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Perhaps the best way of indicating the scope and nature of the activities of the The English Academy of Southern Africa would be to note items which have occurred on the agenda for meetings of the Council and Executive Committee over the past few months. The list of items sometimes exceeds twenty:— Pringle Award; Olive Schreiner Prize; Prizes for English at Black Universities; Essay Competition; English Language Teaching Information Centre (ELTIC); Academy Standing Committee on Education; Academy Conference, 1975; Future Academy Conferences; Publications Board; van Wyk de Vries Report; Informal Discussions on Education (at the invitation of the Transvaal Director of Education); Memorandum from SACEE; English in Government Publications and on the SABC; English Usage Committee; Proposed English-medium University in Pretoria; Book: **Better Than They Knew;** Assistance to South African Authors and Publishers; Scrutiny of Text-books.

Overview of the work of the Academy

These items on the Agenda reflect a good deal of work on the part of Academy members. There is the organising and adjudicating of literary prizes. Committees have to be appointed to read South African writing in various categories and make recommendations for the Pringle Awards and these have to be presented at appropriate functions in places accessible to the winners. For other awards — the Olive Schreiner Prize and the various essay competitions — similar arrangements have to be made. There is the preparation of statements to various authorities or for the Press, the giving of evidence before commissions, representing the Academy at Conferences (a major undertaking for busy people) and shouldering the responsibility of running the English Language Teaching Information Centre (ELTIC). The volume of work undertaken has increased steadily year by year since the foundation of the Academy in 1961 "to promote the interests of the English language and the English language based culture in South Africa". The Academy has no paid staff except for a single (and fortunately most competent) Administrative Officer at its headquarters in Johannesburg. All other work is voluntary. The Academy, as its brochure states, is "not an organisation which exists for the benefit of its members but one in which the members join to serve the public interest". There are Full, Associate and Corporate members, and the Academy relies for the major part of its finance on annual contributions from its corporate members and grants-in-aid from municipalities. There are members in the Cape, Natal, the Orange Free State and the Transvaal and a few scattered outside South Africa in Lesotho, Rhodesia, Swaziland and even Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States, but the majority of members and most of the committees are based in the Johannesburg-Pretoria area, since headquarters is in Johannesburg and great distances make participation in committee work difficult for members living elsewhere.

Among the more ambitious projects undertaken by the Academy is the organisation of Conferences. Apart from the Inaugural Conference in 1961 the Academy has so far organised four Conferences — in Johannesburg in 1966, in Grahamstown in 1969, at Roma in Lesotho in 1973 and in Pretoria in 1975. The Johannesburg Conference was on "English as Communication", its purpose to focus attention on 't'he importance of language as a practical tool in science, technology, business and administration and in particular to discuss the problem of giving university students, who are not language specialists, an adequate command of English for the purposes of their future professions. The Conference had a significant influence on the measures which have subsequently been adopted by South African universities to deal with the problem". (Academy Brochure)

The Grahamstown Conference

The Grahamstown Conference was concerned with the theme "South African Writing in English and its place in School and University". The Proceedings of the Conference were published by the Witwatersrand University Press as a special number of **English Studies in Africa** (Volume 15: March 1970).

A glance at these Proceedings indicates the scope and nature of this conference. Part of the time was devoted to talk about South African writing by teachers and academics, and part to the presentation by the writers themselves of their own recent work in prose, verse or drama. Professor Butler in his opening address raised the questions whether the body of South African writing deserved the title of "literature" and what place such writing has in the school and university. Other speakers were concerned with "Literature across Cultures" — the problem of presenting literature to Afrikaans-speaking, Coloured, Indian and African pupils. Others attempted assessment of novels, plays, short stories and poems written in English by South Africans and by African writers outside our borders. No consensus of opinion emerged as to the place of South African English writing in our schools and universities; but the purpose of our conferences is not to pass resolutions approved by majorities but to provide opportunities for discussion between people with different views, to stimulate individuals by offering a forum for contacts between people facing similar problems, so that they will go back to their own jobs feeling better able to cope with these problems, with batteries, as it were, recharged.

