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PGCE Secondary Classics
Assignment 1C

**‘A critical evaluation of pupils’ perceptions
of the advantages and disadvantages of
having studied Latin prior to joining an
independent, girl school.’**

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Introduction.

The 'Every Child Matters' policy is designed to ensure that the individual needs of each student are being catered to in the classroom and that students are given the opportunity to achieve their full potential (Dfes 2004). For the last few months I have been placed at an all girl independent day and boarding school (School A) in which I have been given the opportunity to observe teachers strive to adhere to this policy on a day-to-day basis, at times in very difficult circumstances. It has become clear to me whilst on my PGCE course that although the most effective way to ensure that each child is being stretched and encouraged to fulfil their potential is through differentiation, this is not always easy. This is particularly apparent in mixed ability classrooms where it is not only the variation of ability that needs to be taken into consideration but also the differing levels of prior knowledge of the subject. Problems with differentiation as well as the benefits of ability grouping will be discussed in the literature review.

Context of this study.

Upon entering School A in year 7 many students choose to study Latin as one of their languages and are placed into mixed ability classes according to the timetable. In theory this appears to be a very logical way for the school to deal with the variety of choices offered to the students. However in practice, a number of girls are entering into the school from prep-schools where they have had at least two years experience of Latin and as a result of timetabling are being placed in the same class as students who have never studied the language before. This is creating a dynamic in the classroom which is incredibly varied and makes the task of catering to each student individually difficult.

When I arrived at the school at the beginning of the spring term, I found myself observing a year 7 class in which 13 of the students were studying from stage 7 of the Cambridge Latin Course book 1 and three girls were learning from stage 10. Impressed by the teachers ability to effectively be teaching two lessons at one time, I was particularly interested in talking to the three girls who were spending much of their lessons huddled around a translation and ploughing through, seemingly not

integrating with the rest of the class very often, if at all. Compelled to talk to these three girls who were 'ahead' of the rest of the class, I wanted to know:

- How did they perceive themselves compared to rest of the class?
- Did they feel that they were benefiting from their situation?
- And perhaps most importantly, were they enjoying their experience of Latin in this classroom environment?

This initial interest has led to the main focus of this study in which I want to achieve an understanding of the pupils' perceptions of the advantages and disadvantages of having a prior knowledge of Latin when entering into a mixed ability classroom. This in turn will help to inform future planning for lessons in which there are students with very different backgrounds in Latin entering into a classroom where they are all being taught at the same time, by one teacher.

Review of Literature.

This literature review will deal with differentiation, mixed ability grouping, gifted and talented students and pupil identity. I shall examine each area individually and use my findings as a basis for my own research.

Differentiation.

When considering the concept of differentiation, I wanted to explore the ways in which teachers dealt with varying abilities within the classroom. It is clear that differentiation is not only the concern of the classroom teacher but arguably also an issue that needs to be addressed by the whole school as it encourages the needs of each child to be met through activities that are targeted to their ability. This is a selling point that many senior management teams use to attract people to their school and so is high on the list of priorities in terms of school policies. Having said this differentiation needs to be handled with a great deal of care and consideration as it may have negative effects on some students as shown in a study carried out by Sue Hall (Hall 1997: 98).

Hall's study was carried out in an inner city school in which they attempted to introduce differentiation by task. This attempt failed to be successful as the lower-ability students felt demoralised which in turn had a very negative effect on the work produced by them (Hall 1997: 95). In this case-study, a Year 9 science group were each given cards with different activities to complete. Different cards were given to higher ability students, middle ability students and finally easier tasks were set for the lower ability students. As a result of this, the students were all aware of which card they had received and where they thought the teacher placed them within the class. This proved to have a very positive effect on the higher ability students who worked hard and enjoyed people knowing the teacher thought of them as higher ability. Unfortunately for the lower ability students this had a very negative effect as they felt the teacher had confirmed that they were unable to complete the tasks set for the other students and comments made by other members of the class also led to low self-esteem (Hall 1997: 96-98) This study emphasises the need for careful consideration by the teacher when dealing with differentiating tasks within the classroom as one needs to ensure that this has positive effects and helps to motivate the student rather than de-motivate them. The importance of pupil perception not only by the teacher but also from their peers was made apparent by this study and is something that I began to consider in my own research.

The literature I examined on differentiation led me to consider more deeply what was happening in a year 7 class in School A. Here my initial focus was on differentiation strategies used by the teacher with a class of relatively similar ability but one where prior knowledge of the subject varied greatly. In this class however, I felt it was not the lower ability students who were at risk of suffering from peer pressure, but the three girls who were segregated from the rest of the class due to their prior knowledge of Latin. It is these girls who are set different tasks and work separately from the rest of the class and I was interested to see both how they perceived themselves within the class but also how they felt they were perceived by others. The concept of pupil identity is one which I shall deal with later in the literature review.

Mixed ability grouping.

In the next stage of my literature review I decided to examine the use of mixed ability groups in secondary schools. Here I wanted to scrutinize the benefits and disadvantages of mixed ability classes for students at both ends of the academic spectrum. Having discussed the perceived benefits that differentiation has on individual students it would appear that all students would benefit from some sort of 'setting', thus narrowing the gap of variance in ability in one classroom.

