ENGLISH IN AFRICA;

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ENGLISH IN AFRICA

A GUIDE TO THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

(With particular reference to the post-primary school stages)
Titles in the series

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Acknowledgements

This book makes little claim to originality. I have tried to present such current theory and practice in the teaching of English as seems most important and most useful to the teacher in the classroom. What I owe to others will, I hope, be obvious from the quotations, and from the references provided for each chapter. If I have anywhere presented as my own an idea which has, in fact, been learned from some other teacher's writings, I am unaware of this and I would be glad to be informed and to make full acknowledgment.

I owe a particular debt of gratitude to Professor P. D. Strevens. He suggested to UNESCO that I should be invited to write this book, and his own books and papers on language-teaching have been most helpful.

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University of Zambia,
As part of its programme to promote improvements in the planning and content of school curricula and in teaching methods, UNESCO produces studies and guides designed to provide educational administrators and school teachers with information and ideas based on international experience.

The present volume aims at giving suggestions for the development of the teaching of English as the language of instruction in English-speaking Africa with particular attention to the problems of the secondary school course. It is intended primarily for African educators who, because of the present pressures in African development, have been appointed to senior positions as administrators, headmasters, inspectors, and teachers of English before they have had the chance to receive formal training in the teaching of English as a second language. However, it is felt that the guidance offered here may well be applicable to a much wider field than Africa.

In March 1967 UNESCO organized a meeting in Tunis for Principals, Chief Technical Advisers and Language Teachers of Teacher-Training Colleges in Africa receiving assistance from UNESCO and the United Nations Development Programme (Special Fund). The more general conclusions of that meeting which concern the teaching of languages of instruction (usually labelled 'second languages' or L. 2 by the specialists) are worth quoting in full:

'If the teaching of L. 2 methods and techniques are to be taken from foreign language teaching, certain peculiarities of the African context should nevertheless be taken into account.

'The very importance of the study of L. 2, often carried over the whole period of school attendance, demands more complex teaching than does a foreign language dispensed a few hours weekly over only a few years of the secondary course.

'As L. 2 serves as a language of instruction for other subjects, the new methods must quickly put the pupil in a position to follow these with the greatest profit. There must therefore be the closest co-ordination between the teaching of L. 2 and the teaching by means of L. 2, and this
requires mutual adaptation: adaptation of teaching of the language to the priority needs of the teachers of other subjects, but also adaptation of the language employed by the latter to the pupils' level.

'Languages of instruction often serve as languages of national as much as international communication, so pupils must be able to express in them their everyday experience in the environment in which they live. In the early stages therefore references to a civilization foreign to the country are rather to be avoided.

'The study of the linguistic substratum, so often recommended, is far from completed, despite the efforts of Africanists. Even if it were more advanced, its use in the adaptation of methods would often raise difficult problems owing to the number and diversity of local languages in most of the countries concerned.

'Lastly, practical considerations must not be overlooked. The difficulty of equipping school buildings imposes the selection of simple, strong and inexpensive material. For reasons of economy, too, methods must not be excessively diversified and efforts must be made to develop teaching material which can be used for large groups of African states. The needs are so urgent that, despite a legitimate concern for perfection, it is necessary to move very quickly and not allow the teaching of L. 2 to deteriorate indefinitely.'

Such is the spirit in which this book was prepared, at the request of UNESCO, by Gordon P. McGregor, until recently Professor and Head of the Department of Education, University of Zambia, Lusaka. A preliminary version was circulated in December 1969 to a number of experienced teacher-educators and bodies specialized in the teaching of English as a second language with a request to communicate their reactions and constructive criticisms to the author.

UNESCO wishes to express its thanks to Professor McGregor and, through him, to those who assisted him for the time and care they devoted to the preparation of the text. The choice of facts presented and the opinions expressed are the responsibility of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of UNESCO.
CHAPTER 1

Aims and Attitudes

The first thing to be said about the experience of learning English as a second language is this: it is not the same kind of experience as learning a first language but the teacher's job is to make it as much like that experience as possible.

Why is English now so important in African education? If teaching and learning in English are to be enjoyable and successful in our schools it is essential that teachers and pupils should understand the answer to this question, and should also understand at least some of the problems which have led up to the present language-teaching situation.

The first mission schools in those parts of Africa which were colonized by the British, were modelled as closely as possible on the best schools the missionaries knew. These were the English elementary schools, which we now call primary schools, and the English public schools, providing what we now call secondary education. Some English was taught in these early African elementary schools, and in the few public school-type secondary schools it was not long before all subjects were taught in English. So, very soon, the ability to speak, read and write English became the mark of the well-educated African in the British colonial territories.

Many of the early missionary teachers learned, quickly and thoroughly, the African languages of the peoples amongst whom they worked. Why then, when they opened their schools, did they not do all their teaching in these African languages? Firstly because the African languages were neither literary languages nor international ones. Even when the missionaries and some of the early government agencies had printed translations of English books and also a few of the works of African oral tradition, there were – and still are – relatively few books in African languages. Also, learning in an African language could not open up to the pupils the ideas and culture of the civilizations to the west and east of Africa. Another important reason why African languages could not easily become the languages of education was that there were too many of them. It is estimated that in what was then called 'British Africa', there were in 1953, 369 languages spoken and
ninety-one of them were used as languages in which pupils were taught in schools.* We need to bear these figures in mind if we wonder why more African countries have not followed the example of Tanzania where a single language, Swahili, is the medium of primary education all over the country. For Tanzania is exceptional among African countries in having a single language which is spoken and understood in all parts of the country. Yet even Swahili which, by the number of people who speak it, ranks as one of the first thirty languages of the world,² is neither an international language nor, if compared for example with English, French, German, Russian, Spanish or Chinese, a literary one. President Nyerere's government has made Swahili the language of national education, as part of its deliberate policy of 'Self-Reliance', and is well aware of the limitations of the language for international and intellectual purposes.

Tanzania was fortunate in not having to import a language which could be understood all over the country. A more usual African situation was the one discovered in Lusaka, the capital of Zambia, in 1966.³ Zambia has more than seventy languages amongst its almost four million people, but there are four main languages of primary education. It had been assumed that Lusaka was in a mainly Nyanja-speaking district, yet when a careful investigation was done in forty-two primary school classes in or near Lusaka, it was found that only 49 per cent of the pupils were Nyanja-speaking, 20 per cent Bemba, 11 per cent Tonga, 5 per cent Lozi and 15 per cent other Zambian languages. Of the twenty-four teachers who taught these classes, only two were Nyanja-speaking, six spoke Bemba and the rest Tonga, Lozi or one of several other Zambian languages. The results were that in some classes Tonga-speaking teachers were trying to teach reading in Nyanja to Lozi-speaking children; in other classes Bemba-speaking teachers were trying to teach primarily Nyanja-speaking children to read from Bemba readers. Even if the children ever did learn to read in an African language under these conditions – and it says much for both their intelligence and determination that many of them did – once they had mastered the difficult art of reading there was little for them to read in their own language. If they, and millions of pupils like them in other African countries, were to cross tribal barriers and to learn something of what the world beyond Africa has to offer, they needed, as soon as possible to learn an international literary language.

These are some of the reasons why many of the countries of Africa which were formerly under British rule, have adopted English as their

* Superior figures refer to sources given under 'Notes and References' at the end of each chapter.
AIMS AND ATTITUDES

national language. This has often been a difficult decision for politicians to take and one that is very often misunderstood. There is one thing which we who are concerned with language teaching should note about it before we go any further. Adopting English as a national language does not imply that the local African languages are unimportant and can now be neglected. It is, in fact, extremely important that African languages should be well taught in primary schools, secondary schools and universities. Not only will such good teaching help to strengthen and develop African culture, but recent educational research has taught us that the good teaching of a language in a school can help the teaching of another language in the same school so that, for example, Bemba, Swahili, or Hausa, well taught, will strengthen the teaching of English or French in an African school.

We have already mentioned that the pupils in the early primary schools learned English and that those few who went on to the secondary schools learned everything in English. It was thought, quite wrongly, that the pupils could learn English in the primary school and then actually learn to use it when they went on to secondary schools. This mistaken theory of language teaching takes us back to the first sentence of this chapter and to a theme which will run through this whole book. All over the world good language teachers are now trying to practise the truth which has been known but ignored for a long time – the Frenchman, Montaigne understood it perfectly 400 years ago – that we learn a language by using it. That is how we learn our first language and that is how we must also learn a second language. 'Using', as we shall see throughout this book, means primarily listening and speaking; all the time we are listening to a language or trying to speak it, we are learning it in the best possible way. This is why it is often said that every teacher is a teacher of language and why it is certainly true, in English-speaking Africa, that every teacher in English is a teacher of English. So this book is not just for those who will teach English as a school subject. It is for every teacher who is teaching any subject in English. It will be most helpful if teachers of English, who are the teachers most likely to read a book of this kind, will pass on tactfully either the book itself or some of the more important ideas it contains, to their colleagues, who teach all the other subjects in their schools. We shall have more to say about this kind of co-operation later in this chapter.

Now let us get back again to our basic principle. If we are to make the learning of a second language as similar as possible to the learning of a first language, we have to know what learning a first language is like. Many of the books on language teaching which are referred to in the bibliography at the back of this book, provide useful ideas on the
experience of learning a first language, and one of the best and simplest accounts is given in a short book by Professor E. V. Gatenby. What do we notice about the learning of a first language if we study a child acquiring its own first language in normal circumstances?

1. That speech comes first. A child learns to listen to his language and to speak it long before he is called upon to read or write it.

2. The child learns the language eagerly because he very much wants to communicate. If he is to achieve the kind of relationship that he wants with the parents, brothers, sisters, and friends he is learning from, then he has to learn to understand and to be understood as quickly as possible. The purpose of his learning is obvious to him and he therefore enjoys it.

3. The child spends a great deal of an average day ‘working’ at his language. He is, as the linguists put it, ‘exposed’ to language for most of his waking hours. It has, for example, been estimated that a child in an ordinary English home, spending most of its day in the company of its mother, as well as of other members of the family and community, will have been exposed to at least 5,000 hours of listening and speaking in English before reaching the age of five and going on to primary school for more formal instruction.

4. The language to which the child is exposed is, even allowing for dialects and occasional peculiarities, reasonably correct. So he learns, with very little conscious effort, to understand and to speak correct forms of English.

5. Closely connected with point 4 above, the child has many teachers and usually enjoys a close and happy relationship with at least some of them. He is therefore corrected early and gently in his use of language whenever he goes seriously wrong, without too much emphasis on being perfectly correct while he is still learning to be fluent.

6. The child learning his first language does not translate, because he has no other language to translate from. Neither, in the early years of language learning, does he ‘learn the grammar’ of his language; he only learns how to use the grammar correctly, and this is a very different thing as we shall see in Chapter 6.

From these facts about how a child learns a first language we can deduce many of the most important principles of learning and teaching a second language. But before we list these principles, let us take an honest look at what is happening, even today, in most of the primary schools of Africa. In these schools, children are spending their best language-learning years trying to master English. The first thing to note is that the pupils are taught by teachers who were themselves badly taught, have been inadequately trained as teachers, and do not
know English well. So the children hear a lot of incorrect English and they learn it thoroughly.

Their teachers will have been persuaded by their experiences both as school pupils and as training college students, that unless a teacher is talking nearly all the time in all of his lessons he is not earning his salary. So our pupils will get plenty of chances to listen – far too many chances in fact – but very little chance to talk, apart from providing ‘echo answers’ to their teachers’ formal questions. And in any case, in a bare, ill-equipped classroom, probably in a remote rural area, and with a badly educated teacher, the pupils will have nothing to talk about in English that they cannot already talk about more fluently and enjoyably in their own native language. So very soon they come to feel that English is a kind of trick to be performed in the classroom at the teacher’s request. They do not think of it as a language to be used in everyday life.

Instruction in reading and writing in English will almost certainly be given much too soon. It will probably start in the first few weeks of the first year, long before the basic speech forms have been mastered, and the child has had a chance to catch up with all the ‘language exposure’ which he enjoyed in mastering his first language. Reading in the primary school will always mean either reading aloud or following in the book while another pupil reads aloud. The process will always therefore be very slow – we shall have more to say about this in Chapter 3 – and will soon become boring. The reading books will probably not have been carefully chosen or graded according to level of difficulty. There will therefore be many mistakes made, most of which the teacher will not be competent to correct. The pupil reading, and all the other pupils listening, will, if they remember anything at all, remember every mistake that is made and later on repeat it in their own speech or writing.

Writing, when it happens, is usually based on exercises in a textbook and often the pupil is given no other reason for it than that he will one day have to do it in an examination. If he is given the chance to write a composition, it is on a subject which the teacher chooses, and lists of suitable words to use in it are often provided on the chalkboard (blackboard). So there is no real point in the activity, and absolutely no question of communicating with anybody. He is simply writing so that the teacher can ‘mark’. There will be, incidentally, in the course of written exercises, a good deal of translation going on from the mother tongue and certainly a lot of instruction in formal grammar, material for which will be provided in the textbook.

To the pupil it will seem that the main purpose of every lesson during
primary education, whether in English or in any other subject, is to get something 'correct'. What he says and what he writes may be dull and uninteresting to himself and to everybody else, but if it seems correct, then the teacher will approve of it. Yet we know that correctness cannot be achieved because, as we noted above, the teacher himself has no clear idea of what is and is not 'correct' English.

There is much more that we could say about the unfortunate effects of primary education on young boys and girls in Africa but these criticisms are enough for the present and we will develop some of them during the course of this book. Let us be clear, however, that in making them, we are *not* criticizing the primary school teachers. Any secondary school or university teacher who has been fortunate enough to have any experience of teaching in a primary school will concede that it is at the primary level that the greatest demands in patience, insight, and teaching technique are made upon the teacher. Africa's primary schools are staffed by thousands of conscientious and hardworking teachers who do the best they can in a difficult language situation. But they have not themselves been taught English properly, nor have they been properly trained in how to teach it. So although it is not their fault, the results of their teaching are often disastrous.

All this can and will be changed in time, for in many countries of Africa there are already schemes at work, under the careful guidance of the Ministries of Education, to introduce teaching in the medium of English from the beginning of primary school. Such schemes need, of course, carefully trained teachers, well-planned courses, and specially prepared materials. With these the children can be provided with plenty of opportunities to hear and speak correct English in and out of the classroom. But let us repeat, that progress takes time and will only come slowly. We have already had setbacks in some African countries where English medium schemes in primary schools have been expanded too quickly and the teachers, supervisors and writers of course materials have not been trained carefully enough. The pupils' command of English has not therefore improved as much as was expected, and Ministry of Education officials have been understandably disappointed and critical.

Having now examined some of the things that should happen and actually do, when a child is learning his first language, and some of the things which actually do happen but should not, when our primary school children in Africa are learning a second language, we can go on to list some of the basic principles of teaching English as a second language. We shall develop these points and add a few new ones in the rest of this book.
I. The purpose of learning English as a second language, which must be very clearly explained to all our pupils, is to use it as immediately as possible.

2. Using the language is not only the aim, it is also the method. We learn English by using it and not by learning about it. We must create learning situations in which our pupils immediately use the English they have learned for things which they want and need to do. The perfect English learning situation, difficult to set up in an African school, would be similar to the first language learning situation, in which the language being learned is the only language in which the pupil can communicate with the other members of his community. (We shall discuss the value of 'English-speaking rules' in Chapter 7.)

3. By 'using' language we mean primarily listening and speaking which must always come before reading and writing. This is true not only when the pupil is first acquiring these skills in the primary school; it applies equally to the learning of individual language items by the secondary school pupil or the adult learner. Whenever a pupil is to be introduced to new vocabulary or new structures, he should always have the chance to listen to them and to speak them before he is asked to read or write them. It has been well-said that language is organized noise; for pupils at all levels, speech should usually come before the reading of written symbols.

4. All the language tasks which we set our pupils and all the learning material which we provide them with, books, charts, records, films, etc., should be very carefully graded. They should be just within the level of skill that the pupil has acquired so that he is not forced into making mistakes by language tasks or learning materials which are too difficult for him, and so that he enjoys the feeling of being able to do what his teacher expects of him. All good language teachers bear in mind the English saying 'Nothing succeeds like success' (see Chapter 2).

5. Even if we carry out these first four principles as carefully as possible, our pupils will still make mistakes. We can ensure that mistakes are as few as possible by regular revision of the language already learned, but when they do occur they should be corrected early and thoroughly so that the correct language pattern replaces the incorrect one in the pupil’s mind quickly and completely.

6. We should allow as much time as we can, in and out of the classroom, for the learning of the second language and should provide as much direct learning contact as possible between pupils and teacher, particularly for the practice of listening and speaking. One obvious way of doing this is to keep language classes as small as efficient administration in the school will permit.

These then are some clear aims for the teaching of English as a second
language and they apply with equal force to both primary school and secondary school teaching. Perhaps we can sum them up best by recalling that language is *activity* and that as language teachers, we are primarily concerned with teaching skills – the four basic language skills of listening, speaking, reading, writing. In Britain and other countries where English is the first language, teachers sometimes debate whether the school subject English is more important for teaching skills or for imparting the culture of the English-speaking world which is so largely expressed in the English language. In African countries, however, there can be little argument on the subject. We must first of all, as language teachers, equip our pupils with the skill to communicate – skill which comes so easily to the first language learner – in order to enable them to gain access to the literary, artistic and scientific culture not only of England but of the rest of the world, which includes the rest of Africa.

We have now briefly examined the primary school experience of the average African pupil and we have made some general statements on the teaching of English as a second language. How can we apply all this to the secondary school English course in an English-medium school which is the prime concern of this book? First of all by recognizing that English is the central subject in the secondary school curriculum, and that all other subjects depend upon it. A word of warning here. To say that English is the central subject in the school curriculum is not at all the same thing as saying that it is the most important subject. If we value the work of our colleagues and want their co-operation, we will be careful how we express the idea that ‘English is central’. One useful way of approaching it, at a staff meeting for example or in individual discussion, is by suggesting that English is the ‘servicing’ subject for all the other subjects in the curriculum. Part of the English teacher's job, we can rightly insist, is to provide pupils with the language skills which they must have if they are to acquire the knowledge they need to progress in the other ‘content’ subjects. It is worth emphasizing the importance of tact in approaching this topic, for the simple reason that teachers of English are almost helpless without the support of their colleagues who teach all the other subjects. Even in a secondary school where English is regarded as important, it is not likely that English lessons will occupy more than one-quarter of the time-table. This means that our colleagues teaching other subjects are exercising the minds and skills of our pupils for the other three-quarters, or if we think in terms of periods, the other 27/36ths of the week. Now we have already established that language skills improve only by continual, correct use. It is almost a complete waste of time and effort for the teacher of English in a secondary school to be insisting on high standards of speech and
writing in English lessons unless these standards are also being maintained in all other subject’s lessons.

How can we expect this when our colleagues have a great deal of subject matter which they must deal with in their lessons and do not have time to show as much concern as we do with language skills? The first stage in the solution is that if our colleagues know that we are supporting or ‘servicing’ their subjects, for example that we take a real interest in all our pupils’ other activities outside ‘English’, that we regard these activities as ideal material for discussion and writing in English lessons, that we consult all other subject teachers about suitable background reading material for form libraries and the school library in history, geography, science and other subjects – then at least our colleagues will be willing to help us. We can show them how to help us by talking to them, and preferably by producing short sets of notes for them, about the kinds of language skills we are trying to foster and the kinds of errors in understanding, in speech, in reading and in writing, which we have discovered are worth spending time on. Pupils are quick to notice when this sort of co-operation is going on between teachers and are very quick to respond to it; they realize that if good English is as important in geography and biology lessons as it is in English lessons themselves then they had better make sure to produce it all the time.

Something else we can do to apply our principles of second language teaching to a secondary school course is to recognize the crucial importance of the first year in the secondary school. We have already analysed briefly the kinds of language learning experience our pupils will have had up to this point. In the first year of the secondary school course we have not only to try to remedy the language faults which have been firmly developed during the previous six or seven years, we have also to try to develop entirely new attitudes towards the learning of English. If this is not done in the first year of the course, it will probably be too late. In tackling this problem in the first year we need a great deal of sympathetic understanding from headmasters, inspectors and school administrators. The first year is so important that only really good teachers – the best English teachers in the school – should teach it. And they should be given as much time as possible in which to do this difficult and important job. How much time? If we assume a normal school week to consist of about thirty-six lessons then twelve lessons of English a week in the hands of a skilled teacher are by no means too many for a first-year class. In any school where enlightened and tactful teachers of English have been able to persuade their colleagues of the central importance of the language there is much to be said for devoting
even as many as half of the lessons of the first term to English. In such a scheme all subject teachers can co-operate closely with the teachers of English to see that the pupils are acquiring and learning to understand the language that they will need for all their subject studies, as well as for the ordinary activities of everyday life.

Now let us consider the 'attitudes' which we referred to above and which form half the title of this chapter.

One of the first aims of a teacher of English as a second language in a secondary school should be to develop in his classroom a relaxed yet purposeful atmosphere in which his pupils can develop new attitudes of enjoyment and enthusiasm towards their study and use of English. We have already noted that, for almost all our secondary pupils, primary education will not have been an enjoyable experience. The main incentive – often the only one – for almost every activity will have been simply that it was 'in the examination'. The teachers themselves may never have been given the chance to experience the pleasures of conversing easily in English, of fully understanding a lecture or a radio or television broadcast in English, or of being completely engrossed in a book written in English and enjoying it because they understood it. Here is a fundamental attitude – not only in the school experience of our pupils but in the whole of the rest of their lives – which we as teachers of English have the chance to change. And there is a practical advantage. If people enjoy something they tend to want to go on with it. If we can help our pupils to enjoy understanding, speaking, reading and writing English then they will go on practising these skills for the rest of their lives. If they do that they have some chance of continuing with the experience which anyone who is bothering to read this book can be presumed to be still enjoying; the experience of slowly becoming an educated man or woman.

When we begin to enjoy practising a skill we begin also to feel confident that we could practise it at a slightly higher level; perhaps there are even more interesting uses of language which we could master. A good teacher of English must show his pupils, from the very first day of their course, that he believes in their ability and is convinced that they can succeed in learning English as a second language really well. He will not be deceived by appearances nor by the unfortunate attitudes towards learning which his pupil's primary school experience may have fostered. He will never call his pupils 'stupid' if they either cannot understand or cannot manipulate language as he wishes them to. He will always assume, what will nearly always be true, that they are able but have been badly taught. Because he wants to make them confident in their own ability he will be careful to prepare all his lessons
with our principle No. 4 above clearly in mind. He will grade all English language work (see Chapter 2) so that what he asks the pupils to do will be just within their abilities. This is not to say that work in English will ever be easy; the teacher will make sure that it is always difficult enough to be interesting but that if the pupils work well in the way that he suggests, they will be able to do it. Whenever he corrects errors from individual pupils whether in speech or writing, he will do it quickly and quietly, with clear and careful explanations, because he knows that no pupil makes mistakes deliberately. This is worth illustrating.

The author’s own ten-year-old daughter recently changed classes in her primary school and within a few days her attitude to learning noticeably improved. She was relaxed, she was ‘enjoying school’, and she was keen to talk about it. After a while we commented on this change and asked if there was anything particular that had helped her to settle into her new class. She explained that whenever anybody made a mistake for the new teacher, the teacher quite gently explained what was wrong to the individual pupil. If it was a speech mistake which several pupils were making, she explained to the whole class. If it was a written one, she marked the line in the pupil’s book where the mistake occurred and discussed it quietly with the pupil, helping her to work out for herself what was wrong. Last year’s teacher had treated mistakes like crimes, had always drawn the attention of the whole class to an individual pupil’s error, and had used ridicule as her standard method of trying to obtain improvement in a pupil’s work. So our daughter’s change of attitude was hardly surprising.

Another important thing about learning – languages or anything else – is that most of us learn better when we understand why we are learning in a particular way. Secondary school pupils will find many of the methods suggested in this book very different from those that were used in their primary schools. Teachers need to remember that their pupils have already been at school for six or seven years and think they know what education ought to be like. When they meet a new method they will tend to resist it and it is worth giving time to explaining to our pupils in simple terms as much as we can about the methods we are using and the reasons for using them. If they know why they are reading simplified books (see Chapter 2); why there is always a lot of discussion in class before they begin to write a composition (see Chapter 5); why, in trying to help them with their English speech, their teacher is spending so much time on stress and intonation and much less on correcting the vowel sounds – ship/sheep – on which they spent hours in their primary school (see Chapter 7); why miming is a
valuable activity even for fourteen- and fifteen-year-old secondary school pupils (see chapter 8) — if they understand why they are being asked to do all these things, they will do them more willingly, and therefore more effectively. And it is important to explain before the activity begins.

