

**THE NATURE OF ENGLISH HIGHER AS A SECONDARY  
SCHOOL SUBJECT IN THE TRANSVAAL,  
1942 - 1972**

**Elwyn Rought Jenkins**

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## ABSTRACT

An investigation was made into what constituted the subject of English as first language in the Transvaal at secondary school level over a period of thirty years, from 1942 to 1972, a period which was bounded by important changes of syllabus. Information for the study was obtained from official publications of the Transvaal Education Department during that period: syllabuses, Language Reports to the Administrator, the Annual Reports, public examination papers and examiners' reports, and reports of the Education Bureau. The titles of the prescribed works for the period were collated and analysed. Some of the language text books in use in the Transvaal at various times were analysed. A sample of internal examination papers in Composition and Comprehension for Std 8, set by Transvaal teachers at the end of 1973, completed the source material.

The study outlines different concepts of the nature of English as a school subject. Present and projected trends in English teaching in major English speaking countries are described, as a background against which to interpret the changes noted in the teaching of the subject in the Transvaal over the given period, and in order to throw light on possible future developments in the province.

The source materials are analysed in chapters on Syllabuses, Prescribed Works, Public Examinations and Internal Examinations. The analysis deals with aims, subject matter, the ethos of the subject, and the assumptions, both explicit and implicit, of the education authorities and the teachers.

The study describes how changes have occurred in every aspect of the subject over the thirty year period. Language teaching has changed from instruction in formal Latinate grammar, through a period of rigorously proscriptive and prescriptive teaching, to a concern with ability to communicate in given circumstances and with the use of language in modern society. Spoken English has also developed from being confined chiefly to proscriptive speech training, to playing a bigger role in all English teaching. Written English has changed slowly from formal essay and letter writing to written communication of various kinds. In the prescription of set works there has been a shift away from the classics of previous centuries to the work of twentieth century writers.

These changes have been accompanied by a change in the subject matter and ethos of English. The language which pupils in the nineteen seventies are expected to study and produce no longer conforms to a Victorian model, as it did thirty years ago. The subject matter is no longer literary and dominated by the British way of life. The shift to

subject matter which is of interest to the contemporary child coincides with a shift in aims. Instead of presenting the child with a culture which he must be able to reproduce, the teacher seeks to draw the child out. Personal development and self-confidence in the use of language are given priority.

The investigation has shown the need for close co-ordination among the various authorities directing the subject, the examiners and the teachers. There has been a lack of common policy and sense of direction, which is shown particularly by inconsistencies and fluctuations of standard in the selection of prescribed works, but is also apparent in the erratic development of the subject over a wide front. Recommendations for future curriculum development in English are made.

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*It is all too easy to invent a 'discipline' and then to limit the problems to precisely those which that discipline can handle, no matter how arbitrary and meaningless such a limitation may be from the human point of view.*

*Angus McIntosh (1969)*



CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This study is an attempt to describe the domain of the secondary school subject 'English Higher' in the Transvaal educational system over the past thirty years. It looks at the aims, the assumptions of administrators, examiners and teachers, the subject matter, the activities, the materials (text books and prescribed books), and the ethos of the subject. The evidence used for drawing conclusions about these aspects of the subject is mainly to be found in official documents: syllabuses, reports and examination papers. Changes in approach that have occurred over the period are described, and the developments in the Transvaal are placed in the context of contemporary thought and practice in Britain, Canada and the United States of America. Comparison with these countries helps to explain changes that have occurred, and also gives us some leads in predicting future developments in the teaching of English in the Transvaal.

1.2 LOCAL BACKGROUND

The starting date of 1942 has been chosen for this study as it marks a significant point in the history of education in the Transvaal. In a sense we are looking at the post-war period, but, as in Britain, the origins of the developments that took place after World War II lie in the war years themselves. The experience of the Depression years, followed by the upheaval of the war, gave a tremendous impetus to educational planning.

In the Transvaal, a major revision of the school syllabuses took place in 1942 (Bot, 1951). This reorganisation followed the publication of the Nicol Report of 1939 (Lynch, 1952). In making its recommendations, the Nicol Educational Commission, which sat in 1937, responded to two social pressures. One was that the educational system should ensure that there should be no more poorly educated whites in the country. As a result, pre-vocational, so called Junior High Schools were established in 1937-38 (Lynch, 1953:107), in which pupils were prepared for the Junior Certificate Examination, and in 1942 public examinations at the end of primary school were abolished (van der Walt, 1944).

The Junior High Schools did not fulfil expectations. Their curricula, according to the Lynch Report (1950), remained too academic for the early school leaver, and

consequently the schools were disbanded in 1951 (Lynch, 1952:153, Bot, 1965). Following the publication of the Steyn Report (1953) and the Van Wyk Report (1955), it was announced in 1958 that a different kind of provision for non-academic pupils was to be introduced in 1961. This involved differentiation into three streams within the high schools. The new system lasted until 1972, when it began to be phased out and replaced by a system of differentiation on two levels according to subjects, with a parallel 'practical course' for non-academic pupils.

The other pressure to which the Nicol Commission responded concerned the language question and national unity. Education was seen as a means of social engineering:

*We accept the absolute ideal of one nation for South Africa and consider that the school must actively co-operate in helping to realise that ideal. (212)*

It spoke glowingly of

*Two peoples, each with its own culture, co-operating sincerely to build up a South African nation as a political and economic unit. (215) (Quoted: van Staden, 1955:295)*

The background to this was the continual wrangling over the language medium in Transvaal schools which had been going on since before Union in 1910 (Coetzee, 1941). Disagreement included the question of making the official languages compulsory; the establishment of separate or parallel medium schools, and parental choice of medium of instruction for their children. The Nicol Report failed to settle these matters, and they were regularised only once the new national government had come to power in 1948, when a definitive Education Ordinance was passed in 1953 (Bot, 1951 and 1955). Because of the delicacy of the language issue, one of the provisions of this ordinance (Section 55(3)(b)) laid down that the Director of Education should each year furnish the Administrator with a report on the state of the languages in the schools. Extracts from these Language Reports have been used for the present study. It is indicative of the importance of the language issue in the Transvaal that the Annual Reports of the Director of Education also emphasise language affairs – but always from the point of view of bilingualism. A typical comment is this:

*As far as the teaching of the two official languages is concerned, it is clear from the reports (of the inspectors) that inspectors and teachers are fully aware of their especial task in this direction and, on the whole, it is possible to report favourably on this matter. (Report, T.E.D., 1955)*

Upon further examination it becomes apparent that remarks like these refer to the teaching of the official languages as *second* languages. In the analysis of the official

literature which follows, it will be seen that there is little evidence that the same urgency or significance has been attached to the teaching of the home language. In spite of the significance of the language issue, it is difficult to detect any effect that this has had on the teaching of English Higher Grade.

### 1.3 TRENDS IN THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH

The teaching of English in the Transvaal is best understood in the light of developments that have taken place in the countries which are most influential in this field. Britain, as the home of the English language, is the most important. The U.S.A. has developed along different lines, and in some ways (e.g. in the use of educational hardware) is a better indicator than Britain of changes that lie ahead. Canada gives us a synthesis of the other two countries. Together they provide a yardstick which can help explain what we find, and identify possible areas of emphasis peculiar to the Transvaal scene. English teaching has changed since the war years. The change is not a simple linear progression, as Shayer's history of English teaching this century shows (1973):

A.C. Capey, in reviewing Shayer's book, says (1973:252):

*The scene has always been complex, darkness penetrated by light, sense and nonsense working together*

At any one time there are always visionaries writing and enlightened practice in schools, as well as reactionary pronouncements, conservative administration and bad teaching. Through it all certain changes are discernible. Geoffrey Summerfield says,

*In both Britain and the United States, then, the English curriculum is responding to two major pressures, from changes within the subject and from social factors. (1971:9)*

Changes within the subject, yes: these changes, such as developments in linguistics, we can identify. But 'social factors' simply mean that the world is changing, and with it English teaching. A full account of these changes would involve a history of society and a history of ideas since the 19th century. Thus instead of attempting to describe the influences that have shaped modern English teaching, this account will be restricted to the actual changes detectable.

There is a catch phrase which in a nutshell sums up the change taking place in English teaching: from Content to Process. This is the theme of Postman and Weingartner's *Teaching as a Subversive Activity* (1969). It is a useful umbrella phrase under which to list the changes taking place in all the different concerns of the English teacher. Different commentators give varying analyses of the subject, but it will be seen in the accounts that follow that they agree basically on the nature of the change.



Shayer (1972:6-24) identifies five basic approaches to English from which teaching has gradually moved away this century. They are:

- (1) 'The Classical Fallacy' - construing, 'allusion hunting', parsing, figures of speech etc.
- (2) 'The Old English Fallacy' - the philological preoccupations of the Oxford school.
- (3) 'Composition and the Imitative Fallacy' - writing based on good models.
- (4) 'The Moral Fallacy' - pupils read and worked on 'improving' passages containing moral precepts.
- (5) 'Grammar and the Content Fallacy' - the idea of faculty training.

Wilsford (1973) has analysed the model of English that emerged at the famous Dartmouth Seminar of American and British teachers of English in 1966, which has been described by John Dixon in *Growth Through English* (1967). Wilsford reports,

*There are many 'Growth Through English' variables that force a choice among teachers as against traditional values (88)*

Of the 35 variables he has isolated, he gives five key 'sets of bipolar variables', as follows (90-91):

- |                     |   |                     |
|---------------------|---|---------------------|
| Correct English     | - | Talk                |
| Literary heritage   | - | Engaging literature |
| Expository writing  | - | Expressive writing  |
| Produce evaluation  | - | Process assessment  |
| College preparation | - | Life preparation    |

These variables stress the value of the activities as the pupil performs them in the classroom rather than aiming at assessment of pupils at the end, against preconceived standards or in competition with each other. Subject matter is chosen to 'meet the needs of the students in content and interest'.

Dixon sums up the extreme stand of the Dartmouth Seminar as follows (1967:114):

*Our subject is experience, wherever language is needed to penetrate and bring it into a new and satisfying order.*

The American writer James Moffett explains it as follows (1968:6):

*English, Mathematics and foreign languages are not about anything in the same sense that history, biology, physics, and other primarily empirical subjects are about something. English, French, and mathematics are symbol systems into which the phenomenal data of empirical subjects are cast*



*and by means of which we think about them. Symbol systems are not primarily about themselves, they are about other subjects. When a student 'learns' one of these systems, he learns how to operate it. The main point is to think and talk about other things by means of this system*

This is not a new idea; George Sampson had already voiced it in his remarkable book *English for the English* in 1921:

*English is really not a subject at all. It is a condition of existence rather than a subject of instruction (28)*

But Sampson was a prophet before his time, and it is only recently that we find his ideas being taken up with the enthusiasm as of a new revelation – with corresponding reactions from the unconverted, such as G. Boomer of Australia, who writes scathingly (1973:19) of

*Advocates of the 'burn-the-textbooks-and-teach-from-the-heart' philosophy, such as James Moffett*

Leslie Stratta, who as a co-author of the epoch-making text book *Reflections* (Cleynants *et al.*, 1963) has himself influenced the history of English teaching, has in recent publications outlined what he sees as the changes in English teaching (1972a; 1972b; 1973). Basically, the shift has been from using literature as the touchstone of English, to basing everything on the needs and interests of the pupil. English can then move out from the pupil's personal concerns in 'a search for objective correlatives to inner states of feeling and thought'. (1973:107)

Most writers point out that the post-war shift to child-centred education has found its main expression in English. John Dixon in *Growth Through English* (1967:1–2) gives a rather simplistic model of this change, beginning in the time of the Industrial Revolution, and culminating in the ideal of 'personal growth'. All the books on 'creative writing' that appeared in the 1960s epitomise this approach. The lengths to which it can be taken when it finally becomes a popular fad can be judged from the publisher's blurb for the Penguin English Project (1970):

*Although we use language for everything, the content of the English lesson is in a sense the child himself and what he is capable of sharing with other children and with adults.*

Stratta describes how the shift from literature-oriented to pupil-oriented teaching has affected the entire English curriculum: writing is no longer based on literary models, reading is no longer drawn from a given corpus of classics, and language study is no longer based on a Latinate model of perfect English. The change in language work has

been closely analysed by Halliday, McIntosh and Strevens in *The Linguistic Sciences and Language Teaching* (1964), where they epitomise it as a move from prescriptive and proscriptive teaching, to descriptive and productive teaching. Walsh (1969:112) describes it as 'removing the emphasis from formal correctness and placing it instead on successful communication'.

Stratta on his own does not mention the growing emphasis on the spoken word, but his co-authors in his latest work, John Dixon and Andrew Wilkinson, (Stratta *et al.*, 1973), restore the balance, for they are well-known proponents of this aspect of English. They point out that drama is increasingly being used by English teachers. Hanratty is given a chapter of Denys Thompson's *Directions in the Teaching of English* (1969) to discuss the growing part played by spoken English.

Other additions to the content of English can be noted. Michael Marland, also writing in *Directions* (1969), says,

*One of the major trends over the twenty past years has been a substantial increase in the amount a pupil writes over a year (61)*

The trend began well before 1949. Blackie produced some striking evidence of the change since the 1920s in *Good Enough for the Children?* (1963).

A further addition to the subject matter has been noted in the U.S.A., which may reach South Africa before it reaches Britain. Fraser (1963) reports the findings of Jewett (1958), who made a nationwide survey of changes in 'secondary school programs in English' between 1932 and 1958. In addition to trends we have already noted, he says that Jewett found

*In response to the increasing urgency of the world situation, many English programs have come to include some literature of other cultures in addition to English and American literature (44)*

It is possibly only a matter of time before South African schools, responding to similar pressures, start setting works in English by black writers living in Africa.

There is another change taking place in English teaching, which on a humble level it is easy to document as an extension in subject matter over the years, but which has implications that may ultimately alter the whole nature of the subject. As the reading matter for English has widened, it has come more and more to include material from newspapers and magazines. The mass media have become the object of critical study. Even more so across the Atlantic than in Britain, other mass media than the printed word have been included in English studies. A Canadian survey (Ontario Institute for

Studies in Education, 1968:24) reports,

*The subject matter of English seems to be proliferating at an alarming rate;*

and it identifies this extra subject matter as 'distinctive grammars of the mass media' – television, film, paperbacks, advertising etc

In England, Robert Shaw, writing in the *Times Educational Supplement* (1972:28), feels that it is not enough for English teachers to mount 'sporadic civil defence campaigns against fall-out from advertising and television'. He is scornful too of 'vestiges of awareness of "new" media in the use of "audio-visual aids"', saying the phrase itself (audio-visual aids) is patronizing and inaccurate in a culture where those (media) are central'. And this is where some writers see the nature of English being revolutionised. It is the arrival of Marshall McLuhan's 'post-Gutenberg age'. According to McLuhan, this does not involve a simple change of subject matter, but a change from the 'nineteenth century world of classified data' to the 'intricate and complex integral world of electronic information' (1966: 198–199). The life of the classroom must be re-orientated, say McLuhan and his followers. This is also one of the main predictions made by Farrell (1971) on the basis of an elaborate exercise in futurology which he undertook for the National Council of Teachers of English in America. He invited hundreds of prominent teachers and academics connected with English teaching in the U.S.A. to forecast future trends in the subject, and found that they were of the opinion that 'the symbolic value system' of education will have to change in order to make contact with our immediate cultural environment (p.23). 'Multi-media, multi-sensory learning will receive greater emphasis than does print.' (p.158) The world is witnessing the beginnings of this reorientation, but it is still in its infancy.

#### 1.4 CURRENT STANDPOINTS

Under the broad heading of 'English as process' the changes outlined above find expression in a number of different interpretations today. In practice teachers may fluctuate in their approach, and different, even contradictory, emphases may be confused within schools, departments or syllabuses. The picture is clearer if one looks at the work of writers on the teaching of English, among whom it is possible to identify distinct standpoints.

Much of the argument about English still uses concepts first formulated for the twentieth century by F.R. Leavis. Hollindale, discussing contemporary English teaching under the heading 'Why have things gone wrong?' (1972:334), has to refer back to Leavis and Thompson's *Culture and Environment* (1933) as 'seminal'. The same book

is also called seminal by Poole and Shephard in the influential preface to their *Impact Teacher's Book* (1967:6). *The Times Literary Supplement*, in introducing a series on The State of English Studies in British Universities (1972:126), puts Leavis at the centre of the argument: it endorses Leavis's views, but goes on to show that they are regarded with cynicism by today's disillusioned young academics:

*'English literature, magnificent and matchless in diversity and range, and so full and profound in its registration of changing life, gives us a continuity that is not yet dead. There is no other; no other access to anything approaching a full certainty of mind, spirit and sensibility - which is what we desperately need.'* F.R. Leavis's words are stirring, meaningful, and - to many who are studying and teaching in our universities - ridiculous.

There are two threads in Leavis's argument: that literature is a means of cultural continuity, and a means of making one a better person. Nowadays the great proponent of English as a means of continuity is Fred Inglis, whose views are used as a reference point in the present study. Most writers today still share Leavis's second argument; they believe that literature in the English course uplifts and ennobles the pupil; that it provides the 'objective correlative' to the child's personal concerns referred to by Stratta (above). Mulford, in his contribution to *Directions in the Teaching of English* (1969:42-43), puts it as follows:

*One of the most significant developments in the teaching of English in recent years has been the way that the concern for the transmission of literary culture . . . has gradually merged with the other concern, for the kind and quality of the child's own world.*

Nevertheless there are two distinctive emphases found today: a concern for culture (in its new manifestation as 'society'), and a concern for the individual.

First, English and society: Leavis's concern for standards has developed into a full-scale critical study of popular culture. The movement was carried by books like *The Uses of Literacy* (Hoggart, 1957), *Culture and Society* (Raymond Williams, 1958) and *Discrimination and Popular Culture* (Denys Thompson, 1964). Hollindale says (1972:334),

*The English lesson became a means of training and protection for sensibilities endangered by the influences of modern society, and its concerns overlapped with social science.*

The publication of the text book *Reflections* (Clements, Dixon and Stratta, 1963) began a flood of English text books based on the study of social themes, which is still mounting in 1973. Conjointly with this shift in subject matter, the status of established literature in the English course has been changed to that of source material,



to be used alongside any other reading material in the study of themes. In Scotland, the Department of Education's Central Committee on English has announced in a Bulletin (1968:28),

*We regard worthwhile literature to be any imaginative writing which offers the pupil improving experience*

When teaching does focus on the quality of literature itself, through critical analysis, this study is part of the wider field of media studies. Literature also takes its place alongside all the other manifestations of language as the source of linguistic material for language studies. This is the approach taken by the Schools Council Programme in Linguistics and English Teaching, outlined in the Project's theoretical publications (1968; Doughty *et al.*, 1972) and implemented in its teacher's handbook, *Language in Use* (Doughty *et al.*, 1971). The pupil's entire linguistic environment, spoken and written, is critically analysed (This approach has been discussed in more detail by the present writer in two papers published in the *Education Bulletin* of the Transvaal Education Department, 1970 and 1972).

Leavis's belief in the refining qualities of literature has also strengthened the hand of those who put the child first in English teaching. Literature, established by tradition as the domain of English teachers, has kept its place, but is used to fulfil far different aims to those originally intended by those who chose the content of courses. It is not taught as a model of language in order to impart knowledge of cultural heritage, but because, as Str

*(it) offers the reader the opportunity to reflect upon living experience in a more organised and considered manner than he is able often to do while participating in the day to day business of living* (1972a:100)

This explains why David Holbrook's stream of books on English teaching, published in the 1960s (1961, 1964a, 1964b, 1967a, 1967b), show a dual concern for good literature and for the child's emotional health. In *English for Maturity* (1961) he says,

*Teaching poetry is at the centre of English.*

(Quoted Stratta, 1972a:100)

Then we have him expounding his theory of English as psychotherapy:

*English is no 'subject', but a means to personal order, balance and effectiveness in living. To give (students) adequate verbal capacities is at one with giving them relief from inward turmoil, a degree of self-respect and self-possession, and the ability to employ their potentialities — not only in 'English' and other 'subjects' or at work — but as lovers, parents, friends, members of the community.* (Quoted Ontario Institute, 1968)

Holbrook's belief in the therapeutic value of verbal expression gives the theoretical background to the interest in 'creative writing' that has arisen over the last decade. Imagination and involvement have become the two criteria for judging the success of a child's writing. (See *Assessing Compositions*, a pamphlet of the London Association for the Teaching of English, 1965.)

The child-centred approach of Holbrook and his successors (Whitehead, 1966; Stuart, 1969) is founded on psychology. Recently, this approach has been supported by Peter Abbs on philosophical grounds. Abbs has written prolifically in the 1970s on what he calls the phenomenological nature of English teaching. The following quotations from his article 'English in Crisis' (1972) illustrate his ideas, and indicate his indebtedness to Leavis:

[English teaching is based on] *an order which has its roots in the tougher side of the Romantic Movement and which is now finding further confirmation in the Phenomenological and Existentialist movement.* (122)

*English teaching . . . bases itself on a personal and enduring relationship between the teacher and the child.* (123)

*When the teacher affirms a fine movement of the body in drama, a delicate perception in writing, a sympathetic understanding in discussion, he is affirming some of those qualities of being which the Romantic revolution understood as the alternative to the essentially passive, the outwardly insatiable but inwardly stunted consciousness, created by the functional society. Such affirmation by the teacher and by the children of individual and imaginative activity is the surest way of developing that deep reservoir of creativity which the child/adolescent/adult will need if he is to retain his own humanity in the shrill and self-confessed inhumanity of modern life.* (123-124)

Abbs is perhaps the most articulate apologist for the child-centred approach to English teaching who is writing today.

Undoubtedly this approach can have in practice a bad effect on English teaching. Doughty pointed this out in the first paper of what later became the Schools Council Programme in Linguistics and English Teaching (1968: 1-6), and he quotes Summerfield as having warned about the same degeneration in 1966. The weakness lies in putting the emphasis on English as a set of activities in which teachers seek for 'highlights' of inspirational experience - 'a non-policy of ad hoc excitements'. The result of this 'episodic' approach, Summerfield is quoted as writing, is

*English syllabuses which fail to define their educational objectives with any sense of articulated progression or with any degree of inclusive generalization.*

Against the extremes of child-centred teaching, of English as process at the expense of content, there have always been those who have fought for what they believe are high standards. Prof. G.H. Bantock is one. Writing in *Freedom and Authority in Education* (1952), Bantock affirmed Matthew Arnold's standpoint that culture is worthwhile in itself and sets standards that children must aspire to. 'Creativity', he believes, is leading to the lowest common denominator. In the U.S.A., Jacques Barzun takes the same stand (e.g. in *The House of Intellect*, 1959). Bantock and Barzun recently joined forces with like-minded Englishmen in *The Black Papers on Education* (Cox and Dyson, 1971), in which the abandonment of rigour and standards in education is deplored.

### 1.5 THE AIMS OF ENGLISH TEACHING

In order to summarise the preceding two sections, current aims of English teaching are presented below in tabulated form. The aims listed here have been extracted from all the literature on English teaching, referred to in this study or cited in the bibliography, which has been published since approximately 1965. This includes recent Transvaal syllabuses. The aims as listed here have not been classified according to whether they are 'median' or 'terminal' objectives, nor according to the specific requirements of any particular group of pupils. All the aims identified in the source material have been collated and are listed; the weight attached to them in any particular teaching situation would be relative to the exigencies of the situation. Some of the aims are irreconcilable, some are old fashioned, but they have all been expounded recently as aims of English teaching. Where possible, the original phraseology has been retained.

In the design of this taxonomy the following works have been consulted: Bloom (1956), Taba (1962), Merrill (1971) and the Transvaal Education Department (1964). For the sake of clarity, an index precedes the full listing. Section 3, 'Requirements of the Subject', is listed in the index only. The reason for this is that aims in education are usually identified from the three sources given here — pupil, society and the nature of the discipline, but in practice the third section would simply entail rewriting from a different point of view the aims already outlined in the first two sections.

**AIMS OF ENGLISH TEACHING****INDEX****1 REQUIREMENTS OF THE PUPIL**

- 1.1 Intellectual
  - 1.1.1 Knowledge (Content)
  - 1.1.2 Skills
  - 1.1.3 Imagination and thinking (reflective thinking)
- 1.2 Affective (Sensitivities and feelings)
  - 1.2.1 Aesthetic
  - 1.2.2 Emotional and personal
- 1.3 Religious and moral
  - 1.3.1 Attitudes
  - 1.3.2 Values
- 1.4 Social
- 1.5 Physical

**2 REQUIREMENTS OF SOCIETY**

- 2.1 Vocational
- 2.2 Social
- 2.3 Cultural

**3 REQUIREMENTS OF THE SUBJECT**

- 3.1 Reading
- 3.2 Listening
- 3.3 Writing
- 3.4 Speaking
- 3.5 Literature



## AIMS OF ENGLISH TEACHING

### I REQUIREMENTS OF THE PUPIL

#### 1.1 Intellectual

The pupil should be provided with the facts and techniques essential for economic stability.

##### 1.1.1 Knowledge

The pupil should be conscious of the power of language.

He should be aware of the social aspects and functions of English. (How language operates in society.)

He should have a simple knowledge of the terminology of grammar as a tool for learning.

He must have an insight into the structure of language.

He should have a sense of environment, history and culture, for he should be culturally enriched.

His horizons and experience should be extended.

##### 1.1.2 Skills

The pupil must learn to communicate effectively.

His linguistic resource must be developed, i.e.:

His vocabulary must be brought out and developed;  
He must learn to control sentences, paragraphs and sustained pieces of writing.

He must learn to speak and write

fluently;  
logically (orderly);  
accurately;  
convincingly;  
clearly;  
courteously

He must be trained to recall.

He must learn to listen and read intelligently (with understanding); thoughtfully and critically; observantly; perceptively; discriminatingly; sensitively; with involvement; with attention to others, and courteously; with stamina.

He must be trained in habits of listening;  
reading – widely, for entertainment and for instruction;  
thinking.

He must learn study skills.

**1.1.3 Imagination and thinking**

The pupil must develop his powers of thinking logically; (with ability to see relationships); methodically.

He must develop his imagination.

He must extend his horizons and experience.

He must learn to understand the role of man in the world and develop a vision of human possibilities.

**1.2 Sensitivities and feelings****1.2.1 Aesthetic**

To develop the pupil's aesthetic response and taste.  
To enrich the pupil's life.

**1.2.2 Emotional and personal**

To help the child through the process of maturation.  
To promote his personal development.  
To help him understand himself.  
To promote and extend the pupil's emotional experience.  
To encourage independent thought and originality.  
To provide for the pupil's artistic creativity.  
To promote the pleasurable occupation of the pupil.  
To provide him with a sense of fulfilment and achievement.  
To develop in him the right attitudes towards work and reading.

**1.3 Religious and moral**

The pupil should develop spiritual maturity.  
He should develop a moral sense: a sense of moral responsibility, sound attitudes and values.  
He should be reasoning, unprejudiced and tolerant.  
He should be sincere.  
He should develop a sense of tenderness.

**1.4 Social**

To develop the pupil's resources for handling social relationships.  
To develop in the pupil a sensibility to other people's feelings.  
The pupil must be able to use his language confidently.

**1.5 Physical**

The pupil must develop poise and self-confidence.  
The pupil must learn the motor skills required for reading, writing and speaking.

## 2 REQUIREMENTS OF SOCIETY

### 2.1 Vocational

The pupil must be able to communicate effectively according to given circumstances.

The pupil must be equipped to contribute to corporate economic stability.

### 2.2 Social

To develop the pupil's social competence.

The pupil must learn to listen and respond to others perceptively and sensitively.

He must learn to share and co-operate.

### 2.3 Cultural

The pupil must acquire a sense of cultural tradition and of the environment.

He must acquire a knowledge of our literary heritage.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE SYLLABUSES BEFORE DIFFERENTIATION

#### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

During the period 1942–1972, five new English Higher Grad. syllabuses for Stds 6–8 were introduced, and four for Stds 9–10. Their dates of publication, usually a year prior to their implementation, were as follows:

1942	Stds 6 – 10
1945	Stds 9 – 10
1948	Stds 6 – 8
1959	Stds 6 – 10
1967	Stds 6 – 10

Occasionally amendments to the syllabuses were made in the interim by announcement in the Departmental Circulars.

The syllabuses for all the standards of the secondary school were never published together. In 1942 and 1945 the syllabuses for Stds 6, 7 and 8 were published as part of the primary school syllabus which started with the grades; in 1959 and 1967 the syllabuses for Stds 6 – 8 still appeared separately from those for Stds 9 and 10 although the Junior Certificate, which could be regarded as marking a break at the end of Std 8, had by then been abolished. Not only did the syllabuses appear separately, but it will be seen that they differ markedly from each other in approach, indicating that they were drawn up by different committees who did not correlate the syllabuses. This discontinuity is most marked in the different approaches to language evinced by the 1959 Stds 6 – 8 and Stds 9 – 10 syllabuses.

