



Latin and Classical Languages on the International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme

by Simon Trafford

Introduction

It is well established that Latin has long suffered from not being included in the National Curriculum. The effects of the National Curriculum have been far-reaching and nearly terminal for the teaching of Latin in state schools, an issue which has been discussed effectively already (Hunt, 2016; Tristram, 2003; Gay, 2003). In the face of the more serious issue of Latin being dropped by many schools due to its status outside the National Curriculum, one issue which is often overlooked is the lack of support and guidance concerning curriculum and assessment models for those departments still offering Latin. Many departments are guided by the course books they follow or the outcomes desired by the GCSE they take. These issues can lead to problems of their own, such as an over-reliance on the course book or too keen an eye on the end goal of the GCSE. Neither of these things is sustainable or desirable when it comes to a dynamic curriculum or meaningful assessment, and the satisfactory resolution of such problems often relies on serious input from outstanding practitioners within departments who can navigate these complicated issues – something not open to all. There has been help offered by the Association for Latin Teaching (ARLT) who have produced grade descriptors to help

teachers who (paradoxically) need to conform to the same standards as other subjects when reporting ‘National Curriculum’ assessment. But this cannot be considered as anything more than a stopgap and only assists with one half of the issue. Alternatively, others may be attracted by the curriculum model offered by the American Classical League’s *Standards for Classical Language Learning* (2016, draft) which offers a comprehensive and fully communicative approach to the teaching of Latin with their 5 Goals and which has been available for 20 years now. This, of course, cannot help with the other half of the problem: the UK assessment model.

There is another route open to teachers of Latin and Classical Languages that offers a comprehensive curriculum model and assessment structure suitable for how Latin is taught in UK secondary schools (11-16). The International Baccalaureate (IB) is known primarily for the Diploma Programme taken by students in the sixth form and I have discussed its benefits before in the *Journal of Classics Teaching* (Trafford, 2017). The IB also offers a curriculum and assessment model for the five year secondary school stage of education (11-16) for Classical Languages on their Middle Years Programme (MYP). I want to put forward here why the MYP should be something all Classics Departments consider adopting, whether or not their school is an IB school.

What is the MYP?

The IB’s Middle Years Programme is a five year programme of study that runs throughout the secondary school level (11-16) and it comprises eight subject groups: Language acquisition; Language and literature (English Language and Literature); Individuals and societies (Humanities); Sciences; Mathematics; Arts; Physical and health education; Design. Latin, as a language, falls in the Language acquisition category in the same way it does on the IB Diploma in the sixth form. It is worth noting from the outset that the MYP in the UK does not currently have the same status in relation to GCSEs as the IB Diploma has in relation to A Levels. As a consequence, many schools choose to run the MYP from 11-14 for three years, rather than five years, dropping it in favour of the two year GCSE courses for 14-16. This is however a purely pragmatic approach to conform to League Table reporting and should not detract from many of the benefits that adopting the MYP can have for classical languages and schools generally; nor does it make the pedagogical approach offered by the MYP any less worthwhile or useful. Indeed, for Latin the MYP’s approach dovetails nicely with the GCSE.

The MYP is underpinned by a keenly felt pedagogical approach which situates the learner within a worldwide community. The MYP provides a clear

teaching and learning context for its programmes of study. The IB believes that students need to have a connection with the real world and a context for their study based on real life experiences. It is the goal of the IB to develop a sense of common humanity, which is reflected in how the MYP subject groups are required to consider the ‘global context’ of their programmes of study. The study of Latin and Roman culture touches on and engages with multiple ‘global contexts’, whether it is: identities and relationships; personal and cultural identity; orientations in space and time; scientific and technical innovation. Latin thus has a key role to play in any MYP curriculum and is an easy way for Classics teachers to stress the multifaceted nature of Latin as a discipline in a way many other subject groups cannot so easily do. As we all know (not least from the famous poster) Latin is more than a language!

It is the aim of the MYP as a programme of study to give a sense of cohesion to the learning process and to build bridges between disciplines, so that students are not simply presented with discrete subjects in the secondary school. A consistent thread which runs through the MYP is the concept of ‘Approaches to Learning’ (ATL) that helps bind the curriculum together with the same pedagogical approach and that encourages students to become resilient and independent learners. As the IB puts it, ATL teaches students to ‘learn how to learn’. There is thus a clear philosophical under-pinning to teaching and learning on the MYP which aims at producing students who are thoughtful and caring international citizens. I think many would agree that in the current climate this is not a bad pedagogical approach to foster in the young people we teach.

Latin and the Classical Languages on the MYP

The aims of studying Latin and the Classical Languages on the MYP fall in line with many course books studied in the UK and with desired outcomes of the two UK Latin exam boards. As the MYP Classical Languages Guide states:

By studying classical languages, students can learn how language

works, and how language was used to communicate the concepts, beliefs and emotions of a community. The study of a classical language can improve communication skills in one’s own language and in other languages studied... Through the study of classical languages, students can also develop intercultural understanding...between the target culture [Romans/Greeks] and the students’ own culture. (International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme, 2017, p.2)

It is thus possible to see that at the heart of the study of Latin and the classical languages on the MYP are the three strands of understanding the Language *per se*, Literature and Civilisation. In addition to this, the MYP desires to highlight connections between our language and culture today and that of the Romans. These are all aspects which form the basis of the study of the language in the UK for the GCSE. However, it is worth noting there is no requirement to speak or write Latin on the MYP. However, in Criterion A – Understanding the language (see below), students are required to identify parts of speech.

The assessment objectives also work well with the major areas of assessment for the GCSE. What follows (taken from the guide) are the four criteria:

A – Understanding the language

This covers the major areas of vocabulary and grammar. Students are expected to recall a range of vocabulary; identify and translate accidence and syntax.

