An investigation into the effectiveness on long term memorisation of learning Latin vocabulary through English derivations, with a year 9 class in a Comprehensive School.

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An investigation into the benefit of learning Latin vocabulary through English derivations with a year 9 class in a comprehensive school.. Will Fagg 25/05/2011.

Introduction.

During the course of my teaching career to date, it has been abundantly clear that vocabulary acquisition has been a barrier to achievement for a vast number of students. This was certainly the case when I entered my PP2 placement. My initial observation showed me that when students from each year group would come across a word that they did not know, they would simply give up on the sentence, rather than make an educated guess. Those who would look a word up in the dictionary or the back of a text book would lose their train of thought, and have no concept on what was happening in the story as a whole.

Furthermore, traditional methods of encouraging students to learn vocabulary out of class time were not working. Vocabulary tests were being set as homework, and a vast number of children were simply not learning them, and it tended to be the same students each time. I therefore decided that a study on vocabulary learning would be entirely suitable, and I took the decision to focus on what effect encouraging students to use English derivatives would have on their acquisition, and retention of Latin vocabulary. I decided to focus on just one particular method of learning vocabulary, as I did not believe that making a comparison of different styles would provide any firm conclusions.

Research questions

1. Is there any evidence to suggest that learning Latin vocabulary through the study of derivations has any discernable effect on long term memorisation?

Anderson and Jordan (1928) had done substantial research on this, but I was keen to find out whether anything had changed. Their research was done in a vastly different era, where students would have enjoyed a vastly different style of teaching. Dare I say their grasp of English vocabulary may have also been higher?

2. How do students go about learning vocabulary?

Through a number of methods, I wanted to know how students were learning vocabulary. I wanted to carry this research out through observation, via a questionnaire, and by interviewing a sample of students. I will explain this further in my methodology and method sections.

3.. Do students' results improve if vocabulary learning is undertaken in class, rather than outside of it?

As I have stated, motivation for learning vocabulary has proven to be limited in all of the schools that I have worked at, especially if the task is set as a homework. The more diligent students will make the effort to learn it, whereas others will spend limited time on it, or simply not do it at all. I was convinced that in my chosen class, given the number of relatively hard working (at least in class time) girls in the group that learning vocabulary in class would have some benefit.

4. Are there any particular methods of making vocabulary learning fun and interesting, even for disaffected or disinterested students?

Much research has been undertaken as to how to engage the disinterested student. Making tasks more fun, buy giving the students greater ownership of the task was something that I wanted to examine, but equally I was conscious that giving rewards for good work was not in conjunction with school policy.

Why derivations?

The study of English derivations of Latin words has always fascinated me, and I have always considered that my knowledge of Latin has expanded my English vocabulary. Furthermore, in a previous school I tutored some year eight students for their entrance examinations, and they found that using derivations helped them greatly in their retention of Latin vocabulary. It is also a technique that I have been using successfully with my year eleven, low ability students that are currently studying for the WJEC exam.

My challenge was to make this useful for a larger group, knowing that it had been successful previously with smaller groups.

In my experience, students found the study of derivations to be an extremely useful and interesting exercise. Evidently in a class where Latin is compulsory, there will inevitably be a proportion of students, no matter how small, that will not enjoy the subject, and see little point in learning it. However, pointing out a vast array of everyday English words have their roots in Latin words has, in my experience, given even disengaged pupils an interest in the subject, and they almost seem surprised that so many English words come from Latin.

The school

My PP2 School is a mixed, non-selective comprehensive school in Essex. The number on the roll is 1030. Latin is not compulsory for any student, but all of them have the opportunity to study it when they enter the school. Between twenty and thirty students study the subject in the first three years, but the numbers drop fairly dramatically in years ten and eleven. Currently six have chosen the subject in year ten, and around fifteen have opted for it in year

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eleven. In year eleven, there are three lower ability students who are taking the WJEC exam. There are also currently two students who are studying for A2 Latin. The school is a specialist language college, and Latin is part of the modern language faculty. Even before the invention of the English Baccalaureate, all students were required to learn a modern language. Interestingly, they do not allow students to exclusively study Latin, and they must do it alongside French or Italian. No other Classical subjects are taught, either on or off timetable.

The class

I chose a mixed ability year nine class for my study, containing twenty one girls, and nine boys. This is the only Latin class in year nine. I felt that this was the most suitable class to study, given that the range of abilities in the group is substantial, but they are largely a diligent, enthusiastic group. This group have been studying Latin for nearly three years, and are currently close to completing book two of the Cambridge Latin Course. They enjoy three hours of Latin teaching every two weeks, and twelve of the students (eleven girls and one boy) have taken the decision to carry on the subject next year. Inevitably this had the potential to cause problems, with eighteen students having chosen to give the subject up at the end of May, when their new option choices come into effect. However, the year eight class are in a similar situation, having just mad option choices, and I wanted to choose a large group for the study. It made sense to choose the group who had been studying Latin for longer, as their translation and vocabulary learning skills are hopefully more developed.

