

THE FORMATIVE AND INCLUSIVE VALUE OF LATIN: DIDACTIC PROPOSALS FOR PRIMARY SCHOOL

IL VALORE FORMATIVO E INCLUSIVO DEL LATINO: PROPOSTE DIDATTICHE PER LA SCUOLA PRIMARIA



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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the formative and inclusive value of Latin in primary education. Through a comparative review of educational projects in the US, UK, and Italy, it highlights how Latin, when taught using playful, narrative, and multisensory methods aligned with Universal Design for Learning (UDL), can enhance language awareness, cognitive skills, motivation and inclusion, especially for students with learning difficulties, Special Educational Needs (SEN) and different educational backgrounds.

Il contributo evidenzia il valore formativo e inclusivo del latino nella scuola primaria. Attraverso un'analisi comparativa di esperienze didattiche svoltesi in USA, UK e Italia, si sottolinea come il latino, insegnato con metodi ludici, narrativi e multisensoriali, in linea con l'Universal Design for Learning (UDL), possa potenziare competenze linguistiche, motivazione e inclusione, soprattutto per alunni con difficoltà di apprendimento, Bisogni Educativi Speciali (BES) e bisogni educativi eterogenei.

KEYWORDS

Didactics; Latin didactics; language skills; primary education; inclusion.

Didattica; didattica del latino; competenze linguistiche; scuola primaria; inclusione.

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Introduction

The educational and inclusive value of Latin has been acknowledged in scholarly literature, which emphasizes both the centrality of elements related to ancient civilization and thought, and the importance of Latin for the development of linguistic competencies (Preti, 2015). Specifically, learning Latin enhances proficiency in the native language, and for students with Special Educational Needs (SEN) and Specific Learning Disorders (SLD), it appears to foster increased motivation (Cardinaletti et al., 2016), especially when employing didactic methodologies such as valency grammar, Ørberg's method, and the Natural Approach (Ørberg, 1990; Tesnière, 2001; Krashen & Terrell, 1983).

While the inclusive potential of Latin has mainly been discussed in recent decades, its formative value has been debated since the second half of the 19th century, when Latin was regarded as a fundamental component in shaping students' intellectual character and historical and humanistic consciousness, particularly in terms of its cultural, social, and educational functions (Bruni, 2005).

Alongside the recognition of these principles, a lengthy debate arose over the mandatory status of Latin teaching, which eventually led to its partial removal in 1962 with the establishment of the "unified middle school" (Law No. 1859), and its definitive elimination in 1977 (Law No. 348). This shift was followed by a gradual decline in both political and social interest in Latin, paralleled by a growing preference for modern foreign languages and technical-scientific education. As of now, Latin is no longer part of the lower secondary school curriculum in Italy and is only offered in certain tracks of upper secondary education: classical, scientific, linguistic, and human sciences high schools (DPR No. 89/2010). Interest in the discipline continues to wane, as reflected in the steady decline in enrollments in courses where Latin is still taught.

In response to this complex and multifaceted scenario—shaped by several factors including the subject's diminishing appeal—recent research has emphasized the need to adopt teaching strategies that can foster greater student engagement. Particular attention has been paid to students with SEN and SLD (Garulli, Pasetti & Viale, 2021). The aim is not merely to counteract disinterest, but to highlight the formative and inclusive potential of Latin through innovative, personalized, and technologically accessible approaches (Iannella, Fiorentino & Pera, 2018; Balbo, 2021). These practices align with the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), which advocates for flexible educational environments capable of

addressing diverse cognitive styles and individual needs through multiple means of engagement, representation, and expression (Mace, 1985; CAST, 2011, 2018).

In this context, there seems to be a renewed interest from Italian educational policymakers in re-evaluating the formative and inclusive dimensions of Latin, with early signs pointing to the possibility of reintroducing the subject into lower secondary school (MIM, 2025).

In the international context, on the other hand, there is growing interest in introducing Latin in primary school. Various innovative methodologies and teaching materials have been developed to make Latin teaching more accessible, engaging, and progressive—aimed at improving students’ linguistic and cognitive skills from an early age (Bracke & Bradshaw, 2020).

Indeed, numerous public and private programs have been implemented in countries such as the United States (since the mid-1960s) and the United Kingdom (over the past twenty years), offering Latin teaching to children as young as six or seven. These initiatives adopt inclusive, multisensory methodologies and age-appropriate teaching materials (Hanlin & Lichtenstein).

This paper will analyze, in particular, through a review of relevant scientific literature, various projects, experiences, and didactic practices implemented to teach Latin in primary schools in the United States and the United Kingdom. It also will explore experiments and initiatives that have been undertaken—or are currently underway—in Italy in upper primary school classes. The goal is to draw comparisons between international and national experiences to identify actionable educational strategies that promote Latin as a culturally and intellectually inclusive tool.

This endeavor is particularly significant within a pedagogical framework that values diversity and seeks to design flexible and participatory educational pathways (Sibilio & Aiello, 2015).

1. Teaching Latin in U.S. primary schools: projects, experiences, and educational practices

In recent decades, Latin has received renewed attention in primary school, particularly through experimental projects launched in the United States since the late 1960s. These initiatives have employed inclusive pedagogy and emphasized the formative dimension of Latin by adopting multisensory approaches and innovative teaching strategies.