The author saw an interesting example of this recently in Northern Uganda. One of his own student-teachers was teaching a very good geography lesson to a senior class which he had not been teaching for long and therefore did not know well. The pupils were only one year away from School Certificate and already showed little interest in anything else but the examination. There was plenty of pupil activity in the lesson, lots of questions and interested and enthusiastic replies from the pupils. Towards the end of the lesson, the student-teacher announced that they were now going to revise what they had learnt. He proceeded to write some clear notes on the chalkboard, leaving out the vital fact in each note. He then told the pupils to copy the notes into their notebooks, completing them for themselves. The pupils looked startled and one of them immediately stood up and said that it was not their job to complete the notes, it was the teacher’s job. The student-teacher replied firmly that he was in charge of the class and the pupils should do as they were told. If anyone wanted to discuss his teaching methods with him, they could do so after the lesson. With a good deal of muttering the pupils got down to their notes, clearly not convinced that this was the right way of doing things. After the lesson, several of them gathered round the teacher’s desk and the two of us discussed the whole problem with them. We explained that this method of teaching assumed that they were clever boys who were capable of thinking for themselves. We added that there were still plenty of teachers from overseas working in Africa who thought Africans too stupid to think for themselves and therefore did all their thinking for them. We believed that a good teacher never did anything for a pupil that the pupil could do for himself. This was the way to learn at school and the way to go on learning long after they had left school. The discussion went on for some time but eventually one of the boys, who was obviously spokesman for the whole group, said that they would now try to follow this way of learning but that nobody had ever told them about it before.

We have stressed throughout this chapter that language is for use in the situations of real life. So is literature, which we shall have much more to say about in later chapters but which, for the moment, we can define simply as language used skilfully about subjects which are important to human beings. Here, as teachers of English, we have another excellent opportunity. Through what they read in books, hear on the radio,
watch on television and listen to in discussion, we can, if we choose, help our pupils to face honestly and understand more deeply the hopes, fears, doubts, joys and conflicts that are part of every human life. Or we can help them to dodge them and pretend that they are not there. Very many teachers all over the world take the second alternative. We must admit that in some ways it is easier. Yet if a teacher of language looks at any book of or about children’s writing or children’s games, he will find that children themselves want to face up to the real problems of life and, in fact, do. In spite of their own honesty, however, millions of young people, all over the world, are still passing through primary, secondary, and even university courses, in which they will never once, in the classroom, have a chance to discuss, freely and frankly, fundamental human experiences such as love, hatred and death.

Again let us use some examples. Do we want, as the Ministry of Education Inspectorate of an African country recently did, to suppress a simplified version of John Buchan’s novel *Prester John*, because, although it is an exciting story, it also reveals Buchan’s ‘racialism’? Or would we prefer to let the book be read quickly and, as soon as any of our pupils notice the obvious prejudices, honestly discuss it in class? Would we have the courage to do this and the insight to then follow it up with a reading of, for example, one of Chinua Achebe’s novels, presenting another point of view on the ‘superiority’ of the white man?

Would we allow our pupils, as no doubt many of us were allowed, to complete a study of Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* without ever seriously discussing what their final emotional attitude towards Macbeth was? There is a serious moral problem here: Good has triumphed in the end and Evil has been conquered. Macbeth has been the agent of evil throughout the play. Are we going to try to get from our pupils an honest personal response, which is likely to reveal that they admire the man Macbeth, although they feel they should not? Or are we going to direct their attention deliberately away from problems because, however interesting they may be, discussion is bound to become complicated, personal, and perhaps embarrassing, and it is easier to set them to work learning passages for context questions?

In lighter vein, but just as serious, when Tom Sawyer tells his brave lie to save Becky from a whipping, do we move quickly on to the next episode in order to finish the book and get the pupils to write notes on it, or do we face the essential moral problem, if necessary by ourselves asking our pupils the question ‘Is lying always bad?’.

There is a real challenge here and one which we must take up. If we fail we are bound to leave our pupils with a subconscious impression that, however enjoyable the reading of literature in English may be, it
has nothing to do with everyday life, particularly with their own.9 Perhaps we can appreciate how great this failure will be, if we consider how little opportunity children get, through the secondary school curriculum as taught in most schools in Africa today, to develop any kind of awareness of moral problems. There should be tremendous scope in the teaching of history and even more in the teaching of religious knowledge. But in fact the teaching of these subjects, like almost all the others, is so directly aimed at the target of School Certificate examination success, that serious discussion of moral problems hardly ever happens. There should be scope too in background studies to science—the moral implications of nuclear weapons, vivisection, artificial insemination, and now heart transplants. But none of these are ‘in the examination syllabus’ and so the teacher is spared a good deal of serious argument. “All” teachers find it difficult—because it is difficult. Yet no one who has thought hard about what teaching ought to be should find such discussion positively embarrassing and unpleasant. In African schools today the pupils, who almost certainly read about these problems in the newspapers and magazines outside the classroom, leave school confirmed in their suspicions that what happened in their lessons has nothing whatever to do with real life.

So far, we have discussed how to change pupils’ attitudes towards the enjoyment of learning, towards understanding the learning process and towards the moral problems on which a good secondary education unavoidably focuses attention. What about pupils’ attitudes to each other? Might we want to change these and can we do so? ‘Competition’ versus ‘sense of community’ is one approach that we might consider here. Throughout their primary school days most of our pupils will have been competing against each other for a very limited number of places in the next stage of education. Many of them will have taken examinations in order to pass into upper classes of the primary school. They will all have competed in a nation-wide examination for entrance to a secondary school. It may well be that the economic position of most African countries will dictate that competition remains a feature of primary education for many years to come. But once our pupils have reached the secondary school, there is no need for them to work against each other any more, and they can far more usefully and helpfully work together.10 It is even easier in teaching a language than in teaching other subjects to allow pupils to work at their own speed. Chapters 4 and 5 of this book provide detailed advice on how this can be done in the teaching of reading and writing. But the perceptive teacher will remember also that in helping children to improve their skills of understanding and speech, it is never necessary to compare one pupil’s work
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with another or to establish an order of merit. Every piece of work can be judged on its own merit, with praise or criticism given according to whether it is better or worse than the last piece of work by the same pupil. Pupils should be encouraged to work together, in pairs, in groups, and as a whole class, commenting on each other’s speech work, proof-reading each other’s writing, comparing notes on books read, and generally sharing their language experience and trying to help each other to improve. They will find this way of working strange at first and may even resent it, but if a teacher will persevere and will explain to his pupils why he believes they should work in this way, he will probably find that they will soon become more relaxed and enthusiastic. His language lessons will proceed in an atmosphere of lively enjoyment, co-operation and mutual respect – qualities which are never far away when good education is in progress.

Once he can demonstrate in his own lessons that his pupils of mixed abilities work effectively in pairs, or small groups, or as individuals working at their own speed, the teacher of English is in a strong position to lead his school staff in a careful re-examination of the principle of ‘streaming’. It is not helpful to be too emphatic about this subject, especially where, as in most African countries, there is no special provision for backward or educationally sub-normal children. It would be foolish to deny that the presence in many African secondary school classrooms of children who are in serious need of ‘special education’ methods is a great problem. Yet streaming is probably one of the most dubious of the many British educational practices which have been taken over without any serious questioning into the African educational system. Few teachers who have read the recent studies by Brian Jackson of the effects of streaming on children in English schools are likely ever again to feel quite the same confidence in the streaming procedure. It is clear that, however convenient streaming may be for the teacher, its effect on children can be permanently damaging. Moreover recent experiments in Europe and America in which groups of bright children have been presented to a teacher as backward children in need of special educational treatment, and other groups of genuinely backward children introduced as exceptionally talented, have demonstrated that children can very quickly become what they have been regarded as by their teachers. If they are treated as intelligent they will respond intelligently; if the teacher shows that he believes them to be slow and unresponsive that is how they will behave.

Rather than divide the pupils in a whole school into permanent streams it is better, where possible, to separate them into ‘sets’ for the study of several different subjects. English and mathematics make a
good start here and it is best to extend this subject division as widely as possible. Almost all children have some talent and by this method every child comes to feel able at some subject and takes a pride in being in one of the top groups for it. It is extremely valuable to the English teacher if, even on a voluntary basis, there can be opportunities for children to shine at art, music, drama and if possible dancing, all of which activities can be closely linked with formal classroom English.\textsuperscript{13} If the school can group its children in this way, it will support its teachers' efforts to help each pupil gain enough confidence in his own individuality to discover what it is that he can do well. Once he has found his talent he will want to work at it. The serious danger of streaming is that children placed in low grades, from which, as Jackson has shown, they seldom escape, gradually come to believe that they have no talent, and therefore no value. They stop wanting to try. This would be bad in any society. It is even worse in modern Africa where we are educating to make 'Independence' a social and political reality. Every African country today needs every individual talent it can find, and needs it as fully developed as possible.

Finally let us give a little thought to the teacher himself. We have suggested some of the things he should do. What sort of person should he be? Professor Edgar Castle, in a recent book for teachers in Africa,\textsuperscript{14} gives us excellent guidance on this. Clearly no teacher will attempt all the things we have suggested in this chapter unless he is already trying, as Professor Castle urges all teachers, to be friendly towards his pupils, to be encouraging, to work \textit{with} them, to give them a chance to contribute to every lesson, to show that he values what they contribute. Equally important is his own attitude to learning. If he is to teach well he must go on learning and developing new interests both within and outside his own teaching subjects. One simple indication that a teacher is still learning – an indication which pupils are quick to notice – is that he is continually reading new books. He is often to be found in the library, but he does not confine himself to reading library books. He also buys his own and is glad to lend them to anyone else who is interested. Some years ago on an inspection of rural secondary schools in Uganda, the Inspector of English reported, with some insight, that one of the things which troubled him most was the 'distressing booklessness of so many teachers' homes'. Educational journals are important to the teacher too, and readers of this book can get some guidance on these from the bibliography at the back. There is one journal which must be recommended here and now. Every interested teacher of English as a second language should either subscribe himself or make sure that his staff room subscribes, to \textit{English Language Teaching}. This journal,
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published three times a year by the Oxford University Press, contains very useful articles and book reviews written by practising teachers of English as a second language.\(^\text{15}\)

In *English Language Teaching* teachers will find much guidance from their fellow teachers, but another very helpful and more localized method of exchanging ideas with colleagues in the language teaching field is to join, or form, an English Teachers’ Association. Such regional associations organized in large towns or in provinces or districts with their headquarters located in the English department of a well-equipped secondary school, have had a powerful effect on the morale and efficiency of teachers of English in West Africa. They are now developing also in East Africa and Zambia and their value to the English teacher can be immense. If any teacher of English finds there is no local association which he can join, he should give serious thought to starting one, preferably in liaison with the nearest office of the national Ministry of Education.

The good teacher, then, goes on learning, but he never forgets that however much he knows, he does not know very much. He is never embarrassed by being ‘caught out’ by a pupil who asks a question that he cannot answer. In fact he is glad that he has been able to encourage a pupil to ask a question he had not thought of, or to apply the knowledge learned in a lesson to a situation that he himself had not considered. When this happens – and it should happen fairly often to the teacher who is really stretching his pupils – teacher and pupil find out the answer together.

Education begins at birth and lasts our whole lifetime. The teacher is always on the way to becoming a well-educated person. He takes as many pupils along with him as he can, and one of his great delights is to find that some of his pupil-companions are getting more out of the journey than he is. He wants them to go further than he himself can towards the goal that none of us ever quite reach. He gives as good an example as he can, but he will never let his pupils be satisfied only with his example. He remembers the wise teacher who told his pupils: ‘Don’t look at me; look where I am looking.’\(^\text{16}\)

NOTES AND REFERENCES

tion. Lusaka, University of Zambia, 1968 (School of Education Occasional Paper No. 1, pp. 14–16.)


7. For further guidance on this see Fletcher, B. A *A Philosophy for the Teacher*. London, Oxford University Press, 1961, Ch. 1.


‘Now do you all understand?’ In primary and secondary schools all over Africa this is probably one of the most frequently heard questions. The teacher who asks it almost certainly imagines that he is checking efficiently on the success or failure of his lesson. What he does not realize is that the question ‘Do you understand?’ is only useful if it is asked of pupils who know what understanding feels like. This may seem a curious statement and we shall take the rest of this chapter to explain it.

In proposing, in our first chapter, some aims and attitudes for the teaching of English as a second language, we looked at the kinds of experience which the primary school leaver, entering the African secondary school, had probably had. We will now look a little further into this experience, remembering that, although the introduction of English medium teaching schemes and new primary school methods will eventually change the experience, it has not been changed yet. The teachers of this generation must plan their secondary school work on the basis of what actually has happened to their pupils in primary schools and not what will one day be happening to such pupils, or what they wish had happened.

There are a number of things that the primary school teacher of the past fifty years needed to know about himself and his pupils, and probably did not know. Once again we must stress that we do not blame him for this; we blame his own school education and his training in his Teachers’ College. He probably did not know that in almost every lesson he talked too much. (In his own Teachers’ College he was nearly always lectured at; so he thinks lecturing is a good teaching method, which it is not.) He did not know that he was probably talking too fast; that he was not allowing his pupils to talk enough; that he should have been asking his pupils questions very often and very carefully; that all his teaching was too closely related to words alone and not related nearly enough to pictures, objects and experiences. Closely linked to these things that he did not realize about his own teaching were things he did
not know about his pupils. He did not know how many English words they knew or which English words; how long an English sentence could be before it became too long for them to follow its meaning clearly; how long they could listen to anyone talking English before their attention began to wander. He probably never noticed that whenever he asked them that question, ‘Now do you all understand?’ they nearly always said, ‘Yes’ because it was both easier and more polite. Nor did he realize that when he asked them questions about a passage of English, they soon became skilful at giving him the answers he wanted. They answered his questions on the passage in words which were in the passage and which they probably did not, in fact, understand. But they knew that these were the words he wanted, so these were the words they gave him. Above all – and this takes us back to our first paragraph – he did not realize that this completely confused experience of primary education, far from seeming strange to his pupils, seemed perfectly normal and acceptable. This was how all their friends found education; they did not know what it was like to completely understand and therefore they never really expected to.

All this may seem very depressing but once we admit what has been happening to our pupils in their primary schools, we can do something about it. What makes a teaching and learning situation difficult? Firstly the attitudes of teacher and pupils. We have made some suggestions about these in our first chapter and we shall be trying to illustrate them throughout the rest of this book. Secondly, the choice of teaching materials. By teaching materials we mean books, charts, pictures, films and film-strips, tapes, gramophone records and – probably most important of all – the teacher’s own speech. Obviously if teaching materials are too easy, pupils quickly become bored. If they are too difficult then pupils get disheartened and are forced into mistakes. Unfortunately these mistakes do not easily correct themselves at the second attempt. The teacher, as we have already suggested, may not recognize many of them as mistakes, and so the pupils practise them and eventually learn them thoroughly. ‘Learning our mistakes’ is one of the most common processes in language learning. If it is done often enough in these vital early years, the mistakes become very difficult to remove. This is why so much time has at present to be given to ‘remedial English’ in secondary schools all over Africa. Teachers spend hundreds of hours trying to undo the damage which has been unnecessarily done at the primary stage, and they often fail because it is too late. So having insisted in our first chapter that language must be used and practised as much as possible, we must add a condition. Language must be used and practised correctly as often as possible and pupils must be given as little
chance as possible to make mistakes. A strange but completely true saying about language teaching is that the way to deal with mistakes in language is not to let them happen.

All these difficulties with carefully learned mistakes and the resulting hours of remedial work, are caused by badly chosen teaching materials. How can we choose them well? By thinking carefully about three things:

1. The subject matter.
2. The vocabulary.
3. The sentence structure.

Clearly the difficulty of the subject matter affects the difficulty of the words and sentences which are used to discuss it. But the subject matter is also important in itself. The teacher must find out as much as he can about what his pupils have learned in class, and about the limits of their experience outside school. This is obviously difficult for an expatriate teacher who does not know Africa well, but it is often difficult too for an African teacher. He may either have been overseas for some years, or may have been away for his secondary education and his teacher-training course to a large African city. He will probably have forgotten how narrow the experience of a rural child in Africa can be. (At the same time he must remember and use the advantages of the rural life the pupils have led. There are some important things that his children will know and understand better than schoolchildren in urban Europe.) If the teacher will think about this problem and study the textbooks that his pupils have used in previous years - and also their class library books if they have any - he will quickly get a clear idea of the level of subject matter which these pupils will be able to manage.

It is worth urging here the great value of carefully kept teachers’ notes in all subjects. These need not be detailed, but if they are regularly written by teachers, and then stored carefully where all staff can consult them, they can be very helpful both to teachers and pupils. One simple method is to label stiff-covered exercise books for every subject for each class and keep them on a prominent shelf in the staff-room. Each teacher then enters brief notes week by week of the work he has done with each class in his subject. However frequent staff changes then become - and these can be a great problem in a period of rapid development in newly independent countries - the newly arrived teacher always has a clear idea of what work has been covered. It is not satisfactory for the new teacher simply to ask the pupils what they have done. Firstly, because as we have suggested above, they will not be confident of knowing anything thoroughly and, secondly, because they will always
be interested to see whether a new teacher has anything to add to what the last teacher had to say on a particular subject. So if the new teacher asks 'Have you done simultaneous equations?', or 'Ohm's Law?', or 'Any of Shaw's plays?', or 'Any work on reading speed?', the answer will nearly always be an inaccurate, but not dishonest, 'No, Sir.'

So the choice of subject matter does not demand much more of the teacher than an awareness of the right sequence of learning items in the subject and some careful investigation into what the pupils have already learned; neither does the difficulty of sentence structure. Sentences get more difficult as they get longer. The first thing for the teacher to realize here, and to pass on to his pupils, is that there is no need to write long sentences. J. A. Bright in some research for his secondary school course *Patterns and Skills in English*, discovered that the English sentence seems in fact to be growing shorter. Two hundred years ago, the novelist Smollett was writing sentences with an average of well over thirty words in them and a hundred years ago Dickens was averaging just under thirty. Yet in the twentieth century the works of the novelists Wells and Hemingway and the more scholarly books of the philosopher A. N. Whitehead, and the economist J. K. Galbraith show an average sentence length of only eighteen words. If such short sentences can serve the purposes of many distinguished writers, they can certainly serve ours and our pupils'. The second thing to note is that the English course which our pupils used in their primary school days was almost certainly written in sentences of limited length. Even the book used in the last year of primary school would have contained very few sentences with more than twenty words in them. This is a safe guide for us. The teacher of English in the first form of a secondary school should assume that his pupils will have difficulty with any writing which contains many sentences longer than twenty words each. Not only should he ensure that his pupils are not asked to read such material, he should also make sure that his pupils do not write long sentences. They will almost certainly try to and will equally certainly go wrong in the attempt. They should be advised to keep their sentences short, certainly until they have had enough reading and writing experience to enable them to master long ones.

This point is worth illustrating. A senior educational official in one African country some years ago, wrote a geography book for use in the top forms of primary schools and the first forms of secondary schools. He was an experienced teacher and paid careful attention to the difficulty of the subject matter in his book. There was no doubt that the geography in it was suitable for the pupils for whom it was intended. He was also aware that words could cause difficulty. So he took the typescript of his
book along to a lecturer in English in the local University College and asked him to examine it carefully to see if the vocabulary was suitable for the pupils he had in mind. The lecturer took samples from different parts of the book and decided that the level of vocabulary difficulty was about right. Yet after the book had been in use for six months in schools, complaints were coming in that it was too difficult and that the pupils could not manage it. When the published version was examined again it was discovered that the average length of the sentences throughout the book was thirty-four words. This was almost twice as long as the pupils were used to and able to manage. This single defect made the book, until it had been revised, quite unsuitable for upper primary and lower secondary use.

We have dealt fairly briefly with the problems of subject matter and sentence structure. Vocabulary needs more detailed attention. Here there are three questions which the teacher will want to ask. He will want to know, firstly, whether he can find out what words his pupils already know; secondly, whether these are the words that they need to know; thirdly, how he can help them to learn more words as they need to. We will look at the third problem at the end of this chapter and confine ourselves to answering the first two questions now. But before we can answer them we must be clear what we mean by knowing a word. Do we mean that we have a rough idea of its meaning so that it gives us no trouble when we read it? Or do we mean that we understand its meaning thoroughly and can use it with confidence in our own speech and writing? For teaching purposes, this, as we shall see, is an important distinction.

Most of us have probably wondered at some time how many words we know. How big is our own vocabulary? The question conceals the important fact that we all have two vocabularies. There is the relatively large number of words which we understand when we meet them, clearly enough for the normal purposes of listening and reading, but which we do not understand well enough to use or to define. Within this first large vocabulary, there is the much smaller vocabulary of words which we can use confidently and accurately in speech or writing. The first large vocabulary, which in a well-read speaker of English might run to 40,000 or 50,000 words, is usually known as our receptive vocabulary. The smaller one, which for most of us is probably no more than 7,000 or 8,000 words is our reproductive vocabulary (some books about language refer to them as our passive and active vocabularies). We shall come back to this distinction at the end of this chapter when we consider how we can help our pupils to increase their vocabularies.

In thinking about the words our pupils already know, and whether
these are the words they need to know, it is important to establish that we mean know for receptive purposes. We are considering the words whose meanings they can recognize clearly enough but which they cannot themselves use confidently. The teacher of English to the first form of a secondary school can find out fairly accurately what words his pupils know by carefully examining the English courses which they used in their primary schools. Unless these courses were extremely badly chosen or published more than twenty years ago, they will have gradually introduced his pupils to a carefully graded receptive vocabulary during the six years of their primary schooling. These then will be the words that they know. But will they be the words they need to know? Fortunately the answer is ‘Yes’. Their primary school courses will almost certainly have been written or revised in the light of a remarkable piece of sustained research which has provided us with a list of the words which a learner of English needs to know first. We shall investigate this in some detail, partly because it is good for us as teachers to appreciate the thoroughness and insight which go into good research, and partly because it is important for us to understand how the scholars assessed the value of an individual word in English.

Research on word lists in English had begun before the 1914–18 war but the first important product of the research was published in 1921. This was E. L. Thorndike’s *Teachers Word Book of Ten Thousand Words*. Thorndike was not directly concerned with the teaching of English as a second language, but he was interested in children and what they read. He was in fact trying to produce some guidance on the selection of vocabulary for better reading materials for American children. (It is interesting and rather humbling to note that a similar list had already been compiled for the Spanish language.) Thorndike’s method was both industrious and precise.

In order to find out which were the 10,000 most frequently used words in English, he studied 4,500,000 ‘running’ words in a wide range of writing in English. We should note at this point that however carefully and scientifically word-counts are done in any language, they will always be slightly influenced by the individual scholars; however carefully and widely they may range for the materials from which they extract their words, their selection still remains a personal one. Thorndike chose the following:

Ten chapters of *Black Beauty* by Anna Sewell.
Three chapters of *Little Women* by Louisa Alcott.
Washington Irving’s *Legend of Sleepy Hollow*.
One issue of the *Youth’s Companion*.
Thirty High School Readers.
VOCABULARY SELECTION

Two High School arithmetic textbooks.
Two High School history books.
Twenty-five High School foreign language textbook vocabularies.
The concordances of the Bible, Shakespeare, Milton, Pope, Cowper, Wordsworth and Tennyson.
*The Garden and Farm Almanac for 1914.*
Hundreds of newspapers, and business and private letters.

In assessing the importance of individual words in all this material, Thorndike made allowances for certain important factors. First, he allowed for the fact, that in some specialized material, words which might not normally be very common would occur very frequently. For example, in the *Garden and Farm Almanac for 1914* the word 'garden' will obviously occur more often than in normal speech or writing outside this specific topic; similarly in Anna Sewell's book *Black Beauty* the words 'black' and 'beauty' can obviously be counted more frequently than in other books and some allowance must be made for this. Secondly, he gave words extra 'credit' if they could be used in a wide range of situations. For example, in a certain limited situation the words 'bough' and 'branch' are almost equally useful. But once we get off the subject of trees, it is clear that 'branch' is a much more useful word since in addition to the 'branch' of a tree, we have a 'branch' of a family, a 'branch' of a railway line, a 'branch' of knowledge, etc. etc. Thirdly, Thorndike considered words of the same spelling but totally different meaning as single items in his list. For example, the word 'bear' may refer to a large, fierce, furry animal, to the act of carrying a sack, or to putting up with pain. As far as Thorndike was concerned in his word-count, 'bear' was counted every time it occurred and was regarded as a single word.