The teacher does not choose to focus too closely on grammar and vocabulary learning. She has worked at the school for a number of years, and through experience has seen that if she concentrates too much on grammar, many of the students become quickly disengaged, or daunted by it. She is also a firm

believer in the Cambridge Latin course, and believes that vocabulary and grammar acquisition develops through reading the stories. When we discussed the potential topic, she was very keen that I did some vocabulary work in class, as she was evidently aware that some of the class were not completing the homework tasks, especially when a vocabulary test was set.

Literature review.

Vocabulary retention of English equivalents of Latin Words.

Anderson and Jordan (1928) carried out substantial research into the acquisition and retention of English equivalents of Latin words. They studied a class of around thirty pupils, all of them around twelve or thirteen years old. Their study attempted to study how quickly students forgot the English equivalent of the Latin word, and whether there was any correlation between the rate of forgetting words and standard intelligence. Their study was undertaken with students who had no previous knowledge whatsoever of Latin, and the material comprised the two hundred and fifty most common words of Caesar, which was taken wholly out of context. They grouped their words into three sections. The first contained words that were identical in meaning; the second had words that were closely associated with an English derivative, and the third comprised words that were completely unrelated to the English, so called "non associative words".

They point out that it was essential that the given derivatives were intelligible to the child, and therefore any word that was given that was not understood may be more of a hindrance than an aid.

Their study was taken over an eight week period, and recollection of the words from each group was recorded. Unsurprisingly, the identical words were remembered the best, with the associative words second, and the non-associative words a distant last.

Their research included a questionnaire, establishing whether they believed that the derivative words helped them, and all but two of their study agreed that it had been of some benefit, adding the caveat: "sometimes it helped, and sometimes it hurt".

Evidently times have changed somewhat since Anderson and Jordan conducted their research. Students were more used to such an intense focus on language in the 1920s, and I think you would be met with glum faces if you presented an enormous list of words from Caesar to a classroom today. But the value of giving unknown words to children is a concept that I shall explore in my methodology chapter.

Engaging the students

Nation (1988) offers a number of techniques that can help to engage the disinterested student. He suggests making it difficult for the student to find the meaning of the word, and making it harder for the student to connect to the meaning and the form of the word. He adds that the teacher should not always supply the form and meaning of the word directly to the learner, thus encouraging him or her to use their own interpretive abilities to find the answer to the problem. Turning the task into a game therefore can be a technique that may help to engage the less able or interested student. He also suggests that students should be encouraged not to give up by offering a

sense of reward at the end of the task, or by encouraging students to be competitive. In essence, Nation suggests that teachers must be creative with their tasks in order to engage the students in vocabulary acquisition.

Nation makes some valuable points in his study. Classes will always contain students who lack motivation to learn vocabulary, and therefore finding ways to engage the students is of paramount importance. Rewarding a child for a piece of good work, or even a positive oral contribution is something that we try to do in the target school. Even something as simple as being put on the "praise board" is something that visibly pleases even the most disruptive students.

St Clair Otten (2003) discovered similar problems to the ones that I have encountered in my career so far. She found that students were simply not completing any work out of class time, let alone studying for vocabulary tests. Even the more friendly way that the Americans refer to tests and quizzes did not inspire the students to prepare in a more thorough manner! She surveyed one hundred and sixteen students, asking them how long they studied for a vocabulary test, and was shocked to discover that sixty five percent studied for ten minutes or less. Again, she discovered that more interactive methods were more enjoyable for the students. She encouraged them to develop their own strategies of learning vocabulary, and like Nation, suggested a competitive element should be employed.

Giving the students ownership of the vocabulary learning task was something I was keen to explore. Evidently my study focussed on one particular method of vocabulary learning, but within that I was keen for each student to come up with their own derivations, and not trying to prompt them towards any particular words myself.

The idea that competition needs to be added is a recurring concept in the research literature that I have read. I decided that it would be outside of

school policy to physically give rewards to my students, but I was keen to reward them with praise points, or even merits if they were deserved.

Vocabulary learning in context

Much has been written about the value of learning vocabulary in context. Ching-yi Lin (2008) devotes an entire chapter of his thesis in the definition of "word". Naturally he is concerned with German vocabulary, and as Latinists we do not have the problem of homonyms. But evidently Latin words, even at year nine level, can have different meanings. The word "*ubi*" was causing a great deal of problems for my GCSE short course students at another institution. The students had learned *ubi* to mean when, and were struggling to make sense of a sentence where it was more appropriate to translate it as "where".

Despite the palpable benefits of learning vocabulary in context, I considered that the most suitable way of learning vocabulary for this study was to give them words that initially they had not seen before. This was in conjunction with Anderson and Jordan's research.

