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Research Article

Teaching Late Latin: past and present, challenges and prospects

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Abstract

This article introduces the special collection Teaching Late Latin: Past and Present, Challenges and Prospects and sets out a deliberately innovative, contrastive agenda for this issue of the Journal of Classics Teaching. While clearly programmatic in nature, this article advances a central claim: that examining the teaching of Latin in Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages alongside the teaching of Late Latin today offers a productive lens through which to rethink Latin pedagogy across time. The special collection is structured around two dialoguing sections, Ars docendi antiqua and Ars docendi nova, which place medieval and contemporary classrooms side by side. In both contexts, teachers respond to shifting sociolinguistic landscapes with methodological creativity. By foregrounding these parallels, the volume challenges the widespread equation (still prevalent across much of the education system) of "Latin" with a narrowly defined Classical norm. At the same time, it calls for closer dialogue between philology and pedagogy, between historical transmission and present-day practice, and between scholars who research Late Antiquity and those who teach it. Our aim is not to offer definitive solutions, but to initiate a conversation. If this editorial has a programmatic edge, it is because we believe that reflecting on how Latin was (and is) taught is inseparable from reflecting on what kind of subject Classics wishes to be.

Keywords: Late Latin; Latin pedagogy; Late Antiquity & Early Middle Ages; language variation; philology & education

Novelty and focus

This special collection has 2 main foci: Late Latin and the teaching of Latin. However, they soon dovetail: The section titled *Ars docendi antiqua* focuses on the specific challenges involving the teaching of Latin in the Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages, whereas the section titled *Ars docendi nova* focuses on challenges in the teaching of Late and Early Medieval Latin in a range of contemporary settings. What holds these 2 sections together, despite their chronological coverage being centuries apart, is the existence of a common set of 'aims', 'problems', and 'solutions'. However, by comparing and contrasting the 2 sections, specificities of each historical periods emerge. Whereas the papers in the section *Ars docendi nova* are consistent with the traditional temporal scope of the *Journal of Classics Teaching*, the section *Ars docendi antiqua* is rather innovative for this journal. What is apparent is that, despite the broad variation in geographical contexts and cultural settings, a few lines of continuity can be identified between the 2 sections, justifying their presentation side by side. To put it bluntly, questions of pedagogy can be explored in ancient and contemporary settings alike. Needless to say, these are answered deploying philological methods in the Late Antiquity/Middle Ages, and social sciences methods when dealing with contemporary issues.

This rather original and implicitly contrastive angle, together with the innovative decision to focus on Late Latin, underpinned the panel *Current Challenges in Teaching Late Latin* held at the *Latin Vulgaire-Latin Tardif XV* conference hosted by the *Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften* in Munich (September 2024), where the contributions to this special collection were originally presented. Far from being exhaustive, we hope that the papers in this special collection are going to be a stimulus for further studies in a set of fields where research is still developing.

Ars docendi antiqua: tradition and methods in teaching Latin from the antiquity to the Middle Ages

The Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages were times of huge social and linguistic development (Marrou 1984). Latin gradually ceased to be spoken as a first language (Adams *et al.*, 2002; Adams, 2013), which had huge implications for its teaching. Materials conceived for native speakers had to be adapted for speakers of vernaculars, in some cases of Germanic (for example, Riché 1976; Law 1997) or Celtic languages (for example, Cotticelli-Kurras and Cotugno, in this volume). Throughout this period, Latin retained a central role in society, where it was the lingua franca of the ecclesiastical, bureaucratical, and legal world, and the teaching methodologies needed to strike a balance between heritage preservation and practical use. A variety of social actors were involved in the teaching and the learning of Latin over time, and different pedagogical approaches were undertaken. Crucially for this special collection, the Classical models lay alongside a 'new' set of

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materials – first and foremost the Bible, but also other ecclesiastical and legal texts.