A number of secondary schools set students according to ability in key curricular subjects such as English, maths and science, as they believe there to be huge benefits for students placed in a class with others of the same ability. With the increased pressure for schools to meet the levels set by the National Curriculum and the governments clear desire for students to be set, it can often appear that the disadvantages of such a system for many students in the school are being overlooked for the benefit of a few. White Paper states that 'unless a school can demonstrate that it is getting better than expected results through a different approach, we do make the presumption that setting should be the norm in secondary schools' (DFEE 1997: 38). Much research has been carried out on the benefits and drawbacks of grouping students according to ability and I shall bear in mind both sides whilst carrying out my research.

Ireson et al speak of a number of smaller studies that have been carried out in individual schools where it would seem that streaming by ability had little impact on higher ability students whereas lower ability students performed better in mixed ability groups (Ireson et al 1999: 3). Surrounded by higher ability students pushes those around them to strive to achieve more and all students learn from each other. It is clear that it is the decision of the school which policy they use for streaming students and it is essential that they create an environment which enables all students to strive to make maximum progress (Ireson et al 1999: 5). The study carried out by Boaler et al in six different schools looked at the effects of ability-grouping practices in mathematics. Here they found that when taught in mixed-ability sets, the teachers gave all students work of the right level and the class moved at a pace that was acceptable for all. When however, mathematics was taught in sets according to

ability, the high-ability students were pushed harder as they were perceived to be capable, whereas the lower ability sets were regarded as incapable and at times were given work to simply copy off the board (Boaler et al 2000: 642-643). It is important to address the balance and to ensure that all students are striving to achieve their best and that no pupil feels that they are perceived as incapable and as a result suffer from lack of confidence or low self-esteem.

Having considered the literature related to mixed ability grouping, I began to consider whether ability grouping in school A would be an answer to the problem of varying prior knowledge of the subject. However taking into account the literature, I feel that all students will benefit from mixed ability grouping if they are encouraged to integrate with each other more and are not physically segregated from the rest of the class. It is such segregation as well as the concept of being different that may lead to low-self esteem and social alienation and I feel that this is present whether we are looking at students at the higher end of the ability scale or at the lower end.

Gifted and talented students.

Next I wanted to consider the place of gifted and talented students within a school and studied some of the vast amount of literature based on this topic. Although the three girls who I have focused my study on are not regarded as gifted and talented, I felt that it was important to consider the difficulties students at the higher end of the ability scale may experience during their school life. The year 7 girls in School A are 'ahead' of the rest of the class and so may be experiencing similar problems as those who are more academically advanced. There is a certain amount of ambiguity with gifted students with regards to whether they are more or less likely to have emotional and social difficulties than their peers. Many argue that the nature of the gifted students means that they are better equipped and more able to adjust to society whereas others believe that they can often become isolated from their peers and as a result suffer with self-confidence and low self-esteem (Mazzoli et al: 2006: 2-3).

Research has shown that as with labelling lower ability students as 'stupid', it can also be damaging to the individual if they are given the label 'gifted'. Mazzoli et al speak in great depth about research into the effects this label can have on students and

whether they are more adept to handling social labels of these kind than their non-gifted peers (Mazzoli et al 2006: 6). This paper also argues that there is nothing to suggest that there are higher levels of loneliness, sensitivity or perfectionism amongst the gifted but that cases of social isolation and increased levels of anxiety due to pressure are not due to the students themselves, but as a result of society's response to them (Mazzoli et al 2006: 11). Again I feel compelled to look further into the idea of pupil identity and discuss not only how the students identify themselves within the classroom but also how they feel they are perceived by others in comparison to how others truly perceive them.

The three students in year 7 who I am keen to discover more about are not viewed as gifted and talented, but their position within the classroom due to their prior experience of Latin has placed some of the same ideals onto them. I feel that as a result of their prior knowledge they have been isolated from the rest of the class and I am keen to explore how this has affected their attitude towards the rest of the class and their enjoyment of Latin. First I shall look at pupil identity and the importance of how the students feel they are perceived not only by their peers but also by their teachers.

Pupil identity.

In the final stage of this literature review I wanted to examine the idea of pupil identity. It was important to consider pupil perception of differentiation as later I wanted to ask the three girls in School A about their views on how they were being taught. Pupil identity is an issue that has been raised in each of the points discussed in the literature review and is also something that will be dealt with in greater depth as this study progresses. The notion of personal identity is one that has been debated by many, each of whom include in their definitions an element of knowing yourself personally and then seeing where that 'self' fits into the outside world (Head 1997: 7-8). Head argues that it is during the stages of adolescence that children begin to acquire a sense of who they are. This can be influenced by their peers, adults around them selected as role models, as well as by the experiences that they are encountering on a day-to-day basis (Head 1997: 7). It is important then to ensure that the students are having positive experiences whilst at school and during this important stage when

they are finding themselves. It is imperative therefore that the teacher does not simply rebuke wrong answers but helps the student to understand where they were going wrong, as well as to ensure that they are generally having a positive experience in the classroom. For the three girls who I am investigating in School A, I am interested to see if they are having positive experiences of Latin, as well as where they perceive themselves to be within their classroom situation.

Whybra argues that due to the nature and ability of gifted students, they are often isolated by their peers due to a sense of 'difference' (Whybra 2000: 38). Head on the other hand argues that there seems to be no connection between identity status and intelligence (Head 1997: 19). I feel that it is not so much the intelligence of such gifted students that isolates them from their peers, but simply their experiences in the classrooms where often they are physically separated from the rest of the class. This is why I have placed the three students in my study into this category as although they may not be regarded as gifted and talented, they are physically being separated from the rest of the class through where they sit, and the activities they are being set. It is due to such experiences that they may become socially isolated as they are perceived as being different from everyone else in the classroom.