B – Comprehending texts

Students will be expected to develop accuracy in understanding the meaning of passages in Latin and develop the ability to convey the meaning in their own language. This takes the form of being able to translate texts and answer comprehension questions on them. Judgements by the students will be made about the passages which are implied by form and content.

C – Analysing texts

Students will read texts in the classical language and will start to

consider the relationship between what is said and how it is said. Students will be able to analyse the content, form, structure, meaning and significance of prepared texts; explain cultural perspective; construct informed, independent and coherent responses.

D – Connecting cultures and societies

Students will meet a variety of material (textual and physical) which reflects the values, ideas and experiences of the societies which used them. Students will be able to investigate cultures and societies in which the language was developed and used; discuss how the classical society and culture influenced other societies including their own (if appropriate).

The nature of assessment for MYP classical languages follows the four criteria A-D, which are all equally weighted, each worth up to 8 marks. The 8-mark maximum for each criterion is helpful too because of its similarity with the National Curriculum levels. However, unlike the National Curriculum levels, it is expected that students can (depending on individual attainment) access the highest grades by the end of each cycle (Year 1, 3, 5). So, caution must be used when awarding MYP grades for a National Curriculum level. Each criterion is assessed twice a year and the guide helpfully provides grade descriptors for each criterion in Years 1, 3 and 5. The MYP also accepts, and expects, that students will be better in some criteria than others. But, it is equally possible to average out the four scores awarded for each criterion to give an average level, which can then be reported if only a single score is required by the school. The MYP recognises that there may be additional local or school assessment requirements which can be added in as the department sees fit.

I do not think there would be many Latin teachers out there who would find it difficult to incorporate these four assessment criteria into their Schemes of Work; they are part and parcel of what we do every day and fit neatly with the demands of the GCSE, whether OCR or WJEC/Eduqas. Indeed, what is helpful about the MYP assessment is the clear

structure and framework which we can use to guide our teaching and give clarity and coherence to our Schemes of Work. This means that even if the rest of the school does not follow the MYP, and students miss out on the overarching philosophy and sense of cohesion the MYP brings to the learning process, Classics departments can still utilise the curriculum and assessment structure for their own benefits and adopt as much of the philosophy of the IB MYP as they desire.

The assessment structure of the MYP works in three phases throughout the secondary school: Year 1 (Y7), Year 3 (Y9), Year 5 (Y11). At each stage an increased level of understanding, fluency and precision is expected from the students as they progress through the programme. There is an appreciation that we are all faced with different challenges and have specific social contexts which mean that the students we teach will progress at different speeds depending on their school, background and individual needs. The assessment structure gives responsibility to the teachers for deciding the appropriate number of vocabulary items and a necessary list of syntax and accidence. It is acknowledged that the teacher knows their students better than the author of the guide and will thus award grades/levels based on a 'best fit' judgement of the criteria and the students' progress. Of course, there is naturally an expectation that come the end of the course students are in a position to tackle the demands of the Diploma.

Furthermore, the MYP incorporates conceptual components for the different units taught to students. Many of these 'Key Concepts' work well with different stages, or groups of stages, of common course books used currently in schools, such as the *Cambridge Latin Course*. What the MYP hopes to achieve from such Key Concepts is to give a 'big idea' which is enduring and goes beyond particular subject matter. They act as a means by which students can approach the issues and ideas taught in the lesson through inquiry. The Key Concepts aim at helping to develop a broad curriculum with ideas that are relevant within and across disciplines and subjects. For instance, for language acquisition the Key Concepts

are: Communication; Connections; Creativity; Culture.

So, for Latin, communication can refer to both our communication with the past through reading classical texts (confected or real) and the ongoing communication with our own language and other modern languages; connections can refer to linguistic, literary or cultural connections that exist across time and place between ourselves and the Romans; creativity is nurtured in the way other languages convey an idea and the classical world is full of great innovators and thinkers; and, of course, culture is at the heart of why we study Latin and the classical languages and why we still visit the ancient sites across Britain and the Mediterranean. The diverse nature of the Roman Empire also provides ample opportunity to discuss and deliberate different cultural identities. For example, a perfect jumping off point would be in *Cambridge Latin Course* Book 2, when reading about Alexandria and why there is such tension between the Romans, Egyptians and the Greeks. Indeed, the *Cambridge Latin Course* is full of wonderful points of departure for an inquiry-based curriculum such as the MYP, both with regard to the language and cultural background, as I am sure other course books do.

What are the benefits of the MYP for Latin and Classics Teaching?

As has been discussed above, the benefits of adopting the MYP are significant. These can be seen in the ability to adopt an already fully-formed assessment structure and curriculum model that coalesce helpfully with the current GCSE exams offered by the two UK exam boards, as well as with the major course books used in the UK. This can be done with or without the school as a whole offering the IB MYP. The benefits also come with the pedagogical approach of the MYP, which treats subjects not as individual or distinct disciplines but as part of a wider teaching and learning experience that wants to develop international citizens curious about the world we live in. This is, of course, much

more difficult to replicate without the school as a whole being an IB MYP school, and would thus be a good reason to promote the IB curriculum in your school should the opportunity arise. To my mind, the MYP offers significant practical benefits to the teaching of Latin and classical languages in the classroom, while at the same time developing a wider sense of worth and value in our subject within the learning process.

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Correction

A small error crept into Simon Trafford's article entitled 'The benefits of the International Baccalaureate Diploma for Latin and Classics in the Sixth Form' in the *Journal of Classics Teaching*, 35 (2017). The internal assessment should be listed as 20% rather than 25% (Editor's note).