The teaching of Latin in the Middle Ages was a crucial and multifaceted aspect of medieval education, reflecting both the linguistic and cultural shifts of the period. The earliest grammars from the classical period were designed with the purpose of teaching Latin to individuals who already possessed proficiency in the language, at a time when Latin itself was a vibrant and dynamic linguistic entity, spoken by native speakers. Even though we do not have direct evidence of the grammatical works of scholars such as Remmius Palaemon, from later authors such as Suetonius, Quintilian, Aulus Gellius, or Servius (Quint. Inst. I, 9, 1) we know about the extensive activity of these grammarians in teaching the Latin language in Latin-speaking environments (Quint. Inst. I, 9, 1). As time progressed, this reality gave way to a new and pressing need: the teaching of Latin to non-Latins, that is, to all those whose native language or everyday language was different from Latin (see, for example, the *Colloquia* of the *Hermeneumata Pseudodositheana*). In this context, teachers found themselves facing a linguistic challenge, which they sought to address with scientific rigour and in a systematic manner, working through the different levels of linguistic analysis – at least phonetics and morphology – and through the different parts of speech. In this, they were inspired by adaptations of classical works such as Donatus or Priscian (Cotticelli Kurras 2022; Passalacqua 1987; 1999; 2006).

During the Middle Ages, the significant contribution of grammars written within the Latin-speaking world is evident thanks to the work of *Schola Palatina* and the Carolingian scholarly environment at large, but increasingly the didactic strategies of various masters emerge, as they endeavoured to teach Latin to individuals with limited proficiency in the language. Noticeable are the figures of Alcuin of York (8th to 9th century) and Bede the Venerable (8th century). Alcuin was a key intellectual at Charlemagne's court tasked with reforming education throughout the Carolingian Empire. He wrote various grammatical texts and manuals to help monks and other scholars learn Latin, a language that was by then no longer spoken daily in many parts of Europe. Bede, although famous for his historical and theological works, wrote educational works in Latin, such as *De arte metrica* and *De schematibus et tropis*, which helped teach Latin grammar and rhetorics. Both Alcuin and Bede developed methods and texts to make learning more accessible to their students: They prioritised grammar as the foundation of Latin education, reflecting the importance of accuracy in a language that was no longer spoken colloquially. They both used religious texts as the primary materials for instruction (Bonner 1986; Dickie 2016), intertwining language learning with moral and theological education. Their methods were highly structured, providing students with a clear progression from basic literacy to more advanced rhetorical and logical skills: Structure and organisation were seen as reflecting the divine order, so teaching methods mirrored these values. Alcuin and Bede were both deeply influenced by the classical Roman educational system, which emphasised the 'Trivium' (grammar, rhetoric, and logic) and the 'Quadrivium' (arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy). These disciplines were taught in a structured sequence, reflecting the belief that intellectual development followed a natural order. A structured approach ensured students first mastered foundational skills (grammar and basic literacy) before progressing to more complex subjects. Alcuin of York reformed the curriculum of the Carolingian schools and standardised Latin instruction, aiming to correct the Latin used in liturgical and administrative contexts, which came to be seen as 'degraded'. His efforts represent the broader medieval tendency to view Latin not merely as a tool for communication but as the language of intellectual and spiritual authority, a trend destined to become dominant in later medieval society.

Monastic and cathedral schools were the primary institutions where Latin instruction took place. These schools often employed rote memorisation of grammatical rules, followed by intensive reading of ecclesiastical texts, classical works, and the Bible. Students were expected to internalise Latin grammar through repetitive exercises, such as parsing sentences and translating Latin into the vernacular and vice versa. The emphasis was on reading and writing, as spoken Latin had ceased to be a priority for most learners, especially outside the clerical circles. By the later Middle Ages, the rise of universities further shaped Latin pedagogy. Latin remained the language of instruction and debate in most academic disciplines, and students entering these institutions were expected to have a solid foundation in the language. However, the methods of instruction became more sophisticated as university masters developed glosses, commentaries, and other pedagogical aids to help students navigate increasingly difficult Latin texts.

The teaching of Latin in the Middle Ages reflects a tension between the preservation of classical linguistic heritage, the influence of the Bible and other religious texts, and the practical needs of a multilingual medieval society. The focus was on ensuring that students, particularly clerics and scholars, could access the vast corpus of knowledge written in Latin, even if this meant teaching the language in a way that prioritised reading comprehension over spoken fluency. In this sense, medieval Latin teaching laid the groundwork for Latin's continued use as the language of learning well into the Early Modern period (Dionisotti 1982; Kaster 1988; Morgan 1998).