The Roma Conference

The Conference held at Roma in Lesotho in 1973 was the only conference I did not attend. It was a specialist conference on "The Teaching of English in African Schools" and attendance was by invitation, mainly to teachers in secondary and high schools who have the experience, responsibility and qualifications to promote new methods and ideas; but also to policy-makers who might be expected to take note of views expressed. The Academy raised money to pay for delegates' board and residence at Roma and to assist those travelling long distances to meet travelling costs. The conference took the form of addresses on various aspects of the teaching of English, followed by Workshop Groups and Panel Discussions. It was, from all accounts, a highly successful conference. Certainly it engendered great enthusiasm and initiated activities among African teachers throughout South Africa and beyond its borders. It was as a result of this conference that the English Language Teaching Information Centre (ELTIC) was established in Johannesburg, and The Association of English Teachers among Africans (AET) was founded, from which smaller conferences and meetings have resulted. In the second number of the ELTIC-AET Newsletter (February 1974) Professor Lanham, who has inspired and guided so much of the Academy's activities in the field of English teaching among Africans, made this comment: "One of the main aims of the Lesotho Conference was to overcome the sense of isolation that many teachers in African schools feel. I believe that the Conference was successful in doing this and one of the main aims of ELTIC is to keep up the spirit of the Lesotho Conference. Part of the spirit is the sense that we are all together in doing an interesting and vital job — a job that is best done by exchanging ideas among ourselves, meeting in groups to discuss new ways of tackling old problems, and keeping up to date with the ever-changing scene of English teaching."

Four of the papers delivered at the Conference, which dealt with aspects of the teaching of literature, were published by the Academy — **Trends in Modern African Poetry** by T J Couzens, **Literature and its Communicative Value** by H G Widdowson, **The Second Language Literature Course** by R Holland and **Why not African Literature?** by B Lindfors. As the foreword suggests, "In addition to the pedagogical value of these papers, they make a contribution to the study of literature written in English by Black writers from the African continent. As such they deserve a much wider audience than one made up only of teachers, and they are offered here to all who may be interested."

The Pretoria Conference

In August 1975 a Conference was held at the Onderwyskollege in Pretoria on "The Teaching of English in Afrikaans Schools, Colleges and Universities". We had hoped that this would be a truly national conference but the introduction in the Transvaal of the three term calendar meant, in effect, that the great majority of participants were from the Transvaal, with a few, who managed to get away for all or part of the Conference, from other provinces. We had speakers or chairmen from Cape Town, Port Elizabeth, Stellenbosch and Pietermaritzburg as well as from the Transvaal, however, and this contact between teachers from other provinces with the large contingent from the Transvaal was particu-

larly valuable. What was also very healthy was the bringing together of Primary and Secondary school teachers with lecturers from Colleges and Universities, mixing them up in Workshop Groups and enabling them to hear each other's points of view. We expected 150 from enrolment forms sent in, but in the event there must have been about 100 in fairly constant attendance. It was one of the happiest conferences I have attended. The spirit was excellent; the addresses full of good points which provoked plenty of discussion. The conference was organised on the same lines as that of Roma — addresses on aspects of the central theme, followed by Workshop Group and Panel Discussions. As in the case of other conferences the value was in the contacts made between people struggling with the same problems at various levels in the educational field. There were differences of opinion, of course, but considerable consensus on a number of points did emerge.

There was agreement on the primacy of speech in language learning and the difficulty of translating this conviction into effective action because examinations are heavily weighted in favour of the written word. Indeed, our examination system provoked a good deal of adverse comment, since it is the nature of, and attitude to, the Matriculation examination which is largely responsible for futile parrot learning and the regurgitation of inert knowledge. Conference emphasised the need to teach **skills** — the skills of hearing (or listening), speaking, reading and writing (in that order) and the immense importance of the competence and attitude of the teacher, and the need in the teaching of reading and literature to associate enjoyment with the written word. Here again the effect of examinations was deplored and the suggestion endorsed that a programme of rich and varied reading should be substituted for a meagre ration of prescribed books, chewed to rags and robbed of all delight by the need to pass the examination in literature. Indeed, the suggestion that formal examinations in literature, in second language teaching, should be dropped, met with a good deal of support. In place of the formal examination informal assessment could be introduced into much more flexible and integrated courses in "English" which would involve all aspects of English teaching (including formal grammar at the High School stage) without the present rigid division of the subject into literature, oral composition, written composition and so on. Inevitably, the choice of prescribed books under the present system was discussed and the question raised whether or not Shakespeare should be retained in the literary course. One speaker suggested that the study of Shakespeare should be optional since, for the weaker students, Shakespeare, and certain other authors, present challenges which, on their level of linguistic competence, and by reason of their lack of specific cultural background, they cannot meet. The problem of set books for examination had cropped up in our other conferences also — in the Grahamstown Conference in the "Literature across Cultures" series of talks, and at the Roma Conference when Professor Lindfors, in his address, objected to the pre-eminence of British over African literature in African schools. "We must begin", he said, "by discarding the musty heirlooms and bric-a-brac of the past. We must release the syllabus from the stranglehold of Shakespeare. We must shut out the poets who wrote in England more than a hundred years ago. We must put the long-winded Victorian novelists back into cold storage." Of the problems that African students have in making Shakespeare meaningful in their lives, he says, "All interpretation continues to come directly from above. The student's job is merely to suck up what he can, filter it through his consciousness, and flush it out at the appropriate moment. No love of literature blossoms from this dreary process". What he says of Africans wrestling with "heavy outdated materials" and being unwilling to repeat such painful experience of their own free will in later life, applies, if to a lesser degree, to Afrikaans students.

