. One teacher of third graders introduced a rich assortment of Latin expressions and derivations throughout his curriculum "wherever applicable even in Art and Gym." Other classes where Latin was in some way included were history and math.

Those teachers who taught Latin as a school subject also represent all grade levels from First through Sixth Grade, and revealed an interesting variety of methods. We think it worthwhile to quote at length from some of the responses.

One teacher taught a class of ten First and Second Graders in oral sessions, using the Polakky materials as a guide. She enclosed a description of a typical lesson.

1. Pledge the Flag in Latin
2. *Quid est nomen tuum? or Quis es?* (Children respond and then repeat the question to the teacher.)
3. *Ubi est Roma? Ubi est Italia?* etc. (Children answer in complete sentences.)
4. Count to twenty, add, subtract, etc., in Latin. Sing "Ten Little Romans" forwards and backwards. Take one of the Latin numbers and discover the words derived from it.

Both children and parents greeted this program with enthusiasm. Two teachers taught Latin to their Third Grade students. One class contained twenty-five students of all ability levels, and Marlon Polakky's book *First Latin* was used as a text. Latin was taught along with parallel courses using classical myths and the Aeneid.

Another Third Grade teacher wrote:

"I have introduced a basic Latin curriculum to third grade students in my talented and gifted program, and to a cross-section of fourth graders. I was only able to work with the fourth graders for one semester, but have been able to work with the third grade children for most of the year.

The high school Latin teacher in my district has been working with me to develop a conversational Latin, Roman customs and culture curriculum for these pilot groups. A third year high school student works with me and my third grade class for forty-five minutes to an hour a week. We've drawn from many sources for the lessons, but perhaps one of our best resources has been the Elementary School Curriculum materials in the ACL Catalog.

Time is spent on derivatives, songs, games (i.e. *Simon Dicit* in Latin). We had a banquet and attended one at the high school. A high school class has visited us to talk about Roman holidays and sing Christmas carols with the children in Latin. Each class period is roughly divided as follows: 10-15 minutes for review and Latin conversation; 15 minutes on Latin derivatives or a discussion on some segment of Roman life (e.g. the family); the new vocabulary, of course, lies in with this section; 15 minutes for the introduction of new vocabulary; 15 minutes for games, songs, or an art activity.

This has been a rewarding experience for both my third and fourth grade children and the high school students with whom they are working.

Feedback has been very positive from both parents and the administration, and the high school Latin teacher and I plan to teach this course or perhaps even expand it next year."

A class of eighteen fifth graders enjoyed a varied course of Latin involving translation, Latin derivations, grammar, the history of Rome and current events. Basic materials were Dorsey Salerno's handbook *Latin for Beginners* along with "some ancient Scott Foresman texts." This group was enthusiastic and became much involved in researching classical architecture.

The Scott Foresman text *Living Latin* was used by another teacher with three grade levels: eighteen fourth graders, eight fifth graders and six sixth graders. Roman history was taught along with Latin, and supplementary materials used were pictures, Seaman's ACL slides, hands-on projects and derivative charts.

A most interesting and successful experiment was the teaching of Latin to low achievers in grades five and six during a thirty minute a day "compensatory reading" period for which the twenty-five students were pulled from their regular classes. These students had tested in the bottom quartile on standardized achievement tests. Says the teacher: "I used Marlon Polakky's *First Latin* and completed most of Chapter One. It provided a terrific introduction for the Aeneid. I used it, also, in order to raise self-esteem with my low achievers, i.e., they would be learning something that no one else in school (even the teachers) knew. The game, song, interactive, mostly oral aspects were well received by my students." Initial reactions from colleagues in the school were skeptical. One remarked, "They can't read English. Why teach them Latin?" But another teacher was so impressed by the program that she said that Latin should be taught to all the sixth graders; and indeed other students in the school expressed interest in Latin.

