Classical Studies for Modern Secondary Students

By

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Abstract

Progressivist reforms beginning in the interwar years moved the Ontario curriculum away from focusing on classical studies towards emphasizing the sciences, for they were seen as more relevant to society (Christou, 2015). The study of Greek and Roman civilizations, which was once the foundation of a Classical Education, are now relatively unheard of electives offered at select schools. This paper examines how secondary school classics teachers reinvent the study of Latin and Greek language, literature, and civilization in a modern context. Analysis of three, semi-structured interviews with secondary classics instructors revealed three themes. First, student enrollment in classics courses is largely determined by the popularity of the instructor, not personal interest. Second, instructors find they cannot teach classics the way they were taught; instead they need to adapt their instructional practices to be more student-centered and include authentic learning. Finally, despite observable benefits that learning Latin has on student success in mandatory courses, interdepartmental divides between classics, the sciences, and even other humanities subjects restrict classics course offerings. Following a discussion of these findings, I conclude with implications and recommendations for educational policy, interdepartmental relationships, and classroom practice that have arisen out of this qualitative research study.

Key Words: Latin; classical studies; modernization; student-centered teaching and learning; interdepartmental conflict
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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.0 Research Context

Latin and classical studies are rarely taught in Ontario Secondary Schools, but the fact that they are taught at all is remarkable. Latin has been a dead language (a language no one speaks in everyday conversation) since the 7th century AD (Pulju, 2010), yet it has persisted in schools and academia. I wanted to know if this persistence was due to Latin’s position as part of a ‘classical education’ or if instructors have brought new meaning to an old discipline. However, in Ontario, Latin, Greek, and Classical Civilization courses are only taught at the secondary level as electives, and only in select schools. The fading influence of classical studies in high schools suggests Latin is antiquated subject, yet it maintains a reputation of encouraging high academic achievement. In some New York City charter schools, Latin is being introduced at the elementary level with positive results on academic performance in other subjects. Educators have even noticed a positive correlation between Latin language learning and improved SAT scores in areas of the city traditionally plagued by poverty, crime, and low literacy rates (Long, 2014). The documented benefits of a classical education and its continued absence in schools raises the dual (and perhaps contradictory) question: why are classical studies courses still taught at all and yet why are they so often ignored in school programming? This study explores the unmapped middle ground between the dual/contradictory poles of a classical education’s unpopularity and advantages, specifically in the context of Toronto schools, both public and private.

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1 A clarification of terms is, I feel, necessary here. “Latin,” “Greek,” and “Classical Civilization” are the course names in the Ontario Ministry of Education’s curriculum documents. Going forward in this paper, when I need to refer to all three subjects as a whole, I will refer to them as “classical studies.” When I need to refer to them individually, I will use their individual titles. A “classical education” is one that has a focus on Latin and Greek literature and civilization (OED, Def. 1.c.).
1.1 Research Problem

Despite studies pointing to the benefits of Latin language learning, particularly on English literacy rates (VanTassel-Baska, 2004), classical studies are largely overlooked in the secondary school system and are relegated to elective status. When Ontario curriculum documents do address the merits of classical studies, they are vaguely framed within the context of interdisciplinary studies (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2000). The buzz word “interdisciplinary” needs to be probed further to understand how teachers make classical studies relatable and truly interdisciplinary subjects. This paper investigates how current classical educators navigate the somewhat mired position classical studies finds itself in and to what extent they have influence over its future direction. I examined what best practices these teachers employ to reach their students and keep their program going strong.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

I sought to understand the hurdles to classics education and why it remains marginalized, yet maintained. Latin is perceived as both a near-forgotten dead language and an elite subject of academic pursuit. The aim of this qualitative study is to learn how secondary school instructors teach classical studies in order to keep them relevant, and to discover how classical studies can be applied in multi- and inter-disciplinary fields, specifically for the teaching of English and History: two core subjects in the Ontario Secondary School Curriculum. If classical studies remain oft-ignored electives with great potential for improving literacy rates, I was curious to investigate how else this potential plays itself out upon core courses and students’ academic success.

1.3 Research Questions
The central questions I examine are “How do secondary school classicists pay homage to and reinvent the study of Latin and Greek language, literature, and civilization in order to apply them to the contemporary educational climate? What does the study of classics bring to other disciplines and to education in general?”

1.3.1 Subsidiary questions. Some further questions to supplement my main line of inquiry include:

- How do teachers of classical studies maintain their program year to year, especially when one considers that Latin, Greek, and Classical Civilization are electives? Is it a yearly fight for enrollment in order to keep the courses offered? What supports do they have from their schools and school boards?
- How do classics teachers adapt their course and curriculum material to keep it relatable? Do they find the binary between antiquity and current events hard to express and employ in their teaching practices? How do they overcome or engage with such difficulties?
- Do classical studies teachers embrace this idea of interdisciplinary application?

1.4 Reflexive Positioning Statement

As a scholar of classics myself I needed to exercise caution to maintain a balanced position of academic inquiry and not to stray into the realm of a pedagogical paean for lost Latin. I do, however, maintain my stance of partiality, for, as Yatta Kanu (2011) said best, “as a social researcher, I do not subscribe to the positivistic notion that the researcher has no position of personal interest” (p.xii). I chose this research topic due to my interest in it and my hope that through its study I could grow and improve upon my own teaching practice. Having studied classics at the university level, but not having been exposed to Latin and Greek language and
culture in my rural high school in B.C., I was curious to explore the experience of secondary school classical studies in Ontario. I was versed in classics, but unacquainted with Ontario high schools. As such, I approached this research from a plural position of expertise and ignorance, similar to the position Latin instruction finds itself in: largely ignored except by experts.

1.5 Preview of the whole

In response to the research questions I conducted a qualitative research study in which I interviewed three teachers whom I selected based on their years of teaching experience either or in both the Latin and Classical Civilization courses, in both the public and the private sector. I asked them about their pedagogical approaches for maintaining the practice and practicality of classical Studies. In Chapter 2, I review the literature in the areas of student academic performance, curriculum recommendations for classical studies in Ontario high schools, and contemporary pedagogy for classical language learning. In Chapter 3 I elaborate on the methodology of my research; I include information on the procedures observed for the semi-structured interview process and on the interviewees themselves. In Chapter 4 I describe my interviews with three experienced educators in the classical studies field and discuss my research findings, detailing the significance of my data in relation to the existing literature. In Chapter 5 I examine the limitations of my study and establish the implications of my findings for my own identity and practice as a teacher, and for the educational research community at large. I conclude by articulating questions raised by my research findings, and point to areas for future research.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

The first half of the twentieth century saw classical studies programs phased out of secondary school core curricula, but, like the regeneration of Prometheus’s liver\(^2\), classical studies has had a revival in recent years (Peritz, 2009). While perhaps the administrators who discontinued the classical focus in schools saw a classical education as Sisyphean\(^3\), classicists and scholars saw otherwise, pointing to the benefits of Latin language learning on English comprehension. I start by reviewing the literature in the area of academic performance for classics students, while considering the potential biases of the scholarship. I next examine the history of curricular restructuring in regards to classical studies, starting in the inter-war years, and how these changes have come to bear on the contemporary curriculum in Ontario. Finally, I review research on contemporary classical pedagogy in order to understand how classical studies instructors keep their programs active and present in schools.

2.1 The Effect of a Classical Education on Student Academic Performance

As the classical focus in Western education systems faded, classicists found themselves needing to find reasons to keep their courses alive - a problem made all the worse now that the dead languages of Latin and Greek were seen as truly deceased and no longer relevant to the changing social climate (Christou, 2015). Educators needed to make the implicit benefits explicit in the face of curriculum reform. As early as 1937, classicists started publishing articles such as

\(^2\) Prometheus is a figure from Greek mythology who was sentenced to have his liver plucked out each day by an eagle in punishment for stealing fire from the gods (NOAD, Def. 1). The liver grew back in time for the eagle to pluck it out again.

\(^3\) Sisyphus is another figure from Greek mythology who was punished in Hades by being condemned to roll a large rock up a hill, only to have it roll back to the bottom where he must begin again (NOAD, Def. 1). I am using Sisyphean in the sense that to many people studying classics may seem like a tortuous, pointless task.
“10 Reasons for Studying Latin” or “Latin and Greek - A Necessity in Modern Life” (Mattingly, 1937; Gertrude, 1937) in response to the perceived threat to their status in schools. While these articles addressed reasons to keep classics in schools, the reasons against them were left more or less tacit, beside a bitter allusion to the hypocrisy of the Sciences for daring to usurp the classics whilst so much of their terminology depended on Latin and Greek (Gertrude, 1937). As a reader, arguments promoting classical studies seem hollow without acknowledging the adverse situation against which they are made. In order to better understand the position classical studies educators find themselves in, I examine claims that challenge the existence of classical studies and research that supports its relevance.

2.1.1 Implicit claims made explicit for and against classical studies. Classical studies’ relationship to the sciences is a paradoxical combination of fierce independence from, and validity-seeking association with them. Cecilia Gertrude (1937) calls the natural sciences the “sworn enemies of the classics” (p. 21), yet in the 21st century classicists ironically seek validation for their discipline by declaring the usefulness of Latin and Greek for the sciences. In her article “The Benefits of Latin?”, Lisa R. Holliday (2012) writes that scholars often contend that Latin “develops transferable skills necessary for success in the sciences” (p. 3). She is not just referring to the Latin and Greek etymology behind the majority of scientific terms (Rasinski, Padak, Newton, & Newton, 2011), but to the analytical thought processes developed for parsing Latin and Greek texts. Humanities scholars in general, and classicists in specific, speak to the habits of mind that their disciplines develop as benefits in and of themselves (Christou, 2015). These explicit claims are made in reaction to changing curricula in the 1930s that began to put the focus on subjects that had a direct benefit to modern life, such as applied sciences and technical training (Christou, 2015). Suddenly, classicists found they had to start giving reasons to
study their discipline. As the curricular changes progressed, the arguments against Latin and classical studies grew, as did the classicists’ defenses.

VanTassel-Baska (2004) articulates five common critiques leveled against Latin language instruction⁴: 1) “Latin is a ‘dead’ language with no practical value;” 2) “it does not ‘train’ the mind as once believed;” 3) “it is difficult;” 4) “it is text-based learning, not aural-oral in technique;” and 5) “it is irrelevant to today’s youth” (p. 57). In answer to these disparaging critiques, the reason many proponents of Latin seem to give for learning it is, as Coffee (2012) says, “general human flourishing” (p. 265). Such a quip seems almost glib in its quickness but it is also profound; it accounts for all the quantifiable data supporting the academic benefits of Latin, as well as the qualitative, more affect-based reasons for Latin that many classics teachers give. The flourishing of the human mind can refer to the rigorously tested academic advantage shown in classics students’ marks, while it can also refer to the flowering of a general sense of human potential and desire to learn. Through the study of classics, students’ appreciation for other cultures blossoms as they learn the lives and traditions behind the Latin and Greek languages (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2000).

