

# Teaching Latin and Greek in Primary Classrooms: the Classics in Communities Project

by Arlene Holmes-Henderson

## What is 'Classics in Communities'?

The Classics in Communities project (<http://classicsincommunities.org/>) is a partnership between members of 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 where Classical languages have not previously featured on the curriculum. 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?

### Conferences

The project held a launch conference at Corpus Christi College, Oxford in November 2013. This event attracted a wide range of participants including primary teachers, secondary teachers (of Classics, Languages, History and English), academics, trainee teachers, outreach

officers, subject association representatives, educational policy advisors and school leaders. More than 100 delegates attended, including colleagues from South Africa, the USA and Europe. Keynote speeches were given by Professor Edith Hall (Kings College London) and Dr Michael Scott (University of Warwick). In addition to plenary sessions, parallel sessions covered a wide range of Classics education topics including; working with museums, teaching literacy using Greek literature in translation, empowering older students to lead junior Latin clubs, collaboration with Classics teachers across Europe and boosting community cohesion through Greek drama. For full details of the conference programme, see <http://classicsincommunities.org/conferences/>.

A second Classics in Communities conference was hosted by the University of Cambridge's Faculty of Classics in September 2015. Again, more than 100 participants came from a variety of contexts, including more adult educators, publishers and charity representatives than had attended the launch conference. Some delegates had travelled from Australia, the USA, Ireland and Sweden to be part of the one-day event. Professor Tim Whitmarsh (University of Cambridge) and the author and broadcaster Tom Holland gave the keynote addresses. High on the agenda for this event was the sharing of strategies to widen access to the study of Classical languages and civilisations for all learners.

In addition to an open roundtable discussion, we heard from teachers setting up new Latin hubs in Tower Hamlets, Hackney and Coventry, as well as representatives from Classics for All and the Kallos Gallery who want to support the learning and teaching of Classics at all levels. Participants provided feedback on the day:

*'It was such an inspiring day – after many years of going on conferences, Saturday has to be the one which successfully galvanised me and has given me so many ideas of what I can do to develop my teaching of Latin within the school. Thank you so very much, I feel propelled forward through the rain of some rather gloomy weather. I would love to come to some future events if you have them.'*  
Jane, primary teacher.

*'Thank you very much to you and your colleagues for organising the day and for inviting me to run an exhibit. I am glad it proved such a success and hope it can inspire many good new initiatives.'*  
Michael, from a university publisher.

*'Thank you so much for yesterday. I cannot tell you what a great time I had. I met some wonderful classics folk, picked up practical tips and will hopefully be creating a new South London Classics hub with Classics for All. Exciting times!'* Charlotte, secondary teacher.

*'Huge congratulations to the CiC team! What a fabulously well-organised*

conference! You must all be exhausted... It was a wonderful day, full of interesting material and a rare opportunity to 'network' within the Classics teaching community. It was particularly valuable to share ideas with colleagues in the primary sector and in academia – the CiC project successfully bridges the divide. It was a day to remember and I can't thank you enough', Emily, Secondary teacher, Sydney, Australia.

It is hoped that a third Classics in Communities conference will be hosted in Oxford in 2017, once again providing a forum in which all those teaching Classical languages can share examples of best practice and discuss ways to collaborate effectively.

#### *Classical languages regional teacher-training workshops*

Given that the KS2 Languages curriculum reform expressly named Latin and Greek as languages suitable for study, the Classics in Communities project sought to equip primary teachers, through training events, with the subject knowledge and confidence they needed to teach Latin and Greek in their schools. In 2014–2015, one-day teacher-training workshops were held at King's College London, the University of Oxford, the University of Cambridge, Lordswood School Birmingham, the University of Glasgow and Queen's University Belfast. These training days brought together those primary teachers interested in (but hitherto unfamiliar with) teaching Latin and Classical Greek with experienced teachers and academics. This cross-sectoral structure was selected to ensure a degree of self-sustainability in the regions – it was crucial for primary teachers to meet experienced teachers and academics so that they felt supported in their new Classical adventure. Equally, secondary teachers and academics in universities enjoyed the opportunity for dialogue and were keen to establish open channels of communication for knowledge exchange across educational phases. The events were publicised to local educational authorities by each local university, by the University of Oxford outreach team and by the Classics in Communities project (by email and through social media). The cost of the workshops was £40, but full bursaries were available for teachers

thanks to the generosity of the Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies, and the Society for the Promotion of Hellenic Studies. Glasgow was the most popular venue, with 22 participants. Belfast had the fewest attendees, just 10. The training day was broadly divided into two: Latin in the morning and Greek in the afternoon.