#### 2.2 THE 1942 SYLLABUSES

##### 2.2.1 1942 Syllabus for Stds 6, 7, 8

The tone of this syllabus is liberal, the approach child centred. The General Introduction states baldly: 'The determining factor is the need of the pupils.' Children are also put at the centre in composition writing: 'Compositions on subjects about which the children may reasonably be expected to write freely.' Furthermore, 'The writing of verse is greatly to be encouraged.' Most notably, the section on grammar attempts to be open-minded:

*Some teachers regard the study of grammar as a desirable and even necessary aid in the study of English, others do not. For those who agree with the former a course in grammar is proffered . . . .*

*It is not essential that a formal grammar lesson, as such, should be included in the time-table each week.*



However, the well-intentioned liberality of the Syllabus is contradicted in many of the details which are included by the authors, who see English in practice as having a distinct subject matter that must be taught to the pupils by the teacher. By advocating the appointment of specialist subject teachers for English, they are accepting that English is a discipline with its own unique concerns. This is more typical of an approach to English as a 'content' subject than as a 'process' subject:

*The Department stresses the advisability of having specialist teachers, technically well equipped and imbued with enthusiasm for their subject. This is admittedly important in all subjects at this stage (i.e. Stds 6 - 8), but particularly so for English, which is much more concerned with the spirit of things, and in which, above all, there should be no possibility of the teacher's regarding the subdivisions as separate entities.*

Although they stress specialisation, the authors contradict themselves in a muddled way, for they seem to be moving towards a view of English as 'process', judging by their use of the phrase 'concerned with the spirit of things' and their hope that the subdivisions of the syllabus will not be carried over to the teaching programme. If that is so, nothing ever came of this trend. In fact, notwithstanding the development of thinking along the lines of English as 'process' which can be seen in successive syllabuses, official Departmental policy has not changed thirty years later, for the idea of having specialist English teachers has spread even to appointing them in primary schools. The T.E.D. Language Report of 1970 reads:

*Favourable reports have already been received from various inspection circuits where subject teaching has been introduced in one form or another in primary schools . . . As one principal remarks*

*'After subject teaching has been in practice for some time, I feel that it has proved very successful for various reasons in any subject, but especially in a language, it is essential that the teacher who is interested in the language, who has a good knowledge of it, should be made responsible for it.'*

In very general terms, this is a reasonable comment to make about any subject, but as a reference to the place of the mother tongue in school it ignores the need and opportunity for integration of English with the other school subjects, of the kind so admirably described by Haggitt (1967), and it displays ignorance of the role of language in the total school curriculum.

The 1942 Syllabus for Stds 6 - 8 illustrates well the tensions and conflict that accompany evolution in thinking on teaching the subject 'English'. In spite of the 'modern' views expressed in the general comments quoted above, the Syllabus is still

very much the product of a more traditional approach. This can be detected in the language style and the terminology used, as well as in the choice of subject matter, the confused thinking about language and the confusion between productive and prescriptive teaching methods.

The rose style used by the authors of the Syllabus is ornate to a degree never repeated in subsequent syllabuses. Significantly, the purple passages occur in the sections on literature – presumably the style is considered appropriate to the subject matter. English teaching was one of the last strongholds of this kind of euphuism, mistakenly based on literary models, that has long since lost any resemblance to the language of the age – even as used by poets. Not only did it appear in syllabuses, but pupils were expected to imitate it in their own compositions and verse. Referring to the teacher's obligations in selecting literature, the Syllabus reads,

*He must be careful, however, to temper his choice to the shorn lamb, and not to despise the assistance of the lowly comic or even the lurid tales of dreadful men. For such children it is the first step that counts in the ascent of Parnassus, and though a great many will always be toiling travellers on the lower slopes, yet the success of the teacher will be gauged [sic, unfortunately] by the number whom he has induced even to attempt the climb. Whatever height is reached, the climb should be an honest, sturdy attempt etc.*

The romantic atmosphere clings to some of the topics suggested, under the quaint title unique to the English classroom, of 'lecturettes':

*Imagined figures. e.g. 'Justice';  
How to make butter*

(Std 7)

(It is interesting to note that the latter topic survived as a relic of a bygone pastoral age until the new Syllabus of 1960 replaced it with suggestions for 'imaginary broadcasting'.)

#### SPEECH TRAINING

The section on spoken English is still called 'Speech Training', with all that implies of prescriptive and proscriptive training and its concomitant moral judgments:

*Just because the playground speech is frequently slovenly, the teacher must always be on guard to preserve the high quality of the classroom standard*

*The teacher should attend to pronunciation, articulation, intonation, phrasing, modulation, modification of tempo, the elimination of vulgarisms and the counteracting of undesirable influences.*

## GRAMMAR AND LANGUAGE WORK

It is not clear what criteria governed the selection of material for the optional 'Grammar' section as distinct from the 'Language Work'. Under the former, for example, we find Subject, Predicate and Object, but under the latter heading are listed, among others, Word Formation, Prepositions, Sequence of Tenses and Active and Passive Voice. Presumably 'Grammar' consisted of Latinate grammatical analysis. Confusion over grammatical categories is shown by the inclusion of 'Literal and Figurative' in the following section of 'Language Work':

- 11 Recasting sentences and sentence sequences:*  
*Sequence of tenses*  
*Direct and indirect speech*  
*Active and passive*  
*Interrogative and categorical*  
*Negative and positive*  
*Literal and figurative*  
*Rhetorical question and statement*

Further logical confusion has resulted in the inclusion under 'Language Work' of 'Allusions: common classical, literary and historical'. One can see the authors' dilemma: allusions, to them, were part of the 'facts' of English (as they could not fit conveniently into any other subject), where in the English syllabus could they appear? Similarly, abbreviations had to be taught; they were also part of the cultural material that could be put in the English syllabus. We find them listed under 'Punctuation'.

A further heading, 'Spelling and Vocabulary', provided scope for yet more factual material:

*Phonetic symbols can be a useful aid in the teaching of correct speech, and it is suggested that pupils should be able to recognise the phonetic symbols associated with any sound, particularly vowel sounds*

## ORAL AND WRITTEN COMPOSITION

The most notable feature of the suggested topics for oral and written composition is the lack of scope for originality and the use of imagination. The section on Oral Composition for Std 6 (on which the work for the other standards is based) is worth quoting in full in order to illustrate this:

### ORAL COMPOSITION

- 1 *Describing and telling the story of pictures and picture series*  
*Interpreting plans and diagrams*
- 2 *Descriptions, making use of illustrative diagrams where necessary:-*
  - (a) *technical: 'what it is', 'how it works';*
  - (b) *of operations: how to make butter, how to mend a puncture, how to make a model aeroplane;*

- (c) actual or imagined scenes, the same scenes viewed under different conditions;
  - (d) actual or imagined experiences;
  - (e) persons well known to the speaker;
  - (f) imagined figures, e.g., Father Christmas;
  - (g) plays, films, books and characters.
- 3 Reproduction of
    - (a) anecdotes and jokes;
    - (b) stories from different points of view and according to varying circumstances.
  - 4 Story-telling from outline; community story-telling; original tales.
  - 5 Biographies and autobiographies
  - 6 Dramatisation: stories; scenes from novels and history; plays and sketches written by individual pupils or groups; charades. Staging of plays for class and public presentation.
  - 7 Record of doings in the classroom.
  - 8 Discussion of reading matter, literature, matters of topical interest, plays and characters.
  - 9 Expanding matter from condensed form, e.g., from a telegram.
  - 10 Summarising
  - 11 Talks by pupils on items of interest culled from newspapers, periodicals, encyclopaedias, etc.
- Lectures by pupils on topics of interest, including hobbies and careers.
- 12 Debates, formal and informal.

It can be seen that most of this work involves handling ready-provided material – reproducing, expanding, summarising. Even when 'imagined' scenes and experiences are mentioned, the formidable heading of 'descriptions' limits the possibilities of their treatment.

The section on Written Composition for Std 6 also leaves little opportunity for personal expression:

#### WRITTEN COMPOSITION.

- 1 Paragraphs on common objects, experiences and scenes, familiar processes and operations, local events and newspaper reports, either real or imagined
- 2 Themes suggested by the exercises in paragraph writing to be developed into more sustained efforts in descriptive composition.
- 3 Pages from a diary
- 4 Story: reproduction (see oral); completion (beginning or ending given).
- 5 Co-operative writing of a book, the subject and treatment, plot, characters, division into chapters, etc., being discussed by the whole class before the writing of the separate chapters is undertaken by groups. Plays and magazines similarly (See Oral 6.)
- 6 Compositions: descriptive (see oral work).
- 7 Biography and autobiography.
- 8 Letters –  
Friendly letters.  
Letters dealing with difficulties, such as complaints.
- 9 Summarising –  
(a) Summary in note and sentence form. Telegrams



*Advertisements, posters, content bills,  
headings, captions.*

*(b) Note making, with subheadings*

*10 The writing of verse is greatly to be encouraged.*

*11 Throughout the course attention should be devoted to  
punctuation.*

*The practice of making rough drafts and of effecting corrections  
before making a fair copy should be encourage.*

Consideration of this list reveals that a pupil may be original when he develops a paragraph on an experience or an imagined newspaper report, but even stories are half-finished beforehand for the pupil. The final commendation of the practice of preparing a fair copy can only reinforce the cumulative effect of stamping out spontaneity.

The Std 7 Syllabus adds to the above list of uncreative topics:

*Business letters Frequent practice in the use of standard  
business phrases, but with avoidance of stilted and  
artificial phraseology*

A difficult distinction! One is led to wonder to what extent the teaching of 'Letters of sympathy', introduced in Std 8, involves similar frequent practice in the use of standard phrases.

Apparently out of keeping with this formality – this emphasis on facts and on reproduction – is the warm recommendation of verse writing. However, without further elucidation we cannot be sure whether this refers to the writing of free verse as practised in the sixties and seventies, or whether it refers to the formal construction of verse according to the rules of prosody. The latter practice had formed part of the English curriculum ever since English became a school subject, where its presence added respectability to the subject because similar verse writing constituted an important part of schoolwork in Latin and Greek. Shayer (1972:121) quotes a number of writers who advocated a switch to free verse writing in the nineteen thirties, but adds,

*This is not to say that the 'prosodic' approach with its  
classically derived scansion patterns did not continue, but  
it tended to take second place to freer forms after 1930.*

In making virtually no allowance for the child's personal, imaginative expression, this Syllabus is typical of the broad trends in English teaching of the earlier part of this century. Shayer (1972) describes how, until the 1920's, nearly all composition was of the type which imitated models, although individual writers on English method tried frequently to change this. He quotes the great Philip Hartog as writing in 1907,

*(The teacher) must admit unquestioningly the right of each  
child to have an opinion of his own in dealing with his subject.*  
(Shayer, 1972:24)

But, says Shayer, 'imitation' was still being advocated in the 1930s: R.K. Polkinghorne's *Easy Steps in English Composition*, (1931) 'actually reproduces short prose extracts for younger pupils to copy out to "improve" their English.' (Shayer, *ibid.*)

The 1942 Transvaal Syllabus, while not advocating wholesale imitation, is nevertheless still close to this tradition in its emphasis on the working of given material.

In keeping with the presentation in the Syllabus of English as a body of facts is the authors' attitude towards literature. The Syllabus accepts the need to provide children with books that will appeal to them, but nonetheless takes a firm stand:

*Fashions in children's reading change, but there is a solid core of all time books [sic] of pleasure and every child should be given the opportunity of entering into possession of this heritage.*

This section of the Syllabus is entitled 'The Heritage of Books'. Among the works, mainly classics, recommended for Std 7 are, significantly, *More Stories from Shakespeare* and *The Stories of Some of the Better-known Operas*. Knowledge of the content of our heritage must be imparted, even if our pupils do not encounter the originals.

#### 2.2.2 1942 TSSC Syllabus

This syllabus differs from the Syllabus for Stds 6-8 in that it is simply a brief outline of the contents of the final examination. The TSSC Syllabus continued to be published in this form until the change to differentiation in 1959 required a lengthier discussion of the course itself.

The longest section is on oral examinations, owing to the need to detail the complicated organisation necessary for the testing (which is moderated by an inspector). The test is in three parts:

- (i) Reading aloud from a prepared book, or, after perusal, from an unprepared book.
- (ii) Recitation - Prose (50 lines); verse (100 lines).
- (iii) Speech - Ability to answer readily questions arising out of the passages read or recited, and to carry on a conversation on ordinary topics of general interest.

This is similar to the regulations for the Junior Certificate oral examination of the same period, except that for the lower examination pupils had to recite 20 lines of prose and 50 lines of verse.

Some confused instructions regarding the recitation are given:

*Each candidate should be encouraged to submit an anthology of prose and verse passages collected by himself (he, etc) and to memorise from these passages about 50 lines of prose and 100 lines of poetry. Further, the candidate will be called*

*upon to recite one or more passages from the anthology submitted and to show an appreciative understanding of the content.*

The liberal-sounding 'encouraged' is difficult to reconcile with 'will be called upon'; but apparently the anthologies were in fact compulsory although the compilers of the regulations were reluctant to put it so blatantly, for they added a section headed 'Suggestions Regarding Anthologies', 'in connection with the prose and verse passages to be collected by candidates.' (My italics, the phrase implies obligation.)

These suggestions for an anthology are a well-intentioned attempt to make literature more enjoyable and interesting for pupils; the section goes into far more detail than any other part of the Syllabus. A call is made for enthusiasm on the part of the teacher, and pupils are to be encouraged to read widely as a background to the anthology, which they should also be encouraged to illustrate. The requirement that 'candidates should always possess a certain amount of knowledge concerning the life and work of the authors chosen by them' is reasonable in this context.

These 'Suggestions Regarding Anthologies' were regularly reprinted in the Handbook in exactly the same form right up until the differentiated syllabuses of 1959 were published. One suspects that what was at first a good idea to bring freshness to the teaching of literature later became a chore and eventually ossified.

In 1942 there were still only two written papers in the secondary school certificate examination, an arrangement that lasted until 1946 when the present system of three papers was introduced. The examination was arranged as follows:

Oral examination	90 marks
Literature	200 marks
Language and composition (Essay 65, Lang. 95)	160 marks
Total	450 marks

It can be seen that the mark allocation is in keeping with the traditional bias of the Syllabus in that it emphasises literature.

The section on literature reveals the same intention to make the subject interesting and enjoyable which is evinced by the notes on oral work and the anthologies; but there is tension between the approach to literature for the sake of enjoyment and the approach to literature as a factual subject that must be 'learnt'. The authors of this syllabus are advanced in their thinking, but hampered by traditional forces. They prescribe 'A period of literature for which a text book will be prescribed', yet stress that the set works themselves be studied for literary appreciation.

*Two plays, of which one must be Shakespearian, to be read with reference to the plot, characterization, and general literary quality*

*The (six) books should be studied from a literary aspect. Annotations, etymological or other, save where necessary for an intelligent appreciation of the text, should be avoided.*

There is a marked difference between the note on the essay in this Syllabus and the notes on composition in the Syllabus for Stds 6-8. This illustrates how the junior certificate and TSSC syllabuses were often compiled by different committees with little attempt, apparently, at collaboration: the syllabuses differ in basic principles, let alone showing any attempt at building a sequential programme involving continuity from Std 8 to Std 9.

The 1942 TSSC Syllabus for the essay paper reads:

*An essay of about three pages (80 lines) in length, a choice of subjects to be given, allowing scope for both boy and girl candidates, and for originality and imaginative treatment*

Here we find that the Syllabus makes specific mention of the need for originality and imagination, qualities which are so strikingly ignored in the junior one

The quaint wording, 'boy and girl candidates', is as old-fashioned as the purple prose in the Stds 6-8 Syllabus; like the title of the poetry book prescribed for the TSSC in 1956, *A Poetry Book for Boys and Girls*, it reveals a way of thinking about seventeen and eighteen year old school leavers that would not be found thirty years later.

(See p 60) In 1942 pupils were still regarded as juveniles who had to be taught; the idea of them as young people *with whom* the teacher works, had not yet developed.

The language section of this Syllabus merely lists the type of question that may be set:

- (1) Points involving knowledge of grammatical principles;
- (2) the correct employment in sentences or in continuous passage of specified words;
- (3) paraphrasing, condensation or précis; expansion of notes;
- (4) the structure of the sentence, including analysis, indirect speech, etc.;
- (5) the structure of the paragraph, style, rhetoric, and rhetorical devices; prosody;
- (6) a letter on some suggested topic of a literary character.

This list is weighted heavily towards theoretical knowledge which can be taught, learnt and tested. Only (2), (3) and (6) involve usage, though (2) is really a test of vocabulary, unrealistic in practice and purely a matter of chance. The way (4) tails off in to a tired 'etc.' indicates that this list is simply a repetition of the traditional 'grammar



questions' so often given as drill in text books and set in examinations. The examination has become an end in itself, an unreal exercise, and the syllabus has been debased, to become a specific preparation for this exercise.

### 2.3 INTRODUCTION OF COMPREHENSION QUESTION - 1.

It was announced in 1944 (T.E.D. Examinations Circular No. 24 of 1944) that as from December 1944,

*One comprehension type of question [sic] will be included in the examination question papers for 'Language and Composition', English Higher Grade*

This was a hurried step. It is unusual that a change in the public examination should be implemented in the same year that it is announced, as the need to give teachers a chance to prepare their pupils usually necessitates a delay of two to three years. Furthermore, no details about the nature of the comprehension question nor the new mark allocation were given. This information was provided only the following year.

### 2.4 1945 TSSC SYLLABUS

In February 1945 changes were announced in the TSSC English examination which were to come into effect in the final examinations of 1946 - a more reasonable time lapse which makes one wonder all the more at the precipitate introduction of the comprehension question the previous year. (T.E.D. Departmental Circular Vol. XI No. 1, 1944).

The big change was that English was now to be examined by three papers instead of two. At the same time certain changes were made in the mark allocation, resulting in a different emphasis on the various components of the course. The essay was taken out of the language paper in order to make room for the new comprehension test, and was made a 'composition' paper on its own. Marks for literature were reduced by 40, of which 15 went to the essay and 25 to the newly designed language paper. As a result, literature lost its extreme dominance in the examination. The new arrangement was as follows:

Oral examination		90 marks
Language (Comprehension test, additional language questions and letter)	- two hours	120 marks
Composition	- two hours	80 marks
Literature	- two and a half hours	160 marks
Total		450 marks

### Language Paper

A breakdown of the mark allocation for this paper reveals what a radical difference was made by the inclusion of the comprehension test. Previously, all 95 marks had been allocated to the miscellany of questions which Bruce (1969) calls 'trivia'. These 'trivia', which are further discussed on pages 85-86 include all the short grammar tests involving sentences, phrases, analysis, transformations etc. The marks for this kind of question were now reduced to 30-to-40 marks, while the comprehension test was given the remaining 60-to-70. Bruce has shown (p.25) that in a combined language and essay paper, if 15% of the marks are allocated to 'trivia', this is enough to enable a very weak candidate or even 'a foreigner, who could not express himself in English' to pass (p.29)

The TSSC authorities, in reducing the marks for 'trivia' from 60% to between 15% and 20% of the total for language and essay, were taking a massive step to reduce this possibility. Furthermore, the regulations governing the type of language question were made far more general in order to allow for more adventurous questions. All that the regulations state (cf. those for 1942, p.24) is

*A choice of questions to test knowledge of idiom and vocabulary, verse form, grammatical structure and/or logical thought*

Of course, there was still scope for trivia in the comprehension test, judging from the Introductory Note on this which was included here and republished in the third term of 1947 (T.E.D Dept. Circ. Vol. XII No. 3, 1947):

#### INTRODUCTORY NOTE ON COMPREHENSION TEST

*The question explication or comprehension test has proved its usefulness for a number of years in France and Britain, and elsewhere. A moderately long passage of prose or verse is set, the candidates are asked to read it through carefully and then to answer a variety of questions on it. The passage must be good, an example of language efficiently used, and the questions should be designed mainly to test the candidates' ability to read accurately and to understand the meaning and implication of what they read.*

*Some of the questions can belong to familiar types—expansion, précis [sic] (supplying a title or giving in one or two sentences the main idea of the passage), paraphrase (putting in the candidate's own words the meaning of a particular sentence or sentences); questions on idiom and vocabulary, or the significance of selected words and phrases, or their force and appropriateness, questions on the simpler figures of speech (e.g. metaphor and similar) [sic] and their effects*

When the syllabus was reprinted in the 1952 Handbook, the reader was still referred to 'the introductory note on Comprehension Test', though no such note was actually printed. Presumably it had been the intention to publish this Note on the 'question *expliquée*' yet again, but through an oversight it was omitted. It was never printed again.

#### Essay Paper

For this paper a number of changes were made to the regulations of the 1942 Syllabus:

*At least nine choices will be offered on a variety of topics. An opportunity may be given to treat a topic as speech, letter or other recognised form (to be defined by the examiner)*

*N.B. This paper is not intended to be a test under pressure, but a means of discovering a candidate's capacity for deliberate and orderly expression while handling a given subject.*

Originality and imaginative treatment were now dropped from the rubric. It was to be many years before they received mention again with reference to candidates' essays, and then it was only in the Examiners' Reports bewailing the absence of these qualities (e.g. in 1958). Had the neutral wording of this Syllabus, repeated in the 1952 Syllabus, an effect on teaching which gave rise to the Examiners' plea for more originality? In other respects, the serious tone of the wording of the Note in this section indicates the increasing importance of the essay in the examination: the emphasis was moving towards what the candidate could do for himself, instead of stressing reproduction.

#### Literature Paper

Six books were still to be set. A text-book on the history of literature had last been set in 1943, and in 1944 a text-book had still been listed among the prescribed works, 'though this book is not specifically prescribed', so that there was now room available for one more literary work. The position regarding literary history was now regularised:

*No period of literature will be prescribed. It is assumed, however, that in studying a book some attention will be given to the type (genre) of literature of which it is an example.*

So there it is: a clearcut switch from the study of history to the study of genre.

A format for the literature paper was laid down which has remained in use until the present. The paper was to be in two sections, one requiring 'Brief answers of a factual nature'. It will be shown later (pp. 89-90) that the brief answers later developed

into a more searching kind of test than the factual one for which they were designed.

### 2.5 CHANGE IN DIVISION OF PAPERS - 1947

It was announced in the third term of 1947 (T.E.D. Dept. Circ. Vol. XIII No. 3) that a change in the TSSC would be implemented at the end of that year. In 1945, when the essay was put in a separate paper, the letter had remained part of the language paper. This had meant that two hours were allocated to the essay, thereby ensuring, as the syllabus intended (see above), that it was *not* a 'test under pressure'; for the two hours allocated ensured that candidates would not have to hurry. The letter, however, had remained in the crowded two-hour language paper. This position was now altered by taking the letter out of the language paper and adding it to the composition paper. Unfortunately this meant that the distinction between the writing of continuous prose and the disjointed answering of short questions was now made complete.

### 2.6 1948 SYLLABUS FOR STDS 6, 7, 8

This Syllabus is very similar in appearance and content to the 1942 one. Like its predecessor, it is published as part of a full series of syllabuses for the Grades to Std 8, and is based very closely on the primary school syllabuses. The two stages are linked in a sequence which provides progression from primary to secondary school.

The Syllabus for Stds 6-8 is divided into the same sections as before: Oral Composition, Written Composition, Grammar (though 'Optional' is now added in parenthesis to the heading), Language Work and Literature.

#### Oral Composition

The Oral Composition section contains some new topics. In an apparent attempt to step up the cultural content of the Syllabus, 'Stories of well-known operas' are now added to this section in addition to the book on this subject which is recommended for Std 7. Mock telephone conversations and broadcasting make their appearance. Times were changing and the Syllabus was adjusting to electronic developments, though it was not yet ready to cast off the rural world of butter-making.

The prescriptive, moralising section on Speech Training has been dropped in favour of a new approach, apparently more dynamic in intention.

*Practice in the 'tunes' of English to express pleasure, cordiality, surprise . . . etc.*

#### Written Composition

The Written Composition section remains the same except for the addition of 'comprehension tests' (surely misplaced in this category?). It was pointed out in the



discussion on the oral and written composition sections of the 1942 Syllabus (pp. 19,20) that they militate against original, imaginative writing by pupils. Here these sections are repeated, to remain in force until the next syllabus appeared in 1959: two decades devoted to the earnest manipulation of words with little regard for the ideas they express. Whether the syllabuses imposed dutiful obedience on the teachers for all these years, or whether the syllabuses simply reflect the way in which English was in fact taught during this period, it is difficult to say. But it can be said that English was taught in this manner, with regrettable effectiveness. Our evidence comes from the Inspectors themselves, who throughout the 1950s reported that pupils' writing was not original. Two examples from the Inspectors' Annual Reports will illustrate how striking the Inspectors found this lack of originality.

*There are, however, still some who, when teaching the home language, do not create sufficient opportunities for the pupil for original expression. Too much of the written work consists merely of transcription.*

(Report for Pretoria, T.E.D. 1955)

*In the home language, more stress could be laid on oral work and on the need for more originality in the work.*

(Report for Boksburg, T.E.D. 1955)

Reports in similar terms were made by the Inspectors right up until 1958, the year before the new syllabus was published. The Inspectors had obviously lost sight of the syllabus which was responsible for this state of affairs (or at least gave it respectability), nor did they realise that they were deploring the work of teachers who were simply doing their duty.

Some of the specific topics for writing listed in 1942 were now modified. 'Argumentative compositions' for Std 7 became 'Compositions on controversial subjects'. This is in fact a significant change, as it shifts the emphasis from sterile, formalised debate, to a concern for the child's own experience. One other ray of light is the omission of the requirement for 'frequent practice in the use of standard business phrases'. The new instruction is, 'Avoid commercialese.'

#### Grammar and language work

The optional section on Grammar – consisting of synthesis and analysis – is now prefaced by a remark which in its confusion reflects the confusion and uncertainty of the authorities who, by making 'grammar' optional, reveal that they were in a tight spot:

*The teaching of grammatical terminology and function is only of value in so far as it helps to clarify word order, grammatical structure and/or logical thought.*

What they mean is, do not teach grammar as a load of useless information for its own sake. But if grammar, when properly applied, clarifies in the way that they say it does, how can any teacher afford to ignore it? The weakness of the 'and/or' shows remarkable lack of conviction for a syllabus.

In their doomed efforts to distinguish a separate category for 'Language Work' the Syllabus compilers have rewritten the 1942 section as follows:

*Exercises to test range and intelligence of reading.  
Further exercises in weaving of sentences.  
Simple proverbs.  
Simple similes and metaphors in their context.  
Direct into indirect speech and vice versa.  
Elimination of common errors, e.g. between you and I.*

Though 'literal and figurative' have gone, 'proverbs' have been included – an open invitation to teachers who favour the memorisation of lists. Also worth notice is the persistence of twee language in the English syllabus, this time in the phrase 'weaving of sentences'. A cause for alarm is the insistence on 'exercises', which suggests artificial work out of context, and the hint in the first two lines that English work has as its *raison d'être* evaluation and assessment.

#### Literature

The flowery section on 'The Heritage of Books' which appeared in 1942 has been replaced by a sober discussion of graded reading and the use of the library. The Syllabus states that 'The average pupil should be encouraged to read from twenty to thirty books a year', but unfortunately adds the clause, 'Two or three books should be studied intensively each year.' This is unfortunate because such an arrangement encourages teachers to concentrate on the two or three set books to the exclusion of all other reading.

The Syllabus gives no aims for the treatment of literature with pupils at this level, so that there is no safeguard against literature teaching being dominated by unimaginative exegesis. The recommended book lists contain a strange variety of books, from the solid Victorian classic (presumably for intensive study) to the frivolous and ephemeral (presumably for the pupils' wider reading): from *Silas Marner*, *The Children's Life of the Bee* and *Lamb's Tales*, to the William books.

### Conclusion

The overall conclusion that can be drawn from this Syllabus is that it is useless to do a patchwork revision of an old syllabus and expect it to stand up to the test of time until yet another syllabus is introduced. While the 1948 Syllabus omitted some of the most antiquated features of the 1942 one, it remains essentially the same in spirit and intention. Consequently in most respects the 1942 Syllabus remained in force until 1960 – thus covering two decades during which educational thought in South Africa was developing and the South African way of life was changing rapidly (Lanham, 1970). The 1948 Syllabus was really a repair job, a rearguard action, instead of a courageous venture into the future.

