

Greek Without Limits: modern experiences of Ancient Greek and Ancient Greece in Education

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Abstract

In more ways than one

As the subheading suggests, the nature of this project is quite unconventional compared to the wider corpus of research conducted as part of the Laidlaw Programme. Rather than questionnaires, interviews or any experimental methods, my research this summer instead consisted of helping to collect scholarly perspectives and experiences; it is thus perhaps most akin to an adapted form of a literature review. These academics' research and their papers were not technically existent at the time of my project, and all are yet to be published, as the role I played this summer was that of an editorial assistant to my supervisor in the process of creating a manuscript for an academic volume. *Teaching Ancient Greece: Linguistic and cultural approaches* assesses the current teaching methods and general educational perspective on ancient Greek language and culture, particularly in primary and secondary schools, sharing these as a means to advocate for its continued presence in international curricula at these various levels. I will be unable to present specific, detailed findings on this subject, as the volume is, at present, unpublished. What I will instead discuss in this report, whilst still conforming to the traditional format of an academic research paper, will be a much more anecdotal and reflective account of my experience of working on this project, so as to remain sufficiently *abstract*.

Introduction

Ancient Greek has long undergone a deficit in promotion as a school subject. What was once considered an absolute essential for one's intellectual development and an unavoidable prerequisite for further study at university is largely inaccessible for state-maintained schools in the UK.¹ This is largely a reflection of wider public perceptions of classical subjects as no longer so significant in today's changing world. My supervisor, Professor Arlene Holmes-Henderson, has published numerous books and articles surrounding this topic and works to advocate for greater access to classical education for all. *Teaching Ancient Greece*, co-edited by Prof. Arlene and Steven Hunt, Associate Professor in Classics at the University of Cambridge (with whom I was also working closely), continues in this focus, discussing the different strategies used by educators in both formal and informal settings to provide access to the classical world. Many arguments around the value of classics education home in on specific 'benefits' to cognitive development provided by its many subcategories. The aim in collating these global educational perspectives is not to analyse them to 'prove' objectively ancient Greek's worth as an academic discipline; instead, the diverse and oftentimes innovative methods employed by educators convey already the benefits of studying the ancient world, through their evident passion and dedication.

As mentioned above, my report will focus on my own personal experience from my work on this book, describing what I was involved in and specific learnings I took from these (including those authors' chapters I found particularly interesting), addressing how both of these have prompted me to become a better scholar.

¹ (Holmes-Henderson, Hunt & Imrie, 2024)

Methodology

My work on this project was divided into two primary roles. The first of these was enabling the publisher—Cambridge University Press—to issue contracts to every author involved in the volume. The information a publisher needs for this is not extensive: simply each author's name, affiliation (e.g. to the university they are employed at), email address and draft title for the chapter they are writing. However, at the time I was working on the project there were 40 chapters, and the substantial proportion of these that were cowritten meant that this information was needed from over 50 authors. After collecting these details, I inputted them all into a Word document supplied by CUP, and sent this to the editorial coordinator, Katie, with whom I was liaising. At the same time as I was requesting this information from authors, I asked them to clarify whether they would be aiming towards submitting their contribution by 1 July or 1 September, which were our two options for submission deadlines.

My second role as part of this project was copyediting. This, naturally, only began once we started receiving chapters for the 1 July deadline, which amounted to 18 chapters overall. In order to ensure consistency of spelling, grammar and general formatting across all chapters, I read through them using an agreed upon style guide to change any necessary aspects of each text. Examples of these include British rather than American spellings (e.g. '-ise' instead of '-ize'), the word 'classical' being written in lowercase characters and all bibliographies in APA style, with in-text references as opposed to footnotes. These were not necessary conventions of the publisher but were editorial decisions, some of which (such as whether the term 'key stage' should be capitalised) were details that I was allowed to determine. After completing each chapter, I notified Prof. Arlene and Steven so that they could read the chapters and provide their own editorial comments regarding the contents. By the last week of my project, all of these papers had received comments, and so I returned them to the authors for their revisions. As an additional task in this last week, I was also able to write up the first draft of the author questionnaire, which is used by the publisher for marketing purposes. This

includes, most significantly, the synopsis of the book itself, but also details for booksellers to enable them to advertise the book to its intended audience.

Findings

On a literal level—that is, in terms of the actual contents of the research I have read—I greatly enjoyed the opportunity to learn about the vast number of ways that classicists worldwide are working towards continuing scholarship in the field. On one hand, some of the chapters were more descriptive, narrating the roles of academic journals, organisations and special university positions. All such accounts provided great insight into their respective origins through to the current research and events they were initiating and promoting. One notable example detailed the emergence of a Greek school in Glasgow, including the various stories from communities that settled in Scotland over the course of the 20th century. I particularly enjoyed reading about this as it seemed to bring a very different perspective to the historical significance of Greek culture in the UK, both ancient and modern, than its typical associations as a subject of highbrow academic discussion and theory: a more tangible, lived experience.