Starting with the FLES program, which began in 1967, and continuing through the Cornerstone Program of 1981, up to more recent initiatives such as Aequora and Latin through Stories, a K–5 curriculum developed by the University of Dallas, these experiences have shared the goal of making Latin accessible, engaging, and meaningful for young learners.

1.1 Foreign languages in the elementary school – Latin (FLES) Program

One of the earliest and most notable pilot projects was the FLES (Foreign Languages in the Elementary School – Latin) program, launched in 1967 and implemented in several American cities (Philadelphia, Washington D.C., Los Angeles, etc.). It involved thousands of elementary students and demonstrated significant improvements in linguistic skills, particularly among students with initial reading difficulties, as reflected in elevated scores in vocabulary tests (Mavrogenes, 1979). In 1967, Latin was at risk of disappearing entirely from the public school curriculum in Philadelphia. Many foreign language teachers, university professors, and community members expressed concern to school authorities about the elimination of Latin in many secondary schools and the parallel rise of modern languages in grades 7 and 8. Following a meeting among key stakeholders, the Latin FLES Latin project was initiated in Philadelphia for grades 5 and 6 (Masciantonio, 1971). The program was well received by institutions and the public. Before the FLES initiative, only 490 students were enrolled in public school Latin classes; within a decade, that number had surged to 14,000 across 125 elementary schools. This growth reflected recognition of Latin's educational benefits, particularly for students with language difficulties who lived in markedly multilingual settings, such as those of several U.S. metropolises in the 1970s.

In fact, the FLES project aimed to: improve English verbal skills by the enrichment of vocabulary based on Latin roots and affixes; broaden children's cultural horizons by comparing classical and contemporary civilizations; enable comprehension and basic spoken Latin; and foster interest in classical humanistic studies (Masciantonio, 1971). The focus of the FLES-Latin program was indeed to support students in improving their English language skills, but more specifically, it aimed to serve those living in disadvantaged urban multicultural environments. The program sought to stimulate linguistic awareness, grounded in the fact that approximately 50% of English vocabulary is derived from Latin, particularly abstract terms used to express higher levels of generalization. As a result, the program activated the innate but

underdeveloped linguistic intuition of verbally disadvantaged students, leading to a measurable increase in their otherwise limited vocabulary (Mavrogenes, 1979). FLES successfully achieved these goals through a pedagogy oriented toward orality, multisensory resources (films, images, cartoons, games), and a gradual introduction to reading. The program adopted a direct method, presenting Latin via audio-visual-linguistic techniques with a strong emphasis on comprehension and speaking skills (Masciantonio, 1971). Latin dialogues were taught through non-verbal visual cues representing Roman life and mythology. This enabled students to understand and speak Latin without English mediation, reducing fear of failure, increasing self-confidence, and fostering authentic communication a process akin to how Roman children learned Latin through lived experience (Mavrogenes, 1977).

Teachers in the FLES program emphasized Latin's formative and inclusive value. Recognizing the urgent need to expand children's English vocabulary, which, if limited, severely hampers academic success, they implemented several strategies: highlighting the connection between English words and their Latin roots; correcting imprecise speech habits through Latin's clarity of pronunciation; and introducing Roman life and mythology to open "new symbolic worlds." The goal was to broaden cultural perspectives through a comparison of ancient and modern life and to link classical material to other subjects and daily experiences. Moreover, for students with reading challenges, Latin provided practice in accurate silent reading of words that follow consistent phonetic pattern (LeBovit, 1976, pp. 11–12). These teaching strategies and the creative multisensory materials demonstrate how teaching Latin can evolve from a rote exercise into a lively, accessible, and deeply formative educational experience. A learner-centered approach integrating language and culture fosters a stimulating environment that nurtures students' linguistic, cognitive, and personal growth.

Latin instruction has also been shown to enhance cognitive development. Drawing on Piaget and Vygotsky's theories, it supports the mastery of higher-order linguistic forms. According to Vygotsky, studying a foreign language enhances mastery of the mother tongue by encouraging children to recognize their language as one system among many, thus increasing metalinguistic awareness (Fredericks, 1974, p. 286). Likewise, Piaget's concept of "decentering" suggests that learning a new language requires reorganization of thought and worldview, fostering higher intellectual functioning (Fredericks, 1974, p. 287).

Empirical data confirms these benefits: sixth-grade students who studied Latin for one year scored higher in vocabulary, reading comprehension, and overall reading

skills. On the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills, fifth-grade students enrolled in Latin scored higher on vocabulary tests compared to their non-Latin peers (LeBovit, 1977), affirming Latin's effectiveness in supporting English language acquisition. The success of the program is reflected not only in standardized test results but also in surveys among students, teachers, and parents. These confirm the value of Latin as a tool for linguistic, cognitive, and cultural empowerment, especially in disadvantaged, multilingual settings.

1.2 The Cornerstone Program

In addition to spreading across multiple U.S. cities, such as Indianapolis, Los Angeles, Washington D.C., Easthampton (Massachusetts), and Philadelphia, the FLES program also inspired subsequent initiatives in other urban centers, including New York City. There, Professor Gladys Shoemaker, Chair of the Department of Classics at Brooklyn College, developed the Cornerstone Program. This experimental Latin program was launched in 1981 in two fifth-grade and two sixth-grade classrooms at P.S. 152, a primary school located in the working-class Flatbush district of Brooklyn. During this period, the number of students with English as a first language was decreasing, while children from Puerto Rico, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, India, Cambodia, and Vietnam were increasing, a reflection of New York City's multicultural character (Fromchuck, 1984). The program was initially modeled on Philadelphia's FLES program. However, the instructional materials had to be revised to match the cultural experiences of students in New York City schools, just as the Philadelphia curriculum had been tailored to its specific sociocultural context.