Identifying a focus for my research.

Taking into consideration the key elements discussed in the literature review: differentiation, mixed ability grouping, gifted and talented students and pupil identity, I needed to identify a focus for my research. The three girls in the year 7 mixed ability class in School A had already caught my attention due to their unique situation and the many issues that surrounded their Latin education. Initially I had considered focusing the study on the differentiation techniques that the classroom teacher was using and how she managed to cope with a class that had not only a diverse range of ability but also a broad variety of prior subject knowledge. However the more I began to look into the study the more I was drawn towards talking to three girls and looking at their circumstance through their eyes rather than through the eyes of their teacher. I feel this will help more with future teaching as it seems quite rare to see things from

the students' perspective rather than the teachers and I hoped that this would be more enlightening.

Having decided on the angle of the study as well as the class and students who would be involved I now needed to refine a question for the research. The prior knowledge of Latin that the girls had is what made them stand out from the rest of the class. This combined with my own interest in pupil perception and identity led me to consider how the girls perceived their prior knowledge of Latin to be benefiting their studies or whether they considered it to be having an adverse effect? I had my own thoughts on whether a prior knowledge of Latin was a benefit or a hindrance, but I looked at this from a wider picture. I knew that at some point all the students would have to be brought together and taught as one class, that ultimately if they took the subject for GCSE they would do this with their peers and I considered the benefits and drawbacks from this perspective. For example I felt that the students who had a prior knowledge of Latin would only benefit if they took the GCSE at an earlier stage in their academic career. Otherwise I feel that they waste much of their time consolidating information they already know and not progressing. I feel that at points they are being held back by the teacher, waiting for the rest of the class to catch up which may be considered as detrimental to their own education. On the other hand this extra time for consolidation may be deemed as beneficial for those students who are perhaps not as linguistically able but still enjoy the subject.

I soon learnt that the way the girls perceived things was very different and their much more refined day-to-day perception of the subject and where they were was far more interesting to hear and explore. The students were living in the here and now and seemed only to be concerned with what activity they were doing from lesson to lesson. The method I used to explore these thoughts and gain a better understanding of the pupils' perceptions shall be explained in the next section of this assignment.

Method of research.

I used a variety of different methods to gather information from the three selected girls. These included observing the girls in lessons taught by their normal classroom

teacher, group discussions and a focus group interview, recording their own thoughts in the form of a diary after certain lessons as well as individual interviews. These methods allowed me to gather a broad range of information as well as allow the girls to express themselves in different circumstances. The various methods used and what they entailed are summarised below.

Observation.

The first step in my method of research was to observe the girls in a standard Latin lesson taught by their usual teacher. I wanted to see how many times the three girls who already had a further two years experience of Latin interacted with the rest of the class, were taught alongside the rest of the class and volunteered answers to questions directed to the class as a whole. I observed the class three times in this situation and my findings can be found in the results section of this paper. I felt that it was important to obtain an understanding of the girls' experience of Latin and monitor their behaviour before they were aware that I had an interest in their own perceptions of the subject and how they were being taught. I wanted to see their instinctive reactions to questions and their natural behaviour in the class and was worried that if they knew of my research in advance, that this would change the way they behaved in their lessons.

Informal group discussion.

The next phase of my research was to talk to the girls about their experience of Latin both in this secondary school and in the prep school all three girls had attended. This was an informal chat and the nature of the discussion meant that the girls could speak freely, allowing me to obtain a better insight about their feelings towards their Latin lessons. During this discussion I asked the girls about why they enjoyed Latin, what they found difficult and their opinions on being 'ahead' of the rest of the class. The girls also drew comparisons between the teaching at their prep school with the teaching in School A. Whilst this discussion was going on I jotted down a few ideas that each of the girls were having as a simple guide to help direct questions that I would ask in the individual interviews at a later stage in the study.

Three different lessons.

Before I asked the girls to take part in individual interviews, I planned three lessons for the whole class with a variety of activities that the three girls who were 'ahead' could also get involved with. In the first lesson we did a class translation of a story from the Cambridge Latin Course Book I, stage 9. I divided the class into three groups and selected one of the three girls to be a team leader in each group and to help their group to get an accurate translation. Each group then acted out their short play in costume for the rest of the class.

In the second lesson the girls joined the rest of the class in looking at a power point presentation and answering questions on the dative case. When the rest of the class then began to do simple exercises on the dative case, the three girls did a more in depth grammar exercise, again on the dative case, which included translating English sentences into Latin.

The third lesson that I taught with this class was based on stage 10 of the Cambridge Latin Course Book 1 and the girls organised a debate for the rest of the class on Greeks versus Romans. This helped them to get a more in depth knowledge of the subject matter whilst introducing the theme of this stage to the rest of the class.

I felt that it was important to give the girls a lesson in which they were working with the rest of the class, one which gave them knowledge of grammar and one which gave them a deeper knowledge of Roman and Greek culture. This was because I wanted to give them the opportunity to interact with the rest of the class whilst still stretching them to achieve the best of their ability. After each of these lessons, the girls wrote mini-diaries which contained their thoughts on the lessons. Again this gave me an insight into what the girls did and did not enjoy about their Latin lessons and helped me with the questions I would ask in their individual interviews. I feel that writing a diary helped the girls to be more honest.

