

# Think Links: using school links to benefit Classics pupils

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**I**GIVE THREE examples of different ways in which schools have linked together with other institutions to provide beneficial educational experiences for young Classicists. The first, a Comenius project, is a major undertaking involving five schools from across Europe. Eileen Emmett guides us through the development, practicalities and rewards of such a large undertaking. Next, I

describe a project linking pupils from a state school to a University faculty, revealing the opportunities for learning on both sides. Finally, a sixth form conference at Saffron Walden County High School, where Etta Martin Smith makes use of contacts and opportunities to provide a group of pupils with the chance to look at the Classical world from a different perspective.

## International co-operation between schools through Comenius

**T**HE STEPHEN PERSE Foundation (Perse Girls) in Cambridge had been involved with EU-funded projects through Comenius for many years in the Creative Arts, combining with a school in Cambridge as well as having partners in Belgium, Finland, Hungary, and Portugal. About five years ago, we decided to go for a first - a Latin project which would unite schools in Belgium, Holland, Germany, Italy and the UK. We have now collaborated on two projects: *vestigia Caesaris* (the Romans in Europe) and *Our Classical Heritage: Metamorphoses* in multas formas. The Caesar project lasted three years, the Ovid project two years.

### Shape of the projects

The projects have three main elements: preparation in school, a week of activities for participants from all the partner schools, and follow-up. Having found a formula which seemed to be successful, both our projects followed a similar pattern.

### Preparation

After initial meetings between the teachers (hosted by one of the partner schools), the themes and appropriate input from each country were agreed. This would form our preparation, back in our own schools. For one project this meant reading about the Roman invasions of Britain; for the Ovid project we had agreed a central core of stories with which all students in all countries should become familiar. As we were running Comenius as an enrichment activity for both students of Latin and non-Latinists, some stories were read in Latin, some were read in translation. From these sessions, national presentation was constructed which could be taken and shown at the activities week: for Caesar, a drama on Boudicca and another on the burning of Rome; for Ovid, animated media films of the Perseus and the Arachne stories.



*One of the Comenius drama productions*



*Pyramus and Thisbe*

### The Activities Week

The pleasure of being the host school for the activities week passed in rotation round the participating countries, with a different country volunteering each year. In Cambridge we hosted the activities week in the first year of the Ovid project (as the theme had been our idea, put together on an aeroplane while still full of excitement after our week in Holland, we felt rather responsible!). Designing a week of activities for 60 foreign students, plus our own hosting students, was a huge undertaking, but gave us scope to build in all those interesting ideas one never has time to develop in lessons. With bought-in leaders, as well as some volunteers from our own staff, the workshops covered a wide range of cross-curricular interests and skills – inscriptions for the linguists, fine art, sculpture, textiles, dance, drama, music, media – all based around the theme of the Ovid stories re-interpreted in any way the students chose: real metamorphoses of *Metamorphoses*. In Belgium this year, our activities centred round a dramatic production including many of the tales but one of the the undoubted highlights was listening to the stories of the constellations, told at night under the stars themselves. Another first was designing robots to help Theseus escape out of the labyrinth.

Every workshop had a mixture of students from the different countries, and though English was the *lingua franca*, they seemed to find their own ways of communicating – even involving the odd Latin word when really stuck! Outings included trips to the British Museum, National Gallery, the Cast Gallery in Cambridge and a Classical Tour of Cambridge, and Hugh Lupton told stories from Ovid (magical). Life in the UK was covered by school food, shopping in Covent Garden, a ceilidh, and staying with a family. Each country also brought a sample of its own speciality food. The Belgian chocolate was much appreciated but we had to rack our brains for something better than scones and jellybabies. The results from the workshops were stunning and the parents were amazed at the final presentation on the last evening.

### Follow-up

Our students presented an assembly to show photos of the week of activities and we also put up displays to raise the profile of Latin Comenius in the school. Our colleague in Germany then held an amazing 'Ovid Fest' weekend in Trier to celebrate the finale of the project. Artefacts from the workshops in Bruges and Cambridge were the background to a performance of Handel's *Acis and Galatea*, as well as to lectures and dramatic productions.

### Benefits

The students met other young people who studied Latin, not just other UK students lucky enough to be studying the Classics, but students from across Europe who found the same subject fascinating and wanted to spend time on their Classical heritage. Many of the pupils made friends with whom they are still in contact by email and some have exchanged further visits.

Something outside of the exam specifications was provided with a study of a wider range of literature and history. With a cross-curricular programme, a range of different methods of accessing the Classical world became possible, not confined to grammar and translation practice.