The goals of the Cornerstone Program aligned with those of FLES but were enhanced to place a greater emphasis on etymology in vocabulary instruction. This refinement aimed to strengthen listening and association skills, broaden English vocabulary, and teach English grammar through Latin-English comparisons. Like FLES, the Cornerstone Program focused on developing listening comprehension skills while minimizing students' fear of failure. In the early stages, children were not required to read or write in Latin (Fromchuck, 1984).

Quantitative assessments, such as the California Achievement Test (CAT), revealed that students who had studied Latin showed significant improvement in vocabulary and reading comprehension compared to control groups. These findings suggest that Latin instruction positively influences language development. In particular, the

results support the notion that studying Latin enhances metalinguistic awareness, facilitates the transfer of analytical strategies from lexical to textual levels, and activates diverse cognitive approaches to learning. Moreover, a survey involving students, parents, principals, and teachers demonstrated strong support for the Latin program.

1.3 Aequora Program

Initiated in 2013, the Aequora program is a Latin language and literacy initiative designed based on the positive outcomes of previous pilot programs. It originated from the collaboration between the Paideia Institute, an American nonprofit organization committed to promoting the study and appreciation of classical languages, and the Still Waters, an after-school program for children based in Bushwick, Brooklyn. In this environment, physically consisting of a single classroom, children work individually and in groups with adolescent and adult mentors on reading and writing activities in English and Spanish. At Still Waters, Latin is not treated as a relic of the past, but as one of several languages that enable children to develop reading and writing skills, thereby improving their overall literacy in English and Spanish (Butterworth, 2017). Since its foundation in 2010, the Paideia Institute has experienced rapid growth, establishing dozens of programs throughout the United States by 2015. It offers Latin lessons in community centers, after-school programs, summer camps, and public libraries. The institute has also developed its own textbook, *Aequora: Teaching Literacy with Latin*, designed to reinforce literacy in English and Spanish through Latin instruction, while introducing students to classical mythology and Roman civilization. Activities and games are geared toward helping students identify connections between English and Latin grammar and recognize English words derived from Latin.

At the heart of Aequora is a broad and inclusive vision of the classics that includes a democratic pedagogy, an emphasis on community involvement, and a value for interdisciplinary research. According to the Paideia Institute, classical outreach should not be limited to simply promoting Latin or increasing the number of students enrolled in classical language courses. Instead, it should involve critical reflection on the social dynamics that intersect with classical studies and offer structured service-learning opportunities in which students can explore these dynamics in depth (Butterworth, 2017). Latin is thus acknowledged for its formative value, related both to linguistic aspects and to elements of civilization and thought.

This is achieved through the presentation of materials focused on Latin culture, designed to prompt students to reflect on social values by encouraging children to observe both changes and constants in human behavior. Considering Latin as fundamental for the development of individual language skills, efforts have been made to ensure that it is accessible to all, particularly to those living in vulnerable contexts and having linguistic difficulties.

At the foundation of Aequora is learning together, a collaborative learning model conducted in small groups guided by coordinators and volunteers, within an environment that fosters creativity and curiosity. The program is permeated by a pedagogy based on the joy of learning Latin together. Moreover, peer collaboration supports not only social inclusion but also the reinforcement of learning, according to the UDL principle of offering multiple modes of action and expression.

In the case of Aequora, the Paideia Institute found it challenging to quantitatively assess the program's impact on academic progress. However, in order to evaluate its effectiveness, the Institute carried out qualitative assessments by collecting data through short pre- and post-activity tests, interviews, and surveys. These revealed that the learning process is perceived as enjoyable, in the sense that student engagement increases and is strengthened by a positive approach to the subject (Butterworth, 2017). It should also be noted that the Aequora curriculum was designed to be both accessible and engaging, considering that fun fosters curiosity and motivates students.

The impact of enjoyment, while not excluding depth and rigor, on the learning process, although difficult to quantify, should not be underestimated, just as the social change brought about by the program through the "democratization" of a subject often considered elitist should not be overlooked.

1.4 *Latin through Stories Program*

Latin through Stories, a K–5 curriculum developed by the University of Dallas, stands out as the only primary-level Latin program explicitly grounded in *Comprehensible Input*, as theorized by Stephen Krashen. Its principal objective is to offer a joyful vision of Latin, a language that has been used for two millennia to convey meaningful ideas and values, through a meaningful learning experience and a narrative-based approach. From the outset, children are immersed in Latin, allowing them to listen, comprehend, and speak the language naturally. [Source: <https://k12classical.udallas.edu/k-5-latin-curriculum/>]

Students learn Latin in a natural and enjoyable way through songs, rhymes, illustrated talks on artworks, “little Socratic talks,” oral storytelling, and picture books. The curriculum begins with listening, followed only later by oral and written production. This sequence respects the natural stages of language acquisition in children, who are seen not merely as individuals producing isolated words but as capable of using language to express thoughts and ideas. The *Latin through Stories* program helps students gradually acquire a variety of complete Latin sentences. At each level, students learn: over one hundred complete sentences through the Gouin Series (or “series method”) developed in the mid-19th century by the French educator François Gouin; to sing more than ten songs and rhymes; to answer in complete sentences during guided “little Socratic talks” with their teacher; and to respond to, fully comprehend, recite, and memorize phrases from approximately ten illustrated books and folk tales read aloud to them in Latin.