Using Latin was the text rather freely adapted by another teacher for use with a class of seven highly motivated fifth grade students of mixed ability levels. These students had already had two years of daily French instruction and a considerable background in Greek and Roman history and mythology. Latin was presented as a rewarding but demanding discipline requiring much extra work from the student. The decision to take Latin or not was the free choice of the student (and all the fifth graders in this multi-grade classroom chose to do so).

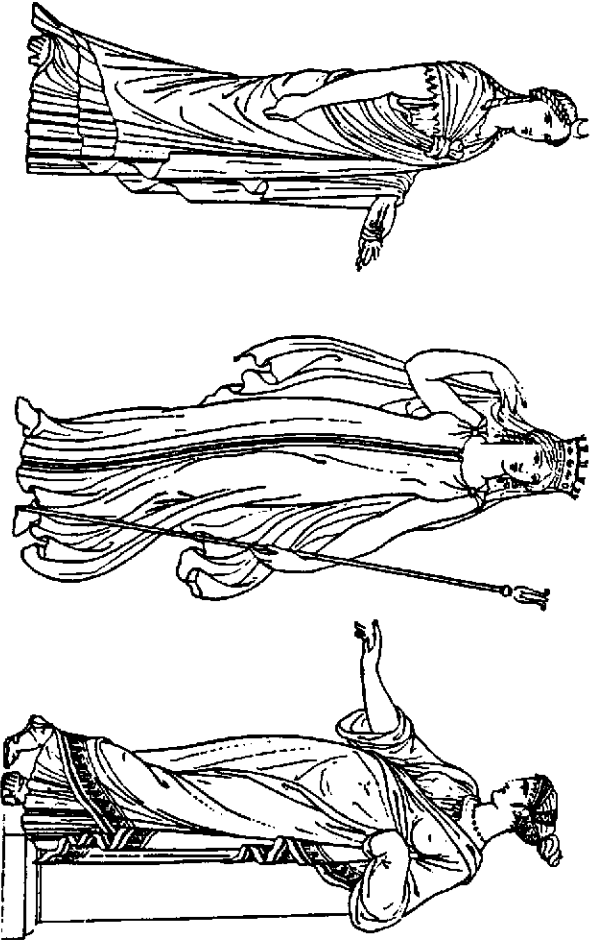
Instruction was built around the translation of passages deemed to be of intrinsic interest, and there was much discussion of etymology and of the content of the stories. Passages were read aloud in Latin by the children and then each would translate a sentence or two at a time orally. During the next day or so each child would then make a written translation into English, and this would be gone over and discussed before the end of the week. There was emphasis on combining accuracy of translation with a smooth English style. The students were extremely conscientious in mastering conjugations, declensions and vocabulary words. During the year they acquired a vocabulary of over 500 words, learned the first and second conjugations and important irregular verbs in present, past, imperfect and future tenses, and the declensions of masculine, feminine and neuter nouns. Emphasis was on thorough understanding rather than speed, and about one-fourth of Book One of *Using Latin* was covered.

One teacher in our survey was a language specialist, teaching Latin and French. Latin was begun in the third grade after four years' study of French begun in junior kindergarten. Both languages were continued through the sixth grade. In the study of etymology this teacher found the large Oxford English Dictionary an invaluable resource, and her students frequently were able to draw comparisons between Latin, French and English. Parent support for this rich language program was extremely strong.

CONCLUSIONS

Several things seem to be worth pointing out at the conclusion of this report. First, there appears to be a refreshing and healthy diversity in approaches to teaching Latin in elementary school; each teacher apparently molds materials and methods to suit the particular ages, abilities and interests of the students involved.

Secondly, every Fellow who essayed the teaching of Latin felt that it was a worthwhile experience. None were planning to cut back the program; a number mentioned that they would like to expand it. Some of those Fellows, furthermore, who introduced the language into non-Latin classes said that they would like to teach it more systematically, given more support and more confidence in their abilities. In this connection it is worthwhile noting the excellent results of the teacher who obtained the co-operation of the local High School Latin department. If this could be done more generally it would be an enormous help to Latin teaching in the elementary school.



LATIN LANGUAGE

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