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How do you say "MOO" in Latin: Assessing Student Learning and Motivation in Beginning Latin

The development of network-based language learning environments and educational MOOs has opened new possibilities for foreign language teachers. The VRoma project, a re-creation of second century Rome that integrates the visual resources of a web page with the interactive abilities of a chatroom, is one such educational MOO. Our involvement with VRoma inspired us to create three exercises to see if VRoma is as useful for Latin language learning as it is for studying culture in Roman civilization courses. The three exercises were designed with several goals in mind: to help students integrate culture and language, to reinforce certain grammatical constructions and lexical items, and to create affective activities that would motivate students to find Latin interesting. We also wanted to test several hypotheses about how students learn best in MOO environments. Does the VRoma MOO enhance student learning of Latin language and Roman culture? Do students learn best individually, competitively, or collaboratively? Do they learn grammar and vocabulary better when they are using the language actively to create meaning of their own rather than responding to textbook exercises? Can a computer-mediated environment enhance a student's ability to integrate language and culture? Does the VRoma MOO affect students in a positive way so that they want to learn more about ancient Rome?

In this presentation, we address these questions and assess the value of the VRoma MOO for Latin language learning. In particular, we discuss the three exercises we designed for second semester Latin courses at Cornell College. The first assignment, a Treasure Hunt, was designed to familiarize students with the layout of second century Rome as they practiced their Latin composition and reading skills. The second, *Indicium*, required students to deduce who killed Argus by conversing in Latin with each other in order to discover clues and solve the mystery. The third assignment, *Quaere*, was a collaborative exercise in which students had to communicate in Latin with their group members in order to find, collect and trade sets of objects appropriate for their characters and locations in VRoma (see http://cornell-iowa.edu/classical_studies/latin/lat102.shtml for complete descriptions and rules). The sequence of assignments was designed to build upon the technological skills and cultural knowledge acquired in the previous exercise. In addition, as the assignments progressed, each exercise required more interaction among students as well as more improvisation, cooperation and more familiarity with MOO commands.

Several tools were used to assess student motivation, understanding of cultural and linguistic structures, and the quality of interaction: daily journals, student evaluations, transcripts of the *Indicium* and *Quaere* sessions, and email responses in Latin to the Treasure Hunts. From this evidence we conclude that VRoma, by combining visual arts and cultural data with the capacity for real time communication in Latin, provides a unique opportunity for students to be immersed in language and culture simultaneously. Such an opportunity is not only useful for developing student's language skills, but also

for giving students a more sophisticated understanding of the ways that language and culture are integrated.