Ars docendi nova: *current challenges in teaching (Late) Latin*

In common perceptions (in the UK at least), 'Latin' (without any further qualification) is often equated to 'Classical Latin', covering the political events from the late the Republic to the expansion of the Roman Empire until its maximum extension (under Trajan 117 AD). This period sees a process of standardisation of literary genres and lexico-grammatical forms, originating the 'Classical' Latin canon commonly covered in most Latin textbooks (Moran 2018). Less attention has been devoted to the teaching of (diatopic, diastratic, and diachronic) language variation (Adams 2013; Clackson 2011; Clackson and Horrocks 2007; Moran 2018), especially in secondary schools/colleges, but also at university level. In particular, the teaching of Late Latin (~3rd to 9th century AD) is marginalised throughout the educational system (in the UK and elsewhere).

Further evidence of this marginalisation comes from an overview of the coverage of both the *Journal of Classics Teaching* (*JCT*) and the journal *Latinitas*. First of all, despite the international perspective of both journals, most articles sampled in the *JCT* reflect the English-speaking context, while *Latinitas* overwhelmingly reflects the Italian and French contexts. The *JCT* 'aims to be the leading journal for teachers of Latin, ancient Greek, Classical Civilisation and Ancient History internationally'. No hard and fast time frame is suggested by the journal: Whereas the label 'classical' may suggest a time frame restricted to Classical Latin, the mention of 'ancient history' is broader and may well encompass the Late Antiquity, that is, a period stretching from 250 AD to the 6th to 7th century AD (see the *Journal of Late Antiquity*,

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extending to the year 800). The journal *Latinitas* is the publication of the *Pontificia Academia Latinitatis*, reflecting the aims of promoting 'the study of the . . . classical and medieval language and literature' (Paul VI, *Romani Sermonis*, b) and beyond. The *series nova* (2013, ongoing) hosts a fixed section on teaching (*Ars docendi*).

Excluding the 9 historical-philological articles dealing with the role of the teacher in the antiquity and/or the critical edition of school texts dealing with, for example, grammar and rhetorics (for example, El Matouni 2020; Zago 2016), most of the remainding 20 articles in *Latinitas* take a macro-perspective on issues such as language ideology or language policy and planning (for example, Bartezzaghi 2013), leaving only marginal space to the micro-level of, for instance, discussing teaching methods and their implementation (Florimbii 2021; Ricucci 2014; Ricucci 2015; Rocca 2015). Interestingly, none of the articles examined focuses on Late Latin and its specific challenges.

Moving on to the *JCT*, a keyword search for the word 'vulgar',[1] run on open access issues (2015 to 2023, issues 31–48), shows that it appears only 5 times and never in an article detailing how to teach 'Vulgar Latin'. A keyword search for 'Christian*', based on the assumption that Christian Latin represents a substantial subset of Late Latin text production, revealed that there are no articles dedicated to the teaching of Christian Latin (either language or literary/non-literary texts). The string 'Christian*' actually mostly appears in book reviews such as Eusebius' *History of the Church* (Dutmer 2020a), *The Passion of Perpetua* (Goddard 2022), and Augustine's *Confessions* (Berquist 2020) (see also: Godwin 2023; Ivings 2022; Johnson 2023; Martino 2023; Reynolds 2023). The very existence of these book reviews shows that there is a keen interest in Christian Latin from the viewpoints of practitioners – even this does not actually translate into the classroom. In research articles, there are some rare mentions of Christianity – such as the relationship between Christianity and the cult of Mithras (Bowden 2018; Hussein 2018; Lawrence 2018), the catacombs and the prayers of the early Christian liturgy reported by Pliny (Pring 2016), the role of the *epistulae* for the transmission of knowledge in early Christianity (Dutmer 2020b), and the way Prudentius reports on gender positioning of Cybele's priests (Sawyer 2016 on diversity). These mentions, though, are fleeting and cursory.