From this formidable exercise of counting and assessing 4,500,000 words from many different sources, Thorndike discovered something which should be extremely valuable to all teachers of English. It was that the 1,000 most common English words in his list comprised 75 per cent of any written material in the English language. This simple, but important, claim was soon supported by the distinguished linguist and language teacher, H. E. Palmer, who had been researching for many years at the English Language Institute in Tokyo. Palmer went even further than Thorndike and suggested that his own selection of the first 3,000 most frequently used words in English would account for 90 per cent of any written material in the language. It will probably never be possible to provide absolutely precise figures and we must remember that the scientific specialization of our own time has added a large
number of difficult technical words to the English language, some of them used in quite ordinary speech or writing. But except for the most highly technical writing and conversation, we can accept Thorndike's claim and as teachers of English, we should bear it carefully in mind. It implies that if we can teach a new learner of the language these first 1,000 words, we have already equipped him with a simple way of expressing in speech or writing, most of what he will need to say.

In 1931 Thorndike extended his list and republished it as a *Teacher's Word Book of Twenty Thousand Words*. At this point the Carnegie Corporation realized the possible influence of such word-counts on methods of teaching English as a second language and upon the preparation of teaching materials for that purpose. In 1934, the Corporation gave a large grant for a group of linguists, including Thorndike, Palmer and West, to take the investigation further. In 1936 this Carnegie Committee produced its *Interim Report on Vocabulary Selection* which was first published in New York and was another step towards providing the learner of English as a second language with a list of the words he would need most. The Committee was even more precise than Thorndike had been in considering the factors which limit the usefulness of any word, and gave particular attention to the following:

1. How often each word occurred.
2. Its structural value, i.e. for building English phrases and sentences (linguists distinguish between structural words 'the words we talk with' and content words 'the words we talk about').
3. Its geographical range.
4. Its subject range (we have already had the example of 'branch' and 'bough').
5. Its value in defining other words.
6. Its value in building other words.
7. Its value for varying the style of speech or writing (this applied to very few words, e.g. 'said', 'told', 'cried').

But the Carnegie list was still primarily a count of how frequently word forms occurred. It did not take into consideration how frequently the different meanings of the same word were used. In 1938, the American scholar, Irving Lorge began a count of the number of occurrences of each Oxford English Dictionary meaning of each of the words in the Carnegie Interim List. He based his research on the examples of each word in 5,000,000 'running' words taken from many different sources. It was the combination of Lorge's work on meaning, with the Carnegie Committee's work on frequency, which finally made possible the publication of a book which every teacher of English as a second language should know well. It is a *General Service List of English Words* edited by
Dr Michael West, one of the original Carnegie Committee. Here are some of the reasons why this book is important to the teacher of English in the secondary school:

1. It tells him what are the 2,000 most important head-words for a pupil learning English as a second language to know (by a head-word, we mean, for example the word ‘certain’ from which such words as ‘certainty’, ‘certainly’, and ‘uncertainly’ are derived. The General Service List contains a total of about 6,000 words including derivatives from the basic 2,000 head-words). We can assume, remembering the findings of Thorndike and Palmer, that within the vocabulary of the General Service List our pupils can find a simple way of saying almost anything they will want to say in English.

2. The teacher can reasonably expect his pupils in the first year of a secondary school to have a receptive knowledge of most of the words in the list. He can assume this because all the approved primary school English courses for use in Africa which have been published in the last fifteen years are based on the graded introduction of the words of the General Service List.

3. These first two points imply that the teacher now has a vocabulary within which to teach in the first year of a secondary school with some confidence of being fully understood by his pupils.

4. It provides a vocabulary within which any piece of written English – except the most highly technical – can be rewritten for the young learner and will still read intelligibly, though not of course with the same style. The General Service List therefore provides a vocabulary within which not only readers for the English lesson, but textbooks for all subjects should be written for the first year of the secondary school - with the few essential technical terms of the subject added.

These are the strengths of the General Service List and we should also at this point note some of its limitations. It does not pretend to be a completely adequate reading vocabulary. It is a foundation vocabulary on which the learner can gradually build, and is therefore very much more useful than an ‘island’ vocabulary such as C. K. Ogden’s Basic English. It does not establish a complete order of learning within the 2,000 head-words though if we study the individual entries carefully the list does offer much help towards establishing such an order. Let us examine a typical entry and see what we can learn from it.

The word ‘game’ is a common enough word and we would no doubt all expect our first year pupils to have met it. But which meanings of it are they likely to know? And which meanings are worth teaching them? Here is what the General Service List has to say about it.
GAME - 638

1. (amusement, children’s play)
   Fun and games
   It’s not serious; it’s just a game – 9 per cent.

2. (with the idea of competition, e.g. cards, football, etc.)
   A game of football
   Indoor games; outdoor games – 38 per cent.

3. (a particular contest)
   We won, six games to three
   I played a poor game
   Playing a losing game (10.5 per cent) – 23 per cent.

4. (games = athletic contest)
   Olympic Games – 8 per cent.
   ? ( = animals 11 per cent; game-/, game-birds, etc. 5 per cent).
   ( = fun, make game of, 0.5 per cent).

This entry tells us that in a count of 5,000,000 words, the word ‘game’ occurred 638 times. In 9 per cent of these occurrences, it meant children’s play, amusement; in 38 per cent of the occurrences, it had the idea of competition as in football, card games, etc. The sign ‘?’ outside the brackets means that the compiler suggests that the meaning ‘animals’ may be omitted by the teacher, even though it accounted for 11 per cent of the occurrences. This, of course, would depend on the reading material that a teacher chose for his classes but Dr West’s hints are well worth the consideration of all teachers. The brackets round the last entry, without the question mark in front of them, indicate West’s firm view that the meaning ‘make game of’ should not be taught. Any teacher of English as a second language who will spend a few hours browsing through this book, will find that his ideas on the relative importance of the meanings of common English words will be considerably changed by it. This is not a cheap book – its current price all over Africa is the equivalent of about seven dollars or three pounds sterling, but every secondary school teaching in English should have a copy, and staff should consult it often.

Another useful product of this important research was Thorndike and Lorge’s Teachers’ Word Book of Thirty Thousand Words. This now needs revising and, because it is based on American usage, contains a few entries which may strike speakers of British English as odd, but it is still extremely valuable to the teacher because:

1. It tells him how common a word is in standard English reading matter and therefore whether the word is worth teaching for receptive or for reproductive use.
2. It gives the teacher guidance beyond the 6,000 words of the General
Service List, sufficient for teaching purposes throughout the whole of the secondary school. If a word is not in Thorndike and Lorge it is probably not worth teaching at all.

3. The General Service List enables us to simplify reading material to a level suitable for first-year classes; the Thorndike and Lorge List enables us to go beyond this to assess the difficulty of books and teaching materials for use at any level in the secondary school.

It is likely that anyone reading this book, who is a teacher of science as well as English is by now somewhat suspicious. We have noted several times that our generalizations about words apply to all except very technical writing. But this is exactly the kind of writing that the science teacher is dealing with all the time. Fortunately the vocabulary experts have been aware of this and another book which should be available in every secondary school is An Elementary Scientific and Technical Dictionary by W. E. Flood and M. West. This has been specially compiled for science teachers and pupils in the second language situation. It defines a wide scientific and technical vocabulary within the words of the General Service List and about sixty other technical words which are themselves listed at the front of the book and clearly and simply defined. So it provides exactly what the second language pupil and teacher require: definitions of scientific terms in words which they are certain to be able to understand.

Having considered subject matter, sentence structure, and vocabulary, we now have a number of standards by which to judge our own speech in the classroom and the teaching materials which we provide for our pupils. We shall say more about reading materials and in particular, about gradually increasing their difficulty, in Chapter 4. Two important questions remain. What happens if the teacher, as many teachers do, decides to ignore the problem of vocabulary and use whatever books happen to be available at his school? Secondly, even if the teacher does take note of all this research on vocabulary, how does he help his pupils to enlarge their vocabularies or, to put it simply, how does he teach words? Let us deal with the first question first.

The teacher may not suffer at all in this process, but his pupils certainly will. To appreciate what happens when pupils are asked to study reading material which is too difficult for them, it will be useful to reflect on a lesson which the author saw attempted by one of his student-teachers in East Africa. This was a keen and able student anxious to do his best for his pupils. He had chosen, with at least a little fore-thought, a book from the Institute of Education library which seemed to him suitable for use in the lower forms of a secondary school. It was called Simple Experiments in Biology, and he accepted this title at its face value,
Being new to the school in which he was doing his teaching practice, he knew little about the reading experience of his pupils. He did know, however, that they came from rural village communities which supported themselves entirely by agriculture. So some basic science of plants and soils seemed appropriate. Early in his first lesson with a second-year class, whose reading experience had been so limited that few of the pupils had receptive vocabularies that went beyond the words of the General Service List, he asked one boy to read the following passage. This is what the passage sounded like to the boy who was reading it and to the rest of the class listening:

‘Musua is formed by the action of crimo-gorgosasms on syllybose, etc., in plant remains, by the breakdown of the gigbom of plants and also from the sighfeelia of soil spunjeye. It has noboidal properties including great water zubarding power. The sizfikkle and agricultural properties of the soil are a gumshut of its collifloatid and quantitative composition. Small tarpickles cause tepontion of and relative pin-nooniability to water, while large tarpickles have the verserve effect. . . .’

The passage therefore did not make sense to the pupils for reasons which we will explain in a moment, though it is probably hardly necessary to explain to the reader who has followed this chapter so far. But the teacher, being conscientious, realized that the class might find the passage difficult, so he asked them questions about it. He was, of course, mainly interested in the scientific facts which the passage attempted to express and therefore his questions were straightforward. First he asked ‘How is musua formed?’ Back came the answer ‘By the action of crimo-gorgosasms on syllybose.’ So the next question was ‘And how do the crimo-gorgosasms act on the syllybose?’ Without much trouble the pupils answered ‘By breaking down the gigbom of the plants.’ ‘Anything else?’ One pupil was able to suggest that the ‘sighfeelia of soil spunjeye’ has something to do with it and the teacher then drew a diagram on the board. The lesson proceeded and the pupils were able to answer quite intelligently, in the words of the passage which they did not understand, questions about the behaviour of small tarpickles and large tarpickles and so on. Here now is what the passage looked and sounded like to the student teacher.

‘Humus is formed by the action of micro-organisms on cellulose, etc., in plant remains, by the breakdown of the lignin of plants, and also from the mycelia of soil fungi. It has colloidal properties, including great water absorbing power. The physical and agricultural properties of the soil are a function of its qualitative and quantitative com-
position. Small particles cause retention of and relative impermeability to water, while large particles have the reverse effect.'

The most important deduction to be made from this lesson is not that the teacher was stupid, because he was not. It is that even when pupils are confronted with a written passage which makes no sense at all to them, it is perfectly possible for questions and answers to go to and fro in the time honoured fashion. The teacher asks the questions, in words taken mostly from the passage, and the pupils answer entirely in the words of the passage. *They do not know what these words mean, but they do know that they are the words that the teacher wants.* In short, although no understanding of the passage is possible, because the pupils simply do not know the meaning of most of the words which it contains, *behaviour which very much looks like understanding can and does take place.* (The reader will appreciate, if he has followed the argument of this chapter so far, that in order to arrive at the first version of the passage as it seemed to the pupils, we simply remove from it all the words which do not appear in the *General Service List* and substitute for them nonsense words of a similar shape. So the passage, which is perfectly intelligible to the teacher, is nonsense to the pupil.) Incidentally this particular extract emphasizes the point made earlier that it is not, by any means, simple, even for the native English speaker, to predict which words are likely to qualify for the basic 2,000 that the second language learner needs. We all tend to think that short words are simple. But this exercise reveals for example that ‘humus’ and ‘reverse’ are not included in the *General Service List* whilst ‘quantitative’ and ‘composition’ are.

One further lesson to be drawn from our student-teacher’s performance is that teachers should not take the titles of books as a clear indication of what the books contain. If the student had made only a brief *survey* of the book – we shall say more about this in Chapter 3 – he would have discovered that these experiments were simple only for a certain class of student. The book had, in fact, been written for students in Colleges of Education who had English as their first language and who had already passed the Higher School Certificate Examination. Even with the aid of Flood and West’s *Scientific Dictionary*, the language of the book was still much too difficult for lower secondary school pupils in Africa.

Now for the final question ‘How do we teach vocabulary?’ The short answer is that we seldom do; but it is an answer that needs to be qualified and explained. We said in our first chapter that one of the English teacher’s jobs was to make the learning of the second language as similar as possible to the learning of the first language. When we learn
our first language we are not formally taught its vocabulary. We 'pick it up' by listening to conversation and eventually by reading books. The second language learner should do the same. During his secondary school course we want him to progress from a receptive vocabulary of about two thousand words to one of at least 10,000 and, if possible, more. He certainly will not acquire a vocabulary of this size by paying 8,000 visits to his dictionary, or by committing word-lists to memory. Listing 'useful words' on the chalkboard and in pupils notebooks is still a common practice in secondary schools. It can be a considerable help to the language learner who is acquiring his first 400 or 500 words of the new language but beyond this point it is almost useless because of the extent to which the meaning of a word varies according to its context. It is certainly not worth the time and effort of the secondary school pupil. He will increase his vocabulary by meeting words again and again in speech and in print. Each time he meets a new word, the words around it will give him some idea of its meaning; he guesses the meaning of the word from its 'context'. Once he has met a new word several times, he will realize, particularly if he has had a little suitable instruction from his teacher, that this is a word worth mastering. He will then go to his dictionary for precise definitions of the various meanings that the word can have. (One of the dangerous by-products of word-lists is the false idea that one word has one meaning.) So the good student is constantly enlarging his receptive vocabulary through listening and reading and is also more slowly enlarging his reproductive vocabulary. The words he meets and needs most gradually progress from his receptive to his reproductive vocabulary.

This implies that even the teacher of English rarely needs to teach the meanings of words in class. Whenever he is tempted to teach the meaning of an individual word, he should first ask himself whether his pupils require the word for receptive or reproductive use. Only if they need it for reproductive use should he attempt a definition of its meaning as used in the passage which his pupils are studying. If he does define it, he should be careful to warn the pupils that the word may have other meanings in other contexts and they can find out what these are from their dictionaries. It is extremely important – in line with the principles of vocabulary selection proposed in this chapter – that the pupils should be equipped with dictionaries which define words in words which they already know. We shall say more about this when we consider dictionaries in Chapter 4.

We ended our first chapter with a short motto for teachers. We can end our second one with another, which sums up all that we have said about these difficulties of subject matter, sentence structure, and
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vocabulary which must be removed before our pupils can begin to enjoy the strange new feeling of complete understanding. What we have suggested is simply this: 'Always start from where the pupils are. Find out what they know, and build on that.'

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. For the views of British University and College students on the effectiveness of lecturing as a method of teaching see Marris, P. The Experience of Higher Education. London, Routledge, 1964, Ch. 3; and University Grants Committee, University Teaching Methods (Hale Report). London, H.M.S.O., 1964, Chs. 6 and 7.


3. It was quickly published in England also, but has long been out of print: Interim Report on Vocabulary Selection. London, King and Son, 1936.


6. For further information on 'Basic English' and the distinction between 'foundation' and 'island' vocabularies see Morris, I. 'Principles of vocabulary control', in Lee, W. R. ed. op. cit., p. 32–39.


10. For a more detailed treatment of the teaching of vocabulary to secondary school learners of English as a second language see Bright, J. A. and McGregor, G. P. op. cit., Ch. 2.

11. A medical colleague of the author's in the University of East Africa equipped himself with the essential Luganda vocabulary for his profession by sticking twenty new words to his mirror every morning and learning them as he shaved. For about three weeks this practice worked well; after that its effectiveness declined rapidly and he found that he could pick up new terms best through conversation with Baganda nursing staff.
'Reading maketh a full man . . .', said Francis Bacon many years ago, ‘. . . and therefore if a man read little he had need have much cunning to seem to know that he doth not.' Most teachers would agree that reading is the central skill of secondary education in all subjects. Yet at present, all over Africa, we are sending out from our secondary schools pupils who have read very little and who will therefore, as Bacon suggested, have to be very clever to conceal their ignorance. In the first chapter of this book, we laid great stress on the importance of enjoyment in education partly because unless pupils enjoy what they are doing in school, they will stop it as soon as they can. This applies as much to reading as to any other school activity. Not only in Africa, but all over the world, young men and women who have not enjoyed reading or had the chance to do plenty of it, stop reading as soon as they leave school. In spite of the value of modern mass media – radio, television, newspapers, etc. – it is still largely true that if they stop reading books they stop becoming educated, and most of the education they have already had will be wasted.

Many of the pupils who leave secondary school and immediately give up reading had already come to dislike reading before they even entered their secondary school. Once again, in suggesting what goes wrong in a secondary school and what we can do to put it right, we must analyse our pupils’ primary school experiences. They have already had six or seven years of reading. What has it been like? We have suggested in Chapter 2 that the books available for them to read in the primary school may not have been carefully graded. They may either have been too easy, or, more probably, too difficult; in either case any teacher who has read this far will now know what to do. But another important point about the books which are available to our primary school pupils is that there are not enough of them. As we shall suggest at some length in Chapter 4, in the early stages of reading quantity counts. Our pupils must read a lot of books, which means that there must be a lot of books available in their schools. By books we do not mean course books in English or textbooks in other subjects but supplementary reading
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materials including stories, plays, biographies, travel books and simple background reading to other subjects such as history, geography and science. We can, unfortunately, assume that the pupils now working in our secondary schools will not have been exposed to this kind of reading material in their primary schools, certainly not in large quantities. Furthermore the normal reading procedure to which they will have become accustomed is, as we have already said, unprepared reading aloud from course books and textbooks, with each child in the class reading a paragraph or two while the rest listen. They are, as we have said, listening to mistakes. There are bound to be plenty of these in unprepared reading aloud in any situation, particularly when children are trying to read a second language. Every pupil listens to the mistakes, learns them, and so learns to read aloud badly. The teacher may try to provide a good example of reading aloud but is almost certainly incapable of doing so.

(Many teachers, understandably troubled by the low standards of English speech and reading in many of the English broadcasting services in Africa, may feel that in this chapter and throughout the book, the author has undervalued the importance of reading aloud. All he would say in defence is that reading aloud is certainly a most useful skill and one which requires far more careful and specific training than many of our radio announcers are presently receiving. But it is a skill which can only be adequately developed after the technical skills dealt with in this chapter and in Chapter 7 have been acquired. Only when the teacher is sure that his pupils are making good progress with these technical skills should he devote any time to the practice of reading aloud. When pupils do practice it, they will, of course, always carefully prepare any material before reading it aloud; their reading skills have already suffered for many years as a result of unprepared reading aloud in the primary school.)

But the learning of mistakes is probably not the worst result of this method of reading. Even more damaging is the fact that every child in the class is limited to a reading and listening speed of between 110 and 130 words per minute which is the fastest speed at which English can be read aloud intelligibly. The very fact that the children are required to read aloud restricts the speed to these limits and a number of other bad habits make things even worse. Many teachers encourage children to point with their fingers at the word they are reading. Others suggest, when pupils have made at least some progress, that they should use a ruler under the line which they are reading and move the ruler down the page as they read. Although many teachers demand that pupils sit up straight while a teacher is talking to them, they pay little attention
to the pupils’ posture when they are reading. So the pupils get into the habit of moving their heads while they are reading and probably, without noticing it, moving their books about a good deal as well. If they are reading aloud they are also, of course, moving their lips. All these effects of unprepared reading aloud soon become so habitual that pupils continue with them even on the rare occasions when they are encouraged by their teachers to ‘read to themselves’, that is, to practice silent reading which is a far more important skill than reading aloud.

All this is unfortunate but hardly surprising. It is only in the last fifteen years or so that scholars in many countries have attended to the problem of how to train readers of varying ages and levels of skill to read faster and more efficiently. The teachers in our present primary schools will almost certainly have had no guidance at all at their teachers’ colleges in how to develop reading skills. Nor have many of our secondary school teachers. In this chapter we shall try to provide some brief guidance on efficient reading and will also refer to a number of useful books for those who would like to learn more about it.

We are concerned here with the actual physical skills and habits involved in reading rather than with the intellectual skills of appreciating literature. We need to know what the average secondary school pupil is now able to achieve when he reads, and what he needs to be able to achieve to tackle a secondary course successfully. It may be helpful to start with a target. By the end of a secondary school course leading to a School Certificate examination our pupils, whether they are going on to further formal education or not, need to be able to read a wide range of materials at a wide range of appropriate speeds. They need to be able to read unsimplified unabridged English in, for example, novels, short stories, biographies and travel books written within a vocabulary of 10,000 to 15,000 words at a speed of between 250 and 300 words per minute. To do this they must have mastered the skill of always reading words in groups, not as single words. They should also have learned to read, moving only their eyes, keeping their head, lips and tongue still, and without what the linguists call ‘sub-vocalizing’. (This means reading ‘aloud’ to oneself; not actually making the sounds of the words, but hearing the sounds of the words ‘in the mind’ and therefore, of course, slowing down to the normal ‘reading aloud’ speed.) They must also understand the difference between quick reading and close study and be able to decide readily which of these two different procedures is appropriate to the material they are presented with. This combination of abilities then is the target. The reality is, at present, very different.
In most African secondary schools – because of the effects of reading in the primary school which few teachers in the secondary school try to remedy – pupils reach the School Certificate class without any of these skills. Most of them are still able to read only single words at a time as a result of continual attempts to read material that is too difficult for them. They have developed the habit of stopping to puzzle over every third or fourth word and are soon unable to read in any other way. Their reading speed probably varies somewhere between 140 and 180 words per minute. They have only one invariable reading speed. They believe, what their teacher has probably suggested to them, that if they want to read something efficiently and really remember it, the slower they read it the better. They have no idea how to adjust their reading speed to the material that they are reading. In case teachers may think that the quoted average speed of 140 to 180 words per minute an underestimate, it may be worth mentioning that the author recently tested a class of thirty-four students in a second year course in an African university. The average reading speed in the class was 165 words per minute. One student achieved only 130 words per minute and had therefore obviously not improved her reading speed at all since her early primary school days.

What can the secondary school teacher do to improve his pupils reading and at what stage should he do it? The many reading speed courses recently produced for adults tend to obscure the fact that both the idea and the practice of faster, more efficient reading can be introduced at quite an early stage of education – probably in the upper primary school and certainly in the first years of the secondary school. The two essentials are that the children shall have first been taught the basic mechanics of reading and secondly that there should be a wide range of materials available for them to practise on. There are now a number of helpful books available on the teaching of faster reading to school children and they provide materials for testing reading speeds for students at various levels.1 We can only attempt in this chapter a brief account of how a teacher may tackle the problem but perhaps the best method of discovering the problems and the possibilities is for the teacher first of all to follow a course in faster reading himself.2 If he does so, preferably working with a group of interested colleagues, he will discover that such courses really can work and can then confidently pass on what he has learned to his own school pupils.

How should he introduce the subject to his pupils? First by explaining to a first-year secondary school class why faster reading is useful. It does not need a very imaginative teacher to demonstrate with the aid of a chalkboard that a pupil with a reading speed of 300 words per minute
can read three times as much in the same time as a pupil with a reading speed of 100 words per minute, and to show what this can mean in terms of magazines, articles and whole books. The next step is to administer a simple reading speed test. This can be made both more interesting and more amusing if the teacher first watches his class during a silent reading period and then tries to estimate the average reading speed in the class and even make specific guesses at the speeds of some of the faster readers. The test is administered as follows: each pupil in the class is given a copy of a reading passage of known length and suitable level of difficulty. At a signal from the teacher everyone begins to read silently. The teacher, using a watch with a second hand, marks up the passage of time on the chalkboard in ten-second intervals (if the passage is more than, say, 600 words long the teacher need not start marking up the time until at least a minute and a half has gone by). The pupils have been warned before they start reading that as soon as they finish they are to look up at the chalkboard and write down the last figure which the teacher has written on it. The first test is best done with a passage of between 500 and 800 words so that within five or six minutes every pupil in the class will have finished reading and will have a note of the length of time it took him to read it. The level of understanding of what has been read is then tested by means of multiple choice questions. These are asked on the main topics of the passage, not on minor details, and all the pupil has to do is to choose for each question what seems to him to be the most accurate of four answers (the books by Fry, de Leeuw, Bright, and Wainwright, listed in the references to this chapter all contain suitable examples of such multiple choice questions on reading passages). Provided a pupil is able to answer a reasonable number of the questions showing that he has understood the passage, he can then work out his reading speed by dividing the number of words in the passage by the number of minutes it took him to read it. So at least every pupil in the class knows his present level of attainment. There is no need for the test to be in any way competitive nor for pupils, at this stage, to disclose their reading speed to anybody but the teacher. The teacher should ask the pupils to keep their own records of progress by drawing three columns in the back of one of their exercise books for the date and number of the test, the speed at which they read it and the level of comprehension, as a percentage, which they achieved. Pupils should be trusted to keep their own records and it is worth explaining to them that in education they can only cheat themselves; it will not in fact help them at all to enter in false results and so achieve, on paper, a reading speed greater than their actual performance.
After this first test of reading ability the next step – if we are to be realistic, particularly in rural African secondary schools – is to provide a simple test of vision. This should certainly be done for all pupils whose reading speeds seem low, and preferably for all pupils. This is not to suggest that the teacher should pose as a doctor or an optician but simply that he may help some pupils immensely if he discovers, as he almost certainly will, that they just cannot see well enough to read better. Any teacher who is interested can easily obtain a simple ‘E’ chart or testing card from an optician in the nearest city. (In fact in some African countries health authorities are already insisting that every school should be equipped with such testing cards.) The need for such tests was underlined in one East African school in which the author helped to administer them. In one class of thirty-two pupils, thirteen were found to have defects of vision bad enough to prevent them from improving their reading. It is not suggested that governments or parents will always be willing or able to pay for glasses for such pupils, though the school should obviously do everything it can to help those with seriously defective sight. What is suggested is that even if such tests of vision only result in handicapped children being placed nearer to the chalkboard and being shown more consideration by teachers who now understand the physical reason for their apparent mental slowness, they will have been worth doing.

