

## **Report From OCC Scholarship Winner Jennifer Limke**

This past July, thanks to Ohio Classical Conference Scholarships, I was given the opportunity to study Comprehensible Input and the Latin Classroom through the Vergilian Society. It was a very rewarding experience. Twelve Latin teachers from around the country learned techniques to apply to our classrooms. We also toured many ancient sights in around Rome and Naples. Participants ranged from a grad student just starting her career to a veteran teacher with thirty-one years experience. Almost all of us had been to Italy at least once and only two of us were from the same state.

I wanted to study Comprehensible Input (CI) to invigorate my Latin IV class. It has been several years since I taught Latin IV and I was looking for a change. CI seemed to be just the thing. Comprehensible Input is the practice of providing input above a reader's knowledge level without the reader understanding all of the grammar and vocabulary in it. I was intrigued by this concept. Since I teach from the Cambridge Latin Course, I thought that it would be a perfect fit. Cambridge always puts a grammar concept or two in a chapter long before I address it. In fact, Latin I students translate the ablative case during the first few days of school. Of course, I could have further investigated CI and all of its various techniques over the Internet from the comfort of my home. I could have selected a few lessons and tried them in my classes. But that's not what happened. The generosity of the Ohio Classical Conference allowed me to learn CI in Italy.

It was so exciting to do so many new things that I had never tried or even heard of before! We were engaging in movie talks and total physical response (TPR). We were doing ping-pong readings. We were drawing pictures and taking brain breaks. We were writing in Latin - something I had only done as a junior in college! These were all great ideas that I couldn't wait to try but at the same time, I was developing a lot of questions with my acquisition: How was I going to generate all of these new lessons? Would they be a good fit for my upper-level classes? What is the best way to introduce CI to my classroom? How had teachers overcome the obstacles associated with using CI in their classrooms? So I asked my colleagues for advice.

A teacher from New Jersey noticed my bewilderment and encouraged me to try bits and pieces of CI. She said that she doesn't go "full CI" but that she has gradually introduced elements and her students have been very receptive. When I was struggling with the implementation of a CI lesson, a bi-lingual teacher from Texas offered to demonstrate the concept in Spanish. It put me in the place of my students and made me realize how the lesson could really work. I was encouraged to explore embedded reading by teachers from Massachusetts and Pennsylvania and they even gave me worksheets that they had generated. I can't wait to try an amplified reading as demonstrated by a teacher from D.C. Without the encouragement and guidance of these great individuals through personal interaction, I might not have

been as confident to try so many elements of CI in my class this year. Now I can't wait to try them all!

The site visits were almost as educational as the classroom portion of the tour. I have taken students on trips to Italy every other year since 2003 and we always hit the same touristy places. But after this experience, my school tours will never be the same. Ian Lockey orchestrated readings relevant to our location. We read Pliny in Pompeii. We read Vergil in the Sibylline caves at Cumae. For a Classics scholar, it was a religious experience. I never would have made it to the top of Mt. Vesuvius without encouragement from Amy Rose, a fantastic teacher from Oregon and my new best friend. Chris Lovell, who lived in Rome for a year, led us to the most wonderful restaurants for lunch each day. I never would have had these amazing experiences without my newfound friends and I can't wait to enrich my student tours with these added layers of exploration.

These days, it has never been easier to form a Professional Learning Network. Latin teachers can tweet, like Facebook pages, read blogs and tune into webinars from all over the world. We can get assistance from our colleagues, day or night. We can share our passions and find understanding among our like-minded peers. But I wanted more. I wanted to have conversations that could begin with one topic and lead to two or three ideas that have sprung from tangents of the discussion. I wanted to know how my fellow Classicists fell in love with teaching Latin. I wanted to compare war stories and learn new things about which I never even thought to inquire. Thanks to the Ohio Classical Conference, I got my chance. I was able to gain a better understanding of Comprehensible Input, I was able to create a solid PLN and, most importantly, I found friendships among my fellow Latin teachers that encourage and inspire me to take my classroom to the next level.