A very small number of articles include Christianity in more clearly teaching-related articles. Hussein (2018) presents some activities to teach religion(s) in the Roman world, with a focus on the cult of Mithras. Christianity is not discussed per se, but mentioned alongside Judaism and the cults of Isis and Mithras as 'elective forms of worship'. Robertson (2019) addresses the issue of how to teach US university students the rich and varied religious landscape of the Mediterranean religions, including early Christianity/ies (vis-à-vis cults ranging from Mithraism to the Eleusinian Mysteries). A novel classification activity is designed to bridge the gap between antique religions and contemporary experiences that share some practices with them. Lobato Beneyto (2019) offers a 'teaching proposal' on how to integrate Beard's book *SPQR* (2016) in the classroom to engage students with contextual (socio-historical knowledge) and lists Christianity among the topics.

Despite some attention, however, these articles do not focus specifically on the teaching of Christian texts or 'Christian Latin'. Hunt (2016) discusses how to teach sensitive topics, such as violence, sex, gender, and slavery in the Roman world. Christianity, included in Stage 8 of the popular *Cambridge Latin Course* (dominant in British secondary schools), is included alongside these topics. When discussing teacher preparedness, this paper quotes one of his research participants saying that, before presenting Pliny and the Christians in class, it may be useful to discuss with the Religious Education teacher what has been covered. Atkin (2020) is a careful evaluation of the use of authentic materials in the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE)[2] Latin classroom. When presenting his case study, he mentions how, having identified suitable material from passages from the Gospels of Luke and Matthew, he had to check whether 'they were appropriate within the ethos of the school' and obtain clearance prior to delivery. Considering that no authorisation was required for teaching Ovid's *Ars Amatoria*'s trap set by Vulcan for Venus and Mars, one infers that paganism was not considered logically on a par to Christianity in that school setting. It is not far-fetched to speculate that polytheist classical religions were just considered myths and fables of the past, in contrast to Christianity, a religion 'with a capital R', likely to be divisive in the contemporary multi-faith classroom. In sum, Hunt (2016) and Atkin (2020) introduce an interesting angle on the teaching of Christian texts, emphasising that there are cultural sensitivities around them, arising out of their reception in contemporary (secular) society.

In some cases, the search for 'Christian*' actually dug up mentions of contemporary, rather than historical, Christianity. Barnes (2018) reflects on inclusivity while pointing out how as a British Christian he reacted to the *lararium* in the Roman house of the Cambridge Latin Course. Next, a book review on the Argonauts observes that 'Christian theologians today' still ask the question how true a myth is, putting past and present in touch. Finally, an article by Forghani and Koutlaki (2018) contains a brief comparison between Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. These mentions are not very important for ascertaining to what extent Christian texts are taught, but they show continuity between the past and the present, which may perhaps (rather paradoxically) be an obstacle to the teaching of Christian Latin/texts tout court – as seen above.

Pedagogical challenges: old and new

Medieval documents offer us the opportunity to compare the challenges between teaching Latin in the Middle Ages and in modern times. Our starting point is that significant shifts occurred in both the purpose of Latin education and the methods employed: While Latin was a functional, necessary language of communication in the medieval period, its role today is mostly academic and historical, leading to different educational goals and pedagogical approaches. Here are 4 key points of comparison, namely (i) the purpose for teaching Latin, (ii) the students' demographics, (iii) the pedagogical approach espoused by the teachers and the core-texts forming a 'canon', and finally (iv) the tools and resources that enact the pedagogical approach underpinning one's teaching practice.

Beginning with the purpose of teaching the language, Latin in the Middle Ages was the language of the Catholic Church and scholarship but also of governance, the law, and international diplomacy, as aforementioned. The necessity to learn Latin stemmed from its status as the lingua franca of the educated elites, clerics, and scholars. Therefore, students learned Latin often as a prerequisite for careers in the Church or state administration. Today, Latin is no longer a practical language of communication, but rather, it is studied for its historical, literary, linguistic, and – to a lesser extent – spiritual significance. An exception is that Latin is the official language of the Holy See and, to an extent, still the lingua franca of the Vatican. The teaching of Latin is still

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considered key in some Catholic seminaries, supported by a variety of papal documents, the most recent of which is Benedict XVI's *motu proprio Lingua Latina* in 2012. Some priests may engage in some oral production, but this is restricted to recitation of the liturgy, that is, memorisation of fixed forms. Despite this rather marginal approach to Latin as an administrative and/or a spiritual language, the majority of students learn it primarily to access Classical texts, engage with intellectual traditions of the past, enriching their understanding of Western heritage, understand the roots of Romance languages, get some linguistic training in an inflected language, improve critical thinking skills, or gain access to (some) university courses. Whatever the individual/collective 'needs', functional day-by-day communication skills are no longer relevant.