VanTassel-Baska (2004) provides nine, carefully reasoned and research supported statements in response to the 5 major criticisms, but there is also something to be said for statements like McGowan’s (2014), namely that Latin is good for the “overall ethos of the school” (p. 256). Latin, for its rarity, makes students of it feel special. They can take pleasure in

⁴ I focus here on Latin language learning, as opposed to classical studies in general, as most research is done on Latin. Latin has more of a quantifiable relationship to English and its position as a dead language exemplifies the estranged and forgotten position classical studies as a whole seems to find itself in.
having mastered something few attempt. Coffee (2012) describes the pleasure of Latin best when he states:

Most often my immediate goal is rather to foster the joy of learning and communicating. I often find this joy easier to convey in Latin, a language that is special for each of us who uses it, that no one owns, where the construction of every sentence can have charm, and the use of a half-remembered word or phrase brings a shared pleasure of recognition (p. 269).

Does this love of learning for learning’s sake still carry on in the Latin classroom? Does this reason satisfy administrators? Does the joy of Latin call to the students, whose enrollment numbers then satisfy the administrators? These are questions that anticipate the research findings in my Chapter 4.

2.1.2 Benefits of a classical education: Improved test scores. The most commonly cited piece of quantifiable data to support classical studies is that Latin learners perform better on standardized tests, such as the SAT. In 1981, LaFleur’s groundbreaking article found that students who had taken the Latin Achievement Test scored 144 points higher in the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) Verbal section and 122 points higher in the SAT Math section than the national average (p. 254). While this is correlational data, in order to rule out the possible advantage that learning any second language gives a student, LaFleur (1981) compared the SAT scores of students who had taken Spanish, French, Hebrew, German, or Russian to the scores of the identified Latin students. Again, the Latin students outperformed all other language students in the Verbal section of the SAT and outperformed all other language students, except for

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5 It is assumed that few have opportunity to attempt learning Latin, due to its association with old Etonian, affluent schools. However, my research suggests it is more the personality cult of the instructor that influences Latin course offerings in schools.
Russian learners, in the Math section of the SAT. Moreover, from 1988-1997 the Educational Testing Service found that students of Latin continued to outperform all other students in the SAT Verbal section (Long, 2014). In a first hand account, Ron Janoff, a Latin teacher at Williamsburg Charter High School in Brooklyn, saw that his students, the majority of whom come from socio-economically disadvantaged families, had improved their SAT scores by studying Latin; admissions officers at colleges also looked favourably at students with Latin on their transcript (Janoff, 2014).

The very nature of correlative data provides no reasons for the results beyond speculation, but many classicists point to the fact that 60% of English words have a Latin origin (Holliday, 2012), and that deciphering an inflected language such as Latin develops analytical skills that can be applied across disciplines (VanTassel-Baska, 2004). Indeed, “Latin develops intellectual habits of mind” is VanTassel-Baska’s first of nine rejoinders to Latin criticisms (p. 57). She even cites a 1992 study by Harrington and Lueker that found Latin improved reading and math skills among minority students. Points four, five, and six on VanTassel-Baska’s list relate to Latin’s ability to enhance English vocabulary, English linguistic competency, and the acquisition of a third language (p. 57). However, in relation to these three points, there has been some debate on the effectiveness of learning Latin as opposed to learning another, modern language.

2.1.3 Latin vs. modern language learning. Latin’s 60% derivation rate from English is a well-documented statistic, so an easy and obvious extraction from it is that Latin improves English vocabulary. Indeed, multiple studies, mostly starting in the mid-20th century, have documented the positive correlation between Latin learning and English proficiency: Holliday (2012) describes and cites Berelson and Steiner’s study (1964), Masciantonio’s (1977),
Lafleuer’s (1985), and Holmes and Keefer’s (1995). However, Holliday also points to research that has shown learning any second language improves English vocabulary. Eddy concluded that the longer a student has studied another language, the better they will do on the SATs (as cited in Holliday, 2012, p. 8). In terms of Latin being beneficial to the study and acquisition of another, modern language, Haag and Stern (2003) found that a knowledge of French actually helped students learn Spanish better than if they had a knowledge of Latin. This is because French and Spanish share structural commonalities, while Latin’s relationship is primarily etymological. On the other hand, Prager (2000) found that students of Latin after one year were able to translate simple sentences in Italian, Spanish, French, and Romanian, despite not having learned them.

All this is not to say that Latin has no benefit; rather it has a benefit similar to many other languages. In fact, some research suggests Latin achieves the same results in terms of English proficiency in less time than the study of another language. VanTassel-Baska (2004) cites a 1984 study by VanStrekelenburg that showed students who had studied Latin for one year had a greater English reading ability than students who had studied another language for four years (p. 57). This one to four ratio holds true in Mavrogenes’s 1977 study which found that, on the California Achievement Test, students who had taken Latin for one year outdid students who had taken French or Spanish for four years. Perhaps Latin courses offer a condensed instructional method, resulting in faster appreciable results. Of course, these correlational studies do not point to causation. In terms of documented advantages, interestingly, in my research I have found that the statistically confirmed benefits of a classical education have grown exponentially as the focus in education moved away from the classics.

2.2 Classical Curriculum Recommendations
After the First World War, when countries in shock began progressivist reforms and the curricular climate started to turn away from the classics, adamant classicists began a long history of studies to document the benefits of a classical education. Ironically, it seems that as the focus on the classics faded, its benefits became more apparent. The first study undertaken by the American Classical League (ACL) between 1921-24 in response to declining Latin and Greek courses hoped to prove the benefit of learning Latin based on its improvement of English grammar (Holliday, 2012). The study proved no such thing, but in the decades following, more and more researchers found the correlation between English and Latin the ACL sought (see research described above). Yet, the studies documented above always frame classical studies in relation to the benefits it brings to other disciplines. Students develop the (transferrable) skill of critical thinking through translation, or an appreciation of other cultures through an extended study of the Greeks and Romans (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2000); Latin improves English proficiency and Math SAT scores. Interestingly, classical studies as a discipline has almost dissolved to become purely interdisciplinary. Such a shift in the position of classical studies is demonstrated by the fact that it is no longer its own department and instead Latin falls under the classification of “foreign language” (Wills, 1998). In Ontario, the curriculum document for classics is in fact combined with that of International Languages (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2000). I do not think educators should seek a return to a classical education, but understanding the process of curricular reform I feel is important to appreciating the efforts of classical studies educators to keep their discipline relevant in the contemporary educational climate.

2.2.1 Classical education: A history. In Ontario, education reform began in the inter-war years during a period of transition from “tradition” to “modernity” during which progressivist reformers started concentrating on “relating school life to contemporary social
realities” (Christou, 2015, p. 295). The old, humanist education system, which included a focus on classics, came to be seen as a means to inculcate knowledge that was no longer relevant to society, and by 1935 Latin was no longer mandatory (Christou, 2015). The old system was out in favour of a system that would better serve the fast-changing society. However, Christou (2015) suggests that a classical education might never have served the interests of society, even before the first World War. He points to the correlation between the increased number of students attending secondary school and the decreased emphasis on the classics (p. 309). He postulates that the humanist education system served only the privileged few who had access to school while believing that that its courses of study were applicable to all. Narrowing the applicability of a classical education even further, Christou draws a parallel to the Minister of Education in 1940, Duncan McArthur, who had studied classics and history at university, but who was one of the leading figures in progressivist reform. Duncan’s contradictory position between his past studies and his job position leads Christou to the astute observation “that humanism was more an individual disposition than it was a characteristic of one social, intellectual, or political class” (p. 299). In the context of today’s classroom, how do modern teachers of classics view their discipline? Do they see it as a collection of like-minded individuals pursuing their interests, similar to a Specialist High Skills Major, or do they see it is an under-appreciated field beneficial to all?

At the time of the reforms, classicists certainly wanted to believe in the importance of their discipline for all students, and so began the ACL’s pioneering study to show the relevance of Latin to English grammar (Holliday, 2012). However, the results did not support their hypothesis and they could not turn the tide of support back to the classics. Interestingly though, classicists did not give up, and later studies (discussed above) did prove a positive correlation
between Latin learning and English proficiency. In 1973 there was even a renewed interest in studying Latin since SAT scores were dropping, as had been the number of Latin courses being offered (Holliday, 2012). A correlational observation of my own is that the studied benefits of Latin on English grammar came during a time when English grammar itself was not being actively taught. Jones, Myhill, and Bailey (2012) point to the absence of English grammar education in Anglophone countries for the past 50 years, resulting in teachers of English who are ill-equipped to teach grammar (p. 1245). It appears that these educators then turned to Latin instructors to supplement the wanting grammar. Latin’s - and by extension, classical studies’ - position as an interdisciplinary subject, and not a discipline all on its own, became solidified in the new educational climate.

2.2.2 The Ontario curriculum. The Ontario Ministry of Education curriculum document (2000) highlights the interdisciplinary focus of classical studies in the very title of the document: Classical Studies and International Languages. Classical studies pairs well with other International Languages. The document itself takes the interdisciplinary approach to the next level by combining a humanist discipline with a progressivist outlook. Indeed, the Overview of the Program states, “[s]ince the study of languages and cultures enhances reasoning skills and the ability to solve problems, classical studies and international language courses equip students with skills that are essential for effective learning in other areas of the curriculum, as well as for employment” (p. 5). The course does not teach skills that are useful in and of themselves, but that have value in relation to other areas of the curriculum and to future employment. Following the practical focus of the progressivist reforms, the benefits are framed in respect to their applicability to the job market. At the more detailed level of the classical languages course descriptions (both Latin and Greek), the Ministry (2000) divides the subject into four major
strands of focus: “1. Oral Communication (Listening, Speaking), 2. Reading, 3. Writing, and 4. Application of Knowledge of the Classical Language to Other Contexts” (p. 9). One of the 4 main goals of Latin instruction is to teach students how to apply what they have learned to other disciplines. Even the original interdisciplinary extension of Latin onto improved English vocabulary is referenced in the Ministry document (2000). Given this emphasis on interdisciplinary application, I aimed to press out how classics instructors bring their (inter)discipline to bear onto other contexts, within the school environment and without.

2.3 The Pedagogy of a Contemporary Classical Education

Beyond sharing the joy of classics through an interdisciplinary focus, how do classics teachers keep their courses active and present in schools? In some charter schools in the United States serving underprivileged students, classics has become the focus of their curriculum. The old humanists and even some scholars today would argue that Latin as a discipline most benefits gifted students (Van-Tassel-Baska, 1987). However, these charter schools are “bring[ing] the elite to the street” (Janoff, 2014, p. 262) with positive results for student achievement. The classical focus in these schools is breathing new life into dead languages, but, far from merely hooking them up to artificial ventilators, instructors are finding new ways to make these ancient languages and their concomitant cultures relevant. From speaking active Latin, to exploring an online interactive Rome, a small-scale classical revival has begun in the United States. In my interviews in Chapter 4, I examine the extent to which this revival has spread to Canada.

2.3.1 Charter schools in New York. While VanTassel-Baska (1987; 2004) describes Latin language learning as the ideal challenge for gifted students who may be bored in standard classes, the three charter schools, South Bronx Classical Charter School, Maspeth High School, and Williamsburg Charter High School, run classically focused curricula for all students, the
majority of whom come from poor neighbourhoods. At Williamsburg Charter High School, students are chosen by lottery from low-performing public schools (Janoff, 2014), while students at South Bronx Classical Charter School come from “the lowest performing borough in education in the city” (Long, 2014, p. 262). Maspeth High School in Queens, New York does not screen students based on test scores and rather gives priority to local kids (Durkin, 2014). Despite these disadvantages, their students perform well with their Classical curriculum; South Bronx claims to have closed the achievement gap between their black and white students (Long, 2014), while Williamsburg has seen improved SAT scores and an increased rate of college acceptance (Janoff, 2014). Being gifted was not a prerequisite to a classical education for these students, but the uniqueness and ‘elite’ status of Latin Janoff (2014) credits with keeping students interested; simply put, it is empowering for students to be able to read (and even speak) a language that few people can.

