

## **The Nuffield Foundation and the Cambridge School Classics Project**

In the 1960s the continuation of the teaching of Classics in schools was in danger from two main causes:

1. The dropping of the GCE Latin qualification by Oxford and Cambridge
2. The reorganisation of secondary education into non-selective schools

As a result there was much discussion about the future of the subject among classical bodies and concerned teachers which led, *inter al.*, to the formation of a new umbrella organisation, the Joint Association of Classical Teachers (JACT). A proposal was made for a curriculum development project in Classics, which was taken up by Robert Morris, a senior HMI and a member of the government's Curriculum Study Group and recommended to the Nuffield Foundation. Morris, though a mathematician, was a strong supporter of the teaching of Classics. He was an influential advocate in that he had previously worked with the Foundation to identify other subject areas (Science, Mathematics and Modern Languages) which would benefit from its funding.

The Foundation accepted the need to reform the teaching of Latin to appeal to a wider range of pupils on what was (correctly) predicted to be a smaller time allowance, and to investigate the provision of courses in English about the classical world for all pupils regardless of ability. This twofold brief has remained constant for over 40 years, although methods, content and materials have been developed in ways that could not have been foreseen at the time.

The organisation of the Classics Project followed that of existing Nuffield Projects. It involved a team of experienced teachers, working in cooperation with university teachers, the preparation of teaching materials, extensive testing in the classroom and revision before publication. The Projects were to have practical outcomes: they were not to result merely in surveys or recommendations.

The list of the Classics Project's achievements over the last 40 years is impressive., but it might not have survived at all without the recognition from the start of the need to train teachers in the use of its revolutionary materials and methods, to disseminate these widely and to continue to assess and revise them in the light of extensive experience. These vital activities could not have been possible without the generosity of the Foundation which assigned its royalties from the published materials to the Project. It was thus able to maintain an office in Cambridge to organise the in-service work described above and to initiate new editions and developments. Contrast this with the disappearance of some innovative contemporary projects which scarcely outlived their initial funding period because of lack of continuing support.

Much of the above summarises the detailed narrative in Martin Forrest's *Modernising the Classics* (University of Exeter Press, 1996).

## **Note on the organisation of the Nuffield Projects**

The 1960s were a golden age for curriculum development. For the first time large scale funding provided by the Foundation and the government's Schools Council was made available to modernise the curriculum by reforming the teaching of school subjects and developing new areas, e.g. humanities courses. This modernisation was badly needed because of the stagnation since WW2, advances in knowledge and methodology and the imminent reorganisation of secondary education.

The organisation adopted for its projects by the Foundation (described above) and by the Schools Council was later defined as the 'centre to periphery model', i.e. a team of seconded professionals funded for a certain time with a brief to produce tested and revised materials, which would then be made available to all schools. This model fell out of favour in later decades, when a 'bottom-up' model, i.e. initiatives made by teachers in schools, was preferred. It seems to me that both models have their virtues for different situations, the bottom-up model being particularly suitable for small scale developments. However, the revolution in the teaching of Classics could have been brought about only by the organisation adopted by Nuffield, requiring as it did the services of a classics linguistics expert, access to other university academics (hence the handy location of the Project in Cambridge), seconded teacher-writers, a Director and an Evaluation Officer (in charge of the extensive testing programme) both of whom had experience of teaching and teacher training, and an Advisory Panel which included a Nuffield representative, HMI and textbook authors who were also practising teachers.

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