Elsewhere, other chapters were more linguistically oriented, focusing more on specific techniques for teaching ancient Greek. Some of these described course curricula, with others that analysed the quality of textbooks. My favourite of these argued the benefits of tailoring teaching resources to the cultural values and experiences of their students, describing a case study of a textbook in which students' own learning followed the fictional education experiences of four teenage characters. As this textbook was designed for the Australian school curriculum, each character's ethnicity and cultural background was representative of the diverse cultural makeup of Australia. This was done to make students' learning more relatable to their own lives, as the mirroring of their personal contexts would allow them to engage more meaningfully with the source material. I was impressed by how

creative this approach is, particularly when compared to formal and often unwieldy textbooks that focus on the traditional grammar-translation approach, even though, upon reflection, the former method seems so logical that I was surprised it wasn't already a widespread method.

The book's later chapters surround the applications of evolving technological capabilities as educational tools, both inside and outside of classroom settings. One such example involved the use of a robot in a classroom in Greece, with the purpose of increasing pupil motivation and engagement with ancient Greek language. Additionally, two separate chapters that I read studied the use of videogames as an educational platform, both as an intentionally didactic class tool, and as a more passive and unstructured way of learning that can be achieved simply by immersing oneself in content about the ancient world. With technology being such a fast-developing area, it was fascinating to see how classicists and classics teachers can integrate into modern advances such ancient material, which in itself gives further evidence of the persistent applicability of classics to modern life.

Completing a first draft of the author questionnaire revolved largely around adapting aspects of the original proposal documents, which Prof. Arlene and Steven had written to pitch the book concept to CUP. This involved an explanation of the editors' motivations for producing a volume on their topic, along with how it would benefit readers. It also required a 20-word 'hook' stating the book's main feature, a brief description for the bookseller to understand how to best market it, and the blurb text. This task was particularly enjoyable as it meant that I could view the book from the perspective of the different kinds of people who would interact with it, such as booksellers, librarians and readers.

Many other aspects of this project I found applicable to my life were the more general lessons that helped to develop my own character. The first of these arose in the form of a minor admin issue, in that some of my emails to authors requesting their details were not promptly responded to.

Originally, it had been our aim to have the author contracts issued before the 1 July chapter

submission deadline, to provide ample time for reading, copyediting, editorial comments and returning drafts to authors for their revisions. However, I found myself sending numerous follow-up emails to authors, which required a delicate balance of polite but firm reminding of their obligations. As this meant that some authors had not yet confirmed which deadline they would be aiming towards, there was also a degree of uncertainty about how many chapters I was expecting to edit, and therefore how heavy my workload would be for the next couple of weeks. Like many, I tend to find uncertainty of this sort somewhat anxiety-inducing, but I had to learn to plan ahead for any eventuality. Some authors were also clearly a little concerned about the delay, and for them this was because of the effect it had on the delivery of their contracts; I received multiple emails requesting clarity on a timescale for this. This was understandable as it was other authors' flippancy that was impacting their work, so I also acted to reassure them that despite the current lack of communication received from CUP, the project was definitely still in the works.

Problems continued to arise even after contracts were finally ready to be issued. Some of these were the fault of my own oversight: for one or two I had misspelled an email address or incorrectly declared whether a chapter was being co-written. These were all relatively easy fixes, and I was lucky that Katie from CUP was so accommodating. Similarly, though not a problem as such, some authors chose at this point to introduce a coauthor to their chapter, which required further back-and-forth with the publishers to have the contracts updated.

The delays in receiving information from authors required me to develop an increased sense of confidence in order to be sufficiently persistent. When starting work on this project I was hyper-aware of my comparative subordinacy to the authors whom I was emailing, as they had, naturally, much more experience, and some were particularly well-known names in the field. I was initially fearful of coming across as irritating and thus felt I ought to be greatly apologetic when chasing people up. This subsided the more emails I sent, as I gained the self-confidence to communicate with these authors, especially as I recognised that it was necessary to do so for the sake of Prof. Arlene's

and Steven's work. This, I would say, combined with the communication skills needed for the aforementioned 'polite but firm' tone of said emails, was the most significant character virtue that this aspect of the project helped me to develop.