<u>Conclusion from the literature review</u>

Having studied a variety of books and articles in depth, I was convinced that Anderson and Jordan's research methods could be adapted to suit the class that I had chosen. My challenge was to engage the students, and make it relatively entertaining for them, whilst still obtaining verifiable and meaningful data. Both Nation and St Clair Otten had conducted research that proved useful, and both gave me ideas as to how the disengaged student may be kept interested in the tasks.

Methodology

Observation

Observation was vitally important as a research process. I was still fairly new to the school, and therefore had no real concept of how the pupils worked in their environment, and the way that they went about learning vocabulary in particular. There were several aspects of the classroom environment that I planned to observe, in order to get to know the class and their learning patterns as thoroughly as possible. As a trainee teacher in particular, one spends a lot of time observing lessons, but if one is not focussed on a particular area, often one learns very little from observation. What was of particular interest to me was what the students were doing when they were having their five to ten minutes of time learning their vocabulary. Were the two girls who claimed to be testing each other actually on task? Was the demeanour of the teacher helping or hindering the children to work quietly? Was there a significant number of children who were simply covering up the English side of the page, and trying to learn the Latin that way? I also wanted to see if particular students were proving a distraction to others when learning the vocab. If in class vocabulary learning was to be a useful exercise for the majority of the group, I wanted to see if there were any members of the class that were a distraction to this.

The questionnaire

The benefits of using a questionnaire to obtain data are that, if constructed properly, they provide simple, easy to analyse data. If one makes the questionnaire anonymous, then students are more likely to give honest responses. I chose to use a questionnaire therefore as a way of ascertaining how long each student was spending on vocabulary learning, and what methods they believed were the most suitable for learning it.

Questionnaires can take a number of forms, but need to be structured and worded suitably in order for any useful data to be extracted from them. I noted from my methodology research that a sample size of 30 is "held by many to

be the minimum number of cases if researchers plan to use some kind of statistical analysis on their date" (Cohen, Manion & Morrision, 2007, p 101). Evidently my class numbered thirty, and so was on the small side. Unfortunately with only one class per year group, there was no chance for me to gain any further relevant data.

What type of questionnaire should be used? Cohen et al compare the benefits of so called closed and open questionnaires (Cohen, Manion & Morrision, 2007, p 321). They comment that the benefit of closed questionnaires is that those surveyed already have the answers in front of them. They are also quick to complete, and straightforward to code. They also do not rely on any spoken or written articulation from the sample. Open questionnaires can lead to irrelevant and redundant information, and also run the risk of being spoilt or not taken seriously. Given the nature and age of my targets, I considered that a closed questionnaire would be the most suitable method of gaining responses, for those reasons.

Cohen et al also comment on the benefit of multiple choice questions (Cohen, Manion & Morrision, 2007, p 323). They comment that "the categories would have to be discrete (i.e. having no overlap and being mutually exclusive) and would have to exhaust the possible range of responses." They point out the drawbacks of the methodology, however. They point out that "The multiple choice questionnaire seldom gives more than a crude statistic, for words are inherently ambiguous." (Cohen, Manion & Morrision, 2007, p 324). The questionnaire would therefore have to be carefully formed in order to obtain some meaningful data. I decided that all of the students should be given the questionnaire, given that my sample was fairly small anyway.

The words

Nation's (1988) suggestion that students may relish the chance to find their own derivations or cognates for Latin words was something that I was keen to explore. I was aware that to come up with their own English derivations from

Latin words required the students to have a substantial English vocabulary. However, I believed that giving ownership of the task to the students was something that they might relish, if only for novelty value. I was also sure that if they learnt the words off other members of the class, they would be more likely to remember them, rather than if I had simply given them to them myself. It was therefore important to add time for the class to come together to discuss the words that they had found, and to compile a class list.

The tests

Fundamentally, it was vital to obtain some verifiable data to see whether vocabulary learning through derivations had any long term affect on the memorisation of particular words. The tests carried out by Anderson and Jordan seemed to me to be suitable models to use. Evidently their students had no Latin whatsoever, so I decided that the best test would be to give students words that they were initially unfamiliar with. I decided that I would give the students the same test three times. Anderson and Jordan's methodology (1928) suggested that the test should be taken in week 1, week 2, and week five, so I followed this model. I decided that using the same test would be important, and did not want to adapt it at all, even the order of the words. I believed that any slight alterations, no matter how small, may have altered the eventual data. Anderson and Jordan

The interview

Having obtained straightforward, easily manageable data from the questionnaires, I wanted to use a method of data collection that would focus more on the thoughts of the individual, rather than simply carrying out another

multiple choice survey. I believed that the students would relish the task of being interviewed, even if it was merely because it would be something that they would not have been used to in their everyday school lives.