After a welcome from the local host and an introduction from the Classics in Communities team, participants were introduced to the learning and teaching resources available for teaching Latin. In Oxford, this was led by Barbara Bell, the author of *Minimus*, who showcased the range of pupil textbooks and teacher handbooks available, and gave advice about how best to use them. In other locations, this was led by teachers with experience of teaching Latin in the primary phase. In addition to *Minimus*, attendees could peruse copies of *Telling Tales in Latin* (Robinson), *Latin for Beginners* (Wilkes and Shackell) and the *Cambridge Latin Course* (CSCP). The benefits of teaching Latin in the primary classroom were discussed, as were some of the challenges of setting up a new language in a school. Participants had the opportunity to try out some Latin learning of their own and asked a number of questions about which pedagogical approaches were suitable for teaching a Classical language. The final session before lunch was a 30-minute talk from a local primary teacher who outlined their top tips for introducing Latin at KS2. The cascade of this information from a fellow teacher who had actually been through the process was particularly valuable for participants and allowed them to have many practical questions answered.

The afternoon was spent introducing teachers to the Ancient Greek alphabet and helping them transliterate accurately. Exercises exploring vocabulary, derivations and present tense verbs gave them a flavour of the content of Ancient Greek at KS2 level. Resources such as *Gorilla Greek* (Wright), *Alpha is for Anthropos* (Sellers), *A New Greek Course for Schools* (Williams) and *Our Greek and Latin Roots* (Morwood and Warman) were shared, and their suitability for use with children at KS2 level discussed.

#### *Feedback from primary teachers*

Questionnaires were distributed to participants in the Classics in Communities

training workshops. The first was completed at the end of the training day and another was sent electronically 6 months later. There were 45 responses from the first questionnaire and 13 from the second. The feedback from the teachers highlighted a number of interesting findings which have been important for subsequent phases of the project.

The collated results show that, at the end of the one-day training event, 70% of participants said it was 'very likely' that they would start teaching Latin in their primary schools. 13% said it was 'likely' and 17% replied 'maybe'. Not a single participant replied 'probably not' or 'definitely not'.

The picture for Greek was much less encouraging. Only 22% of primary teachers thought it 'very likely' that they would introduce Ancient Greek. 9% thought it 'likely', 47% (the majority) replied 'maybe', 16% thought 'probably not', and 6% had decided that it was 'definitely not' for them. Common reasons given for these less enthusiastic responses included Greek being harder for the teachers themselves to learn, it being beyond the intellectual reach of some children, and the lack of suitably demanding but engaging textbooks.

The follow-up questionnaire asked participants to evaluate the impact of the Classics in Communities training day on the language offering at their schools. More than 90% of respondents answered that Latin was now being taught in their school, and one teacher reported that she was teaching Ancient Greek at KS2. It appears, then, that teachers were sufficiently enthused and informed when leaving the workshop to take the step of making Latin a reality in their classrooms. It is important to note, however, that there were fewer respondents to the second questionnaire (about one third the response rate of the first questionnaire), and those who replied were perhaps the very people who wanted to share good news. It has therefore been difficult to track what progress (if any) has been made by the remainder of the training day participants. School visits are planned in the coming months to gather more information.

Future needs were identified by primary teachers as: a follow-up training workshop, more online resources, schemes of work and lesson plans,

mentoring from experienced teachers, and ideas for cross-curricular Classical cultural-themed activities. The Classics in Communities project was able to deliver additional online resources on its [website](#) and has, through school visits, provided professional mentoring and curriculum-planning guidance. Thanks to funding from the A. G. Leventis Foundation, a follow-up workshop will be held in due course which will feature the sharing of best practice and ideas for innovation in Classical language teaching at the primary level.

