ACM-Teagle Collegium on Student Learning
Final Conference
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1. **Summary**. In a paragraph or two, what was the main teaching/research question of your project?

There is a fair amount of literature on metacognition in the area of Second Language Acquisition (SLA). The studies I read at the outset of the Collegium project all focused my attention on the elementary levels of our language sequences. Thus the question I started with was simply whether beginning-level Latin students would benefit from more explicit attention to possible learning strategies: whether encouraging metacognitive awareness and self-monitoring would in fact result in enhanced language learning.

2. **Context**. Briefly describe the teaching environment in which you investigated your question (level of course, number of students, course goals, time frame, etc.).

My study ended up confined to the 2009 Latin 101 class. That year it was particularly small (10 students; historically the average is closer to 20). Because Carleton has a language requirement, the beginning language sequence always enrolls a mix of students with widely varying abilities and interests: some are there because they've always wanted to take Latin and it wasn't offered at their high school, and some are there because they weren't very good at French or Spanish and think Latin will be easier because you don't have to speak it.

Unfortunately for this latter group, Latin 101 is an extremely challenging course: it presents a very large amount of information very quickly. We meet five days a week, with new material presented almost every day. A great deal of memorization of forms and vocabulary is essential, but there are also numerous important concepts and structures students must understand and deploy once they have learned the forms. The rate at which the sequence moves means that the classes soon bifurcate into students earning quite high and quite low grades, and we end up with many more drops and failures in Latin than we do in any of our other courses.

3. **Teaching Practice**. How did you use your teaching question to inform your teaching practice? What were the main metacognitive strategies and interventions that informed your practice? How did your project change over the course of the Teagle Collegium?

I was not teaching the Latin sequence this year, but my teaching practice was certainly informed by the work! In the study, the main intervention was the addition of "exam wrappers" students filled out when their weekly quizzes were returned to them. These asked a number of questions about how students had thought they would do as opposed to how they actually did on the quiz; what strategies they had used in studying for the quiz and how long they had studied; what sorts of mistakes they had made on the quiz; and what they thought they might do differently next time based on how things had worked this time. In addition to the exam wrappers, at the outset of the class we gave all the students a list of tips in the form of "dos" and "don'ts". Thus each of their textbooks through the term had "How to succeed in Latin 101" emblazoned on the front

cover, and "How to fail Latin 101" on the back. For the wrapper on the final quiz, we duplicated and returned to the students all their previous exam wrappers, and asked them to look them over to try to spot patterns in types of mistakes and strategies for studying. The last question was about what advice they would give next year's Latin 101 students.

Those were the strategies and interventions that made up my study. However, as I said, I was not teaching Latin 101. On the other hand, I was so focused on metacognition that I actively integrated it in the courses I was teaching, particularly an advanced Latin course and an elementary Greek course later in the year. In both cases we had a running (if not extensive) discussion of strategies different students used in approaching the material. I came to be convinced that simply getting this on students' radar could be helpful: occasionally setting the question, and encouraging students to think about how they did what they did, and whether there might be more effective ways to the same end, had the effect of fostering habits of self-monitoring.

4. **Conclusions and Evidence**. What conclusions have you reached about your main question? What assignments or performances provide evidence of changes in student learning or understanding in response to your practices? Please offer some description of your evidence and how you collected it.

Overall the study confirmed my initial hypothesis that making learning strategies explicit for students and repeatedly requiring them to practice metacognitive activities like self-monitoring seemed to pay off in better success with the material. Since the whole class had participated in the study, the evidence I used to understand its effect was the comparative data of historical final grades in Latin 101. This class had a higher average grade than past classes (more As). It also had more Cs than average, but had no students who dropped or failed. Thus I would theorize that the metacognitive activities were helpful for the very lowest-achieving students, who in other years did not complete the course successfully.

I also looked more closely at the wrappers of the top two and the bottom two students in the class. Here the correlation between good self-monitoring and high performance was quite clear: the higher-achieving students were much fuller in their accounts of what they had tried and how they had thought about what to try than were the lower-achieving ones. My guess is, though, that the higher-achieving students were good at this sort of experimentation and self-monitoring before they started the class. Still, the data of the grades does suggest that even if the lower-achieving students weren't practicing metacognition at the same level as their higher-achieving peers, the interventions we made did encourage them to do some, and the some they did was helpful in their final grades.

5. **Implications**. How can this information inform future teaching practices (both yours and others')? How did collaboration with colleagues affect your project and practices?

While my study did not, alas, provide the silver bullet of successful Latin learning that would have made my fortune, it did convince me that a general awareness of the benefits of metacognitive activities is a helpful tool in the arsenal of any language instructor. This is the sort of development that I feel is most effective as it infiltrates the culture of a department or

institution; as more faculty are aware of potential benefits and more likely to integrate some discussion of them into their daily practice, more students are likely to encounter them in some context and then transfer them to their general approach to learning.

The collaboration the Teagle Collegium allowed was instrumental in both the formulation and the analysis of my project; I had never put such a thing together before and the conversations with colleagues at other institutions and my own that occurred during the course of the initiative were absolutely essential in my ability to run the study and think about the data it generated. Beyond that, though, the conversations also have affected my practices more generally: the utility of exam and paper wrappers is clear to me and I will be integrating these into my teaching in many contexts from this point on. I also have happily stolen a practice from my colleague Chico Zimmerman, who has started requiring students to post three times over the course of a term to a Moodle forum on metacognition. This ensures that at least a few points students step back from the course material itself and address metacognitive issues: something that will minimally get them thinking about the area and practicing the skills. As faculty share and take up this sort of exercise, students will encounter them more and more frequently, and thus (one hopes) begin to get the same level of practice with metacognition that they get with other skills associated with a liberal arts education such as writing, speaking and critical thinking.

6. **Looking ahead.** What future modifications in your course, assignments, or approaches along the lines of this project could be made to further improve student learning? Where do you go from here with this project?

I have addressed above general metacognitive practices that I have and will continue to incorporate in my teaching. The main and nagging question that my study left me with had to do with the value of self-reporting in this context. Asking students, after the test, how they spent their time in preparing it seems to me probably less effective than some sort of direct observation or time-journaling. An interesting article (Vann and Abraham, cited below) suggests that unsuccessful language learners often generally report using the same strategies as successful ones, but they are sometimes using inappropriate ones for the specific task. My study could not have uncovered such mis-matches.

I also tried to gather data that encouraged students to think systematically about the kinds of mistakes they made, and to generate strategies for addressing that particular type of error. However, I did not have enough data to assess how successful they were at this task. I suspect that language (maybe in particular intermediate, rather than elementary) students would benefit from practice in this kind of error identification; that would entail some class time talking about and practicing identifying different categories of mistakes. Again, elevating this sort of discussion so that it is visible to students and faculty would likely be of some benefit on its own, and a careful study might even yield valuable data on matching learning strategies to error types.

7. **Bibliography.** What were the key sources that informed your project and that might be useful to fellow teachers and researchers?

I based my study generally on the study described in Flaitz, Feyten, Fox and Mukkherjee (cited below), so that single article was probably the most helpful to me. I also found Wenden's

literature review extremely helpful in getting up to speed on previous research, and was fascinated to discover the general SLA literature (which we in Classics are not trained to be aware of, unfortunately). Finally, at a more general level (and although it goes well beyond metacognitive issues) I highly recommend Daniel Willingham's book.

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