### 2.7 STANDARD OF ENGLISH IN 1956

In 1958 the Education Bureau of the Transvaal Education Department published a research report, *Die Skoolse Peil van Leerlinge in Hulle Moedertaal* (T.E.D., 1958b). The purpose of the research had been to discover how pupils' ability in their home language compared with that of pupils in the past, and, in the case of English speaking children, with that of children overseas. No doubt this research was to some extent prompted by public criticism that pupils' English was deteriorating – a popular point of view especially strongly held in South Africa where the influence of the other official language is feared and resented.

Tests were administered in order to compare pupils' standards in 1956 with those achieved by pupils tested by E.G. Malherbe in 1938 and by the National Bureau of Educational and Social Research in 1948, with matriculants in 1939 and 1947, and with pupils in England and Australia in 1956. The 1956 English speaking pupils were found to be weaker than those of 1938, of the same standard as those of 1948, better than the matriculants of 1939, weaker than those of 1947, the same as English pupils and weaker than the Australians. Overall, the Report concluded that the standard of English pupils had not improved as much as that of the Afrikaans pupils, but that the results were not satisfactorily conclusive.

Of interest to the present study is the conclusion that the Report apparently reached about the standards of English teaching:

*Die peil van moedertaal onderwys in Transvaal het oor 'n tydperk van 18 jaar oor die algemeen verbeter – dit het in elk geval nie versleg of agteruitgegaan nie.*

(p. 69)

Coming as it does about half-way through the period under review in this study, the 1956 research provides a useful control in considering the development of English teaching in the Transvaal. At least we know, as the Report rather negatively points out, that changes in syllabuses and examinations had not brought about a collapse of standards.



## CHAPTER THREE

## THE SYLLABUSES AFTER DIFFERENTIATION

## 3.1 DIFFERENTIATION

In 1959 new syllabuses for Stds 6-10 were published, to be implemented in 1960 and examined at the Std 10 level for the first time in 1961. These syllabuses introduced differentiation in the secondary school. There were to be three streams, based on overall academic ability: the C Stream, who would leave after Std 8 or else normally repeat Std 8 in one of the other streams in order to be able to continue at school; the B Stream who would write the Transvaal Secondary School Certificate at the end of Std 10; and the A Stream who would write the Transvaal University Entrance examination.

The Language Report for 1959 announced the introduction of the English Syllabuses as follows:

*Not only have they been drawn up with a view to the implementation of the policy of differentiated education, but use has also been made of the opportunity to bring about far-reaching changes in the content and to introduce the newest methods. The new syllabuses resulted in new text-books of a quality not achieved hitherto being produced.*

The accuracy or otherwise of this eulogy may be judged from the discussion of the syllabuses which follows.

## 3.2 THE 1960 SYLLABUSES

## 3.2.1 1960 SYLLABUS FOR STDS 6, 7, 8

This syllabus, and the one for Stds 9 and 10, are very different from earlier ones in appearance. Quite clearly they are completely new in design and wording. This indicates that they had been completely revised for the first time since 1942. The badly needed revision of the English curriculum had arrived.

One difference between these and previous syllabuses that is immediately noticeable is how much longer they are. Subject matter, methods, materials, and the principles on which their selection is based, are discussed at length, both in a preamble and in the two sections into which the Syllabus is divided. These are followed by schemes of work presented in tabular form, carefully streamed:

*The B scheme includes the C core. The A scheme includes both B and C schemes, with something in addition.*

Teachers are told to treat the divisions as 'elastic rather than rigid'. These schemes,

which must have involved tremendous work in their compilation, are ultimately spurious both in their intended progression from one standard to another and between streams.

The length of the Syllabus is its weakness. It is earnest in tone, but uneven, confused and contradictory, and in spite of its discursive nature makes assumptions which are never qualified or justified. At no stage does it define what the subject is nor state any aims. The Preamble is concerned only with differentiation, but in reading it through one can pick up hints as to the authors' understanding of the nature of English as a subject:

*Work prescribed for the C stream is the essential minimum which every pupil in that particular standard must learn.*

*Teachers will realise that any given exercise can be adapted to the ability of the various groups.*

This is going to be a 'content' syllabus, prescribing material which pupils will have to learn.

The Syllabus is divided into two sections, (1) Reading, literature and speech; (2) Language and composition. This strange division illustrates the futility of trying to compartmentalize the subject. Subsequent syllabuses all continued to subdivide the subject, though not necessarily along the same lines. It was only in 1968 that a warning note was included to the effect that these divisions were not intended to reflect the actual presentation of the subject in class.

#### Reading, literature and speech

In general, the Syllabus makes moderate and helpful suggestions about the selection of reading material and the methods that can be used. There are, however, some strange, if not unhappy, features.

Concluding a list of criteria for the selection of books, the following appears:

*The language should be of such a standard that the book will enlarge his vocabulary and enrich his knowledge of idiom. This extension of vocabulary is one of the primary aims of English teaching. Pupils should be given frequent practice in the use of a dictionary.*

In spite of prior reference to the importance of books for the pupil's emotional experience, this does give the impression that reading is a vocabulary exercise. That the reader should understand this to be the import cannot be entirely accidental; in fact, the point is made explicit in the 1968 Syllabus for Stds 9, 10. (See below, p. 47)

The Syllabus expects the A stream to read, among other works, 'the established classics', and to study 'a definite period of literature'.

Now comes a further peculiarity. 'Poetry' is treated as a separate section from 'Reading and Literature'. (It may be noted here that this strange dichotomy still exists in the minds of teachers thirteen years later. One of the Std 8 internal examination papers of 1972 which were assembled for this study is headed 'Literature and Poetry'.)

A paragraph from this section is worth quoting for the elitist terminology of the opening phrase and the impossibility of the example suggested:

*For the better classes, it is suggested: (i) that pictorial, chronological charts representing the development of English literature be placed on classroom walls and copies inserted in the pupils' anthologies; (ii) that a further chart, depicting a particular period, e.g. the ballad period, be worked out in fuller detail.*

The only other guide to teachers as to what they must do with poetry is found in the Language section, where the A and B streams are required to learn about rhyme, assonance, alliteration, inversion, repetition, and iambic, trochaic, dactylic and anapaestic feet – the Syllabus thus fulfilling its earlier hints at regarding English as an assemblage of facts to be learnt.

The Speech section is the only part of the Syllabus of which the approach is similar to that in force in the Transvaal today. It advocates fluent, pleasant speech and the use of drama, and marks a progressive change from the 'speech training' approach of the earlier syllabuses.

#### Language and composition

The opening sentence of this section reads,

*The teaching of grammar should be functional; that is to say, its aim should be the prevention or eradication of common errors and the inculcation of correct sentence structure.*

Thus we find that this Syllabus is explicitly prescriptive ('inculcation') and proscriptive ('prevention or eradication'). What has happened here in the Transvaal in 1959 is exactly what the redoubtable Ballard saw happening in England twenty years earlier (incidentally another indication of the time lapse between innovation in English teaching overseas and its introduction in South Africa). The process which Ballard saw at work is described by Mittins (1970:34):

*In England, P.B. Ballard (1939) accused teachers – deprived of formal grammar as a weapon of attack – of fashioning 'other weapons equally apt to deaden and stupefy'.*

The new weapons referred to were prescriptive teaching methods, whereby the teacher tries to ensure that pupils do not make certain mistakes in their language usage. A number of writers have pointed out how unrealistic this approach is: the popular 'mistakes' picked on

actually constitute only a tiny fraction of the whole language; there is really no agreement as to whether they are indeed mistakes; and pedants usually worry only about their own favourites while ignoring someone else's. Barbara Strang (1962) calls this 'popular pendency', Fowler (1926) called these favourite items 'fetishes', and Halliday, McIntosh and Stevens (1964) call them 'shibboleths'.

Ballard was right. In the Transvaal, formal grammar had been optional for twenty years. Obviously the time had come to drop it from the syllabus altogether; neither could the vacuum be filled with proverbs and prepositions, for opinion had progressed beyond that subject matter too. The emphasis naturally swung to usage ('function'), but the only way this could conceivably be taught was by prescription.

On the merits of this kind of teaching, Halliday *et al.* have this to say:

*There is no point in writing in polemic against prescriptive teaching as such, for the same there are, in our view, two ways in which position may be done by prescriptive language teaching, one that it too easily becomes proscriptive, with all attention on what must not be done. The other is that it may occur, and there is no doubt that it still often does, in what must not be done. The place in the teaching of the native language.*

(1964: 229-230)

Both these criticisms apply to this Syllabus, as the details which follow the statement of the general aim go on to show. An account of them follows.

The section lists what the teacher has to deal with; this includes

*Verbs incorrectly spelt or incorrectly used, e.g. practise, license, advise, devise, prophesy, mourn for complain; centre round for centre in; quit for leave; shift for move (house); scandal used as a verb.*

It is worth noting the linguistic confusion of this miscellany: phonetics, orthography, semantics, prepositions (in a section on verbs) and colloquialisms. Such ignorance of simple linguistics lays teachers open to accepting the fallacies of 'popular pendency'.

Although formal grammar is excluded, the old Latinate concepts are invoked to protect the authors' favourite fetishes:

*Errors connected with the use of participle, gerund and infinitive. e.g. The teacher objected to him eating in class*

(The example is a long-lived favourite of English text books.)

The stress on linguistic purity leads to the invocation of esoteric examples:

*Errors in elliptical sentences e.g. 'No one has and no one will; answer the question'*



*Confusion in the use of such verbs as prefer and would rather.*

*If I had spoken I should have known what to say.*

Teachers are warned,

*The work in this section should be related closely to the pupils' own speech and composition,*

and

*Teachers should avoid giving their pupils lists of words which are not subsequently used in some form of composition,*

yet the language of the examples given in the Syllabus itself is remote from the pupils' lives; it is that of another age, if not of a kind found only in grammar text books:

*We winter in Durban (Verb, because it expresses what we do.)*

and

*e.g. labour, labourer, belabour*

The exercises envisaged are apparently self-fulfilling as they will only serve to test the examples given — examples which have been perpetuated by the text books and have acquired unique rules for their manipulation:

*Changing, from direct to indirect speech, sentences and simple passages, involving statements, questions and commands and the following adverbs: now, to-day [sic, hyperated] yesterday, tomorrow, ago, here*

The traditional catch words are worked in willy-nilly:

*Examples of sequence (of tenses) within the sentence He said that he had lain on the couch.*

(The purpose of this is really to test the forms of the irregular verb 'to lie' and has nothing to do with sequence of tenses.)

The authors deceive themselves when they justify their references to Latinate grammar by calling it 'functional' grammar:

*Parts of speech should be recognised and defined by their functions, e.g. Winter is cold. (Noun, because it is the name of something.)*

This kind of definition is semantic, not functional.

A confession of the narrowness of this grammatical system is the remark of the Syllabus itself,

*To counteract the possible effect of the inevitable simplification (of this system), . . . teachers should read good prose aloud to their classes as often as they can*

In spite of the unoriginal, clichéd nature of its own language section, the Syllabus expects the pupils to be original:

*While the pupils of all the groups should be drilled frequently in correct grammatical construction, more in the way of content, originality and thought should be expected from the A and B groups*

The unfortunate C streamers, it is assumed, have no ideas of their own, and are sentenced to the mind-shrinking exercise of filling in blanks. Some of the worst possible consequences of streamlining are realised in this section:

*Teachers will realise that any given exercise can be adapted to the ability of the various groups. For instance, where Group C might fill in a single word in the sentence 'The wild waves ... on the rocks all through the stormy night' ('broke', 'dashed', 'thundered'), Group A might be asked to construct a sentence to convey the idea of waves on the shore during a storm. For a first exercise in paragraph writing, Group A might be given a topic sentence only: 'Eloff Street on a Saturday morning presents an animated scene'. In Group C, on the other hand, the exercise might take this form: 'The room was very untidy. On the floor ... The walls ... The table ... On the windowsill ... In the fireplace ... From the ceiling ...'*

Understanding the nature of 'composition' as a school activity appears in all respects to be a weakness of the Syllabus. There is no hint of the notion that original composition can be a valuable educational and personal experience for even backward children – a view which had already been convincingly stated by Marjorie Hourd in *The Education of the Poetic Spirit* in 1949, and which other writers were promoting at the time that this Syllabus was published. However well-intentioned, the Syllabus remains circumscribed by an extraordinarily narrow view of what children's writing can achieve:

*Teachers should take advantage of every opportunity of giving reality to the composition lesson. For instance, an exercise may take the form of an article for the class magazine, a notice (in prose or verse) advertising a class activity, an entry for an essay competition; a letter may be a real letter, to be posted to a living person*

The argument that an exercise becomes 'real' if written for an essay competition, verges on sophistry.

### 3.2.2 1960 SYLLABUS FOR STDS 9, 10

This Syllabus was completely new, bearing little resemblance to the preceding one. Unfortunately it was also apparently created without any reference to the Syllabus for Stds 6–8 which was being drawn up at the same time, for even allowing for the differences in emphasis required for the senior classes these syllabuses remain incompatible in their

approach to different aspects of the subject.

#### Differentiation

Unlike its junior counterpart, this Syllabus does not discuss differentiation in the English course. There is a separate column for B Stream activities in the scheme of work which is laid out in tabular form, but almost without exception no distinction is made in the work.

#### Literature

The Syllabus is heavily orientated towards literature: in terms of sheer length, close on four fifths of the space is devoted to literature, the rest covering the following topics:

- Reading and speech
- Language and vocabulary
- Sentence
- Paragraph
- Essay writing
- Letter writing
- Principles of debate and discussion

A philosophy of the study of literature is propounded, in a style which adds to the confusion of the argument itself:

*There is a difference between objective and subjective value, the latter tending to transfer the personal state of mind of the reader to the work admired. Notwithstanding, literary appreciation is based upon subjective judgments, upon personal likes and dislikes, provided they are substantiated by evidence. Illustration and quotation should, therefore, support the pupil's judgments.*

And later:

*The ideal is to yield to the author a willing ear, but to possess one's own integrity of judgment.*

Here are echoes of the purple prose of 1942, in which apparently the authors of syllabuses think it fitting to discuss literature. The method of approach that is proposed is practical criticism, but the precise language of Eliot and I.A. Richards is distorted by sentimentality.

*When reading prescribed books, the pupils should be reminded to give the content time to mature in the mind. They should transcribe quotations with the object of writing about the books, so that each will illuminate either the author's craft or the reader's reflections upon it. They should read to catch the writer's peculiarities of style. They should make a commonplace book of his memorable phrases, and should note especially the mutually enriching use of nouns and adjectives.*

The idea of promoting practical criticism through the transcription of quotations is unusual. It has all the appearance of the old method of culling literature for 'improving' aphorisms, which is described by the historians of English teaching, Palmer (1965) and Shayer (1972), but which had otherwise apparently disappeared in the Transition (if had ever been used).

before 1942. The idea is so contrary to trends in the Transvaal that it is not surprising that this suggestion was never taken up.

This Syllabus marks a well-intentioned attempt to swing the study of literature to a personal response by the pupils. The examinations and examiners' reports for the next ten years record the growth pains of this approach – and there are indications that this Syllabus played a recognised part in bringing about this change. By 1964 we find the following announcement being made:

*The Book Committee has not selected specific poems for intensive study, as has been the practice in the past, for the English Higher Examination, because the Committee feels that the teacher should be allowed to select the material that he regards as most suitable for his chief aim: the understanding of poetry rather than a knowledge of particular poems*

(Annexure to Circular Minute No. 27 of 1964)

(This development is discussed further in Chapter 5, p. 94.)

In emphasising literature to such a large extent, the Syllabus explains that it regards literature as incorporating language, speech and composition. Literature is seen as the basis for a 'humanistic discipline' and thus as the core of the subject English. This view, which is something of a reversion to the pre-1945 position, was apparently commonly held in South Africa at the time, to judge by a contemporary dissertation from the University of Cape Town. The latter is entitled 'An investigation into the teaching of English literature in South Africa today at school-leaving and university-entrance level' (Honikman, 1959), but in the text the author in fact equates 'literature' with English:

*As literature is one of the most important school subjects, it would seem that it is not being given enough attention – three or four periods a week being spent on English literature throughout the year*

(p. 102)

Honikman finds herself in the usual predicament over literary history. She regards it as 'an essential part of (the ordinary pupil's) education' which should be 'entrenched' in the syllabus (p. 59), but says on the other hand,

*It is not necessary to describe how literature is taught in the average school – often a 'potted' life of the author is dictated together with notes on 'style', figures of speech, philosophy, etc., passages are set to be read at home, and very little scrutiny of the text itself is carried out in the classroom. Seldom are pupils called upon for a considered opinion of the qualities of passages studied.*



The Syllabus of 1960 does not, like Honikman, mention literary history, but it does resemble the Honikman thesis in advocating practical criticism as the method of teaching literature.

The Syllabus is notable for the firm stand it takes against short, factual questions:

*Contextual questions have the value only of informing the examiner that the candidate has read the books – which ought to be assumed, and not made the basis of the whole examination.*

In saying this, the Syllabus has come a long way from the Mackie Memorandum, drawn up for the Joint Matriculation Board in 1943, which proposed

*A compulsory question to test the candidate's knowledge of the set books. This should of course not be an essay question, but simply a knowledge or information test that may be answered in some kind of tabular form.*

(p. 34)

However, although the Syllabus is against short tests of factual knowledge, this criticism has been ignored by the TSSC and TUE examiners, who have continued to set contextual questions in the spirit of Mackie's 1943 proposal. The examiners have also ignored the warning of the Syllabus against comprehension questions as a means of examining literature:

*Comprehension tests should be used sparingly, and then only to relate the passage chosen to the understanding of the book as a whole. Detached comprehension passages are of little holistic value.*

No doubt there is some truth in what the Syllabus says, but in fact the public examinations continue to maintain a balance between this type of question and the essays which the Syllabus prefers.

#### Language

This section, as has been pointed out, is extremely brief, in contrast to the involved and lengthy exposition of the Std 6-8 syllabus. The following points are listed:

Parts of speech  
The Principles of Predication and Subordination (see Jespersen's  
*The Essentials of English Grammar*, chs. VII – X)  
Clausal and Phrasal Analysis  
Tenses

This grammar is accompanied by a hedging and uncertain gloss:

*Grammar is the anatomy of speech, not its physiology, it has no much creative value. The purpose of it is to explain the structural units and functions of speech, as more or less abstract entities. The active concern of the student should be with composition (i.e. lively communication), with the movement of ideas, relevance, fitness of expression, ability*

*to stimulate thought and emotion in others. The old name for the latter was rhetoric.*

Although the Syllabus makers were so uncertain about grammar, apparently teachers were not. By the time the schools had had time to grow accustomed to the Syllabus, the Inspectors were reporting as follows:

*Good schemes of work have been drawn up with greater emphasis on the functional rather than the formal approach*  
(T.E.D. 1964)

*The functional approach is gradually being adopted. Schemes of work [sic] were revised and the preparation is more meaningful. More grasp was shown of the value of purposeful oral work as a basis [sic] for all written work is being realised more and more. [sic]*

(T.E.D. 1965)

The Language Report for 1966 states that in teacher training,

*A difference is being made between the methodics for the mother tongue and the other language. [sic]*

(T.E.D. 1966)

One can only assume that such confidence stemmed from blithe continuation of old-fashioned grammar teaching which ignored the changes in the air that the Syllabus only hinted at. The quality of the English in the Reports, one might note in passing, is sufficient to cast doubts on the efficacy of the instruction so glowingly reported.

### 3.3 THE 1968 SYLLABUSES

Eight years after the introduction of differentiated education the syllabuses were replaced. The new syllabuses were implemented in 1968 and remained in force for five years until, at the beginning of 1973, a revised system of differentiation was introduced on a national level, and new syllabuses were introduced, each based on a common core syllabus for the whole country. The 1968 syllabuses can therefore be seen as an attempt to update the original differentiated syllabuses and maintain the viability of the system of streaming. Within a short time of their appearance it was known that they would simply be holding the fort until the new national system could be introduced.

Nevertheless, these 1968 syllabuses are most significant as they will show whether the rapid developments that took place in English teaching in Britain and the U.S.A. in the 1960s had reached South Africa yet. It will be seen in the analysis that follows that some subtle shifts in viewpoint are indeed apparent, and that the Std 6-8 Syllabus also makes some explicit changes towards a more productive approach to speaking.

and writing. According to the Language Report for 1969, the changes were sufficient to alarm teachers – which seems to provide evidence that, anachronistic or at least unrevolutionary as the Transvaal syllabuses often have been, they were still sufficiently ahead of the thinking of the teaching body to create difficulties in their implementation:

*The initial uncertainty and a measure of uneasiness as to the proposed innovation disappeared after the demarcation of the subject matter and after further elucidation during the regional courses.*

(T.E.D. 1969)

### 3.3.1 1968 SYLLABUS FOR STDS 6, 7, 8

#### Differentiation

Unlike its predecessor which, in its early enthusiasm for differentiation, attempted to delineate a simpler course for the intellectually inferior C Stream, this Syllabus makes little distinction between the three streams:

*Differentiation will not mean to any great extent differentiation in subject matter*

The Syllabus sees the difference as being one of emphasis:

*In the Std VIII Course the emphasis should be on the peculiar and particular needs of those taking this course here the stress should be on listening, talking, reading, and, to a lesser extent, writing. The various syllabuses are elastic rather than rigid.*

It is noteworthy that although the Syllabus speaks of 'the peculiar and particular needs' of the C Stream, neither here nor in the previous syllabus is there an attempt to define the work for the C Stream as vocationally orientated. There is always the possibility that English for children who are classified as early school leavers – as were the C Streamers created in 1960 – should be seen as mechanical preparation for the kind of language use they can be expected to encounter in their future (imminent) employment. When the provinces took over the technical high schools from the Department of National Education on 1st April, 1968, the pupils in those schools were using a text book called *Office English* (Moon, 1961) which typifies this impoverishing approach. The case against this kind of English course is given by a group of teachers at Manchester Grammar School in the introduction to their series of course books (Thompson, A., et al., 1968: iii):

*It is not only for the most gifted, but for all pupils that we advocate such a literary approach to English. Indeed, those with less aptitude for academic learning are likely to suffer most from the arid abstractions of traditional*



*grammar, or the trivialities of that approach, misnamed 'practical', which concentrates on business letters, recipes, and reports*

But it can be said to their credit that throughout the Transvaal syllabuses of the period under review there is very little hint of such a narrow interpretation of English as a preparation for the pupils' vocation

#### **Integration**

In introducing the different sections of the Syllabus, the authors make this point:

*The various aspects of the subject have been considered separately, but it must be remembered that speech, reading, writing and language studies are in reality inseparable*

The same clause has appeared in each subsequent syllabus. It is evidence of the quandary in which the authors found themselves. For the first time an attempt was being made to present English as an integrated subject, but as long as the content matter remained undefined, the only convenient way of outlining the course was to list the (physiological) skills involved, with a final acknowledgment that language is in a mysterious way a factor common to them all. No matter how piously the warning quoted above is repeated, teachers will continue to fragment the English course by attempting to time-table each skill separately - Monday 'Speech', Tuesday 'Essay', Wednesday 'Set work' etc. Only a syllabus which outlines the organisational principles on which a sequential programme can be based, will achieve an integrated approach to English; yet no such syllabus can be drawn up which will suit all teachers and pupils in all circumstances. It is a dilemma to which the Transvaal has not yet found a solution.

A discussion of the Syllabus follows in the order in which the 'aspects' are listed. Significant of the new emphases in the subject is the position of 'Speech' at the beginning.

#### **Speech**

The influence of the growing science of psycholinguistics can be detected in this section. The publication of A. F. Watts's *The Language and Mental Development of Children* (1944) brought a significant new dimension to English by drawing attention to the manner in which children acquire language and thought. In subsequent years theories on the role of language in personal development have been refined by many writers, and reference to this theoretical work has become common in syllabuses and books on English teaching.



This 1968 Syllabus is the first in the Transvaal where such explicit references are found. It bases its argument on two premises:

*(Speech) is the primary human way of establishing social relationship and expressing personality. In the second place . . . it is a powerful instrument of self-development, more powerful probably than any other.*

The Syllabus concludes,

*If boys and girls are to leave school properly equipped to play an effective role in contemporary society,*

they must not, as in the past, get rid of their 'slovenly' speech (T.E.D. 1944 p.2), but acquire

*ease and confidence in expressing their ideas to others directly, in speech.*

#### Reading

The theme of this section is the aphorism, presumably quoted from A.J. Harris who used it in *How to Increase Reading Ability* (1940: 4):

*The emphasis in the teaching of reading in the high school should shift from learning to read to reading to learn, and to the deepening of understanding.*

The disconcerting solemnity of this pronouncement is elsewhere in the Syllabus counterbalanced by the commendation of personal reading 'both for study and enjoyment'. Reading is seen as a means to the widening of one's experience and sharing of the riches of humanity. While six books 'of literary merit', covering various genres, are prescribed for close study each year – an increase on the two or three of 1948 – the Syllabus breaks new ground in including

*a wide variety of reading material, e.g. books of reference, the daily newspaper, magazines, periodicals, pamphlets and brochures*

#### Writing

This section is a continuation of the argument of the Speech section that self-expression through language is a valuable means of personal development. Since the previous syllabus had appeared, in which there was no hint of such a theory, Holbrook had published his *English for the Rejected* and Clegg his *The Excitements of Writing* (both in 1964) and their ideas had gained popular currency. The Syllabus advocates two kinds of writing, 'syntactical, and stylistically contrived writing' including summarising and other forms of functional communication, and 'free, original and

abundant writing'. (The term 'creative' does not appear in the Syllabus.) Associated with the free writing is the recommendation that such work remain unmarked although it should be given a sympathetic reception by the teacher – a hint of the 'to mark or not' controversy of the sixties.

This Syllabus is a belated record of the pronounced swing during the preceding decade to what may be called 'child-centred' education. Belated, because to a certain extent the Syllabus presents these ideas in a naïve manner as though they had just been discovered. This new discovery of the child as a *person* leads the Syllabus to a touch of sentimentality expressed in 'poetic' prose once reserved for discussing the glories of literature:

*Pupils have much that is secret in their hearts, and this they will unburden freely and vividly to the person in whom they have learnt to confide.*

#### Language and Grammar

This section marks the biggest change from the previous syllabus. When all the syllabuses of the thirty year period are reviewed in perspective, the 1960 Syllabus can be seen as a freak: out of keeping with the trend of earlier syllabuses towards eliminating formal grammar, it was a final flowering of complex Latinate confusion. The 1968 Syllabus ignores its predecessor and instead continues the process of turning language study into a tool of productive teaching. The 'terminology of conventional grammar' is 'a means of providing the teacher with a frame of reference for constructive teaching in language usage.' 'All that is important' about figures of speech and poetic devices is 'the way (they) give impact to and illuminate the meaning of the passages in which they occur'. Recognition of parts of speech and syntactical structures should lead to more flexible and competent expression. A purpose is even found for that old *sine qua non* of school English, Direct and Indirect Speech, which here is seen as a basis for 'the writing of dialogue as a creative exercise'.

Grammar is no longer an optional part of the syllabus, as it was in the fifties, but a tool which teachers can use whenever necessary, no matter in what part of the course the class is engaged.

#### 3.3.2 1968 SYLLABUS FOR STDS 9, 10

The Syllabus is divided into three sections, viz Reading and Literature, Speech; Language and Composition. The division of the subject for examination purposes remained the same as it had been since 1947, with the same mark allocation. While

recommending integration of the subject divisions, the Syllabus suggests 'that three fifths of the available time be spent on reading, literature and speech, and the remaining two fifths be allocated to language and composition'.

#### Reading and Literature

The bulk of the Syllabus is in fact devoted to this section. The aim of reading at this level is stated to be to 'develop and refine the pupil's emotional experience and taste' and to 'enlarge his vocabulary and enrich his knowledge of idiom'. 'This extension of vocabulary,' the Syllabus notes, 'is one of the primary aims of English teaching'. This statement is based on a similar one in the 1960 Syllabus. There is something wrong when such a simplistic view of the aims of literature teaching at matriculation level can be held in 1968. It is indicative of the uncertainty that teachers have about the teaching of literature, although literature has always been central to English teaching. Most high school teachers of English study only literature at the university; perhaps it is to be expected that their education does not familiarise them with the aims of English teaching in schools. Teachers and the compilers of syllabuses seem to feel instinctively that literature is worth teaching, but everything about the subject, from choice of books and classroom methods to examination, points to confusion as to *how* and *why* it should be taught. Certainly, a full explanation must be far more complex than this Syllabus suggests.

