

Research concept statements on the *Cambridge Latin Course*

The following statements are excerpted from “Cambridge Latin Course: History of the Course in Britain and North America,” by Ed Phinney (University of Massachusetts at Amherst). Click [here](#) for the complete “History”.

The University of Cambridge School Classics Project (referred to in the excerpt as the Classics Project) was first funded in 1966 by the Nuffield Foundation with a grant of £34,000, and with later grants by the same foundation and the Schools Council. The Schools Council was a semi-autonomous educational body set up by the British government, working chiefly to develop and support new curricula and examinations in British schools.

“In the late 1960s, when planning for the *CLC*, the Classics Project was influenced by the practice of more progressive teachers, particularly those who attempted, within the framework of traditional courses, to present their students with “Latin first”; this had been strongly advocated, in the 1950s and 1960s, by the handbooks for teachers which were written and distributed by Her Majesty’s Inspectors. The Project also, reacting to the beginning of disillusionment in structural linguistics, rejected the audiolingual methods (based on Skinnerian stimulus-response psychology) which had dominated the foreign language teaching scene since World War II in both Britain and the United States; it preferred to structuralism a Chomskian approach in which the rules of language were said to function, not only in single inflected words, but also across sentences and paragraphs. In the actualizing of Chomskian theory in the *CLC*, the Project was fortunate, in the choice of its early consultant on linguistics, John Wilkins....As a result, the *CLC* aims to develop in students, by extensive practice in reading continuous Latin texts, a functional skill in reading which leads to the comprehension of Latin literature...

“The Classics Project responded to [contemporary] educational needs by designing a Latin textbook series which teaches primarily, though not exclusively, the skills of reading and comprehension, integrates culture with language so that students can learn the social background in a minimum of time, and reaches out with dramatic devices to capture students’ attention and interest from the very beginning and keep it thereafter.

“The Roman historical period which the Classics Project chose for illustration in the *CIC* was that of the early Empire....[which] seemed ideal for providing historical background of topical interest. Its social and political structure was not only more colorful and widespread than that of the Republic, witness writers like Pliny and Tacitus, but also easier for students to understand and far easier for teachers – given the larger number of physical remains dating to the period of the empire – to show in illustration. Moreover, although the more readable poets, like Catullus, Vergil, and Ovid, dated to the period of the late Republic, Catullus’ most interesting lyrics were about his personal life, and Vergil and Ovid reacted, each in his own way, to the establishment of the Empire by Augustus, the proto-Emperor... Suggestions for choice of characters and locales were gathered by a consultant on Classical civilization, Martin Forrest.”