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The Cambridge Latin Project

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1973
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https://hdl.handle.net/10539/27621
Rockas, L.D. (1972/1973). The Cambridge Latin Project. Symposium: A Journal of Education for Southern Africa, pp. 67-68, 64

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the cambridge latin project

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THE CAMBRIDGE PROJECT involves a most commendable method to use for teaching Latin, because it allows the learner to study Latin as a living language which is not a set of rules but the result of social interaction, environment and history.

The course has two main objectives:

1) to teach comprehension of the Latin language for teaching purposes
2) to develop from the outset an understanding of the content, style and values of the Roman civilization.

Thus language is not seen as an end in itself nor as an instrument of mental training but as a means of gaining access to a literature and the culture from which it springs. Latin literature contains the intellectual experiences which contributed to the growth of civilized thought and it is for this reason more than any other that it has a part to play in education.

It is therefore important that language and culture be very closely integrated from the beginning. In the past this integration has often been lacking with the result that when pupils begin to read original authors, their grasp of the background is inadequate for a proper understanding of what they read. The Cambridge Project solves this problem because from the outset the reading matter is based upon actual Roman situations and historical characters are frequently used.

Interest and momentum can easily decline in the middle stages of Latin study because there is often a gap between the Latin of the course books, which cater for the early stages and the Latin of the original texts which are begun later. Pupils find this transition difficult and to some extent the difficulty is inherent in the nature of the Latin because it is not the language of daily conversation or newspapers; it is the language of a sophisticated literature.

An important point to consider is that of interest. The majority of pupils hope to find interest in what the texts say, rather than in the study of the language itself. Too often in the early stages they are disappointed and give up the subject without achieving any real insight into its social or literary content. The picture of the Roman world presented to them frequently lacks coherence or human credibility. It is often excessively military or vaguely historical and fails to present a picture of a living society.

The Cambridge Project offers the pupil narrative and dramatic stories which are culturally valid and attempt to depict Roman life in realistic detail. This may help to satisfy a pupil's reasonable expectations. If the pupil's interest is engaged by the content of the language, his chances of mastering the language itself will be greatly improved.

A fundamental reason for considering the possibility of change both in the content of the Latin course and in the methods of teaching it is current research into how children naturally acquire language. Although the research is still exploratory, certain concepts have been worked out sufficiently to justify their application to Latin teaching. The most significant idea has been that the whole sentence rather than the individual word is the primary unit of meaning.

A common characteristic of Latin teaching is the tendency to stress the forms of words, particularly their inflectional aspects, rather than the shape or pattern of the sentence. Yet it is experience of sentences, where form and function are encountered together that is fundamental to the successful development of reading competence.

The sentence conveys the essential message that the hearer or reader must arrive at. It is not a simple aggregation of smaller units, namely words, strung together in an order that may be flexible or fairly rigid. The sentence has a structure, often complex, through which the interrelationship of words and groups of words is expressed. This structure is crucial for meaning.

Words in themselves yield important lexical information. Nevertheless it is the way

in which they are brought together and the rules governing their association that make the difference between an arbitrary list and a meaningful utterance. Hence the primary task involved in learning a second language is to make it possible for the learner to recognise the sentence and phrase structures correctly. The observation of inflectional variables and word order has a part to play in the process, but it is not sufficient in itself.

The development of insight and ready recognition of the structures will be facilitated rather by presenting the learner from the outset with complete sentences, carefully selected and designed than by the more usual procedure which begins with analysis at word-level and then tries to jump from there to understanding at sentence level. The difficulty of this latter procedure is familiar in the classroom. The pupil is told to study carefully the endings of the words and is trained to describe them by declension, conjugation and other categories, the implication being that when he can account for words in this way, he will also be able to grasp the meaning of a sentence as a whole. When he fails, as frequently happens, the teacher tries to help him further by instructing him to pick out the subject, the verb, the object and so on until the sentence has been re-arranged into some English order.

There is an inherent disadvantage in this practice. It tends to convey the idea that Latin is at best obscure and cannot be comprehended until English word order has been imposed on it. Thus in helping the pupil to make a progression from the description of words to an understanding of the sentence, the teacher may considerably undermine the pupil's confidence in Latin as a language.

The Cambridge Project applies structural rules to the design of the learning materials, so as to provide the pupil with intensive practice in phrase and sentence structures and only a minimum of formal information about the inflectional system. Thus it is hoped that the pupil will learn the crucial lesson of structure more successfully and acquire a truer perspective of the role of inflection.

In the Cambridge Project the pupil's material is divided into stages, each containing one or two linguistic advances. The stages take the form of separate pamphlets each numbered and with its own title indicating the main theme of the stage. The time required to complete any one stage varies, and the teacher will have to find the right balance of thoroughness and good pace according to the needs of the class and the time available.