One school in the West Midlands which adopted Latin as the only language for all children across KS2 made the request for a progression grid to help teachers gauge, monitor and track the progress in key skills made by pupils through learning Latin. These grids are produced by local authorities and subject associations for modern foreign languages but, without the level indicators, teachers were finding it difficult to report on progress in Latin. Two versions (one basic grid and a second with exemplified content) of the primary Latin skills progress grid were created for teachers and are now freely available on the [Classics in Communities website](#).

#### *Educational Research*

Alongside its training focus, the Classics in Communities project is conducting an educational research study into the impact of learning Latin on children's cognitive development. It is a longitudinal study in which quantitative attainment data are being collected from a number of schools, in partnership with the Iris Project and the Latin Programme. In order to get a better understanding of the impact of learning Latin beyond baseline and progress measures of cognitive attainment, qualitative research methods are being used in school visits to hear the situated perspectives of key stakeholders including pupils, teachers, school leaders and parents.

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. The impact of learning Latin on children's development of critical skills and global awareness is also being explored. Data collection and analysis are currently ongoing and

detailed results will be published in due course.

#### *International collaboration*

Steve Hunt (Cambridge), Mai Musić (Oxford) and I travelled to the Classical Association of South Africa's conference in 2015 to present the work currently being done by the Classics in Communities project. It was useful to exchange knowledge and experiences with colleagues who are also working to widen access to Classical languages in South Africa and Malawi.

After giving papers at conferences in New Zealand and the USA, I have developed fruitful links with individuals and organisations who are involved with teaching Latin and Greek to young children. There are plans for further collaboration and cooperation.

## What next?

#### *Training workshops*

Together with Classics for All, Classics in Communities will provide three additional teacher training workshops in 2016. These will be held in Nottingham (9th June), Liverpool (7th July) and Leeds (8th July). The workshops will be free of charge for teachers (with generous funding from the A. G. Leventis Foundation and the National Network for Collaborative Outreach) and will include initial training in Latin and

Greek, alongside pedagogical advice and resource sharing. Details will be given on how to apply for follow-up funding from Classics for All (<http://classicsforall.org.uk/>) and how to access financial assistance for purchasing classroom resources. This information can also be found on the Classics in Communities website: <http://classicsincommunities.org/financial-support/>

We hope to host another training workshop in Scotland following the success of the Classics in Communities event in Glasgow in June 2014. Scotland's adoption of the European 1 + 2 policy (English + two other languages from primary level) gives great scope for including Latin as L3 (the third language after English and a modern language). The Iris Project is already thriving in Glasgow, Edinburgh and St. Andrews so we hope to build on this momentum and raise the awareness of Latin as a viable and valuable language for the children of Scotland to study. The Classical Association conference is being hosted by the University of Edinburgh this year and local teachers are being invited to attend. It is hoped that a suitable venue will be identified so that an additional Scottish workshop can be held in 2016.

#### *Celebration of Greek language and culture education*

Together with the Greek ambassador to the UK, the Classics in Communities project will host a 'Celebration of Greek' event in summer 2016 in London. This is

