

INTRODUCTION

Although this paper is a direct response to the C.X.C. syllabus for the Examinations in English which was published in April 1977, it is not an attempt to appraise it. The paper addresses itself directly to teachers of English Literature throughout secondary schools.

The present syllabus does not offer teachers substantial guidelines as to how it could be practically implemented into their teaching programmes. It provides instead content-specifics with no point of direction. As such, it contains possibilities for good and harm. What this paper attempts to do, is to make a contribution to fulfilling its possibilities for good by isolating one of its dangers and suggesting ways of overcoming the danger. It is hoped that other teachers would follow this example. This kind of activity is vital if the subject is to be saved. For one foresees that in the near future, what this new Syllabus would have done, is contribute to the decline in the teaching of the specifics of Literature. The syllabus with its language-orientation could well cause the large majority of secondary school students opting to sit the English A examination, at the expense of English B.

More specifically then, this paper deals with one disturbing aspect of the syllabus : its sacrifice of specialised attention to

the art of literature with special reference to the craft of the novel. The isolation of the novel is a result of personal preference but there is also a need to teach the techniques of poetry and drama.

As there are enough strengths in the Syllabus to permit the imbalance to be corrected (without scrapping the entire Syllabus) once the dangers are recognised, it is proposed first to indicate these strengths under the heading, Favourable Response.

#### FAVOURABLE RESPONSE

It is a laudable attempt by Caribbean officials to correct a situation which had been left over from colonial days viz, the study of Literature, which was set in a foreign country and which contains English characters and English situations. This led students to regard it as something to be learnt, a subject which had no connection with one's life and interests. They saw it as a discipline which afforded no easy access to the inwardness of the language and to a body of allusions, customs and manners. It necessitated a poring over books of social history and mythological and literacy reference before they were able to enjoy a literary work.

The advantages of the present syllabus are seen to be:

- (1) Its emphasis on West Indian Literature.
- (2) The co-existence of West Indian Literature with the

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literature of other countries.

(3) It affords both teacher and student a universality of reference and offers the opportunity to approach the subject 'from the known to the unknown'. One body of writing can be made to complement and supplement the other for the benefit of the whole.

(4) It emphasizes an integrated approach to the teaching of English. Composition, literature and grammar are treated as integrated segments of the structure of English and as such each must be studied and taught in relation to language and not as separate subjects.

But, the integrated approach and the flexibility it can bring to the teaching of English Language and Literature contains within it a great danger, for it seems to initiate a disturbing trend i.e. literature being made to serve solely the needs of language.

To elucidate this observation, it is necessary to cite certain areas of the syllabus:

The Skills and Aptitudes to be Developed

The objectives stated above can be attained by developing the related skills in the student. These skills are categorised under two broad headings Understanding and Expression, which will appear as profile points on the Secondary Education Certificate in English.

1. Understanding

The ability to

- (a) understand meaning conveyed through vocabulary, syntactic structures, sentence patterns, the use of punctuation and paragraph construction.
- (b) obtain factual information accurately i.e.
  - (i) recognise facts stated explicitly,
  - (ii) discern meaning implied,
  - (iii) note time sequence stated or implied,
  - (iv) perceive cause and effect relationships,
  - (v) distinguish between main and subsidiary ideas,
  - (vi) interpret pictorial communications e.g. posters, cartoons, maps, charts and diagrams presenting factual information, and conventional signs and symbols;
- (c) grasp insights from reading literature, i.e.
  - (i) deduce reasons and motives for particular spoken and written communications (other than those with an overt persuasive intent),
  - (ii) appreciate the appropriateness of different uses of tone, register, code and style in talks and speeches in non-literary forms and in literary forms (prose verse and drama) in relation to the author's intention,
  - (iii) detect connotations in the use of words and in the presentation of ideas,

(v)

- (iv) appreciate the apt use of rhetorical devices such as puns, innuendo, exaggeration, sarcasm, irony and symbolism,
  - (v) recognise and respond to the appropriateness or otherwise of the means, including form and structure, used by a speaker, director or author to achieve the intended effect of a talk or speech, letter, article or essay, poem, novel, story or play,
  - (vi) imagine the situation, attitudes, mood and setting of a play and appreciate how they influence the actions and interaction of actors in the performance of that play,
  - (vii) recognise implicit themes;
- (d) recognise and evaluate opinion expressed in various forms, viz:
- (i) distinguish factual statements from opinion statements, and detect connotations in the use of words and the presentation of ideas,
  - (ii) recognise techniques of persuasion employed in social intercourse and by the mass media,
  - (iii) evaluate the effectiveness of language devices used to persuade.

## 2. Expression

The ability to

- (a) use vocabulary items, structures, sentence patterns and punctuation to convey clearly identifiable meanings with facility and spontaneity;
- (b) communicate factual information clearly, concisely and adequately, including the ability to organise and sequence ideas to
  - (i) give clear instructions, explanations, and directions,
  - (ii) give concise reports and summaries.
- (c) give aesthetic satisfaction to others in personal, creative and imaginative language, including
  - (i) organising and sequencing ideas to communicate emotional and imaginative

- interpretations of experience in the form of short stories, poems, scenes or plays, for stage, radio and television, playlets for stage, radio and television and passages for novels,
- (ii) using registers appropriate to particular situations and contexts.
- (d) communicate personal opinion clearly and cogently in language which persuades or dissuades effectively, viz:
- (i) present a logical argument using the differing techniques related to oral and written debate,
  - (ii) present evaluatory comments on proposals and situations of various kinds, e.g. new transport and traffic proposals, community projects and institutions.

(Caribbean Examinations Council,  
Secondary Education Certificate,  
English Syllabus, June 1979  
pages 2-3)

Although Sections 1(c) and 2(c) suggest some concern with literary techniques, Sections 1a, 1b, 1d and Sections 2a, 2b and d indicate a marked emphasis on the acquisition of language skills. What emerges is that officials seemed to envisage a study of Literature as subservient to the needs of language.

Further evidence of this tendency is found in ADDENDUM to the syllabus which deals specifically with the English B Examination June 1981. Teachers are advised that this examination is intended to provide a test of those skills listed on page 2 of the syllabus in section 1(c) and, together with the English A

examinations will provide a complete test of the full range of skills which the integrated syllabus is designed to develop.

It re-iterates that the English B examination is designed to be a test of a candidate's acquisition of those skills that would enable him to pursue the study of literature at a more advanced level.

The Syllabus assumes then, that students would have acquired basic appreciation of the art of Literature. One wonders, whether the syllabus would have provided such students (i.e. those wishing to pursue literature at a more advanced level) with sufficient groundwork.

While one is in general agreement that the study of Literature can improve language performance and that a certain achievement in language is a pre-requisite for any literary study and that collaboration should be encouraged between students and teachers in the two fields, a student who is attempting the English B examination will be a student who has elected at the end of the third year in Secondary School to concentrate on Literature as a specialist subject. It follows therefore that an in-depth study of the discipline is desired. Whereas language can be made to serve some of the needs of

literature and vice-versa, literature involves more than the subtleties and intricacies of language. It is, to some extent, a formal question and it is this lack of sufficient attention to the craft of the novel that is disturbing.

One hastens to add that given the flexibility of the syllabus this deficiency or more accurately, this imbalance can be readily redressed by the literature teacher who is concerned and conscientious enough to attempt it. The contention of this paper is that such an imbalance can be corrected in the third form literature classes of Secondary Schools and it furnishes guidelines for doing so.