The next stage is to explain to the class, which has now completed its first test, the curious truth that we read better if we read faster. If we are to persuade pupils of this, we must explain a little about the way the human memory works. (We shall have more to say about this below when we consider study methods.) The important truth for young secondary school pupils is that since the human memory is simply not capable of remembering everything that is presented to it, it is better for any student not to try to remember everything. Nobody who reads a novel ever remembers all of it. Even a skilled reader probably ends up with no more than a firm grasp of the plot, some clear memories of the most important characters, and a sense of the quality of the writing. This incidentally is an excellent example of what we were talking about in our first chapter – taking pupils into our confidence. Some years ago the author ran a short course in reading speed and study methods for students at Makerere University College in Uganda. The most remarkable discovery made during this course was that almost all the students attending it believed that they individually were the only members of the human race who forgot almost everything they read. It was clearly an enormous relief to them all to learn that this happened to everybody including their lecturer. Teachers who share with their
pupils the truth that they too forget what they read, will almost certain-ly find that their students quickly become not only more confident in their work, but more relaxed about it. They stop worrying about something that it is quite useless to worry about.

Stated like this, it sounds simple enough to persuade a class of first-year secondary pupils that we read better if we read faster. But we will not, in fact, persuade them by telling them. The only thing that will really convince them is experience. So the next stage in the process of helping pupils to improve their reading speed is to take them through a series of tests over a period of a few months. All the tests are conducted in the way we have described above but it is important to vary the kind and the length of test passages. Experience shows that pupils can soon learn to read passages of between 500 and 700 words very fast. If, from time to time, along with such passages, they are confronted with longer passages of 2,000 or 3,000 words, a much truer indication of their progress is obtained. The books by Fry, Bright, and Chapman-Taylor and Ballard listed in the references to this chapter provide good examples of suitable passages of differing lengths. Teachers will find it both useful and enjoyable to select additional passages, both from books and periodicals, and may occasionally need to abridge or simplify such material. Although fairly simple material should be used for the first few passages, it is important that the test passages should not all be written, as Fry’s are, at a level of vocabulary and structural difficulty lower than the normal reading of the pupil in English and other subjects. When the teacher chooses his own passages, he also has the opportunity to construct his own multiple choice questions. This is a particularly useful skill to acquire, though not an easy one, and again teachers will find a wide range of examples of multiple choice questions in the books recommended below. It is not essential that the reading test questions should be of the multiple choice variety. Short single sentence questions requiring brief answers, perhaps even single word answers, are just as effective. Indeed they often demand a more precise recall of the material read, and therefore make greater demands upon the pupil. They certainly make fewer demands upon the teacher because they are much easier to prepare than multiple choice questions.

But the test passages are not the most important feature of any course in reading improvement. As with all our other language skills, the most important element is practice. The teacher must keep continually before the pupils the slogan ‘You will read better if you read faster.’ He must ask them from time to time – in the early stages of a course he may ask every day – whether they are practising their faster reading in their spare time on novels, background books, newspapers,
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magazines, notices and any other kind of suitable material. A reading improvement course is an ideal activity to illustrate the rule which we suggested in Chapter 1 – that progress depends upon the pupils' efforts. The teacher can explain how any pupil can learn to read faster, but he cannot do the work for him. The teacher should always be ready with encouragement and advice on particular difficulties but he must impress upon the pupils that his advice is no substitute for their efforts.

On the other hand, in the early stages of any reading improvement course the pupils must have confidence in their teacher. The notion that faster reading is better reading seems illogical. When the teacher translates it into particular targets and suggests that the best result in the comprehension test on each reading passage is not 100 per cent correctness but 70 per cent correctness, the pupils will find it even more difficult to believe. As we have said, a clear explanation of the possibilities and limitations of the human memory helps here, but pupils who have been taught quite differently for many years will not find this easy to accept. Luckily there are a number of physical difficulties which hold back the slow reader, which the teacher can analyse in a way that will convince pupils that he knows what he is talking about. Once they begin to act on his explanation they really do begin to read faster; their confidence in their teacher and therefore in his curious advice about memory then increases rapidly.

The first of the physical difficulties is Movement. The teacher should explain that in good reading only the eyes move. It is a good idea to ask the science teacher to fit in, parallel to the early stages of a reading speed programme, one or two elementary physics lessons on light and how the eye functions. These lessons will both amplify and confirm the simpler explanations given by the teacher of English and pupils will grasp the importance of focusing. It should then be easy for them to understand that the more often the eyes have to focus on the same group of words, the slower will be the speed at which they send suitable messages about the words to the brain. It can be helpful, particularly in a school where games are played with enthusiasm, to compare reading with physical skills. In all ball games it is vital to 'keep your eye on the ball'. A goalkeeper must keep his head still as he is watching an approaching forward about to shoot. A batsman must keep his head still as the bowler runs up to deliver the ball. If a diver moves his head at the beginning of his flight, he will probably spoil his dive. In each case it is a matter of the time it takes to focus again on the object. And so it is with reading. Movement of the finger along the line, or of the ruler down the page, is fairly easy to dispose of if the teacher explains to the class how much quicker it is possible to read silently than anyone can
read aloud. In a reading speed course we are trying to correct any habits which prevent the meaning of the black symbols on the paper from travelling to the brain by the quickest possible route.

In dealing with the further physical problem of Vocalization (the habit of reading aloud quietly, frequently met in Europe in old people reading newspapers and magazines) and the mental problem of Sub-vocalization (imagining the sound of the words as we read them) it is again important to stress the difference between silent reading and reading aloud. We stress that silent reading is much more important and useful, and explain to pupils what has been the effect on them of the reading habits they have acquired in primary school. (Once again the teacher advises that the pupils must make the effort.) It is then easy enough for pupils to stop vocalizing, since they can hear themselves doing it. Sub-vocalizing is more difficult to deal with and it is probably best to simply encourage pupils to read so fast – and to keep telling themselves that they are going to go faster – that it is no longer possible for them to think of the sounds of the words at all as they read.

Probably the most difficult physical habit of all to correct is that of Regression (continual backward movement along the line of print). Again it is worth following our basic principle that all students learn better if they understand why they are being asked to behave in a particular way, and explaining to our pupils how they have acquired this habit. It is, as we have implied in Chapter 2, the result of continually meeting new words which are not understood. In their primary school days our pupils were very often forced back to the beginning of a sentence or a phrase by a strange word whose meaning they did not know but could not read any further without understanding. So they soon became physically incapable of reading even simple material without continually ‘regressing’. Once they understand why they do it, we can help them not to do it. To this particular aspect of reading improvement, the suggestion made earlier, of starting pupils with very simple vocabulary and structure, is important. Pupils will only begin to break the habit of regressing if they are, first of all, told to go straight on whether they meet a new word or not, and secondly, are given, in the early stages, practice material which contains no words which force them back to the beginning of the phrase or sentence. Not until they are given reading matter which they can work steadily and intelligibly through, without stopping to work out new meanings, will they begin to want to read in this way. It is helpful, as Fry suggests,\(^6\) to demonstrate on the chalkboard what good eye movements look like and then to get pupils to work in pairs inspecting each other’s eye movements.
One pupil sits reading his book while the other pupil stands looking just over the top of the book and watching the movements of the first pupil's eyes. If the teacher is confident of his own reading speed and ability it helps for him to invite pupils to watch him reading. He knows that he can provide them with a good example of three or four eye movements or 'fixations' to a line of print.

We have emphasized that reading improvement courses can and should begin early in the secondary school. But we cannot expect young secondary school pupils to benefit from the kind of 'crash' courses which are sometimes provided for adult readers. Teachers will be well advised to spread their reading improvement courses over at least two or three months and probably longer. One useful tactic is to begin the course at the beginning of the first or second term in the first year, to keep it going steadily throughout that term and then deliberately to allow a vacation, of probably three or four weeks, to intervene before the course is completed. This makes clear to the pupils that the tests in themselves are not the most important feature of the course but that practice must go on through the vacation on suitable materials which the teacher should be able to provide. Any teacher who has worked through a reading improvement course himself and made an honest assessment of his progress and overall result, will emphasize to his pupils that there are no short cuts to faster reading and no cheap rewards. Some instructors claim average improvements of 200 and 300 per cent amongst their pupils at secondary school and college level. These 'improvements' have usually been calculated by simply noting the difference between the speed achieved in the first test of the course and the speed achieved in the last test. This is not the most accurate or the most useful measure. What is important to any student at any level is the retained increase in reading speed. If we are to assess this honestly we can only do so some months after the last test has been completed. The author has found that the most effective tactic with students at school and university level is to conduct a course over a period of five or six months, to keep reminding the students, after the course has been completed, of the importance of going on reading fast, and then to retest them three months after the course ended and again three months after that. Any increase in reading speed which has been retained, without further formal testing or practice, six months after the end of the course, is likely to be retained for life. It is perfectly possible for all students at all levels, particularly those whose starting speed is only the basic 100 words per minute or so of primary school 'reading aloud', to achieve retained increases of 100 per cent or more. But average retained increases are very much less sensational than this. It is important for
teacher and pupils to acknowledge at the outset that an overall increase of 30 or 40 per cent is an excellent reward—especially considered over a lifetime's subsequent reading—for a total effort of not more than twenty hours of formal instruction and five or six months of spare-time practice.

To illustrate what seems to have been an average course result the author tables opposite the achievements of some of his own students on a course run at Makerere University College in 1963 and 1964. The students were all experienced primary school teachers, ranging in age from their early twenties to their late thirties. They had obtained one-year UNESCO Fellowships to attend a full-time course to prepare them for posts as tutors in colleges of education for primary school teachers. The Reading Course was based on Fry's material, with longer supplementary passages selected and edited by the tutor from such sources as The Listener, the Uganda Argus, Time Magazine and Longmans Bridge Series Readers. It will be noted that the average retained increase in reading speed was 40 per cent. The students are now scattered in various African countries tutoring student teachers of English preparing to teach in African primary schools. No doubt by now many of them will have conducted similar courses in reading improvement for their own students and if, as we hope, they and some of their colleagues read this book, they will be able to verify that their own achievements on the reading improvement course were as indicated in this table. The final test to determine the result of the reading speed course was given six months after it had ended, right at the end of the students' year at the University.

By happy coincidence one of the students rejoined the author three years later as an undergraduate at the University of Zambia. Conscious of the new demands of his university course he decided to try to improve his reading speed still further by regular practice and by taking another course. He has managed to push his normal reading speed well above 300 words per minute, a good achievement considering that the damage done to his reading habits in his primary school days had gone unchecked for at least ten years after he had left primary school. It is a good achievement but by no means a remarkable one and one that is open to thousands of other students in Africa if their teachers will provide basic guidance on the lines suggested here, and if they themselves will do the work.

A successful course in faster reading will not, however, solve all our pupils' learning problems. Reading fast in order to remember the general gist of a passage or a book is an important skill. But more frequently in his secondary school career a pupil is faced with a section, a
### OVERALL RESULTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Start of University Course 10 October</th>
<th>End of University Course 8 June</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Speed</td>
<td>Comprehension %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.H.</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B.</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B.S.</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C.G.</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C.E.</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D.P.</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D.J.</td>
<td>265</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G.B.</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J.</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K.L.</td>
<td>256</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K.C.</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K.M.</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K.C.</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L.G.</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M.B.</td>
<td>200</td>
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<tr>
<td>M.J.N.</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>40</td>
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<td>M.J.</td>
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<td>M.S.</td>
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<td>M.G.</td>
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<td>N.V.</td>
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<td>N.S.</td>
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<tr>
<td>N.O.</td>
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<tr>
<td>N.J.</td>
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<td>70</td>
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<tr>
<td>O.G.A.</td>
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<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P.B.</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.A.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.A.</td>
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<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T.N.</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W.S.</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**At beginning of course:**
- Average Reading Speed: 179 w.p.m.
- Average Comprehension: 68%

**At end of course:**
- Average reading speed: 249 w.p.m.
- Average Comprehension: 74%

**Average percentage increase:**
- Speed: 40%
- Comprehension: 7%
chapter, even a whole textbook from which he is required to learn and remember a large number of facts and details. For this skill, techniques of study quite different, and in some ways quite opposite, to the skills of faster reading are required. A competent teacher of English should understand the basic principles of study method and be able to pass them on to his pupils. Efficient study is very closely related to skill with language and if the teacher of English does not teach pupils how to study, it is unlikely that any other teacher will.

In any advice which the teacher of English gives on methods of study, he must continually stress that the aim of a secondary school education is to enable pupils to work on their own, and to think for themselves. As we have suggested in Chapter 1, it will not be easy to persuade them of the value of this aim since their whole primary education will have contradicted it. But when they actually feel it working, when they experience the end products of good guidance in study methods—free use of the library at any time, the responsibility of project work, the mutual criticism of group work, the creative experience of writing what they like on a subject they have chosen for a class magazine—they will come to both believe in independent study and positively enjoy it.

When a teacher first introduces the topic of study he is likely to find that his pupils have two fundamental illusions. The first is that there is, if only one could discover it, an easy way of studying. The teacher must counter this at once by explaining that there are two kinds of study methods, effective ones and ineffective ones—and neither is easy. One of the first things that pupils need to be told and shown is that study is an active business; we learn best of all by doing. There is an old proverb that might profitably be displayed in every classroom in Africa: ‘If I hear I forget. If I see I remember. If I do I understand.’ The second illusion, particularly common among relatively unsuccessful school pupils, is that the reason why they do not do well at school is that their memories are bad. The teacher should explain that there is rarely much wrong with a human memory, but there is usually a great deal wrong with the way we use our memories. Psychologists have, in fact, discovered that we have not one memory but several different memories which enable us to recall different kinds of facts and experiences. There seems to be practically no ‘transfer of learning’ between these memories. For example, improving our skill at remembering the names of people who are introduced to us will not help us at all to remember the names of artists who painted famous pictures that we know. If we want to improve our memory for faces, we must practise at remembering faces. If we want to be better at remembering poetry, the only effective method is to practise learning poetry. Generalized courses of memory
training are usually ineffective. If we will use and train our different kinds of memory sensibly, we will find that they gradually come to serve us much more effectively.\textsuperscript{10}

Our secondary school pupils in Africa, especially the majority who study in rural boarding schools in which they live for three-quarters of the year, will need advice not only on how to study but also on where and when to study. As with instruction in faster reading, we can give, in this short chapter, only a brief outline of what they need to know. Teachers will find very much more detailed accounts in the books on study techniques recommended in the notes in this chapter, and can use them to help not only their pupils but themselves, to improve the efficiency of their study.\textsuperscript{11}

First of all, \textit{Where to Study}. Psychologists have made a number of surprising discoveries about the places in which students choose to study. Careful analysis of the habits of students in schools and colleges has shown for example, that students who work regularly in the same place perform more efficiently than those who frequently change their place of study. Regular habits are important in every aspect of study and regular use of the same room or library desk seems to be one of the most effective. It is important, when studying, to be comfortable -- \textit{but not too} comfortable. Study undertaken sitting at a desk on a hard-backed upright chair has been shown to be more effective, with most students, than work on similar study tasks done sprawled in an armchair. Good students usually clear their desks before they begin to work. They make sure that they have on their desks only the books and materials which they need -- and as few distractions as possible. Photographs, newspapers, books on other subjects, should all be removed. If they are not, it is almost certain that when the student begins to find his work difficult and tiring, he will be distracted from it by the unconnected objects on his desk which suddenly seem to take on a new interest.

Again on the subject of choosing a place to study, some of the most interesting experiments have been carried out in connection with noise as an interruption to study. Most of us, particularly when we are having difficulty with our studies, find sudden noises exasperating. But this does not necessarily mean that a noisy place is unsuitable for study. Controlled experiments have shown that when two groups of students of parallel ability attended similar courses in totally different surroundings, the group studying in the middle of a factory complex in a large, industrial city performed rather better than the second group located in a remote and quiet country house. Although we need to bear in mind that individual students vary considerably in their ability to tolerate noise, nevertheless, the conclusion to be drawn from these
Experiments can perhaps best be summed up by the slogan 'Don't worry about the noise and the noise won't worry you.'

In any well-equipped school which offers a choice of places for study - perhaps a library, a reading-room, several classrooms, and some small individual cubicles or studies - it is often most efficient to study regularly in the library or reading room. There the accepted (possibly imposed) discipline of silence and quiet behaviour will ensure that study is not interrupted. An individual cubicle or study room can be a very comfortable place to live in but it is also very vulnerable to interruption from friends who may not feel like study nor need to study at the same time as oneself. A useful motto here is 'In study your friends can be your worst enemies.' So although pupils should be encouraged to work in groups and pairs as much as possible to avoid excessive competition, they should also be advised that they should sometimes study where their friends cannot get at them.

The most important discovery that the psychologists have made about When to Study is that regular and consistent study is more effective than frenzied bursts of activity. Most teachers will, at some time, have had a fellow-student or colleague who would do nothing for several days on end and then suddenly for two or three days and nights, make a determined and exhausting effort to catch up with all that he had missed. Some students even claim to be unable to study any other way. Nevertheless, investigation shows that the all-out effort, preceded and followed by periods of idleness, is the least efficient of all methods of study.

It is helpful, both for the boarding and day-school pupil at secondary level, to be encouraged to make a study time-table for the week, the month and the term. A weekly time-table for, say three hours of individual study each evening should be divided into specific subjects and topics within the subjects. Study will be most effective if periods are set aside for each subject roughly the same length as the class-room periods common in the school. It is, for example, less efficient to spend the whole of a three-hour evening studying history than to break up the period into three separate hours of, say, history, geography and French. If the time-table is broken up into periods of an hour, then five minutes spent relaxing between each hour period are well spent. Relaxing means doing anything that the student enjoys and that has not the slightest connection with the study in hand. An important principle in revising and consolidating new work is that roughly the same amount of time is needed on the personal time-table for such revision as was needed in class for the first treatment of the new subject. So if the pupil, for example, has spent an hour and a half in the
physics laboratory discovering, with the teacher's guidance, some new principles of magnetism and electricity, then he should spend about an hour and a half in the evening going over the work again, clarifying and emphasizing all the points covered. Any good study time-table will take account of the fact that an average adolescent needs eight hours sleep a night, needs to spend up to two hours a day on meals – allowing short rests before and after – and also needs about two hours complete relaxation from study.

A rather simple but helpful piece of advice is that it is most inefficient to try to study when one is angry, worried, unhappy, or tired. It is more effective to try to first remove the cause of the emotion – perhaps by discussing it with other people involved – and in the case of tiredness, to have a short sleep before trying to study. It is, for instance, seldom worth trying to study immediately after a very vigorous physical or sporting activity. In his own school and university days, the author recalls many hours wasted after rugby and cricket matches, sitting at his desk going through the motions of studying and in fact, accomplishing nothing. He would have been far better occupied either asleep in bed or relaxing at some social activity which had no connection at all with his study.

Yet another important recent discovery of the educational psychologists, which lies somewhere between When to Study and How to Study, is that not only is it true that we forget nearly all we have read or listened to, but that the forgetting is nearly all done almost immediately. Suppose for example, that we attend a lecture. Within an hour or two after it has ended, we will have forgotten at least half, and probably more than half of what the lecturer said, however interestingly he may have said it. The same is true of reading a book. From this fact we can make a deduction which is extremely important to study method. Since we do nearly all our forgetting almost at once, the best time to revise work which it is important for us to remember fully is as soon as possible after we have first undertaken it. If we wish to remember more of the lecture than we can within an hour after hearing it, then we should revise our notes, if possible discussing them with fellow students, as soon as possible after the lecture and certainly the same day. A second revision a week or so after the first, will ensure that almost all that we need to remember is remembered.

William James, the pioneer psychologist, said many years ago 'All improvement of memory consists in the improvement of one's habitual methods of recording facts.' The most common way of storing facts is, of course, to write them down, which means that the making of efficient notes is one of the most important of study skills. But since this is
This brings us to the core of the problem of How to Study which is how to get the best out of books. We have implied in the early part of this chapter that reading and studying are not the same process. Reading demands a straightforward progress as quickly as possible through the material from beginning to end with no serious attempt to remember details. The reader is satisfied with a general grasp and remembrance of what he has read. Close study on the other hand implies the wish to remember details. It therefore depends upon intelligent repetition and revision of the material to be studied. A good summary of an efficient way to study any reading material is provided by the SQ3R formula described in the books on study technique by Fry and Maddox.\textsuperscript{13}

SQ3R describes a technique of study and stands for the words: Survey, Question, Read, Recite, Revise.

1. **Survey**: When the pupil first picks up a book and is trying to decide whether or not he should study it, he should survey it quickly. He is trying to find out as much as he can about who it was written by and for, and what information it is intended to convey. To do this he will quickly skim through the author’s preface, study the list of contents, look at acknowledgements and notes to assess the scholarly scale of the book, look at the chapter summaries, if there are any, and quickly look through a chapter or two. He will have a clear idea in his mind of what it is that he wants to find out about the subject of the book and will be able to make up his mind after a survey that need not last more than five or ten minutes whether this is, in fact, the book for him.

2. **Question**: The next step, after having decided to study the book, is one which is much neglected, even by students who are familiar with the SQ3R formula. It is to jot down, as an aid to positive study, some of the questions which the student expects the book to answer. This process ensures that the reader gets from the book what he wants – he may of course get a good deal more besides – and that the ideas and information obtained from the book can be arranged in answer to his questions in an order which is useful to him.

3. **Read**: The next stage is to read through the book, chapter by chapter. Obviously since the book has been chosen for study, even the first reading will not be done at great speed. Yet it is important to remember that there is no virtue in slow reading for its own sake. It simply is not true, though so many primary school teachers seem to assume that it is, that the slower a book is read, the better it will be remembered. So this first reading is as fast as is consistent with some attention to details, and it makes full use of
4. **Recite**: Psychologists have discovered that continually re-reading a passage is not the most effective way to commit it to memory. It is better to stop between each reading and to try to recall as much as possible of what has been read. The first attempt at this kind of 'recitation' is not likely to be very successful. But if it is followed by another reading, then a second recitation will probably reveal that much more of the chapter has now been remembered. Two or three more such readings, followed by recitations, are likely to give an overall grasp of the chapter superior to that which would be acquired from as many as ten or twelve successive readings, without any process of review or 'recitation' between them.

5. **Revise**: We have already suggested the importance of early revision of new material. This applies equally to lectures, lessons or books. Maddox has a helpful section on this subject, together with some interesting graphs demonstrating the curves of forgetting which apply to average school and college learning situations.\(^\text{14}\) The important principle to be grasped is that material that has to be remembered must be *revised frequently*. The worst possible method of studying is the very common one of attending a lecture or reading a book, making some immediate notes upon it and putting them away to bring them out again only just before the examination — perhaps as much as a year later — in order to 'revise' them. As so many students have discovered to their cost, this process is hardly revision at all. It is almost complete relearning. Many school and university students who keep careful notes, but store them instead of using them frequently, find that when they produce them before examinations they are almost useless because so much of the material to which they refer has been almost completely forgotten. And there is no time to relearn it before the examination. To sum up then, we need a first revision *as soon as possible* after new material has been studied and then frequent and *regular* revisions thereafter for as long as the material needs to be retained.

This SQ\(_3\)R technique does not embrace all the possible methods of studying written material. But it does provide a good summary of a sensible approach. It is one which should certainly be taught to pupils as early as possible in their secondary education. Any good teacher of English as a second language should find himself frequently employing this method himself and therefore eager to pass it on to his students. This 'eagerness' is a good note on which to conclude.

For almost as important as the actual information on reading and study methods which the teacher provides is the underlying attitude
towards his pupils which encourages him to provide it. In discussing study methods with his pupils he will draw on his own experience and will not be embarrassed to discuss with his pupils his own strengths and weaknesses in study. The very fact that he will not pretend to know everything or to be able to remember everything will be a great encouragement to his pupils. They will realize that he himself has followed in the path that they are treading and he stands before them as a living example that it is possible to succeed. In his guidance on reading and study he is always constructive and encouraging. As we suggested in our discussion on aims and principles, he wants to be excelled by his own pupils so he delights in passing on to them knowledge of reading and study techniques which his own teachers probably did not have and certainly did not communicate. He spends a part of the first year of the course giving his pupils a better start to secondary education than he was given himself.