Words are introduced through meaningful sentences rather than as isolated grammatical categories to be learned. As a result, children naturally develop an “ear” for the language and an intuitive understanding of Latin sentence structures. The educational follows multimodal didactic approaches, engaging multiple sensory channels, auditory, visual, and kinesthetic, in order to foster inclusion and participation for all learners, who are actively involved with their entire bodies. This design, in Italy, could make the program particularly suitable for students learning Italian as a second language (ELL) and for those with learning difficulties, enabling them to reach the same educational goals as their peers.

Vocabulary and grammar are taught in meaningful contexts through sentences, songs, rhymes, brief Socratic dialogues, and the Gouin Series. The deliberate absence of grammar exercises reflects a methodological choice aimed at reducing the metalinguistic load, thereby facilitating implicit learning that is more accessible and motivating. In this way, language acquisition occurs through the actual use of the language in concrete and engaging communicative situations, supporting the spontaneous development of both linguistic and cognitive skills, even among children with special educational needs (SEN) or those learning Italian as a second language (ELL).

2. Teaching Latin in UK primary schools: projects, experiences, and educational practices

Since the early 2000s, various educational initiatives aimed at introducing Latin in primary schools have been implemented in the United Kingdom. In fact, a number of teaching materials had already been developed and used for such initiatives in the late 1990s, most notably with the publication of *Minimus: Starting out in Latin* by Barbara Bell. This textbook introduced a playful and age-appropriate approach to Latin for children aged 7 to 11, and was so well received that it inspired the development of other Latin courses, such as *Latin for Children*, and has been adopted in several projects run by charitable organizations. These projects were often initiated by private entities or non-profit associations with the aim of presenting classical subjects in a fun, accessible, and modern way (Holmes-Henderson, 2016). Only later, and more recently, have these initiatives become more systematically structured, eventually developing into broader programs designed for expansion into other schools. Some of them have even become ministerial programs, as in the case of the *Iris Project*, launched in 2006. This project gained such widespread support that it contributed to the establishment of the *Latin Excellence Programme*, a nationwide initiative targeting students aged 11 to 14 (Long & Danechi, 2024).

2.1 *Iris Project*

The oldest but undoubtedly most significant project, aimed at teaching Latin to children aged five to eleven, is the Iris Project (<http://irisproject.org.uk>), launched in 2006 under the direction of Lorna Robinson, a classicist trained at Oxford. It was specifically designed to teach classical languages into primary schools in disadvantaged urban areas, following a similar approach to that of U.S.-based initiatives.

The Iris Project aims to promote and support Latin literacy across the UK (Robinson, 2016; <http://irisproject.org.uk/index.php>) and has evolved into several sub-projects, including *London Literacy through Latin* and *Oxford Literacy through Latin*. These initiatives, developed by Robinson, incorporate creative, playful, and accessible activities, such as using myths from Ovid, to support and enhance

national literacy strategies within the Latin curriculum (<http://irisproject.org.uk/index.php/the-iris-project/iris-project-history>).

The lesson plans were carefully designed to provide an engaging, original, and accessible introduction to Latin, incorporating a wide variety of dynamic activities: using puzzle pieces to teach inflection, creating spider webs to illustrate links between Latin and English words, designing road signs to introduce imperatives, and inventing ancient menus to explore vocabulary and aspects of Roman culture. Among the simplified texts that use visual support, common in Latin instruction for primary students, is *Learning Latin through Mythology* (Hanlin & Lichtenstein, 1991). This textbook leverages mythology to capture students' interest and imagination, offering each chapter in three components: a short English version of a myth, a simplified Latin version with lexical explications, a grammar activity, and accompanying writing projects.

Following the belief that learning occurs through the magic of storytelling, Lorna Robinson (2013), in the spirit of Barbara Bell's work, authored *Telling Tales in Latin*, a book in which the Roman poet Ovid guides young readers through some of the most compelling tales from the *Metamorphoses*. As readers progress, they acquire Latin vocabulary and grammatical structures, while being encouraged to explore connections between Latin and English and reflect on the relevance of Ovid's stories in the modern world. The book employs illustrated narratives adapted from the original texts and is more structurally sophisticated than many other primary-level Latin materials. It encourages learners to make linguistic connections between English and Latin terms, explore grammar through accessible and playful means, and reflect on the enduring power of myth. The book places particular emphasis on thinking about the universal resonance of mythical stories, inviting children to explore connections with contemporary themes such as scientific progress, climate change, and environmental stewardship. Students are encouraged to engage with myths through multiple modes, drama, storytelling, and creative reinterpretation, within a broader interdisciplinary approach that also maintains a constant focus on the development of literacy and language competence.

