

A case study exploring what preconceptions primary school pupils have about the learning of Latin and the Classical world and how teachers are to adapt teaching to correct or consolidate preconceived knowledge.

“Everyone, it would seem, has something to say about the value, or otherwise, of learning Latin. Some feel it is totally out of fashion; others feel, nevertheless, that rather like cod-liver oil it is "good" for one, if a little unpleasant” (Cross, 1996).

The aim of the research that I carried out was to observe and determine the preconceptions that pupils have about Latin. The purpose of this was to reflect and then consider the way in which teaching styles and content in lessons may have to be adapted to correct or consolidate such preconceived knowledge, both in my own teaching and also for Classics teaching in general. Although Latin is most commonly introduced at secondary level, my research was based on primary pupils who were given the chance to study Latin. This was in order that the research could be narrowed down to a particular comprehensive level and to engage with an age range that is so receptive and willing to learn in their early stages of academic development. The primary schools opt for Latin and I was interested to find out why they chose this and how the students reacted to the prospect.

An additional reason for carrying out this research in the context of my placement was due to the opportunity presented by a Latin outreach programme set up between the secondary and a local primary school. The

reasons for this programme were mainly due to the fact that my placement school has obtained Language college status. Consequently, as part of their extra funding and responsibility to provide services for the wider community, such primary outreach programmes in both Latin and Modern foreign languages were set up. A primary school would be allocated a total of five sessions lasting approximately half an hour. All resources were provided by the secondary school, which included text books, exercise sheets and enticing objects such as white chocolate mice. This research will be based on one such school that had introductory Latin lessons, taught by the head of Classics at my placement secondary school, over a period of five weeks.

In this research I have drawn upon four areas of focus for collecting data through the process of interviews. The four sets of sources used were: the Primary Teacher, the Secondary School Head of Classics that was teaching the Latin lessons, two Year 9 pupils, and two small groups of primary pupils from the class in Year 6. The primary teacher was given questions regarding her experiences with Latin, the classical world and other languages in general, how she taught the history syllabus which included the Romans and Ancient Greeks, what her thoughts were on Latin and how it could be incorporated, if at all, into the primary curriculum. The head of Classics was asked questions regarding the teaching of beginners Latin, the preconceptions that she has to deal with and how she adapts her teaching to overcome such thoughts. Two Year 9 students were asked questions concerning their reactions to studying Latin at primary level and the reasons behind continuing with the subject. Finally, the primary pupils were the main focus and were asked their opinions about Latin and the classical world,

where they got their information from, what they had studied before and whether they thought the Latin lessons were what they expected. As a result, the overall theme of this research is based on the preconceptions of pupils about the Classical world and Latin in particular, which has been investigated by means of examining primary outreach programmes set up between the schools.

If Classics is to have an encouraging future in schools, teachers need to make sure it is made accessible to pupils of all abilities. This can be largely achieved through their delivery of the subject, with lessons that provide kinaesthetic, interactive and varied activities. It is important to develop the different learning styles of students using diverse modes of teaching and the abundance of resources that are available to present information through a variety of educational activities. Also, it is important to present Classics not only as a subject that can help pupils' general education due to its significant links to other areas of the curriculum, but also as one that can increase understanding of the wider world, with its bearing on societies and cultures.