

The Department of History and Classics (Swansea University)

in collaboration with the Iris Project, Swansea Metropolitan University,

the South West Wales Reaching Wider Project, and the South West Wales Classical Association



Literacy through Latin Project

Information for Teachers and Parents

The Project

The Iris Project is a charity which brings Classics to primary and secondary schools in the UK. As part of its mission, it runs a very successful Literacy through Latin project, in which students from various universities (including Oxford University and King's College London) teach Latin to local primary and secondary school pupils, specifically with the aim of improving young people's literacy skills. The national Literacy through Latin project has recently been nominated for the prestigious EU Language Label 2013, which demonstrates the impact of the project, not only nationwide but also internationally.

In October 2011, the Department of History and Classics (Swansea University) started working together with the Iris Project, and we set up the first Literacy through Latin project in Wales. We piloted the project in a local primary school, Brynmill Primary, with sixty-five pupils between 9 and 11 years old. The feedback was immensely positive, and six more schools have now joined the project. In 2012-13 twenty of our students are teaching Latin as volunteers to approximately three hundred and thirty pupils.



Latin basketball

The entire cost of the project is borne by Swansea University – there is no cost for the schools. We reimburse all travel costs of our student volunteers, as well as all the teaching materials. Our students are trained by Swansea University, Swansea Metropolitan University, the Iris Project, and the South West Wales Reaching Wider Partnership. All students are also DBS-checked (former CRB).

Why Latin?

Latin might seem like an odd subject to choose: it's a dead language, and doesn't seem to have any immediate relevance in modern Wales. However, the literacy levels of young people are among the worst in Western Europe (you can find information on this in the 2009 PISA report). This year, the Estyn report has established that 40% of pupils start secondary school with reading skills below their actual age and 20% are functionally illiterate. As well as this, the recent publication of national GCSE results has revealed that the educational gap between Wales and the rest of the UK at the end of secondary school is widening.

Studies done in other countries suggest that learning Latin can actually help improve literacy levels of young people. In the USA, the Educational Testing Service has revealed that Latin students consistently outperform all other students on the verbal portion of the SAT. Another US study has shown that Latin even helps with math solving abilities and gives pupils an advantage in terms of reading age. (See <http://www.bolchazy.com/al/latadv.htm>) A study in England reveals that people who studied Latin at school say it has influenced their life and career in a very positive way. (See <http://www.friends-classics.demon.co.uk/survey.pdf>).



Dressing a Roman soldier

The way Latin is taught by our students is aimed particularly at improving the literacy levels of young people in Wales – this is a very new approach. We focus on connecting Latin with English (as approximately 60% of all English vocabulary is derived from Latin), and also Welsh – from next year onward, we will focus more on including other modern languages, as we will start a collaboration with the Modern Foreign Language Department at Swansea University. Our activities are specifically designed to fit in with the KS2/3 curriculum and the government's National Literacy and Numeracy Framework.

Above all, all our activities are fun and age-appropriate. Don't imagine pupils sitting still and listening for hours! We organize a lot of physical activities (Latin basketball and dance video), act out ancient Roman stories, and sing songs. There is no pressure on pupils whatsoever; through play, we aim to get young people to think about languages and how they might be used.

Pupils have an option of doing an OCR exam at the end of the course, but this is to be done *only* if pupils are keen to do so, and in coordination with teachers and parents. In order to monitor the impact of Latin teaching on literacy skills in Wales, we are currently gathering data from the schools and in the next academic year, will start doing pre- and post-tests on pupils.

Pupil feedback on the South West Wales Literacy through Latin project:

- I loved every single lesson
- I liked the mock test because I like being challenged and learning new things
- I liked learning the Christmas songs in Latin
- The Latin class I found most exciting was the lesson where we looked at the first Harry Potter book in Latin, English and Welsh.
- I liked the last lesson before Easter because of the song and the Easter egg hunt.
- We had to write fairy tales in English but add Latin words that we know in English and we watched videos.
- I liked the songs because I now know 'Reach for the stars' in Latin.
- Learning about the verbs: past tense and the future tense.
- All of the Latin songs were very helpful to remember the words and all we were focusing on; I enjoy all lessons.
- I have told my friends, close family and distant family about Latin. I tell them about how fun it is and I compare it to other languages with my sister who is learning Spanish and French.

What kind of projects we can organize in your school

The Literacy through Latin project can be brought to schools in various formats:

- The most common format are weekly classes brought to pupils (maximum 40 in a group) by our students: there are approximately 10 classes per term;
- We have also started an ancient Greek project for secondary schools, in which our students can again teach up to 30 pupils an introduction to ancient Greek (again designed to improve literacy skills) and the ancient Greek world;
- We have a separate project specifically designed for MAT (More Able and Talented) pupils, which teaches Latin particularly with the aim of challenging pupils and making links with other modern languages;
- We also organize workshops for SEN (Special Educational Needs) pupils. We can offer one full-day workshop per semester, run by Dr Evelien Bracke from the Department of History and Classics (helped by student volunteers), doing lots of games specifically aimed at helping SEN pupils with literacy in English (and Welsh, if requested) through the medium of Latin.
- We have experts on various aspects of antiquity in our department (including Egypt!). If you would like one of us to come and talk to your pupils, feel free to get in touch.
- If you as parent or teacher would like to learn Latin, Ancient Greek, or Hieroglyphs, feel free to contact us about ongoing evening classes and also classes which will take place in Swansea and Neath during the Summer. See: <http://www.southwestwalesclassicalassociation.co.uk/resources/Ancient%20Languages%20in%20the%20Park%20flyer.pdf>



Latin spells at Halloween

How to get involved

If you would like your school/your child's school to get involved in the project, or would like us to come and have a chat with you about how we can work together with your school, feel free to email Dr Evelien Bracke, the Project Coordinator, at e.bracke@swansea.ac.uk.

More information about the project and its partners can be found here:

1. Lots of photos of project can be found on the Facebook page of the SWW Classical Association: https://www.facebook.com/pages/South-West-Wales-Classical-Association/121485431289104?id=121485431289104&sk=photos_stream
(Feel free to 'like' us if you are interested in getting updates on our projects)
2. University news: <http://historyclassics.wordpress.com/2013/01/16/the-literacy-through-latin-project-is-expanding/>
3. The Iris Project: <http://irisproject.org.uk/index.php/projects/literacy-through-latin/55-south-west-wales-latin>



Triple Literacy: Latin, English, and Welsh

About the Project Coordinator

Dr Evelien Bracke is Employability and Schools Liaison Officer of the History and Classics Department (Swansea University). She has set up the South West Wales Literacy through Latin Project in collaboration with the Iris Project, and collaborates with Swansea Metropolitan University in designing an innovative MFL-based approach to Latin teaching. She is also the Secretary of the South West Wales Classical Association branch, organizes events (e.g. the Ancient Languages in the Park project) and school workshops and long-term projects on Classics and History. Evelien recently got nominated for a Distinguished Teaching Award, which highlights her commitment to the teaching of young people. Her email address is e.bracke@swansea.ac.uk.

You can find an article she has written in the Iris magazine about the project here: <http://www.southwestwalesclassicalassociation.co.uk/resources/Evelien%20Iris%20Article%202012.pdf>.

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