Telling Tales in Latin effectively embodies the theories of Stephen Krashen (Krashen, 1982; Krashen & Terrell, 1983), the American linguist who formulated the concept of *Comprehensible Input*. According to this theory, second language acquisition occurs through repeated exposure to language that is understandable to the learner, even if it contains slightly more complex elements

than their current proficiency level, closely related to Vygotsky's theory of the Zone of Proximal Development.

Comprehensible input involves the entire communicative context: gestures, images, intonation, and concrete situations that enable learners to infer meaning without knowing every word or grammatical structure. Krashen argues that when the learner is immersed in such input-rich environments, free from pressure or forced language production, language acquisition occurs spontaneously and naturally. Based on these principles, Krashen and Tracy Terrell developed the *Natural Approach*, an inductive method that promotes global comprehension of meaning without relying on literal translation or native language mediation. Through simple and accessible texts, learners are able to construct meaning independently, gradually developing their language skills. In this approach, the teacher's role as a facilitator, in alignment with Vygotsky's view of the importance of social interaction in the learning process. Both Krashen and Vygotsky thus conceive of language learning as a natural, social, and progressive process, grounded in interaction with accessible and meaningful input.

2.2 Latin Excellence Programme

Following the success of the *Iris Project*—in terms of its popularity, partnerships with major London universities, and its linguistic outcomes, the UK government launched a national initiative in 2022: the Latin Excellence Programme (LEP). Backed by a £4 million investment, the programme aimed to introduce Latin at Key Stage 3 (ages 11–14), alongside complementary activities such as visits to Roman heritage sites. The initiative marked a significant shift in accessibility: Latin, previously taught in only 2.7% of state schools (compared to 49% of independent schools), was now being extended to a much broader range of students, as part of an effort to break away from Latin's traditional association with elitism (<https://latinexcellence.org/the-programme>).

The LEP was designed to increase both the number of students pursuing Latin and their success rates in the GCSE Latin examination (General Certificate of Secondary Education). However, in February 2025, the programme was officially suspended. According to the Education Hub of the Department for Education (DfE), the 39 participating schools still retain access to the curricular resources developed to support high-quality teaching. The DfE emphasized its commitment to a broad and balanced curriculum and clarified that any school is free to introduce classical

subjects independently of the LEP. Additionally, the department stated it is working with two charitable organisations, *Hands Up Education* and *Classics for All*, to provide targeted support to schools that require specialist assistance (<https://educationhub.blog.gov.uk/2025/03/teaching-latin-and-the-classics-support-available-for-schools/>). The decision to suspend the programme came despite the publication of a comprehensive evaluation in October 2024 (<https://latinexcellence.org/latestnews/year-2-evaluation>). The report, based on specific evaluative tools, assessed both student and teacher satisfaction. In its second year, the LEP had seen notable growth, expanding its reach from 18 to 40 Key Stage 3 schools, and from 10 to 24 Key Stage 4 schools, with a corresponding increase in student participation, particularly in geographic areas where Latin had previously not been taught. The evaluation also documented a significant rise in engagement among students from socio-educationally disadvantaged backgrounds.

Interestingly, while Latin was perceived by students as a subject with high cultural and academic value, levels of motivation and engagement declined slightly over time. This drop, however, was consistent with broader trends observed in modern language learning at school. On the other hand, qualitative feedback revealed that students greatly appreciated the integration of historical content and extracurricular activities. Participation in educational trips rose dramatically, from 172 to 736 students for visits to UK-based sites such as the British Library, British Museum, York, and Vindolanda, and 114 students took part in a study tour to Rome. These enrichment activities were seen to generate enthusiasm not only among Latin learners but also among their peers who had not yet studied the language.

From the perspective of teachers, the qualitative research reported strong student engagement, especially attributed to the inclusion of mythology and storytelling, which were praised for their communicative power and cultural resonance. Teachers highlighted the effectiveness of LEP resources in making Latin more dynamic and accessible, stating that the materials and support provided boosted their confidence and competence in teaching the subject. While some concerns were raised regarding the limited time allocated to Latin instruction, overall satisfaction with the programme remained high. Importantly, the LEP played a pivotal role in broadening the perceived feasibility of teaching Latin in new educational settings.

The Latin Excellence Programme thus had a substantial positive impact on the broader school community, despite ongoing concerns about long-term

sustainability, particularly regarding continuity after the end of government funding and the natural decline in student motivation over time. One of the programme's key strengths was its ability to enrich the educational offering through experiential learning opportunities beyond the classroom. These activities, made possible by the programme's financial support, enabled the participation of students who otherwise might not have had access to such opportunities, thereby contributing to their personal and academic development. Furthermore, the creation of teacher networks, through local hubs and communities of practice, strengthened professional cohesion and opened new possibilities for the expansion and consolidation of Latin education on a national scale.

2.3 *Minimus*

A variety of teaching materials have been developed to support Latin instruction in primary schools, with the earliest examples dating back to the late 1990s. In 1997, Barbara Bell began corresponding with those who had expressed interest in a Latin textbook she was drafting, and in 1999 she published *Minimus: Starting out in Latin* (Bell, 1999). The idea for the book arose from her concern that many of her secondary school students had a weak understanding of their own language and a relatively limited English vocabulary.