NOTES AND REFERENCES


3. All the passages in the drill book by Fry, E. *Reading Faster*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1964, fall within this range.

4. See notes 1 and 2 above. A careful study of the question alternatives in these books, in Chapman-Taylor and Ballard, *op. cit.*, and, at a more advanced level of literary appreciation, in Munby, J., Thomas, O. and Cooper, M. *Comprehension for School Certificate*. Nairobi, Longmans, 1966, will help teachers to construct their own multiple choice questions. See also Chapter 10.


6. Or they may prefer to base tests on materials extracted from the various series of simplified and abridged readers published by Longmans, Oxford University Press and other publishers, and referred to in Chapter 4.


12. Maddox, H. *op. cit.*, pp. 205-6 offers interesting evidence and guidance about the effects of noise on study.


CHAPTER 4

Organizing and Teaching Reading Skills

The procedures outlined in Chapter 3 will get our pupils to a point at which they are technically equipped to become good readers. But, as we must emphasize again and again, only continual practice will effect that transformation of their reading skills and habits which is the most important business of the lower secondary school. Before we ask what kinds of reading practice our pupils should be doing we must, as always, decide our educational aims. What reading skills do we want our pupils to master? What in fact are the skills of the accomplished reader? We can usefully divide them under three headings.

1. Technical skills.
2. Appreciative skills.
3. Reference skills.

We have referred in a previous chapter to the main technical skills which include the ability to read fast, the ability to vary reading speed according to the nature and difficulty of the material, and the ability to read groups of words rather than single words with the minimum of physical movement. These technical skills have little value on their own but they are the essential equipment without which we cannot go on to a full appreciation of the meaning of written language.

Among the most important of the appreciative skills which our technical skills can help us to acquire are the following:

(a) The ability to imagine the scenes and events which we read about.
(b) The ability to sympathize with the characters in a story and to understand and perhaps evaluate their motives.
(c) The resulting ability to respond to the whole attitude to life which a writer may reveal in his book – the writer’s philosophy.
(d) The ability to understand and appreciate language which does more than make plain statements, for example, imagery, irony, satire and humour.
(e) The ability to interpret artificially emotional language – the
language of advertisements and of some journalism – without being completely deceived by it.

One important skill which lies somewhere between the technical and the appreciative is that of guessing the meaning of a word from its context. This skill is essential in the development of faster reading and is too often neglected in both primary and secondary schools, where dictionaries and word lists often play too great a part in reading lessons.

Reference skills which, like work on reading speed improvement, should receive careful attention in the first year of the secondary school course, comprise all those skills which enable us to read for required information. We know what we want to find out, and we know which book we are likely to find it in. The question is, how quickly and easily can we find it? How good are we at finding what we want in a dictionary, an encyclopaedia, a directory, a time-table, an index, a catalogue, a lengthy report or even a notice board?

These three lists of technical skills, appreciative skills and reference skills do not by any means exhaust the abilities of the well-trained reader. Two more skills which are useful to the student and essential to the teacher are those of accurate proof reading and of correct and agreeable reading aloud. These, then, are some of the things we want our secondary school pupils to be able to do well by the time they leave school. What kinds of reading practice must we provide to help them?

We have dealt, in Chapter 3, with the kinds of practice required for the technical skills and the most important point to remind ourselves of here is that the practice must be continual. Reading speed tests are almost useless in themselves unless practice on a variety of materials continues between them. The first point to note about the practice of the appreciative skills in the secondary school is that it should be done on whole books. The main aim of our reading course in a secondary school is to help our pupils to read books with enjoyment and understanding. We learn to read books by reading books, however helpful the study of extracts and short passages may be in certain situations. We shall say more of this in a moment. The practice done on these whole books needs to be of at least two kinds.

They are commonly distinguished, in books about the teaching of reading, as extensive reading and intensive reading. These terms will serve us well enough as long as we remember that the activities which they denote are not completely separate from each other. The terms almost explain themselves. By extensive reading we mean the continuous reading, at the fastest speed which will permit a reasonable level of understanding and remembrance, of lengthy portions of reading
material, e.g. short stories, novels, travel books, etc. (Faster reading practice for example – the practice, not the testing – can always be classified as extensive reading.) Such reading is tested, where necessary, not by detailed questioning but by asking only such questions as a reader who has followed the main course of the story or argument cannot fail to answer.

If, for example, a teacher wished to test his pupils on their reading of the first three chapters of Chinua Achebe’s novel *Things Fall Apart*, he might ask the following questions:

Why was Okonkwo well known throughout the nine villages?
What was the great difficulty which Okonkwo survived shortly before the death of his father?
How did Ikemefuna come to be placed under Okonkwo’s protection?

Any reader who can answer these three questions accurately has understood the gist of the first three chapters and made a good start to the complete understanding of the whole book, which is always the aim of extensive reading.

Intensive reading on the other hand is the careful and detailed study of short passages and extracts – the intensive reading of a whole book would take several months – in order to ensure that every aspect and detail of meaning is completely understood. It is concerned with both the literal and figurative sense of individual words, with the grammatical relationships between words and clauses, and with the emotional implications of words and phrases. Yet although intensive reading proceeds by close attention to detail, its overall aim is similar to that of extensive reading – the right response to the whole meaning of the passage. Professor P. E. Gurrey provides useful guidance on the distinction between extensive and intensive reading in his book *Teaching English as a Foreign Language*. The kind of questions which intensive reading sets out to answer, Gurrey calls Stage One questions; extensive reading questions of the kind we have suggested above, he calls Stage Two questions. His book contains a helpful appendix of an extract from an actual English lesson including many examples of Stage One questioning. To complete the comparison here, we might note that a teacher who wished to engage his pupils in intensive reading practice by helping them to examine closely the first page of Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* might ask the following questions, amongst many others:

How do we know that it was a long time ago when Okonkwo threw Amalinze, the Cat?
How long had Amalinze remained unbeaten?
Why was he called the ‘Cat’?
Why did it matter to him as a wrestler, that his back would never touch the earth?
Why does the writer compare Okonkwo to a fish?
What does he mean by saying that Okonkwo's fame had 'Grown like a bush fire'?
The writer says that the drums beat and the flutes sang - what else does he say which makes the fight seem exciting?

And so on, examining each sentence and important phrase carefully to extract its full meaning.

A careful comparison between the questions asked on the first three chapters and the more detailed questions asked on the first page of Achebe's book should give some indication of the difference between extensive and intensive reading. But it should be noted that both kinds of reading are practised on the same book. It is tempting, particularly for the inexperienced teacher, to use, for intensive reading, one of the many available collections of 'passages for comprehension'. Our secondary school pupils are used to these books. They will almost certainly have used them during their last two years in primary school in preparation for the secondary school entrance examination. They may have used little else. The author has, in fact, taught pupils in secondary school who did not know the luxury of reading a whole book - even a short, simplified and abridged one - until they entered the secondary school at the age of fourteen. This concentration on books of short passages has at least two serious defects. First and most obviously, they offer no practice at all in extensive reading. Secondly, as we have hinted, the passages - particularly in such books prepared for upper primary and lower secondary classes - seldom interest the pupils sufficiently to make them want to read the books from which the passages have been taken. In short, the passages do not lead on to whole books. They are an end in themselves, and offer the pupils no clue to the importance and enjoyment of reading whole books. It is easy for the secondary school teacher, who will have acquired good reading habits during his own training as a teacher, to forget how much specific guidance young pupils often need. In case the suggestion that pupils will not always find their way on their own to the reading of whole books seems exaggerated, it may be worth mentioning that one of the author's own pupils confided that he had never read a whole book during his primary education because no one had ever told him that 'it was a good idea'.

All this is not meant to suggest that books of passages are altogether worthless. Both textbook writers and publishers have become more aware in recent years of the need to encourage children towards the
reading of books. Some recent collections of passages offer specific guidance towards books which, they suggest, should be available for the classes for whom the books of passages are intended. Ronald Mackin’s *A Course of English Study* is based on passages extracted from a number of simplified and abridged readers particularly suitable for pupils in the lower classes of secondary schools abroad. At a much higher level, and not designed specifically for the second language learner, the Oxford University Press Course *Reflections* edited by Clements, Dixon and Stratta provides a stimulating collection of passages which has already sent many pupils to their school libraries to search out the books by Lawrence, Gorky, Orwell, Faulkner and others, from which the passages were chosen. To sum up then, good ‘books of passages’ will lead immediately outward to good whole books. But even such useful selections should be used sparingly.

It will be clear to any teacher of English who has read this far that the provision of books for the teaching of English in a secondary school abroad is crucial. We can teach English without almost anything else but we cannot teach it well without plenty of books for our pupils to read. It is a commonplace of education that every good school should have a well-stocked library. But in Africa we do not work in ideal conditions. Money is often short. The physical condition of schools – the classrooms, the desks, the dormitories – is often bad. There is constant pressure to spend the limited available funds on such basic necessities, and it is not uncommon in secondary schools to find that the provision of large quantities of books is regarded as a desirable luxury which must often be sacrificed to more urgent essentials. So, at this point, before we go into further detail about the teaching of reading skills it is necessary to say a little about the provision of essential reading materials without which the skills simply cannot be taught. This advice is offered, not only for the guidance of teachers of English but also as an indication, to headmasters, inspectors and school administrators, of the minimum equipment which the teacher of English needs to do his job properly.

Let us begin with an ideal which every secondary school teacher of English in Africa, whatever the present shortcomings of his school, can work towards. A secondary school in Africa with, say 500 pupils in a three-stream entry for a five-year course leading to school certificate would be well-equipped for the teaching of English as a second language with the following range of books: a main school library of 5,000 volumes including a carefully graded junior section; at least two form libraries, one each for the first and second years, located in classrooms and containing about 150 different simplified and abridged books of
appropriate vocabulary and structure level; a well-stocked book store containing adequate supplies of English course books for all forms and, for each of the first three years, between six and twelve sets of class readers of appropriate level of difficulty. This is an ideal. Now let us consider a much more common and realistic situation and what a teacher of English can do about it.

For our second more realistic example we will think about a secondary school which has been open only two or three years, and has already suffered from a rapid turnover of staff. It has, as one result, an erratic system of accounts in which it does not seem to be clear to headmaster or staff whether specific sums are set aside for books or whether, if they are, they are adequate. The first comment to be made on this fairly common situation is an administrative one. We have already stressed that we cannot teach English well without books. It is one of the first jobs of effective school administrators to see that *specific funds* are allocated to secondary schools for the purchase of books and to make it difficult for these sums to be converted to any other use. Where this is done, the first job of the headmaster is to make known — and the first job of the newly arrived teacher of English is to find out — exactly what funds are available for books and whether they are separately allocated for textbooks and library books.

Let us suppose that our newly arrived teacher of English has discovered that there are limited funds available and has ensured that in future regular amounts will be set aside specifically for books. But he has also discovered that the school is at present virtually bookless. Where should he begin? His most important initial aim is to make easily available to his lower school pupils books which they can understand and enjoy. He would therefore be unwise to begin by developing the main school library only. The urgent need is for two small collections — form libraries we can call them — located respectively in one each of the first and second year classrooms. These form libraries will consist of suitable simplified and abridged books beginning at the 1,500 word level (which we can be confident that almost all first year pupils will be able to tackle — see Chapter 2) and rising to the 2,000 and 2,500 word level in the first year collection, through the 3,000 word level — with a few books as high as 5,000 to 6,000 — in the second year collection. There are now hundreds of such simplified and abridged books available from several publishers. Some are abridgements and simplifications of well-known English classics while others are original works written for second language learners within the appropriate limited vocabularies. The main publishers of these books are Longmans and the Oxford University Press. The most important series to note are the *Longmans Simplified*
English Series (at the 2,000 word level), the Longmans Bridge Series (3,000 to 7,000 word level) and the Oxford University Press Series Tales Retold for Easy Reading second series (2,000 word level) and Oxford Supplementary Readers (1,500 to 2,000 words). Both these publishers have other series at slightly easier levels and also worth noting are the Nelson Rapid Reading Series, the American Ladder Books and other readers from publishers such as Macmillans and Evans. Any teacher of English who will take the trouble to write to the main publishers asking for catalogues and to be put on their mailing list will receive regular information about the latest readers and textbooks being published and in preparation.

In selecting reading material it is extremely important that teachers should not limit their choice to simplified novels and short stories. They should guide their pupils also to the wide range of biography and travel literature which is available and above all, to factual materials including simple scientific and technical books. The American Ladder Books already mentioned are helpful here, and a number of publishers are now introducing graded series to meet these needs, e.g. Longman’s Structural Readers: Factual and Technical Series. Carefully chosen magazines and periodicals, even though they are ephemeral, are also a good investment for the school library. The wider the range of material, the greater is the chance that every individual pupil will find something to interest him and fire his imagination. It is not only the well laid plot or the finely drawn character that can be the beginning of a lifetime’s reading.

So the first aim for our teacher trying to build up an adequate stock of books, is to have collections of graded readers located in the first and second year classrooms. In a three-stream school such as we have described, the ideal situation would be to have a book cupboard in each classroom and a total collection of between 100 and 200 simplified and abridged texts for each year. The collection can then be divided into sets of about fifty books and the sets rotated between the classes. Each set remains with each class for a term, so that over the year every pupil has the widest possible choice. But this is the ideal and for a start, one cupboard will do. If a teacher will establish personal contact with publishers and suppliers, it will not take him much time or much money to collect in his cupboard at least as many books as there are pupils in the whole year. Books from the series mentioned above, average about fifteen pence each in price so that to provide 120 readers for a first year in a secondary school will cost less than £20. If any teacher is told that there is not even that much money available to provide essential teaching materials for the vital first year of the course, then he is justified in protesting, and waving this chapter under the noses of as many
school administrators as necessary, until he can get the local sense of educational priorities radically altered.

Once he has his single cupboard and his collection of different titles at the rate of one book per pupil, he has the minimum equipment to mount an effective reading programme for the first year. The problem then is to ensure that the time-table is planned so that as often as possible and at least three times a week, the three first forms are all studying English at the same time and can take turns to use the classroom which has the book cupboard. Each teacher of English must have a key and there should be an exercise book kept in the cupboard in which at first the teachers, but soon the pupils themselves or elected library monitors, enter the titles of books and the names of borrowers. Having to change classrooms can be tedious and obviously the more books and the more cupboards – but books first – the better. However modest his first book collection may be, three firm rules for the teacher must be noted:

1. He should keep the key of the cupboard in his pocket all the time so that
2. He is not only willing but able to open the book cupboard for a few minutes whenever this is at all possible. Too often in schools and colleges, library rules are unnecessarily restrictive. As teachers of English we should remember that a library which is available for only half an hour on two or three days a week will convince pupils that reading cannot be very important.
3. He should spend his book grant as soon as he gets it, being able to spend wisely, though quickly, because he has planned ahead. He should take every opportunity to remind his headmaster that he always needs more books. Then, if there ever is any money to spare the headmaster will think at once of the English department.

We have said much in our first chapter about taking pupils into our confidence and making them responsible for their own progress. The form library presents good opportunities to do this. The wise teacher will give his pupils, even in their first year, some insight into the school finances – how much money is available for books and how he has chosen to spend it. He will emphasize that the library is their library, that if they take care of the books, the library will grow steadily, but that if they damage or lose books, they cannot be replaced until next year because there is no more money. Even first-year pupils can and should take most of the responsibility for their own class library and their own reading progress. Paperback books however well produced come apart fairly easily, and a lesson can be well spent instructing pupils in the care of books. The life of a paperback can be considerably
prolonged if, before it is put on to the library shelves, it is strengthened with cellulose tape applied to the top and bottom of the spine and to the inside endpapers. Pupils can do this job themselves after only a few minutes instruction.

Pupils should be encouraged, but not compelled, to keep records of what they have read from the form library. Some will find this an incentive to reading while others – sometimes the keener readers – will think it an imposition. One way of encouraging reading notes is to offer a small book prize at the end of the year for the best set. A useful side-effect of such notes is that pupils begin to compare what they have enjoyed with what other pupils have enjoyed and can then give the teacher some indication of what kind of books are most popular. It is a short step from this to getting the pupils themselves to work through catalogues and suggest titles which might be ordered for the form or school library when the next grant becomes available.

Many teachers find that there is opposition to the idea of form libraries from headmasters, inspectors and even colleagues because a centralized school library is said to be more efficient. The main justification for the form library is that it provides an immediately accessible selection of reading material exactly suited to the needs of the class. But it is important for the teacher of English to emphasize that the use of the form library leads on to the use of the main library. This is not the place for an account of how to run a main school library, for there are plenty of small books available on this subject. The catalogues and bulletins of the Schools Library Association in Britain are also helpful, used with discretion, to the teacher of English in an African secondary school. An important quality of an effective school library is that it should enable pupils to graduate easily from the use of the form library. One way of assisting this is to have, in the main library, a section specially for the junior and middle school. It should consist of books of the right level of difficulty for the pupils who are progressing from simplified and abridged books to unsimplified, unabridged books at a vocabulary level of anything from 8,000 to 20,000 words or more. It helps the junior readers if the librarian grades this separate collection – or indeed all the books in the library – with coloured tags, each denoting a certain level of difficulty. (Some teachers will be familiar with this grading method which is employed by the SRA Reading Laboratories. These, though not designed specifically for the second language situation, can be interesting aids and incentives to reading improvement in African secondary schools.)

As with the form libraries, the main school library should quickly become the responsibility of the pupils. While the collection is small –
and it may take a few years in an African school with limited funds to build a collection of even 2,000 or 3,000 books — it is a good idea to confine all books to the library room. This ensures that all pupils can have a fair share of the limited number of books available and it also encourages pupils to come to the library and gradually assimilate that atmosphere of quiet, purposeful individual study which should characterize it. Again the important thing is to encourage in the pupils the feeling that the library belongs to them. It is not usually difficult in most African secondary schools — because their pupils still regard secondary education as a privilege — to build up a strong public opinion in favour of the use of the library for quiet study rather than for social chatter, casual newspaper reading, or generally whiling away a ‘free period’.

One advantage of running a school library in Africa is that not all the books for it have to be bought. It is assumed in this chapter that if the library is not already being efficiently run then the teacher of English will take it over. If he does, there are a number of organizations that he should write to to ask for books. Foremost among these are the local branches of the British Council, of the United States Information Service, and of the large international oil companies such as Shell and Caltex. These organizations, if approached, will often contribute not only large basic reference books, dictionaries and encyclopaedias from their list of standard contributions to school libraries but also other specific titles which the teacher may request for his particular school.

However short of books a library may be it is also important not to ‘accession’ every book which may be given to the library. Many people leaving African countries sort through their books and give away all the ones they do not want to school libraries. These gifts should obviously be accepted gratefully at the time, but many of them will be quite unsuitable both in kind and condition for a school library and should be thrown away. It is just not true that any books are better than no books in a school library. It is better to start with a small collection of books the pupils will enjoy and understand rather than have shelves cluttered up with books which may look impressive but will never be used. Quantity certainly matters in an individual pupil's reading; in building a library, quality of books and suitability is far more important.

But it is no good establishing a well-equipped library unless we teach our pupils how to use it. Teachers of English should devote a number of their periods during the first term of the first year to helping pupils to understand and use the library catalogue and the various sections of the library so that it can become, as quickly as possible, the English teaching ‘laboratory’. This will only be achieved if the teacher takes his class to the library and uses the library with them. The worst possible example we
can give – and no doubt many of us need to examine our consciences about this – is to take a class to the library, see them all suitably occupied with books and then spend the rest of the period ourselves marking exercise books. Nothing demonstrates more clearly to our pupils than this that we do not regard reading as important enough to do it ourselves.

There is more to running a school library than we have been able to indicate here. But any teacher who will make a beginning on these lines can easily get further guidance from the books mentioned in the references to this chapter. We have given much space to the provision of books and the running of libraries in a chapter on the teaching of reading because it is almost useless to run the most skilful courses on extensive reading if, when our pupils are equipped with the necessary skills, they find that their school cannot offer them a wide selection of interesting reading on which to begin to develop pleasures and tastes which will last them a lifetime. Having given some indication of the minimum acceptable library equipment and of the ideal situation for an African secondary school, let us return to the teaching of the skills.

In the first few weeks of the secondary course in English we should devote as many as five or six periods a week to allowing our pupils to discover the delights of the form library if it is already established. (If it is not, we can make a good beginning with just thirty-five or so different titles – one for each pupil in the class – selected from the various simplified and abridged series, and offering our pupils a reasonably wide range of choice.) If we also have some sets of readers available we may, during this early period, begin some formal extensive and intensive reading with every member of the class having a copy of the same reader. But, in spite of all we have said in Chapter 3 on the importance of reading improvement, it is vital in these early stages, not to confuse our educational aims. In this early period we should not test reading frequently. We are not, in the first few weeks, looking for evidence of improvement. We are trying to help our pupils to know the enjoyment of reading. We are trying to share an experience.

It is one which as teachers, we too often take for granted – the experience of becoming completely absorbed and involved in a book. Probably most of us who are teaching English in secondary schools regularly enjoy this experience and regard it as one of life’s great pleasures. We tend too easily to forget that it is often the beginning of education. For many of us it happened first at the age of six or seven when we first found delight in a book written in our own language. For some teachers to whom English is a second language it may have happened much later in life, but whenever it happens – and the sooner
the better – it is in the true sense of the term a seminal experience. It does not matter in the least what kind of book first inspires it. It may be a novel, a biography, a travel book, short story, or an account of a scientific experiment. But whether it is Crusoe’s island or Hillary’s Everest, or Edison’s phonograph, or Dickens’ London, or Heyerdahl’s raft, or Okonkwo’s fight or Spider’s cunning does not matter. What does matter is that the young reader should know the delight of being ‘lost in a book’. This is the incentive for acquiring and polishing many of the skills which we listed early in this chapter – the skills of imagining scenes and events, of sympathizing with characters, understanding and evaluating their motives, and of responding to the whole attitude to life reflected in a book. The key, both to the desire and to the ability to practise these skills, is the enjoyment of reading. So it is sad to discover, as the author did recently at an international conference on the teaching of English, that the idea of allowing children to just range freely in a small, carefully graded library for the first few weeks of their secondary school course without being tested regularly on what they were reading, seems to occur to very few teachers of English as a second language. Yet this is an idea which can transform the whole experience of education. Teachers often ask what kind of books are most likely to give children this experience. The question can hardly be answered except in the most general terms. We have already urged the selection of a wide variety even of simplified and abridged books. The form library should mingle the familiar with the exotic, and beyond hinting that school stories and African stories have been amongst the most popular choices in many form libraries known to the author, it would be unwise to try to offer any more specific guidance.

During this early period of reading for enjoyment, the teacher of English should take his pupils into his confidence by explaining as clearly as he can the reasons for what they are doing. He may wish to explain in simple terms the importance of ‘involvement’, much as we have explained it in this chapter. He should certainly explain that in reading, quantity counts. His pupils will already be all too familiar with the notion that quality is important; they will have been told throughout primary school days that they must ‘read carefully’. They are much less likely, as we stressed in Chapter 3, to have been told that they should read quickly and read a lot. But how much can we expect them to read in their first year? J. A. Bright suggests an interesting little piece of arithmetic which is worth sharing with our first-year secondary pupils. Few of them will have reading speeds slower than 100 wpm. They are therefore capable of reading 6,000 words in an hour. The average simplified and abridged book selected from the various series which we
have recommended for the first and second years of the secondary school, contains about 30,000 words. It is therefore only five hours work for even the slow reader, and this is a point worth proving to our first-year pupils on the chalkboard. One can almost guarantee that if the teacher of English will conclude his arithmetic with the apparently casual deduction that the pupils could therefore take away a book tonight and bring it back tomorrow having finished it, he will find that at least a few of them will do just that. When they have done it once, they can do it again. When they have done it other pupils in the class will follow suit. It is no exaggeration to suggest — particularly in a boarding school where pupils’ time is fairly strictly organized — that in the first year of the secondary school English course, an average pupil can read fifty simplified books and a bright pupil as many as a hundred. These are realistic targets based on experience in several African schools. And when a pupil has read between fifty and a hundred short books in the first year of his course, he is already a genuine reader. On this amount of reading experience we can begin to build up fairly quickly the complex of reading skills we attributed to the good reader. The way is open to a lifetime of enjoyable reading.