The purposes of the interview can be many and varied. It can gather information and personal responses. It can also challenge perceptions. In the case of vocabulary acquisition, I had a fair idea of what the results of the quantitative research would show, given what I had read in Anderson and Jordan's research. But I was wholly unsure of how the students would react to the method of using derivations to help them learn vocabulary. I was convinced therefore that an informal interview, in a small group would give me the type of honest response and feedback that I was looking for. Evidently vocabulary learning is an extremely personal thing. It is impossible to teach a student how they should learn vocabulary, as all students will learn in slightly different ways. I believed that an interview would give me a good insight into how the students had reacted to a particular method.

The biggest problem I faced was how to put the interview together, and how to construct the questions, if at all. Three different types of interview are outlined in Cohen's chapter on interviews ((Cohen, Manion & Morrision, 2007, p 353). I decided that the so-called interview guide approach would be the most suitable, give the age and spread of abilities in my class. Characteristics of this type of interview are that topics and issues are covered in advance. The interviewer decides the topics and issues that are covered before the session, but the sequence of questions can be changed depending on the direction in which the interview goes. This maintains informality to the proceedings, allowing the interviewees to feel relaxed, but keeps structured questions, so that data and clear responses can be recorded. I believed this to be preferable to so called closed quantitative interviews, as this removes any kind of personal element to the questions, and limits the interviewees' response choices.

Method

My research took place over a six-week period, including an initial period of focussed observation. I was keen to watch a lesson where students had been set vocabulary as homework, and to see how they went about learning the vocabulary in the five minutes that they were allotted at the start of the lesson. I wondered whether any of them would have made flashcards, or any other lists that may have made the words easier for them to learn. I was also keen to look at previous test scores. The permanent teacher gives out a booklet to each student at the beginning of the year, and the students always undertake their tests in this booklet. I was keen to see the scores that they had been achieving in general over the course of the year. And whether there was a general trend of results. It was also important to look at a sample of their exercise books, to see whether it was merely vocabulary tests that were not taken seriously, or whether it was homework in general. The books seemed to show a clear discrepancy between the works that the students were doing in class, and work their homework. Classwork in general was completed diligently, and neatly. Work was underlined, and learning objectives copied down. Homework was invariably rushed and scruffy, with little care and attention taken.

The second task was to give the students a questionnaire, designed to establish how each student learns vocabulary; why they feel that vocabulary learning was important; and whether they thought that learning vocabulary in class time was more valuable than setting it as a homework task. I also wanted to find out how long students spent on vocabulary learning, when set as homework. I encouraged the students to be as honest as possible, and I considered that the best way to do this would be to anonymise the scripts. This would ensure that students would be more likely to write what they really believed, knowing that there would be no repercussions on them. I decided to make the students aware that this research would be part of a project that I

was undertaking for University. I was largely unsure what effect this would have! But I considered that if they felt that they were doing something for a reason other than for their own benefit, they may try harder!

My next task was to collect data. I decided that I was going to give the students half a lesson on the concept of derivations, and their understandings of what the term implied, simply to get them to think about how they might be useful in terms of learning vocabulary.

In lesson one, all of the students were given a list of fifteen words. I wondered whether it would have been more useful to give them more words than this, but eventually decided that the process may become tedious for them if they were to be given a vast list of words. They are used to being given fifteen words, and therefore decided that this would be appropriate for the study. I gave them a paper copy, and I put the words onto the interactive whiteboard, along with instructions. Students were given initially the Latin word in column A, and the English in column B. Column C was left blank, for them to write an English word/phrase alongside which would help them remember the meaning of the Latin. I gave them the example at the top of the sheet (see appendix A)

The rest of the words were all taken from chapter 16 of the Cambridge Latin Course. Following on from Anderson and Jordan's research, I decided to set them vocabulary that they were entirely unfamiliar with. This ensured that the less able students, or those with a less good memory were not at a disadvantage, and made for a fairer experiment. Evidently my class are not complete novices as Anderson and Jordan's were, but I was keen to see if they remembered this vocabulary when they encountered them in the later stories. I gave the students fifteen minutes to come up with their own English derivatives or cognates. Students were allowed to work in pairs, sharing their ideas, which made the task less intimidating to those who may have struggled with a new concept. I also wanted to give them as much help as possible, so I decided that I should circulate the room, and offer helpful hints where

required. We then discussed their words or phrases orally as a class, and compiled our own table of derivations. I wanted the students to be able to keep their own cognates or derivations, and was therefore not insistent that the students copied the class list. That was merely there to fill in any gaps, and to get the students thinking about the words. The students undertook the task enthusiastically. I then gave them fifteen minutes to look over the words, and I tested them at the end of the lesson, giving them a sheet that was identical to the first sheet, other than that the English meaning had been removed from column B. This test was informal, and merely served as a plenary. I saw no point in formally testing them at this stage, given that we had been discussing the words throughout the lesson, and the words were so fresh in their minds, that the majority would have a good memory of the meanings of the words.