This Syllabus and its predecessor provide an example of how uncertainty over the principles involved causes confusion in the choice of books. Under the heading 'Additional Reading', the 1960 Syllabus for Stds 9, 10 had stated,

*The need to encourage reading of the English classics is fundamental to the appreciation of good writing; The detailed study of the prescribed works limited to six in number . . . should therefore be augmented by at least six selected English classics*

The 1968 Syllabus gives a very different aim under the same heading of 'Additional Reading'

*To encourage wide reading for enjoyment*

Yet when this Syllabus gets down to recommending actual books for additional reading, it ignores this stated aim and lists classics in any case — books which in most cases are hardly likely to enthrall the modern teenager or encourage further reading. For example, for Std 8 the list comprises works by Kipling, Masfield, Dickens, Shaw, Brownlee (*Cattle Thief*), Chesterton, Gosse, Scott and Blackmore. The sanguine list for

Stds 9 and 10 comprises Austen, Brontë, Eliot, Swift, Dickens, Chaucer, Bridges, Kipling, Conrad, v.d. Post and Shakespeare

#### Speech

This section is repeated verbatim from the 1960 Syllabus for Stds 6-8. It advocates drama and specific oral lessons, as well as making the point that 'oral work plays a most important part in other sections of the course'.

#### Language and Composition

Parts of this section are quoted from the two 1960 syllabuses. The approach is said to be functional; there is still the reference to 'structural units and functions of speech as more or less abstract entities'. Formal grammar is still listed - 'The principles of predication and subordination' and 'Synthesis of sentences according to given formulae with clauses and phrases defined'. But place has also been found for the first reference to semantics to have appeared in the syllabuses - though questions on the emotive use of language had in fact been appearing in the examinations for some time.

Various kinds of writing are listed - essay, précis, letter, objective reports, minutes and reviews, and verse composition (the last being optional, and 'for the better pupil').

Reading this list, one gets the impression often made by the syllabuses, that their authors feel obliged to add remarks even where they have nothing to say:

#### Letter Writing

- (i) *Practice in writing letters of different and interesting types*
- (ii) *The difference between the language of formal prose and the language of the letter.*

The Syllabus weakly repeats the suggestion of 1960 that essays can be made 'real' by being entered for essay competitions. This completely ignores what writers had been saying for the last decade about the nature of writing as a school activity and about the criteria to be used in assessing it. It is also completely out of touch with the views of the Transvaal University Entrance examiner, who in 1968 was calling for 'sincerity' in candidates' writing. (T.E.D. Examiner's Report, 1968). It is impossible to view this situation the other way round, and blame the examiner for being out of touch with the Syllabus, when the examiner's approach is mainstream, while the Syllabus is simply repeating a ten-year-old cliché.

#### Conclusion

This Syllabus is not the confident interpretation of modern trends which its junior counterpart is. It is a patchwork creation, often relying on passages from the syllabuses



of ten years earlier. As though realising that this approach does not do justice to contemporary needs, the Syllabus is tentative in tone. No wonder courses had to be held to give guidance to the teachers who had to implement it.

#### 3.4 CHANGE IN MARK ALLOCATION - 1970

Circular Minute 104 of 1970 announced a change in the mark allocation for English in the TUE and TSSC. While the marks allocated to the different written examination papers had been changed in 1945 and 1947, the total mark distribution for written work, oral work and the school record had until now remained the same since the Transvaal began its own examination in 1923. The old and new schemes are given below.

TABLE 1 - ALLOCATION OF MARKS IN THE TUE AND TSSC

Examination	Marks	
	Before 1970	1970
Language	100	90
Composition ( now 'Essay')	100	80
Literature	160	150
Total written	360	320
Oral examination	90	80
Oral school record	45	40
Total oral	135	120
School record	180	120
Total	675	600

Note: In a regrettably retrogressive move the title 'composition' had, over the years since 1952, been changed to 'essay' - this at a time when topics in the essay genre were disappearing from the actual examination papers.

It will be seen that the change in marks involved a reduction in each total. The only significant shift in the relative weighting given to components of the course is the lessening in importance of the essay paper. No clue to the motive for this is apparent.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### PRESCRIBED WORKS

#### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

As English developed as a subject in schools and universities in England in the nineteenth century, the approach to literature became standardised. This approach, which has been mentioned in Chapter One, may be characterized as the 'literary heritage' approach. It is an historical approach, concentrating on text books of literary history and the prescription of periods of literature for special study.

The historical approach epitomises one particular theory of the teaching of literature in schools. A recent American work on the didactics of English in schools (Hillocks *et al.*, 1971) distinguishes it as the 'conservative' theory. According to its protagonists, literature is a distinct subject matter within the English curriculum. All the pupils must make an intensive study of the same small number of works which are chosen for their established reputation of high literary merit, and assessment tends to be based on the pupils' knowledge of content. This study goes hand in hand with a study, at secondhand, of the history of literature - names, movements etc. The aim of this approach is to teach the pupils their cultural heritage. Consequently the only criterion for the selection of prescribed works is that they must be the 'best', though as a concession to local culture they may, in the case of South Africa, include works by famous South African writers, starting with Lady Anne Barnard who is suitably placed by history.

The exclusive use of the historical approach in England died hard. A circular from the Board of Education in 1910 recommended that this approach be discontinued (Shayer, 1972), and the Newbolt Report (1921:219) was still attacking the cramming of secondhand literary history in 1921. In the Transvaal, the demise of the study of literary history appears to have been hastened by the confusion caused by the shortage of text books during the Second World War. In 1942, when this study opens, pupils had two text books, Hudson's *An Outline History of English Literature* and Thompson's *A First Book in English Literature*. (See Table 7) From these books they were to study the complementary accounts of the particular period prescribed for study that year. (The periods were set in a cycle: 1745-1798, 1832-1887, 1887-1930 etc., so that each succeeding generation of school leavers was familiar with a different period.) Both these text books were of long standing: Hudson had been reprinted many times since its first publication in 1912; Thompson ran to seven volumes, each succeeding one, covering a different period, produced (according to the prefaces) in response to

clamorous demands from teachers. Their style is similar; a detailed list of authors and works, with biographies and critical judgments, placed in the context of literary movements. Thompson is more detailed, as he can afford to be with separate volumes per age, and he includes 'illustrative extracts' (p.vi). But their long life was coming to an end. They were both prescribed in the Transvaal for the last time in 1943. In 1944 the prescribed list still included Hudson, 'though this book is not specifically prescribed. The prescribed list for that year was later amended, and the 1945 list had to be amended several times, to take advantage of existing stock in schools. The fate of Hudson and Thompson during these chaotic years is obscure; but by 1945 they had both disappeared.

In contrast to the historical approach there is a different theory of the teaching of literature, which Hillocks (1971) naturally labels the 'progressive', as it regards literature as a part of the emotional experience of the child. This is the approach adopted by all the teachers of English whose work Calthrop describes in his survey of the best contemporary practice in literature teaching in England, prepared for the National Association for the Teaching of English in 1971 (Calthrop, 1971). These teachers have various criteria for the selection of readers, the most common being that 'the children should enjoy the books which are read'. Another point they make is a realistic one of practical didactics: 'The appeal of the book to the teacher'. They choose a book if it has 'a particular value in relation to some other area of English teaching' and (implied by most of them) 'the book stimulates further reading of a similar "good" quality'. 'Literary criteria are not ignored,' says Calthrop, 'they aim "to deepen their pupils' literary awareness and aesthetic appreciation of literature."'

The lists of Transvaal prescribed works, as far as one can deduce the criteria behind their selection, indicate a compromise between the two approaches described above. Generally books have been selected because of their established position as notable works in the history of literature, whose worth as classics is established. In recent years there has been a move towards selecting works on the grounds described by Calthrop: landmarks of English cultural heritage have been sacrificed to make way for works that will appeal to children and have a more immediate influence on their lives than perhaps the classics may have. The only one of Calthrop's reported criteria not apparent in the Transvaal is that of relevance to other areas of the English course.

No doubt in the closed circles of the selection committee human considerations, such as a book's appeal to the teachers, are taken into account. Also carrying considerable weight are the views of the general public regarding the suitability of books on moral, religious and political grounds. One suspects that the inordinate proportion of Victorian



writers in the lists is due to their 'safe' themes and language.

The prescribed books of the Transvaal, therefore, represent a narrow, traditional view of teaching literature, additionally circumscribed by public opinion. But the fact that the Transvaal system leaves the teachers to get on with choosing and teaching a great many books in addition to the hard core specially prescribed, indicates that the authorities are content that the humane study of literature is left largely in the hands of individual teachers and their pupils.

The books are selected by a specially appointed committee which selects the books for English Lower Grade as well. The committee has to observe certain stipulations with regard to the selection, which have in most particulars remained the same over the last twenty years:

- (1) Six works must be prescribed, one in each of the following categories:
  - Novel
  - Shakespeare
  - Other drama
  - Short Story
  - Other prose
  - Poetry
- (2) One book must be set for two consecutive years.
- (3) One book must be set for both the Higher and the Lower Grade.

The poems to be studied for the final examination have nearly always been specified; a total of approximately 2000 lines is stipulated.

Only four books are examined in the final examination, the other two being examined internally in Std 9.

A complete list of works prescribed in the Transvaal from 1941 to 1972 is given in Tables 7 to 12 in the Appendix. The same books have always been prescribed for the TSSC and the TUE. The books for 1941 are included as a kind of check on what was happening before this study begins, and to give some sense of continuity. Unless specifically referred to, these titles have not been taken into account in the discussion.

It should be mentioned here that the compilation of this list was no easy task, so that it is possible that minor errors have crept in. In most cases the source of information was the original Departmental Circular or Circular Minute that announced the books for the year, but in some cases the titles had to be gleaned from the examination papers. Amendments, especially during the war years, have had to be taken into account. Consequently, it has not always been possible to supply the names or the initials of all the authors and editors.



#### 4.2 THE NOVEL

(See Table 8)

The most frequently prescribed author over the full period of thirty years under review is Dickens, whose books have been set eight times, at regular intervals. Other authors who put in a considerable appearance are H.G. Wells, Jane Austen and Thackeray, though the latter's run of appearances came to an end in 1951. Authors most prescribed, in order of frequency, are Dickens (8 times), Wells (7), Austen (5), Thackeray (4), Conrad and Kipling (3 each). H.G. Wells has been the most frequently set author since 1960. Individual titles most frequently set are *Pride and Prejudice* and *Kim*, each of which appeared three times. *Kim* first appeared for 1951 and 1952, and was resurrected nineteen years later in 1971. A survey held in Transvaal schools in 1956 (T.E.D., 1958a) found that among books stocked by schools, *A Kipling Reader* was very widely disused in Std 7 classes, which indicates that the later prescription of *Kim* for Std 10 was not based on considerations of popularity lower down in schools.

Although Joseph Conrad appears among the top six authors this does not indicate that he was frequently prescribed. *Youth* was set in 1952, and *The Nigger of the Narcissus and Other Stories* was set two years running sixteen years later – with *The Nigger* itself specifically excluded from the prescription. A higher degree of popularity for Conrad might have been expected if one considers that he is one of only two novelists (Dickens being the other) whose works appear in the formidable list of books commonly set by teachers for the 14+ and 15+ age group in England in 1940, which was published by Jenkinson (1940) in his *What do Boys and Girls Read?* Furthermore, W.H. Mittins, in his exhaustive survey of G.C.E. prescribed works from 1955–1965, noted 'the steadily growing use of Conrad'. (Mittins, 1966: 208)

In addition to Conrad, there are several other authors who, for various reasons, one might have expected to appear more often. It is most surprising that Thomas Hardy's works have been set only twice, especially as he is one of the top four novelists in Mittins's survey (Mittins, 1966). *Under The Greenwood Tree* was set in 1942 (a rather easy choice for Std 10), and *Far From the Madding Crowd* in 1962. George Eliot has not been seen since 1948. The single appearance of *Silas Marner* is in marked contrast to the book's popularity as a set work elsewhere, for example in the U.S.A., where a survey in 1964 found that

*In three quarters to more than ninety percent of secondary schools all students in some English classes are required to read Macbeth, Julius Caesar, and the indomitable Silas Marner.*  
(Anderson, 1964, quoted Hogan, 1965: 20)

Moving back in time to earlier classics of English prose, we have already noted the disappearance of Thackeray, and we find that the Brontës last appeared in 1955, although the survey of Transvaal schools held in 1956 found that *Jane Eyre*, last prescribed for Std 10 in 1946, was still the most widely read supplementary novel in Std 8. Walter Scott has become extinct: his last appearance was *Quentin Durward*, set in 1941, and the Transvaal survey of 1956 found that lower down in schools, *Ivanhoe* was one of the books with the largest number of disused copies lying in Std 8 cupboards (770 copies in 35 of the 50 schools investigated). Other notable departures from the lists of prescribed works are Goldsmith (in 1943) and Blackmore's *Lorna Doone* (in 1942).

The most striking feature about this list of novels is the paucity of twentieth century works. George Orwell and two South African writers, R. Lighton and F. Brownlee, are the only writers of this century represented. Modern writers are given much more coverage in the sections for drama, short stories and non-fiction. However, comparison with reading lists in British schools and even of some of the other examining bodies in South Africa shows how conservative the Transvaal has been. For example, a British Joint Matriculation Board report (Petch, 1967) quotes a Fifth Form reading list which includes novels by Sassoon, Lawrence, Hemingway, Salinger, Golding and Sillitoe. Mittins reports that G.C.E. titles up to 1965 included Graves's *I, Claudius* and L.P. Hartley's *The Go-Between*. In 1964 a number of prominent English teachers published a report on the C.S.E. (Cambridge Institute of Education, 1964) in which they endorsed, among other writers, E.M. Forster and Mark Twain as suitable for study at school.

If the Transvaal is reluctant to prescribe some of the modern authors mentioned above, there is nevertheless a strong case to be made out for the prescription of books by South African authors. This was one of the chief recommendations made by M.J. Honikman (1959) as a result of an investigation into the teaching of English literature in South Africa at school leaving and university entrance level in the nineteen fifties. On the other hand, there have been opponents of modern and local prescribed works. G.M.H. Bobbins, doyen of English teaching in the Cape, denounced the choice of such books in 1936:

*Neglect of the great and attention to the ephemeral would not be tolerated in a study of Mathematics, Science, Art or Music*

The fact that only insignificant work by Lighton and Brownlee has so far represented modern South African writers is something of a vindication of Bobbins's fears of lowered standards. No established South African classics have been set. A notable

absence is Paton's *Cry, The Beloved Country*, which has been prescribed by the Natal Education Department and is also widely read in schools in Britain and the U.S.A. Furthermore, the suggestion has recently been made\* that white South African school children should also read works in English by black African authors.

#### 4.3 SHORT STORIES

(See Table 9)

Mittins (1966) feels that short stories are replacing the obsolescent essay in the G.C.E.; this does not appear to be happening in the Transvaal, where essays seem well entrenched. Nevertheless, the choice of short stories evinces more flexibility and readiness to experiment than are found in the other sections. The opportunity has been taken to provide more South African literature, and the stories are far more modern than the novels. On the fourteen occasions on which collections of short stories were set, five were South African, and most of the titles explicitly state that the stories are 'modern' or 'twentieth century'. One volume contains nineteenth century stories, and Sherlock Holmes has been very popular, though he was prescribed only in 1957, three different selections of Holmes stories featured among the books reported by the Transvaal survey (T.E.D., 1958a) to be most in use as extra readers in Stds 9 and 10 in 1956. Together they totalled 3330 copies, more than any other title listed as being in use at that time. This success must have prompted the setting in 1963 of *Six Detective Stories* – the only overt attempt to teach a particular genre of writing other than the six main categories. (Teachers themselves could presumably make a closer analysis of other genres with their pupils, making use of the prescribed material.)

#### 4.4 NON-FICTION

(See Table 10)

This section contains both non-fiction and essays. In fact, the majority of books set in this section have been volumes of essays, especially since 1960. Other works set include biographies, travel books, true adventure and even popular science. Over the years tastes have changed. The prolific editorial labours of Guy Boas were last recognised in 1955. Anthologies such as *Adventure Sought and Unsought* would never go down with the matriculant of the nineteen seventies. (*A Book of Escapes* was found by the Transvaal survey to be one of the most disused titles in Std 8 in 1956.) This kind of anthology, containing simple extracts of mediocre prose, was designed to present

\* By Prof. Bernth Lindfors at the Conference on the Teaching of English in African Schools, held at the U.B.L.S., Lesotho, in January, 1973



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children with uplifting accounts of courage. The aim was part of the old approach to English which required the subject matter of exercises and reading material to be 'improving' – morally exhortative and worthy of emulation. The pill was sugared by the rollicking adventure of these anthologies. Other attempts to stir the adventurous spirit of youth with accounts of Scott, Spencer Chapman and attempts on Everest petered out during the fifties. A probable reason for the disappearance of this type of book was the difficulty it posed in examination. As long as the entire literature examination concentrated on testing the candidates' knowledge of the content of the set books, it did not seem strange to be testing memorisation of the facts of true stories. But as more emphasis was put on testing appreciation, uncertainty grew about the aims and methods of teaching and examining non-fiction. This ambivalence is illustrated by the 1951 Transvaal Circular which prescribed Strachey's *Queen Victoria* but added the note, 'This is to be read as a work of historical portraiture, not memorised as a text book'.

The prescription of essays clearly presents problems today. Good modern essays in the traditional mode are rare; consequently either the old classics are maintained or mediocre semi-modern ones are prescribed. Although *Essays of Elia* were last set in 1941, Stevenson's *Virginibus Puerisque* was set as recently as 1961. Hazlitt, though reported by Mittins (1966) to be the top essayist in G.C.E. lists, does not make an appearance, which is surprising. The essays set in 1962 were all written between 1939 and 1942, and the contents of *Modern Essays*, set in 1972, in fact reflect an insular Britain of the earlier part of this century (even though A.P. Herbert on 'Members' Pay' was specifically excluded from study). Because of the shortage of modern essays, anthologies are prescribed which contain a variety of literary forms, such as sketches, letters and journal extracts. This is especially true of the South African volumes set. For it can be seen that an attempt has been made to compensate in this section of the literature for the paucity of South African works prescribed in the fiction section. However, the results are similar, for selections containing some pieces of dubious literary quality are chosen, such as Partridge's *Readings in South African Prose* (prescribed in 1959) and Waldman's *Onward from Table Mountain* (1969 and 1970). Uys Krige's *Orphan of the Desert* was a recent, more worthwhile, choice.

#### 4.5 DRAMA

(See Table 11)

In the period under review, plays or volumes of plays were set sixty times. The picture that emerges is that three authors provided the major corpus of works set; no other

author is represented by more than one play. The majority of plays are by Shakespeare, which is to be expected as one of his plays is set every year. Second in frequency is Shaw, though it is noteworthy that his popularity really dates only from 1950. A spate of his plays followed in the sixties and early seventies. Assuming that Shaw's plays were set only occasionally before then, one can speculate whether this is an example of the reluctance of educationists to prescribe contemporary authors. Did Shaw have to be dead a few years before his plays became respectable enough (both academically and decorously) to be prescribed? T.S. Eliot seems to have been similarly regarded: he received no mention before 1964, but since then *Murder in the Cathedral* has been set three times.

The third most common author after Shakespeare and Shaw is Sheridan: *The School for Scandal* shares with *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* the top position of having been prescribed five times. His remarkable popularity with the Transvaal Prescribed Books Committee compares well with his position among the G.C.E. boards (Mittins), though in England it is *The Critic* which is most often set, a play not prescribed in the Transvaal in the period under review. In a recent article in *The Use of English*, M. Pittock (1972) makes some likely suggestions as to why Sheridan is prescribed so often:

*Does The School for Scandal deserve its place in the school curriculum: from intrinsic merit, or merely because, as Graham Greene once averred, it is Restoration Comedy without the sex? (146) . . . I think Greene is right: the widespread attention it is still receiving in the schools is largely owing to adventitious circumstances (151)*

Pittock's remarks about 'adventitious circumstances' can probably be applied to a number of other works that feature in this survey.

It is difficult to infer on what grounds various plays of Shakespeare are chosen for prescription. Twelve of the corpus appear, headed by *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* (five times each) and *Julius Caesar* (four times). Possibly overall popularity with the public influences selection. This would explain the position of the top three plays, but would not account for the fact that another favourite play with the public, *Twelfth Night*, is seldom set. Two other plays, *Much Ado About Nothing* and *A Winter's Tale*, which are among those most frequently set by G.C.E. Boards (Mittins), are missing altogether. If it is argued that these plays are omitted because they are difficult, it is then surprising to find *King Lear* set three times (including 1941). Propriety no doubt accounts for the absence of *Antony and Cleopatra*, and public opinion puts paid to *Othello*, though both of these are popular set works in England and have also been set elsewhere in South Africa. The most surprising feature for a list of school plays is the poor

showing of the chronicle plays: only *Henry IV Part 1* and *Henry V* appear, each prescribed once. It is probable that these plays are not set more frequently because of the difficulty of studying only one play of the tetralogy at a time. Teachers may feel that pupils do not know what precedes and follows the play they are studying, and there is no time to teach the other plays. It seems, though, that teachers take the historical aspect of the plays too seriously, and that this frightens them off. The argument teachers use against the history plays is typically expressed in the following personal communication to the writer from a teacher:

*South African scholars lack the background to enjoy a play with an historical background like Henry IV Part 1. The Wars of the Roses do not feature in their history syllabus.*

That such opinions are still held by teachers in 1973, and the fact that a chronicle play was last set in 1958, indicate that misapprehensions about the nature of studying a Shakespeare play continue in Transvaal schools. However, there is some evidence that it is fear of the final examination that makes these plays unpopular as set works: the Transvaal survey showed that in 1956, thirteen years after *Henry IV Part 1* was prescribed, it was still one of the most widely read works for supplementary reading in Stds 9 and 10.

Apart from the three dramatists who dominate the prescribed lists, the variety is wide and sometimes weird. There is the singular choice of the *Iphigenia in Tauris* of Euripides (incidentally, the only work in translation set during the entire period). But generally the choice is conservative, 'safe', dated: Arnold Bennett, Barrie, Drinkwater, Galsworthy, *The Winslow Boy*. Strange that Goldsmith appears only once. Ben Jonson, frequently set for the G.C.E., is absent. Just as no modern novelists are prescribed, so the playwrights of the fifties and sixties are excluded, presumably because their themes and language are unsuitable for school study. The theme and milieu of modern plays such as those of Wesker and Osborne are of course remote and inaccessible to the average South African school pupil – but there has been no sign of compensating for this by setting South African plays.

#### 4.6 POETRY

(See Table 12)

Until 1944, the prescribed poetry was the work of a small selection of poets from the period of literary history prescribed for study. In 1942 the Victorians were set, in 1943 it was a range from Hardy to Spender, and in 1944 the period 1745–1798 was covered by a suitable volume, *Eighteenth Century Poets*. Even after the historical approach was



discontinued, the practice of limiting the number of poets to be studied kept its appeal: in 1950 only twelve of the poets in *The Poet's Tongue* were set for detailed study, and in 1952 the set anthology was *Eight Poets*. Ever since then the practice has been to prescribe poems written by a very wide range of authors. Almost without exception the approach has been chronological, the list every year beginning generally with a traditional ballad ('Lord Randal' and 'Edward' are favourites) and taking the pupil right up to the twentieth century, but usually ending safely with Dylan Thomas, though in 1971 Philip Larkin was included. The relatively few modern poems studied are an advance on the drama and novels, of which we have seen that few modern examples are prescribed. Possibly modern poetry – carefully selected – is more approachable to the modern pupil. At least there is a wider selection from which to draw 'suitable' items.

The attempt to cover every year all the major poets in the history of English Literature differs little in principle from the earlier approach of studying literary periods in depth. Both aim at introducing pupils to English poets in their historical context, or at least in chronological relationship to each other. When Transvaal pupils were still studying a small group of poets from a particular period, they did have the opportunity to read deeply in the poetry of a single author – a principle still to be found in the G.C.E. But nowadays the Transvaal is in fact attempting in the poetry section to give pupils a crash course in English literature without giving them a chance to study any particular poet closely. There is no justification to be found in the present syllabuses or elsewhere for the fact that the poetry, unlike any other section of the literature course, is based on an historical approach. It certainly is a curiosity: Roy Knight, who is principal of an English college of education and is knowledgeable about these matters, wrote in 1972 (Knight, 1972):

*There can be few English literature courses which now plod relentlessly and chronologically from Chaucer to (perhaps) Tennyson.*

A turning point in the tradition of prescribing poetry was the period 1952 – 1957. Not only was the idea of studying a limited number of poets abandoned, but in 1954 the first South African anthology was prescribed. This was Miller's *Thudding Drums* which, besides including the usual English poetry, introduced South African pupils to the work of writers of their own land such as Francis Carey Slater. Two years later this was followed by the anthologies of Neville Nuttall which also contain South African poems, including, modestly, some of Nuttall's own efforts. The year intervening between



Miller and Nuttall had seen the last of the old style of anthology, one entitled *A Poetry Book for Boys and Girls*. One can speculate on what success this title might have had with the sophisticated teenagers of the seventies, whose penchant for the sensational is pandered to by anthologists who tempt them with titles like *Wordscapes*, *Outridings*, *Echoes* and *Voices*.

There are distinct differences between the manner of prescribing poetry in the Transvaal and that of the English G.C.E. boards. On the one hand, the G.C.E. puts great emphasis on the study in detail of the great poets, Spenser, Chaucer, Pope, Milton and Keats, whom Transvaal pupils probably encounter through only one or two poems, if at all. Mittins reports that in the 1960s there was a boom in the romantics, Byron, Browning etc., but that there appears to be a swing now to the satirists. No such trends can be traced in the Transvaal. On the other hand, besides the attention paid to the classics, the G.C.E. does not neglect the moderns. *Ten Twentieth Century Poets* is very commonly set. The Transvaal, perhaps understandably, shies away from modern poets, for the difficulties of establishing a literary canon are beyond the scope of teachers. Anthologies including in their titles the words 'new' or 'modern' are often dated and record the obsolete tastes of previous generations. Methuen's *An Anthology of Modern Verse*, first published in 1921, was prescribed unchanged in 1947, so that pupils reading it would find T.S. Eliot represented by one poem, 'La Figlia che Piange', embedded between the poetry of Helen Eden, John Freeman, Rose Fyleman and six poems by James Elroy Flecker.

#### 4.7 CONCLUSION

In selecting prescribed works the Transvaal has fluctuated between the two criteria basic to the task. The dilemma is explained in the Cambridge Institute of Education Report (1964:11):

*Whenever books are given for close study, they should be fine works, touching the imagination deeply, of that simplicity and directness which secondary modern school children can absorb.*

Literary and didactic: the two are not easy to reconcile. Where extraneous considerations have had to be taken into account, even greater compromises have been made. Dull books have been set because they are safe, and second rate books set simply because they are South African, while good South African literature has been excluded either because it is controversial or – might one suggest – because the Prescribed Works Committee was ignorant of its existence.

Finally, one must conclude after considering the findings of this chapter in conjunction with the previous chapter on the syllabuses, that the selection of prescribed works has been to a large extent haphazard. We need only repeat the observation and recommendation made by Dr Stevens (1970:475):

*Certainly they [the examining boards] should take their decisions as the result of strenuous and systematic curricular study – not, as one sometimes suspects, on the suggestion of a weary examiner at the end of a meeting: 'Why not try Lord of the Flies?' or 'Would Beckett be going too far?'*

## CHAPTER FIVE

## THE PUBLIC EXAMINATIONS

## 5.1 THE CONTENT OF ENGLISH EXAMINATIONS

The form that English took as it developed as a separate university subject in England towards the end of the nineteenth century dictated the kind of examination that could be set in the subject. The examination that emerged at university level was a test of knowledge about English literature on the one hand, and a test of philology (chiefly Anglo Saxon) on the other (Palmer, 1965). When the School Certificate was instituted in England in 1918, the schedule included papers in 'Literature' and 'English Composition' (Essay and Precis). In subsequent years, as the aims of teaching literature changed from emphasising knowledge of facts about literature, to promoting sensitivity and appreciation, it became apparent that the existing form of literature examination was unsuitable. At the same time, the essay paper was felt to be proving ineffective as a test of language usage, with the result that there was increasing demand that school leavers should write an examination expressly to demonstrate their ability in language. Dr. Petch records that by 1935 the position regarding the essay paper was as follows:

*Criticism of the papers set, of the way in which scripts were marked and of the inadequacy of the tests as proving ability to write English had long been vehement*  
(1967:4)

As a result of this dissatisfaction with both the literature and essay papers, in 1935 a new paper, 'English Language', was introduced into the School Certificate schedule, but only, Petch records, 'after long and lively debate', and in the face of 'strong opposition' against which the reformers finally prevailed. The essay paper, however, was allowed to continue.

*In the late 1930s . . . the separation of 'Language' from 'Literature' was regarded as a major reform. This was because it was thought possible (though difficult) to test a 'utilisable skill' in the writing of English, whereas there was considerable doubt whether the study of literature could be formally tested, at any rate in an external examination.*

(Stevens, 1970:18)

Now that Language and Literature were separated, efforts to abolish the literature paper were increased. The Spens Report of 1938 went so far as to recommend

*that books should no longer be prescribed in the School Certificate examination.*

(Quoted Stevens, op. cit. 15)

and the Norwood Report (1941) supported this view, but these recommendations never bore fruit.