The Latin prose is heavily adapted initially but then advances toward largely unchanged original Latin. Most stages begin with several pages on which a new feature of the language is presented by means of model sentences or, in later stages, by short paragraphs accompanied by line drawings. At the end of the sentences there usually follows a short note about the language whenever some formal comment is thought necessary.

The model sentences and language notes are followed by several narrative or dramatic passages in which the new and old linguistic features are rehearsed. These passages are the central core of each stage. They increase in length and complexity as the course advances, but the gradient has been carefully controlled.

Next come the manipulation exercises. In the early stages the pupils practise the new linguistic features. Soon they concentrate upon important features taught in preceding stages; this is intended to serve mainly as consolidation. Thus the exercises are largely, though not exclusively. retrospective in purpose. It is important to note that the manipulation is conducted in Latin and by translation from Latin.

The final section of a stage consists of paralinguistic material. This term is used to denote both written and visual material which aids the exploration of cultural issues arising from the written passages. This section, written in English, tries to do more than simply impart information. It seeks to give a picture of a living society and to raise questions of behaviour, attitudes and tastes. Pupils should be encouraged to learn something of the rhythm of daily life, the fabric of social relationships, the atmosphere of business and politics, styles of recreation and leisure and above all, something of the stock of ideas which in the hands of creative writers emerged as literature. To delay this until pupils actually begin to read original authors, is to delay too long. This process should start from the beginning of the course.

The Cambridge Project is not a course in

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was found to be by means of writing, whereas the personal application was far more successful.

The average educational standard of the fathers of those interviewed was between Standards 2 and 3. The average for mothers was higher: between Standards 4 and 5. Two fathers had had no education, and no mothers were illiterate. Significantly, one of the respondents stated that "one of the barriers to obtaining higher education is a background in the family of little education".

Some of the major employers of African matriculants.

The Johannesburg Municipality, at the time of writing, employed 194 African matriculants, out of a total staff (graded and non-graded) of 21 000 Africans. Altogether 218 posts are designated as being available only to those with a matric. However, because of suitability and seniority of service quite a few "matric posts" are filled by non-matrics. The salary scale ranges from R105 per month (grade B5) to the maximum salary offered by the Municipality to any African, namely R207 per month.

A well known bank in South Africa employs 1 200 Africans, of whom about 50 are matriculants who are spread out over the whole country. This bank has recently placed Africans on the same salary scale as the whites, so that a man with a matric starts at R116 per month, with an additional allowance of R35 for married men and R25 for unmarried men and all women.

There are few vacancies in shops (large or small) or in the head offices of large mining houses. One of the largest industrial firms in South Africa employs about 30 matriculants, who receive between R62 and R124 including board and lodging. When asked what vacancies there would be for an African with a B.Sc. in Chemical Engineering a spokesman explained that there would be no job available to such a person — he would have to do the work of an ordinary matriculant. This was because "you can't have an African working over or even with Whites . . . difficulties would arise".

In the field of nursing two courses are offered at Baragwanath: a two-year "enrolled course", requiring only a Junior Certificate, and a 3-year diploma course, requiring a matric. A four and a half year course at Turfloop University will also be available from the beginning of 1972. At the time of writing, there are 174 matriculants out of a total of 3 700 nurses. The qualified staff nurse earns R70 per month as a starting salary. The highest salary she will be able to earn will be R225 per month as a matron, grade I.

In teaching, an African man with matric plus two years' further study starts on R70 per month (compared with the white's equivalent of R160). A man with matric and four years' training starts on R100, rising to R210 per month (compared with the white's R250 rising to R385).

In conclusion it was noted that there are many small firms that employ Africans with a matric, and the salary scales for this type of employment are probably closer to those of the bank, where an African teller, after an unspecified number of years (probably between 2 and 4 years, depending on ability) can get a salary of R140 per month. Considering that the teacher, who receives no salary while training, only receives a starting salary of R70, it is clear that the trend for the matriculated African will be away from the teaching profession towards commerce where there are better opportunities from a financial point of view.

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which responsibility for guiding pupils' learning has been transferred largely from the teacher to some other agency of control. Neither the pamphlets nor the tapes and slides will of themselves teach pupils to read Latin. The aim of the varied techniques recommended is to enable the pamphlets to have the optimum effect and to help the pupil to respond to the material in an active and personal way. However the part to be played by the teacher is central because the effectiveness of the course will depend on her skill in using the techniques, deep understanding of the workings of grammatical structure, wide knowledge of Roman culture and sources of information about it, discretion in using different methods (group method, formal lecture method, miming) for the optimum effect, skill in her presentation and interest and vivacity in her attitude.