For the staff involved, we met an inspirational group of colleagues, were able to discuss methods of teaching Latin and, most of all, to meet schools where there was a passionate belief, at all levels, in the importance of the Classical heritage of Europe and the need to promote our underlying unity.

For all it was stimulating and exciting, providing that 'lift' which everyone needs now and again.

### Practicalities

Funding for projects is received by application to the British Council, which looks at its own priorities as well as the international aspects. Be warned – there are certain 'buzz words' which need to



*Metamorphosis*

be included in the proposal and educational rationale. Three schools need to be collaborating so our project was rather ambitious in having five countries. Our projects involved 12-15 pupils per school but Comenius has strange things called 'mobilities' which are people movements between the countries and the funding depends upon ensuring a minimum number of mobilities. There are lengthy forms to fill in but the money is available and it is a shame for Classicists not to take advantage of this resource. My colleagues and I would be most willing to help anyone who decided to take the plunge of becoming involved in a project.

#### Contacts

British Council: [www.britishcouncil.org/comenius](http://www.britishcouncil.org/comenius)

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## The Chesterton Classics Project

**T**AKE 90 YEAR 7 pupils, add 15 trainee teachers, put them into a museum, and stir. Then repeat the whole process the next day. The Chesterton Classics Project is now in its second year of operation and offers a valuable opportunity for the Classics PGCE trainees and local pupils from Chesterton Community College to come together in the world-class facilities of the Museum of Classical Archaeology in the Classics Faculty at the University of Cambridge. There are similar opportunities for schools elsewhere in the UK to link with local museums, PGCE courses in other Humanity subjects and local universities. This article explores the rationale for setting up such a partnership and invites readers to present their own experiences of school – university partnerships for future publication.

#### Chesterton Community College

At Chesterton pupils have been offered a Latin class starting in Year 8. In the past, to encourage pupils to opt for Latin, the subject teacher has beetled around the classes just before the end of Year 7,

drumming up custom. One of the issues affecting take-up is that the pupils have little knowledge of what they are opting for, except for that brief moment. What knowledge they have tends to be based upon the study of the Greeks at KS2 – a study which is heavily reliant upon the subject knowledge of their individual teachers and which tends to focus on Greek mythology, and their own reading of popular children's non-fiction, such as the *Horrible Histories* series<sup>1</sup>. Here, then, was an opportunity to bring specialist teachers and pupils together for a series of talks, activities and workshops to promote the idea of study of the Classical world. The Museum of Classical Archaeology provided the main setting for the project. Pupils explored the Cast Gallery – a collection of Victorian casts of all the major sculptural and architectural pieces from Greece and Rome – with a variety of activities devised by the trainees. These ranged from gallery talks about the myths of Hercules, the Olympic Games, and assorted gods and goddesses. Particularly impressive was an activity which involved the pupils acting as 'salesmen' for Greek or Roman statues, and an 'instant human temple'. For details

and a video of these activities, see [www.classicsteaching.com](http://www.classicsteaching.com). Then, on a carousel model, trainees introduced groups of pupils to writing in the Greek alphabet, the construction of Greek pediments, the story of the Cyclops and many other things. After the pupils finished the activities, they completed a questionnaire. 65% of the pupils declared that they wanted to learn more about the Greeks and the Romans, 22% felt they knew enough already, and 9% said that they did not want to learn anything more (!).

Last year, after a similar set of activities, over 60 pupils – that's a third of the year group – chose to start Latin. And this was Latin which took place off timetable, at a pre-school breakfast club, twice a week. Options for this year group have not yet been made, but it is possible that numbers choosing will be similar.

## PGCE

The Chesterton Classics Project also met some of the requirements of the PGCE Classics course. At the end of the PGCE trainees come back from their school placements to Cambridge for two weeks. Classics PGCE trainees have a slightly different experience to trainees from other subject areas on the Cambridge PGCE: due to the shortage of good placements locally, trainees are often placed in schools some distance from each other and although they are often being trained with teachers from other ITT providers and those gaining qualifications through the GTP, it could be said that they are not as able to collaborate with each other as much as those who are training in the other subject areas. In addition, due to the selective nature of some of the schools where the placements have been arranged, trainees do not always have much experience of working with pupils of a wide ability range or from different social or ethnic backgrounds. The last two weeks of the Cambridge Classics PGCE, therefore, try to address some of these issues, within the broad framework of teaching pupils in extra-mural settings. One of the distinguishing features of the PGCE is the opportunity given to the trainees to reflect upon and collaborate on pedagogical approaches. Thus, building on the sessions held earlier in the year on museum education, using artefacts and replicas, the trainees were encouraged to devise a range of learning activities which went beyond the normal classroom settings of the pupils and which utilised the individual subject-specific knowledge of the trainees themselves. Trainees worked together in small teams, with responsibility for a group of 15 pupils at a time, whom they accompanied throughout the sessions. Thus all the trainees had some responsibility for the creation of appropriate resources, using ICT, telling stories, behaviour management and, in essence, organising an extra-mural activity – from taking the pupils from school in the morning, through supervising their lunch break, to returning them to school at the end of the day. They accomplished all of this with utter dedication and professionalism.