Despite the current success of their programs, each school faced some difficulty in getting started. Janoff (2014) in particular noted the rate at which Williamsburg went through Latin instructors until he arrived and found a new focus that worked for both students and instructor alike. For him, it was introducing an active, oral component to Latin instruction that made the difference. Students could now banter and chat in Latin as they could with any other modern language. At Maspeth High School, teachers try to connect the lives and language of the Romans to their students’ own languages and histories as Queens is such a diverse neighbourhood (Durkin, 2014); they are fostering inclusiveness while maintaining the relevancy of classical studies.

2.3.2 Classical revival: Active and interactive Latin. Educators are rising to the challenge of making classical studies relevant and engaging to students by turning a dead
language into an active tongue in the classroom and an interactive one online. Like Janoff observed in his own students, Wills (1998) found that students’ desire to be able to communicate in Latin as their peers studying modern languages could promoted the turn to active, spoken Latin. Moreover, active Latin differentiates instruction from the traditional translation exercises by catering to aural/oral learners (Wills, 1998). Yet there are limitations to the introduction of active Latin, namely the hesitancies of instructors who doubt their own oral competence (Wills, 1998), and the stubbornness of academic institutions unwilling to change the traditional instruction of a traditional subject (Coffee, 2012). The research suggests that it is the students themselves who take a leading role in promoting this change of focus. Janoff (2014) notes that he faced “student opposition, rebellion, sabotage, and failure” (p. 259) until he found a textbook that suited the students’ needs; this text book of course had a large oral component.

Classical programs are also being helped by movies and TV shows such as Gladiator and HBO’s Rome, which have increased awareness and interest in the classical world (Peritz, 2009). These representations in popular media make classics seem more hip. And for those who think active Latin cannot match the fluidity and adaptability of modern languages (see Coffee, 2012, p. 266), there is always the Lexicon recentis Latinitatis, published by the Vatican. It is a compendium of words that are recent additions to Latin, such as Karate (oppugnatio inermis Iaponica), skyscraper (caeliscalpium) and miniskirt (tunicula minima) (Peritz, 2009).

From active Latin, to interactive Latin, a pioneering group of researchers created the VRoma Project, an online, interactive map of 2nd century Rome that allows students and scholars to communicate in Latin while studying Roman art, architecture, and culture (McManus, 2001). It was founded and funded in 1997 by grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH). The idea was to create a tool for scholars which made use of
“[t]echnology’s capacity to create a sense of immediacy and intimate contact with the classical world [that] generates interest and personal investment in teaching and learning classics” (McManus, 2001, p. 253). The site may not look like much (designers deliberately kept it simple to keep bandwidth requirements low for school use), but it provides an explorable city in order to promote “situated learning” (McManus, 2001, p. 257). It contextualizes students’ learning and concretizes abstract concepts such as vocabulary definitions by situating words learned in their historical context. A follow-up study conducted by Gruber-Miller and Benton (2001) found that the immediacy VRoma fosters heightens students’ and teachers’ cultural understanding of Rome. Moreover, students reported that they found this cultural component of VRoma the most useful for Latin language learning (Gruber-Miller & Benton, 2001). VRoma successfully combines culture and language learning, to the benefit of both. The integration of technology into as traditional a subject as Latin is both inspiring and a representation of the necessary adaptability of classical studies in the contemporary education climate.

2.4 Conclusion

In this literature review I examined research on the correlation between Latin language learning and academic performance, the history of classical curricular restructuring, and the resulting contemporary classical pedagogy. By couching the results of these studies on Latin language learning within the context of the changing curricular climate, I observed the inverse pattern between the diminishing focus on classical studies and the seemingly increasing effectiveness of said discipline. Such a relationship raises questions about the extent of progressivist reforms and points to the need for further research in the areas of curricular co-dependence and evolution. How does changing the curricular foci maximize learning and how representative of social change are educational reforms? The value of classics may be seen more
in the connections it forms between disciplines than in it as a dominant discipline of its own, but perhaps this interdisciplinary trend is present in all subjects. Over the course of the 20th century, classics changed from a discipline unto itself, and adapted into an interdisciplinary subject. In light of this interdisciplinary adaptation, the purpose of my research is to understand how classical studies educators in Ontario keep their subject relevant and interesting to today’s students. Do they model instruction off of modern language classes and incorporate technology into their pedagogical style? Or have they found a continued niche for traditional translation-based instruction?
Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.0 Introduction

In this chapter I explain the research methodology behind my study of classics in secondary education; I describe my rationale for how this specific methodology supports my research purpose. I begin with a review of the general research approach and its concomitant procedures, before moving on to an elaboration of the main instruments of data collection. I then present the details of my study’s participants, including the criteria for sample selection and recruitment as well as relevant biographical details. I explain data analysis procedures, before reviewing the ethical considerations my study raised and how they were addressed. Relatedly, I identify possible limitations to my qualitative methodology while acknowledging its areas of strength for my particular research. I then conclude the chapter by summarizing my methodological decisions and previewing how this methodology played out in the analysis of my semi-structured interviews.

3.1 Research Approach & Procedures

This study was completed using a qualitative research approach wherein I reviewed the relevant literature, both on the topic of my chosen research and on the appropriateness of the qualitative study method, and I conducted semi-structured interviews with practicing teachers. Marshall (1996) has pointed out that the research question, and not the researcher, determines the type of study to be conducted. In the debate between quantitative and qualitative research, one of the main determining factors between the two is the nature of the data sought and collected; quantitative research creates generalizable data that can even demonstrate causality through the manipulation of variables, while qualitative research presents emerging data that can be used to
develop themes related to humanistic queries but not definite conclusions (Campbell, 2014; Marshall, 1996). Qualitative data is exploratory in nature, indicating that there is not a great deal of data on the subject (Campbell, 2014). In the context of my research, my unique focus on classical studies in Ontario secondary schools necessitated a qualitative approach. I investigated the best practices of teachers in both the public and the private sector and explored themes related to how these teachers keep the study of dead languages and their concomitant civilizations relevant. While ‘what?’ questions are the foci of quantitative studies, these ‘why?’ and ‘how?’ questions are at the centre of qualitative studies (Marshall, 1996). I asked why these teachers feel classics still have a place in schools and how they work to keep this study relevant.

At the start of my Chapter 1, I referenced Yatta Kanu (2011) and her belief, which I support, that social researchers must acknowledge a position of personal interest in their work (p. xii). Qualitative research adds this personal connection as a fundamental feature to its method of inquiry and analysis. By nature, qualitative research provides information on the participants’ feelings towards the research through interviews conducted person to person (Ivey, 2012). Clark (2010) has noted that participants in qualitative research feel that this method of inquiry provides an outlet for self-expression and opinion formation; it can even be seen as therapeutic for some. Such concern with the human side of research provides the context for any data, whereas quantitative research removes this information as extraneous variables (Ivey, 2012). The context and lived experience of secondary classical instructors is the focus of my work, not any sort of variable to be removed.

The characteristics and experiences of the participants are the focus of qualitative research, but the researcher is personally vested in the process. Not only is the motivation behind qualitative studies often to satisfy a personal interest (Clark, 2010), but the data and themes that
emerge from the study are analyzed and coded by the researcher themselves (Ivey, 2012). In quantitative studies the researcher strives to be objective, but in qualitative studies the researcher acknowledges their (personal) relationship to the research (Marshall, 1996). As such, qualitative studies provide an avenue for the exploration of subjective experience in research (Carr, 1994). Earlier, I reflexively positioned myself as a student of classical studies; I now point to this statement as a level of personal interest and involvement that qualitative research requires.

3.2 Instruments of Data Collection

In my small, qualitative study, I conducted my research using semi-structured interviews. These semi-structured interviews allow for flexibility of responses while also providing a framework for the researcher (Jackson, Drummond, & Camara, 2007). Unstructured interviews, on the other hand, are found primarily in larger scale studies, such as ethnographic research, where the researcher can observe groups of people and move around asking questions (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). As I am interested in the unique perspectives of secondary classics teachers, I organized individual semi-structured interviews where I could speak one-on-one with my teacher participants and get their candid perspectives.

With semi-structured interviews the researcher acts as a guide to the themes they wish to investigate and, as such, they can go off-script to encourage more elaborate responses (Qu & Dumay, 2011). They are not held to a list of prescribed questions such as one would find in a structured interview; these structured interviews are much more rigid and more likely produce quantitative data (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Semi-structured interviews are adaptable because they are designed around human conversation, which structure allows the interviewees to answer fluidly, employing their own unique use of language (Qu & Dumay, 2011).

Understanding the best practices of specific teachers, such as is the purpose of my research,
requires that these teachers have the freedom to express themselves. Qu and Dumay (2011) even coordinate what they call a “localist perspective” (p.239) with semi-structured interviews. In other words, the focus of semi-structured interviews is on the specific, or localized, perspective of the person being interviewed. As I wanted to hear about the lived, specific, and localized experience of practicing classics instructors, semi-structured interviews were the most appropriate format. Though the results from these small, semi-structured qualitative interviews are not generalizable like large quantitative research findings, the results of qualitative research are transferable (Marshall, 1996). For my purposes as a beginning teacher and researcher, the transferable themes gleaned from semi-structured interviews about the personal experiences of teachers are most applicable to my future practice.

3.3 Participants

Due to the subjective nature of qualitative studies, Marshall (1996) remarks that the unique parameters of the research question determines the size and nature of the sample selected. In this section I address the sampling criteria that my focus on secondary classical studies necessitated and I select the most appropriate avenue for teacher recruitment out of a range of options. I have also included a section for participants’ biographies, where I provide their relevant background information.

3.3.1 Sampling criteria. The following criteria were applied for selecting teacher participants:

1. Teachers have experience teaching both classical civilization classes and the classical languages (either or both Latin and Greek) classes. I wanted participants to be able to comment upon the differences in enrollment between the history-focused civilization class and the translation-centered language classes. Did they notice a difference in popularity and enrollment?
I was also interested to see how their approach to teaching differs between the classes. I wanted to know if there was any overlap of translation exercises between the classes, for example.

2. Teachers are secondary school instructors in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). The localized nature of this small qualitative study and my own travel restrictions required that participants be employed within the same general geographic location for continuity and comparability.

3. At least one participant teaches in a private school and one in a public school. I was interested to know if there is a noticeable difference in student and teacher perceptions of classical studies between the public and private sector. Latin and Greek seem like private school staples and connote images of Eton College, but were these fancies substantiated by teachers’ perceptions of their school’s climate?

4. At least one participant is an experienced teacher (over 15 years experience) and one is a new teacher (less than 5 years experience). I wanted to compare the experiences of an established teacher and a new instructor of the classics to see if they have different approaches to teaching the same content. I was also curious to hear if and how the status of classical studies in secondary schools has changed during the course of the experienced teacher’s career.