It is important to note here that when I first started observing the lessons in January the three girls were beginning stage 10 and the rest of the class were nearing the end of stage 7. The rest of the class were slowly catching the other girls up as they were

being taught by the teacher whereas the three girls who were ahead were ploughing through translations on their own which slowed them down considerably. The girls were aware of this and expressed opinions on how they felt about the situation during their individual interviews (Appendix 3).

Individual interviews.

I next interviewed the three selected girls individually. It was important to do this before the focus group interview because I wanted the girls to feel that they could speak openly, un-influenced by their peers. I had selected a range of open questions that I asked each of the girls based on information I had gathered from the informal chat and the diaries the girls had written for me. I called on each of the girls one by one and sat with them for between 15-20 minutes recording their answers verbatim as they offered their feelings and opinions regarding their Latin lessons. A copy of the interview questions along with the answers can be seen in appendix 3. I shall compare and analyse the answers given later in this paper.

Focus group interview.

The final stage of my research was to carry out a focus group interview with the three selected girls. This enabled the girls to share ideas and expand on each others ideas. I directed the girls slightly, again asking similar questions to those which I had asked in their individual interviews. I was keen to see if any of the girls held back or offered different answers in front of their friends. Again I wrote down their answers verbatim allowing the girls to see what I was writing as this seemed to prompt new ideas from them, and I also wanted them to feel secure that I was recording exactly what they were saying. I feel it was important to carry out the focus group interview as I had already gathered personal information and ideas from the girls and I felt that this was a good way to draw all of their opinions together and hold a more formal discussion in which to consider each others ideas. I was very pleased with the openness of the girls to express their opinions in front of me and I feel that I have now got some very good results on which to base my research.

A presentation of the evidence collected.

Here I will summarise the results found from each of the five stages of the research. I shall select comments made by the girls which I feel best form an argument for the focus of this research and the full set of diaries and recorded interviews can be found in the appendices.

Results from the Observation.

When I observed the girls during the initial stages of the research, I wanted to see how often they interacted with the rest of the class, were they offering answers to questions they ought to know the answer to, and was the teacher calling on them for help when the rest of the class was struggling or not offering answers. In one of the lessons I observed, these were the results I found:

Time allowance for a 55 minute lesson:

- 5 minute allowance for students entering and leaving the classroom.
- 15 minute starter activity in which the whole class is involved and the teacher directs questions according to ability.
- 25 minutes main activity. The three girls continue to work on a translation they had started in the previous lesson. The classroom teacher offers help where necessary but is also helping the rest of the class with a different activity.
- 10 minutes plenary activity in which the teacher goes over the work the rest of the class has been doing. Whilst this is happening the three selected girls are asked to carry on with their translation in silence so as not to disturb the rest of the class.

Of the questions directed at the whole class during the starter activity this is how the three selected girls responded:

Question 1: None of the three selected girls volunteer.

Question 2: Student B puts her hand up to translate but is not chosen.

Question 3: Students A and B both volunteer and student B is chosen to translate.

Question 4: Student B and C both volunteer and student C answers correctly.

Question 5: None of the three selected girls volunteer.

Question 6: None of the three selected girls volunteer –students B and C both call out the correct translation of postquam.

Question 7: Student B volunteers but is not chosen.

Question 8: None of the three girls selected volunteer.

Results from the informal discussion. (Appendix 1)

During the informal discussion with the girls, they each expressed that they had preferred studying Latin in their prep school for reasons such as:

- *“We were working at the same pace as the rest of the class and so had the opportunity to work with our friends.”*
- *“They [the teachers] carried out projects where we would focus on one aspect of Roman life and learn about this as well as the language.”*

The girls also expressed that they find some parts of the text difficult as they feel they have a ‘jumbled knowledge’ because the OLC and CLC teach parts of grammar at different stages so they found that they knew some bits of grammar but not others. It was during this initial discussion that I obtained a sense of who the girls were and how they felt about their Latin lessons and the ways in which they were being taught in School A. This helped me to form the method for the next few stages of my research.

Results from the diaries composed by the girls. (Appendix 2)

The diaries which the girls were keeping about the positive and negative thoughts they had felt towards lessons were also very eye-opening as there were clearly some opinions shared by the girls as well as things that they felt towards each other.

Thoughts on the first lesson in which the girls worked with the rest of the class to produce a translation which would be acted in front of the class included:

Student A: *“I think it is better when everyone is at the same stage and are doing the same things because it is more sociable and fun. When you are doing different things you feel isolated and depressed because everyone else is having fun.....but I felt pressured to know every word.”*

Student B: *“I liked contributing with the class but I felt pressure on me to know every word.”*

Student C: *“I had a fun lesson and enjoyed dressing up but I felt under pressure to know all the words.”*

The girls then expressed opinions through their diaries on the second lesson in which they were given a more in depth grammar task to work on which was a different activity from that given to the rest of the class. The girls made comments such as:

Student A: *“The sheets were ok but it was a normal, typical lesson. I don’t like working alone.”*

Student B: *“I would have liked to be doing more challenging work though, as I found myself getting distracted and losing focus rather than thinking.”*

Student C: *“The lesson was ok. I had more fun when we were working with the rest of the class though.”*

In their final diaries when the girls were commenting on the lesson in which they were asked to carry out a debate in front of the whole class the girls made these comments:

Student A: *“... I felt like I did all the work though in the debate. It is more fun doing sentences with the class.”*

Student B: *“It was good also not to be doing the rest of the translation, like the class was and doing something by ourselves as well as contributing to the class in one lesson.”*

Student C: *“This lesson was fun because we got the chance to do something other than translation.... I liked the debate because we could interact with the rest of the class and I liked it more because I won.”*

Results from the individual interviews.