The Transvaal Secondary School Certificate has always included a Literature paper; language questions were set, but as part of the Essay paper, until in 1946 Language was accorded a paper in its own right – a division which has remained in force until the present. The G.C.E. O-level continues to include separate language and literature papers. The A-level includes only a literature paper. It never introduced a language paper, but some universities (including Oxford and Cambridge) compensated for this by stipulating that candidates for entrance should pass a special examination in language called 'Use of English' (Committee of Vice Chancellors and Principals, 1969).

Today the pendulum has swung back to the pre-1935 opinion that language cannot be tested by a separate paper. George Bruce, in his authoritative survey of the G.C.E. (1969:125) writes of 'the growing feeling here that it was a mistake when, during the life of the School Certificate, language and literature were divorced and made separate papers'. In 1966 the National Association for the Teaching of English came out strongly against the division, and in 1968 the Central Committee on English of the Scottish Department of Education announced that it had come to the same conclusion (1968:28). Both these bodies go further, for they regard public examinations as inimicable to the study of literature, and advocate internal assessment instead. They argue that English cannot be fragmented, and that literature is part of the body of experience encompassed by language. Now that literature is no longer taught as a source of facts, but as part of the child's linguistic, emotional, moral, aesthetic and cultural experience, there is no reason why it cannot be the object of the 'utilisable skill' for which a separate paper was originally instituted. So far this change in approach has not altered the structure of the Transvaal examinations, but it has affected the style of questions that is set.

A useful explanation of this shift in viewpoint is provided by Wiseman (1961:145-146). Examinations, he points out, can be valid according to syllabus *content* or the *aims* of the syllabus. Until recently – and to some extent it is still true of the Transvaal – English examinations tested content: a knowledge of grammar, of prosody, of figures of speech, of proverbs and idiomatic expressions, of suitably 'literary' style, of the plots of prescribed works. But the aims of English teaching – insofar as the syllabuses have ever articulated them – have never been so blatantly limited to this sort of knowledge. As teachers have tried in their teaching to develop pupils' attitudes and habits of thought, the examiners have been forced to concentrate more on testing these aims,



in order not to lose touch completely with the classroom.

But, as Wiseman points out, the goal-oriented test imposes certain difficulties. First, there is 'the necessity to analyse and clarify the aims of the curriculum being tested'. The inadequacies of the Transvaal syllabuses in this regard have been described. The next stage is even more difficult: objectives can only be tested in behavioural terms, because internal processes cannot be measured (Hillocks *et al.*, 1971). When syllabuses do list objectives they are usually framed in general, high-sounding phrases such as 'fostering aesthetic sensibility' or 'read with understanding and appreciation'. The challenge facing the modern examiner is to break these down into testable skills and attitudes, and then devise questions which can unambiguously test them. Whether the aims of the teaching have been achieved will have to be inferred from the candidates' performance in the test.

American writers have been ruthless in their insistence on measurable behavioural objectives. Hillocks, for example, insists that teachers should eschew terms such as 'understand', 'appreciate' and 'interpret'. Bloom's famous taxonomy (1956) attempted to list educational objectives in a conceptual framework. Like all such lists, it appears at a distance in time to be mechanical. Nevertheless, it is worthwhile at the outset of an analysis of a body of examination papers to look once more at his scheme:

Cognitive domain

Knowledge  
Comprehension  
Translation  
Interpretation  
Extrapolation  
Application  
Analysis  
Synthesis  
Evaluation

(Handbook I: 201-207)

Affective domain

Receiving  
Responding  
Valuing  
Organization (of a value system)  
Characterization (by a value or value complex)  
(1) Conceptualization of a value  
(2) Organization of a value system  
Characterization (by a value or value complex)

(Handbook II: 176-185)

Immediately one realises how unbalanced the Transvaal English papers are. The Language paper, for example, tests mainly 'Translation' — and then not at Bloom's elevated level of 'the ability to understand non-literal statements', but at the level of paraphrase, or

simple one-to-one equivalences of vocabulary. In the 1972 TUE Language paper, seven questions tested vocabulary, definitions, paraphrase and similar exercises. They accounted for 37 out of the total of 90 marks. The equivalent in the TSSC paper was five questions totalling 33 out of 90 marks. When we consider Bloom's affective domain, we may ask to what extent the Literature papers reach the level of testing the 'conceptualization' and 'organization' of values.

## 5.2 EVALUATING THE TRANSVAAL PAPERS

In the analysis of examination papers which follows, the two kinds of test which Wiseman defines provide two basic questions that can be asked in an attempt to discover what was actually being tested, i.e. (i) What *content*, and (ii) what *skills* (as defined in the *aims*) were being tested? It must furthermore be borne in mind that the examiners' reports show that in some cases what was actually being tested was not what the examiners believed they were testing.

There is a third question that can be asked which is more important than the other two in providing information about what the Transvaal examiners took to be the nature of the subject. This question may be defined as asking what *areas of experience* they saw English as impinging upon. This does not involve simply the subject matter of essays, passages, sentences etc., but also the values inherent in the design of the examination, the format of the papers, and the language, both of the passages and sentences quoted, and of the examiners themselves as used in the rubric and the wording of the questions.

## 5.3 MATERIAL

For the purposes of this study, it was intended that the public examination papers set at the end of Std 10 in the Transvaal should be examined and analysed. However, a complete set of these papers is not available. Missing are those for the first five years, from 1942 to 1946, the Literature papers for 1956 and 1957, and Section 1 (the short questions) of the Literature paper for 1958. The introduction of Differentiated Education in 1961 resulted in the setting of two separate English examinations, the Transvaal Secondary School Certificate (TSSC) and the Transvaal University Entrance (TUE). The papers for both these examinations are analysed. In addition to the final examinations set at the end of the year, supplementary examinations are written during the following March. As the original and supplementary papers are set by the same examiners, who are instructed to match the two examinations as closely as possible, and as the supplementary papers are written by a very small proportion of the original

candidates, it was decided that for the purposes of this study the supplementary examination papers would not be included.

Until 1946 English Higher Grade was examined in the Transvaal by means of two written papers, after which the present system of three papers, 'Language', 'Composition' and 'Literature', was introduced. Thus our sample does not illustrate the earlier system of two papers, but it does give almost complete coverage of the system of setting three papers. Each of the three papers is set by a different examiner, who may continue as examiner in his particular field for a number of years. No attempt has been made to distinguish between the work of individual examiners.

The examiners write reports on the examination, which are circulated among the schools, commenting on the candidates' performance and making suggestions to teachers preparing the next year's candidates. The reports in their present form began to be published in 1958; earlier reports are not available. In this chapter the reports are referred to by the date of the examination to which they refer, and not the date on which they were published, which was always in the subsequent year. The reports have been analysed for any light they may throw on the examiners' views of the subject in addition to the information concerning 'his that is provided by the papers themselves, and for information on how the candidates actually performed in answering the questions in the examinations.

#### 5.4 THE DIVISIONS OF THE SUBJECT WITHIN THE EXAMINATION

As has been related, the Transvaal originally set two papers, 'Language and Composition' and 'Literature'. Later these were expanded into three papers, 'Language', 'Composition' and 'Literature'. Certain conclusions can be drawn from this later division of the subject.

First, the writing of continuous prose is differentiated from the writing of brief sentences. (This became fully entrenched when the letter was transferred from the Language to the Composition paper in 1947.)

Secondly, the attempt to test candidates' ability to write different kinds of prose became atrophied with the naming specifically of 'the letter' as the second part of the composition paper. For years the consequence was that the examiners, in order to provide some variety, sneaked in other kinds of writing as alternatives for composition, such as dialogue and journal entries, even though they were hardly comparable for the purposes of reliable assessment. A further development has been that recently the examiner has bent the regulations, ignored the official designation 'letter', and required



in its place other specific kinds of writing, such as reports and notes.

The third implication of the division of the papers is that literature is seen as a separate branch of the subject. The division is not, however, complete, as in some respects the other two papers are strongly coloured by literature study. On two occasions the comprehension test has actually been taken from a current prescribed book. Other ways in which literature finds its way into the other papers will be described later.

A fourth separation is that of the literature paper into two parts; one to be answered by essays, the other in the form of short questions, answerable with sentences or short paragraphs. This division invites the testing of appreciation through essays, and of simple factual knowledge of the books by short questions. Over the years examiners have, however, seen the possibilities of testing specific responses by means of the short questions. Essays, on the other hand, have often been abused by being used for testing simple repetition of the story.

## 5.5 THE ETHOS OF THE EXAMINATION

### 5.5.1 The tone of the papers

The ethos of the subject is inherent in the way the question papers are set. This point is made by several commentators. Preen (1970: 189) asks,

*Do the regularly set exercises (in particular paraphrase) affect students' habitual thinking about the nature of poetry? Do the conventional forms of the questions, and the overall tone of the paper provoke inappropriate postures in many answers? Does the practice of setting questions on each book separately inhibit the exploration of interrelationships between books? . . .*

*The very nature of the A-level papers has a formative influence over the average candidate's notion of the discipline . . . The structure, content and approach of the papers are based on assumptions which are not made explicit.*

Indeed, to anyone approaching English examination papers with an open mind, they must appear part of a mad-hatter world, with a mystique and conventions peculiar to the world of examinations.

The rubric that introduced the section of short questions in the Transvaal Literature papers for many years in the forties and fifties read,

*Answers must be concise. Those which are MORE THAN 25 WORDS IN LENGTH WILL BE CONSIDERED POOR*



While one can accept that the imposition of brevity is a legitimate stipulation, as an unqualified threat it sounds wholly unreasonable. So too is a question of 1948. Who but an examiner should want to ask an adolescent the following:

*Outline the story [of Romeo and Juliet] in not more than 400 words. (56 marks)*

The mathematical niceties of this operation make the mind boggle.

No wonder Frances Stevens commented after her study of A-level papers (1970:455-456):

*Above all what strikes one is the lack of what may be called gentleness. The 'stand and deliver' tone of many of the questions feels incongruous with the quality of literature.*

The Transvaal papers are not, themselves, examples of the 'language of tenderness' which Inglis (1969: 20) says embodies one of the most important values that English teachers should impart to their pupils. The papers are a denial of what they should be affirming.

To some extent this is the inevitable concomitant of examinations; but there are many examples of how the examiners could have been more positive. In the example quoted above, the use of capital letters for emphasis would be regarded as anathema if it appeared in the writing of a candidate. This 'Do as I say, not as I do' approach can become quite ludicrous as in the following:

*Give a short summary of the first SEVEN lines in smooth prose.*

(1957)

There is also an example of a question in the 1958 paper:

*Below are given examples of 'Jungle English'; in other words, they are unacceptable or displeasing, because their language is pompous, or hackneyed, or verbose, or affected.*

(The question goes on to require candidates to rewrite the specimens in acceptable English.) It may be asked why, if the examiner was so concerned with good English, he fell back on such a quaint slang term himself, even though he did make the weak apology of putting it in inverted commas.

### 5.5.2 Lack of context

Reinforcing the abrupt tone of the papers is their bittiness, their fragmentation, which Preen touched on (above). Everything is chopped into small pieces to be tested separately. The two pieces of continuous writing required for the essay paper are on quite unrelated topics, apart from the laudable integration provided when short questions are based on the comprehension passage, the language questions are a hotch-potch of

unrelated items in no conceptual sequence; with few exceptions the précis passage is not part of the comprehension test; and the literary works are seldom linked in the same questions.

Frances Stevens comments,

*One notices also a kind of remoteness. The poets speak with disembodied voices. The plays might never have been near a stage.* (1970: 476)

These observations are equally true of the Transvaal papers. Above all, so much of what appears is *out of context*. This does not only give the subject an air of unreality, but it makes the candidates' task of registering the desired response to the questions extremely difficult, and it makes a reliable assessment of the candidates' response extremely dubious. This is such a significant feature of the questions that examples will be adduced from each section of the composition and language papers by way of illustration.

(1) **Essay**

The 'essay' or 'composition' is a good example. As Dr Petch says, 'The essay is set in vacuo' (1967: 5). He sums up criticism of the essay as follows:

*The case against the traditional essay is held to be much stronger when examiners take into the reckoning the content of an arbitrarily imposed task which has to be completed within arbitrary limits of time and in the artificial conditions of the examination room.*

In the Transvaal, with few exceptions, right up until 1962 topics were set without any explanation or background. This, in spite of the fact that informed opinion had for many years held that candidates need to have the topics placed in a context. In 1941, the year before our survey starts, Sir Philip Hartog's committee on 'The Marking of English Essays' wrote – and it is worth noting that this was a repetition of views previously expressed –

*In previous work on the subject by the Director of the Enquiry it was pointed out that in real life a person does not just 'write'. He writes for a given audience and with a given object in view*

(Quoted Stevens, op. cit.: 12)

'Real life': this is what is lacking in questions such as these: 'Water'; 'Hats'. The earlier papers are full of such examples, the nearest thing to context being the qualification that a certain topic should be the subject of 'a speech in a debate'. In the sixties, the TSSC continued in this vein, while the TUE moved strongly away. The former had 'The Customs of the Teenager' (a chapter from a book by Margaret Mead?) for 1964, and in

1972 it was still typical of the ISSC that only one of the seven topics was couched in a full sentence, the rest all being single word or phrasal subjects. One topic was to write the foreword to a book – which, considering the non-existence of the book, is a prime example of lack of context. In contrast, by 1969 the TUE was specifying dialogue and inviting short stories, and giving long, detailed accounts of background for the letters. In 1970 alternatives to the letter were being offered in the form of tables to be analysed. The same TUE paper (1970) contained an essay topic which provided the fullest context of all the topics set in the period studied. It began with the quotation of a paragraph on 'trend setters' from Denys Thompson's *Discrimination and Popular Culture*, and followed this with the question,

*Is man aware of what shapes him to think, feel and act as he does? What, do you think, has shaped you? (Entitle your essay, 'Some Shapers of Me')*

Significantly, the examiner reported of this question,

*Unquestionably the best handled topic and, fortunately, one of the most popular*

Similar subjects have appeared in other years, but always in the form of a short title. It is therefore fair to conclude that the manner in which this particular topic was set added materially to its success.

## (2) Paragraph

The weakness of setting candidates to write out of context is clearly shown by the history of the 'paragraph'. The rationale behind this exercise – it is not discussed in the syllabuses – was presumably that unless candidates could construct a paragraph they could not compose longer pieces of writing. But pity the candidate who had to compose his paragraph without knowing of what it could be presumed to be a part. The choice of topics in its first year, 1955, is representative of its annual appearance: of seven choices three were factual, the rest brief titles such as 'The Idle Man'. Within five years the examiners' reports had begun complaining that apparently the candidates did not know what was expected of them in this question, but it nevertheless limped excruciatingly on. In 1960 the examiner reported,

*Too many paragraphs were pedestrian and dull.*

the topics that year included Mice; Patterns; Hands; Tea; and Queues. Surely the examiner could see that candidates would find these topics 'pedestrian and dull'? The horrors of 1964 were 'These I have loved' and 'Autumn has its own beauty'. The examiner for the 1968 TUE made one last bizarre attempt to make the paragraph mean something:

*Takkies  
Myself  
Stumped!  
Vietnam*

but without a rationale its doom was sealed. The paragraph was withdrawn the following year.

(3) **Comprehension and Précis**

Equally as difficult as being able to produce a meaningful passage out of context is having to grasp the full meaning and implications of a passage that has been extracted from a context. It is not so much that candidates need to know what has immediately preceded the passage set for comprehension – the examiners usually find 'self-contained' passages – but they have to transport themselves in mood, and especially in time, in order to understand what is happening. It is easy to imagine the consternation of a Transvaal pupil suddenly confronted, on a hot November morning in 1959, with a comprehension test beginning with a description of a character reading *The Times* and exclaiming,

*'Ha! Here we have it! Mr Disraeli threatens to resign. The  
poor Queen will be forced to send for that turncoat  
Gladstone*

(4) **Short questions**

Much has been written about the linguistic fallacy of posing short questions on language taken out of context. Edward Blishen (1958: 222) has, rather kindly, described these exercises as 'mending punctures in bicycles on which one is never likely to go for a spin.' Any idea of the usefulness of these 'trivia', as Bruce (1969) calls them, was finally debunked by the detailed arguments of the Schools Council Eighth Report (1964), as a result of which such questions were removed from the G.C.E. O-level (Bruce, 1969:30). But in the Transvaal they continue to be set. Admittedly they do not form as large a proportion of the questions as they did in the forties and fifties, and the worst excesses of lack of context are avoided nowadays.

In 1959, just after the Disraeli question, candidates were asked in cold blood to give the meaning of a list of poetic quotations, apparently arbitrarily chosen, which included,

*Ay, in the very temple of Delight  
Veil'd Melancholy has her sovran shrine.*

However, in 1972 the TUE paper was still asking for lists of antonyms, and for the use of phrases such as 'credibility gap' in sentences to show their meaning. The modernity of the phrases now used in such questions still does not compensate for the arbitrary nature of their choice.



Absence of context is most serious in those questions beloved of the prescription school – the correction of common errors. Linguists such as Halliday, McIntosh and Strevens (Halliday *et al.*, 1964) have shown that the most vital factor governing decisions of usage is context – register, style, tone, mode of discourse etc. Yet this is precisely the information that is withheld from candidates. The following is quoted as a typical example of this perpetuation of the myth of monolithic English:

*Explain clearly what is wrong with any FOUR of the sentences given below. (You may, for example, find them ambiguous, or illogical, or grammatically faulty in some way) After showing what is wrong, write improved versions of the four sentences.*

- (i) *Have you finished with the bathroom yet, because I want to come in, you know?*

(TUE 1964)

One might comment that under the circumstances, the quoted utterance is in fact exceptionally articulate!

#### 5.5.2 Conditions governing answers

The unreality of the questions is further exacerbated by the peculiar conditions that are laid down for their answering. Often the wording of the questions is in a kind of shorthand or code which presupposes that the candidates have had enough experience with these conventions to know what is expected of them. The wording is part of a world of phantasy, and the candidate is expected to join in the game with a straight face and pretend it is real. A characteristic example, probably unique to such examinations, is the use of the simple past tense for imaginary situations such as the following.

*You attended a preview of a film, a play or a musical recital. Write a brief critique.*

(1956)\*

The origin of the unrealistic conditions laid down for the answering of certain types of questions is explained by Ummerman and Melching (1971: 80):

*Many writers of objectives have thought that the measurability of an objective was of prime importance. Thus, to make an objective measurable, it often had to be modified to reflect the school situation and the types of tests used at the school. This leads to stating conditions and standards pertaining to the test situation, such as*

*Without the use of class notes or textbook, solve at least five problems of type x within a period of fifty minutes. Too frequently such modifications result in statements of conditions and standards which have no relationship to work performance requirements.*

\* *The basic meaning of the simple past tense is to denote definite past time, i.e. what took place at a given time or in a given period before the present moment.* (Quirk *et al.*, 1973: 86)

Hence we find the following qualification added to a literature question:

*(Quotation is not essential. Inaccurate quotation will be penalised.)*

(1972 TSSC)

The prime example of this process of evolving unreal standards is the précis test. As has been mentioned, the passage set is usually unconnected with any other portion of the paper. The rubric for the 1972 TUE is typical:

*Write a précis of the passage below in about 90 words  
Excessive length will be penalized  
Show in brackets the number of words you have used*

Consequently, it is hardly surprising to find this triumphant remark in an examiner's report:

*As always, there were the 'chancers' who carelessly (or optimistically) understated the number of words used. It should be remembered that the markers do themselves check the totals given by the candidates.*

(1970 TUE)

It is an indictment of the Transvaal that Bright and McGregor, writing in 1970, say that they are speaking of 'the bad old days' when they describe the précis test as follows (1970: 168):

*It was also a highly conventional test. The working world outside school is not littered with fairly self-contained passages of approximately 350 words in length that are all the better for being reduced to 116<sup>2</sup>/3 words. Indeed such passages are so hard to find that schoolmasters faced with this curious demand from examiners needed special books to enable pupils to practise acquiring this strange skill, required solely for examination purposes.*

Similar criticisms had already been made more stoutly by the Schools Council Eighth Report (1964: 12):

*Moreover, some of the usages which have come to be traditional in a test of the power to summarise are of dubious worth. It is, for example, a common practice to ask for a reduction to a certain number of words . . . . Worse still is the custom which has grown up of demanding that all passages alike, whatever the differing densities of their contents, should be reduced in the same ratio. Again, examiners sometimes superimpose some of the requirements of a quite different exercise, that of paraphrase, on the summary and expect the candidates to eschew the words used in the original.*

'Conventional', 'traditional', 'custom': these words testify to the strength of the past in dictating the format of the modern examination.

#### 5.5.4 Influence on teaching

The emphasis that examinations give to what is measurable is bound to have an effect on English teaching. Brian Jackson wrote in *English Versus Examinations* (1965: 11):

*Examinations necessarily are the terrain of the measurable,*

and spoke of how teachers adhere to 'the secure syllabus, its attendant texts, tests and well-worn habits' (p.13). When the present study opens, in 1942, the public examinations already had a long history of influence on teaching in Transvaal schools. Van der Walt (1944: 317) concluded as follows:

*Die eindeksamen van die middelbare skool het, niteenstaande die kleinere toegewings van die G.M. Raad, ongehinderd voortgegaan en sy invloed op die skoolwerk laat geld, 'n invloed wat volgens baie getuies uiters verderflik was en nog is, afgesien van die ander gebreke van die eksamen.*

The fact that the Ridout series of text books (Ridout, 1948) was extensively used in Transvaal schools in the 1950s (T.E.D., 1958a) indicates that the type of English language work practised in the classroom indeed reflected the bitty, artificial approach of the examinations. However, there is also evidence that there were certain areas in which actual practice in schools forced examiners to modify their question papers, so that it is not always a one-way process. These instances will be discussed later.

#### 5.5.5 Subject matter and wording of questions

The force of outmoded tradition governs more than the format of these papers; it lies behind the subject matter of the essay and language papers, and the language in which the material is couched – these two aspects being closely connected. If language and subject matter together create the ethos of the subject, then it can be said that until the mid-nineteen sixties, the ethos was 'olde worlde' poetic. While most contemporary writers agree that English should deal with feelings, the imagination and aesthetic experience, and that pupils should learn to handle their experiences, and the vicarious experiences of literature, in suitable language, it will be seen that until recently the examinations presented them instead with a spurious world of Victorian sentimentality. The essay itself, as a literary genre, belongs to the world of belles lettres, which requires a particular style, somewhat arch, seldom used by writers today. The topics set in the Transvaal papers used to be all of a kind: 'Shadows'; 'Balloons'; 'The Beauty of Night'. It was noted above that the old fashioned style of title was still used for the paragraph after it had gone out of fashion for the essay. A variation in wording, dating back to classical times, takes the form 'On Buying Presents' (1959). Even if the topic itself is a well-intentioned attempt to be modern, the form in which it is couched must

alienate the modern teenager: 'In Defence of the Modern Teenager' (1956). No wonder the examiners were reduced to comments such as this:

*Most candidates who chose to write on Mountains and Valleys failed to do justice to valleys* (1959)

The National Association for the Teaching of English aptly comments:

*There is a curious air of weariness about so many of these papers as if setters were at the end of their resources. How else can we account for the curtness of so many 'titles'?*  
(NATE, 1966: 12)

Another favourite way of posing a topic is to give the opening sentences, and invite the candidate to continue. Presumably the rapid language of these openings is exemplary of the style which the examiner favours. In 1948 one read:

*As I settled myself in the empty compartment, I was looking forward to a pleasant relaxed journey. Chocolates beside me, new novel in my lap, I reflected 'very satisfactory'. At that moment, there was a knock at the door . . .*

Examples over the years reinforce the impression of cliché though the stereotype may have changed:

*A new and silent world, born in a night of snow, had come into existence.* (1955)

A variation borrowed from the literature paper takes the form of a pseudo-quotation intended to form the basis of the candidate's argument:

*'Sport is the usurper who de-thrones King Learning from his ancient supremacy!'* (1950)

A strange feature of their use of this kind of writing is that the examiners do not seem to recognise it for what it is. In the 1961 TUE paper, the first four topics were 'Of the writing of many books there is no end', 'Gossip', 'Modern Rush' and 'Good Citizenship' – yet in his report the examiner complained of 'poverty of thought, insincerity, false "prettiness"; trite, dull' writing by the candidates.

It should be remarked that a good candidate can nevertheless do very well on a short topic such as one of those quoted (e.g. 'Motorbikes', 1972 TSSC), but in the absence of further guidance, weak candidates try to fall back on the traditional essay form – which they have probably encountered in a prescribed book – and dismally fail, as the above report testifies.



The range of topics for letters is extremely circumscribed. In the 1940s the letter topics reflected genteel society of another age:

*A circular letter to boys and girls in your neighbourhood,  
proposing the formation of a dramatic society (or tennis  
club, or reading circle)*

(1947)

But usually candidates could count on a letter of a certain type being set. Letters to the press were very common, even though the examiners complained, as in the 1962 report, that candidates were unable to achieve the right tone or style because they had never read a real letter in a newspaper. The other favourite was a letter to a friend in order to supply him with some unlikely information or news.

The passages set for comprehension provide the most obvious index of what language and subject matter the examiners thought most appropriate for English. Two passages were set, one prose and one verse, until the poetry test was dropped from the TUE in 1965 and from the TSSC four years later. The prose passages were usually taken from either essays or Victorian novels. Apart from isolated examples later, the TUE began setting modern passages in 1961, the first year of differentiation, and the TSSC in 1969. (The TSSC was usually a few years behind the A-stream in adopting changes.) Typical of the old fashioned passages that used to be set is that of 1957, which came from an essay on collecting as a hobby, and ended,

*Romance, exhilaration, self-importance — these are what  
my labels symbolized and recalled for me. That collection  
was a running record of all my happiest hours. It was my  
diary, my humble Odyssey, and the one work I never,  
never was weary of.*

The candidate to be tested on this would have to be in sympathy with its antiquated cadences and vocabulary, its hyperbole and sentimentality.

When the examiners set this sort of passage, the same phenomenon occurs that has been referred to above; the examiner is oblivious of the quality of the writing he presents to the candidate, for in another context he expects the candidate to be critical of similar writing. In the paper from which the above quotation is taken, the contradiction is made in a question which is of a type very popular until the late 1960s, in which candidates are required to 'rewrite in plain, simple and correct English' passages written in poor style or full of jargon. Thus we find the candidate who had to read in all seriousness the passage about collecting, now has to 'correct' a passage beginning, 'At this juncture we adjourned, as was our wont . . .'

In contrast to the old fashioned type of passage, the comprehension passages of the

last four or five years have been selected from the writings of modern authors such as Evelyn Waugh, Peter Fleming, Priestley, Leonard Cottrell and Winston Churchill. They reflect alertness of mind, vitality of interest in the world around them, and wit.

The choice of verse for comprehension tests never, on the other hand, made a clearcut transition from poetry of the past to modern verse. True, in 1951 a poem on 'Pylons' (not Pender's) was set, and in 1959 the TSSC had Lawrence's 'Humming Bird', but these were out of keeping with the trend that lasted throughout the duration of the setting of this section. In the earlier years, verse such as this was favoured:

*For see! where on the bier unweary lies  
The pale, the fallen, th' untimely Sacrifice  
To your mistaken Shrine, to your false Idol, Honour  
(1949)*

However, in the last few years of the life of this question, after the TUE had dropped it, the TSSC came to use Shakespeare more often. George Baker's 'To My Mother' appeared in 1966; in 1967 there was a rebound to Lytton Strachey (for the prose) and Shakespeare's 'The quality of mercy', then the verse fell away altogether.

Of the passages quoted by the examiner, those next in length after the comprehension test are ones to be rewritten correctly, and those for précis, for analysis, and for rewriting in either direct or indirect speech. There are also passages to be subjected to a miscellany of other operations which are tested only sporadically, such as changing from primary to historic sequence. Apart from the passages of deliberately poor prose for correction, these passages provide further examples of what is deemed appropriate material for English examinations. The picture they present is a familiar one. In the 1940s the subject matter was still outrageously alien; and it continued to be of a kind that was probably strange and remote to candidates, until about 1968 when the new syllabuses were introduced, after which an obvious attempt was made to be modern or relevant.

Three examples will illustrate this progression.

(1) Clausal analysis in 1949:

*O let not Virtue seek  
Remuneration for the thing it was;  
For beauty, wit,  
High birth, vigour of bone, desert in service,  
Love, friendship, charity, are subjects all  
To envious and calumniating Time*

(2) Passage for punctuation in 1955:

*What interrupted I and were you indeed married by a priest*

(3) Précis in the 1971 TUE: a report from *The Star* on Johannesburg's traffic problems.