5. At least one teacher has a teachable subject outside of classical studies. I wanted to know if this teacher noticed a substantial difference in school opinion towards their different teachables. Did they find that one teachable is more employable than the other? I also was interested to know if they could speak to what classical studies brings to other disciplines, specifically their other teachable. Was there any overlap between unconventional pairings of subjects?
3.3.2 Sampling procedures. When conducting research, the recruitment procedure used depends on the type of data one wants to obtain. As I conducted a small-scale qualitative study I employed non-probability sampling, which simply means that my sample size was too small and specific to be generalizable; rather, my data is only applicable “to the specific population under investigation” (Higginbottom, 2004, p.14), in this case, secondary school classics teachers in the GTA. Within the broad category of non-probability sampling, three main sample strategies can be identified: purposeful, convenience, and snowball (Koerber & McMichael, 2008). A purposeful sample, also known as a judgement sample, is the most popular technique in qualitative analysis (Marshall, 1996). With purposeful sampling, the researcher actively selects the participants who are most suitable to answer the research question (Marshall, 1996), while keeping in mind the principle of maximum variation (Koerber & McMichael, 2008). Maximum variation refers to the need to include participants who will present the widest possible variety of perspectives that the research question allows (Koerber & McMichael, 2008). I largely employed purposeful sampling as I had five specific criteria (discussed above) that I wished participants to meet. However, the question remained how to find such participants. The easiest method, though least intellectually credible, is convenience sampling, where the researcher reaches out to the most accessible subjects (Marshall, 1996). I employed convenience sampling to a limited extent as I happened to have spent my second practicum in a Toronto District secondary school that offers Latin and I made connections with the instructor; however, he also happens to satisfy my purposeful criteria. The third method of sampling, namely snowball, is simply the name for the process of recommendation that one participant can start if they know someone else who satisfies the criteria. In the case of my study, my conveniently sampled participant recommended some classics instructors whom he knows. My participant base snowballed in size.
These sampling techniques come with their concomitant ethical issues, notably the issue of transparency and biased selection. Higginbottom (2004) has noted that a lack of transparency in sample selection is a common critique for qualitative studies. My explanations above and honesty about the source of my participants is my effort to counteract this criticism. Moreover, with purposeful sampling researchers can create biased results by handpicking participants who will produce the data that they want (Koerber & McMichael, 2008). My employment of all three sampling techniques aimed to prevent this pitfall. I took measures to conduct an ethical and considerate qualitative study.

3.3.3 Participant bios. I selected and interviewed three high school Latin instructors from three different schools within the Greater Toronto Area. While all three participants have degrees in classical studies at university, only one participant has had the opportunity to teach the Classical Civilizations class, due to inter-departmental competition which I shall expand upon in my Chapter 4. However, each participant has experience teaching classes outside of classical studies. Participant 1, whom I shall henceforth refer to with the pseudonym Gus Caesar, is a relatively new teacher with under 5 years experience; he teaches Latin and history at a downtown private school. Participants 2 and 3, whom I have given the pseudonyms Mark Chips and Scott Ramsay, respectively, both teach Latin at Toronto public schools. Mr. Chips has 7 years experience teaching French and actually started the Latin program at his school. Mr. Ramsay is the most experienced teacher I interviewed, with over 15 years of experience teaching Latin, history, and classical civilizations.

3.4 Data Analysis

After conducting, recording, and transcribing my interviews, I began analyzing the data. First I coded my data by looking for descriptive words or phrases that “represent and capture a
datum’s primary content and essence” (Saldaña, 2009, p. 3). I then integrated and categorized my codes by looking for patterns; As Charmaz (2006) wrote, coding “generates the bones of your analysis… [I]ntegration will assemble those bones into a working skeleton” (as cited in Saldaña, 2009, p. 8). I added ligaments and muscles to this ‘working skeleton’ in the form of comprehensive themes. A theme “is a phrase or sentence describing more subtle or tacit process [in the data]” (Rossman & Rallis, as cited in Saldaña, 2009, p. 13, emphasis added by Saldaña). My themes arose from comparing categories across interviews to get at the heart of what was said by all three of my participants. I also examined null data, or, what was not said by my participants. From this analysis I was able to extract three themes that work together to form a narrative which directly speaks to my research questions.

3.5 Ethical Review Procedures

Qu and Dumay (2011) noted that with the societal shift towards protection of personal information and maintenance of human rights it is of paramount importance, now more than ever, to consider ethical issues when conducting research. They identified four specific issues interviewers should consider: impose no harm, maintain an ethical relationship with the interviewee, disclose the research’s intent, and respect the interviewee’s right to privacy and confidentiality. DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006) added the further consideration of reducing the risk of exploitation; in other words, the interviewer should not personally gain from conducting the research and they should acknowledge how the participants’ perspectives contributed to the success of the research. As without my semi-structured interviews my research would be a simple literature review and not a qualitative study at all, I am very much indebted to my volunteer interviewees. I was sure to convey the extent of my gratitude to them. However,
more importantly I upheld the other four tenets of ethical research, as identified by Qu and Dumay (2011).

In order to impose no harm, I informed my interviewees of all potential risks before commencing and emphasized that they may withdraw from participation at any time. As my topic concerns best teaching practices and does not extend into more sensitive subjects such as discrimination in schools, there were no known risks to participation in this study. However, during the interview process I took into consideration the possible stressors and self-consciousness my interviewees might feel and attempted to prevent them by asking questions that were exploratory in nature and did not contain value judgements.

As part of my duty to maintain an ethical relationship with the interviewee, I kept my participants informed of the timeline my research project followed through revisions and publication. I communicated with my participants both to thank them for their contributions and to inform them when my research would be published on TSpace, the University of Toronto’s research repository. Moreover, Qu and Dumay (2011) emphasized that a key component to researcher/participant dynamics is the power differential between them. They highlighted the fact that an educated researcher may be intimidating to, or even exploitative of, their subject. However, in the case of my research, this power differential was inverted; I was a student researcher interviewing practicing teachers, so there was no risk of leveraging power for personal gain.

Acting in full disclosure of the research’s intent, I asked participants to sign a consent letter (Appendix A) in which I requested their consent to be interviewed and audio-recorded. Moreover, this consent letter presented an overview of the study and addressed the ethical
considerations, including the potential for risk. The letter also detailed the expectations included with participation in the study, namely one 45-60 minute semi-structured interview.

I respected my interviewees’ right to privacy and confidentiality by first and foremost assigning them each a pseudonym. Moreover, I removed any identifying markers of their schools or students so that their identities would remain confidential. I also informed participants that all data (in the form of the audio-recordings from our interviews) would be destroyed within five years.

3.6 Methodological Limitations and Strengths

Historically, qualitative research has been ascribed a lower status than quantitative research (Carr, 1994). However, what is considered a weakness from the point of view of a quantitative study may be considered a strength for a qualitative approach. For example, from the point of view of a quantitative researcher, the small sample size of a qualitative study would be perceived as a weakness since the purpose of quantitative research is to produce generalizable results (Marshall, 1996). However, Carr (1994) contentiously argued that qualitative research can be generalized, though to a smaller extent, provided that the sample is well defined. Marshall (1996) called this limited generalizability “transferability” (p. 524). In the context of my research, the limited numbers of teachers I could interview certainly affected how broadly I could apply the results; however, my defined focus of classical studies instructors in secondary schools in the GTA allowed for some transferability to the larger population of teachers who fit that description and may have experienced similar opinions towards their subjects. Notably, I do not make the claim that the results from my semi-structured interviews are statistically applicable, but that they can contribute to an improved understanding of the complex situations in which my participants are embedded (Marshall, 1996).
While the subjective nature of qualitative research allows the researcher to personally connect with the participant and hear in greater depth the details of their experience (Qu & Dumay, 2011), the strength of this connection is also a potential weakness (Carr, 1994). They may become too close to the subject or participants and become biased (Carr, 1994). Marshall (1996) indeed stressed that “biases are inevitable” (p. 523). The level of close, interpersonal conversation between interviewer and interviewee though is largely beneficial to the study. Clark (2010) noted that the process of interviewing provides “an opportunity for self-expression” (p. 401) and results in a greater wealth of information shared than could be conveyed through a quantitative method such as a survey. Moreover, some interviewees find the process therapeutic (Clark, 2010), perhaps because it validates participants’ experiences. The restricted nature of my study (only three 45-60 minute interviews) reduced the risk of bias while leaving the avenues for personal expression and validation open.

3.7 Conclusion

I opened this chapter with an examination of my rationale for my qualitative research approach, noting that I pursued answers to the questions why secondary school classics teachers feel their subject still has a place in schools and how they work to keep this study relevant. I drew attention to the personal involvement of both the researcher and the participants in qualitative studies, a statement that echoed throughout my considerations of ethical procedures and limitations to my study. I described the semi-structured interview technique I will be employing and explained how the guided, yet flexible, nature of this process fosters the best responses for the best practices I wish to discover from my interviewees. I then detailed my sampling criteria and the sampling procedures employed; I utilized a mix of purposeful, convenience, and snowball sampling so as to minimize the unfavourable aspects of each.
Moving from the ethical concerns of sampling procedures to larger concerns about my qualitative study, I examined the four ethical principles of qualitative research: impose no harm, maintain balanced relationships, disclose the intent of the research, and respect participant’s privacy. The ethical concern of bias reappeared in my consideration of methodological limitations and strengths. I noted that strengths can be weaknesses and weaknesses can become strengths. Indeed, the limitations of my study in terms of its small-scale nature actually strengthen my data by decreasing the likelihood of bias in my interviews. There were only three short interviews, thereby limiting the time spent with each participant in which I could influence them, but the interview structure remained open for participants to share their experiences. Next, I report the research findings in Chapter 4.
Chapter 4: Thematic Analysis

4.0 Introduction

In this chapter I recount the findings from my qualitative study into how secondary school classics teachers pay homage to and reinvent the study of Latin and Greek language, literature, and civilization in today’s educational climate. These results come from three, separately conducted interviews with secondary school instructors, two of whom teach at public schools and one at a private school. My interviewees have been assigned the pseudonyms: Gus Caesar, Mark Chips, and Scott Ramsay. I recruited these participants through both my own personal connections and their networks within the classics instructors ‘community’ network. In other words, I employed a mix of convenience and snowball sampling. Each interview was transcribed and individually coded, from which larger themes were drawn. I have organized these themes below under the headings:

1. The Marketability of Classics
2. Latin as a ‘Living’ Entity
3. The Interdisciplinary Nature of Classics.

I hope to tell a story of how classical studies survives on its own and in relation to other disciplines. In particular, I examine what attracts students to the discipline in the first place, how instruction is adapted to match an antiquated discipline with modern students, and how the content of classical studies interrelates with different disciplines and cultures.

The first step to understanding the current position of classical studies in secondary schools, I feel, is to understand the factors that help and hinder the popularity of the discipline. As such, my first theme investigates what makes classical studies marketable. In examining why students still study classics, I discovered that the marketability of classics has less to do with
inherent student interest in the discipline itself than with the popularity of the instructor. However, once students start studying classics there is a complicated interplay between the difficulty of the discipline and its exciting extra-curricular opportunities that affects who continues studying classics.