As a second point of comparison, interesting differences also occur regarding the student demographics across time and space. Whereas in the Middle Ages Latin was typically taught to boys entering monastic or cathedral schools to prepare them for religious or scholarly careers, something that is mirrored to a limited extent by the teaching of Latin in seminaries, Latin learners today are more diverse, ranging from high/secondary school pupils and university students to adult learners. In some cases, students are learning Latin as a second or third language, sometimes having already acquired proficiency in modern languages. The approach to teaching Latin, therefore, is more flexible, depending on whether the focus is on linguistic structure, historical knowledge, or cultural appreciation. However, it may be constrained by the national curriculum (in schools) or tradition (at university).

The next point of comparison considers how different learning objectives align with different pedagogical approaches. Teachers used traditional grammars (such as Donatus's *Ars Minor* and Priscian's *Institutiones Grammaticae*) to instruct students in Latin grammar, typically through rote memorisation and translation exercises. The focus was on mastering grammar and syntax, often divorced from meaningful conversation or interactive exercises. Texts such as the Bible and works by classical authors were used to drill students in reading and writing. Once students had a firm grasp of grammar, they moved to the great classical Latin authors. Cicero, with his elegant prose and deep reflections on rhetoric and philosophy, was among the preferred authors. His works, such as *De Officiis* and *De Oratore* were studied not just for their language but for their moral lessons and insight into Roman public life. Virgil's *Aeneid* was another cornerstone of the curriculum. More than just a story of gods and heroes, the *Aeneid* provided students with a model of poetic form and narrative structure, as well as moral lessons that resonated with Christian values. Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, with its mythological tales of transformation, was also widely read, though often with some of its more risqué parts censored by medieval educators. While these classical texts formed the backbone of Latin learning, Christian authors were just as important. St. Augustine, one of the most profound thinkers of the early Church, was a guiding light for medieval scholars. His *Confessiones* and *De Doctrina Christiana* were studied not only for their spiritual depth but also for their elegant Latin prose. The Vulgate Bible, the Latin translation of the Christian Scriptures, was, of course, the most essential text in any medieval school. Students would spend years learning to read and interpret the Bible, both for its religious significance and as an exercise in mastering Latin. Boethius' *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, which blended classical philosophy with Christian thought, was another key text, offering students a window into both ancient wisdom and the challenges of living a Christian life. The goal was primarily to develop written literacy in Latin, and there was little emphasis on spoken fluency, as Latin had ceased to be a vernacular language.

Over time, the pedagogy of Latin has changed. As stated by McMillan (2015), in the early 20th century the focus of Latin teaching was purely linguistic. However, McMillan points out that '[a]fter the Change, the focus is no longer completely linguistic and reading literature, even at lower levels, is considered of great importance (. . .). [T]he traditional method was focused on written translation from Latin into English and from English into Latin, and Latin prose composition. Extended prose passages for reading were rare (. . .). Extended prose passages for reading are now prominent from the very beginning in the most popular textbooks, such as The Cambridge Latin Course'. Furthermore, there have been calls for 'reconsideration of Latin teaching methodologies and for the promotion of Latin as a communicative language rather than an artifact to be studied' (Carlon 2013), with the pedagogy of 'active Latin' growing in popularity. Hunt (2023) maintains that Latin can still be thought of in the same terms as a language that is in use today, and the same approaches which are used for teaching a modern language can be used for the ancient one. Creative writing is also seen as a way to develop pupils' fluency: At the end of January 2022, the International Baccalaureate Organisation published the new Diploma syllabus for Classical Languages: An addition to the new syllabus is the writing of an original 100-word composition in Latin, described by a teacher as 'terrifying but also quite exciting' (Guardamagna and Zambianchi 2024, unpublished data).