The language of the reported speech/dialogue questions is usually very artificial. It consists of made-up sentences containing an abnormally high proportion of pronouns and adverbs of time and place, and there is an unusual variety of tenses, some of which involve rare usages. These passages are apparently custom-made for the examination, which is not surprising, for their very existence is artificial; one seldom has to write extended passages of reported speech. Recently, examiners have managed to use fairly normal language, but before 1961 these questions contained some of the most outdated prose in the papers. Bright and McGregor (1970: 266) comment:

*We also disapprove, mainly on grounds of feedback, of regular and lengthy tests of direct and indirect speech. If such a question is always liable to turn up, pupils waste hours learning mechanical and inaccurate 'rules' about what to do with pronouns, tenses and expressions of time and, which is much worse, waste time turning good speech into appalling narrative or good narrative into stilted speech*

These writers do not go far enough in their criticism: in the Transvaal's early papers, even the original direct or reported speech is 'appalling' and 'stilted' -- and from an alien world:

*Snow declared that in cross-examination the thief had stated that young Jack Barthwick had invited him into the house to have a drink . . . Mr. Barthwick hesitantly asked if the thief intended putting forward this account at his trial Snow thought that probable . . .* (1950)

*Who hath done this, think ye?* (1955)

*Replying from the chair, the Vicar thanked Sir John effusively for his hint that they might have been planning too ambitiously* (1956)

*Markheim demanded to know who he was, but the stranger returned that . . .* (1960)

Lastly to be mentioned are the individual sentences, set as exercises of one kind or another. Even here one can only marvel at the kind of English which the examiners believed to be in use -- for 'these questions purport to test usage. The NATE had the same impression of the G.C.E. O-level papers that they examined (NATE, 1966: 135). Their report criticises the questions that require 'correcting made-up sentences' because they are 'often written in a strange, embalmed English'. This criticism is true of many of the Transvaal papers. For example, in 1956 a question that refers specifically to

'the speaker' asked for the purpose of this pedantic utterance:

*There is not the slightest doubt that we shall win the match.*

However, since 1968, when the examiners began emphasising, in their papers and their reports, 'the different kinds of English expression needed for different circumstances' (TSSC Report, 1968), sentences for comment have really begun to sound realistic:

*Oh no? I don't count do I? (TSSC 1970)*

It seems that there has been a rapid change in the last five years from testing candidates' knowledge of obsolete English which they might just possibly encounter in their reading, to testing their facility in the contemporary language of their environment.

## 5.6 WHAT DO THESE EXAMINATIONS TEST?

### 5.6.1 Composition

In attempting an analysis of these papers, it is useful to consider a comment made by Douglas Barnes (1970). In an article on internal examinations for junior secondary school pupils, Barnes gives examples of examination papers containing up to thirteen topics. (Actual papers set by his English Department at Minchenden Grammar School often ran to twenty topics.) He remarks,

*The papers so far quoted imply a conception of priority in English teaching in their display of subjects - and by the freedom of choice amongst them - they emphasize the pupil's use of language to shape and find meaning in his own experience, real and imaginary, and in ways not dictated by the teacher but by the pupil's own wishes and interests. (p.284)*

The two points he makes are also valid for the matriculation papers: the topics set, and the range of choice offered, do imply a conception of priority in the subject on the part of the examiners.

The subject matter of the topics set in the Transvaal has already been discussed above; the breadth of choice must now be examined. The Transvaal papers used to offer a wide choice. In 1947, taking all options into account, a candidate had a choice of one out of sixteen topics. We may speculate whether this is indicative of a belief on the part of the examiner that the actual topics were really incidental, the real aim being to give the candidates, by means of a very wide choice, an opportunity to write at their best, with as little restriction as possible as to style, audience or purpose. Bruce (1969) has pointed out that experience with the G.C.E. shows that this generous aim fails in its purpose, because a wide choice is more likely to confuse candidates, and weaker ones



especially seem incapable of choosing the topic most suitable to them. On the other hand, it is equally unsatisfactory to reduce the choice of topics – to one some would like – in the belief that such a reduction will increase the reliability of the examination for marking purposes. Certainly, some of the topics set as alternatives in the Transvaal papers are so disparate that it is difficult to see how the candidates' answers could ever be compared; but Bruce (1969: 29) points out that to eliminate alternatives is unfair to those candidates who do not find a topic to their liking among the limited choice remaining. Some candidates, forced to take the examination, would not be interested in *any* topic the examiner could think up. But this is an obvious point that at least one Transvaal examiner failed to see; hence the irony of the word 'wanted' in his report:

*Many of the weaker candidates would have produced better work if they had had a clearer idea of what they wanted to say before beginning to write.*

(1961 TSSC)

The topics that the weaker candidates 'wanted' to write on in this case included 'Gold', 'Shoes' and 'Advantages and Disadvantages of City Life'.

The number of composition topics was reduced to six when the paragraph was introduced in the Transvaal as a separate question in 1955, and it has remained at this number ever since, though occasionally an alternative within a topic increases the number of options slightly.

So far this analysis has dealt with the subject matter for composition and the range of alternatives offered. The third aspect of the composition paper is the kind of writing which the papers require. Different kinds of writing, such as expository writing and narrative, require different skills and are mastered by pupils at different levels of maturity. A full description of the kinds of writing that can be expected of children is given in the next chapter, where the internal examination papers set in Transvaal schools in 1972 are analysed to see what kinds of writing teachers expect of Std 8 pupils.

In the public examinations set over the years, several kinds of writing have been specified. A popular genre was the belletristic essay. It would appear, however, that in later years, when a topic was given without qualification, candidates have preferred to use it as a basis for a short story. Before 1968 short stories were actually seldom set, but since that date we find the rubric assuring candidates,

*By all means attempt a short story. (1972 TUE)*

'Discussions' were always popular:

*This is a scientist's century (1964 TUE)*

Occasionally descriptions were required:

*Neighbours. (1959)*

The only other kinds of writing were the friendly letters and 'business' letters, and letters to the editor, until the recent introduction of notes and the interpretation of factual information.

The fourth aspect of the composition papers is the qualities which the examiners wanted to test. Our source of information in this regard is their own reports since 1958. Quantitatively, their main concern was accuracy. Their reports are full of lists of common errors of spelling, punctuation and usage that they extracted from the scripts (e.g. 1964 TSSC). Their other priorities also have to be deduced from negatives – from the statements of what they did *not* like in the scripts. It is here that a marked discrepancy becomes apparent, in that the faults criticised by the examiners are those which the papers themselves invite. Sometimes hapless candidates were trapped by the very questions which the examiner had framed; at other times candidates were simply responding according to the traditions of the subject which had been built up over the years and according to which they had presumably been taught, but which the examiner was now trying to change. For example, in 1967 the report of the examiner says that many candidates, the very good and the very weak, went for the only abstract topic, on 'Happiness'. As has been shown, this topic is typical of the kind traditionally set in the composition paper.

Chiefly the debate centred on the degree of sincerity and originality in the candidates' writing. In the discussion on the Transvaal syllabuses in Chapters 2 and 3 it was pointed out that although sincerity and originality were not given as aims of the English course until 1959, the Inspectors had complained regularly since 1955 that these qualities were lacking in pupils' writing. From the first examination report of 1958, the examiners made the same complaint. But at that time the topics which they were setting were of such a kind that candidates would have had great difficulty engaging with them. In 1960, when candidates' writing was reported to lack 'sincerity' and 'honesty', one of the topics was 'The Microscope and the Telescope'. Nevertheless, the examiner commented severely, 'It is not sufficient to catalogue the uses of the microscope and telescope.' It was a vicious circle, as Brown and Dixon (1968: 28) explain in their account of how the backwash of the G.C.E. influenced their college students:

*All too often students fall back on essay formulae which express nothing but stock responses or conventional ideas. Since many of them come with little sense that thinking, discussion and writing entail genuine involvement, this is hardly surprising.*

When examiners eventually came round to explicitly inviting personal response, they were excitedly surprised by the results. Reporting on the 1964 TUE topic, 'What ... means to me', the examiner said that it had been chosen by nearly 50 per cent of the candidates. It

*gave rise to some very sincere, interesting and, in many cases, moving essays. Written under the power of personal feeling, the expression was free, clear and forceful, and most of the usual errors seemed to fall away.*

This success encouraged the TUE examiner to stress in the wording of the topics that they gave an opportunity for personal expression. In 1966 five of the seven topics included in their wording the first or second person pronoun. The introductory rubric for the composition paper since 1968 has been the following, significantly couched in informal language:

*Try to select a topic that touches a chord of your experience or a facet of your thinking. AVOID writing over-dramatic and second-hand fiction. By all means attempt a short story but then it should be relevant to the life you have lived. In other words, BE SINCERE.*

If the examiner sounds a little desperate, his repeated plea in his reports for *true* experience and sincerity confirms that candidates were not responding as he would have liked. The conclusion to be drawn from the candidates' failure to write sincerely is not necessarily that teachers do not encourage sincerity in their pupils' writing, though the weight of tradition shows this to be likely; but it may also be that the examiner is being unrealistic in expecting this kind of writing in a public matriculation examination. Candidates who are quite capable of writing sincerely and personally may not feel moved, or prepared, to write openly for the examination. On the other hand, 'sincerity' can be artificial, and there are teachers who boast that they can train their pupils to produce a convincing pastiche of personal writing.

#### 5.6.2 Language

The nature of the prose comprehension test has made it a fool-proof section of the language paper. Once the examiner has exercised his whims in the choice of a passage, he is at his best in setting questions to test the candidates' comprehension. There have been lapses; the candidates who read of Disraeli and Gladstone (see p. 71) were asked,

*What evidence is there in the passage that the events described took place before the end of the century?*

(Which century is not specified.) But on balance the questions have searchingly tested candidates' powers of understanding, of inference, and of sensibility to the author's

tone, intention and attitudes, and (latterly) to style and context. Of course, many of the questions test paraphrase and knowledge of vocabulary (in 1972 they contributed to the 41% of the Language marks awarded for this kind of knowledge); but at least in this instance the vocabulary is tested in context, with candidates often being specifically invited to deduce the meaning from context.

In contrast with the prose test, that of the verse was a wretched failure. The history of this test is an extreme case of failure to allow a test to evolve, so that it became instead a harmful anachronism that had to be abolished. Even after it had been removed from the TUE paper, it remained as old-fashioned and pointless as ever in the TSSC until it was withdrawn from that paper too, four years later.

In analysing the faults of the verse comprehension test we can begin by remarking that a lot of trouble seems to have been caused by keeping this test as part of the Language paper. In the Natal Senior Certificate, a question on an unseen poem has for the past decade proved a highly successful part of the Literature paper. The literature examiner uses the opportunity to set a poem that the candidates will find fresh and appealing. It is usually modern, so that there are no obstacles such as archaisms or alien background to hinder testing the candidates' response to the poem. In the Transvaal, the Language examiner, in setting the verse comprehension questions, fell further and further behind the Literature examiner in his approach to poetry, until eventually the questions of the former were being contradicted by the comments in the report of the latter. For example, the questions on verse set by the Language examiner concentrated on scansion and the identification of types of poem and figures of speech, long after the syllabuses had discontinued mention of such exercises and the literature paper had stopped examining them. The Language examiner assumed that candidates had been taught a number of labels which they had to be able to apply mechanically and without insight into their meanings, and his questions encouraged this sort of approach:

*Which word describes this poem — lyrical, narrative or dramatic?*

(1961 TSSC)

On the other hand, the TUE examiner for the same year criticised this very same approach.

*Figures of speech are known nominally, but in general are not associated in the minds of candidates with style and effect. Similarly, the terms — lyrical, epic, dramatic, objective, subjective — were known as 'terms' without the knowledge of their implication in describing poetry.*



However, though the examiner could contradict his colleague so loftily in his report, in practice he set exactly the same sort of questions, which encourage rote learning rather than understanding:

*Give a description of the metrical pattern  
Say to which of the poems the following descriptions can  
be applied:- lyrical, epic, etc.*

The verse comprehension test is one instance where eventually the examination no longer had any effect on the teaching of the subject, for in spite of regular questions on scansion, the teaching of scansion died out, to the accompaniment of indignant expostulations from the examiners. The 1962 TSSC poem was a sonnet by Shakespeare; the candidates were asked,

*Define 'personification' and quote an example from the poem.  
Write down and mark the scansion of any TWO lines which  
differ from the general metrical pattern. State what the  
irregularities are.*

The examiner reported,

*The poetry question was, on the whole, poorly answered. In  
particular, the attempts to quote and scan irregular lines were  
rarely successful.*

The 1966 TUE examiner complained (somewhat incoherently)

*The scansion question revealed much wazy and inadequate  
knowledge.*

During the last few years of the unseen poem the examiners were, if anything, more preoccupied with concern for mechanics than they had been a decade previously. In 1957, although candidates had to paraphrase a poem about a cat, they were at least also asked,

*Which of the words given below best describes the poet's  
feelings about her subject? Give reasons for your  
choice. Angry, resigned, regretful, etc.*

Yet in the 1966 TSSC, when as a change from all the Shakespearean passages, there appeared as a delightful surprise George Barker's 'To My Mother', not a single question touched on the feeling of the poem; instead candidates had to date it from internal evidence. The 1964 TUE paper had an extract from 'Ulysses'; 14 out of the 24 marks were allocated for scansion, recognition of verse form and naming of figures of speech, and the other 10 were for a paraphrase. This unimaginative approach had its just reward in a comment from the examiner responsible in 1966 for TUE literature - which apparently also expressed the opinion of the candidates and their teachers who had prepared them for the examination:

*The candidates made it obvious to the examiners that they knew that the study of poetry does not mean a reproduction of the 'story' or the recognition of figures of speech or an 'appreciation' in mellifluous jargon.*

And so the tail wagged the dog and the unseen poem disappeared from the language paper.

The rest of the language paper consists of questions which were dismissed by the Schools Council Eighth Report in the following terms (1964: 12-13):

*Our eighth criticism is directed to that part of the present papers which consists of questions on grammatical and other minutiae. Some of the most eloquently critical of the replies we received from the schools were directed against these questions; we share the view that they are of doubtful utility in any examination of English language and that in their present form they do great harm.*

When one comes to analyse what linguistic skills these questions are aimed at testing, three disconcerting features become apparent:

First, the framing of the questions reveals the examiners' own ignorance of linguistic matters. (A similar weakness was remarked on in the syllabuses.) A fallacy alluded to frequently in the reports is that of the link between speech and English orthography:

*Spelling was often poor and it was significant that an unduly large number of wrong spellings was directly attributable to poor articulation.*

(1958)

The examiners' ignorance gives rise, for example, to the number of questions in which candidates have to distinguish the correct version in given pairs although some are straight questions of spelling (idol/idle), while others are points of grammar (who/whom) and other again are usage (direct/directly).

Second is the element of chance in answering the questions — that and a shrewd eye by the candidate for trick questions. It is difficult to know exactly what is being tested when candidates have to match with an accompanying list of definitions, a list of words such as the following:

*abscond, annihilate, decimate, delete, deprecate, deteriorate, exonerate, expurgate, exterminate, harass, impersonate, minimise, personify, proscribe*

(1958)

A lucky candidate, not knowing the correct answers, may pair off the right ones; but the earnest, average candidate may easily be confused by the subtle differences between the near synonyms.

Third is the admission by the examiners that most of these questions require drill

and practice. There is a strong suggestion that the purpose of the drill is simply to be able to answer the final examination paper. The following comment is typical:

*There can be no doubt that many candidates were ill-fitted by ability or training to pass the Language paper. There was also evidence to suggest that the candidates from a few centres had had little practice in written exercises in English.*

(1963 TSSC)

Bruce (1969: 28-29) claims that the amenability of these questions to mechanical training allows the weakest candidates to be coached to pass. The examiner's report on the analysis question for the 1967 TUE supports Bruce's contention:

*It was notable that many of the weakest candidates scored highly on this question, and that many of the good candidates knew nothing at all about clauses.*

Another report admits that there is little carry-over from these practice skills to their actual application in context:

*Answers to question 4(a) (on punctuation) generally revealed good training in punctuation. It was surprising therefore to find that many candidates who scored well in this exercise showed a lamentable disregard for the rules of punctuation in other parts of their papers.*

(1970 TUE)

There is evidence that questions on analysis, punctuation, direct and indirect speech etc. are going the same way as the prosody questions. They flourished between 1955 and 1967, but since then have been increasingly replaced by questions on emotive language, varieties of language, logic and communication. In the case of the TUE, it would appear that this change has been brought about by the teaching in the schools: the questions have been so badly answered that the examiner is being forced to give them up. In his report for 1971, the examiner reported on the candidates' performance in the traditional grammar questions,

*Answers frequently revealed inadequate knowledge, or perhaps inadequate drill in normal language exercises.*

Teachers are increasingly discarding this sort of drill in favour of a more dynamic approach to communication.

The TSSC examiner shows the direction in which he expects their teaching to shift. His report for 1971 comments that the candidates' performance

*seems to indicate that not enough work is being done in schools on the subtleties of spoken English.*



It seems likely that soon no more mechanical questions on grammar and punctuation will be set. Unlike what has happened in the G.C.E., short questions will continue, but through the influence of linguistics they will attempt to measure candidates' ability to use and understand current English. Whether such questions will avoid the pitfalls of lack of context is a moot point.

### 5.6.3 Literature

Clear changes in the approach of the examiners to literature are discernible over the period 1947-1972. The trends are not always consistent; among the large number of questions set every year there are always some which would either be more in keeping with the common approach of some years before or which anticipate a type of question destined to become common only some years later. Certain periods (certain examiners?) seem to have been more subject to experimentation than others, and occasionally an examination has marked a break with certain customs of preceding years.

The picture of the whole period which emerges from the analysis that follows can be summed up shortly. While the period 1947 to 1955 was dominated by a style of question which could not have changed much in twenty years (Palmer 1965; Shayer, 1972), the early fifties did see some experimentation in wording. After that the papers remained conservative until, with the advent of differentiation in 1961, the TUE made some marked innovations. In 1964 the introduction of some 'different' prescribed works was the signal for the TSSC to catch up with the TUE, and although the questions themselves have not changed much since then, the examiners' reports for the last four years have shown a great change in the aims and expectations of the examiners.

The literature paper is in two parts, viz. essays, and short questions which are usually based on brief quotations. With this study opens, it appears that there were traditionally three main kinds of question set, in both parts of the paper. These questions required of the candidates (a) 'set piece' appreciations, (b) summaries, and (c) character sketches. Of these, the first kind has now disappeared, but the other two still appear, though usually in a disguised form.

A common criticism of the matriculation literature examination, made by teachers and the public, is that it concentrates too much on testing simple recall. The earlier papers in this sample are full of examples of questions that test the candidates' factual memory of the text, whether it be fiction or non-fiction. The following examples are typical.

*In not more than 200 words in each case, summarise 'Sohrab and Rustum' and 'Michael'.*

(1947)



*'Foolity, thy name is woman!'*  
*When and Hamlet say this?*

(1947)

*Outline the story [of Romeo and Juliet] in not more than  
 400 words.*

(1948)

Non-fiction set works are naturally prone to more factual, non-critical questions than fiction and poetry are:

*Give an account of Indian customs, beliefs, characteristics  
 and superstitions as Parkman observed them.*

(1947)

The examiners obviously had difficulty thinking up more taxing questions on the non-fiction: sometimes they managed to set one good one but fell back on a factual question as an alternative, the resultant coupling of incomparable alternatives being hardly conducive to reliability in the examination. For *The Jungle is Neutral*, candidates had a choice between discussing Spencer Chapman's courage or 'giving an account of certain episodes in the book. (1954). A good question on Burchell's *Travels* was:

*It is said that Burchell was a man of outstanding personality,  
 meeting difficult situations with courage and resourcefulness.  
 Write a short essay in support of this statement.*

(1951)

The following year, the examiner asked one good question on the book, but his ingenuity was exhausted when it came to an alternative:

*Write an interesting essay on Burchell's opinion of the  
 Hottentot people. Describe appropriate incidents to  
 illustrate the characteristics you mention.*

OR

*Describe Cape Town as Burchell saw it.*

The character sketches often set are equally a test of recall, though they also have some of the elements of a 'set piece'. A favourite formula was to 'describe the part played by —', e.g. a character such as Edmund in *King Lear* (1950).

In the setting of this kind of question the same phenomenon occurs that has been remarked upon earlier: the examiner continues to set questions which encourage a certain type of answer, even while he objects to such answers and indicates that he is trying to forestall candidates from giving them. A postscript to a question in 1951 read:

*You are not asked for character sketches or stories, nor  
 for brief notes on a large variety of topics.*

One of the questions that year runs:

*Write a concise history (not a character sketch) of Mahbub Ali.*

The following year the examiner anticipated that candidates would produce summaries, where he *wanted* character sketches:

*Describe TWO of the following characters. You must NOT tell the story.*

(1954)

Yet most of his questions could only encourage candidates and their teachers to prepare for his papers by preparing summaries. Sample rubrics for 1952 are:

Why  
What  
How  
Give one fact  
Explain  
Suggest  
Describe in the form of a short story  
In your own words give  
Tell the story of (Three times)  
Give the theme of  
Describe [a certain character]  
Write on

In those early years the section of the paper devoted to short questions appears to have been designed as a test of factual knowledge of the set-works, to be cleared out of the way before moving on to the interpretative essays. (In 1955 the marks allocated to the short questions had been increased so that they counted for more than the essays.) By 1959 we find the examiner apologising for having to test 'facts', but he had to, he says, because candidates did not know them:

*They claimed that Sir Morte d'Arthur had eloped with Madeline*  
(1959 report)

Two years later the examiner went a stage further, and expressed the view, which is probably general today, that it is unnecessary to test recall of the work first, because the candidates' knowledge will show up in his argumentative essays. The following year, 1962, the TUE examiner put forward in his report a new *raison d'être* for the short questions which meant that this section of the paper had acquired an entirely new function:

*The paragraph section is set to discover whether he understands those principles of literary criticisms [sic] set down for study in the English syllabus*

By a weird piece of reasoning, this examiner argued that the essay section in fact tested recall - though not of the contents of the setworks:

*It would be correct to say that the essay section is designed to test the candidate's ability to recall what has been discussed and to set it down logically, grammatically, and in an interesting and pleasing manner.*

This would almost seem to give approval to prepared essays of appreciation. Fortunately, as such the statement (with its curiously assertive tone) was an anachronism, for by the end of the 1950s questions requiring 'appreciations' had become rare, and had already attracted the disapproval of one examiner:

*Anything in the question that reminded them of the essay they had prepared was a justification for the reproduction of the essay.*

(1959 report)

From 1949 onwards there were signs that examiners wanted to enliven the papers as a counterbalance to the deadliness of sheer repetition of the setworks; that examiners wanted their papers, and the candidates' answers, to reflect some of the vitality of the literature that the whole exercise was about. (Such an attempt, if it succeeded, would forestall the criticism made earlier, that English examinations do not reflect the qualities which are held to be inherent in the subject.) However, the questions are blundering and some are incapable of being answered.

One kind of question expected the candidates to reproduce the style of the original in their answers – literary criticism which imitated its subject.

*Write an interesting essay . . . . . (1951 etc.)*

*Write entertainingly on what you found amusing in Seary's anthology.*

(1954)

*Write an amusing essay on what you found amusing in American Prose.*

(1955)

*Writing as humorously as you can . . . . . (1958)*

It seems that in the 1950s the examiners did not yet understand what practical criticism entails. Honikman's thesis on teaching literature, which was presented in 1959, indicates that practical criticism based on the Cambridge model had not yet found its way into South African schools.

Another question which illustrates how the examiners failed to think logically about their questions is the following, with its shift of conceptual standpoint:

*Imagine you are Queen Victoria writing in her journal. Describe and comment on several of the incidents and people you found interesting in your reading of 'Queen Victoria'.*

(1951)

The examiners also had trouble with a new kind of question which they had begun setting. It was designed to give more scope to the candidates to write critically, and entailed presenting a critical quotation which the candidates had to discuss. Stevens writes (1970: 46):

*The form is a favourite with examiners and, wisely used, is a good instrument . . . . It can give the candidate a chance to present alternative arguments and thus show the width and balance of his reasoning . . . . The objections to this type of question are that it is over-used, and that examiners have an annoying and possibly dishonest habit of inventing quotations.*

As the examiners were feeling their way, there are examples of how this particular type of question was misunderstood and misused. One example shows how it can become a loaded question with no room for 'alternative arguments':

*'In Campbell's autobiographies there is a liberal infusion of fiction. But that does not detract from the liveliness, the picturesqueness, of the story'*  
Refer to Memories of Natal in support of this statement  
(1959)

Other examples remained disguised invitations to write character sketches or retell the story. However, even in such cases the new form of wording would have had the advantage of the Hawthorne effect, and it did increase the liveliness and variety of the papers.

In these early papers one also finds occasional attempts to encourage candidates to write sincerely:

*Choose, from More Poems Old and New, a descriptive poem AND a lyrical poem, and write about them in any way that is sincere.*  
(1949)

In 1953, the poetry section although comprising a series of questions requiring recall of the contents of poems, was prefaced with this:

*Attempt this question only if you can show in your answer that poetry gives you pleasure*

In the absence of an examiner's report, it is not possible to tell whether anyone was able to succeed in this requirement. These calls for sincerity remained nothing more than pious appeals to the candidates; the questions themselves were not specific enough to engage the candidates' involvement.

Inevitably, in their search for variety in order to capture the interest of the candidates, the examiners posed some bizarre questions. The prize for the most fatuous question in



the entire corpus must go to this:

*From More English Verse choose 2 poems you would like to include in your anthology. Give your reasons for choosing them, and describe how you would illustrate one of them with brush and pencil.*

(1958)

Far from liberating the candidates to write freely and with involvement, such questions are very difficult to answer. They are not specific enough about what is expected of the candidate.

Towards the end of the 1950s the examiners turned their attention to the skills which the literature examination should test. Their reports, though containing vague phrases such as 'understanding of what he read' (1958), and 'test his sense of literature' (1959), also began to express more precise objectives. For example, candidates should be able to *select* material for their answers. In 1960 the report stated,

*Literature should be studied to discover what a writer is trying to do in his play, novel or poem, to discover how he does it, and to determine the extent to which he is successful in his undertaking.*

The examination of 1960 is a significant milestone. Although the new differentiated syllabuses were to be examined only the following year, they had been introduced in lower standards in 1960 and this must have influenced the examiner, whose paper shows the effect of the spirit of innovation that was abroad. Afterwards the examiner excitedly reported,

*The work of a large number of this year's candidates was better than it has been for some time. It was marked by a depth of thought, an originality and a grammatical accuracy that were at once gratifying and unexpected. Since the ability of a large group of candidates does not vary to any extent from year to year, the examiners concluded that the improvement in the work examined was closely related to the type of question set in the examination paper. It gave candidates little opportunity to make use of the prepared essay or paragraph, it obliged them to work out their answers in the examination room. The result was an almost complete absence of irrelevancy and staleness in the answers marked.*

The questions certainly were better, overall, than in previous years. Sample questions, one for an essay, the other for a short answer, are:

*'Macbeth is the victim of his own passionate imagination.'  
Discuss*

*Suggest a reason for Robert Lynd's popularity as an essayist.*

In the enthusiasm of his discovery of literature as a humane force in pupils' lives, the examiner takes an extreme stand:

*Literature should be studied assiduously because it is a defence against all those forces that endeavour to destroy a noble way of life. Comic-strips, radio programmes, bioscope films and advertisements cater for men and women of low intelligence, insidiously strengthening them in their complacent acceptance of themselves.*

The arrogant tone of this remark was typical of writers on English teaching in the 1950s (Knight, 1972: 19-22). More recently, English teachers have begun to regard the mass media with more respect, and have not been so dogmatic. Bolt and Gard (1970:16) quote Frank Whitehead's remark in *The Disappearing Dais* (1966):

*That trivialisation which is the hallmark of all popular newspapers and television programmes.*

They ask,

*Is this so sweepingly true?*

The English examiners studied here have tended to adopt a high-minded, censorious attitude. Another example is this remark:

*It is a pity that supplementary reading was not always controlled as it should be controlled. Many candidates had read *Catcher in the Rye* [sic] and referred to it in the essay on humour. One and all quoted it as an example of humorous writing. As there is nothing humorous about this work . . .*

(1967 TUE report)

The 1950s can be summed up as marking a growing concern for wording questions in such a way that they would encourage the candidate's personal involvement, and give guidance as to the critical skills the candidate was expected to demonstrate. This development was given new impetus by the TUE paper of 1960, and by the introduction of the new syllabus in 1961. The 1961 TUE paper, for example, had questions on the relationships between characters, on dramatic techniques and structure, poetic tone and mood, and symbolism and theme. Other questions invited personal response and involvement:

*At which school would you have liked to be a pupil, *Kremetartkop* or at *Sannashoek*? Refer to both schools in your answer.*

The change that came about in the TUE in 1960, with its new concern for practical criticism and the nobility of literature, did not carry over to the new TSSC when it was introduced the following year. The revolution in the TSSC came in 1964, when *Animal Farm* and *Murder in the Cathedral* were the prescribed works. If ever there was

a justification for setting modern works which would appeal to pupils, it is to be found in the testimony of the two examiners for this year:

*The most significant aspect of this year's examination was the high quality of the answers to Animal Farm and Murder in the Cathedral. These were the most difficult of the setworks, which were described at various times and by various pupils and teachers as first year university studies*

(TUE)

*Candidates revealed an ability to think for themselves, to express personal opinions and to escape the toils of poor narrative. Animal Farm and Murder in the Cathedral had evidently been enjoyed.*

(TSSC)

(One of the TSSC questions was, 'How did the Knights' apologies affect you?' – Not perhaps literary criticism, but apparently the B-stream candidates found they could write on it, and it set a standard for future TSSC papers. A 1972 example, complete with underlining, was:

*Write an essay in which you explore your personal reaction to at least four of the deaths for which Macbeth was responsible.)*

A further chance in 1964 was that no specific poems were set for study. (See p. 40). Consequently, the TUE paper did not include any essay questions on poetry, but only a detailed set of questions on the text of Hopkins's 'Inversnaid' which was printed in the paper in full. The TSSC continued to set general essay questions on poetry, but by now, apparently, teachers were no longer preparing their pupils to answer this type of question – they had taken heed of the complaints made by earlier examiners about this practice. Evidence of this is that in 1967 candidates preferred the comprehension-type question to the essays on poetry:

*Most of the weak candidates elected to answer the question on the sonnet (by Shakespeare) because the sonnet was printed on the question paper*

(1967 TSSC report)

This is another instance of how the examiner can be forced by current practice to change his style of questions. The 1968 TSSC report stated that it was apparent that teachers were now training their pupils in practical criticism. Since this comment was made most TSSC poetry questions have been based on printed texts.