Having read Anderson and Jordan's methodology, I decided against grouping the words into the three categories that they chose. Whilst I understand their methodology, I believed that the results would merely show very similar readings to those that they had come up with. It was manifest to me that the majority of the identical words would be recalled better than the associative and non-associative words. This was not the focus of my study. The only way that I decided to group the words was in terms of the function of the words. Whenever I set vocabulary tests, I have a group of nouns, a group of verbs, and a group of "others". I find that this is an effective method of getting the students to think of the function of words, and not just the meaning.

It was imperative to set the students the same vocabulary test at the start of the next lesson. The second lesson was five days later, and I wanted to test the students' recall all of the words that they had learnt in the previous lesson. I decided that I was not going to inform the students that they were to have a test on the vocabulary, as evidently this would have rewarded the more diligent students. I also decided that I was not going to give them any time before the test, as I wanted to see how much they could recall, and whether the derivations had proved to be any use to them. In my analysis, this will be referred to as the week one test.

Following Anderson and Jordan's methodology, I decided to set the test on two further occasions. The first occasion was in the following week, but not in the next lesson. The final occasion was three weeks later. I believed this would be the perfect way of seeing whether the technique had worked, given that in my experience, students tend to forget words after a month or so, if they are going to at all.

In between these three vocabulary tests, I wanted to see whether the students could transfer these skills, and be able to recognise and translate the words in a short story. I therefore asked them to do a short translation from the Cambridge Latin Course, in which several words with English derivatives appeared. This would test the usefulness of learning vocabulary through derivations, as well as seeing if vocabulary learning out of context can ever be a transferable skill for the majority of students.

My final piece of research took the form of an interview with six students, in two groups of three. The purpose of this was to see if they believed that the method of learning vocabulary through derivations was useful to them, and to find out whether they considered that they may use it in the future. I wanted to pick a random sample of the class, so I tore up my form list, and pulled six names out of a hat. I considered that six was a good number to choose, representing around one fifth of the class. I did not want to interview them individually, as this can be intimidating for less confident students, particularly as I was still a relatively new face to them, particularly as the split nature of my placement means that I miss one of their bi weekly lessons. I also didn't want to interview them as a group of six, as interviewing a larger groups means that some individuals may not be heard or be able to express their opinions clearly. I chose not to record the interview, and used my journalistic shorthand skills instead. In my experience, children especially do not express their true feelings when they know they are being recorded.

Drawbacks of the methodology

With a large class, I believe that the results tend not to prove a great deal, especially with such a small sample (only three tests), and it may have been better to do a comparative study to see which methods produced the better results. In general, it is likely that the more able students will do better than the less able ones, but this would have been easier to prove with a comparative study, rather than a simple look into derivations.

I believe that a more conclusive study would be to encourage students to write a list of words from a story that they have been studying, rather than to make them learn from a list. Vocabulary learning in context is a more valuable skill, and would allow the students to take full ownership of the task, rather than simply write their own derivations.

This kind of research, I believe, should also be undertaken over several months, rather than just a few weeks. Evidently it would be hard to compress a large sample into 8000 words, but if one wanted to see genuine progression with a method, then one would need to train the brains of the students towards it, and inevitably this would take time. One would evidently need to adapt the task. Students would become bored with undertaking the same activity regularly, and therefore one would have to come up with different methods of motivating them, whether by a reward system, or by offering different activities on the same theme.

Finally, evidently the purpose of this was to give the children the opportunity to think about English derivations of Latin words, and to allow them the chance to use the method if they wanted to. Evidently there is no right or wrong way to learn vocabulary, and we all learn it in different ways. But perhaps it would have been better to offer an alternative, or allow them to actually devise their own methods.

Findings and analysis

Questionnaire

The questionnaire was designed to establish, anonymously, the whole class's attitude towards vocabulary learning. In question A, students were asked to tick a box to establish how long they spent learning vocabulary. The options were:

a) between 0 and 5 minutes
b) between 5 and 10 minutes
c) between 10 minutes and half an hour
d) more than half an hour.

Out of the 28 student surveyed (two were absent that day), 3 chose option A; 16 chose option B; 8 chose option C, and 1 chose option D. Students in year 9 are meant to spend twenty five minutes on their homework, and it was clear from previous results that the majority were not doing this. This proved to me that focussed sessions on vocabulary learning in class time would be beneficial.

Question B asked the students what they considered to be the best way of learning vocabulary. They were given five options:

a) By looking over the words, and then covering up the English meanings.
b) By writing the words down in a random order/making flashcards
c) By learning with a partner and testing each other
d) Using the online vocabulary tester on the CSCP website
e) Other: please specify.

None of the students chose another method other than the first four that I provided. 16 out of the 28 students chose option A; 6 chose B; 2 chose C, and 4 chose option D.