Distinct from contemporary times (in response to the socio-linguistic changes above) are questions on the value of learning Latin and the leverage that can be used to attract students to the subject. These go hand in hand with contemporary social issues such as elitism and inclusivity. A range of methodologies – old and new (see *infra*) – are deployed in this new scenario where Latin is a language with high symbolic value but little direct practical/vocational application. All these issues are to be understood against the backdrop of complex changes of language/educational ideologies, which are sometimes highly politicised.

Finally, teaching tools and resources are also relevant, as in the medieval period teachers had very limited resources, including writing material. Education relied heavily on costly and impractical handwritten manuscripts, and the process of teaching was highly dependent on the teacher's ability to transmit grammatical rules orally and through examples. Classrooms were focused on rote memorisation, declension tables, and repetitive exercises without much variety in method. The modern teaching of Latin benefits from a wide array of resources, including printed textbooks, online tools, interactive applications, and multimedia content. However, a difference in channel is not necessarily equivalent to a difference in approach and method. What has changed more in the recent years is a different orientation to learning and teaching that may be reflected in a broader range of materials, supported by technology alongside traditional 'legacy' support.

Our positioning, our challenges

Much literature on language attitudes, linguistic ideology, and ideologies of education suggests that no choice regarding language teaching is ideologically neutral – including what to teach, how to teach it, whom to teach it to, and why to teach it. As scholars educated in Italy up to degree level before spending a substantial part of our working life in other European countries where we specialise in (historical) (socio)linguistics and education, our

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positionalities are also 'value laden'. First of all, we strongly contrast the widespread tendency (in schools, in newspapers, on TV) to regard the "antiquity" as a sturdy monolith devoid of any internal differences, especially in the case of the so-called 'Graeco-Roman civilisation' (Di Donato & Taddei 2024). Second, we agree with the *Journal of Late Antiquity* that the period stretching 'from the late and post-classical world up to the Carolingian period' is 'as a discrete historical period in its own right', where Latin played a crucial role. For these reasons, while recommending a more nuanced approach to the teaching of Latin in general, we specifically advocate a more thorough reflection on the maintenance and transmission of Late Latin. We are also interested in how Latin was transmitted through the Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages. This involves a set of new challenges for the communities of scholars, practitioners, and learners. It is the goal of this Special Collection to put (some of) these in focus for the first time.

Going in the direction of increased knowledge, awareness, and understanding involves at least 3 major strands. First of all, we need to have a clearer empirical understanding of what is going on at the grassroots; that is, we need a 'reconnaissance' and evaluation of what is already taught and how it is taught. Second, one could question whether there is space for expansion, within the current educational system – or beyond, for example, identifying new audiences (Christian worshippers interested in developing their faith, medieval historians looking sharpen their document analytical tools, and the adult education system). In concomitance with this, it is important to evaluate the teaching resources that are available off the shelf, as well as stimulating novel and more updated approaches. We believe that this is a catch-22 situation: Teaching resources are scarce because the market is small (. . . and/or has shifted, or transformed), but it is difficult to expand the audience without ready-made appealing teaching materials.

A more thorough understanding of how Latin was taught in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages requires thorough philological, epigraphic, Indo-European (for example, for the interplay of Latin, Germanic, and Celtic materials in the documents), and historical foundations. Issues that come to fore here concern the preservation and the transmission of the skills required to undertake such endeavours – and the funding to support them. Ideally, this effort would then need to tie in with pedagogical concerns, which would lead to a better, deeper, and broader understanding of the transmission of Latin over time and across space.

Alongside this practical strand, and intertwining with it, are important theoretical questions. The question of why one 'should' learn (about) Late Latin needs to be addressed – as it were – both from above (as we have in part done here) and from below (empirically engaging with the actual or potential learners). Identifying challenges related to inclusivity in a global perspective is also decisive: for instance, considering different needs posed by learners who may not be conversant with Classical Latin and may not even have a Romance language in their repertoire (D'Alessandro 2021: 146; Hui 2018) or learners for whom Latin is the learned language associated with their political coloniser (Brague 2014: 138). Another issue is the consideration of an (arguably flexible) 'canon' of Late Latin writers and texts, which would be reflected in pedagogical publications tailored to particular learners. Many of these issues will presuppose a reflexive approach in terms of language attitudes and linguistic ideologies.