Once we have got our first year reading programme moving in this way, we can begin to test the quality of the reading more frequently, though such testing should be done as unobtrusively as possible. Even at the first form level, it is possible to test in such a way as to make it appear that the pupils are discussing the book rather than the teacher testing their knowledge of it. As Professor Gurrey indicates in the examples already mentioned,7 the teacher’s questions must be carefully prepared, especially for intensive reading work. We can all go into a classroom and ‘ask questions’ on a passage even if we have not read it carefully ourselves. But to ask a series of closely related and searching questions on the most important points of meaning and grammatical relationship in a passage requires careful preparation from even an experienced teacher. Probably the best kind of lesson plan for an intensive reading period is — just a set of questions. As we emphasized in discussing the problems of vocabulary in Chapter 2, it is true that we can test understanding of a passage by asking questions on it but only if they are the right questions. In extensive reading, as our example indicated, we ask the big questions which no one who has read the chapter with reasonable attention can possibly fail to answer. In intensive reading we ask much more detailed questions which probe meanings and relationships of words and phrases and the relationship of sentences and paragraphs to each other.

Throughout the year, practice in these two related but different kinds
of reading is done on the same book. Any book that is really worth reading will provide ample scope for both kinds of questions. If, in his first year or two in charge of such a reading programme the young teacher of English cannot afford to buy sets of readers, he need not despair. He can start off with his small collection in the form library and concentrate on extensive reading practice until he has discovered which are the most popular books – which are likely, within a few weeks, to have been read by most of the pupils. He can then mimeograph (NB this is only legal if passages copied are strictly for educational purposes only) two or three of the most crucial or exciting passages from such a book and, reminding the class where necessary of the context of the passages, use these for intensive reading practice. An ideal situation, to which English department stocks can gradually be built up, is to have as many as six or eight sets of readers, one copy for every pupil in the class, so that for at least two or three weeks in each term the whole class can be working together on the same book. (Even if a book is being used for both extensive and intensive reading practice, it should still not be left with the pupils for longer than two or three weeks; if it is, then enjoyment will soon give place to boredom.)

A good tactic is to begin by asking the pupils to read the first thirty or forty pages within the first few days of receiving the book. The number of pages set corresponds to the point at which a passage occurs that is suitable for intensive reading practice. The first half of the next reading lesson is taken up with a careful examination of the intensive reading passage. The reward of those pupils who have read the first thirty or forty pages carefully is, of course, to understand the context of the selected passage really well. Only the first half of the lesson is suggested because intensive reading is hard work. Twenty or twenty-five minutes of it, with carefully planned questions proceeding at a brisk pace, is certainly enough for a first- or second-year secondary school class. If the intensive reading is done well, it is a good idea to allow the class to spend the rest of the lesson reading on in the book for relaxation. A new target of another thirty pages or so is then set, the teacher having looked ahead to see where the next suitable passage for close examination occurs. This method helps the pupils to understand that intensive and extensive reading are not two quite separate skills, but both contribute towards the same end – the total understanding of a worthwhile book. It also ensures a fairly rapid progress through each book and saves pupils from the fate of a class, taught by a colleague of the author’s, which was presented with Treasure Island as ‘the book for the term’.

Both extensive and intensive reading questions will usually be oral. But it is a good idea to vary the approach and occasionally present
questions on slips of paper for the pupils to answer briefly in writing. It is also helpful, in order to avoid interrupting the flow of reading and to allow each pupil to proceed at his own pace, to write extensive reading questions on the chalkboard. This works particularly well, when, as often happens, a class has to read from several small or 'broken' sets of books and there may be as many as six or seven different readers in use at the same time. Provided the teacher knows the books himself (the actual simplified editions that the pupils are reading, not the original, full-length editions), he can, with a bit of judicious timing, write up questions on the chalkboard to direct them to the things they must notice. He warns the pupils beforehand of the order in which questions will be written on the board for different books. Then, assuming that the pupils will be able to read about thirty pages in a forty-five minute period, he might write up first a set of questions on the first eight pages of Chike and the River, then on pages ten to sixteen of The Wooden Horse, then on pages fifteen to twenty of Pioneers of Progress and so on, providing a short set of extensive reading questions on each book in use. Pupils look up to the board for the questions on their own book, but they are not disturbed by the questions on the other books because these are just written quietly on the board.

Many teachers with whom the author has discussed this approach to reading in the secondary school, consider that it is too casual. It is, they assert, not sufficiently directed at the basic problem of the secondary school which is to pass examinations. We have already agreed that examinations certainly cannot be ignored. But we have agreed too that the strength of our position as teachers of English is that we are teaching skills. If we really provide our pupils with the language skills which they need and if we help them to keep these skills in continual practice we are in fact, equipping them to face any examination in English with confidence. And we must remember that we are trying to train intelligent and responsive readers, not literary critics. Particularly in the first two or three years of the secondary course, we are slowly developing what we have called the appreciative skills of reading, but we are concerned far more with involvement than with judgment or criticism. After their initial period of preparation on simplified and abridged material, our pupils must read twenty or thirty unabridged books at least before they can establish any criteria on which to judge. What a Cambridge professor said recently of his undergraduate students applies with equal force to our pupils in African secondary schools: they need to read more and judge less.8 (For further detailed guidance on the techniques of teaching intensive and extensive reading see the recommended books by Billows, F. L. and by McGregor, G. P. and Bright, J. A.)
When we have established this kind of reading programme in the lower classes of a secondary school, we should give some thought to the more searching teaching of literature in the upper forms. The teaching of literature is badly neglected in many of our African secondary schools, partly because of a vicious circle of educational experience which only well-trained and well-informed teachers of English can break. At present the circle runs roughly as follows: our pupils get very little reading experience in their primary and lower secondary schools. They therefore have not learnt to enjoy reading and can make hardly any valid response to works of literature. Their teachers therefore tend to assume that the only way to deal with literature, particularly for School Certificate examinations is either to 'cram' it or to drop it. So our pupils are either forced to make a close and repetitious study of half a dozen 'set books' during the last two years of their secondary course, or they drop 'English literature' as an examination subject and read no literature at all. In either case the end result is usually the same: once they leave school they stop reading literature and never start again. Some of them may even go back, after periods of inadequate teacher-training, to teach in primary or lower secondary schools. Teaching as they were taught they ensure that the circle is perpetuated.

And why does all this matter? Why is it important that pupils should understand and appreciate literature? The answer to these questions is both simple and profound. Literature is the best that men have done with language. And culture, as Denys Thompson and others have done well to remind school teachers in recent years, depends ultimately on language. There is no simple explanation of why and how we benefit from and enjoy the study of words well used. There are many good reasons why the foreign learner of English as a second language should read and occasionally study the best of English literature.

We certainly do not teach English in order that foreigners may learn the British way of life and yet equally certainly, to learn about the British way of life is one valid reason for reading English literature. To learn about the workings of the minds of individual authors is a better reason, and to appreciate the beauty of language and thought skilfully blended is perhaps the best of all. As Professor Geoffrey Bullough has suggested, it is important in the study of literature for the second language learner that the aesthetic experience, and what he calls the 'documentary experience' – that of simply learning about a way of life – should join together. We shall have more to say on this in Chapter 9 when we consider the teaching of poetry, but there, as here, we will emphasize that it is most important for the teacher not to confuse the aims of teaching language and teaching literature. When we teach
literature we should be sure to teach literature and not language through literature. It is all too tempting to use poems, stories and even novels in English as quarries of new vocabulary and structures. In teaching literature we should pay close attention to the writers' skill in using language, but we should remember always that the language is the medium and that our analysis of the skill with which it is used must enhance and not obscure our appreciation of the meaning which it is used to convey. Perhaps we might sum up by saying that the appreciation of good literature is one of the best rewards of advanced language learning; it is not the same thing.

The teacher may choose to drop the terms 'intensive' and 'extensive' reading as we proceed further up the secondary school to the serious study of literature. Yet we should remember that we go on practising intensive and extensive reading for the rest of our lives, however expert or scholarly we may become as readers of English literature. As our pupils move higher up the secondary school with the kind of reading experience behind them which we have outlined for the first two years of their course, much more can be taken for granted with the study of each book and both the pace and the quality of reading improves. Genuine class discussion becomes more feasible and more important, with teacher and pupil playing equal roles and every opinion fairly valued. The teacher goes on asking questions but as Professor Bruce Pattison has emphasized, these are teaching questions not testing ones. The teacher is not trying to discover how much his pupils know; he is trying to lure and tempt them on to expressing their opinions. And then to checking those opinions against what they and their fellow pupils discover when they re-examine the text under discussion.

If we are to take seriously the aims of education which we discussed in our first chapter, and if we really want our pupils to go out from secondary school able to think for themselves, then one of the things we will quietly emphasize is the importance of not always agreeing in class discussion. One of the questions which almost every teacher, in any country, who has ever prepared a class for an external examination will have been asked is 'What happens if we give our opinion about a book or a poem in the examination paper and the examiner disagrees with it?' The answer is simple but important, and it applies not only to external examinations but to individual class discussions with the teacher: what the good examiner and the good teacher are interested in is not opinions which agree with their own, but opinions which, however unusual and perhaps misguided, are supported by evidence drawn from the text under discussion. This is not to suggest that in classroom discussion the teacher's opinion is unimportant. However widely he
encourages his pupils to read in the first two years of their secondary course, he will still find that when they begin to discuss unsimplified, unabridged works of literature they will tend to accept his opinions on them. Every teacher of English must face the fact that, whether he likes it not, he is a teacher of taste in literature. This is, of course, true to some extent of every teacher of every subject and we need to remember that in the last resort, what a teacher teaches is himself. We cannot escape influencing the literary and artistic taste of our pupils even if we want to. But there seems no very good reason for wanting to and every teacher of English should try to do this job of educating the taste of his pupils as honestly and skilfully as possible. On the other hand, no teacher should wish to dominate or mould the taste of his pupils, and as F. L. Billows has pointed out, one good way of sharing responsibility for the education of taste in the English class is to encourage group work in the study of literary texts. During the course of a year’s work in English literature, every pupil in the class can be given the opportunity to lead a group discussion. The teacher will always be available to promote and guide discussion and to interpret points of particular difficulty, but not to press upon pupils his own opinions and judgements.

Teachers in Africa sometimes complain that the opportunity for educating the taste of their pupils hardly arises. By the time pupils have acquired even the rudiments of the many reading skills we have referred to in this chapter, the external examination at the end of the secondary course is almost upon them and they have time to study only the few set books which have been selected by the external examiner. Now although the external examinations are often allowed to assert an undue influence on our educational systems, we should be honest enough to acknowledge that one thing an enthusiastic and well-prepared teacher can do with the external examination is to help to change it. Probably the most powerful external examination body in the African educational system, for example, the Cambridge University Examinations Syndicate is very receptive to suggestions for changes in its examinations, especially if such suggestions come from practising teachers. The author has found this from personal experience. Teachers who criticize the choice of English literature set books, for example, might reflect on the fact that Achebe’s novel *Things Fall Apart* became a Cambridge University School Certificate set book within five years of its publication, largely because many teachers of English in Africa pressed for its adoption.

This example brings us naturally to the question: what literature should we teach? One immediate response is that we should teach not only ‘English Literature’ but also a wide range of literature in English.
Many teachers reading this book will have taken college courses in English literature based entirely on works written in England from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries. Much of what they studied was no doubt valuable, but there is much that is equally valuable and far more relevant to our pupils in twentieth century English literature. For pupils in Africa, some of the most important literature in English, which they should certainly read and study, has been written in this century by Africans. One of the things which we should be trying to do in our secondary schools in Africa is to create an African reading public. As Paul Edwards has suggested, in an anthology of African writing with the significant title – Through African Eyes – the creation of an African reading public is bound to depend largely upon African writing in English. In their study of literature – the best that men have written – it is certainly ‘through African eyes’, amongst others, that our pupils should have the opportunity to interpret the world they live in. There has already been a good deal of African writing in English published and some of it is well worth teaching. J. A. Ramsaran’s New Approaches to African Literature contains useful bibliographies of recent African writing. Much of it, as Ezekiel Mphahlele has pointed out, has its roots in the early oral traditions and in the vigorous African journalism which developed in the nineteenth century.

In suggesting that there is already much African literature in English which is worth teaching, we are not pretending that all that has been written has permanent literary value. A few years ago, the author talked to an East African sixth form on the development of the novel in English. In summing up, he suggested that the work of Achebe and Ngugi already gave promise that novels might eventually be written in English by Africans, worthy to rank with the great masterpieces of eighteenth and nineteenth-century English fiction. One of the young sixth formers present promptly asked whether the author did not think that ‘Europeans these days were making a great deal of fuss about African writing simply because it was African.’ The honest answer to this question was ‘Yes’. But it was also important to stress that Europeans were not just being patronizing. As Edwards has suggested, Africans are only likely to become deeply interested in reading literature in English if much of it is about Africa and written with the knowledge and insight that only Africans themselves can bring. Certainly the output of the last ten years has been unequal and much has been published which is of little literary merit. Yet already in the novels of Achebe, in the criticism and autobiography of Mphahlele, in the drama of Soyinka, in the poems of Okigbo, and in the journalism and occasional writing of Transition and Black Orpheus African writing in English
has made progress towards establishing a literature. There is also a growing body of African writing translated from French and other languages into English — for example the works of Camara Laye and of Senghor — which deserves close attention. (This is a suitable point at which to put in a plea for the use in African secondary schools of modern translations — for example in the Penguin classics series — of the great classics of European and Asian literature. Homer, Sophocles, Cervantes, and Tolstoy to name only a few, are now easily accessible in cheap and good translations and should be made available to our secondary school pupils.)

There is already a useful range of critical literature on African writing in English which can help both teacher and pupil. Mphahlele's *The African Image*,16 Gerald Moore’s *Seven African Writers*,17 and Oladele Taiwo’s *Introduction to West African Literature*18 can be easily and cheaply purchased for any staff library. These are honest critics and Taiwo, for example, in the conclusion to the most recently published of these books,19 suggests that African literature is, at the moment, very one-sided, dealing mainly with ancestral traditions and mission schools. It has still hardly entered the world of science and technology, and therefore the African student will, for many years to come, have to read very largely outside the writings of his own continent.

Teachers of English literature in African schools need to take this comment of an African critic seriously. African writing is important to our pupils, but for the present and for the foreseeable future it can form only a relatively small component in literature courses which must consist primarily of the best work in English from England, America and other English-speaking countries outside Africa. Selection needs to become far more enterprising than it has been in African schools in the past. Here again there are a number of critical works which can help the teacher and Laurence Lerner's *English Literature: An Interpretation for Students Abroad*20 is particularly recommended. Lerner's bibliographies on the novel, drama and poetry, read in conjunction with the bibliographies in David Holbrook's books will provide the teacher with excellent guidance on the selection of texts for literature in the upper school.

The teacher who follows these suggestions and adds many of his own may produce a reading programme with many of the classics of eighteenth and nineteenth-century English literature — Swift, Fielding, Austen, Dickens, Eliot, Hardy — but with much too of Twain, Lawrence, Forster, Hemingway, Joyce, Conrad, Gorki (in translation), Orwell, Greene and other contemporary writers. (For suggestions on drama and poetry, see the separate chapters on these subjects.) This list is not
intended as a prescription for the teaching of literature in English. Every
teacher must choose only what he knows and loves. For only an enthusiast
can teach enthusiasm and that is our aim. We are trying to teach our
love of literature. Explanation, analysis, discussion, will all help but
what is most likely to arouse in our pupils a permanent addiction to
reading, is the sheer pleasure of a single book to which we have guided
them. For in the last resort the love of literature is probably caught
rather than taught.

We have given much attention to the appreciative skills because they are the supreme achievement as well as the supreme pleasure of the trained reader. But they must be supported and augmented by the reference skills to which we referred at the beginning of the chapter and to which we will now briefly turn. Practice in reference skills should begin in the first week of the first year of the secondary course with a careful examination of a good second language learner's dictionary and a clear explanation of how to use it. We have not so far in this book laid down any rigid rules for the selection of English teaching books but there is no doubt that the Oxford Series of dictionaries for second language learners is by far the best. This begins with the *Progressive English Dictionary*, suitable for the upper forms in primary schools, continues with *An English-Reader's Dictionary*, adequate for most of the work of the secondary school and concludes with the indispensable *Advanced Learner's Dictionary* which offers very detailed guidance on reading and writing difficulties for both the secondary school pupil and the university undergraduate. It is extremely important that second language learners should have access to these dictionaries which have been written especially to cater for their needs. For the second language situation, they are vastly superior to either the *Pocket Oxford Dictionary* or the larger *Concise Oxford Dictionary*, which teachers of English will tend to know and therefore tend to choose. Every secondary school pupil should have his own copy of *An English Reader's Dictionary*. This will take care of almost all his receptive vocabulary problems, giving him a definition within a limited vocabulary of any word that is likely to hold him up in his reading. *The Advanced Learner's Dictionary* is the best English language teaching tool known to the present author and should be easily available for pupils to consult. There should be at least one copy in every classroom and pupils should be encouraged to buy it as early in their secondary school career as possible. This is essentially a writer's dictionary and it helps with vocabulary at the reproductive level. As in the *English Reader's Dictionary* there is a phonetic transcript of every word, followed by a classification of the part of speech, a definition of every common meaning of the word, examples of its use in
phrases and sentences and, with every verb and with many nouns, references to the patterns of English in which it can be correctly used. A good dictionary is a record of usage; our pupils need that and as far as possible, a book of rules as well. If they have the Advanced Learner’s Dictionary they have both. As early as possible in the secondary school course, certainly by the second year, the teacher should spend time explaining the grammatical introduction to this dictionary and the idea of verb patterns in enough detail to enable the pupil to use the dictionary efficiently. Practice in using a dictionary quickly is important and enjoyable. It can begin by taking half a dozen useful common words one by one and seeing who can find them first. A little help with principles of alphabetical order will save hours of the pupils’ time and it is as true of dictionaries as of any other tools that the ones we can use efficiently and quickly are the ones we enjoy using and therefore tend to use often.

But not, of course, too often. One of the most important reading skills which we mentioned early in this chapter was that of deducing or guessing the meaning of a word from its context. We emphasized in Chapter 2 that words will rise, as we meet them and need them frequently, from our receptive to our reproductive vocabularies, largely through the exercise of this ‘contextual procedure’. So the skilled reader will stop in his reading to look up the meaning of a word only if he cannot go on without it. This is how our pupils should be reading and one of the jobs of the teacher is to warn them that the dictionary is a good servant but a bad master.

The important skill of ‘reading for required information’ should be practised in the first year on other reference books as well as on dictionaries. In library periods pupils should be introduced to encyclopaedias. The Oxford Junior Encyclopaedia or selected volumes from it is very useful for lower secondary forms and if the school cannot afford to buy it, the English teacher may be well able to persuade the British Council or one of the other organizations mentioned earlier in this chapter to donate it. The teacher should show the pupils round the reference section of the library, however small it may be, and encourage them to dip into reference works on any subject – from music, or art, to motor cars or football – that may take their fancy. An enjoyable way of practising quick reference and also of helping pupils to get to know the normal layout of a newspaper is to get hold of a set of old newspapers, give out one to each pupil and fire questions rapidly to see who can find the relevant article first. ‘Where was President Nyerere going by plane the day this paper was printed?’ ‘Who is selling a Peugeot 404 station-wagon and how much does he want for it?’ ‘What is the weather forecast
for the next day? 'What did the editor choose as the subject of his own article?' Pupils who can find their way quickly around a newspaper to answer such questions are likely to spend a sensible amount of time each day reading the local newspaper and also to become more skilful users of reference books. This is a practical method even for a rural school. Newspaper offices will usually supply old copies of their papers free and it is not important how long they take to arrive since the lesson is often all the more enjoyable and instructive if the world situation has changed considerably since the paper was printed. With this kind of foundation in their first year pupils will, with guidance from their teachers, easily learn to extract what they need from directories, catalogues, parliamentary reports and all the larger and more sophisticated works of reference which they are ever likely to encounter.

If we can give our secondary school pupils in Africa this kind of reading programme there will be no need for them to develop the kind of Baconian cunning referred to at the beginning of Chapter 3. They will not have to conceal how little they know. They will have acquired the joy of reading, and the confidence of 'knowing where to look'. They will have acquired too – for a good reader can hardly fail to acquire it – a healthy humility in the face of all that there is to be read which we shall never be able to read, and all that is to be known, which we shall never know. Thorough training in the skills of reading such as we have outlined in this chapter will give any pupil that valuable knowledge so well expressed in the proverb, 'The fool who knows that he is a fool will never be a very big fool.'

NOTES AND REFERENCES

5. The SRA Reading Laboratories are now available at six different grade levels, and can be adapted for use at various levels of the secondary school in Africa. They are produced and marketed by Science Research Associates Inc., 259 East Erie Street, Chicago, Illinois, USA, who have agents in most English-speaking countries of Africa.


Professor P. Gurrey, in a book to which we have already referred, *Teaching English as a Foreign Language*, suggests that there are usually four main causes for lack of progress in writing in a second language. They are: inadequate preparation for the writing; having to write without a clear purpose or objective; not having the right kind of help to show exactly how to improve the writing; and being given unsuitable subjects to write about. With these four points Professor Gurrey briefly summarizes, as he so often does in his books, the essential problems of one aspect of teaching English as a second language. This chapter will be not much more than a development and illustration of the four difficulties which he has cited.

There are three truths about writing which the teacher of English should be aware of if he is to teach writing skills successfully. The first truth is that we do not normally write unless we want to. The second is that writing is intensely individual. The third is that writing is difficult. Once again we have an opportunity here for taking our pupils into our confidence and for sharing with them as much as possible of the truth of what we are doing and why we are doing it in a particular way. These are three truths about writing which we should share with our pupils. Teachers may object that it is not very helpful to tell pupils that writing is difficult, that we do not (in real life) do it unless we want to and that it is very individual. Many teachers would object to sharing these truths with their pupils on the grounds that they have little to do with preparing pupils for writing for an examination. We have already suggested in our first chapter the right relationship for the English teacher to adopt towards the external examination: we have summed up this relationship in the slogan ‘It’s no good the pupils passing their examinations if they are not being educated, but neither is it any good them being educated if they do not pass their examinations.’ So perhaps the first thing to say in defence of our three truths about writing is that we are not primarily training pupils to write for an examination.

We want them to write because writing is a valuable form of expression and because, since language is very closely related to thought,
there is some chance that learning to write clearly will help them to learn to think clearly. We will build up their confidence if we explain what we believe to be the value of writing and if we tell them the truth about our own experiences of it. It is just as important for us to share with our pupils the knowledge that writing is difficult as it is, for example, for us to share the knowledge that we, like them, forget most of what we read. If we fail to share these truths with them, then we merely ensure that the learning process is a very depressing one. We are helping to perpetuate the situation, which we referred to in our first chapter, in which thousands of children all over Africa leave school with little intention of ever reading or writing seriously again.

Let us consider our second and third truths. Writing is individual, writing is difficult. Many of the world’s greatest and most successful writers have written interestingly about their own experiences of the writing process. One would have thought, judging from the number of novels that he produced, that Thackeray, the novelist, did not find writing particularly difficult. Yet he himself tells how, on one occasion, he was trying to finish an article promised for the following day to the *Cornhill Magazine* of which he was himself the editor. On this particular evening some of his friends burst into his office and asked him to go out with them. He told them that he had to finish his article that night, and he worked away at it all through the evening. In the small hours of the next morning, his friends returned to his office in high spirits, and probably a little the worse for drink, to find out how he had got on with his writing. There was the great Thackeray, surrounded by pieces of paper – most of them on the floor – and in front of him was the current page, on which was written – a single sentence. This was the product of an evening’s hard work by a very gifted writer. So Thackeray sometimes found it difficult.

Coleridge, on one famous occasion, found it easy. He was sitting in a lonely farmhouse one evening reading an old book called *Purchas His Pilgrimage*. He had just finished a chapter about the Khan Kubla and a palace that he had commanded to be built, when he fell asleep in his chair. When he woke up he was conscious of having composed in his sleep, two or three hundred lines on this theme. He immediately wrote down fifty-four of them, and at this point he was interrupted by a visitor. He returned to his writing an hour later, the visitor having gone, but he found to his dismay that he had completely forgotten the rest of the poem. There was no doubt that this was, as writing occasionally is, a piece of inspiration; and the inspiration had gone. Throughout the rest of his long poetical career Coleridge could add nothing to the fifty-four lines which we now know as *Kubla Khan*.
But poets, like lesser writers, are all different. Wordsworth tells quite another story about the composition of the famous *Lines on Tintern Abbey*. He was on a walking tour down the Wye Valley in South Wales and stopped to inspect and admire the ruin of the ancient abbey at Tintern. He has himself described how he then wrote his poem.

'No poem of mine was composed under circumstances more pleasant for me to remember than this. I began it upon leaving Tintern, after crossing the Wye, and concluded it just as I was entering Bristol in the evening, after a ramble of four or five days with my sister. Not a line of it was altered, and not any part of it written down 'til I reached Bristol. It was published almost immediately after.'