Although the papers of the year following the highlights of 1964 were somewhat retrogressive, since 1966 the questions have on the whole been ingenious and challenging.

One from 1967 is an example:

*Show how Dickens makes use of one of the following to create an effective background to character and event: a garden, a churchyard, a tempest.*

(1967 TUE)

At the same time there was a growing tendency for the Prescribed Books Committee to prescribe the non-fiction works for study in Std 9, so that they are examined internally by the schools. This has relieved the examiners of the difficult task of having to set good questions on the non-fiction. (i.e. They have passed the buck to the teachers.)

Of course, there are still bad questions. Candidates' essays were reported to be poor in the 1969 TUE, but it is very likely that this was due to poor wording of the questions. Three of the questions began with 'Show that' or 'Show how'. Frances Stevens (1970:56) found in her analysis of G.C.E. papers that 'how' questions in literature papers are 'likely to be either trivialising or unanswerable'. Simple recounting of the story is still sometimes asked; in the 1970 TUE there was one such question, contrasting strongly with all the other questions and forming an incomparable alternative to one of them as the second choice in this pair):

*Show that Shaw is thinking of what is wrong with the age in which we live when he dramatises what is wrong with the age in which Joan lived. Refer to the text of the play in your argument.*

OR

*Show, by referring to argument and incident, why the following wanted Joan restrained . . .*

Some questions are peripheral to the literature. One 1970 TUE question is no better than a 1949 one which ran, 'Write a brief account of life in the Forest of Arden': it reads:

*Do you think Polonius was a good father to Ophelia or not?*

The past tense 'was', where it is customary in literary criticism to use the present, is significant. Stevens comments that in examination papers

*Characters . . . seem to have taken on some kind of existence more substantial than that of their creators.*

(1970: 476)

If there has been any development in the examiners' approach since the heady days of 1964 with their emphasis on the nobility of literature, it has been in a growing concern for the value of literature as a vicarious experience which will heighten the quality of



the pupils' own lives. The 1968 TUE paper and examiner's report illustrate this. The paper contained a question on what constitutes happiness in the home in *David Copperfield*. The report complained that candidates

*were unable to name even such obvious prerequisites as warmth . . . , and to relate them to one or two of the homes described by Dickens.*

The examiner's selection of this theme is similar to the choice by Fred Inglis (1969:32) of the passage from Lawrence's *The Rainbow* (ch. 2) about Brangwen and Anna in the barn, which Inglis regards as a touchstone of the admirable qualities of good literature. In fact, there are times when the examiners and Inglis think alike. The statement by the TSSC examiner for 1968 could well be Inglis speaking:

*It would appear that pupils lack the vocabulary to discuss sensitive and complex interpersonal relationships, so that their thinking on these issues is shallow and stereotyped. The study of literature provides the ideal opportunity for widening pupils' thinking in this direction.*

Inglis would be gratified to know that this is the direction in which the public examiners are leading English teaching in the Transvaal.

## CHAPTER SIX

### CURRENT PRACTICE IN WRITING AND COMPREHENSION

#### 6.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter surveyed developments in the Std 10 public examination papers up to the end of 1972. This chapter supplements what was said about the position of English teaching in 1972, by turning attention to the practice of English teachers themselves and subjecting certain aspects to a closer analysis than was possible in the broad survey of the external examinations.

The aims of the study were threefold. First, to ascertain to what extent the trends detected in the public examinations correlate with the practice of the teachers, second, to obtain some indication of which of the aims of English teaching described in Chapter 1 are currently favoured by the teachers; third, to attempt an analysis of the subject matter that teachers deem appropriate to the subject. The source of information chosen for the study is the internal examinations set by teachers at the end of 1972.

A survey of internal examinations set in one year is a synchronic analysis of English teaching practice in schools. Only the finished product is studied. If it is argued that teachers do not set their own questions or choose their own writing topics and comprehension passages, but prefer to borrow from books and past papers, the answer is that the resulting papers remain an indication of their assumptions and aims. A collection of internal examination papers presents a picture of what thousands of pupils all over the Transvaal were required to spend some hours doing in the name of 'English' as the culmination of a year's work in 1972. To be complete this study should include the oral examinations, but this has not been possible. The study is therefore limited to only certain parts of the examinations.

#### 6.2 MATERIAL

The internal examination papers studied are those set at the end of Std 8 in 1972. This particular level was chosen as being sufficiently senior for the examinations to typify high school work, while still being far enough removed from the public matriculation examination for the teachers to have felt free to exercise their own initiative in setting them without being unduly influenced by the TSSC and TUE. The sample analysed here consists of papers gathered as part of a wider piece of research, for which examination papers in English Higher Grade were obtained from 54 of the 59 secondary schools in the Transvaal in which English Higher Grade was taken in 1972.

This sample includes papers from all the ordinary English medium secondary schools and the only English medium agricultural high school in the Transvaal. This means that the typical Transvaal high schools where English Higher Grade is taught are fully represented in the sample. The five schools whose papers are not included are among the rare categories of school that are not typical of English medium education, viz. the 'project' schools, technical schools and commercial schools. They may be regarded as untypical because the project schools were at the time participating in an experiment in employing internal examinations for the TUE and TSSC, and the technical and commercial schools are predominantly Afrikaans parallel-medium schools. As the sample includes all the typical schools and most of the other schools, it was regarded as being sufficiently representative to make the study worthwhile.

Three sections of the examinations were analysed: composition ('essay'), other writing, and comprehension tests. In the analysis it has not proved possible to quantify the results in such a way that reliable statistics could always be obtained. Some schools set their composition examinations before the other papers are written; often the topics are simply written on the board in the classroom. Consequently, only 31 of the 54 schools supplied their composition questions. Questions on other kinds of writing, such as letters and reports, are also often written earlier, but there is also the added complication that some schools do not set such questions at all. Of the composition papers received, four do not include other kinds of writing, and it is not known how many schools whose composition papers were not received also omit questions on other writing. No conclusions could therefore be reached as to the proportion of schools that set other writing.

Comprehension papers were received from every school, so that conclusions can be based on a complete set, amounting to a sizeable collection of passages.

A possibility of distortion in the analysis of the topics for writing arises from the fact that there is no consistency among the schools as to the number of alternative questions or topics that are set for composition and other writing, and as to the number of different papers set for the three streams — university entrance, Std 10 school leaving, and Std 8; and the number of alternative topics offered for writing varies a good deal from paper to paper. No attempt has been made to average out the topics or weight the questions according to school or stream, as the intention of the study is to present a global impression of the nature of the subject in the Transvaal.

In analysing the comprehension passages, it has proved possible to cross-check to what extent the examination papers reflect current practice in the schools. This was done by

undertaking a similar analysis of the two English language text books authorised for use in Std 8 in the Transvaal (T.E.D. Book Catalogue). The books are: *English Through Experience*, Book III (Rowe and Emmens, 1964) and *The Art of English*, Book 3 (Lennox-Short, 1970). One or the other of these books is used by most teachers, so that it is very likely that the comprehension tests in these books represent the bulk of such work done by the pupils who wrote the examinations analysed here.

### 6.3 KINDS OF WRITING

#### 6.3.1 Background

The traditional division of writing assignments in examinations into 'essay' and 'letter', which has been laid down in the Transvaal syllabuses studied, indicates that teachers have for a long time recognised that there is more than one kind of writing. In recent years there has been increasing interest in the way language varies according to its function. English teachers overseas have come to realise that children should be given the opportunity to practise writing and talking for different purposes (e.g. Martin, 1968; and Doughty *et al.*, 1972) and it is fair to assume that their examinations would reflect this concern. The Examination Bulletins of the Schools Council indicate that this is in fact the trend in C.S.E. English examinations, both oral and written.

The present study attempts to ascertain what kinds of writing Transvaal teachers nowadays expect their pupils to be able to write. For this purpose a taxonomy of kinds of writing has had to be drawn up.

Two different approaches can be used in drawing up this taxonomy, based on (a) the kinds of language use found amongst children, and (b) the kinds of prose which they are expected to be able to write at school. The taxonomy adopted for the present study incorporates both elements.

#### (1) Children's language

A basic distinction is made between two kinds of language used by children: 'transactional' and 'non-transactional'. This concept has emerged from the work of the Research Project on Writing which began under the direction of Prof. James Britton at the University of London Institute of Education in the mid-nineteen sixties. Britton has published various versions of the model of language that the Unit has developed, showing different degrees of refinement.

He suggests that from the general matrix of talk and 'mixed bag' writing of young children, there gradually emerge two distinct uses of language. These he calls using language as 'participant', and using language as 'spectator'. When one uses language as



a participant, it is in order to get things done. This sort of language is referential, informative and conative. One uses language as a spectator for reflective, imaginative purpose -- to mull things over or engage in phantasy. The word Britton has fixed upon for this kind of language is 'poetic'. Because of confusion that might arise from this specialist terminology, the term 'non-transactional' has been preferred to 'poetic' for the present study.

Two versions of this scheme that Britton has published are given below. It will be noted that Britton has found, through analysing children's writing, that a lot of it is in a transitional stage which is not yet exclusively either transactional or non-transactional.



#### (2) Kinds of prose

It is not too difficult to reconcile Britton's model with the classifications of kinds of writing that are usually found in books on rhetoric. Though precise usage of terminology may differ, the same categories or modes of discourse are usually distinguished. From American sources we have

narration, description, exposition, argument, criticism

(Braddock, *et al.*, 1963: 8)

and

exposition, description, argumentation, narration,

(Stover, 1972: 202)

and the University of London School Examinations Council lists in its G.C.E. handbook narrative, descriptive, discursive, argumentative.

(U. of London, 1973: 83)

For the purposes of this study, the terms narrative, descriptive, expository and argumentative have been chosen. The fifth category, 'criticism', has been omitted because it is required only by the Literature paper, which falls outside the scope of the present study.

### 6.3.2 Analysis of the material

#### (1) Transactional/non-transactional

The distinction between the two kinds of language, transactional and non-transactional, coincides to some extent with the division of the examination questions into 'Letter' and 'Composition',

The composition topics almost all require non-transactional writing. The pupil will engage as spectator in producing a piece of writing that is complete and self-fulfilling in itself, existing as an act of self-conscious reflection and self-expression. Out of a total of 304 composition topics, the only ones that do not invite this kind of writing are to be found in the papers of three schools, where there are altogether five topics that require transactional writing as alternatives to the usual composition. These topics comprise three objective descriptions (how to find the way, or make something operate), one formal invitation, and one book review. It is sad to think that, when the modern child needs the skill to cope with so many relevant 'transactional' situations, one of the only five assignments set should be the obsolete exercise of writing a formal invitation. Teachers are perhaps wise not to set transactional writing as an *alternative to* non-transactional writing, because it is not easy to obtain reliable marks when assessing different pieces of writing that require such disparate skills. But there is nothing to stop them allocating another section of the paper for transactional writing.

However, the only other section on writing in the papers is the Letter. Apart from the five topics found among the composition titles, no other transactional writing is required of the pupils except the letter. This is a very different state of affairs to that found in C.S.E. and G.C.E. papers in England, where all sorts of exercises in written communication are set, such as interpreting data and note-taking. Not only is the variety of transactional writing required in our Transvaal sample limited, but in fact the amount required is small, for not all the letters themselves are transactional. True, they are all directed to some recipient, but some require the kind of reflective thinking that Britton would classify as spectator activity. Nor does the distinction coincide with the traditional distinction

(which these papers do not make) between 'friendly' and 'business' letters, as some friendly letters aim at getting something done. Although no quantitative statement is possible, it is significant to note simply that only some of the letters are transactional. Hence the conclusion is that there is not nearly as much transactional writing required as non-transactional writing, and that the kinds of transactional writing are extremely limited.

This reveals a dichotomy between the practice at Std 8 level and at Std 10 level. The previous chapter described how the public examiners have increasingly ignored the heading 'Essay and Letter' and set exercises in other kinds of referential or transactional writing. In 1969 the Std 10 Syllabus regularised this by introducing provision for 'A letter, review, objective description or report'. This development was not matched in the Std 8 Syllabus, and our sample of papers shows that teachers are continuing to set a very restricted variety of kinds of transactional prose.

## (2) Rhetorical styles

The composition titles were analysed in order to ascertain in what rhetorical styles the pupils were expected to write. In all, there are 304 topics in the papers. This does not include the letters, which were left out of this particular analysis because they cannot be assigned with certainty to the categories of rhetorical style. It was found that about four fifths of the composition topics could, with a fair amount of certainty, be placed in categories descriptive of the kind of style in which the pupils would be expected to write on them. 'Narrative' topics invite pupils to tell a story or relate an incident. 'Descriptive' topics usually invite pupils to 'describe' or 'write a description of' a scene, a place, a person, an animal or an object. 'Expository' topics require some sort of discussion or comment. 'Argumentative' topics are worded according to a specific formula giving two sides of a case. The five transactional topics discussed above were given their own category, as were the two topics for which dialogue was stipulated. After the topics had been divided among these categories, one fifth remained that seem to leave to the pupil the choice of how the topic should be handled. These topics were classed as 'open-ended' and usually consist of enigmatic titles, such as 'Boldness be my friend'. Often they consist of one word, such as 'Money'. The proportion of topics in each category is given in Table 2 below.

TABLE 2  
 NUMBER OF COMPOSITION TOPICS REQUIRING EACH RHETORICAL STYLE,  
 EXPRESSED AS A PERCENTAGE

Rhetorical style	Number	%
Narrative	81	26,5
Descriptive	82	26,8
Expository	56	18,3
Argumentative	23	7,5
Open-ended	57	18,6
Transactional	5	1,6
Dialogue	2	0,7
Total	306	100

From Table 2 it can be seen that the two largest categories of style are Narrative and Descriptive, both of which are required by about 26 per cent of the topics. One can speculate which way the balance falls if the pupils' choice of style for the open-ended topics could be taken into account. It was suggested in the discussion of similar topics in the TSSC and TUE (p 80 ) that whereas in the past these topics were expected to give rise to belletristic essays, nowadays candidates use them as a springboard for narrative. This trend is even more probable with the younger pupils of Std 8, and the topics do have more of a suggestion of narrative to them than the Std 10 ones: in addition to those quoted above there are many titles like 'The problem', 'Out of the fog', 'Road to death'. If this is the trend, then narrative is the most common type of writing expected of the Std 8 pupil.

The least common type of style (apart from dialogue and explicitly transactional writing) is the argumentative essay, in which the writer must give the arguments for and against a topic, as in a debate, e.g. 'The advantages and disadvantages of the telephone'. These topics sound artificial when posed, and are perhaps the most artificial form of essay set. The fact that none of the comprehension passages takes this form (see Table 3 below) supports this observation. Nobody actually writes in this form. Hayakawa (1952: 253) maintains that making a pupil take this approach to controversy can harmfully distort his attitude to logic and truth: he is forced to take an extreme stand, and if necessary distort the truth, in order to make out a case for his side. Debating does not promote serious discussion; it suggests wrongly that there is a right and a wrong answer to everything, and the topics which one finds debated in schools are often silly and lead



to sterile ticking. There can be little justification for continuing this kind of question as a composition topic.

In summing up what the teachers are doing in rhetoric, it can be said that at the Std 8 level they require of their pupils a good deal of expository and descriptive writing in addition to narrative. In this way they are preparing them for the Std 10 examinations which lay most stress on expository writing. There is very little stress on language for other purposes of communication apart from the traditional composition and letter.

When we try to discover what models of the different kinds of prose the pupils have to study, the picture is disturbing. It can be assumed that the comprehension passages are typical of what the teachers expect their pupils to be able to read with understanding, and typical of the prose that the pupils have had practice in studying. These examination passages were therefore analysed according to the same categories of rhetorical style as the compositions, in order to ascertain whether the pupils ever read the kinds of prose which they are expected to write. Confirmation of these findings was sought by referring to the passages given for comprehension in the two text books (Lennox-Short, 1970, and Rowe and Emmens, 1964). The results of this analysis are given in Table 3.

TABLE 3

NUMBER OF COMPREHENSION PASSAGES WRITTEN IN EACH RHETORICAL STYLE, EXPRESSED AS A PERCENTAGE

Rhetorical style	Examinations		Lennox-Short		Rowe and Emmens	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Narrative	59	55,7	14	77,8	6	33,3
Descriptive	22	20,7	1	5,5	4	22,2
Expository	25	23,6	3	16,7	8	44,5
Argumentative	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	106	100	18	100	18	100

From Table 3 it can be seen that the two text books represent opposite extremes in the kinds of passages that they favour, and that the choice of passage in each category in the examination papers represents roughly a midway position between the two extremes. This has proved a most interesting finding. It supports the impression that the text books give of representing different approaches to English — which is possibly why they are offered as alternatives in the T.E.D. Catalogue. The Lennox-Short volume, a South African adaptation of an English work, is heavily biased towards narrative in its choice of passage. The Rowe and Emmens volume has many more articles of

scientific and general interest – on astronomy, popular science and historical subjects – which are written in expository style.

It would appear that Std 8 pupils are having to read a disproportionate amount of narrative, especially if one bears in mind that most of the books they read are also narrative. They are expected to be able to write other kinds of prose, but can have little experience of closely studying extended passages of expository writing. The expository passages in both the text books and the examinations are mostly self-contained snippets; and a glance at the books examined in their literature papers indicates that they have not studied works of non-fiction which would have given them experience in reading expository prose at length. Another source of factual writing that teachers could use in teaching their pupils how to read expository prose, and in presenting them with models of this kind of writing, is newspapers and journals. But there is no evidence from the examination papers that teachers habitually use the resources of the press – unlike the TUE, which, we have seen, makes use of *The Star*. It seems that, if one bears in mind that the overwhelming amount of writing expected of the pupil as he grows older is expository in style, he should be made more familiar with good prose of this kind than is at present the case.

#### 6.4 SETTING AND SUBJECT MATTER

##### 6.4.1 Background

The rest of this chapter is devoted to a study of the subject matter and setting of the topics set for writing and the comprehension passages. It seems generally agreed among the sources consulted in Chapter One that writing topics should be such that they encourage pupils to write well. This study will show what topics the teachers think will achieve this purpose. It is not within the scope of the study to test whether the choice of topics has succeeded. The topics will also show whether teachers have another aim: that of perpetuating the interest of what they conceive of as the subject 'English'. According to current writers, if this clashes with the former aim, there is something wrong: J.W.P. Creber has written,

*We cannot, however, accept . . . any dichotomy between the interests of the pupil and the interests of the subject.*

(Creber, 1965: 10)

Similarly, the influential American writer, James Moffett (1968:7-8) maintains,

*In many of our writing assignments, I see us feverishly searching for subjects for students to write about that are appropriate for English . . . Once we acknowledge*

*that 'English' is not properly about itself, then a lot of phoney assignments and much of the teacher's confusion can go out the window.*

In the previous chapter of this study it was shown that in the Transvaal the public examination papers have over the last thirty years made the transition that Moffett calls for. The MUE and TSSC essay topics are chosen for the scope and encouragement they give the young candidate to write well about matters in which he knowledgeable and about which he is concerned. The same criteria of interest and relevance govern the choice of comprehension passages. The analysis of the 1972 internal examination papers will indicate whether teachers in schools have kept in line with this approach. In addition to analysing subject matter, where it might be significant, the background or environmental setting (milieu) of the topics and passages has been distinguished as a separate parameter.

In an effort to establish a taxonomy of school writing topics, a survey was made of previous research on composition writing. Use was made of the study of 450 pieces of research into composition undertaken by the American National Council of Teachers of English in 1963 (Braddock *et al.*, 1963). No analysis relevant to the present study could be found in the literature. The only example known to the present writer is an investigation in which he was personally involved in 1967. It is described in unpublished papers of a Curriculum Study Group which comprised representatives of member institutions of the University of Leeds Institute of Education (Barnes, 1967). The material analysed for that study differs from the present sample in that the topics were those listed by the pupils themselves as topics on which they would like to write. The Leeds material was analysed twice. The first time it was done by the Study Group, who, when deciding on categories, overlooked the fact that the children had chosen the topics themselves. The second analysis was made by Barnes, who specifically approached the topics as evidence of the areas in which children desire to express themselves. The pupils in the Leeds study were first year secondary pupils and therefore younger than Transvaal Std 8 pupils. Because of these differences between the Leeds survey and the present study, the categories of the earlier study have not been taken over in their entirety.

The preliminary Leeds study distinguished the following subject clusters among the pupils' preferred topics

- 1 Physical activities
- 2 Animals
- 3 Science, technology, the natural world

- 4 Entertainment
- 5 Transport
- 6 Prehistorical, historical, the man-made environment
- 7 The affective and personal in people's lives

Because the topics were suggested by the children themselves, Barnes, using a Piagetian model, saw them as an expression of strategies for 'the assimilation of new experience and the taking on of more adult roles' 'What can be assimilated depends on the structures to which each child can reshape and fit the new experience.' The following eight categories emerged:

- |   |                            |  |
|---|----------------------------|--|
| 1 | The assimilated present    | (Experiences that children are at home with as people)             |
| 2 | Self-justifying games      | (Football, athletics)  |
| 3 | Collecting the outer world | (Hobbies)  |
| 4 | Adult categories           | (Chemistry, Archaeology)   |
| 5 | Acknowledged phantasy      | (Treasure)   |
| 6 | Phantasy of child role     | (A holiday abroad)   |
| 7 | Phantasy of adult role     | (Explicit identification with adults - pop stars, astronauts etc.) |
| 8 | Entering the world         | (Dressmaking, careers)   |

Further ideas on categories for the topics can be found in books on English teaching, a number of which give lists of children's interests at different ages as a framework on which to build syllabuses. Two recent examples may be adduced, those of Creber (1965) and Tunnicliffe (1971).

Creber gives a scheme for imaginative composition at each age level. For the thirteen to fifteen-year-olds, he writes (1965:73-75),

*Children of this age are becoming, as they move into the difficult period of adolescence, much more vividly aware not only of internal stresses but also of their relations with other people, whose behaviour interests them deeply.*

*(Secondly) The aim at this stage is that of Kierkegaard 'What I want is to spur people into becoming moral characters'. I believe that the only satisfactory method of making a real impact on the moral standards of the children is through the imagination.*

Tunnicliffe's syllabus gives 'ten branches of experience' to be drawn on for themes. For pupils in the fourth and subsequent years, he suggests (1971: 51) that decreasing attention be paid to topics 2 and 3 of those listed below, with correspondingly more attention to 8, 9 and 10:

- 1 Personal health
- 2 Possessions
- 3 Families
- 4 Social groups outside the family
- 5 Physical environment



- 6 Leisure
- 7 Technology and the individual
- 8 The mass media
- 9 World affairs
- 10 The arts.

For the purposes of the Transvaal study, a scheme was worked out by trial and error, incorporating elements of the four schemes by the Leeds Group, Barnes, Creber and Tunnicliffe, which have been outlined above. As far as possible the same categories were also applied in an analysis of the letters and comprehension passages – though certain unique features of these sections also became apparent during the analysis and are noted separately below.

The following categories have been used in the analysis of the Transvaal papers:

- 1 Phantasy
- 2 Personal expression
- 3 Urban or rural setting
- 4 Contemporary and technological (Technology, urban life, contemporary society)
- 5 The child's world
- 6 The child's interests (Hobbies, games, adventure, natural world)
- 7 Entering the adult world
- 8 Adult categories
- 9 People and human behaviour.

In the analysis of setting and subject matter, the assignment of writing topics and comprehension passages to different categories is subjective. In only a few areas of comparison is it possible to place a topic or passage in one of several mutually exclusive categories, as was possible above, when analysing the rhetorical style of the comprehension tests. For the most part, a topic often falls under more than one heading of subject matter. In some cases, composition topics were unassignable. Attention is concentrated on those instances where teachers specifically call upon pupils to work within a certain framework.

#### 6.4.2 Analysis of the material

##### (1) Phantasy

The sources consulted for the list of aims of English teaching given in Chapter One generally stress development of the imagination and promotion of originality. The quotation from Creber (p. 107, above) emphasises the basic importance of the imagination, and Barnes lists two categories of phantasy. An attempt was made to gauge the degree of emphasis on phantasy in the Transvaal papers, but without much success. 'Phantasy' was taken to be indicated by an invitation to the pupil to write about something entirely outside the realms of possibility. This definition is perhaps too

narrow, as many other titles actually allow scope for imaginative writing. Of the composition titles, 11 per cent fulfilled the narrow definition. This hoary favourite is an example:

*Write a story concluding, I awoke with a start – it was only a dream.*

(It contrasts with the severe warning that concludes the following somewhat garbled composition topic in another paper:

*A short story beginning The experience that I am now about to relate is one that has never happened to me before, and so far as I know, to no-one else of my acquaintance either.*

*THIS ESSAY MAY NOT BE ABOUT SPACE TRAVEL: NOR MAY IT END AS A DREAM.)*

Of the comprehension passages, many stir the imagination but there is only one that is truly fantastic – an extract from *The Invisible Man*. A similarly small proportion appears in the text books: of the 36 passages in the two books, there is only one of outright phantasy, which appears in *The Art of English*.

## (2) Personal expression

Previous chapters have recounted the gradual shift in the Transvaal towards acceptance of the aim that pupils should write sincerely and personally. This aim was laid down in the 1969 syllabuses, and the TUE examiner has made it one of his chief concerns in recent years. In the discussion on the TUE examinations, it was suggested (p. 82) that it is perhaps a little unrealistic to expect candidates of that age and in those circumstances to write 'under the power of personal feeling', to quote from the 1964 TUE Report – though of course 'sincerity' is always a legitimate criterion of good writing. Std 6 pupils writing an internal examination need not feel so inhibited, and our analysis of the papers bears out that personal expression is accepted as normal in scripts at this level. The teachers still use formally worded rubrics, but there are few of the direct appeals for sincerity that the TUE examiner has had to resort to. A count of the topics reveals that 33 per cent of them include 'I', 'you', 'we' or one of the personal adjectives in their titles. And of course many of the other titles clearly invite a personal response.

This incidence is encouraging, for there is evidence from a Schools Council research project (1970: 53) that the inclusion of a personal invitation does increase the pupils' involvement, especially when this is coupled with an attempt to place the subject in a context, as was recommended in the discussion on the public examination papers.