Finally, there is a foundational point to address. It might perhaps sound counter-intuitive, but not everyone who teaches think of themselves as a teacher. While promoting the *Latin Vulgaire-Latin Tardif XV* symposium on the teaching of Late Latin, for instance,[3] quite a few university lecturers declined our invitation, stating that one's field of study concerned the history/literature/texts of the time but did not include the teaching of Late Latin. Despite not actively researching the pedagogy of Late Latin, it is our view that most of these scholars are actively involved in the teaching of their subject, and as such, they are certainly reflective practitioners who would potentially have a lot to offer. How could educationalists actively capture their rich experience? How could greater engagement into pedagogical reflection be stimulated?

These are of course only some of the issues involved, which nevertheless give a sense of the breadth of our ambitions. It goes without saying that such a vast amount of work cannot be done overnight and will not result in a one-size-fits-all approach. In fact, what we expect is the emergence of a dialogue engaging the scholarly community with practitioners and learners. Our aim, therefore, is more humbly to kickstart the process with this Special Issue.

Overview of the special collection

This Special Collection brings together for the first time researchers and practitioners to discuss the state of the art and the challenges faced in the teaching of Late Latin in a variety of contemporary social settings, such as different countries, varying ages, and distinct social groups. It does so also involving scholars of Late Antiquity/Early Middle Ages responsible for the transmission of Latin in those centuries. Our objective is to showcase original research and innovative practice to support and promote a better understanding of the pedagogical practices used to convey Late Latin (language, literature, non-literary texts) today and possibly cast some light on how these can be improved. In parallel, we promote a greater understanding of the transmission of (Late) Latin in the Late Antiquity/Early Middle Ages, which is valuable in and of itself, but also in dialogue with later and contemporary settings. All contributions display close integration of teaching/learning theory and pedagogical practice.

The section *Ars docendi antiqua* invites the reader to step into a world in which Latin teaching was neither an antiquarian exercise nor a neutral transmission of a stable code, but a pragmatic, intellectually ambitious response to profound sociolinguistic changes. Between Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages, Latin gradually ceased to coincide with native linguistic competence while retaining an unparalleled symbolic and functional authority. Teaching it therefore became an exercise in mediation: between inherited grammatical categories and new linguistic realities, between canonical texts and emerging pedagogical needs, and between unity and variation.

The contributions gathered here illuminate this process from distinct geographical and cultural vantage points, yet converge on a shared concern with how grammatical knowledge was made intelligible, learnable, and usable in multilingual settings. Cotticelli Kurras and Cotugno examine Notker Labeo's treatment of the *adverbium*, tracing the porous boundaries between adverb, preposition, and conjunction. Their analysis shows how translation into the vernacular is not merely ancillary but constitutive of grammatical reasoning, revealing a sophisticated didactic strategy in which metalinguistic reflection is carefully recalibrated for learners operating across languages. Giusteri turns to medieval Wales and the *Liber Commonei*, offering a finely grained reconstruction of glossing practices that function simultaneously as exegetical tools and pedagogical scaffolding. Here, Latin and

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Greek were taught not in isolation but through layered textual strategies that reflect both ambition and constraint, pointing to a curriculum attentive to progressive competence rather than rote mastery. Longo's contribution moves northwards to medieval Iceland, where Latin instruction unfolded in dialogue with a strong vernacular intellectual tradition. Drawing on fragmentary evidence, he shows how local grammatical reflection and Latin learning intersect, producing neither passive reception nor wholesale resistance, but a negotiated pedagogical space.

Across different contexts, these studies exemplify the central premise of this Special Collection: that questions of Latin pedagogy are historically situated, theoretically rich, and strikingly continuous across time. They remind us, with quiet elegance, that teaching Latin has always been less about preserving a monument than about making a language thinkable for those who did not already possess it.