My second theme shifts the focus from what attracts students to the discipline to what teachers do to keep them there. My data shows that for a discipline whose focus is on two dead languages (Latin and Ancient Greek), it is, shockingly, still very much alive, largely due to adaptable teachers. Instructors find they must work to counteract misconceptions about classical studies, namely that it is antiquated and difficult, while modernizing both instructional practices and content.

With my third theme I broaden my analysis from the students and teachers themselves to the discipline as a whole. I consider how classical studies relates to other disciplines offered in high schools; in other words, I examine how interdisciplinary it is. My research finds that classics faces a lot of opposition from other disciplines, yet studying it improves student performance in other fields. This correlation between academic success in Latin and success in other classes substantiates the research I presented in my literature review. Beyond classical studies’ relationship with other disciplines, I examine its position in relation to the changing cultural dynamics of the modern world in which it is taught. The classical connections across disciplines and cultures looks forward to my Chapter 5 where I discuss the implications of my data and areas for future research.

4.1 The Marketability of Classics

I had wondered how instructors navigate the mired position of classical studies, with it being both a seemingly forgotten discipline and at the same time a subject of elite academic
pursuit. Does its uniqueness and elitism naturally attract curious students, or does it face a yearly fight for enrollment? The data extracted on the theme of classical studies’ marketability to high school students reveals that it is the popularity of the teacher that plays the most decisive role in attracting students to the discipline. The difficulty of classical studies, contrasted with the engaging extra-curricular activities classics instructors offer, creates a push and pull of repulsion and attraction to the discipline that affects enrollment rates.

4.1.1 The personality cult of the teacher. The title for this subtheme derives from an expression Scott Ramsay used to describe powerful figures in classical education and the legacy they leave in their schools; he called it their “personality cult.” In other words, initial interest in classical studies largely hinges upon the popularity of the instructor and the reputation they have built within their school, not an inherent fascination with the subject matter itself. The data moreover suggests that this instructor popularity must exist both among students and within the school administration, for it is they who ultimately determine which courses will be offered the next year.

Perhaps it is due to the large scale disappearance of classical studies in secondary schools that I examined in my literature review (Christou, 2015; Wills, 1998), but my data suggests that students lean more toward being ignorant of, or indifferent to, classical studies. As this inherent interest is lacking, teachers then have to “sell” their courses to students. Scott Ramsay explained how he not only sells the course, in this case Latin, but also promotes himself as the teacher of that course. He contended that:

the promotion and the selling you do… uh… like, when I promote Latin, it’s promoting it to the grade 9s in, as in you should take it. Uh… and that’s more of the sell job. But even then I’m not really promoting… Latin, per se. I’m promoting… like myself and kind of
like the idea of this course. Um, I think once they start taking it… I think it, I think it promotes itself.

The key point of information here is that once students are taking the course and have learned about the discipline, it promotes itself. Such a state of affairs shows how absent classical studies are from the popular imagination of education; students do find the course inherently interesting once they start taking it, but they do not know enough about Latin to drive them to take it in the first place without the instructor selling it to them. This latent interest in Latin supports Coffee’s (2012) statement I examined in section 2.2.1, wherein he states that “Latin [is] a language that is special for each of us who uses it” (p. 269). However, based on my data, I would contend that Latin becomes special to each person who learns it, for first they must discover it.

In the case of Mark Chips, he described himself as “lucky” to have been able to start a Latin program at his school from scratch. However, his luck comes down to the support of the administration and department heads, or, what I would term, interdepartmental popularity and collegiality. First he taught only French, then, with the support of his department head—for Latin is classified as an international language (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2000)—he was able to bring in Latin, and, finally, with a change of History department head, he was able to introduce the Classical Civilizations class. I shall examine interdepartmental tensions in greater detail in section 4.3.1, but for now the pertinent point is that these courses were only offered with the support of the school and the advocacy of Mark Chips. As he explains:

The way it’s done of course is sort of collegial at the…. um, having been at these meetings myself, where courses are decided on, and really if anybody has an objection to a course, that course is not going to be kept.

He needed the full support of his school to even offer the classics courses. Before teacher
popularity with the students has an effect on enrollment numbers, teacher popularity among administration and other departments determines whether or not a classics program will be started.

My third participant, Gus Caesar, teaches at a private school where one year of Latin is mandatory, so he defined his role as less one of attracting students to the discipline, but of “win[ning] them over” once they are there. The effect of mandatory Latin is “that there’s more awareness that it exists,” as compared to the other schools in which Gus has taught. Perhaps as a result of this greater “awareness,” for, as Scott Ramsay noted above, classics promotes itself once students learn about it, Gus described how 60 to 65 students, out of a year of 100, continue “with the Romans in some form [whether that be through Latin or ancient history classes], two years after they stopped having to take it.” My data suggests that the popularity of the instructor among staff and students affects course offerings and enrollment, while the continued popularity of the discipline depends on an increased awareness of it. Moreover, Gus Caesar’s examination of interest and its effect on retention rate hinted at an important distinction between the language side of classical studies and the history side.

4.1.2 Retention rate. As much as the discipline of classical studies promotes itself once students start learning about it, my participants noted that the retention rate for students of Latin is only about 50% between grades. Both Mark Chips and Scott Ramsay observed that they lose about half of their students each subsequent year of Latin, which requires them to promote it well the first year in order to ensure they can offer all three levels of Latin. Interestingly, Gus Caesar found he had a higher retention rate of about 60-70%. As these figures are coming from a private school where grade 9 Latin is mandatory and the culture of the school is steeped in the idea of a classical education, this higher retention rate supports the theory that the more aware of, and
familiar with, the discipline students are, the greater their interest in it. In this instance, interest is measured by retention rate.

However, my data suggests that the reason behind this attrition of students is not due to a lack of interest, but rather an underestimation of the difficulty of Latin. Mark Chips observed that “a lot of students drop Latin because they realize it’s harder than they thought it would be.” Indeed, this defeating difficulty, is one of the top 5 critiques VanTassel-Baska (2004) identifies that are leveled against the Latin language, as discussed in section 2.1.1. I am specifically mentioning the difficulty of Latin in this instance, because it is at this point that a distinction between the language side of classics and the history side becomes clear. Students find learning a new language difficult, but their interest in classical civilizations continues. Gus Caesar noted “that they’re interested in learning about the Romans. They may not be interested in... continuing to learn about how the language works.” In other words, they are inherently interested in the subject matter, but not the linguistics. All three of my participants observed this phenomenon of students giving up on Latin but going on to take classical civilizations or ancient history classes. However, classical civilization courses do not steal students from Latin class; rather students who struggle with the language find solace in the history, and Latin students who are interested enough in the discipline take the history-focused class in addition to their linguistic studies.

A greater hindrance to student enrollment numbers is actually pressure from other disciplines such as Math and Science. As I elaborated in section 2.1.1, the antagonism between the sciences and classical studies has been well documented since Gertrude (1937) described the sciences as “sworn enemies of the classics” (p. 21). However, in the contemporary educational climate this antagonism is more accidental than purposeful. Scott Ramsay identified the change in math curriculum to “double math” —whereby advanced functions became prerequisite for
calculus—as having a detrimental effect on his numbers because students who wanted to take math now had to devote two courses to it. Students had fewer elective options to chose from, so fewer students choose classics. However, my data suggests that this change in scheduled class availability resulted in a greater emphasis being placed on extra-curricular classical activities.

4.1.3 Extra-curricular classical options. All three of my participants identified extra-curricular classical studies options, such as Latin Clubs, as a means by which to attract students to the discipline. However, the data reveals that these extra-curricular options also exist to supplement student learning and resolve timetable/student interest conflicts. What I mean by resolving timetable/student interest conflicts is that many students who cannot fit Latin into their timetables, such as those who are taking both advanced functions and calculus as Scott Ramsay noted, can still pursue their interest in classics through these extra-curricular activities. Some students in Gus Caesar’s and Mark Chips’s schools even voluntarily take Ancient Greek class at lunch, simply out of interest; there is no credit involved. Such a situation shows that classics is thriving, in its own little way. To use Gus Caesar’s words, “So, yeah, something’s working.”

The Ontario Student Classics Conference (OSCC) is another such extra-curricular that has a major impact on the marketability of Latin. Gus Caesar went so far as to say, “I mean definitely in every school that goes to the conference that’s really one of the main forces keeping Latin going.” For him the OSCC also fosters school pride since the school has been participating for the past 25 years, and, more often than not, winning competitions in the athletic, creative, and academic categories. Mark Chips was my only participant who did not take students to the OSCC, and he identified this event as a major avenue for expanding his program, which he finds has plateaued as his school moves away from housing an extensive “gifted program” and instead turns to “the other end of Spec Ed.” He remarked:
[T]hat isn’t necessarily good for the future of the Latin program here, but I think it will survive. But my hopes for growth have been somewhat diminished. Maybe if I was to get students involved, make a bigger thing of Latin club and actually start going to the classics conference and, and doing things like that…. that might help.

His comments on the gifted program require discussion, for this association between Latin and elite academia persists, contrary to my research in Chapter 2 that shows learning Latin benefits students from low-performing public schools and impoverished backgrounds (Durkin, 2014; Long, 2014; Janoff, 2014). However, I shall take up the sociological aspects of Latin learning in section 4.3.3. For the present, the important message I wish to draw from Mark Chips’s words is that he feels the more awareness he can bring to classical studies, the more he can make his program grow. It will no longer merely “survive,” but it will be alive.

### 4.2 Latin as a ‘Living’ Entity

My title for this section stems from a tried (or perhaps tired) and true pun: namely that Latin is a dead language and classics instructors strive to breathe new life into it. It is the classics instructors and how they perform this resuscitation on which I would like to focus in this section. To continue with the revitalization metaphor, the first step, as I have demonstrated in the previous section, is to exhume the body, so to speak, for students to examine, and from there curiosity and latent interest take over. However, the data shows that while the content may be inherently interesting, the instructional strategies teachers use and the means by which they present the content information have a large bearing on students continuing in classics.

#### 4.2.1 Counteracting preconceptions.
As much as students do not know much about classical studies before they enter the discipline, my participants spoke to the large number of preconceptions students brought with them to class. Perhaps unsurprisingly, these
misconceptions aligned with the common critiques of Latin I outlined in section 2.1.1: Latin is ‘dead’, irrelevant, and solely text-based (VanTassel-Baska, 2004). Gus Caesar described how he tries to counteract these preconceptions, namely by:

- showing them things like the percentage, the sheer volume of Latinate words in the English language. The uh…sort of all the references in the world, in the English-speaking world to the, to the Roman world, um, are what basically what drives, drives the year.

In other words, Latin ‘lives’ on in other languages, and Roman culture remains present and relevant in the English-speaking world. Mark Chips challenges the solely text-based nature of Latin by introducing an oral component to his classes. Students in his class do not simply translate from the text book; they read stories out loud to understand how the language would have sounded, and they prepare oral presentations for the class. In my analysis of Mark’s data, I see his experience as a French-language instructor coming through in how he approaches Latin. He incorporates more of the oral aspects of Latin, just as a modern language teachers include written and spoken language exercises.