Other topics which occupied the Conference were: the desirability of a radical change in national policy from unilingual to bilingual schools, colleges and universities so that pupils can learn the second language in a natural situation without the need for artificial (and ineffective) drills; the **relevance** of much of what we teach in our schools and universities to the needs of our community; and the dangers to language teaching of the multiple answer or objective test. The Academy hopes to arrange for the publication of all or some of the proceedings of the Conference. There were, I may add, excellent book exhibitions set up at the Conference by Longman Southern Africa, Perskor Pub-

lishers and the Transvaal Education Library Service. One of the Executive Officers of the Academy, Mr M C O'Dowd, delivered a most interesting and balanced public lecture in the Unisa Senate Room on "English, the Common Language".

The organisation of the Conference provided an admirable example of the co-operation between the Academy and one of its associated organisations, The South African Council for English Education. (Other associated organisations are the 1820 Settlers National Monument Foundation, the South African Guild of Speech Teachers and the Transvaal Teachers' Association). The Pretoria branch of SACEE, under the able chairmanship of Mr J Ballantine, undertook the business organisation, the booking of accommodation, preparing of file covers and name tabs, and took care of registration and the provision of the indispensable morning and afternoon teas, etc., while the Academy Conference sub-committee was concerned with the drawing up of the programme, decisions as to speakers and group leaders, the drafting of notices and letters and so on.

In the Academy Newsletter, June 1972, there is a section referring to the work of Mrs Rankin, who was a member of the Academy Council from its early days and whose death in September 1971 was a sad blow to the Academy and more especially to the Oral English Committee of which she was Chairman and for which she worked tirelessly among teachers and pupils in the African townships. The Oral English Committee gave help of a most practical kind — providing text-books through the Doreen Rankin Lending Library, distributing English dictionaries and preparing tape-recordings of poetry and set books. Tape recorders were supplied also. There were annual drama festivals in the townships in the Transvaal when plays were presented by various schools and prizes awarded by adjudicators. African teachers themselves later took over the organisation of these festivals with help from members of the Oral English Committee.

ELTIC

The work of the Oral English Committee has now been incorporated in that of ELTIC; the Oral English Committee disbanded and the activities it set in motion greatly extended. A permanent headquarters for ELTIC has been established next to the Academy office in Braamfontein, Johannesburg. Mrs Hermina Mpakanyane has been appointed full-time Field Officer with a Mazda one-ton truck (a gift from the Chairman's fund of the Anglo American Corporation) at her disposal to enable her to travel to African schools and institutions with ELTIC equipment. Under the chairmanship of Professor Lanham, the Steering Committe of ELTIC has been increased to include representation from — the In-Service Training Centre at Mamelodi, the British Council, the Council of Education, Witwatersrand and the Trinity Players. The twelve members of the Committee include three members of staff of the University of the Witwatersrand and one from the University of the North, a Headmaster and Headmistress from Soweto, the Educational Planner and one Senior Inspector of the Department of Bantu Education and one teacher of English in a White high school. Professor H Holmes (former Rector of the Johannesburg College of Education) has undertaken to act in a supervisory and consultative capacity in the ELTIC office.