So, unlike Coleridge, Wordsworth, on this occasion, found little difficulty in composing in his mind some 160 lines of poetry during four or five days rambling and in writing them down without any alteration at the end of his journey. So even if this little story does not show that writing is always difficult, it certainly does show that writers are very different.

The novelist, Anthony Trollope, also explained in some detail, in his autobiography, his method of writing. Trollope was an Inspector of Post-Offices, a busy man with little time for writing. So he decided that if he was going to write novels he would have to set himself a regular time-table and write a definite number of pages, each of about 250 words, every week. Here was a method totally different from that of either Coleridge or Wordsworth and one of which the British reading public did not approve. When Trollope's autobiography was published, the popularity of his novels declined sharply because the reading public was so disappointed to learn that Trollope wrote in such a workman-like and uninspired way. These then are four examples of famous writers explaining how they did it. Here is a fifth example of another gifted writer who could not explain. Joseph Addison, the famous politician, essayist and man-about-town, was once asked how he came to write the famous *Spectator Papers* now known as the *De Coverley Papers*. These essays which describe episodes in the life of the Tory Squire, Sir Roger de Coverley, are very carefully and subtly written at three quite distinct levels. The first level is sheer entertainment. The second is criticism of the society of the time. The third is delicate but biting political satire. And yet, when he was asked how he came to write these papers, all that Addison could say was 'I thought of Sir Roger de Coverley'. Which tells us absolutely nothing.

Now there would certainly be no point at all in telling these five stories, one after another, to a secondary school English class. Indeed it
is not suggested that teachers reading this book should necessarily use any of these stories. But they are told here to illustrate the points that writing is difficult, that writing is individual, that writers do it in different ways and that sometimes they can explain how and sometimes they cannot. There is much to be said for letting our pupils know that even some of the greatest artists have found their work difficult and taxing, particularly if we go on to make the point that many of the most gifted people in the world have been the people who worked hardest at their gifts. One of the author’s own most illuminating experiences was a morning spent in the Manuscript Room of the British Museum. There he was both astonished and heartened to see the number of alterations in the manuscripts of such writers as Keats, Shelley, Scott and Meredith, to whom writing always seemed to come so easily. Perhaps we can sum up by saying that writing does not come easily for very long, even to the greatest geniuses.

Now let us go back to our first truth: we do not normally write unless we want to. This is closely related to the problem of individuality in writing. There are in fact two great problems in the classroom. How to get the children to want to write at all, and then, how to get thirty-five pupils in the same classroom writing individually. There is a great deal to be said on both these points but we will begin with a question. Can any teacher reading this book think of a worse way of getting thirty-five pupils to write individually than this: to set them all the same composition topic, ask them all to write about it at exactly the same time and to hand it in at exactly the same time in order that their teacher can set himself the extraordinary task of reading through all these compositions on the same topic one after another and hand them back all at the same time? It would be difficult to think of a worse way of doing it, wouldn’t it? Yet this is how ‘composition’ is still taught in very many secondary schools all over the world. Worse still, the form of writing most often requested is the very artificial ‘essay’. In English for Maturi9 David Holbrook has a brief but penetrating chapter on the effects of essay writing in English.4 In it he suggests, what few thoughtful teachers would deny, that this method encourages children to write in a pompous and complicated way. It leads them to avoid the personal, the emotional and any kind of individual commitment and to think that plain words are too plain to be used in writing. For too long the essay has been fostering in our schools the vices of insincerity and verbosity. Here is one way of positively discouraging children from writing as individuals. We will try to make a few more positive suggestions below.

Let us return to the problem of wanting to write. Why should children write? One short and valid answer is that they should write to
discover more about themselves and the world they live in – both the real world and the fantasy world of imagination. Another good reason for writing is to communicate in a situation in which speech will not do. (Letters and notices are two simple examples.) Immediately the question arises, who are children in school supposed to be communicating with? And this is extremely important. If we are going to ask children to write, then there must be someone on the other end who is going to read. There are three immediate alternatives – three that is if we ignore the commonly accepted idea that children will write enthusiastically and efficiently because they know that the teacher is going to mark what they write. This surely is absurd even though it seems to have been orthodox doctrine in schools for many years. Yet the teacher is the first alternative as a reader because pupils will write enthusiastically for him if they think that he is really interested, as a person, in what they have to say. Pupils will also write well for the rest of their own class, possibly even for the rest of their school, if again they believe that their schoolmates will be interested in what they have to say. Thirdly, there is no doubt that in certain situations children can write very interestingly for themselves. So here are three possibilities as readers: the teacher, fellow pupils, the pupil himself.

F. L. Billows has an amusing and instructive passage in which he describes his own difficulties as a schoolboy in knowing what to write home to his parents. In one of his early letters he had written a detailed account of the first school debate which he had ever attended. The debate had made a great impression on him and he assumed that it would be of great interest to his parents. When his parents told him during the holidays that all debates were conducted in much the same way and that he really need not bother to write details about such things, they destroyed all his confidence in his own ability to select interesting topics. And nothing, says Billows, is more important in writing than that the writer should have a reader clearly in mind and should know what subjects and what treatment of them will best capture and retain that reader's attention.

So the pupil, in writing, must always aim at a reader. The next thing that the teacher should remember is that pupils, like everybody else, are likely to write well about what they know. What sort of things do they know about? First of all, they all know a good deal about themselves. They know about their own homes, their own families, their own villages, their schools, their friends, the kinds of things they like to watch and do in their spare time. To be specific, the two best pieces of writing that the author has received from his pupils in Africa were about what we might call hobbies. One boy wrote a simple account of bark-cloth
making in Buganda. This was not exactly a hobby to him; it was more of a vacation job because every holiday when he went home from school he had to help his father with the family trade of bark-cloth making. So, from his early years, he had got to know the intricacies of the job thoroughly. Now one truth which seems obvious, which many teachers neglect, and which Professor Gurrey proved experimentally on the West Coast of Africa is that we, in fact, write not only much more interestingly but much more correctly and accurately when we write about things we know about. This composition on bark-cloth making was not only fascinating to the reader, it was also, for a third-former, remarkably correct in its English usage. The second piece of writing was also remarkably correct and interesting for exactly similar reasons. It was about growing roses. In our school we had gardens round each of the school ‘houses’ and every year there was a competition to see which house could produce the neatest and most colourful garden. This particular pupil had taken to growing roses in his house garden just because he loved it. He wrote about what he loved doing, and he wrote well.

Something else which pupils know about, and which they can therefore often write about interestingly, is what they are reading. F. L. Billows again has some interesting ideas on the value of ‘copying’ during the early stages of writing in schools.6 Eva Engholm in her book Education through English, based on her experiences as a teacher of English in schools in Uganda, has some good specific examples of the use of model passages on which pupils can base their own efforts.7 Her pupils used Elizabeth Fry as a model for their diary writing, Rupert Brooke’s poem The Great Lover as a model for a composition on things that they loved, and a passage from D. H. Lawrence’s Sea and Sardinia as a model for a composition on an incident on a journey. She believes that her pupils were able to identify with the writers whose work they studied, and that the language of the original writers helped the children to select their own expressions and imagery. Moreover the example passages gave them the confidence of knowing exactly what kind of thing they were being asked to attempt.

It is also useful as we have suggested in Chapter 4, to get children to write short accounts, with some rudimentary literary appreciation, of books they have read. But this should certainly not be done too often because if it is it can kill the enjoyment of reading.

Let us summarize what we have said so far. We have deplored the weekly essay done by every pupil on the same subject. We have proposed that children should be asked to write about what they know, what they are interested in, what someone will want to read. Obviously the examples of bark-cloth and growing roses will not take us very far.
Teachers will rightly demand many more examples of the sort of writing we have in mind. Again Eva Engholm gives useful advice on autobiographical subjects and reproduces a number of extracts from compositions which her pupils wrote for her on such topics as ‘A Portrait of my Mother’, ‘In my Garden’, ‘When I was Very Small’, ‘The Chief of my Village’ and ‘A Visit to an African Market’. What kinds of writing can we expect and encourage in our African secondary school classrooms? We might do well to pause before answering that question and think about the purposes for which language has been used. J. A. Bright has an interesting list of them in the first book of Patterns and Skills in English. They include:

- To help remember the past.
- To help think about the future.
- To help understand the present.
- To help people do things together.
- As a way of using up energy instead of doing something active.
- As a way of being polite, friendly or sociable.
- As a record.
- To make people (and animals) do things.
- To stop people from doing things.
- To give information.
- To obtain information.
- To show feelings (or to hide them).
- To change the feelings of other people.
- For argument and discussion.
- To think and reason.
- To make things happen, e.g. rain to fall.
- To give pleasure, just as sound.
- To say what we mean to do.
- To plan what we mean to do.
- To think about possibilities (if... then...).
- To tell stories.
- To describe things or events.
- To make people smile or laugh.
- To swear and call people bad names.
- To call attention to things.
- To tell others our thoughts (or to hide them).
- As a means of artistic creation like paint to an artist.
- To explain how to do things.
- To help us calculate: add, subtract, divide, measure, estimate, etc.
- To agree.
- To disagree.

These purposes for which people use language suggest the following
kinds of writing which school pupils will be able and interested to produce:

- Stories.
- Descriptions.
- Arguments.
- Character studies.
- Dialogues.
- Telephone conversations.
- Business and personal letters.
- Invitations.
- Reports on school and local activities.
- Magazine and newspaper articles.
- Advertisements.
- Minutes of meetings.
- Rules for societies in the school.
- Complaints.
- Requests.
- Notices.
- Travel descriptions.
- Personal diaries.

In addition to these, David Holbrook offers a list of realistic and real life writing activities intended for pupils in English secondary schools, but easily adaptable to the African situation. The ones we have listed will do to be going on with and any teacher who works his way through them with a class during the course of a year’s work will find that they will lead on to other useful writing activities.

This wide variety of forms of writing will, of course, demand of the pupils a correspondingly wide variety of ‘styles’. The kind of reading programme we have outlined in Chapter 4 will already, if the teacher has provided reasonable guidance, have drawn their attention to different styles of writing, e.g. business communications, formal, informal, colloquial styles, etc. The course books by Bright, Ogundipe and Tregidgo, and MacAdam, recommended in Chapter 6, will give further detailed guidance, and another most helpful book for pupils in their third or subsequent years of secondary education is Alan Warner’s *Short Guide to English Style* recommended in the bibliography (see Appendix 3).

One of the most effective ways of arousing enthusiasm for writing in an African secondary school class is to start a class wall magazine. The idea is that the main weekly piece of writing takes the form of a contribution to a class magazine which is pinned up on a notice board in the classroom every week. The magazine consists of the most interesting
ten or twelve articles – or however many the notice board has space for – handed in during the week. Where a class has access to a spirit duplicator, it is also possible to produce, as some of the author’s classes have, a regular, limited edition of a stapled magazine to be circulated, perhaps for a nominal charge, as widely as possible throughout the school. As soon as possible the pupils should take full charge of every aspect of production. It is a good idea to start the class off with a collection of interesting published magazines such as American Time and Life, the British Sunday papers’ ‘Colour Supplements’ and The London Illustrated News and anything else that the school can afford to buy or the British Council and the American Information Services can be persuaded to donate. After these magazines have been passed around during a couple of class periods and during the spare hours of a week or so, they are discussed in class. Some conclusions are drawn about the variety of topics and ways of presenting material that go to make up an interesting magazine. These conclusions are then adapted, in further discussion, to meet the needs and interests of our particular readership, which will consist of our own class and anyone else who uses our classroom in the course of the week. If the pupils particularly want it, the teacher can set out on the chalkboard a long list of the topics which pupils suggest they might like to write about. He should emphasize, however, that anything that really interests them and which they think they can make interesting to other people in the school is a good subject, whether it is on the list or not. It does not usually take more than the first two or three weekly editions for the class to break away from the idea of lists of topics altogether. There are usually a few pupils who delight in writing articles on subjects that no one else might think worth the magazine’s attention and trying to show why the subject is in fact worth investigating. Articles can be written in the first place in the class exercise books. As with any magazine there has to be a ‘deadline’ for the submission of work but there is not one date and one time at which everyone must hand in their article. We take material when it is ready as any well-run magazine will do. It is the teacher’s job to notice whether any pupil has failed to produce a contribution during the week and then to encourage and where necessary, help him to do so. It is the pupil’s job to hand in as interesting a piece of work as he can, written as correctly as he can. We shall say more about correctness later in this chapter. It is much less important than interest. Levels of correctness will vary greatly within the same class and probably the most helpful thing that a teacher can say to his class about their written work is that he does not at first mind how incorrect it is, as long as it is really the best that they can do.
In accepting articles for the class magazine or wall newspaper, it is wise at first to limit the length of articles to the equivalent of two sides of foolscap. The author has, incidentally, used a class magazine as a way of improving the standard of handwriting in his classes. The method is simple, and is accompanied with a certain amount of basic instruction in handwriting techniques. When the teacher has read through an article, and indicated where it needs correcting, he marks it with a ‘P’ if he thinks it fit for publication and then hands it to the pupil with some foolscap on which he is to copy it neatly for display. Where the standard of handwriting is already satisfactory, of course, pupils may be given foolscap to write their articles on immediately.

Once the class magazine is fairly launched and there is plenty of material coming in, the selection of articles can be handed over by the teacher to an editorial board composed entirely of pupils. The teacher still keeps an eye on the selection procedure to make sure that the less talented pupil who has written something which by absolute standards is not very good but which is much better than his own average, has a fair chance of publication. In practice, this kind of project is a great leveller. Teachers will find that very few pupils are incapable of producing something interesting when no subject is barred and they can choose freely for themselves.

All this on the choice of subjects for writing and on the possibilities of free selection of subjects, because the greatest classroom problem is to get the flow of writing going – to encourage pupils to the point when they really want to write. Too many teachers are pre-occupied with the problem of how to get children to write sensible, grammatical English. The present writer is convinced that this must wait. We should not concentrate on the correctness of writing until we have actually got some writing going. In the same way, in Chapter 3, we stressed that we cannot do anything about getting children to read faster until we have got them to read. It is hardly possible to overemphasize this point about the language skills: until we have got the flow of language going we should not worry too much about the quality of the flow. If we put correctness first, then we will stop the flow before it has ever really had a chance to get started – and then it never will. Gurrey and Holbrook are both good on this topic and in his little book *On learning the English Tongue* Vicars Bell tells an instructive story against himself. He had in one of his primary school classes, a little boy who seemed to be almost completely inarticulate. At least he never said anything in the classroom and he hardly wrote anything either. Bell was not sure what to do about this or why it was happening, until one morning he arrived a
little earlier than usual for school. As he walked towards the classroom he could hear a group of youngsters deep in animated conversation and he stood for a moment outside the door, listening. Right in the centre of the group was his apparently backward pupil who was entralling his classmates with a description, in broad dialect but nevertheless fluent English, of how his father, who was a gamekeeper had thrust a ferret down a hole the night before to fetch out a rabbit. Clearly the boy was a natural story-teller and his classmates were fascinated. After listening for a few minutes, Bell pushed open the door and walked in. The boy stopped immediately, went quietly across to his desk, sat down and waited for the lesson to begin. This little incident showed Bell that he had been stifling a potentially enthusiastic and skilful user of the English language by correcting him almost every time he opened his mouth or put pen to paper. In the end the boy had obviously decided that, in the teacher's presence, it was better to shut up altogether than to be corrected every time he tried to say anything. (Some experienced teachers of English as a second language who have read this far, may well feel that the importance of free writing has been exaggerated and that not nearly enough has been said about controlled writing. This is a perfectly valid point of view, and we shall have more to say about controlling the early stages of secondary school writing later in this chapter.)

For an individual pupil, especially a disadvantaged one, it may take a very long time before the flow begins. John Dixon in his useful book *Growth Through English*\(^1\) (in part an account of the proceedings of the Dartmouth Seminar on the teaching of English which took place in the United States of America in 1966), quotes a poem by a retarded child, which is reproduced in David Holbrook's *English for the Rejected*. This little girl had an IQ of only seventy-six. Her poem was badly written and very badly spelled. It would have been all too easy for a teacher to glance at it and dismiss it, as so many of us do dismiss the first creative efforts of our pupils. It is only six lines long and it is about a very simple incident - how a bird came down and sat on a window-ledge. But it told the teacher not only a great deal about little Joan, but also about the way she was responding to a sympathetic and carefully planned attempt to help a class to write creatively.

But we do not have to go to Vicars Bell or to Holbrook for examples. The author was shown one quite recently by a friend teaching in an English secondary school. This man was not a full-time teacher of English but had been asked to take over the class for a teacher who was away sick. He had asked the children to write about any film or television programme that they had enjoyed recently, and had suggested
as a title either ‘My Favourite Programme’ or ‘A Visit to the Cinema’. At the end of the forty-five minute period, the class had produced a mixed set of offerings and one pupil had written just this:

**A Visit to the Pictures**

The other day I come home from school. The front door was locked so I went round the back and found that are Mum was out. I took some bread and jam and biscuits and put some records on. After a bit are Dad Come in. He said ‘Where is your Mum then?’ I said she was out and he said ‘Shut that noise off then. Here’s a bob. B— off to the pictures.’

The teacher was not sure whether it was a genuine best effort, a joke or a deliberate attempt to provoke him. He realized however that it would be both absurd and ineffective for him to stand on his dignity and to write in the margin what so many teachers do write on work which offends them, the words ‘See me!’ This teacher assumed what any good teacher will assume until he has evidence to the contrary, that the writing offered to him was honest. This piece certainly had the ring of unvarnished truth about it. There was not very much of it, it was not very grammatical or correct, and it was very badly spelled, *but it was a start in the direction of interesting writing*. So the teacher treated the pupil sympathetically, considered the written offering seriously, and suggested some ways of improving and expanding it. The pupil never became a poet nor indeed a really competent writer but he did go on wanting to write – which is what matters most.

Some pupils *do* become poets, however, and most pupils can write interesting free verse if they are given subjects which stimulate and appeal to them. Here for example are two poems written by very ordinary African secondary school pupils who never achieved any outstanding examination or school success in any subject:

**BLINDNESS**

When I observe a blind man  
Who cannot see the way, I remember.  
In pain because of bad eyes,  
But skilled in your work.  
For you can read your books.  
You feel things with clever touch,  
And you can use your hands.  
Yet you can work hard at your job  
Because of your strength; blind man.  
Blind man, friend of ours.  
You blind man, go your unseeing way.
You can think well,
You can read,
Use your hands to see things.
But listen, you can hear everything.
Oh, friend, on your unseeing way;
Born without eyes.
I wonder how you do things,
On your unseeing way.

THE MOON LOVES THE SUN

The moon loves the sun.
Slowly quietly moves the moon and the sun.
The moon to the left, the sun to the right,
Harsh sun beam, quiet moon beam.
Quietly slowly the moon shines,
The moon loves the sun.
Sun is a King, Moon is the Queen
The sun-beam is a soldier, the moon-beam is a servant.
Naked Queen, and the King clothes her.
If the King divorces her to live alone,
The Queen reconciles them, and peace reigns.
The moon loves the sun.

These poems were written by second-year secondary pupils who had free choice of subjects and no guidance at all from their teacher. They had begun to read and enjoy poetry during English lessons. Writing like this comes only from personal interest and involvement, and it is part of our job as teachers of English to foster the kind of observation and writing which both reflect and require personal experience. Sometimes as Holbrook and Mrs Engholm have shown, pupils will produce poetry which is truly figurative and symbolic. Many teachers are troubled about how to help such pupils to go further. As Dixon suggests there are experiences which we can bring to the classroom to foster such self-expression. Experiences with music, painting, photographs and unusual or bizarre objects such as shells and fossils. Sharing such experiences as these will often cause the pupil to look or listen with such concentration that he releases an imaginative flow of expression that he simply was not aware he had. Such partially contrived periods of creative writing are valuable, but should lead on to the exercise of pupils’ creative writing skills on their own everyday experience, which is not provided for them by the teacher. There are great opportunities here for co-operation between teachers in different disciplines, particularly between the teacher of English and the teacher of art and music. One of
the finest examples of this in English education has been recorded by Sybil Marshall in her book *An Experiment in Education*. The whole book is a record of creative experiment linking all the activities of a one class primary school through work with language. It concludes with an account of a whole term’s work for a school of five to eleven year olds which was based – believe it or not – on the Pastoral Symphony of Beethoven. At the back of the book there is photographic evidence of the art work which Mrs Marshall’s class produced, which refutes any suggestion that the theme she chose might have been ‘above the pupils heads’. This is not to suggest that teachers of English in African schools should immediately base their term’s work on the classical symphonies; but it gives us something to aim at and at least it reminds us to set our targets high.

Once we have really got the individual flow of writing going – which may take several terms – group work on writing projects can be very effective and enjoyable. With the right kind of guidance, children can write whole books. One class with which the author worked in East Africa produced two books which were illustrated with photographs and bound with hard covers. One was a study of the port of Mombasa and the other of agriculture in Buganda. The pupils themselves wrote to Government Ministries for official reports and statistics, and to National Information Offices for photographs. They corresponded with pupils in other schools in Mombasa and in other parts of Buganda and from them got personal accounts and details of everyday life. In short, with careful but unobtrusive guidance from the English, geography and history teachers, they did nearly all the work themselves. They produced two useful additions to their own school library and were surprised to discover what they were capable of doing with a certain amount of organization, enterprise and hard work. Gurrey has some useful advice on the planning of projects round some of the careers open to our secondary school pupils. The pupils themselves suggest the careers which interest them most, write to the appropriate organizations, do such visiting as is possible from the school, and then produce short guides which are often very useful to senior members of the school, and to the careers master, if the school has one.

Having dealt at length with the central problem of getting children to the point at which they want to write, we must now turn to the less urgent, though important and difficult, business of correcting and improving written work. Having agreed that correctness is not the most important quality of good writing we must be careful to act on this principle. It may not be too extreme to suggest that whenever a teacher comments on the correctness or otherwise of a piece of work before
having made any comments on the quality of thought or experience conveyed, he is positively discouraging the pupil from writing.

Nevertheless 'marking' is an essential part of the English teacher's job. If he does not find himself spending a great deal of time reading and assessing his pupils' writing, then they are not writing enough. Marking is not an exercise to enable the teacher to demonstrate how skilful he is with the written language. Nor is it an opportunity to decorate the pupils' books as comprehensively as possible with red marks. Our marking ought to show our pupils that we are interested in their work, that we are thorough in our examination of it and that we are encouraging to anyone who is trying his best. (We should bear in mind that this means that we are encouraging to nearly everybody nearly all the time. Very few pupils make mistakes or present inferior work because they want to.) So, as teachers of English we shall have to work hard at our marking. At the same time we should try to act on the resolution, proposed in our first chapter, never to do anything for a pupil that he could do for himself. This means that we shall make clear that although we are prepared to help, it is the pupil's job to do the correcting. We will indicate in the pupils' exercise books where something is wrong, and, perhaps, what is wrong but not how to put it right. Apart from being sound education this saves the teacher of English hours of time which he may easily waste in writing correct versions in the margin. Most pupils never even read these correct versions because they are more interested in the mark at the bottom of the page. If they do read them, they probably do not remember them. But what they have to work out for themselves, they probably will remember.

As usual it is important to explain to our pupils exactly how we are going to mark, and why we are using this method. We should make it clear at the beginning of the course that we do not mind how bad their 'best' may be because, as long as we do not have to waste time treating carelessness as if it were ignorance, we will soon be able to help even the weakest members of the class to improve. Then, when the first piece of written work comes in we go through every pupil's work, carefully marking, but not correcting, every mistake. (On this first occasion we will mark every mistake; but not on every occasion. More on this below.) What do we mean by marking a mistake? We mean drawing attention to it by a symbol in the margin against the line in which the mistake occurs. It does not matter very much what symbols the teacher of English uses as long as the class clearly understand his system. It is, however, a great help to co-operation between the teachers if there is a standard system in use for all subjects throughout the school. Here are a few of the symbols which the author has found most useful:
Many teachers will wish to change these and add others.

The most important thing about correcting and improving written work is that it should go on *all the time in all subjects* which are being written in English. This is one of the areas, referred to earlier, in which we English teachers are helpless without our colleagues' co-operation. We may mark as carefully as we can, but if the standard of written English is virtually ignored in the other 26/36ths of the school week, then we are wasting our time. In suggesting that our colleagues should help us with correcting and improving written English, we do not imagine that they have time, or that it is part of their job, to help pupils to put things right. What is important is that they should be willing and able *just to indicate*, with our symbols if they can use them, but if not, with a single symbol – perhaps an ‘L’ or ‘E’ for ‘Language’ or ‘English error’ – where the English needs correcting. It is then, as always, *the pupils’ job* to put right the English in the physics or geography or mathematics exercise, with the teacher of English to help him if he needs help. This may sound like a lot of extra work. In fact, it takes very little. We are not asking favours from our colleagues; we are admitting that we are practically helpless without their co-operation. We are asking them to help us, and thereby help themselves, to improve the standard of English in their lessons as well as ours. In the end they will get better physics, geography, mathematics and everything else if they will help.