Personal expression does not only depend on whether the pupil is invited to write personally, it also depends on what he is asked to write about. As Creber says,

*The experience, whether the pupil is to 'comprehend' it or communicate it, must be relevant, so that he may feel some urge to explore it or share it with others.*

(1965: 11)

When the National Association for the Teaching of English made a national survey in England of its members' opinions of G.C.E. O-level English examinations (N.A.T.E., 1966: 14), there was widespread endorsement of 'topics . . . introduced in an attempt to meet the interests and concern of adolescents'. The Report concludes,

*This should be a first consideration of setters . . . It is the clear duty of examiners to frame invitations to write that have some chance of arousing interest and engaging resources.*

It is equally important that pupils' interest should be engaged by the passages for comprehension. This is emphasised by a Schools Council paper on C.S.E. and G.C.E. English (1967: 14):

*The choice of an appropriate text is more important than the construction of questions.*

'Appropriate' is a better word than Creber's 'relevant' for describing the passages that teachers should set, for relevance should never be allowed to overrule the quality of the passages, just as the aim of 'widening the pupil's horizons' should not be overlooked in favour of sticking to subjects that the pupil already knows a lot about. Without embarking on a critical analysis of the 106 passages included in our sample, it may be said that in general the teachers have been conservative in choosing passages of well-attested literary value in preference to the ephemera of the mass media. Some of the worst written passages used appear to have come from school text books in history and civics.

### (3) The setting: urban or rural?

The Transvaal internal examination papers and the two text books were analysed in order to discover the extent to which they concern life in the modern, urban environment which is the home of most of our pupils. There were grounds for hypothesizing that the papers would be found to portray a rural and rather outdated way of life. First, the Transvaal authorities do not prescribe works with a modern, city background (such as the works of Sillitoe and Brain). Secondly, our analysis of past Transvaal syllabuses and examination papers revealed that at one time, and to a much lesser extent today, setters were obsessed with old-fashioned and countrified topics. Thirdly, disregard for the typical living environment of the majority of their pupils is apparently still common among authorities in English in Britain and the U.S.A., according to two recent large-



scale investigations. In the N.A.T.E. study of the 1965 G.C.E. papers (N.A.T.E., 1966: 15), the Birmingham Branch of the Association reported,

*Most serious of all was the lack of any subjects with a genuinely urban or industrial bias*

Sara Zimet and her research team reached a similar conclusion after an exhaustive analysis of first readers in U.S. schools:

*With the increased exposure of children at all ages to the mass media, their interests have broadened and changed. The readers, although professing to reflect these interests, have not kept up with the changing times.*

(Zimet, 1972: 16)

*The stories were rated according to the environmental setting in which they occurred. Urban was in extremely low frequency (1 percent) Rural accounted for 20 percent of the stories*

(Blom *et al.*, 1972: 16)

The position in the Transvaal is given in Table 4 below.

TABLE 4

NUMBER OF WRITING TOPICS AND COMPREHENSION PASSAGES WITH A RURAL SETTING, EXPRESSED AS A PERCENTAGE

	Examinations						Lennox-Shute		Rowe and Enimens	
	Composition		Letter		Comprehension		Comprehension		Comprehension	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Rural setting	27	8,8	8	8,8	49	46,2	10	55,6	7	38,9
Total	306	100	91	100	106	100	18	100	18	100

From Table 4 it can be seen that teachers nowadays hardly ever set their pupils to write about subjects set on farms or in the veld. Only once does 'A visit to a game reserve' occur; and there are no 'Hunting adventures'. Country children appear to have suffered from this backlash as there are almost no topics about farm life. Where they are given the chance to write about their school life this has been classed as non-rural.

Too many composition topics are of unidentifiable setting for a count to be made of positively urban topics, but the letters proved easier to classify. Only 8,8 per cent of the letters are indeterminate; the remaining 82,4 per cent are definitely urban.

We can conclude that the writing topics in the papers are not unrealistically biased



towards the rural way of life. The letters, which are more specifically linked to pupils' lives than are the compositions, are in fact given a heavy urban bias.

However, the setting of the comprehension passages is in marked contradiction to the writing topics. Nearly half the passages in the examination papers are set in the early days of white exploration in South Africa, or on Pacific islands, or in Amazon jungles, or in a nostalgic Laurie Lee world buried in rustic England. The same is true of the text books, especially *The Art of English*. This book is a South African adaptation by Lennox-Short of a book published in England; the only passage obviously substituted for the benefit of South African readers is an extract from 'The Pain' by Pauline Smith. This particular choice seems typical of the 'bushveld' syndrome that governs the choice of so many comprehension passages in the examination papers.

What is it that made Pohl's *Bushveld Adventures* the most popular single source of passages in the 1972 examinations? Perhaps it is an attempt to compensate for the paucity of good books with a South African background to be found among the prescribed works for Stds 9 and 10. A more likely explanation, however, is that these passages by Pohl are fossils from past school text books. Teachers continue to cull comprehension tests from books that have long since gone out of print and been removed from the Catalogue.

#### (4) The subject matter: contemporary and technological?

After looking at the setting, our analysis now focuses in more detail on the subject matter. The composition topics and comprehension passages were analysed to see whether the pupils had to read and write about the concerns of modern life. The categories used for the analysis were suggested by some of those given by Tunnicliffe and the Leeds survey (above): Technology and the individual; Science and technology; Transport; World affairs. By trial and error, three distinguishable categories were found feasible for the present study: Technology; Urban life; and Contemporary Society. 'Technology' includes any description of, or involvement in, the use of machinery or electrical equipment. 'Urban life' is a slightly different viewpoint which includes use of telephones and television, and roads, traffic and similar urban phenomena. 'Contemporary society' refers to subjects such as the generation gap, drugs, housing, politics, race relations, international affairs and the Olympic Games.

The allocation of topics to these categories is somewhat arbitrary, and in the case of the compositions and letters the distinctions between the categories proved to be too fine, so that certain of the categories could not be used or else had to be lumped

together. However, the results are of sufficient interest to warrant grouping them for comparative purposes. The results are given in Table 5.

TABLE 5  
NUMBER OF WRITING TOPICS AND COMPREHENSION PASSAGES CONCERNED  
WITH MODERN SUBJECT MATTER, EXPRESSED AS A PERCENTAGE

	Examinations						Lennox-Short		Rowe and Emmens		
	Composition		Letter		Comprehension		Comprehension		Comprehension		
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	
Technology	14	4,6	)		3	2,8	2	11,1	3	16,6	
Urban life	—	—	)	14	15,4	12	11,3	1	5,6	1	5,6
Contemporary society	45	14,7	)	—	—	17	16	1	5,6	3	16,6
Total	306	100	)	91	100	106	100	18	100	18	100

This table shows that, whereas there is a big difference between the predominant environmental setting of the writing topics and that of the comprehension tests, in subject matter approximately the same proportion of each is devoted to modern topics. This proportion is very low: less than a fifth in each case.

The fact that pupils may choose to interpret one of the open-ended writing topics as a reference to modern subject matter provides little mitigation for this state of affairs. For it would appear that teachers do not draw their pupils' attention to matters of importance to modern society, to the individual as a member of that society who is living in a technological era. *English Through Experience* stands apart with its passages on science and astronomy. Among the examination papers, a technical school sets a passage on the likelihood of nuclear war in the future; a commercial school has one on the use of the submarine in peacetime; and there is one passage on film making. That is practically all. Perhaps teachers do use the modern world as the subject matter of English in the classroom, but surely this would have been more evident from this analysis? One can only conclude that fears of English becoming a pseudo-sociology (Eva, 1973) have as yet no grounding in the Transvaal.

A strange feature about the absence of modern social topics from English teaching in the Transvaal in 1972 is that a different approach did once prevail, but the tradition has not been maintained. Many of today's English teachers must themselves have been at school in the 1950s when, as we have seen (T.E.D. Bureau Report, 1958a), Ridout's *English Today* was the prevailing text book. By 1956, when the Bureau made its survey, this book had gone through eight impressions. It was first published in 1947, and became famous for pioneering the incorporation of English in the work of social reconstruction after the War. Book 4 included sections on Local Government, The Press, Meetings, Citizenship, The Cinema and The Radio. One comprehension test was actually based on an extract from *Education for Citizenship in Secondary Schools*, by Sir Ernest Simon. One can speculate why the 'Citizenship' approach did not take root in South Africa. In the decade after 1948, when South African youngsters were being made to read fusty articles about the socialist movement in Britain, their own country was going through important changes. The new government was entrenching itself and making its policies felt in many aspects of South African life; and rapid urbanisation was changing the pattern of South African society (Lanham, 1970). The remoteness of the subject matter of English teaching provided in those days by Ridout must bear part of the responsibility for the situation today where teachers do not see that English impinges on the life of the nation.

(5) Centre of interest: the pupil?

Tunncliffe and Barnes describe the child's interests as spreading outwards from his own circle of family, friends and experience, to embrace wider experience. Tunncliffe says that the child at the Std 8 level should be looking at the public affairs of the world which he is entering, but we have seen that Transvaal teachers do not seem to be taking this line. Is their English teaching therefore firmly centred in the child's world?

The answer is that this is indeed the major bias of the writing assignments: for both compositions (23,2 per cent) and letters (35,2 per cent) this sort of topic is the largest single category. Pupils are invited to write of their own experiences, the world of school, domestic life, family holidays and activities with friends.

On the other hand, only one or two of the comprehension passages in the papers, and none in the text books, can be said to reflect the sort of lives the pupils lead. One curiosity emerges, however: there is a particular genre of writing that noticeably finds favour for these tests. It is one of the largest single categories, although in fact constituting only 8,5 per cent of all the passages. This genre may be called 'Childhood



Reminiscences'. These are usually nostalgic memories of rural England, though some recall sterner experiences. The text books also have one of these passages each. Hopefully – and this is probably why teachers use them – if these passages are sensitive in insight, they do provide pupils with good models of a kind of writing which should appeal to children and come easily to them, and their subject matter might also stimulate the pupils' interest.

(6) The pupils' interests?

The topics have been examined to see whether teachers are catering for what they might consider as the interests and tastes of young people. There are some surprising gaps, especially in the field of hobbies and games (which feature so prominently in Barnes's list). Hobbies are barely mentioned. Sport is hardly touched on in the composition topics, but it does constitute 7.7 per cent of the subject matter of the letters, which is to be expected as the letters consistently focus more on the pupils' lives than do the compositions. When one considers the fanatical emphasis on sport in most South African schools, it is in fact surprising that sport does not feature more in these examination papers. Furthermore, even if teachers believe that they are restoring a balance in values by eschewing the topic of sport in a 'cultural' subject like English, it is still surprising that they do not let children read and write about sport, in an effort to capture their attention and stimulate their interest. After all, our schools seem to assume that all pupils are sports addicts, and even the Leeds children themselves listed a preference for 'Physical Activities'. Yet out of the 142 comprehension passages in the sample, from papers and text books, only two are on organised sport. One, from the examinations, is a piece of sophisticated comedy about an Englishwoman at a French football match; the other, offered by Lennox-Short, is an aged set-piece on 'A Famous Cricket Match'. A passage like the last match in David Storey's *This Sporting Life* (1960) which combines excitement with a penetrating study of character, would make an ideal comprehension test. Surely here is an opportunity for relevance that has been overlooked.

One way in which teachers attempt to cater for the tastes of the pupils is that many of the comprehension passages describe episodes of adventure, especially true-life adventure. The choice of these passages is similar to the prescription in past years of anthologies of adventure as set works. It was mentioned in the discussion on the set works (p. 56) that this kind of book was discontinued during the 1960s. Either pupils' tastes were changing or the authorities discovered that pupils had never liked this kind of reading matter anyway. It also appears that these anthologies proved difficult to examine as works of literature. However, the dropping of these books is



not reflected at the Std 8 level in the classroom, where teachers continue to set many highly similar passages involving acts of courage and moments of danger. They constitute 31,1 per cent of all the examination comprehension tests. The two text books, following the trend shown in the selection of set works, have hardly any of this type of passage. The nearest they come to it is that both books do have extracts from *Moonfleet* and *Shane*, though they are not all passages of excitement.

Another field of interest among children, which is highlighted by the Leeds survey, is the natural world, or, as Tunnicliffe calls it, their physical environment. It has become fashionable in the last decade, especially since the publication of Clegg's *The Excitement of Writing* (1964), to exploit the child's curiosity by encouraging him to observe his environment closely and then write about his observations. Whereas in earlier times descriptive assignments were of the more general kind cited in the chapter on the public examinations, such as descriptions of beautiful scenes, the 'kipper-sniffing' school of thought advocates close description of details from the natural environment – leaves, insects etc. (See, for example, Maybury, 1967).

For the purpose of this study, topics have been placed in the category of 'physical environment' if they discuss, or invite the child to discuss, details of his natural environment. The account is expected to be, and, in the case of the comprehension passages, actually is, simple, non-technical and first-hand. Topics on chemistry, physics, astronomy etc. have not been included here as they use the formal framework and jargon of the discipline and embrace the assumptions of what Barnes calls 'adult categories', which have been analysed separately (below). The results of the analysis show that topics falling into the category of 'physical environment' are rare. Lennox-Short has one passage of this sort, Rowe and Emmens, as is to be expected, have two. The examination passages often deal with natural history – 19,8 per cent of the passages discuss animals or insects – but seldom from the point of view of close observation of a particular feature of appearance or behaviour. Only 6,5 per cent of the compositions fall in this category, and this is generously taken to include topics such as 'Hands', 'Feet' and topics on the weather.

It can be concluded that this category ideally meets the dual requirements of interesting the pupil and offering the challenge of disciplined writing; but that, especially as a composition topic, its potential has been overlooked by the teachers.

## (7) Young adults?

The pupils in the Leeds sample listed topics about themselves as adults, and about careers, prompting Barnes to distinguish 'Phantasy of adult role' and 'Entering the world'. Sources for the aims of English teaching referred to in Chapter One usually include 'developing self-confidence' and 'equipping for a vocation'. Do Transvaal teachers lead pupils to think about their futures?

They certainly do not expect them to want to write compositions about their careers. Only 15 topics (0,4 per cent) could by any stretch be defined as falling in this category. On the other hand, the letters that are set follow the tradition of including topics (usually in the form of advice to be given or received) on length of education, jobs available etc. It is unfortunate that the wording usually makes the topic sound false, and one wonders whether the letter, compared with the composition, is less likely to be a genuine expression of matters of personal concern. Similarly the 'business' letters, which should perhaps be included here, sound more often like a drilled exercise than a genuine step in learning the ways of the adult world. (Letters are to stationmasters about lost bicycles.) Teachers should give this more thought, for they set many such letters: 16,5 per cent of the letters are about work, and 19,8 per cent are business transactions.

## (8) Through adult eyes?

The pupils in the Leeds survey made two lists of composition topics. After the first, it was explained to them that they were completely free to choose what they liked; there was no need to put down the sort of topics they thought were suitable for school. One of the main differences in their choices as a result of this assurance was that, to a large extent, they dropped the names of the traditional disciplines, 'Geography', 'History' etc., though enough still clung to the traditional headings for Barnes to have to make a section for 'Adult Categories'.

Children who are the product of traditional teaching, according to the traditional curricula, are used to having experience demarcated into different 'subjects'. Liam Hudson found this in his study of the English schoolboy (1966 95-96). He asked his subjects to react to certain 'controversial statements' (which actually sound very like the normal composition topics teachers set today). An example of the statements is,

*Human nature being what it is, you can't run a boys' school without corporal punishment*

He comments on the results as follows:

*It is interesting to see how muddled even the cleverest 15-year-olds are when considering a topic outside the curriculum. Boys who work with elegance and precision on Latin verses or mathematics are children when confronted with a task which is unfamiliar.*

These are two examples of children whose education has been restrictive with the result that they lack the flexibility of thinking which Hudson believes is the high quality of 'divergent' thinkers. The Transvaal sample was analysed to see whether or not teachers adopt the same convergent approach, seen in the English examples. The results show that happily Transvaal children are better off in this respect. Ruthless searching of the examination papers failed to reveal more than 1 per cent of the composition topics which could possibly be described as falling into 'adult categories'. The nearest is 'Charity is the greatest virtue'.

The presence of 'adult categories' among the comprehension tests cannot be gauged in the same way, but indicative of this thinking are certain passages which cluster into peculiar genres that are adult and schoolmasterish in their conception. Most noteworthy is a class of passage which can be described as 'self-conscious history'. There are six of these passages (5,7 per cent) in the examination papers, and one in each text book. These passages relate briefly the history of some item, such as the upbringing of the mediaeval boy; zoos, stamps; feasts and festivals; and fairs. In brevity, conciseness and pedantry they resemble paragraphs from old-fashioned, middle school history text books. Not quite so obvious an adult category as the above are the many passages on historical subjects - totalling 21,7 per cent of the examination passages. They range widely in time and scene: from a history of the Jewish uprising against the Romans (set in a commercial school), they embrace Pizarro and Capt. Cook and several visits to native kraals in Southern Africa, and come right up to Churchill's introduction to his history of the Second World War. Most of these passages are simple narratives of historical incidents.

These comprehension passages are paralleled in the composition papers by topics which are redolent of school history:

*A day in the life of an 1836 Voortrekker  
Pages from a Voortrekker diary*

Do these passages and topics reflect a concern for the past, a curiosity about historical times and persons, shared by pupils and teachers in their reading and discussions? Do they help 'extend the pupils' horizons' and 'give them a greater vision of human possibilities'? Are they evidence that teachers do in fact aim at the cultural enrichment



of their pupils through imparting an interest in their cultural heritage? Will these pupils acquire a sense of the past and a critical appreciation of their man-made environment, as Fred Inglis has pleaded for? To a small extent the answer may be in the affirmative. Two of the Transvaal schools parallel Inglis's preoccupation with these matters, evinced in *The Englishness of English Teaching* (1969): one sets a passage by D.H. Lawrence on the spread of mines across the countryside, and the other sets one on the growth of slums around the cotton mills of northern England. There are no passages with a similar message for South Africa – perhaps because they remain to be written. But 4 per cent of the composition topics may be said to follow this theme, chiefly taking the line of conservation and pollution. The Leeds survey found that the pupils *wished* to write about the past and their man-made environment; one could wish for more topics in the Transvaal that required pupils to take a similar interest in this subject.

Another aspect of the child's cultural education, which adults could be expected to drum into pupils even in the face of apathy, is an interest in the arts. Tunnicliffe gives the arts a section in his syllabus. Richard Lewis, the American poet and editor of *Miracles*, the anthology of children's writing, says (1970: 93), 'We have to show this generation of children that the arts are the expression of human dignity, human growth, and human consciousness.' However, as might be expected after noting the low incidence of topics on contemporary society in general, the arts are almost never mentioned in the papers and text books. At the most they feature in 2.9 per cent of the topics for writing. There are two or three topics on films (not on the cinema, but on 'A film I really enjoyed'), and on reading ('My favourite short story'), but nothing on ballet, theatre, music, painting. Even pop entertainment – a category in the Leeds survey – is not represented. Nor are the arts better served by the comprehension passages: only the article on making a film, and a discussion, incredibly, on the function of comprehension tests, remotely touch on this field. The text books offer nothing.

The arts, our cultural, aesthetic and man-made environment, are fields of human experience that should be close to the centre of English teaching. Their absence from these papers and text books is an abrogation of responsibility by English teachers. Inevitably it raises questions about the quality of the teaching of literature that can take place in the context of this philistinism.

#### (9) Human behaviour?

Creber, Tunnicliffe and the preliminary Leeds analysis all distinguish the child's interest in 'the affective and personal in people's lives'. According to Stratta (1972: 98), 'the



exploration of human issues, especially those dealing with interpersonal relationships' is one of 'the important concerns of the subject which seem to have emerged during the past decade'

It has not proved possible to infer, from the writing topics that are set, to what degree Transvaal teachers foster this interest. As far as encouraging introspection and self-knowledge is concerned, it has been pointed out above that many of the topics invite, or can be taken as inviting, introspection. Some of the letters, though not many, do the same. It is easier to define topics that draw attention to other people. These constitute the second largest category of composition topic (17,3 per cent), and make up 7,7 per cent of the letters. Most of these topics take the form of descriptions of people. (There is, for example, the curiously outdated 'Companions in a Railway Carriage'.) Some topics, however, are more thought-provoking:

*'How many roads must a man walk down  
Before you can call him a man'*

*(Bob Dylan)*

There are two approaches when it comes to deciding on the nature of the passages to be selected for comprehension exercises. On the one hand it can be argued that the exploration of human behaviour is best left to the study of literature, and that comprehension tests should require an understanding of the argument, tone, intention and feeling of good, non-fictional prose. The other point of view is that comprehension tests can test a pupil's sensitive perception of the type of insights into people that novelists convey, and that this study should not be left entirely to a separate section of the English curriculum. It would appear from the present analysis that Transvaal teachers prefer the former kind of comprehension passage.

Table 6 gives the proportion of passages which deal with human behaviour and interpersonal relations.

TABLE 6

NUMBER OF COMPREHENSION PASSAGES CONCERNED WITH PEOPLE AND HUMAN RELATIONS, EXPRESSED AS A PERCENTAGE

	Examinations		Lennox-Short		Rowe and Emmens	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Passages about people	37	34,9	9	50	5	27,7
Total	106	100	18	100	18	100

From this table it can be seen that the Lennox-Short text book has a high proportion of (narrative) extracts about people. Rowe and Emmens favour the discursive type of article about matters of general interest. The examination papers come somewhere between these two approaches, showing a fair interest in people, though the majority of the passages are factual.

### 6.5 CONCLUSION

The picture of English teaching in the 54 schools whose papers have been analysed here, may be summed up as follows. The demonstrable aims of the teaching lie in the field of the personal development of the child – his imagination, originality, independent thought and emotional fulfilment. To this end the writing assignments encourage personal expression concerning matters within the child's experience: introspection, his family circle, school and friends, and people. His tastes are taken to be an interest in people and their activities. The reading matter for close study represents a compromise between what it is believed that the child enjoys and what is deemed suitable for the subject, hence the predominance of stories about people and their activities, especially adventures in foreign places or far-off times, or else about animals.

On the negative side, it must be pointed out that this type of reading material fails to promote such aims as widening the pupil's experience, extending his horizons, enhancing his sense of environment, history and culture, or heightening his moral sense.

Most noticeably, the English work represented here devotes a minority of its attention to preparing the child to take his place in the contemporary world. The kinds of written communication the child is expected to master are very limited, thus restricting his social competence. The prevailing ethos of the reading matter is historical and bland, not modern and thought-provoking. The child is not encouraged to examine and consider his physical environment, and little cognisance is taken of the impact of technology on his life. Nor is this oversight restricted to utilitarian matters: aesthetic response and taste, an interest in the arts, even a critical awareness of the mass media, are not cultivated here.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### CONCLUSIONS

#### 7.1 ADMINISTRATION

7.1.1 In the past English Higher in the Transvaal has suffered from discrete planning and control. Lack of common policy has led to anomalies in the subject curriculum whereby syllabuses, lists of prescribed works and examinations are mutually contradictory. Effective curriculum development in English will depend upon a much closer liaison between relevant bodies and individuals in the future.

The committees designing syllabuses for different standards, or for different courses within the system of differentiation, should share, at least to some extent, common membership and common chairmanship. There should be some continuity of office for those responsible for selecting prescribed books, who should also be closely involved in the construction of the syllabuses, so that the choice of prescribed books may be an integral part of policy for the subject. The examiners for the various papers of the public examinations and the oral examinations should work as a team, which should preferably also include members of the bodies responsible for the syllabuses and the selection of prescribed books. It is becoming increasingly detrimental to the subject that the examiners work in isolation.

7.1.2 It would appear that syllabus revision in the past has been haphazard. The announcement that, with the introduction of the new national system of differentiated education in 1973, syllabus revision will be undertaken regularly at five yearly intervals, is to be welcomed. Syllabus revision should be thorough. The present study has shown that patchy revision of old syllabuses can result in parts of syllabuses being perpetuated for years after the approach which they advocate has been discontinued in other parts of the syllabuses, so that their existence within a particular syllabus as a whole has become anomalous.

#### 7.2 SYLLABUSES

7.2.1 The designers of future English syllabuses will have to pay far more rigorous attention to defining aims than has been the practice in the past. With the disappearance of much of the old content from the latest syllabuses, teachers need more specific guidance in the approach envisaged for each area of the subject curriculum (see pp. 63-64). In the past, the syllabuses have been silent, or made contradictory statements, on aspects of the subject about which major assumptions are nevertheless made, as can be seen in

the choice of prescribed works and in examination papers and the examiners' reports. These assumptions need to be spelled out.

7.2.2 The practice of drawing up syllabuses in isolation, referred to in 6.i.1 above, has resulted in a lack of sequential design in syllabuses from primary school through to Std 10. Future curriculum development in English should be designed stage by stage from the grades upwards.

### 7.3 DIFFERENTIATION

When differentiation was introduced in 1960, the syllabuses for the B and C Streams were not simply watered-down versions of the A Stream syllabus, but were actually inferior in the quality of education that they offered. Instead of providing a different approach to the subject through different emphases in subject matter, media and activities, the B and C Stream syllabuses excluded the possibility of imaginative work for the less academic children and reduced English to exercises in drill. Furthermore, the TSSC examination papers were until the latter half of the 1960s inferior to the TUE papers.

Any attempt in the future to provide differentiated courses in English must at all costs avoid relegating certain pupils to inferior, limiting work which might favour training in restricted language areas based on putative future employment and life styles, at the expense of personal, imaginative and cultural enrichment.

### 7.4 LITERATURE

7.4.1 The role of literature in English teaching is entering a critical stage of reassessment similar to that from which language is emerging. There are many reasons why literature can be studied in schools, and many ways in which it can be approached. In the past these aims and objectives have not been clarified in the Transvaal, to the detriment of the selection of prescribed works and the setting of the examination papers. It is desirable that a consistent approach should be adopted for the syllabuses, the selection of prescribed works, and the examinations.

7.4.2 Often the non-fiction prescribed works have not been of high literary quality, and the only other expository prose that our pupils are trained to read takes the form of snippets for comprehension. In view of the amount of expository writing expected of our pupils, both at school and afterwards, and since many people read more non-fiction than fiction, it is desirable that pupils be given more experience in reading good non-fiction than is at present the case.



## 7.5 EXAMINATIONS

7.5.1 To a large extent the design and wording of the Transvaal public examinations in English have become fossilised. The internal examinations in turn are imitations of the public ones. A new approach to assessment in English is needed. Oral and written examinations can be a useful part of the ongoing teaching programme in the years before Std 10. As such they can lose their artificial character as something apart from the rest of the English course, and instead merge in identity with other forms of assessment such as course-work assessment.

7.5.2 Even where final examinations are maintained, they should be re-designed in order to reflect in style the nature of the subject which they are assessing. Particular attention should be paid to structure, wording, the tasks imposed and the subject matter dealt with. For example, the questions should be posed in some sort of context, which, in the case of literature, might be provided for by means of an open-book examination.

7.5.3 At present the Transvaal external and internal examinations have only a haphazard relationship with the aims and content laid down in the syllabuses. The examinations should be systematically designed to assess the candidates' achievement according to the aims of the syllabuses.

7.5.4 The traditional division of the Written English paper into Essay and Letter is inadequate. Candidates should be expected to show their ability in several kinds of written language, both expressive or 'poetic', and transactional.

7.5.5 Transvaal examinations in Language are still too concerned with a prescriptive model of English teaching, and with the technicalities of Latinate grammar. They need to concentrate on testing the ability of pupils to communicate in given circumstances.

## 7.6 SUBJECT MATTER

7.6.1 The custom that has arisen in the Transvaal of dividing syllabuses and examinations into sections on reading, writing and language study, has led English into a dead end, for it perpetuates a fragmentary approach to the subject even while the syllabuses exhort teachers to adopt an integrated approach. English should be planned, taught and examined in such a way as to reflect the unified nature of the subject.

7.6.2 Where in the past literature was studied, today English should encompass all the manifestations of contemporary culture, but especially the mass media – film, radio, television, newspapers, magazines, paperbacks. This material, as well as literature, need

not always be treated as the object of critical study, but as source material in the exploration of issues concerning the individual in society and his environment. This new subject matter is bound to play a larger part in English teaching in the future.

7.6.3 In the last decade English in the Transvaal has very largely changed in nature. The child used to be presented with a given world for him to assimilate. This was a rather old fashioned, remote world that had little bearing on the child's personal life or the skills he would need in adulthood. The swing to more child-centred English teaching which gained momentum in England in the sixties reached South Africa rather late, and we are witnessing at present the transition in the Transvaal to English as a subject that promotes the personal development of the child. Meanwhile, elsewhere, English has moved on: the insights into the links between language and personal growth that the sixties provided have not been lost, but now English is concerned with the way language affects the quality of the child's social, as well as personal, life. The concerns of English in the Transvaal can be expected to broaden outwards from stressing the emotional development of the child – an emphasis which in any case has had a rather uneasy place in our English teaching – to stressing the child's development in his social, cultural and physical environment.

**APPENDIX**

**PRESCRIBED WORKS FOR THE TRANSVAAL SECONDARY SCHOOL  
CERTIFICATE AND TRANSVAAL UNIVERSITY ENTRANCE EXAMINATIONS**

1941 - 1972

















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