However, the data indicates that it is not only the students who must shift away from preconceptions about classical studies, but the instructors too. Moreover, this shift in preconceptions largely entails moving towards a more student-centered instructional style. As Scott Ramsay summarized it, “[i]f I had a perception of what Latin has to be... and I don't take the kids into account, I will soon be teaching an empty room, which means I will soon be teaching Canadian history.” This is not to say that Canadian history is the worst possible thing to be teaching, rather it is a core course and, most importantly, not his chosen discipline. However, the key point is that the instructor cannot simply teach the way they want to, or even the way they were taught themselves; they “have to find a median” (Scott Ramsay) with the students. Gus
Caesar further clarified this meeting in the middle to include collaboration with colleagues to best support the students. As his classics colleagues are primarily older, more experienced teachers, this intergenerational collaboration has helped Gus learn some techniques that have stood the test of time, such as systematically setting up charts of grammatical rules to which the students can refer, as well as providing an opportunity for Gus to teach his colleagues the inductive, inquiry-based models he had learned in teachers’ college. From the data, I have learned that both students and teachers need to challenge their preconceptions about classics in order to most effectively learn and teach the discipline.

4.2.2 Bringing the past to the present. The traditional model of Latin instruction, which Gus’s colleagues had practiced, involves rote memorization of charts and grammatical paradigms. Scott Ramsay described such practices as creating “horror vision[s]” in those who suffered through it. To some extent this grammar instruction is a necessary evil, so modern instructors must work to counterbalance this instructional method with activities the students like. My data reveals that students particularly enjoy reading stories about Roman life in Latin; this is the structure of the Cambridge Latin series that both Mark Chips’s and Scott Ramsay’s schools used. However, Mark Chips surprisingly commented that the stories and activities he uses to teach Latin are so inductive (i.e. figuring out the grammar principles from specific examples, instead of learning the grammar first and then reading examples of it in use) that students actually ask for “traditional grammar lessons every once and a while.” Moreover, it is important to note that this traditional instruction comes at the request of students, so his approach is still very student-centered.

Gus Caesar also described his students’ appreciation for grammar lessons, quoting his students as having asked, frustrated, “why were we never taught this… in English class?” In
answer to their question, Jones, Myhill, and Bailey (2012), whom I discussed in section 2.2.1, would blame the absence of active grammar instruction in Anglophone countries that has existed for the past 50 years. My data suggests that Latin instruction is a means to counteract this dearth of grammar instruction; I discuss the observable benefits of Latin language learning on other disciplines in section 4.3.2.

While teachers of classics are changing their instructional strategies, the content they are teaching is also changing and adapting to suit new audiences. Most notably Scott Ramsay points to the addition of women’s roles in the newest edition of the Cambridge Latin textbook as a redress for the heretofore “very male focused” nature of the discipline. The equity lens through which he pitched his request for these new textbooks to his school’s administration resulted in their full support and financing of the books. Such an equity lens hints at the potential for social change inherent within modern day classics instruction that I examine in section 4.3.3. Contrary to VanTassel-Baska’s (2004) critiques, the discipline of classical studies is relevant to, and has an effect on, contemporary society. Moreover, contemporary culture has an effect on classical studies, both in terms of the content, as I discussed above regarding the inclusion of women in the textbook, and in terms of how this content is taught, which I examine in the next section.

4.2.3 Pop culture and the classics. Classical themes have seen a resurgence in popular culture in shows such as Rome, or the Percy Jackson books and films. My data shows that teachers find they can use this pop culture to fuel interest in the discipline. Gus Caesar remarked that “that’s how most kids know something about the classical world these days, with Percy Jackson.” However, even these popular culture references become dated quickly as Gus observed. The classically themed shows that I grew up with, namely HBO’s Rome or the film Gladiator, which Peritz (2009) identifies as decisive productions for increasing awareness about
the classical world, came out before Gus’s current students started kindergarten. Far from suggesting that classical studies have become dated, the quickness with which these pop culture references change and evolve suggest classical studies is alive and adapting well.

In my research, the data reveals that it is the teachers who are at the forefront of this change and adaptation. They bring their own knowledge of contemporary society and media to parse out classical themes and connect students’ contemporary lives to those of the Romans. Scott Ramsay beautifully and hilariously exemplified this trans-cultural and trans-temporal ethic when he “ma[de] a Buzzfeed quiz for [his] students on whether they could tell the difference between Taylor Swift lyrics…[a]nd lines from Ovid’s love poetry.” The pieces were so similar that his students “didn’t do particularly well.” These unexpected pairings between the classical world and the modern one work to engage students with the discipline and emphasize the continued relevance of classical studies. In my next section I examine unexpected (and expected) pairings between classics and other disciplines.

4.3 The Interdisciplinary Nature of Classics

The curriculum documents from the Ontario Ministry of Education (2000) stress that classical studies are “interdisciplinary” (p.4). Some might see the title of ‘interdisciplinary’ as a type of insult, for classical studies’ decline that began at the start of the 20th century has ended in the discipline being defined, not on its own, but in relation to other subjects. However, my data suggests that classics teachers find ‘interdisciplinarity’ an integral part of classical studies and opportunity for growth and expansion into the modern world. That is not to say that bringing a discipline so steeped in history —both in terms of its subject matter and its foundational position in the Western education system— up to the present does not present its challenges, but rather that the optimism of possibility comes through in the data.
4.3.1 **Interdepartmental divides.** While the interdisciplinary nature of classical studies provides opportunities for it to reach out and connect with other disciplines, these other disciplines themselves may resist alliance with classics. In my Chapter 2 I traced the early tensions between classical studies and more ‘modern’ or ‘relevant’ disciplines, such as the sciences (Christou, 2015; Gertrude, 1937; Mattingly, 1937). However, my data indicates that the greatest source of interdepartmental conflict comes from those disciplines that are inherently similar to classics, not opposed to it: namely, history and other international languages. I noted above that Gus Caesar’s school did not offer the classical civilizations course, and instead only offered the ancient history class. Gus identified the reason for this being a reluctance on the part of department heads to bring in another course that might detract enrollment numbers from the history department and “cause competition between the various departments.” Ancient history and classical civilizations classes were deemed too similar to offer both of them. I examine what makes classics distinct from history in section 4.3.2.

In Scott Ramsay’s school, the administration and department heads are all very supportive, but he acknowledged there is an unfortunate level of competition between the different language courses available to students. For example, the past year, the school offered a Latin 12 class, but there were not enough students enrolled to offer a Core French 12 or a Spanish 12 class. As Scott said, “if my numbers go up, like other numbers go down.”

The resolution to Mark Chips’s interdepartmental divide, however, offers hope for similar situations. The history department head in his school had initially blocked the introduction of the classical civilizations class, but with a change in department head, the class eventually came through. During our interview, Mark happily announced that “I just heard from one of the people in guidance that the course is hot and they’re gonna look at giving me three next year.” Student
interest has skyrocketed since the course has been offered at the school. In a sense these students were denied the opportunity to explore their academic interests when the course was not offered, and as such, interdepartmental divides can restrict potential student enjoyment of school and development of passions.

4.3.2 The effect of classics on student success in other disciplines. While restricting course offerings limits students’ ability to explore their interests, having classical studies courses on offer opens up the possibility for increased student success; my data suggests studying classics improves students’ critical thinking skills and perseverance in the face of difficulty. The research I explored in section 2.1 focused primarily on recorded benefits of Latin language learning on proficiency in English or another modern language (Janoff, 2014; LaFleur, 1981; Long, 2014; VanTassel-Baska, 2004). However, Holliday (2012) emphasized that Latin rather “develops transferrable skills” (p. 3). As my research study is a qualitative one, I cannot speak to numerical correlations between success in the Latin classroom and success in other disciplines, but anecdotally Mark Chips noted that “one student said that she was doing an AP English exam and it really helped her that she had the knowledge of Latin.” The correlation between English and Latin still is there. However, my participants placed more emphasis on the transferrable skill sets they see their students developing in their class rooms, such as attention to detail and perseverance in the face of difficulty. As he teaches in two different departments — history and international languages — Gus Caesar could offer a comparative perspective; he remarked:

I have a few kids who took the grade 9 Latin course with me last year in the world history course this year and… I noticed that the ones who… the ones who were very good in Latin, or who applied themselves very well at Latin, are… are definitely, for example, more attentive when they’re reading historical sources.
These students have learned through the practice of “decoding the puzzle that is Latin” (Gus Caesar) to pay attention to detail, for that is where the meaning lies in inflected languages.\(^6\)

Scott Ramsay offered a perspective on the interdisciplinary nature of classics that I found helpful in understanding just how such a discipline can teach this attentiveness. He said “classics is… one period of time, from every possible perspective.” Nominally one is learning about the Romans and Greeks when studying classics, but classics entails much more than just the history. It includes the ancient languages, the history, the archaeology, the mythology, and even the art history. This practice in considering “every possible perspective” teaches students attention to detail. Moreover, Scott described how Latin is a vehicle for teaching perseverance due to its level of difficulty. He marks students for their perseverance, and not for creating an exactly perfect translation. Learning to think critically, and learning that one will not be punished for trying hard are two important, though non-subject-specific, lessons that classical studies can teach students. The possibilities for lessons and connections beyond the specific content knowledge found in the classical studies curriculum are surprisingly fruitful and help to make this discipline relevant to the modern world in which it is taught.

### 4.3.3 The changing cultural dynamics of the classics classroom.

Perhaps the broadest and most telling question I asked my participants was “Why do you think classics should be taught in schools?” I hoped to gain new insight into how in-service teachers of the subject view their discipline in relation to today’s educational climate. Gus Caesar pinpointed the well-established answer when he said, “I mean certainly the traditional answer of, you know, it is at the, like one of the cornerstones of Western civilization and you need to know the roots of the

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\(^6\) In “inflected” languages, meaning is made through the modification of individual words in order to express different grammatical categories (OED, Def. 2). In contrast, “analytic” languages (such as English) rely primarily on word order to make meaning (OED, Def. 4). A small change in how a word is spelled can completely alter the meaning of a sentence in Latin.
society that you live in.” I find this traditional view troublesome, for it privileges tradition over adaptation, and it privileges Western society over other cultures. As my data has shown in section 4.2, it is adaptation that allows instructors to keep their discipline relevant, not tradition, and what is considered relevant depends on the students themselves. The student-centered approach my participants were moving towards requires a recognition of the cultural backgrounds students bring into the classroom. It cannot be assumed that they all hail from Western backgrounds.

Gus Caesar then went on to clarify his own belief, namely that “I think that… more and more, one of its main points of value is what most historical studies courses have, which is learning about others’ perspectives.” He has taken the Western-centric viewpoint and expanded it to includes others’ views –their perspectives. From a specifically Roman lens, one could expand outward through the reaches of their empire and contact with other civilizations. He even suggested that:

you could do an entire course on that [the breadth of the Roman empire] and, and sort of, what that has meant in different parts of the world, even in places like Turkey, or places… you know with the republican movement after world war one, or… or the American republic, or anywhere, you can, you can do that sort of thing.

