The experience of one teacher teaching the non-linguistic Classics modules of the International Baccalaureate

by Sally Ann Edmonds

It is not a very well-known or well-advertised fact that there actually is a non-linguistic Classics syllabus for the Internal Baccalaureate [IB]. Most students study Latin and Ancient Greek but not Classical Greek and Roman Studies [CGRS]. The main reason for this is because CGRS is only available as a school-based subject as the IB do not seem prepared at the moment to offer it as a main-stream subject. This makes the administration of CGRS slightly different from the other subjects on offer as part of the IB, and not all schools are prepared to undertake this extra administration. This probably goes someway to account for its low profile and therefore its uptake by schools.

Rather than just Classical Civilisation, which is the most popular Classics A level, the current IB syllabus is a combination of Classical Civilisation and Ancient History, which is both an advantage and a disadvantage.

Currently the syllabus consists of the following modules:

- Greek and Roman Epic: Iliad and Aeneid.
- Greek and Roman Drama: Euripides Electra, Trojan Women, and Seneca Phaedra.
- Peloponnesian War: Thucydides.
- Age of Augustus: Various texts.

On the plus side there is the chance to study both subjects, Ancient History and Classical Civilisation, within one qualification. However, of more of a disadvantage is the reduction that this means in the matter of choice and availability. Within the A Level it is also possible to study both subjects within one qualification but it is also an option, with OCR, to study only Classical Civilisation or only Ancient History, something which is not possible with the IB and this emphasises another difference between A levels and the IB: the lack of choice within the IB modules. There are only four on offer and all are compulsory. Again, with the OCR A Level, besides the choice between single subject examinations, there is also a choice of modules to study from the range of subjects available. This lack of choice makes the IB syllabus quite limiting, to both the student as well as the teacher. The teacher has no option but to teach these modules and cannot therefore choose modules that he or she might have greater expertise in or a preference for, nor can he or she cater for their students' preferences or abilities through the teacher's choice of modules.

Thus, this limited IB syllabus concentrates on literature and history only, with none of the options of Art, Architecture, Archaeology, etc. which makes the study of Classics so interesting and interdisciplinary in its outlook and something which seems to be a great advantage within the A Level specifications presently being offered by AQA and OCR.

Another experience of this teacher was the lack of any form of help from the exam board, in this case the IB itself. With either OCR or AQA there are copious amounts of resources available on their websites, such as Schemes of Work, Teachers' Guide and Past Exam Papers. The IB does have its Online Curriculum Centre but this is maintained by teachers, not the IB, and with such a minority subject as CGRS there are not too many resources, if any, available. It was also very difficult to get hold of Past Exam Papers; there were no Schemes of Work or Teacher's Guides offered at all. In addition, the syllabus is not very detailed and quite limited in its rubric and it is quite hard to know how deep a knowledge one's students need to acquire for their examinations. All this makes the teacher feel very isolated, even floundering, especially in a one-person department. The IB does organise Cluster Group meetings within the local area which offer support and help but these are fine if you are teaching a mainstream subject such as English, where there would be many schools offering the subject. However, for CGRS there are only perhaps a dozen schools who teach the subject and they might not even be within your area, and even if they are, they may feel that they do not want to be part of a Cluster Group, as I found the situation to be in my case.

The option to be able to teach CGRS as part of the IB is an advantage otherwise there would be nothing but Classical languages on offer to represent the Ancient World in the hexagons, now circles, of the IB; the language modules do not include culture as part of their syllabus. However, since the recent subject review, the syllabus for CGRS has been greatly overhauled and in the process the ability to have options has been removed; it is debatable whether or not this is a good move. The compulsory aspect of the subject greatly limits the appeal of the topic to students when being compared to other subjects; History has two streams to choose from, for example: Medieval and Modern. Perhaps another stream could be added to cater for Ancient History which would increase the scope and appeal of the History syllabus and provide Classicists with another opening to study their subject. If this were to happen, it might enable the IB to create a syllabus which equates more to a Classical Civilisation course rather than the mixture there is at the moment between history and literature, as the history aspect would be catered for within the History section. Failing these developments, which would greatly enhance the perception of Classics within the IB, it is hoped that the IB will soon decide to include CGRS (even as it stands at the moment) as a mainstream subject and when this happens perhaps a more exciting, inviting and interesting syllabus will become available when more schools are aware of its existence.

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