The full interviews can be found in appendix 3, but here I am going to focus on the four questions that I think help to obtain the best understanding of how the girls view their prior knowledge of Latin as well as how they perceive themselves within the class and how they feel they are perceived by their peers. The results of these interviews are shown below:

Question 4: What do you consider being ahead of the rest of the class means?

Student A: *“I think it is that I have more experience in Latin than the others and that I understand things more than everyone else.”*

Student B: *“A couple of stages ahead. But we scrape by looking up words – not proper translation – But we do know our cases off by heart.”*

Student C: *“We know more. They are moving quickly but because we learnt it over three years we know it more thoroughly.”*

Question 5: How do you feel about being ahead of the rest of the class?

Student A: *“I feel that it is pressurising – if no-one knows the word the teacher asks you and expects you to know the answer. I don’t like being ahead of the class, I want to be with everyone else, that way it is more fun and sociable.”*

Student B: *“It is nice. I like being involved with the class but it is nice to know certain things and not have to worry about them rather than just not understandingI feel under pressure and don’t feel as ahead now.”*

Student C: *“It is fun being better than everyone. It will be weird when everyone catches up – although we will still be doing the same thing so we will still know it better than them.”*

Question 6: How do you feel you are perceived by the rest of the class?

Student A: *“Because we are ahead they may feel a bit low down because they are with the rest of the class. Sometimes they think we know everything but we don’t always.”*

Student B: *“I think they all think that we think we are really ahead but they don’t think that we areSomeone got a better mark than Student C in the end of term test and they all found it funny but it wasn’t and they were annoying.”*

Student C: *“People who are my friends ... if I get something wrong, they laugh because I should know it. If we work with the rest of the class and I fall behind it will be weird. People who aren’t my friends don’t take any notice.”*

Question 7: How does this make you feel?

Student A: *“This makes me feel annoyed, as though we are a helpline. If they are stuck they come to us – they don’t see us as being part of the class, just someone to ask for help.”*

Student B: *“Annoyed.... It’s quite nice that I can think to myself that I am a bit ahead.”*

Student C: *“I don’t care if they find it funny. It will feel weird to me falling behind. I am worried about it getting harder and not having time to go back over it....It will be a shock when I have to start learning new things.”*

Results from the focus group interview. (Appendix 4)

The main points that came from the focus group interview included:

- The girls felt that at times it was unfair to expect them to work alone in silence whilst the teacher went through activities with the rest of the class. They felt that whilst the class were doing fun things, they were left to do translations by themselves.
- All three girls felt that they were not under as much pressure in School A in terms of exams but did feel pressure to be able to answer questions asked by the teacher as they felt that everyone would expect them to know the answer.
- All three girls still share the same view that they preferred studying Latin in their prep school. They believe this is because they were all working together as a class. They also feel that because they were set according to ability they were progressing and working at the right level for them.

Summary of results.

I have briefly summarised the results of the various activities set for the three selected students and will use these results to consider the arguments both for and against the advantages of a prior knowledge of Latin. It is clear that although the three students are clearly living the same experiences and at times share opinions on how they feel towards their Latin education and others in the class, they all seem to want different things from their lessons and their own individual personalities shine through in their answers. It is important to remember that although these girls are in the same situation, even within three students there is a mix of ability and demand for what they want out of their Latin education.

Analysis of the evidence collected.

I am now going to analyse the results and look at them in comparison to the literature reviewed in order to obtain an understanding of how this could improve future teaching practice.

Advantages of a previous knowledge of Latin.

Through the activities that the girls have carried out with me, they have shown that they consider their previous knowledge of Latin to be a mixed blessing. On the one hand the girls seem to relish the fact that they are ahead of the rest of the class and that they do not need to worry about new things that might come up on a day-to-day basis *“It is nice. I like being involved with the class but it is nice to know certain things and not have to worry about them rather than just not understanding.”* They are content in the knowledge that they can come to their Latin lessons and understand what is being taught with little effort required on their behalf. The girls also seem to feel secure in the fact that due to their extra two years experience of Latin they have had the opportunity to come to grips with the vocabulary and grammar necessary for translating a passage at this stage in their Latin education. They have expressed that they see it as an advantage that they *‘know it more thoroughly.’*

From this perspective one can see that the girls certainly feel that having studied Latin over a longer period of time gives them confidence when translating in class.

However I cannot help but feel that the girls have been left for much of the year consolidating information but not actually progressing. One of the girls even stated, *“... we scrape by looking up words – not proper translation.”* The girls clearly enjoy feeling secure in their basic knowledge and at times even enjoy being ‘ahead’ of the class, but as they progress further in the book it is clearly becoming more difficult for them to continue without being ‘taught’. I fear that if this continues, the confidence in their ability which they have at the moment will diminish. At this point I feel that it would have been better if the girls could have been placed into a top set where they could have continued to be taught with girls at the same stage and progress from there. However I understand that this is difficult in School A where there are very few students who enter the school with two years of Latin behind them.