Minimus adopts a narrative approach, featuring full-colour comics written in simple Latin and set in the everyday life of a Roman family living at the fort of Vindolanda, near Hadrian's Wall. Its main character is a mouse named Minimus, who helps make Latin feel more accessible and relatable to young learners. Across twelve chapters, students are guided by Minimus to explore Latin nouns, adjectives, verbs, and other grammatical features. Each chapter also includes English vocabulary development exercises based on Latin roots, as well as the retelling of a Greek myth in English. The illustrations by Helen Forte support the stories visually and often include key words and a picture dictionary, either on the same page or on subsequent ones, to aid comprehension ([Minimus Picture Dictionary](#)).

In addition to the main coursebooks, *Minimus* and *Minimus Secundus*, and their corresponding workbooks, a wide range of supplementary materials has been developed to expand and enrich the learning experience. These include the MiniBooks, structured in three series of ten volumes each, which expand on the main course's characters through stories graded in vocabulary and length; the volume *Minimus in Practice*, which presents interdisciplinary approaches with

practical ideas for teachers; and *Minimusculus*, a resource aimed at children aged three to six, written primarily in English. The latter introduces the characters and setting of Vindolanda and is accompanied by songs and adult guidance notes, supporting home learning of Latin numbers and greetings (Bell, 2018). These materials contribute to humanizing the educational process by positioning the teacher as a cultural mediator and facilitator, rather than a mere transmitter of content.

Minimus was already a significant reference in the British educational landscape before 2014, but its popularity increased notably after that year, when the UK Department for Education allowed primary schools to teach an ancient language, Latin or Ancient Greek, as part of the national curriculum. Since then, Barbara Bell, in collaboration with her team and the *Primary Latin Project* (PLP), has delivered training events across the country, especially in high-risk areas. She also established a network of official *Minimus* trainers, who have shared their expertise throughout the UK. Today, *Minimus* is one of the most widely used and preferred Latin courses for children. It equips students with foundational tools for learning modern languages in secondary school, and its team offers start-up grants and teacher training for educators in English or other modern foreign languages (Sienkewicz et al., 2004).

The child-friendly, playful approach to Latin for ages 7–11 was so well received that *Minimus* became integrated into both the PLP and the *Classics for All* curriculum. These initiatives, active since 2010, aim to promote the teaching and learning of classical languages in primary schools (Bell, 2015; Classics for All; Primary Latin Project; Minimus Latin). The PLP is managed by a charitable organization that offers Latin instruction to students who otherwise would not have access to it. Classics for All, also a charitable organisation, supports state schools across the UK, particularly those in socioeconomically disadvantaged areas, in introducing or expanding classical subjects, either as part of the core curriculum or in after-school programs.

This inclusive and democratic dimension is highly significant: it reflects the desire to make Latin learning a true opportunity for all students, not a privilege reserved for the few. Latin is thus framed as a common good, capable of closing educational gaps and offering growth opportunities to all children, regardless of their background.

Minimus is specifically designed to help children improve their understanding of English through Latin (Bell, 2015). One of its key strengths lies in challenging long-

held prejudices about Latin as a "dead" or difficult language. Instead, it presents Latin as a living, accessible, and even enjoyable language that can connect with children's everyday lives and imagination. By stimulating interest, curiosity, creativity, and linguistic reflection through an illustrated narrative path, *Minimus* transforms the learner into an active participant. This immersive storytelling approach fosters emotional and motivational engagement and aligns with the first principle of Universal Design for Learning (UDL): "Provide multiple means of engagement."

The programme's success also stems from its ability to integrate language learning with historical discovery, mythological storytelling, visual literacy, and reflection on English vocabulary. This interdisciplinary strategy is especially important in primary education, where knowledge is often perceived holistically rather than compartmentalized. The inclusion of Greek myths, for example, connects Latin to literature, while the use of images and comics activates visual and narrative learning pathways, which are often more effective than traditional frontal teaching. By encouraging reflection on Latin roots in English, *Minimus* positions Latin as a tool for developing linguistic awareness. It becomes a gateway to language itself, highlighting its educational value as a formative resource.

2.4 Latin for children

Among the most significant and widely distributed materials for teaching Latin to children is *Latin for Children*, a program conceived, developed, and continuously updated since 2001. Designed by Larsen and Perrin to introduce Latin to students from fourth grade onward, the program is notable for its creative and inclusive approach, which successfully engages learners with different learning styles. Like *Minimus*, *Latin for Children* is based on storytelling (Larsen & Perrin, 2017; <https://classicalacademicpress.com/pages/series-latin-for-children>).

Latin for Children offers structured instruction in grammar and vocabulary, combining linguistic rigor with interactive pedagogical methods. It consists of three main textbooks, Primers A, B, and C, each divided into units that introduce mnemonic aids, mainly in the form of songs and rhymes. These support the natural and enjoyable memorization of grammatical and lexical structures. The grammar explanations are tailored to the cognitive level of the students and include guidance on both classical and ecclesiastical Latin pronunciation, fostering a well-rounded

phonological awareness. The books also contain adventure stories, illustrations, and visual representations of Ancient Rome.

