

# SATIPS

Support and training in Prep, Primary and Senior Schools

Classics

## Editorial

A number of exciting events have been taking place throughout the summer, including the IAPS Classics course in April and the ISEB Classics Day in June; both very valuable and productive days. The usual range of summer schools awaits us. Common Academic Scholarship and Common Entrance round off the academic year as always, and my best wishes go to all for an enjoyable summer.

Having edited the Broadsheet for the last five years, and with other responsibilities meaning that my Classics teaching will be scaled back next year, the time has come for me to hand on the editorship of this publication to someone with new ideas. If anyone is interested in fulfilling this position, please do not hesitate to contact me or SATIPS.

## Differentiation within the Mixed-Ability Latin class

The idea of differentiation is nothing new. Ensuring that every member of a class made progress through undertaking work challenging to their own ability, with appropriate support, was a tenet of good teaching long before it needed a label. Within the prep school environment, small classes and favourable teacher-pupil ratios usually ensure that each pupil receives more individual attention than would be available in another setting. From this, individual differentiation occurs through the support available to a pupil for a teacher who knows them well, asking questions and answering them in a way suited to the pupil's ability and learning style.

While the importance of this cannot be overlooked, it alone is not enough. Effective differentiation requires that weaker pupils are able to make progress in confidence and efficacy, while the more able are extended. Neither is it enough for a more able pupil simply to work through more exercises: while practice allows opportunities for rigour and the avoidance of complacency, it is equally true that it can be tedious. Nor is it often necessary for a more able pupil to take the same sequence of steps towards mastery of a technique or point of grammar than a weaker counterpart.

What implications does this have in the teaching of Latin, and particularly at prep school level? Too often the weakest of pupils end up as non-Latinists, with the optional nature of the subject for entrance to many senior schools meaning that many make the pragmatic decision that in borderline cases,

time and effort spent on a subject not essential for entry would be better deployed on those that are: an understandable decision, if one perhaps a little sad when so young. Setted or streamed classes permit a narrower spectrum of ability and a closer matching of task and pace to pupils' general ability, but the teacher of a mixed-ability Latin class, usually assembled for the most sound of reasons, faces particular challenges.

The creative subjects and humanities offer the possibility of a greater degree of open-ended questions and tasks which allow pupils, with support, to extend themselves while others give answers within their means. The same can be said of modern languages. Perhaps the closest to Latin in terms of pedagogy is Maths. Here, there is ready made and effective differentiation by task built into such schemes as Abacus, to name but one of many examples. There is no such straightforward equivalent currently available to the Latin teacher in currently-published courses. It is, then, often a challenge for a Latin teacher faced with a class of pupils of whom some, left to their own devices, could merrily work their way through the book to a reasonable degree of accuracy over the course of a few lessons, to those who struggle even to identify the most basic of words and structures.

Those teaching the Cambridge Latin Course have, over the years, come up with a variety of means of allowing pupils to be challenged appropriately and to progress. Those taking translations on a whole-class basis in which each pupil translates a sentence in turn were adept in ensuring that the longer or more challenging sentences and passages went to the most able. Photocopiable worksheets cater, to a degree, for weaker pupils, and the online activities allow opportunities for consolidation. There is the danger in this, however, of keeping weaker pupils simply engaged on something to keep them occupied while the brighter ones get on with the real work. In a very mixed class it is therefore often most beneficial simply to base oneself in a chapter for a week or two (often delineated by a vocabulary test in which everyone can participate) and allow pupils to work through hand-picked exercises and stories at their own pace. Translating the 'picture sentences' at the beginning of each chapter alone will allow pupils at least to experience the grammatical points under scrutiny and encounter some of the vocabulary. For some pupils, working through these with support is a significant achievement. 🍷

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Others need not bother as the grammatical points are understood and these sentences often do little to move the story on; better for them to go directly to translating the stories, either individually or in small groups. The exercises can, then, be used for individual assessment or extension as required.

While there is little formal or systematic graduation in difficulty as the stories progress through the chapters, teachers become adept at identifying the trickier stories, sentences and passages.

For those engaged in the non-CLC courses, the opportunities for the extension of the strongest pupils and supporting the weakest remain. The crucial difference is in the opportunities available to introduce English into Latin composition: a far greater challenge and one neither catered for nor easy to achieve with the CLC. In this is the opportunity to develop a breadth of vocabulary, complete mastery of the grammar but, moreover, and in playing firmly within the rules, that vital ingredient of creativity. The benefits of Latin composition have been eloquently outlined by Bob Bass in this publication recently, and this is an element which takes the subject from the purely functional to the creative. Furthermore, it clearly consolidates pupils' understanding of the grammar under scrutiny.

What, then, of the three-tiered system at Common Entrance? It is worth noting at the outset that that the system employed for Latin differs from that in English, Maths and Science, in that Level One is not the exclusive preserve of the weaker pupil, but a paper designed to present a challenge to those with limited exposure to the language. While the system does present challenges in a mixed-ability setting, in the sense that it is possible that a mixed CE and Scholarship class could have pupils taking up to four different papers just for ISEB, it ensures that pupils can take an examination at CE that provides appropriate challenge. While ISEB offers guidance as to the comparability of the papers, as is the case with much at Common Entrance and Scholarship, it is down to the senior schools themselves to interpret the papers and their results as best suits their circumstances.