

NEW LATIN FOR A NEW MIND

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It is often heard that those who can, 'do' ; and that those who can't, 'teach'.

In my early years, I could see the sense of this platitude as so many young people, lured by government scholarships and studentships found themselves foundering at the front of classrooms regardless of mental and physical dexterity to cope. I was part of this great mass in the mid 70's ; and my first posting on the outskirts of industrial Wollongong left me wishing daily that I had driven off the freeway before I made it to work.

I was not rough enough for the job and lost any missionary-like zeal the first week! A.D.D. was not even a defined disorder then, but at least one child in every room had it anyway.

To their credit, teachers persisted hard with students ; and incredulously, the method used to teach reading at my school was Caleb Gattegno's *Words in Colour*. In their colourless world, children were being taught to read...by colours! What a wonderful thing! Large black charts with coloured lettering featured on the walls of every classroom in the Infants' Department.

It made me think back to my own primary schooling where, in the early 1960's in Brighton Beach in Melbourne, I had been taught maths through Cuisenaire rods. These beautiful pieces of wood in 10 different shades could graphically illustrate concepts from simple addition through to ratios, fractions and percentages. It was fun making mini-mats and towers; and to this day more than 40 years later, I vividly recall all colours and their relative dimensions.

I was also the sort of child who would ask Santa Claus each year for 72 Derwent pencils; but generally had to be satisfied with just twelve. When my dream was finally realised, I would sit and sort them into different groups and patterns, and count them up again...just to be sure !

Sorting, colouring and drawing were childhood pastimes which gave way during teenage years to study, and...more study.

I became very interested in languages which continued at university with majors in Spanish and Latin. The demand for neither (either in the southern outskirts of Wollongong, or in Whyalla in S.A. where our family lived later for 10 years) was not significant.

Notwithstanding, serendipity provided a chance at several points to teach Latin at Middle School level. It didn't take long to click that, by using coloured chalk, understanding was heightened. I then started to use one particular colour consistently for one idea, and a second colour for another. It was a rudimentary coding system, yet apparently one that instantly clarified issues. It also made me ponder what more could be done along these lines.

Another chance opportunity occurred midway through 2005 when I was invited to teach Latin once weekly as part of an After-School-Activities' Programme at an inner city Primary School in Melbourne. I had never used a whiteboard much before, but decided there and then that this was going to be the major aid needed to teach 'Latin-in-Colour' to six young students.

The results are quite amazing as we are able to cover aspects of simplified grammar in psychedelic and meaningful script. Each child has a four-coloured pen of his/her own and a folder, plus I have a store of fine-liner felt tips to mirror any other colours used on the board.

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My class no longer has just six students; but six times that number, and five classes as well (Mon., Tues., Wed., Thurs. and Fri. afternoon groups). The initial group was just for upper primary students, but now Latin is run for children as young as Prep.

Latin is an activity that we all look forward to doing and carrying out. Many years and a lot of luck have brought about such a niche teaching/learning situation; but now that I have had this experience, I will not lightly give it up. Clearly students and teacher do reinforce one another's ends, and are jointly reaping healthy benefits.

In hindsight, I see now that I have been preparing for this endeavour for the whole of my life, since it makes uncanny use of idiosyncrasies and interests. Colours which have been so etched into my mind and intrigued me in different ways in the past, will go on a different route now, guiding others to see linguistic patterns, relationships and connections long into their future.

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