A key feature of the program is its multimedia component, especially the *Streaming Video & Audio* volume. This high-definition audiovisual content provides integrated presentations of vocabulary, grammar charts, declensions, and conjugations, along with clear and engaging explanations by the author, Christopher Perrin, in sessions lasting approximately 20–25 minutes. Audio files further enhance learning by capturing teacher-student interactions and encouraging rhythmic repetition of linguistic content, first in Latin, then in English. This musical approach facilitates internalization of over 240 lexical items and promotes automatization of structures through repetition and song. Accessibility is further enhanced by the streaming format, which allows immediate access to the materials across various devices, including desktops, smart TVs, tablets, and smartphones. This flexibility contributes to a more adaptable and engaging learning experience. The instructional pathway is rounded out by two complementary resources: the *Activity Book*, which offers more than one hundred pages of language games, puzzles, and interactive exercises that reinforce learning in a playful and motivating way, and the *History Reader*, which enables children to read and translate simple stories matched to their level of proficiency.

2.5 Visual literacy and play-based learning

Both visual literacy and play-based learning, foundational elements of *Latin for Children* and *Minimus*, are rooted in the pedagogical thought of Quintilian and Comenius.

As early as the first century CE, Quintilian, in his treatise *Institutio Oratoria*, emphasized that children's learning should occur through play. He argued that instruction, to be effective, must elicit pleasure and curiosity. His expression *maxime ludendo* ("primarily through play") highlights the idea that children learn best while playing (*Institutio Oratoria*, I, 1, 26), thereby anticipating the principles of modern ludodidactic theory.

Comenius, regarded as the father of didactics, advocated in *Orbis Sensualium Pictus* (1658) for the association of words with tangible objects, promoting an inductive learning model based on direct sensory experience (Balbo, 2023, pp. 7–8). His belief that learning should engage the senses foreshadows the importance of visual literacy in contemporary education. Within this perspective, learning is

understood as a natural and enjoyable process, in which play serves as a vital tool for stimulating intrinsic motivation and fostering autonomous knowledge construction. The insights of Comenius and Quintilian thus provide a theoretical foundation for current pedagogical practices that value the use of images, sensory experiences, and playful activities to promote more meaningful and meaningful learning.

In addition to the use of visual resources, the incorporation of concrete objects (*realia*) can also support comprehension in young learners (Regagliolo, 2020) and serve as a useful aid in instruction (Irawan, 2017). The activities included in the textbooks discussed in earlier sections could be further enriched through the integration of real objects, used to help students identify and understand narrative elements they have encountered only in auditory or contextualized form.

Latin acquisition may also be effectively supported through ludodidactic strategies, particularly the *Total Physical Response* (TPR) method developed by psychologist James Asher. This approach is based on incorporating full-body physical responses into the teaching process by having students carry out verbal commands. TPR allows learners to move and remain active, encouraging unconscious learning in line with the *learning by doing* principle articulated by Friedrich Fröbel. In accordance with these approaches, the method of creating and repeating refrains to support the memorization of sounds and vocabulary (Burke, 1990; Taylor, 2010) is reflected in textbooks such as *Song School Latin Book* by Amy Rehn (2008). Alongside *Minimus* and *Latin for Children*, this series is among the most widely used because it can also be taught by non-specialists. Singing is employed as a tool to facilitate the acquisition of Latin language elements. The books introduce numerous commands in the imperative form, which students can physically perform with teacher guidance, applying the TPR method. The accompanying songs can also be mimed, reinforcing the connection between Latin vocabulary and physical action. Executing commands in the imperative mood through TPR thus emerges as an effective way to associate Latin vocabulary with real-world actions, supporting experiential and movement-based learning. This method is particularly valuable in supporting learners with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), who often struggle to remain still for extended periods.

Such methodologies can make the learning process more relaxed and engaging, highlighting Latin's potential as an inclusive subject capable of fostering educational success in diverse classroom settings.

3. Latin teaching in Italian Primary Schools

In Italy, the teaching of Latin is not currently included in the official primary school curriculum. Nevertheless, a few isolated initiatives have emerged, particularly in fifth-grade classes, such as those implemented at the Sant'Orsola Institute in Piacenza and the "Spataro" Comprehensive School in Vasto (Chieti province). These projects aim to enhance students' personal development and promote linguistic reflection on the Italian language through playful and innovative methodologies.

As early as 2014, the University of Turin allocated funds for a collaborative project with the University of São Paulo, Brazil, focused on the relationship between the ancient world and contemporary society. The initiative involved field observation at the Escola Desembargador Amorim Lima, attended by children aged six to fourteen, where since 2005 an educational project has been underway that emphasizes the personalization of each student's learning path. In this setting—where learners independently decide the order and timing in which they engage with proposed topics, the Minimus method was adopted (Raschieri, 2014). According to Barbara Bell (2018), this Brazilian experience was later adapted in Italy, although it appears to have since concluded.

In 2023, the Spataro-Paolucci Institute in Vasto launched a Latin teaching initiative for the first time in an Italian public primary school. Targeted at fifth-grade students, the project seeks to introduce children to Latin language and culture through a playful and inclusive approach (<https://www.ic1vasto.edu.it/site/>). The initiative aims to merge tradition with innovation by using advanced technologies such as immersive monitors, while also promoting Latin as a foundational tool for personal growth. Rather than relying on traditional methods, deemed inadequate in today's "liquid society", the school adopted the Ørberg method, an inductive approach aligned with *comprehensible input*. This methodology uses games, simulations, real-world tasks, and hands-on activities (such as a Latin version of the game of goose for learning numbers or locative prepositions) to encourage metalinguistic reflection after learning through play. This vision stems from the awareness that Latin can contribute meaningfully to students' personal development. Teaching the language in this way helps foster children's linguistic and reflective competencies, enabling them to take ownership of their native language and cultural heritage through an inclusive, future-oriented methodology. Teachers implement dynamic, hands-on activities designed to develop students' curiosity, vocabulary, and linguistic awareness from an early age.