The section *Ars docendi nova* turns to the present-day challenges and opportunities involved in teaching Late Latin within contemporary educational systems, where institutional constraints, curricular marginalisation, and changing student profiles increasingly shape pedagogical practice. The section brings together contributions that span secondary and tertiary education and that collectively argue for the relevance of Late Latin as both an object of study and a catalyst for methodological renewal.

The section opens with the contribution by Tantimonaco, addressing the long-standing hesitation to introduce Vulgar and Late Latin (LVLT) at secondary-school level. Focusing in particular on the pedagogical use of epigraphic material, the author shows how non-literary texts, linguistic variation, and 'non-standard' forms can become powerful tools for engaging pupils with Latin as a lived and historically embedded language. This article shows that Late Latin is especially well suited to student-centred, activity-based approaches, fostering critical thinking, cultural awareness, and reading competence while also challenging the implicit equation of Latin with a narrow Classical canon. In doing so, the paper aligns closely with the Special Issue's broader aim of rethinking Latin pedagogy through the lens of diachronic and sociolinguistic diversity.

Next, Guardamagna and Zambianchi investigate the place of Latin within Catholic secondary schools and colleges in Northern England, adding a religious dimension to debates on Latin teaching that have largely focused on class and access. Drawing on qualitative interviews with teachers, the article shows that Catholic institutions do not function as an automatic 'safe haven' for Latin. Instead, Latin provision emerges as fragmented and highly dependent on individual teacher agency, shaped by competing pressures of inclusivity, market positioning, and shifting liturgical practices. While in some contexts Latin is mobilised as symbolic capital linked to prestige and tradition, in others it is reframed as optional cultural enrichment, often detached from explicitly Christian Latin. By foregrounding the tension between heritage, institutional disengagement, and contemporary educational priorities, the article directly contributes to the Special Issue's aim of reassessing how Late, Medieval, and Christian Latin are (or are not) integrated into present-day curricula, and of highlighting the structural conditions that continue to marginalise these forms of Latin despite their historical centrality.

The next 2 sections shift the focus to higher education. Korkiakangas and Alho adopt a diachronic approach, tracing the history of Late and Vulgar Latin teaching in Finland from the 19th century to the present. By reconstructing shifts in curricula, degree structures, and thesis production, their article shows how Vulgar and Late Latin were gradually integrated into Latin studies through philological renewal before being weakened by recent structural reforms. This historical perspective provides essential context for understanding current vulnerabilities and clarifies how institutional frameworks profoundly shape what can be taught and sustained.

Within the very same context of higher education in Finland, a context in which, as shown, Vulgar and Late Latin have enjoyed an unusually strong historical presence, Korkiakangas provides a synchronic analysis of the current challenges faced in teaching LVLT at the University of Helsinki, drawing on interviews with researcher-teachers and doctoral students as well as on his own pedagogical experience. His contribution identifies institutional pressures (such as reduced degree requirements and staffing cuts), teaching-related issues such as constructive alignment, and learning-related challenges linked to declining linguistic proficiency. At the same time, the article offers concrete reflections on effective responses, emphasising interdisciplinary approaches, careful contextualisation of texts, and the importance of independent study.

Collectively, the papers gathered in *Ars docendi nova* present Late Latin as a fertile pedagogical terrain, capable of sustaining methodological innovation across educational levels. At the same time, they expose the conditions that continue to circumscribe its development: curricular compression, uneven institutional commitment, reliance on individual initiative, and persistent uncertainties about Late Latin's place within established canons and assessment frameworks. By foregrounding these structural and ideological constraints alongside concrete teaching practices, the section not only demonstrates what Late Latin can offer contemporary classrooms but also clarifies what must be addressed if its pedagogical potential is to be more fully realised.

We hope that readers of the *Journal of Classics Teaching* will find in this Special Collection a set of historically grounded and empirically informed perspectives on what it has meant, and what it still means, to teach Latin beyond the classical canon. By placing medieval and contemporary pedagogical practices in dialogue, this Special Collection invites reflections on continuity and change, as well as on constraint and creativity, in the teaching of Latin.

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Notes

1 A related search for the modifier 'late' yielded poorly focused results due to the term being rather generic.
2 The General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) is sat in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland after 11 years of core education (ages 15–16 years).
3 We cannot report the actual words/emails for privacy reasons.

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