These results were initially surprising to me, but then I had previously been a boarding house tutor, where students regularly tested each other, and also used the online tester during prep. Having done the questionnaire anonymously, it was difficult to tell whether the students who chose the last three methods were the more effective at learning vocabulary. Evidently one should not suggest that any method of learning vocabulary is incorrect, but in my experience few succeed with the "look at words and cover up method".

<u>Results of the quantitative research</u>

The best scores were obtained in week one, and they got progressively worse in weeks two and three. On average, students remembered 82% of the words in week one (roughly twelve out of 15). By week two, the students had remembered 76.4% of words, and by week five, they had remembered around 62% of the words on average.

The table below shows the scores of the thirty students in the class surveys, and how their scores depreciated over time. What was extraordinarily remarkable is that all thirty students were present for all three tests!

Student	week 1	week 2	week 5
1	9	9	7
2	11	11	10
3	14	13	12
4	14	12	11
5	8	7	7
6	12	11	11
7	13	12	10
8	11	11	8
9	15	15	15
10	11	11	11
11	14	13	13
12	12	10	10
13	11	8	8
14	14	14	10
15	11	10	10
16	15	15	15
17	10	9	8
18	12	11	10
19	14	12	12
20	13	13	12
21	11	12	11
22	6	6	6
23	14	13	12

24	12	12	12
25	14	13	10
26	15	14	14
27	15	13	13
28	11	11	11
29	14	13	14
30	12	10	9
average	12.3	11.5	10.4

Words that were best remembered.

Inevitably, some words were remembered better than others, and this was perhaps the most interesting part of the study. I expected words the words with identical meanings to be the best remembered, and this proved to be the case. *Pereo* was remembered by all bar one student, in all three tests. Other words that were remembered by over 90% of students included *flos, summus, punio,* and *navigo.* As Anderson and Jordan suggest (page 2) there is absolutely no surprise in this. These words all have strong links to English words, with almost identical meanings in the case of the last three.

The least well remembered words were *melior,* and *consilum. Melior* was the word that I had to supply a derivation for, as none of them, unsurprisingly for year nine students, could come up with "ameliorate". For *consilium*, our whole class derivation was "counsel", and it was presumably the case that students found it hard to relate plan to "counsel".

Best and least well remembered words

Best   (85-95%)   **Least (below 50%)**

Punio   melior

Pereo   consilium

Summus   Verto

Mater

bonus

55-65%

Delecto

Navigo

Bonus

Imperator

Auxilium

inter

Which pupils did best?

The fact that the students were unaware that they were to have a vocabulary test, and that it required no out of class learning, provided some intriguing results. In general, the high ability students, and those with the highest target grades for the term achieved the highest results, and had the least depreciation of scores. Students at the school are given target grades for

each subject at the beginning of the school year, and at the beginning of the summer term. They are given an achieved grade at the end of the lent term. I won't explain the levels in detail, but the range of abilities in the class ranges from a low level 5 (there are three standards within each grade) to a high level 7, which is a substantial spread of abilities. The majority of the class are on nearer 7 than 5, however.

However, three students who have target grades of 6, which is low, achieved more than 10 out of 15 each time. This demonstrates that removing vocabulary learning from homework was certainly beneficial for some students. The fact that they were forced to learn the vocabulary in class time, and that any distractions were removed was wholly beneficial.

Students' experience of vocabulary learning.

A week after my final lesson, I picked out six students at random to interview regarding vocabulary learning strategies, with particular focus on the technique of learning through derivations. I interviewed them in two groups of three. I felt this was a more effective method than interviewing them as a larger group, which can be intimidating for less confident students.

Firstly, we discussed the benefits of studying vocabulary in class time. Five of the pupils acknowledged that there were palpable benefits to it. Comments included:

"I prefer it. When I do it at home, I don't concentrate as well, and find it hard to remember the words"

"Yes because you have to do it. I just watch TV at home".

"It was better because you were there to help us"

Lack of high quality homework is a problem at the school. Whilst there are expectations that homework should be completed on time, and to a good level, the punishment for not completing the task is not a deterrent. However, the students tend to work diligently in class time, especially in from year 9 upwards. The responses of the children tend to suggest that students have the expectation that they will work hard in class, but not outside.

Interestingly the highest ability student was less certain of its benefits:

"I found some of the people in the class distracting, and am happier learning at home or in the library".

Evidently some of the more hard working students are likely to prefer to work at home, where they do not have the distraction of a disinterested counterpart.

Students were asked why they thought that they are asked to learn vocabulary. Results predictably were fairly generic, with little deviation.

"So we can understand text easier"

"So that things are easier and faster to translate"

Student's perceptions of why they were asked to learn vocabulary were less cynical than I was expecting, and it would have been interesting to guage the

responses from my rather less engaged year 8 class! Essentially, if students see a purpose to doing a task, they are more likely to undertake it more seriously.