Disadvantages of a previous knowledge of Latin.

Disadvantages of a prior knowledge of Latin have also been discussed with the girls. All the sources gathered from this study concur with the idea that the girls feel isolated from the rest of the class and much prefer lessons in which they are able to integrate with their friends and be taught alongside their peers. *“I think it is better when everyone is at the same stage and are doing the same things because it is more sociable and fun.”* The girls clearly seem to enjoy the social aspect of working alongside their peers which came through in the diaries they composed for the first lesson. During this lesson in which they helped their classmates to translate a play, I observed that they worked very well and I think all students benefited from this learning environment.

It can be seen that the fact that the girls feel isolated from their peers is starting to have a negative effect not only on their enjoyment of Latin but also on the way in which they view the rest of the class. The three selected girls are beginning to see translation as a punishment that they have to do whilst the class around them are being taught by the teacher and enjoying activities as a class. When asked about how the girls felt towards their peers in terms of being perceived as ‘ahead’ of the rest of the class two of the girls commented that the class makes them feel *‘annoyed’* with one of the girls going further and adding *“If they are stuck they come to us – they don’t see us as being part of the class, just someone to ask for help.”* This level of animosity towards the rest of the class as well as the view of translation as a punishment needs to be removed as the girls will continue their Latin education unhappy and will not progress and achieve as highly as they are capable. It is this kind of isolation and social alienation that places the three selected girls into the same category as gifted and talented students, and as is the case there, teachers need to be careful that students are not being given a label which may in turn lead to low self-esteem.

As with students regarded as gifted and talented, the three girls selected for this research project also felt high levels of pressure being placed upon them in the classroom. This accords with the already mentioned study by Mazzoli et al, and the concept that it is society’s response to such students that leads to social isolation and

high levels of anxiety due to pressure. When asked about how they felt about being ahead of the rest of the class, the girls made comments such as *“I feel that it is pressurising – if no-one knows the word the teacher asks you and expects you to know the answer.”* At other times the girls expressed a pressure felt from their classmates to do better in tests and to know all of the words. It is clear that the pressure of a prior knowledge of Latin is not only coming from the girls in the rest of the class but also from the teacher who may at times, unknowingly, be placing added pressure onto the girls. Again this is something that needs to be stopped in order to create a good learning environment for all students in the classroom.

Through talking to the girls both individually as well as in a group, and through reading the diaries in which the girls commented on their likes and dislikes on a range of lessons, I feel that I have been able to gather incredibly interesting evidence on pupil perceptions of a prior knowledge of Latin. Looking at this research through the eyes of the students rather than the teachers has not only been enlightening but has also increased my awareness of the struggles that students are faced with, the ways in which they perceive their Latin education and how they would like to be taught. The girls have helped me to acknowledge the need for differentiation within the classroom in order to help all students strive to achieve the best they can, but have also made me aware of the importance of letting the class work together in order to create an enjoyable learning environment where students are not made to feel isolated. Taking into consideration the feedback I have been given from the selected students I will aim to create a classroom environment which incorporates many of the aspects outlined by them as beneficial and enjoyable. Such aspects include more interactive lessons both with the use of the interactive white board as well as creating activities where the girls can work in groups.

Conclusion.

What was found from this study?

This study has shown the advantages and disadvantages of a prior knowledge of Latin when entering into a mixed ability classroom through the eyes of the students who are directly affected by this. Advantages included such things as a more in depth

understanding of the language and the satisfaction of going to lessons and knowing that they will be able to handle all aspects of the lesson covered by the teacher. They also expressed a confidence in being able to tackle translations and complete tasks set by their teacher. Disadvantages included things such as isolation from the rest of the class, pressure from both their classmates and the teacher to know the answer to questions as well as increased animosity towards their peers and the subject itself. This research has also helped to create an understanding of the elements required by the students in order to construct a lesson in which all students are able to participate and build on their knowledge of the Latin language regardless of ability.

How can this inform practice?

This study has shown the importance of keeping a positive whole class attitude towards the subject and the need for all students to be involved so that isolation from the rest of the class and negative perspectives are not an issue. Through differentiating activities in a positive way as well as through encouragement from the teacher to work together as a team, it is possible to incorporate all students, regardless of ability or prior knowledge of the subject into the lesson. The literature review and my own study have highlighted the importance of teacher awareness with regards to isolating students. It is necessary for students who are 'ahead' of the rest of the class to experience a variety of activities so that they do not become complacent nor do they begin to find the lessons mundane and predictable. Such students need to remain stimulated and the teacher needs to be aware of their needs as much as the needs of the rest of the class and not segregate them on such a permanent basis.

Using the information provided by the girls on their 'ideal' Latin lesson (appendix 3) one can also produce lessons in which both language and culture are catered to, as well as producing interactive and enjoyable lessons with a broad range of activities. The girls have helped me to see that through a range of activities and with the element of curiosity and suspense I can try to create lessons where they want to translate and find out what happens next rather than lessons that they deem 'typical' Latin lessons where translation is used as 'punishment'.

What further research is needed?