A Standing Committee on Education under the chairmanship of Professor J M Niven was formed at the end of 1972 and has submitted several valuable reports on the state of English education in South Africa, with particular attention to the supply of English-speaking teachers. Because of the importance which the Academy attaches to the role of English education in South Africa, the Memorandum of this Committee recently submitted to the Academy Council was reprinted in full in the Academy Annual Review, 1975. Major concerns of the Standing Committee and suggestions for the attention of universities and educational authorities which emerge from this Memorandum are the following:— the shortage of English-speaking teachers (particularly marked in rural schools and small towns); the problem of recruitment to the teaching profession; the need for special training in second language teaching; the shortage of graduate teachers in a number of subjects (in this connection universities are urged to review courses they offer, consider failure rates and examine whether the standards they demand are realistic); the literary bias of English courses in universities, the need to develop courses in "communication in English" and the very great responsibility which will devolve on universities if all (White) teacher training is to be con-

ducted under their direction; the question of whether the degree of bilinguality demanded as a requirement for promotion posts in the the Cape is related to the requirements of the post, since the present policy has the effect of discouraging good teachers who know they have no chance of promotion; pupil-teacher ratios; the need to provide teachers whose home language is English, in all English-medium schools, in all English-speaking classes and in all English classes where English is taught, whether as main or second language, as a subject (certainly there should not be lecturers in English at Colleges of Education whose home language is not English); the shortage of facilities for the training of English-speaking teachers; obstacles placed in the way of recruitment overseas for scarce subject teachers; in-service training of teachers; the need for research into such subjects as the drop-out of men teachers, the content of syllabuses and the quality of text-books in English. One item to be referred to the Minister of Education as a matter of urgency refers to the constitution of the National Education Council. It is suggested, in this connection, that the Minister be asked to nominate a member of the Academy to the NEC since the Academy is the only English body which represents English-speaking interests in general and education in particular.

Academy policy on social and political matters

The attitude of the Academy to Government Departments and the bodies such as the Akademie vir Wetenskap en Kuns was defined by the President of the Academy in the Report of the Council for the year ended 30th September 1974. It is an attitude of co-operation where this will serve the interests of English-speaking South Africans and the wider interests of the whole South African community. But the Academy does not hesitate to criticise official policy where it believes that this works to the detriment of the English-speaking community. Thus it refused to act as adjudicator in the Verwoerd Prize for Patriotic Literature "because it believed this would serve neither patriotism nor literature"; this Prize appears to have been subsequently abandoned. It criticised the withdrawal of the playwright Athol Fugard's passport (which was subsequently restored). It issued a Press statement opposed to the majority report of the Censorship Commission and submitted evidence, both written and oral, to this Commission. It is at present involved in correspondence with the SABC on the poor quality of the English on some of its programmes and the paucity of representation on the controlling body of the SABC of English-speaking South Africans. Two members of the Academy, Mr G A H Dale and Professor J M Niven, have recently been appointed to the National Education Council. There has also been a lengthy correspondence with the Transvaal Director of Education, the Adiministrator and the Prime Minister over the exclusion, without explanation, of the book **Better Than They Knew** from the list of recommended reading in Transvaal schools. This book, the publication of which was a joint venture by SACEE and the Academy, seeks to explain in unemotional, non-contentious style, the achievements of English-speaking South Africans. It is a relevant work of social and historical value and as such should surely be "highly recommended" reading by educational authorities. The second volume has now been published; it is to be hoped that both volumes will in due course find their way into school libraries in the Transvaal.

The President noted in his 1974 Report that the Academy has, on occasion, been adversely criticised for sitting on the fence; he declared that "it will continue to be 'neutral' where it considers that dispassionate, disinterested judgement will best serve the community it seeks to defend". It feels it can best serve the community by throwing its energies and resources into projects such as ELTIC, The Standing Committee on Education and the organising of Conferences, which are of immediate benefit to this community."

Perhaps my comments in this article on Academy activities will help to persuade some of its critics that it is not, and was never intended to be, as Mr O'Dowd remarked in an address to the Grahamstown Conference, "an organisation to represent the political aspirations or even the cultural aspirations of English-speaking South Africans". Its operations are centred on the English language — its standards and effectiveness. The various projects I have outlined would suggest that its energies are indeed being channelled into activities which are of immediate benefit to the whole South African community.