There were two trips, as it was not possible to accommodate all 180 Year 7 pupils in the Classics Faculty at the same time. After the first session, trainees had the opportunity to reflect on the day's practices and consider refinements for the following day. I have already mentioned some exceptional practice. But for me as well there were lessons to be learnt about how I might improve training in various aspects for the 2011-12 trainee cohort. It seemed to me that areas to consider next year include the following:

Trainees should:

- be encouraged to use the rooms and spaces available in an extra-mural environment to develop activities which suit them – not merely to carry out the sorts of activities which can be carried out in the standard classroom setting.
- be more aware of pupils' previous learning about the Classical world from their primary schools.

- not underestimate the sophisticated thinking and ideas of Year 7 pupils.

- encourage the pupils to look closely at the statues in the Cast Gallery, rather than rely too heavily on giving the sort of information which can be taken from a book in class or from merely reading the labels on the exhibits.

- try to think of the impact of body language, tone of voice and use of language when telling a story or encouraging pupil responses.

- try to link different sections of the carousel together so that there is an internal logic to the sequence of activities throughout the day.

- try to ensure that pupils have something concrete to take home with them at the end of the day.

## University Outreach

Access and outreach are becoming important activities for University departments now, especially Classics departments. We are lucky at Cambridge in having several museums to work with and a convenient set of Classics PGCE trainees, and regular contacts between local schools and the University. I am sure these things can also be replicated elsewhere, if they are not actually already occurring. For example, the Corinium Museum runs training activities for History PGCE trainees from the University of Gloucester, and there may be many others. If there are, and your school is involved with a project a little like this one, it would be interesting to hear what is going on in a short article for this journal. If not, an interested teacher should get in touch with their local museum or University Classics department and see if their outreach officer can help. If we want our subject to grow even more, we need to use the opportunities that are available for us and our pupils at all times.

## Update

In Chesterton Community College it was not just the pupils who were impressed by last year's set of activities: parents were so moved by the positive experiences of their own children that they pushed for Latin to be offered for the September 2011 Year 7 intake. Accordingly next year Latin will be timetabled twice a week in Year 7. This should lead to an increase in the uptake at GCSE in future years and secures Latin teaching in another state school.

## Sell me a hero: an example of an activity devised by PGCE trainees for use in a museum or gallery.

This activity took place in the Museum of Classical Archaeology (the 'Cast Gallery') at the Faculty of Classics, University of Cambridge, but it could be easily adapted for use in other museums. The activity was carried out with Year 7 pupils who had a little prior knowledge of the Classical World, beyond what they had learnt in Key Stage 2 and from their own experience. The purpose of the activity is to get pupils to evaluate and describe the aesthetics of sculpture in the round, to consider possible original locations and settings for an individual piece, and to develop a sense of historical empathy. The activity requires a minimum of one teacher facilitator. In this particular case, there were three teachers for the group altogether.

The pupils gathered in a single group of 15 around the statue of the Farnese Hercules. The teacher elicited descriptive information about the sculpture, designed to enable the pupils to identify that classical statues of heroes and the gods had characteristics, clothing and attributes which were used to identify them and the mythological scene which is depicted. The teacher focused on two stories surrounding this particular sculpture: the labour of the killing of the Nemean lion (his club and lion skin are clearly visible) and the labour of the fetching of the apples of the Hesperides (Hercules





*Pupils of Chesterton Community College and their pediment*

holds the apples behind his back as he rests wearily on his club after holding up the Earth). Rather than telling them the full details of each story, the teacher encouraged pupils to contribute information from their own prior knowledge and from interpreting what they could see before them. An especially good feature was when the teacher encouraged a pupil to search around the back of the sculpture to find the apples of the Hesperides – and then drew the pupils' attention to the next phase of the activity. This was the fact that sculptures such as these were designed for particular locations, (such as a bath house on this occasion) – perhaps, as pupils suggested, in the main entranceway where you would pass by and around the sculpture on the way to the baths themselves. In this way the teacher encouraged the pupils to think of the sculpture in a different context from that where they were seeing it now – in its original context in the Roman world. From this point, the teacher encouraged the pupils to think of who would commission such a sculpture, thus developing the pupils' sense of historical empathy: someone clearly had to be very rich to commission something this size, and someone who wanted to make a strong impression on visitors to the baths.