In critically analyzing the extent of the Roman empire, Gus is suggesting that one can critically analyze the lasting implications of empire on today’s society. The broad extent of the Roman empire opens up the discipline for discussions of other cultures and larger social phenomena such as colonization and (neo)colonialism. In the example cited above about the addition of women’s perspectives and roles to the new edition of the textbook, classical studies could even be the medium for a discussion of the sociology of gender roles, past and present.
To conclude this section, I would just like to pick up on a topic briefly discussed above. Mark Chips had hinted in his interview that the presence of gifted students at his school was a significant factor in the continuation of the classics program. Such a belief reinforces the opinion held by Christou (2015), as discussed in section 2.2.1, that the humanist education system, of which classics was a huge part, only ever served those privileged enough to be able to afford an education; when education became more accessible to those of lower socio-economic status, the emphasis on classics decreased. The relationship between socio-economic status and those who study classics is an area for future research that I examine in my Chapter 5. The belief that classical studies is for the elite and gifted is a popular one, as examined in my Chapter 2 (see VanTassel-Baska, 2004); however, Durkin (2014), in his description of Maspeth High School, which accepts students without test-score screening, noted that even the disadvantaged students, both in terms of socio-economic status and academic performance, achieved well when the teachers were able to connect the Latin they were learning to their own diverse cultural backgrounds. How culturally relevant pedagogical theory can apply to classics instruction is another future direction for this research project.

4.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I have examined the findings from my participant interviews and parsed out how three instructors of classics navigate the relationship between tradition and adaptation in the study of Latin and Greek language, literature, and civilization. A student-centered approach helps find the balance between tradition and adaptation that makes the learning relevant and understandable to those studying it.

My first theme examined how instructors market a discipline that has largely been forgotten to incoming grade 9 students who know very little about it. The data reveals that the
initial interest in classical studies stems from how well the teacher markets themselves as someone from whom a student could learn. However, as exposure to, and experience with, the discipline grows, so too does the students’ inherent interest, and classical studies starts to promote itself. As a result of the power dynamics at play between different departments in the school, classics enrollment is often affected by required math and science courses that limit students’ availability for electives such as classical civilizations and Latin. However, extra-curricular options provide a haven for students who cannot fit classics into their scheduled timetable.

My second theme delved into the preconceptions both students and teachers bring to the discipline. Students need to work to break down the notion that Latin is a dead language, while teachers need to understand the unique learning needs of their students, or they will soon be teaching to an empty classroom. My participants adapted both the content to be taught, and their instructional strategies to teach it, in order to better reach their students and make the discipline relatable to them.

Finally, I concluded my thematic analysis with an investigation into the repercussions of classical studies being “interdisciplinary,” as directed by the Ministry of Education. Despite interdepartmental divides restricting classics course offerings, classical studies actually promote connections between and across disciplines for the focus is on developing transferrable skills, such as attention to detail and persistence in the face of difficulty. The interdisciplinary nature of classics also helps to break the discipline out of its roots of Western-privilege and expand to address the diverse and multiple cultures present in the classroom.

In the next chapter I examine the implications of my research both in the educational community at large and within my own professional practice. For the community outside of the
discipline of classics, this research shows examples of best practices simply in terms of general educational philosophy and instructional practices, while I have a more vested interest as an aspiring instructor of Latin myself. I also explore areas I have identified for future research: namely the socio-economic barriers or advantages students of classics face, and how to bring culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy into classics instruction.
Chapter 5: Conclusion

5.0 Introduction

In this final chapter I explore the implications of my research on the educational community at large and my own professional teaching practice in particular. I find significance in the data for policy makers, department heads, and individual teachers, as well as for my own professional development. Moving from the theoretical to the practical, I draw out concrete recommendations for how best to implement the new knowledge my study has brought to the education field. I also point to areas for future study and identify new directions in which I could take this research. The scope of my learning from this project extends far beyond the explicit focus on classical studies instructors in Toronto secondary schools and reaches into the realm of Culturally Relevant and Responsible Pedagogy (CRRP).

5.1 Overview of Key Findings and their Significance

In my data analysis, I discovered what helps and hinders students’ enrollment in classical studies courses, what keeps them there in consecutive years, and how interdisciplinary collaboration and interdepartmental competition affects these students’ learning. The relationship between the student and the teacher, the teacher and the departments, and between the departments themselves repeatedly rose to the surface of my results. Students need to like the teacher in order to enroll in the course, while the departments need to like the teacher and each other in order to offer the course. When these requirements are met it creates a Goldilocks effect where the conditions are just right to promote student success both within and across disciplines, for my participants, Scott Ramsay, Gus Caesar, and Mark Chips, emphasized how success in the
Latin classroom translates to success in other classes. This chapter examines how best to achieve this Goldilocks effect in Ontario secondary schools for the benefit of all students.

From the larger thematic results presented in my Chapter 4, I have distilled three key findings that have direct bearing on educational policy, interdepartmental collegiality, and best teacher practice. Firstly, educational policy favours the maths and sciences, as Scott Ramsay noted with his observation about “double math” restricting student access to classics electives. This double emphasis on math speaks to the general push towards math and sciences that has been observed for the past century (Christou, 2015) and which I examined in my literature review. Not all of my findings simply supported my literature review though; rather my research identified a gap in the literature regarding what factors in the administration of schools affect classical studies course offerings. My participants noted that interdepartmental competition between classics and other humanities courses is actually having a greater effect on classics course offerings than the tension between classics and the sciences. I examine the implications of this finding on interdepartmental collegiality and school-wide collaboration for student success in my next section. Finally, I found that instructors need to adapt both the content of their lessons and their instructional practices in order to make the classical studies discipline more relevant to their students’ lives and contemporary society. My findings demonstrate both new strategies for classics instructors specifically as well as best teacher practices for any educator whose students are struggling to connect with the material.

5.2 Implications

The results of my Toronto-based qualitative research study have broad implications for educational policy, interdepartmental collegiality, and best teacher practice in schools across Ontario. My study articulates avenues to support the healthy development of classics
departments in high schools as well as provide best practices for teachers across disciplines who wish to promote their students’ academic success. In addition to the educational community at large, my study has implications for my own professional practice as a teacher and researcher.

5.2.1 The educational community. Working from the top down, I shall examine the implications of my study at the different levels of the education system: educational policy across the province, interdepartmental collegiality across the school, and teacher practices across classrooms in those schools. At the level of policy, the number of compulsory credits students must take to earn the Ontario Secondary School Diploma favours the maths and sciences. Students must take five credits total in maths and sciences, while classical studies are listed as one of eleven possible disciplines to choose from in order to satisfy one “additional credit” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2011, p. 55). Scott Ramsay articulated the policy problem well when he remarked “universities require calculus but functions is the prerequisite and they don't require functions but you can't take calculus without functions.” Scott Ramsay adds that requirements at both the high school and university level are restricting “the availability of... grade 12 university prep courses and options” so students have fewer credits to fill and a lower likelihood of being able to fit classics into their timetable. Such a simple timetabling conflict can actually have a significant impact on student success in their mandatory courses though; indeed, both the research in my literature review and my participants themselves identified the strong correlation between learning Latin and improved learning in other disciplines. In other words, the learning that occurs in the classics elective courses improves student success in mandatory courses. If the students are unable to take the classics elective courses though, they are unable to take advantage of that benefit. In some senses educational policy is restricting students from expressing their full academic potential.
Further interdepartmental divides within the ecology of the school inhibit students from pursuing their interests and extinguish the potential for fruitful, cross-curricular connections. My participants identified history departments as the biggest factor limiting classical studies course options. However, when Mark Chips’s school relented and brought in the classical civilizations class, it became instantly popular - so popular, in fact, they have added another section of it to the timetable. Prior to offering this course those students were unable to pursue fully their interests in a school setting. History departments fear that they will lose students to the classics, but this fear blinds them from seeing the potential for student success between courses. Gus Caesar observed that his Latin students are “for example, more attentive when they’re reading historical sources” in the history classroom and they lament ‘why were we never taught this in English class?’ when learning Latin grammar. My research offers an alternative perspective of how departments view and engage with interdisciplinary courses. I see the need for a paradigm shift from regarding these courses as competitive to seeing them as complementary. Such collegiality and collaboration between departments manifests in improved student engagement at school for they are able to pursue their interests and see the meaningful connections between different disciplines at school.

At the level of individual teacher practice, the tension between disciplines suggests a need for teachers to look beyond competitive self-interest (i.e. teaching the courses they want, the way they want to) and instead implement a more student-centered approach to education. When they teach the courses the students want, the way the students learn best, my participants noticed that students are more inclined to learn and continue with classics in subsequent years. Moreover, I believe these results are generalizable to instructors in disciplines other than classics for many of the strategies my participants employed were not subject specific. Strategies such as
using online quiz platforms like Buzzfeed to teach Ovid’s poetry, or simply allowing students to read and enjoy the stories in the Latin textbook without interrupting to pick apart the grammar, could easily be extended to the English or French classroom, for example. My participants harnessed student interests from outside of school (doing online quizzes and reading for pleasure) to make learning more relevant to them. Moreover, there is a need to make learning more culturally relevant to students. The diversity of the student population studying classics has increased from the demographic at whom a classical education was originally aimed (Christou, 2015). Instructors have an obligation to respond to these changes in student population. As Scott Ramsay noted, “the subject itself isn't going to be enough to... keep you employed in Latin.” It is what the instructor does with the material and how they connect it to their students’ interests and identities that keeps students coming back to the discipline.

5.2.2 My professional identity and practice. As much as I am producing data from which I hope other educators can learn in this research study, I too am also learning. The results of my research have challenged me to reflect upon my own identity as a scholar, and now instructor, of classics. The emphasis in my data on the need to change instructional practices to suit student needs made me re-evaluate how I was taught. I wondered if the traditional instructional method that was the most familiar to me (through my experiences as a student) is indeed the best way to teach, or if I am just one of the few who could learn from the traditional model of a classical education. At the conclusion of this study I can now say firmly it was the latter. There is no perfect way to teach classics, for so much of it depends on the students themselves.

7 Traditional instructional practices include rote memorization and written translation exercises without extensive aural and oral components (Wills, 1998). I compare traditional and modern instructional practices in section 2.3.2.
As a female instructor, I am particularly excited by the push to update classical studies curricula and shift the focus away from ‘great men.’ The emphasis on women’s perspectives in the new edition of the Latin textbook that Scott Ramsay described allows me to find new, meaningful connections with the material. As much as instructors should be striving towards making the learning relevant for their students, I think they also need to have some connection with the material themselves. In other words, I believe teaching should be relevant to instructors, just as the learning should be relevant to the students.

5.3 Recommendations

Taking into consideration the implications examined above, I now will identify the recommendations for policy makers, department heads, and individual teachers to take action on the results of my research. Policy makers might want to reconsider the restricting effect that the increasing number of mandatory courses has on electives and students’ academic potential. The benefit of Latin language learning on student success in core subjects needs to be more broadly publicized and taken into consideration. Policy makers might also consider avenues for providing students with further opportunities to pursue their interests. One such avenue would be re-implementing the fifth year of high school in order to accommodate the increasing number of mandatory courses while allowing students to maintain elective freedom.

In terms of reconciling interdepartmental tensions, there is a need to debunk the myths and misunderstandings between subjects and courses. The history department will not fall to the classics department for, as Scott Ramsay noted, classics and history are vastly different in terms of ways to approach the content. He commented, “classics is… one period of time, from every possible perspective,” and, by extension, history would be many periods of time from a more localized perspective. Instead of perpetuating interdepartmental relationships that are based on a
deficit, competitive model, there is a need to reconfigure such relationships to be based on a positive, student-centered model. Staff meetings and Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) are examples of ways to bring recognition to the value that each department brings to the school and to the education of the student. My research points to the benefits of a student-centered, holistic approach to education; in other words, I believe in education of the whole student by the whole school.