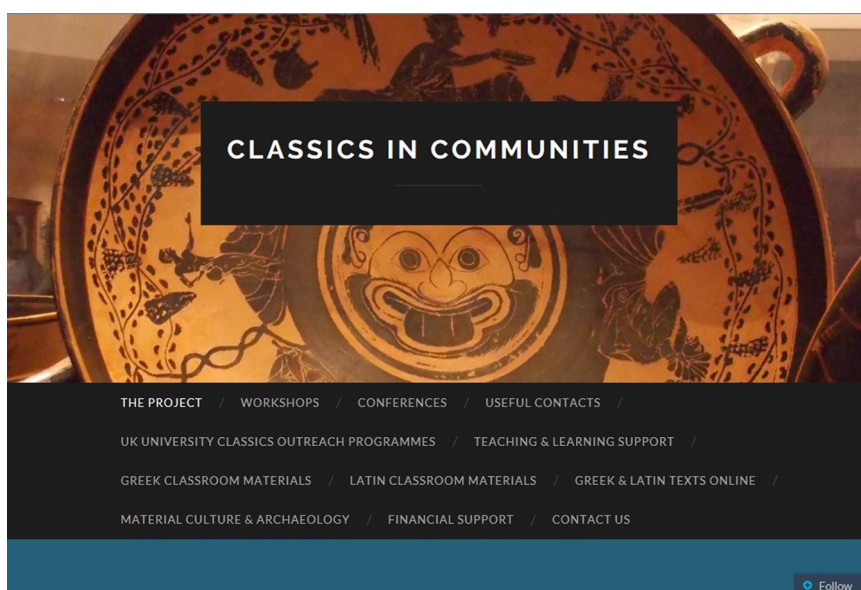


Figure 1. | The Classics in Communities website.

partly an effort to raise the profile of teaching Greek in schools with the aim of boosting the number of children with access to the language and its associated rich historical, literary, philosophical and visual culture. The event serves an additional purpose: to bring together those people currently teaching some form of Greek in diverse contexts. This might include Classicists, theologians, philosophers, ancient and mediaeval historians, modern Greek linguists, and members of the Hellenic community in the UK. There is strength in numbers and, by involving as many stakeholders as possible, we hope to reflect on current provision and devise strategies to promote and extend the reach of Greek language and culture education as widely as possible.

#### *Digital resources*

It is hoped that the *vox populi* approach to recording sound bites will be used at the Greek celebration event, we intend to record and make available online short videos which capture individuals sharing the impact learning Greek, or about Greece, had on their personal and intellectual development.

In response to requests from teachers, teaching resource videos are planned to help less experienced teachers of Classical languages to see the content and pedagogical elements of a 'model lesson'. Making these available online will not only help teachers currently delivering Latin in their schools but may also inspire newcomers, if they can see pedagogy and learning in action.

Discussions have been held with a number of key individuals regarding the dispersal of Classics resources across the internet. In addition to

classicsincommunities.org, key information is stored on [www.classicsteaching.com](http://www.classicsteaching.com), [www.theclassicslibrary.com](http://www.theclassicslibrary.com), [www.classicalassociation.org](http://www.classicalassociation.org), [www.classicsforall.org.uk](http://www.classicsforall.org.uk), [www.startingtoteachlatin.org](http://www.startingtoteachlatin.org) and [www.cambridgescp.com](http://www.cambridgescp.com). It has been acknowledged by many that this range of 'entry points' can seem confusing for people who want to know where to start with Classics education. Together, we are actively working on improving the accessibility of this information and hope to provide clearer links to make the process better in future.

#### *Book*

A contract has been signed with Bloomsbury Academic Publishing for *Forward with Classics! Classical Languages in Schools and Communities*. This edited volume will survey the current status of Classics education in policy and practice around the world. It will explore emerging trends and evaluate growth in Classical language learning in schools and communities. It will do so by featuring a number of interesting and innovative case studies. Edited by Mai Musié, Steve Hunt and myself, it will report the findings of the Classics in Communities project and will identify future priorities for Classics education research. The 25 contributors include academics such as Professor Mary Beard and Professor Edith Hall, practising teachers from around the world, community educators and creators of educational digital resources.

#### *Funding*

Classics in Communities could not undertake Classics education advocacy, teacher training and research without

funding. The project was launched with funding from the University of Oxford Knowledge Exchange Seed Fund and the John Fell Fund. Since 2013, Classics in Communities has received funding from a number of donors. Thanks are due to: the Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies, the Society for the Promotion of Hellenic Studies, the Classical Association, the A. G. Leventis Foundation, the Institute of Classical Studies, the University of Oxford Faculty of Classics, the University of Cambridge Faculty of Classics, Classics for All and the National Network for Collaborative Outreach.

To enlarge the scope of the project, funding is still being sought. If you know of any individuals or organisations interested in contributing, please do ask them to get in touch.

**Dr Arlene Holmes-Henderson has a Doctorate in Classics education and is a postdoctoral researcher in the Faculty of Classics at the University of Oxford.**  
**Email: [arlene.holmes-henderson@classics.ox.ac.uk](mailto:arlene.holmes-henderson@classics.ox.ac.uk)**  
**Twitter: @drarlenehh**  
**Website: [www.drarlenehh.com](http://www.drarlenehh.com)**

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