This study concentrated on the views and opinions of the three selected students. It would also be useful in order to get a more rounded view of the situation and a clearer perspective to discuss such issues with other members of the class as well as with the teachers themselves. Research into how this situation is dealt with in other subjects, for example Modern Foreign Languages, may also be useful as a guide to different strategies. It would also be interesting to see if the same girls are being affected across their lessons and compare their thoughts on a range of subjects. Further research into the field of differentiation and the positive and negative effects that this can have on the students may also be required in order to obtain a broader view of this subject matter.

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Appendix 1:

Monday 23rd February. Informal conversation with Students A, B & C during their Latin lesson (5-10 minutes)

The girls' experience of Latin at their prep schools.

- They had all attended the same prep school where they were given 3x30 minute lessons per week.
- There were three groups, one top group (student A), and two middle groups (Student B & C in the same class).
- They began learning Latin in Year 5 using the Minimus book and then moved on to use the Oxford Latin Course in Year 6.

The girls' experience of Latin in School A.

When they started at School A, they began learning from the Cambridge Latin Course where they began on Stage 7.

What the girls find difficult.

Here they express that they found some parts of the text difficult for two reasons, firstly they have a 'jumbled knowledge' because the OLC AND CLC teach grammar at different stages so they found that they knew some bits of grammar but not others. They also expressed that they find some parts of translating difficult because they are working alone without a teacher.

Why they enjoyed Latin at their prep school.

They enjoyed learning Latin at their prep school because they were working at the same pace as the rest of the class and so had the opportunity to work with their friends and different members of the class. They also carried out projects where they would focus on one aspect of Roman life and learn about this. Whilst at their prep school, they also studied Greek at the end of Year 6 and took part in Latin plays.

The girls' opinions on being 'ahead' of the rest of the class.

- The girls expressed mixed opinions about whether they would like to go back and work with the rest of the class.
- Student B feels she is not learning anything.
- Students A and C are enjoying being in front of the rest of the class.
- Student B feels she would learn more if she were being taught with the rest of the class.
- Student A feels she will be bored if she had to go back over the same stories.

Appendix 2:

Diaries from Student A, B & C written after three Latin lessons.

Student A: 06/03/09

I thought the Latin lesson was really fun because everyone joined in and we dressed up. I think its better when everyone is at the same stage and are doing the same things because it's much more sociable and fun. When you are doing different things you feel isolated and depressed because everyone else is having fun. The best part of the lesson was dressing up in the togas. I don't know why but it was the best part but I felt pressured to know every word. Sometimes, I thought it was boring listening to the same thing.

Student A: 09/03/09

The lesson was quite boring. The games were interesting but I thought it was quite dull because no-one joined in. The sheets were ok but it was a normal, typical lesson. I don't like working alone. It was fun working on the smart-board because the smart-board is new and exciting. Overall, I thought it was a typical Latin lesson.

Student A: 13/03/09

It was quite fun when we did the debate because we did something other than translation. The beginning game was fun guessing if it was Greek or Roman but I felt like I did all the work though in the debate. It is more fun doing sentences with the rest of the class.

Student B: 06/03/09

I liked the combination of work and something fun. Doing the plays and dressing up was great but I though that it could have been better if there were two translation passages. Four groups, one doing English and one doing Latin, on each translation, so you weren't doing the same thing and then listening to the same thing. I liked contributing with the class but I felt pressure on me to know every word.

Student B: 09/03/09

I though today's lesson was good fun, and working on the smart board was good as well. It was fun to do something other than translation and grammar work. It was also nice to be contributing with the class. I would have liked to be doing more challenging work though, as I found myself getting distracted and losing focus rather than thinking.

Student B: 13/03/09

This lesson was fun, especially when we were doing the debate. At the beginning it was quite easy so I wasn't really focusing. The voting on which one was Greek or Roman was fun as we knew as much as the class did, not less or more. It was good also to not be doing the rest of the translation, like the class was and doing something by ourselves as well as contributing to the class in one lesson.

Student C: 06/03/09

This lesson was fun. I liked being a leader and helping the others in my group. I really enjoyed acting out the plays and dressing up in the togas. I had a fun lesson

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and enjoyed dressing up but I felt under pressure to know all the words. I also liked that everyone in the class was working on the same translation rather than us just sitting on our own doing a translation when everyone else was having fun.

Student C: 09/03/09

The lesson was ok. I had more fun when we were working with the rest of the class though. The exercises on the dative case were harder and I liked that we were given different work from the rest of the class because it makes me feel like I am ahead. The work was more difficult though but I am glad I didn't have to do more translating like everyone else.

Student C: 13/03/09

This lesson was fun because we got the chance to do something other than translation. I did like shouting out the sentences and the pictures but I felt strange being part of the class since we learnt a different order some words we don't know but they do. I liked the debate because we could interact with the rest of the class and I liked it more because I won.

Appendix 3:

Individual interviews.

Student A

1) How much have you enjoyed studying Latin in School A?

I preferred studying Latin at my prep school – I prefer how they teach the OLC but prefer the characters in the CLC. I feel that I have to do more translations than everyone else in the class and that they are catching up with us. I also feel pressure to know every word.

2) What things do you enjoy most about studying Latin?

- I enjoy translating plays and acting them out afterwards.
- Not all the time but more lessons on the people who lived in Pompeii.
- Sometimes I enjoy translating – I like pastor et leo but not controversia.
- It is fun to work on the smart board.

3) What things do you enjoy about studying Latin?