Individual teachers themselves can take up this student centered approach through such practices as student-teacher conferencing and regular check-ins with students. Teachers might consider administering ‘Tell Me About Yourself’ questionnaires in which they ask students to identify their interests and preferred learning styles. They might discover that their students learn best from actually speaking the dead language, as Mark Chips did. Even though “sometimes [he] feel[s] like it impedes progress, [he] recognize[s] they like it. So whenever [they] read through a story [they] always have to go through the whole thing, always reading in Latin.” Moreover, instructors could make such questionnaires a part of a culturally relevant and responsible pedagogical practice. They could ask students to answer questions such as: ‘What personal connections, if any, do you have to the Romans or Greeks? Would the Romans ever have had contact with your ancestors?’ Or even, ‘What similarities and differences are there between the way the Greeks and Romans treated women and the way women are treated today?’

For my own part I am going to continue learning about the discipline in specific and student-centered pedagogy in general in order to find new avenues of connecting the content to students and connecting students to their learning. Just because the discipline is based on two dead languages does not mean that scholarship is not alive, changing, and adapting. I will strive to keep up with new research and not fall into the old habit of teaching the way I was taught.
5.4 Areas for Further Research

In my Chapter 4, I identified two areas for further research: how classical studies can be used as a tool to challenge the Western-centric education system and, by extension, how classical studies might still favour students from the dominant Euro-Canadian culture. As Gus Caesar noted, the breadth of the Roman Empire provides avenues for discussion on the effect of global migration and the lasting impact of colonization. He remarked, “I mean you could do an entire course on that.” However, these possible applications were presented as simply that: possibilities. One could design a course around these critical extensions of empire but as of yet it is not part of the curriculum. Further research would need to be done to see if actively extending the foci of the classical civilizations course would make the course more culturally relevant to students and improve enrollment. Moreover, such extensions might provide an opportunity for interdepartmental collaboration. The effects of shifting populations would find connections with the geography department, and the expansion of Latin into modern-day Romance languages would connect with the French, Spanish, or Italian departments, especially as they examine the diasporic spread of French, Spanish, and Italian culture. The global imperial ambitions of these European powers draw further parallels to the subjugation of oppressed peoples under the Roman Empire. The connections with other cultures and civilizations could expand across geographical space and historical chronology.

However, despite this possibility of de-centering the Western focus of the discipline and making the experiences of school more culturally relevant for students, my data hinted that classical studies in Ontario high schools still favour students from the dominant Euro-Canadian culture. Mark Chips expressed concern that a declining gifted program in his high school would negatively affect his class numbers. This association between classical studies and the academic
(or financial) elite is one well documented in my literature review (Christou, 2015; VanTassel-Baska, 2004). Christou (2015) suggests that a contributing factor to classical studies’ decline in popularity in the education system is actually a reflection of the diversifying population attending school. The social and financial elite around whom a classical education was designed no longer were the dominant population in school so classics fell out of favour. However, the continued connection between giftedness and classics suggests the correlation Christou (2015) identified continues in some form today. Even the finance elite bear a close connection to the academic elite for they have the means to hire tutors to assist with their academic success. It appears that classics is for the elite: academically, socially, financially. As such, I believe further research is needed to identify the relationship between socio-economic status and the demographics who continue to study classics. Are students of classics still part of the dominant, elite, Euro-Canadian demographic as Christou (2015) discussed, or does the discipline attract students from diverse backgrounds? Could CRRP begin to change the demographics of the Latin classroom? This research would need to have significant quantitative elements, such as socio-economic status surveys and census data, and be conducted over an extended period of time to see if the demographics of the classics student population change with CRRP. Moreover, a research study of this nature could be extended to identify social inequities that are lurking behind, and perpetuated by, the education system. Who has access to what courses according to policy versus who has access to what courses in reality is a topic for future consideration.

5.5 Concluding Comments

My qualitative research study sought to answer the question: how do secondary classics instructors keep their discipline relevant and relatable to modern day students? However, in the process of answering that question I exposed the hurdles classics instructors face in order even to
offer classical studies courses, let alone keep students interested in the discipline. Favouritism of
the maths and sciences at the level of policy and competition between humanities departments at
the level of the school restrict classics course offerings. However, such timetabling restrictions
also limit students’ ability to express their academic potential and pursue their interests. When
and if classics courses are offered, individual teachers can help foster and maintain their
students’ interest in the discipline by crafting a student-centered and culturally relevant
pedagogical model to follow.

In order to combat the prejudice of policy and the suspicions of departments I
recommend moving to a more collaborative model of education instead of a competitive one.
Reintroducing the fifth year of high school lessens the pressure for students to fill their timetable
with math and science courses at the expense of their electives, while hosting PLCs on the
collaborative benefits of interdisciplinary learning fosters an inclusive environment in the school.
Teachers, including myself, might consider conferencing with students in order to best tailor
their lessons to their students’ needs and interests. My recommendations take a holistic, student-
centered approach to education: the whole school collaboratively educates the whole student.

I identified two areas for further research. I wish to examine the extent to which the
traditional model of classical education has/has not changed, and evaluate whether the
instruction of more culturally relevant pedagogy and materials affects enrollment demographics
and student success. I say student success in general because I firmly believe that the themes
identified in this research study and the recommendations for improved student learning in
classical studies can be applied across disciplines. Classics is an interdisciplinary subject that
produces research with interdisciplinary applications.
References


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Clark, T. (2010). On ‘being researched’: Why do people engage with qualitative research?

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Appendix A: Letter of Consent for Interviews

Date: April 7, 2016
Dear __________________________,

My name is Corey Boechler and I am a student in the Master of Teaching program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto (OISE/UT). A component of this degree program involves conducting a small-scale qualitative research study in order to gain experience in the process of documenting and analyzing academic inquiry. My research will focus on the position classical studies finds itself in within the context of secondary schools in the Greater Toronto Area. I am interested in interviewing teachers who have experience teaching both the classical civilizations history class and the language courses, and can speak to changing position of classics into what the Ontario Ministry of Education stresses is an interdisciplinary elective. I think that your knowledge and experience will provide insights into this topic.

Your participation in this research will involve one 45-60 minute interview, which will be transcribed and audio-recorded. I would be grateful if you would allow me to interview you at a place and time convenient for you, outside of school time. The contents of this interview will be used for my research project, which will include a final paper, as well as informal presentations to my classmates. I may also present my research findings via conference presentations and/or through publication. You will be assigned a pseudonym to maintain your anonymity and I will not use your name or any other content that might identify you in my written work, oral presentations, or publications. This information will remain confidential. Any information that identifies your school or students will also be excluded. The interview data will be stored on my password-protected computer and the only person who will have access to the research data will be my course instructor Angela MacDonald. You are free to change your mind about your participation at any time, and to withdraw even after you have consented to participate. You may also choose to decline to answer any specific question during the interview. I will destroy the audio recording after the paper has been presented and/or published, which may take up to a maximum of five years after the data has been collected. There are no known risks to participation, and I will share a copy of the transcript with you shortly after the interview to ensure accuracy.

Please sign this consent form, if you agree to be interviewed. The second copy is for your records. I am very grateful for your participation.

Sincerely,
Corey Boechler
Phone Number (redacted)
Email (redacted)
MT Research Coordinator: Angela MacDonald
Contact Info: angela.macdonald@utoronto.ca

Consent Form
I acknowledge that the topic of this interview has been explained to me and that any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw from this research study at any time without penalty.
I have read the letter provided to me by ____________ and agree to participate in an interview for the purposes described. I agree to have the interview audio-recorded.

Signature: ________________________________

Name: (printed) ________________________________

Date: ________________________________
Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study, and for making time to be interviewed today. This research study aims to learn how classics instructors keep classical civilization classes and Latin and Greek language classes relevant in the current educational climate. This interview will last approximately 45-60 minutes, and I will ask you a series of questions focused on your professional experience, your instructional practices, your perspective on the issue, challenges you face or perceive the discipline as a whole to be facing, and any next steps you can suggest for teachers. I want to remind you that you may refrain from answering any question, and you have the right to withdraw your participation from the study at any time. As I explained in the consent letter, this interview will be audio-recorded. Do you have any questions before we begin?

To begin, can you state your name and school for the recording?

Background Information

1. How many years have you been teaching?
2. Do you teach in a private or public school? Have you taught in a private school (if currently teaching in public)? Have you taught in a public school (if currently teaching in private)?
3. What grades and subjects do you currently teach? What other subjects have you taught?
4. Are you involved in any other school activities outside of your role as a teacher? For example, clubs, advisor, coach.
a. Which activities, both past and present? Are any activities specifically related to classics?

b. How did you become involved in these activities?

5. Did you take any classics courses at high school or were you first exposed at university? If so, which high school classes did you take? Are they similar in structure to the ones you teach now? (history, Latin, Greek)?

Teacher Practices

1. Do you teach both the classical civilizations class and the languages, Latin or Greek? Do you find there is any overlap between the classes? (For example, do you translate texts as examples of primary sources in the civilization class?)
   a. If you only teach the languages or only teach the classical civilizations class can you speak to why you only teach the one? (I.e. Is it just a matter of scheduling or is there an inherent departmental divide between the history side of classics and the classical languages?)

2. Do you feel that you need to keep classics relevant and relatable? How do you approach or adapt course material to keep it relatable?

3. The Ontario curriculum documents stress that classics courses are interdisciplinary. How do you understand “interdisciplinary” and how does this affect your teaching practices?

4. What techniques do you use when teaching Latin or Greek? Do you incorporate oral Latin at all into your program?
   a. What resources do you have available to use? Ex. what textbooks, dictionaries, etc.
   b. What techniques do you notice the students respond the best to?

5. Over the course of your career, how has your approach to teaching the classical civilizations
class or the classical languages changed, if at all?

a. Can you speak to what prompted these changes? (i.e. Student feedback or changing ministry guidelines?)

**Teacher Perspectives/Beliefs**

1. Is there a classical studies subculture at your school? Are there clubs? Do students attend the Ontario Schools Classics Conference?

   a. Do you see these clubs and conferences as aids to keeping classical studies relevant or are they too niche?

2. Do you see a greater interest in classical civilizations classes, as opposed to classical language classes? Is there a noticeable difference in enrollment?

   a. What factors do you think contribute to this disparity in popularity?

3. Can you speak to the general attitude towards classical studies in your school?

   a. If you have taught at another school, have you noticed a difference in student and teacher perceptions of classical studies from one school to the next?

   b. Over the course of your career have you noticed a shift in perceptions towards classics?

4. Why do you think classics should be taught in schools?

5. Have you noticed a correlation between student success in the Latin classroom and success in other classes?

   a. Why do you think this correlation exists? (i.e. Latin improves grammar and study habits, or students with linguistic aptitude choose Latin in the first place.)

**Supports and Challenges**
1. Have you faced any obstacles or challenges in teaching classics courses at your school?
   a. How might these obstacles be different from challenges facing other elective courses?

2. What supports do you have from your school or from other organizations?

Next Steps

1. What goals do you have for the classical studies program at your school?

2. What advice would you give to a beginning teacher looking to teach these subjects?

Thank you for your participation in this research study.