The pupils had thus been primed to have a look independently at more sculptures. They were given clear instructions on what to do next. In groups of five, pupils went and chose one sculpture. Each group had to imagine that they had commissioned 'their' sculpture for the emperor's wife. They had a printed checklist of things they ought to consider:

- identifying features of the sculpture
- any story attached to the sculpture
- the aesthetics of the sculpture
- possible location of the sculpture in the palace buildings or grounds

•possible setting of the sculpture

•personal significance of the sculpture (either for the donor or the recipient).

And off they went, each group with an individual teacher to monitor and guide. One group took on the Laocoon, another Niobe and the third Artemis. After 10 minutes, the teachers took on the role of being the 'empress', swapped groups, and became subject to the salesmanship and blandishments of the other groups. Had time permitted, one could envisage all 15 pupils being taken to each of the three sculptures to see how each one tried to sell them in turn.

What was effective about this activity? The pupils were instructed on how to interpret sculpture using the appearance and attributes as guides – and to ask the right questions rather than wait to be fed the answers. The focus on the first sculpture acted as an effective springboard to explore the others. They began to look at the sculptures as three-dimensional objects. They began to transfer the sculptures out of the museum context and place them in another, Classical one. They started to realise that the sculptures had political, and social functions as well as decorative ones. Best of all they began to articulate sophisticated and complex ideas about form, shape and beauty, and context and message.

Notes:

<sup>1</sup> Evidence based on research carried out by PGCE Classics trainees in 2011 on pupils' preconceptions of Latin.

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# A Classical Conference for Sixth Form Pupils

ON WEDNESDAY 23<sup>RD</sup> March, Saffron Walden County High School hosted its first Classical Conference for sixth form and Year 11 students of Classical Civilisation and Latin. The event was very well attended by Saffron Walden County High students and we were joined by students and staff from Newport Free Grammar School, Herts and Essex and the Perse ensuring that we are forging links between the classicists in the area.

We were hugely fortunate to be able to listen to two such distinguished speakers on their areas of expertise. Dr. Charlie Weiss, Director of Studies for Classics of Clare College and Gonville & Caius College, Cambridge, presented us with some insightful and probing ideas on the role of the gods in the *Iliad*. His lecture was both entertaining and thought-provoking, and enormously helpful for supplementing and testing our impressions of divine behaviour in

Homer's epic.

We were no less impressed by the thoughts of Dr. Gail Trimble, a Research Fellow at Trinity College, Cambridge, whose lecture entitled 'Virgil: between Homer and Rome' challenged our preconceptions of the deeper purpose and characterisation within Virgil's first century BC poem. She captivated us with her wit and perception in much the same way as she bewitched all *University Challenge* viewers during her well-publicised triumph with Corpus Christi, Oxford in 2009.

The students enjoyed an afternoon of extremely informative lectures which will prove invaluable as preparation for their summer examinations, but also in providing them with an insight into the nature of teaching and learning at university level.

## Endnote

THESE THREE ACTIVITIES show the breadth of possibilities – from the international to the local – and perhaps indicate the lengths to which teachers of Classics are willing to go to encourage pupils to see the benefits of studying the Classical world. But there is of course much more to it than that. What became transparent was that the study of the Classical world is a complex, multi-faceted and fascinating one. Pupils and teachers on the Comenius exchange discovered that approaches to the study of Classics varied greatly from one country to another. They also experienced something of the culture of another country. On the Chesterton Classics Project, pupils who perhaps had never stepped inside a museum or a university faculty were introduced to the entire idea of the study of

the Classical world. The trainee teachers learnt how to take into consideration the varying needs and interests of pupils from a whole range of backgrounds and prior experiences. At the sixth form conference, pupils who had been in modest departments (the Classics department at Saffron Walden County High School has existed for only three years) met pupils from other schools for the first time and scholars who are experts in their fields. They realised they were not alone in their interest in studying the Classical world.

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