- I don't enjoy learning endings- at the prep school this wasn't fun as we just learnt columns.
- I don't like translating long boring stories that go on and on and don't really go anywhere.
- I don't like it when you have just translated a story and the teacher asks you to do the next one – you feel as though you want a break.

4) What do you consider being ahead of the rest of the class means?

I think it is that I have more experience in Latin than the others and that I understand things more than everyone else.

5) How do you feel about being ahead of the rest of the class?

I feel that it is pressurising – if no-one knows the word the teacher asks you and expects you to know the answer. I don't like being ahead of the class, I want to be with everyone else that way it is more fun and more sociable.

6) How do you feel you are perceived by the rest of the class?

Because we are ahead they may feel a bit low down because they are with the rest of the class. Sometimes they think we know everything but we don't always.

7) How does this make you feel?

This makes me feel annoyed, as though we are a helpline. If they are stuck they come to us – they don't see us as being part of the class, just someone to ask for help.

8) In an ideal world what would you like your Latin lessons to be like?

- Everyone working together.
- More dressing up – translating and acting out a play.
- Story on the smart board and we can say what will happen next.
- Maybe some easy sentences writing in Latin.
- Do something different about Pompeii, perhaps on the people themselves.

Student B

1) How much have you enjoyed studying Latin in School A?

I have enjoyed it but not as much as I did at my prep school because I liked to be one class as prep school but I don't want that here as it would be embarrassing to come down.

2) What things do you enjoy most about studying Latin?

I like studying culture, not just translating. I like breaking sentences into little bits and translating, it is quite satisfying.

3) What things do you enjoy least about studying Latin?

Student A is a bit better – more independent and likes working by herself. People think that Student C and I are not as good. I don't enjoy translation as much any more and sometimes find it tedious but I feel I have to do it to keep up. I prefer it when we work as a three.

4) What do you consider being ahead of the rest of the class means?

A couple of stages ahead. But we scrape by looking up words – not proper translation. But we do know our cases off by heart. OLC is easy and we would be ahead and have finished the book by now. The CLC is different as one moment we know what we are doing and then we are lost.

5) How do you feel about being ahead of the rest of the class?

It is nice. I like being involved with the class but it is nice to know certain things and not have to worry about them rather than just not understanding. We know some things that the others don't and they know things that we don't. I feel under pressure and don't feel as ahead now.

6) How do you feel you are perceived by the rest of the class?

I think they all think that we think we are really ahead but they don't think that we are. They are unsure of why we do different things. They just see us as the people that came from the prep school. Someone got a better mark than Student C in the end of term test and they all found it funny but it wasn't and they were annoying.

7) How does this make you feel?

Annoyed – I know that the prep school was ahead of everyone but it was a nice school – they all think it was a posh and academic school and it wasn't. It's quite nice that I can think to myself that I am a bit ahead.

8) In an ideal world what would you like your Latin lessons to be like?

- Studying the whole culture of the people as much as the language.
- Options of what to do for example translation or worksheet.
- I like working with the class but I like that I don't have to worry about what might come up.
- I would like to be working with the class here but using the OLC.

Student C

1) How much have you enjoyed studying Latin at School A?

I preferred Latin at the prep school because we were all working together. If we did something fun we all did it together. At School A when they do something fun, we are translating.

2) What things do you enjoy most about studying Latin?

I like that it is really old – that interests me. I like the Romans way of life – not the language but the people.

3) What things do you enjoy least about studying Latin?

I don't really like translation. It always feels like when everyone else is doing something fun, we are left to do translation.

4) What do you consider being ahead of the rest of the class means?

We know more. They are moving quickly but because we learnt it over three years we know it more thoroughly.

5) How do you feel about being ahead of the rest of the class?

It is fun being better than everyone. It will be weird when everyone catches up – although we will still be doing the same thing so we will still know it better than them.

6) How do you feel you are perceived by the rest of the class?

People who are my friends ...if I get something wrong, they laugh because I should know it. I am not as good as student A and B. If we work with the rest of the class and I fall behind it will be weird. People who aren't my friends don't take any notice.

7) How does this make you feel?

I don't care if they find it funny. It will feel weird to me falling behind. I am worried about it getting harder and not having time to go back over it. Because the prep school was ahead in most subjects I can relax now – it will be a shock when I have to start learning new things.

8) In an ideal world what would you like your Latin lessons to be like?

- I would like the lessons to move slower so there is time to go back over things.
- I think the lessons at School A are fun and I enjoyed dressing up.
- I would like to do more about the culture, not just the language.

Appendix 4:

Key points raised in the focus group interview.

- Student A & B: preferred Latin at prep school.
Student C: we did plays.
Student A: We had to do translations all the time but we were allowed to discuss the translation with the people around us.
Student B: I don't like to be silent when translating – everyone else in the class is chatting but we get told off if we talk when they are going through things.
Student C: There are more aspects that are better here – not so much pressure in exams.

All three girls again express a preference to the OLC- they feel it is more challenging and prefer the structure of the course.

- Student A: I think I prefer the CLC, I like the characters.
Student C: The CLC is boring. The rest of the class are all doing fun things together and are chatting and we get told off if we talk.
Student A: At the prep school I was all about exams. Our teacher read us the Iliad in Latin – it was so boring.
Student C: We prefer the prep school because there were different characters in our class that brightened up the lessons.
Student B: I do like Latin here – we do fun things.
Student A: There is something different about Latin here, I don't know why but I preferred it at the prep school.