The Classics in Communities Project – an update (14.05.2015)
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Background, purpose and aims

The Classics in Communities project (http://classicsincommunities.org/) is a partnership between the University of Oxford, the University of Cambridge and the Iris Project. It was set up in response to the primary curriculum reforms which were implemented in England from September 2014. In the Key Stage 2 (KS2) Languages curriculum policy, for the first time, Classical Greek and Latin can be chosen for study by pupils aged 6-11 in place of a modern language. The project particularly targets schools which might not otherwise consider the option. It has twin aims: to equip teachers in primary schools with the skills and knowledge necessary to teach these languages; and to conduct parallel research to determine the impact of Classical language learning on children's cognitive development.

What has been achieved to date?

Opening Conference:

- 'Theories and Practices to develop Classics Outreach in the 21st Century', Public meeting and teachers' colloquium – University of Oxford, November 2013

This was attended by more than 100 people, including delegates from South Africa and the USA. The issue of reviving Classical languages in UK schools stimulated interest and input from policy-makers, school leaders, teachers and students. We had presentations such as 'Teaching Ancient Greek at primary level' and 'Teaching Homer to 5-10 year-olds'.

Classical Languages Regional teacher-training workshops

- Classical languages teacher training workshops – London, Oxford, Cambridge, Birmingham, Glasgow, June 2014 and Belfast, February 2015

These regional events were hosted by universities or schools and helped bring together those primary teachers interested in teaching Latin and Classical Greek with experienced teachers. Training was provided and useful teaching resources shared. The participants found the workshops very helpful (feedback was gathered via questionnaires) and are now helping to provide data for the ongoing research arm of the project.

Research

- Quantitative Data collection in partnership with The Latin Programme (London), the Iris Project (Oxford) and Unity Trust (West Midlands).
- Qualitative data collection with school leaders, teachers, pupils and parents through school visits.

- Questionnaire feedback sought from teacher training workshop participants (at end of introductory workshop and again at 4-5 months intervals).

Results

Initial analysis of the data reveals positive trends in the development of literacy skills, when a Classical language is used as the medium for (or supplement to) literacy learning. For example, at a large state primary school in outer London, where 51% of students have Special Educational Needs, 82% speak English as an additional language (i.e. they are native speakers of languages other than English) and 69% of pupils are entitled to free school meals, the results of teaching literacy through Latin are very compelling. After one year, 60% of pupils progressed at least 2 sub-levels beyond their predicted literacy level. After two continuous years of Latin, 75% of pupils progressed at least 2 sub-levels beyond their predicted literacy level, with many progressing 4 sub-levels beyond their prediction. By the end of 3 years of Latin, 86% of pupils had made this giant leap in literacy attainment. Similar results can be seen in schools across London, East Oxford and the West Midlands where baseline and interim data are currently being collected.

Conferences

The Classics in Communities team have been invited to present papers on the project's findings at the following conferences:

- Nottingham Classical Association Conference - April 2014
- Bristol Classical Association Conference - April 2015
- South Africa Classical Association Conference – July 2015

What next?

Funding has recently been sought to launch phase 2 of the research project which will evaluate the effect of teaching/learning Classical languages on student outcomes and teachers' professional development and will assess the impact and reach of the project. Funding-permitting, the data will continue to be analysed and the results will be disseminated through various channels in 2016.

Together with our partners, we will host an international conference in Cambridge on Saturday 19th September titled, 'Access to Classics in Schools and Communities: Two years on', to which alumni are warmly invited to attend. The keynote speakers will be Professor Tim Whitmarsh and author Tom Holland. Parallel panel presentations will be given by practising primary and secondary teachers, community educators, language education experts and representatives of Classics education abroad, including colleagues from Australia and Ireland. Full details, together with a number of resources which champion access to Classics in schools, are available on the project's website http://classicsincommunities.org/

The Classics in Communities team are working with Bloomsbury publishers on editing a book focused on the work of the Classics in Communities project and exploring Classics outreach (case studies) internationally. The 'Reviving Classical Languages in Schools' book will act as a legacy of the project.