I asked the students how effective they found their work with derivations, and how useful they thought it was in terms of remembering the vocabulary over time. Their comments were again mixed, including:

"Some words look like English words, but others don't. So maybe it's useful for some and not others".

"I found it a bit confusing. I hadn't heard of some of the English words that you gave us".

"I enjoyed it. It encouraged us to think about English words, and it did help me remember them. Also knowing French helps with words like "est" and "et".

This kind of mixed response was not necessarily unexpected. Different students will always learn in different ways, and I was acutely aware that some students would not have the English vocabulary skills to be able to work out their own derivations. The task was meant to give them the opportunity to learn vocabulary in a different way, and therefore it certainly was successful, even if four or five found that it was a good way for them to learn words.

Finally, I asked the pupils what their preferred method of learning vocabulary was after our sessions, and whether they would carry on the work with derivations.

"I still prefer to learn with a partner, to get my sister to test me works best for me". Hearing the Latin helps me see the words in my mind"

""It is really helpful, and I would like to keep doing it for other vocab tests. I doesn't matter if it doesn't work for every words, and it is fun making your own cognates"

"I think I would use it, but it doesn't work with every word".

"It is really helpful, and I would like to continue doing that".

"I prefer to learn on the computer, or by drawing pictures, but it did help for some words.".

"I like it. It doesn't matter if there isn't an English word that is like it, as long as the word or phrase helps you remember it".

Clearly students enjoyed the task, and some found it less useful. Again, this was consistent with the predictions that I made whilst carrying out my initial research.

I posed the question, did you enjoy taking ownership of the task, and coming up with your own derivations or cognates? Comments included:

"yeah it was fun to play with words, and to come up with our own ways of remembering words".

"well, we were still in the classroom, so enjoy might not be the right word!" But yeah it was good to do something different".

" I think it was fun but I wouldn't want to do it every time"

The final quotation represents an inevitable response that we as teachers face. Students enjoy variety, and inevitably if they are faced with a similar task each week, they will begin to lose concentration, and enjoy the task less and less. Novelty value certainly played a part in their enjoyment of the initial task, but you could see their enthusiasm waning when they had to undertake the same vocabulary test three times. I therefore asked my interviewees whether they thought there was any merit, from their perspective, in doing the same test several times:

"I guess you were trying to see what we had remembered, but I didn't enjoy doing it!"

"Not really. I had forgotten a lot of the words…. You could have told us that we were having the tests"

This last comment is wholly significant. Some students are extrinsically motivated by the idea of rewards, or achievement, and this dictates whether the student will revise for a test, and for how long. Others would prefer not to know that they were having the test, as it puts them on an even playing field, meaning that the more diligent students do not have an advantage over them. In the end of stage twelve attainment tests, from the Cambridge Latin Course a number of the students who invariably perform poorly in vocabulary tests outperformed some of their more diligent counterparts.

The students' reaction to the method was mixed, though in general the majority saw some benefit to it, even though the general caveat was that there isn't always an immediately obvious English derivation. This is no surprise, evidently. The majority of year nine students do not have sufficient knowledge of English vocabulary to derive an English word from the corresponding Latin word. This was the reason that why I decided that the derivations would be initially discussed in class, both in terms of the paired work, and also the whole class discussion, i.e. the class list of derivations that we compiled for the list of words.

Conclusions.

The main conclusion that can be drawn from this study is that the intense in class vocabulary learning that we did had some benefits. The structured, supervised nature of the lessons forced the students to think of English derivations, and the results of the tests that I set them were positive, and increased their average test scores considerably. Inevitably, one has to conclude that no one particular style of vocabulary learning suits every child. Some children will, of course, prefer to learn visually; some would rather learn from the online vocabulary testers, and a small minority are capable of learning a page of vocabulary simply by looking at the words on a page, and memorising them. But the results show that the method increased their average test scores, even if it did not conclusively prove that the use of English derivations was the reason behind it.

It was clear that the students relished the chance to devise their own derivations and or cognates. It gave them ownership of the task, and the vast majority of students came up with some excellent responses. I was keen to reinforce to the students that a wide range of English vocabulary was not required for this task. The main aim was to encourage them to invent their own ways of acquiring vocabulary skills, which would help them when translating a passage of Latin.

Evidently the results show that there was a greater recall of the vocabulary in week one than there was in week two, and students had forgotten even more of it in week five, and was entirely in conjunction with what Anderson and Jordan had predicted (page 2).

Words that were best remembered were ones that had a clear resemblance to an English word. Words with associative meanings were remembered by some students, and words with non associative meanings were remembered by a few. Again, this is entirely consistent with Anderson and Jordan's findings. In future lessons therefore I would really encourage the students to think of their own ways of remembering words, even if no English derivation was obvious to them. One girl did this successfully, remembering words by association. When she explained the method to me, I had no idea what she was talking about, (!) but she scored 14, 12 and 12 in her three tests, which was higher than average. Interestingly, she was not one of the students with a high target grade, and she tends to score around 10 or 11 on her vocabulary tests.