This was something I then further developed through the second part of my project, being the copyediting process. As discussed in the methodology, much of this involved more trivial aspects of proof-reading, such as correcting spelling errors and formatting grammar to British English standards. Especially when working on a total of 18 chapters, all between 2,000 and 5,000 words, this required a great degree of concentration and detail-orientation, so as not to miss any errors due to lapses in attention with such a large volume of reading. One aspect that I was initially concerned would emerge as an obstacle is my overall lack of proficiency in ancient Greek: I am a Latinist and have never studied Greek at school or university. This was surprisingly beneficial in certain situations, as one of our stylistic requirements was that all ancient Greek text had to be translated into English by the authors. I found it easier to pick up on smaller pieces of untranslated Greek in the drafts, such as example words or short phrases, as I would stumble over it while reading given that I could not understand it. Upon reflection, this may have been more of an asset than I anticipated as I feel that I would have been more likely to mistakenly miss these errors had they not affected my ability to access the chapters' subject matter. However, there were some more significant editorial aspects to this work, namely that, for some of our authors, English was not their first language, and therefore aspects of their contributions could be slightly clunky in their wording. On these occasions, I needed to rephrase certain sentences to render the chapter a smoother read. Sometimes a more significant overhaul was required, for instance, one chapter was originally designed to be a speech for a presentation, and was thus originally written with more persuasive language and colloquialisms than are typical for an academic volume. This meant that more areas needed to be reworked, such as aspects of particularly casual, idiomatic language. Initially, I felt guilty, as if it was not my place to be modifying other people's words in such a way, something once again influenced by a sort of

imposter syndrome about the fact that they were all significantly more qualified academics than me. However, practice at this helped me to gain more of an authoritative attitude to making decisions for the book, along with encouragement from Arlene and Steve that these kinds of adjustments were necessary. I also realised that my concerns about offending authors were perhaps also a reflection of my own sensitivity to having my errors be acknowledged, and that any changes I made were highly unlikely to be received as criticism.

I have also been fascinated to learn about the process of academic publishing, and the publishing industry as a whole. The timeframe of my project has given me insight into all aspects of this: I have had to catch myself up on details all the way from the project's inception, worked on significant aspects of its development, all crucially requiring my awareness of the end goal of the publishing date. By liaising directly with the editors, contributors and staff at the publishing house, and acting as a copyeditor myself, I have had contact with all of those in major roles in this process, and so have received relatively comprehensive insight into it.

Discussion

An explanation of the literal findings of this project demonstrates that, while Greek may be experiencing a withdrawal in funding, interest and overall space in academic curricula, there is regardless a breadth of evidence that educators and scholars worldwide are creating innovative and interesting ways to continue providing pathways for studying the subject. In examples such as the Greek School of Glasgow that I discussed, the presentation of the historical significance of hellenophone communities in Scotland demonstrates strong cultural ties as evidence for why their form of Greek education should continue. Meanwhile, applying technological advancements to Greek, such as robots and videogames, could increase student engagement as it harnesses common hobbies and interests of modern schoolchildren. Overall, the research this book presents is highly

likely to have a significant effect on educational policymakers and curriculum design, as it highlights ways that teaching ancient Greek can be made applicable in schools for today's children. This helps to dissuade against arguments that its 'ancient'-ness makes it irrelevant, and thus that its removal would make way for newer subjects.

On a personal level, I have also gained benefits from this project that I can apply to my own life and future academic study. As part of a team with Arlene and Steve, I have spent a great deal of my time communicating about progress, deadlines and to-do lists, which is highly valuable for future group work both at university and in the workplace. A great deal of my project has also revolved around organisation, particularly when working to deadlines and completing these tasks and, to a certain extent, prompting a little more organisation from those I was working with. As I previously addressed, this has required an increase in confidence and authority, asserting myself and my opinions for the purpose of reaching project goals. This is also a necessary quality for all aspects of life. With regards to my experience in the publishing industry, as I have an interest in further academic study and am also considering journalism as a future career, this has given me integral insight into the work that is constantly occurring behind the scenes in these similar disciplines.

This project has also taught me how I could improve if I were to ever undertake something like it in the future. For instance, I have learned that I ought to have been more persistent and direct when sending reminder emails to authors who had not responded to my previous questions about their contributor information. My lack of confidence in this regard contributed to our delay in finalising contracts as I had given some authors far too long to reply before following up. In terms of copyediting, I would have greatly benefited from being more proactively decisive about certain editorial choices, both in those choices I got to make and in asking Prof. Arlene and Steven for their preferences. Much of this came from simply not knowing the extent to which certain details were necessary, such as only realising that font, size and spacing should be consistent across all authors' chapters halfway through the process. Since then, I have learned which details are for the book's

editors to confirm and which are reserved for the professional copyeditors employed by CUP, who's work begins once the full draft manuscript is completed.

Conclusion

My project may not have followed the conventional pathway of Laidlaw research, yet I have regardless had a deeply insightful experience, during which I learned more about both my subject and myself. Starting out, the concept of publishing a book and what that entails was entirely novel, and thus my personal possession of the necessary skills required similar development. Naturally, all parts of the process are essential, but I feel that my involvement in the middle of it gave me a balanced view of not only what the project currently looked like, but how it had at commencement and how it would at completion.

Working on *Teaching Ancient Greece* has not only taught me about the highly original ways that educators continue to teach Greek language and culture, but has also helped me to develop my own character, primarily in terms of my self-confidence and organisation. I am incredibly grateful to Prof. Arlene and Steven for the chance to work with them, and for their guidance and patience with me as a novice copyeditor and assistant. It has been an incredibly valuable experience, and I leave this project as a more enriched scholar because of it.

References

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