A comparable approach has been adopted in the *Vale Project*, launched in 2021 by the Sant'Orsola private school in Piacenza, one of the first Italian schools to introduce Latin at the primary level. In *Vale*, Latin is taught through playful activities such as singing, dramatization, and simple conversations to promote natural and spontaneous acquisition. The project also incorporates *Numeremus*, a multidisciplinary and inclusive textbook that explores etymology through mnemonic strategies and mind maps (Calatroni et al., 2024). The initiative has been well received by both families and teachers, affirming Latin's value as an early educational tool for developing linguistic and cultural awareness.

These Italian experiences thus reflect a renewed interest in introducing Latin at the primary level, highlighting its formative value as a means to foster reflective thinking and broaden linguistic competence from an early age.

Conclusions and Future Perspectives

The formative and inclusive value of Latin instruction at the primary school, as evidenced by the international and national experiences analyzed, emerges as highly significant.

The experimental educational programs developed in the United States and the United Kingdom, have primarily targeted Latin instruction for 7–11-year-olds and employ a wide variety of innovative pedagogical strategies that are well suited to the linguistic and cognitive level of young learners. These include instructional materials and methods designed to make learning more accessible, motivating, and inclusive: storytelling; play-based and multisensory approaches; comprehensible input; the Ørberg method; learning together; and tools that aid comprehension of words and concrete expressions through visual aids, realia, gestures, and Total Physical Response (TPR).

Initiatives such as the *Iris Project* and the *Aequora Programme*, which use collaborative activities and strategies based on storytelling and play, have shown that Latin learning can be experienced as a positive and motivating process. These programs enhance students' linguistic knowledge, self-efficacy, and confidence. Other programs, such as *FLES-Latin*, *Cornerstone*, and the *Latin Excellence Programme*, have also demonstrated meaningful results both in terms of language acquisition and cognitive development.

Experiences involving *Minimus* and *Latin for Children* offer compelling reflections on the role of Latin, which in both international and Italian projects is presented as a “living” language, a language for the future (Gardini, 2018), and as a means of cultural, linguistic, and cognitive exploration. These programs promote situated learning and multisensory engagement: their use of illustrated narratives and dialogic storytelling, paired with playful and didactic activities, supports effective acquisition. Their transdisciplinary content, ranging from mythology to daily life, together with gradual pedagogical sequencing and sensitivity to diverse learning styles, directly address the cognitive and affective needs of pupils while honoring principles of personalized and individualized education.

The use of diverse communication channels also aligns with the UDL principle of providing multiple means of perception, enabling students to access content in ways that best match their abilities (CAST, 2011).

The U.S. and U.K. experimental projects were often implemented in economically, culturally, and socially disadvantaged contexts, including multiethnic settings in which difference became an asset for approaching the classics from different perspectives. These initiatives arose from a desire to raise students’ educational expectations and to challenge the notion that Latin is reserved for academic elites or private institutions. They have demonstrated that Latin instruction can enhance English language skills, support the acquisition of modern languages, and deepen understanding of Western culture. Latin thus becomes a linguistic bridge between students of diverse backgrounds, offering access to those who would not normally have this opportunity. These approaches are intended to engage students who might otherwise lack access to high-quality education, in line with the goals outlined in the UN 2030 Agenda (<https://unric.org/it/agenda-2030/>).

Latin is therefore regarded as a foundational tool for every child’s education and as an intrinsically valuable learning experience. Its inclusive potential is affirmed by efforts to ensure all students, especially those in disadvantaged settings or with language difficulties, can access it. This is illustrated by the *FLES-Latin*, *Cornerstone*, *Aequora*, and *Iris* projects, as well as by courses such as *Minimus*. This perspective is entirely consistent with the theoretical framework of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), which maintains that a truly inclusive education must provide each learner with multiple, personalized pathways to success (Mace, 1985; CAST, 2011, 2018).

Latin thus emerges as a democratic educational and pedagogical resource, not an elitist one, capable of celebrating diversity and promoting inclusion.

In light of the international evidence presented, it is desirable to foster a broader discussion about the role of Latin instruction in Italian primary schools. This includes advocating for widespread adoption of practices that blend tradition and innovation through networks of schools and pedagogical methods that are narrative, playful, and multisensory. These approaches should highlight Latin's educational and inclusive value by adapting the most widely used global materials to the Italian context.

One possible direction could involve an inductive approach, such as the Ørberg or Natural Method, paired with the visual representation of simple sentences and the multisensory use of audio and video formats. These might take the form of brief illustrated stories (both in print and digital formats), supported by narrated audio tracks and visual vocabularies that introduce key nouns and actions. The aim would be to stimulate linguistic reflection in the learner's native language.

By activating multiple sensory channels that support inclusive education for all learners, applying inductive methods that promote natural and spontaneous acquisition, using illustrated narratives that capture interest and imagination, and employing visuals to reinforce meaning, such a model can enhance both cognitive development and linguistic awareness. It would also serve as a valuable support system, especially for students with Special Educational Needs (SEN), thus reaffirming the formative and inclusive potential of Latin.

Author contributions

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