Students seemed to enjoy the task, but I do wonder whether this was merely novelty value. If we did this once a week, I think they would find it mundane. I would certainly devote lass time to vocabulary learning, however, but I would

allow the students to learn in their own way, rather than simply by derivations. There is no particular benefit in instructing students how to learn vocabulary, but it is essential to make as many different methods as possible available to them to facilitate their learning.

Gaining feedback from the students was an important part of the study, and I believe that the methodology was appropriate. The questionnaire gave me date from the whole class, whilst the interviews allowed me to gain more detailed feedback from a small spread of students. It is essential that students see benefit in the activities that they are doing. When students do not see a discernable improvement in their results, many will become disillusioned with it quickly. Students must also enjoy the task, and the feedback that I received suggested that they did.

A drawback of this study was that, in retrospect, I should have made a comparison with another method of vocabulary learning, in order to ascertain whether it was the derivations that helped them retain the vocabulary, or whether it was the fact that this work was conducted in class time. I would have given half the class this method, and half of the class a different method, and measured the results that way. Evidently no study is perfect, and I would have had to engineer the results somewhat to ensure that the two halves of the class were balanced in terms of ability. But this would have given an indication as to whether there was real benefit in one method or the other.

Appendix A Initial test paper. The English meanings were subsequently removed.

Nouns

Latin	English	English derivation
e.g.Mater	Mother	Maternal
Auxilium	Help	
Consilium	Plan	
flos	flower	
Imperator	Emperor	

Verbs

consentio	agree	
navigo	sail	
pereo	perish	
Punio	punish	
verto	turn	
Delecto	delight	

Others

summus	The top/summit	
Bonus	good	

| melior | better | |
| inter | among | |

Interview transcript

T: So guys, I am going to ask you about your experiences of learning vocabulary, in particular how you found the in class work that we have been doing in the class two weeks. You are aware that I will be making a record of what you say, but it will be anonymous, and I want you to speak honestly. Ok?

P1,P2,P3: "Yes".

T: "So firstly, did you feel that learning vocabulary in class time helped you?"

P1: "I prefer it. When I do it at home, I don't concentrate as well, and find it hard to remember the words"

P2: "Yes because you have to do it. I just want to watch TV at home!".

P1: "It was better because you were there to help us"

T: "So there were fewer distractions in the class?"

P3: "Not really. I found some of the people in the class distracting, and am happier learning at home or in the library".

T: "Ok, interesting. I think this shows that we all learn in different ways, and that there is not one correct way of learning?"

P2: "Yes. Some people like to use the flashcards or the website?"

P3: "yeah".

T "Ok, good. So why do you think myself and Miss ***** ask you to learn vocabulary?"

P2: "Because it helps us to understand the language better"

P1: "yeah so we can translate easier"

T: "So you think that knowing the vocabulary makes reading Latin easier?"

P1: " Yeah, because we don't have to look in the back of the book, or ask the teacher".

T:Did you enjoy the work with derivations? Do you think it helped you remember the words? Sorry, two questions in one. Answer whichever part you like!

P1: "Some words look like English words, but others don't. So maybe it's useful for some and not others".

P2"I found it a bit confusing. I hadn't heard of some of the English words that you gave us".

P3: "I enjoyed it. It encouraged us to think about English words, and it did help me remember them. Also knowing French helps with words like "est" and "et".

T: Do you think that you would use this method of learning vocabulary in the future?

P1:"I still prefer to learn with a partner, to get my sister to test me works best for me". Hearing the Latin helps me see the words in my mind"

P3""It is really helpful, and I would like to keep doing it for other vocab tests. I doesn't matter if it doesn't work for every words, and it is fun making your own cognates"

P4:"I think I would use it, but it doesn't work with every word".

P6:"It is really helpful, and I would like to continue doing that".

P5"I prefer to learn on the computer, or by drawing pictures, but it did help for some words.".

P2"I like it. It doesn't matter if there isn't an English word that is like it, as long as the word or phrase helps you remember it".

T: did you enjoy taking ownership of the task, and coming up with your own derivations or cognates? Comments included:

P5"yeah it was fun to play with words, and to come up with our own ways of remembering words".

P4"well, we were still in the classroom, so enjoy might not be the right word!" But yeah it was good to do something different".

P3" I think it was fun but I wouldn't want to do it every time. As I said, I prefer learning vocab at home"

T: Do you think there was any point in doing the same test three times.

P2:"I guess you were trying to see what we had remembered, but I didn't enjoy doing it!"

P1:"Not really. I had forgotten a lot of the words…. You could have told us that we were having the tests"

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