The first three or four written exercises of the term should give the teacher a fair idea of the standards of grammatical and idiomatic correctness which the class has attained. These may be very differently distributed indeed from the levels of imaginative awareness of expression reflected in the written work. A few class sessions on the most common errors should then help to create some kind of base to work
from though there will nearly always be a few pupils who need special remedial work. Once the teacher has reached this stage with a class, it is probably best to base the writing period for the week on a particular 'study point'. In any particular week it might be any one of, for example, paragraphing, verb patterns, countable and uncountable nouns, punctuation, or even spelling. He then marks the written work for the week only for that particular study point. This procedure must, of course, be clearly explained so that the pupils will not assume that an unblemished script has necessarily been returned to them as being perfectly correct. 'Slanting' the marking in this way helps to focus attention on the particular difficulty selected for the week’s lesson and it also means that even the weakest pupil rarely has the margins of his exercise book littered with red symbols. (It may be worth noting at this point that everything the teacher wishes to say about a pupil’s writing should be written clearly in a wide margin required for that purpose. To try to write above what a pupil has written is both discourteous and inefficient. What a teacher writes can seldom be read easily above the pupil’s own script.)

Every four or five weeks the teacher marks every mistake so that the pupils get an idea of how they are faring by absolute standards of correctness. Any teacher who uses this system should, incidentally, let his headmaster and any visiting inspectors know that he uses it so that they do not confront him with the many errors that he has apparently ‘missed’. Above all, the pupils should understand the method and the reasons for it. The most important reason is that we want them to do a great deal of writing – far more than the teacher has time to mark in detail. We want them, too, to concentrate on the particular study point for the week.

With a first year secondary class which has been badly taught in the primary school, it may be necessary for the first few weeks of the secondary course to give clear indications of what is wrong where an error is indicated. But as soon as possible the teacher should put the responsibility on the pupil to find out what is wrong. The next stage is merely to underline the error and put the appropriate symbol in the margin. A few weeks later only the symbol in the margin appears and it is the pupil’s job first to find out where in the particular line the error is, and then to correct it. We should encourage even first year pupils to become good proof readers of their own and other peoples’ writing. One useful way of doing this is to give a bonus mark for errors detected and neatly corrected after a final reading of their work and before they hand it in. This is not as curious as it sounds. Few pupils will bother to make deliberate mistakes and correct them just to earn a couple of extra marks.
Group work is useful here also, as pupils can proof read each others work before it is handed in, and can earn a bonus mark for the number of errors they spot. Finally, when all the marking has been done both by pupils and teacher, there is one absolute rule: the teacher should decline to read any further written work until corrections of the previous written work have been done. By corrections, we mean writing out briefly the correct form of the word, phrase, idiom or sentence pattern – whatever has been wrongly written. The correct form should be written out, once only underneath the exercise so that the teacher can quickly check that all the corrections have been done.

Some years ago, when the author was new to teaching English as a second language, one of his own pupils demonstrated the importance of this to him in a most unfortunate way. He was a keen student of English and prepared to do a great deal of extra writing. But he did not care at all for correcting the previous exercise – he was all for breaking new ground. In his first attempt at School Certificate, he got distinctions in three science subjects but only a pass in English. He wanted to join the Ugandan Army – and a very good officer he would have made – but for this he had to have a ‘credit’ in English. So having left school he studied privately in the following year for the English paper only. He was working in an office during the day and would either post his work or cycle out twelve miles to deliver it personally. But he still preferred to do half a dozen new summaries or comprehension exercises rather than do the corrections of one previous one. A more experienced teacher would have insisted, as the author now does, on the corrections of the previous exercise being done before any new work was attempted. But the result with this particular pupil was that he did not learn much more English in his second year of School Certificate study and in spite of all his efforts at the end of it he got only a pass again. He was now too old to apply for an army cadetship and so missed his chance of pursuing the career on which he had set his mind. His experience represents at least one good reason for insisting on corrections.

How should the pupils do their corrections? Mainly by referring to a few standard reference books of which we shall have more to say in the next chapter. The Advanced Learner’s Dictionary we have already mentioned. Very useful, in addition, are A. S. Hornby’s Guide to Patterns and Usage in English,16 and W. S. Allen’s Living English Structure for Schools.17 There are other books of structures and exercises available18 which teachers may find just as good though there is no substitute for the dictionary. If the pupil cannot work out the correct version with the help of these reference books, he is perfectly free either to ask another pupil – for he now knows that this is not ‘cheating’ but ‘working to-
gether' – or to ask any of the English staff, preferably the teacher who set the work. This simple explanation of the method conceals the fact that it all takes a lot of time and care – especially time – for nothing else is as effective as patient explanation from the teacher followed by plenty of drills and practice of the pattern or idiom which has been explained.

We have already suggested that all written work be treated with respect. One of the best ways of doing this is to mark it and return it quickly. Any teacher who sets written work and then keeps it for two or three weeks before returning it is showing his pupils that he does not think it important almost as clearly as if he had told them so. Another good reason for returning written work quickly is that our pupils need to write often. *Little and often* at first to avoid creating opportunities for making mistakes. Then, as they grasp the basic mechanisms of the language and as their reading experience grows, as often and as much as they like. The reason for this is that we learn to write by writing.

We suggested earlier in this chapter that many teachers might feel that not nearly enough had been said about controlling pupils' writing. Certainly all the advice which has just been given on the subject of free writing needs to be acted upon discreetly, particularly by the inexperienced teacher. There are many secondary schools in Africa in which the level of skill in the speaking and writing of English which pupils have reached on entering the secondary school is so low that it is better not to give them much scope at all for free writing. We have stressed throughout the first four chapters of this book that one of the basic principles of language teaching is to avoid 'mistake-making situations'. If we encourage children to write freely about anything that interests them *long* before they have sufficient mastery of English to be able to do so, then we are setting up a perfect mistake-making situation. The premature use of free composition is probably one of the worst mistakes still being made in the teaching of English as a second language. But what else can the teacher do?

He can construct a syllabus for the teaching of writing skills which will control, as rigidly as is necessary, the difficulty of the tasks the pupil is asked to attempt, matching them carefully with the level of language skill the pupil has attained. For example, the following sequence of reproduction exercises might form the basis for the first term's writing in English for a first year secondary class which has been badly prepared for secondary education.

1. The teacher writes a simple passage on the board with several choices available for some of the verbs and nouns. All the possible choices are correct alternatives. The pupil simply has to copy the
passage correctly, choosing any one of the alternatives for each verb or noun where a choice is offered.

2. The teacher writes a short passage on the board leaving blanks wherever 'a' or 'the' occur. The pupils have to copy the passage correctly inserting 'a' or 'the' as appropriate.

3. A simple dictation exercise. The teacher reads a simple story to the class. After some discussion and explanation, he reads it again slowly, sentence by sentence, and the pupils write it out as correctly as possible.

4. The pupils are given copies of a simple picture. The teacher dictates a passage in simple sentences which describes the picture. He then asks the pupils questions about the picture which they answer by reproducing the appropriate sentence from the dictated passage.

5. Further dictation practice as above, but without the picture. The teacher asks questions mostly requiring answers in the form of the sentence dictated. A few questions require the pupils to make up short sentences for themselves.

6. The pupils read a story silently. The teacher then tells them to close their books and gives them a skeleton of the story, leaving gaps which require words, phrases and clauses to complete the sentence.

7. As in 6, but with pupils being required to construct whole simple sentences.

8. Pupils read a short story silently and then retell it briefly without any written help.

9. Pupils are given a sequence of pictures which tell a story without any captions underneath and are required to tell the story simply in their own words.

10. The teacher reads a simple story aloud. (The story, like all other materials used in this sequence, being carefully selected within the vocabulary and structure knowledge of the pupils.) The pupils are required to reproduce a simple version of the story.

There are many possible variations of such sequences as this, and it is possible to introduce intermediate stages so that the pupils pass through as many as twenty or twenty-five recognizable stages during one or two terms' work. It is hoped however that this simple example makes the principle of controlled composition clear. Teachers who wish to start their secondary school pupils writing in this strictly controlled way, can get further detailed guidance from the books by Spencer, Robinson, Wingfield, and Moody, recommended in the references to this chapter.

The last part of this chapter on teaching writing skills must be devoted to one of the most important writing skills which pupils will use.
in all subjects – the making of notes. We must stress at the start that we want the pupils to *make* notes, not to *take* notes. Any teacher who spends even a few weeks in Africa is likely to notice that our pupils are addicted to notes. They use them very frequently and very inefficiently, because they have never been taught how to use them well. We have agreed that our task as teachers of English as a second language is to give attention to every aspect of the pupils’ exercise of their language skills in all subjects. Here is another challenge for us: to teach the proper use of notes, and thereby to contribute greatly, not only to the pupil’s writing skill, but also to their intelligent grasp of all their other subject studies. How can we start?

First, strangely enough, by undermining their great and misguided faith in the written word. Written notes are one of the least efficient aids to memory. There are many primarily non-verbal ways of storing information. Amongst them are:

- Drawings.
- Diagrams.
- Graphs.
- Maps.
- Models.
- Photographs
- Films.

and all these can be more efficient learning tools than written words. We should encourage our pupils to make written notes only when other forms of record are inadequate. But at present our pupils do not regard written notes either as aids to memory or as learning tools. They have, for many years, been encouraged to regard their notes as essential material of education. Once the notes have been committed to memory they can be used as a substitute for genuine understanding, and, if they are presented in a suitably literate disguise, they will satisfy almost any examiner. Readers of this book who have taught at sixth form or even at college and university level, will know from experience that this possibility does not, by any means, end at School Certificate level. It should not be possible to succeed in Higher School Certificate and university level examinations through sheer memory. *But it often is possible* and it is no use telling our pupils that memorized notes do not ‘work’. They know that they do.

If we are to transform the making of notes into a useful exercise for our pupils, we must change their present attitude towards notes. We shall only bother to do this if we are seriously interested in helping them to learn to think for themselves. We will then have to both explain and
demonstrate that understood notes work better than memorized notes and that because our power of sheer rote memorization is limited, understood notes also work over a wider area of knowledge. We can go on to explain and demonstrate that notes which pupils have built up themselves are more efficient than ones which a teacher has made for them. This is because the process of planning the notes for themselves begins the longer process of complete understanding and mastery of the knowledge which they are trying to acquire. They are systematizing their knowledge — 'making a pattern' is a better way of expressing this idea to pupils — which in that very act of arrangement is beginning to become their own.

Many teachers defend the time-honoured and worthless practice of dictating notes or requiring pupils to copy notes from the chalkboard, on the grounds that the act of copying begins the process of memorizing. But there does not seem to be any evidence for this and if we examine our own experience honestly we are likely to admit that it is quite possible to copy or write from dictation without a glimmer of either understanding or memorization. (Many English grammar school pupils spend most of their French lessons doing precisely this.) The pupil is not being required to systematize, to review, to recall, or even initially to understand the knowledge that is presented to him. So teachers who insist on constructing notes for their pupils should admit the implications of what they are doing. They are treating the children they teach as if they will never mature into anything else. Such teachers could do the job that their dictated notes do better by giving out duplicated handouts which would waste less of the pupils' time and be no more inefficient than dictation or chalkboard copying.

Bearing in mind the primary school experience which we outlined in our first chapter, we must recognize that it will not be easy to impress our secondary pupils with the notion that notes should be understood; as we have suggested earlier, they have not been used to fully understanding anything. So it is as well to establish three aims for the first year of the secondary course. To convince our pupils:

1. That they are capable of making their own notes.
2. That to be able to do so will help them to understand which is better than memorizing.
3. That when they have made good notes they will be able to use them to produce good 'essay' answers if they want to.

If we really want to help our pupils to arrange knowledge rather than merely to show off our own arranged knowledge, we will help them to prepare notes only on material that they have already covered and
therefore have some chance of being able to arrange. This is where the centrality of English which we have emphasized throughout this book is a great help. We need not begin with ‘English’ material at all. We can begin with something from another school subject which the pupils really want to remember. The teacher can ask the pupils for suggestions or get some from the other subject teachers.

Because notes are, as we have said, one of the least effective forms of record, it is a good idea to begin in the first year with sketches and diagrams to be labelled. They are simpler than notes and more effective. Examples are easy enough to find: flowers, insects and animals from biology; a shaduf, a ‘Spinning Jenny’ or a velocipede from history; physical and political maps or a sketch of, for example, the Kariba Dam, from geography; an electrical circuit or a photometer from Physics, are only a few possibilities. Pupils will no doubt have had experience in copying sketches from the chalkboard or textbook. This, like copied or dictated notes, demands no understanding or arrangement from them. A first simple stage towards independence and their own arrangement, is to leave it to the pupil to put in the arrows linking the labels with the parts they describe. It makes the job a little more difficult if the pupil has to invent the labels from a continuous description provided for him. It is more difficult still if he is left to decide what ought to be labelled, and most difficult of all, if he is required to note the names of things which should be labelled from a description read a few days before. If we can practice this kind of development for a few weeks we have prepared the ground for notes without other aids.

Here again, if we want the pupils to think the exercise valuable, we should propose notes of something that they want to remember. Their textbooks in other subjects will provide a useful start. But we cannot just say ‘Read Chapter 15 of Stembridge’s Asia and Australia’ and then make notes on it. This is too difficult; the pupils need a specific aim. Here are three examples:

1. Read Chapter 15 and then fill in the spaces in the note. Australia has many occupations and industries of which the most important are:

   \[(a) \quad (b) \quad (c) \quad (d)\]

   (when the pupil is able to insert sheep farming, cattle farming, growing food crops and mining, he has obviously read the chapter and begun to arrange for himself the information which it contains. But he could not have set out the information methodically without some help from the teacher).

2. Read Chapter 3 and draw a map showing the main wheat, rice
and cotton growing areas of India. Add short notes explaining why these three crops grow in different areas.

3. Read Chapter 17 and then draw a plan of a hydro-electric power-station and dam, of the kind much used in New Zealand.
   (You may use additional information from your Intermediate Physics textbook if you wish.)

Even when we have practised this sort of thing for a term or so we should beware of throwing the pupils in at the deep end to ‘make notes on the chapter’. They still need help in structuring their notes and they will do this well only when they have a firm grasp of the concept of levels of generality. Language teachers tend to assume that secondary school pupils will have mastered this concept. Very few of them have and therefore very few are able to understand and systematize complex material. Levels of generality are extremely important in everyday conversation. We would be surprised if, in reply to the question ‘How did you go to town?’ a colleague replied, ‘I went in my 1967 Mercedes 230 S diesel.’ We would think this an odd reply but might not stop to work out that the oddity consisted in the use of a level of generality which was inappropriate to the context. J. A. Bright deals with the concept clearly and briefly in Book I of Patterns and Skills in English and uses amongst others the following example:

‘Arrange the following words and groups in levels of generality with the most particular on the lowest level. You may find one word or more than one at the top.

1. Zephyr Saloon, sports car, truck, vehicle, Jaguar Mark E, coupe, saloon, cart, estate car, van, two-seater, lorry, petrol lorry, Hillman Minx Estate car.

What would be the best level to use in a shop if you wanted to buy something?’

Teachers will find it well worthwhile expanding the kinds of examples which Bright gives and allowing their classes some practice in setting out tables showing levels of generality. This should be done before going on to the next stage which, for the purpose of note-taking is to establish a system of headings, sub-headings, letters and numbers which correspond to the levels of generality in the material to be noted.

It is helpful both to pupils and staff if a common system of note-making is established for all subjects throughout the school. The English teacher will not find it difficult to ensure this if he is willing to give the lead. Any system which uses capital and lower case letters and Roman
and Arabic numerals will do. Here is an example, showing four 'levels of generality' in note form. It is based on the material in Chapter 3 of this book.

READING AND STUDY METHODS FOR SECONDARY SCHOOL AND COLLEGE STUDENTS

A. Two common fallacies
   1. That there is an easy way to study. There isn't.
   2. That your memory is bad. It isn't. You treat it badly.

B. Where to study
   1. In the same place as often as possible. Only study materials on desk.
   2. Comfortable, but not too comfortable.
   3. Don't worry about noise and it won't worry you.
   4. Friends can be worst enemies. Use library instead of own study – to get away from them.

C. When to study
   1. Regularly and consistently – bursts inefficient.
   2. From first day of term.
   3. According to a time-table.
      a. Prepared for the whole week.
      b. Divided into specific subjects and topics.
      c. Periods similar to lectures – \( \frac{3}{4} \) to 1 hour.
      d. Not too long on one subject – a period is enough.
      e. Allow equal amount of own time on new work.
      f. Have short break after each period to relax.
      g. Adjust time-table when necessary, but stick to it.
   i. Remember you need:
      (i) 8 hours sleep a day.
      (ii) 2 hours eating time a day.
      (iii) 2 hours real recreation a day.
   4. Revise new work as soon as possible after you have first done it.
      Very important because we do nearly all our forgetting almost immediately. (Revise these notes tonight and in ten days’ time.)
   5. Don't try to study if angry, worried, unhappy, tired. Remove the cause first if you can.

D. How to study
   1. Getting the most out of lectures.
      a. Arrive before lecture begins.
      b. Sit near front where you can see and hear.
      c. Take notes:
         (i) Get to know lecturer's system and signals.
(ii) Use headings, numbers and letters.
(iii) Revise and prune notes before storing.
(iv) Use loose-leaf notebook – remove poor notes and insert own reading notes.
(v) Work together with class-mates on lecture notes.

2. Getting the most out of books.
   a. Reading and studying not same procedure.
   b. Reading is fast – varied speed, no repetition. You will read better if you read faster.
   c. Study much slower – depends on intelligent revision.
   - The SQ3R technique:
     Survey.
     Question.
     Read.
     Recite.
     Revise.
   d. Study is active. You need a pencil and note paper.

Once we have established some such system of note-making as this what we have to do over the first year of the secondary course is gradually to increase the amount of the framework that we expect the pupils to provide for themselves, beginning immediately by leaving gaps in the lowest levels of generality. Pupils soon learn to fill the gaps even at the highest levels, in response to carefully planned questions from the teacher. The last stage before leaving the pupils to do the whole job for themselves, can very usefully be to distribute a series of graded stencilled outlines on the above pattern. The last of them leaves out everything except the lettering and numbering of the levels.

By the middle of the second year the pupils’ own notes should be good enough to stand up to either of the following tests:

1. The pupil reads through his notes, has a few minutes to review them and is then required to speak from them on the general heading. If they do not contain enough detail for him to do this adequately then he is not going down low enough in the scale of generality and must add more detail by doing so.

2. The pupil is required to prepare and, after the teacher has looked at his plan, to write an essay based on notes drawn from more than one section of his notebook. (By the time he has reached this stage he deserves a looseleaf file for his notes instead of an exercise book.)

If our pupils can acquire these skills in the second year of their course then, quite apart from the effect on their efficiency in every other subject, they will be well equipped to tackle the serious project
work, mentioned above, which can form the basis of their written work in the third year.

Taking notes from radio programmes or visiting lecturers – not from lectures by the teacher because these should never happen – is a useful skill for senior pupils, especially if they hope to go on to higher education. The essential here is to give the pupils help in spotting the lecturers ‘signals’ – ‘The next stage is’, ‘It is essential to grasp’, ‘We now move on to’, etc., etc., and then to give them plenty of practice. The set of notes on Reading and Study Methods reproduced above, has in fact been distributed to many of the author’s senior secondary school pupils and first year university undergraduates, after talks and discussion periods on the subject. The pupils were invited to make their own notes, but were not told until the end of the sessions that a set of sample notes was to be distributed. The author is satisfied from what he has seen of undergraduate notes recently that many of our second- and third-year African university students could still benefit greatly from a short course in the kind of approach to note-making outlined here. It is never too late to learn how to make good notes. But the right time for it is the first year of the secondary school course.

Finally a few words on summarizing, about which we have so far said nothing specific in a whole chapter on the teaching of writing skills. The first thing to note is that even external examiners for Overseas School Certificate Boards no longer require pupils to summarize passages within specific word limits. Teachers of English are, therefore, no longer forced to teach this highly artificial exercise and can devote their time to teaching the skills of summarizing in a realistic way for the kinds of use to which we put them in everyday life. One obvious realistic use of summarizing which we have dealt with in this chapter is that of note-making. But the skills of reference reading which we discussed in Chapter 4 also require the concise and clear presentation of what has been gathered – and summarized in the mind, if not on paper – from many reference sources varying from newspapers to encyclopaedias. Every answer to every extensive reading question is in itself a short summary. Every stage of the SQ3R study technique, described in Chapter 3, demands skill in summarizing either what has been learned so far or what the evidence suggests the reader may expect to learn. Whenever we ask pupils to write, either from or about what they have read, whether it is just a short account of a book, or part of a larger writing project of the kind referred to earlier in this chapter, they are exercising their summarizing skills. If we consider summarizing in this way we will not be so concerned, as many teachers have been in the past, to teach, at an early stage of secondary education, the formal practice of summarizing short
passages of English in even shorter passages. We shall understand that our pupils are acquiring the essential skills of summarizing, in an informal way, in almost every activity in the English lesson.

Not that we are rejecting formal practice in summary altogether. In fact this exercise makes a very good controlled writing situation, particularly for a class which has spent too long learning its mistakes. In Chapter 10 the reader will find a suggested method of organizing a few weeks concentrated summary work to get a neglected, or badly taught, School Certificate class into the swing of writing – to 'get the flow going' to use the phrase which has been the theme of this chapter. As with the making of notes, pupils respond well to summary practice on passages taken from their textbooks in other subjects; they can see the purpose of the work immediately. Summarizing a passage involves, of course, first an intensive reading exercise and then a reproductive writing one, with the pupil not having to think up what he has to say, but having to select the most important things which he thinks the passage has said, and its overall impression, clearly and briefly. He is not forced to use his own words or to use those of the original writer. He is looking for the best words, which will sometimes be the ones he chooses himself and sometimes those which another writer has already chosen. And that seems a suitably realistic note on which to end a chapter on the teaching of writing skills.

NOTES AND REFERENCES


CHAPTER 6

Teaching English Grammar

'The art of grammar . . . is a distinct thing from the mere knowledge of the languages; for all mankind are taught in their infancy to speak their mother tongue, by a natural imitation of their mothers and nurses, and those who are around about them, without any knowledge of the art of grammar, and the various observations and rules that relate to it.

'Grammar indeed is nothing else but rules and observations drawn from the common speech of mankind in their several languages, and it teaches us to speak and pronounce, to spell and write with propriety and exactness, according to the custom of those in every nation who are or were supposed to speak and write their own language best.'

So wrote the English poet and teacher, Isaac Watts in 1741 and he was right to stress that most of us do not know the grammar of our first language - we just know the language. The English grammarian Henry Sweet once said that there was a real sense in which no one could know the grammar of a language until they first knew the language thoroughly. When we talk of 'knowing the grammar' we mean understanding and being able to explain how its mechanisms work. This means 'knowing' it in a quite different sense from simply being able to work it. Many a housewife is able to use a vacuum cleaner or electric food-mixer without being able to explain how it works. The teacher's task is to know the grammar of English, not only so that he himself can manipulate it correctly but so that he can explain its workings to his pupils to enable them to manipulate it correctly as well.

We have already suggested in our first chapter, in which we quoted Professor Gatenby, that the best way for pupils to learn their second language would be exactly the same way as they learned their first and this is the way which Isaac Watts summarizes in his first paragraph. But, as elsewhere in Africa we know that this is almost certainly not the way in which our pupils have begun to learn English. They have not had the chance to assimilate the language naturally and easily as if it were their mother-tongue. In the secondary school they will need as much teaching and guidance as we can spare time to give them to undo what has
been done in their primary days. Watts' second paragraph suggests the kind of guidance that is most useful. It should, as he says, be drawn from the 'common speech' of those who 'speak and write their own language best'.

Unfortunately few teachers of English as a second language either know Watts' words or sympathize with the spirit of them. In too many staff rooms of secondary schools in which English is taught either as a first or a second language, the value of teaching English grammar is hotly disputed. 'I don't teach grammar at all,' says one teacher, 'the pupils find it so boring.' 'English hasn't really got much grammar,' says a second. And a third teacher may volunteer, 'I just deal with grammatical mistakes as they come up in class.'

These are three common points of view expressed by teachers of English. If they show one thing clearly it is that the speakers are not thinking about the same thing when they talk of 'grammar'. The first teacher has probably bored his pupils by teaching them about the grammar of English instead of teaching them the grammar of English. It has not occurred to the third speaker who 'deals with mistakes as they come up' that he might be able to prevent some of these mistakes from ever happening if he dealt with them in class at an earlier stage. The second teacher does have part of the truth. His suggestion that 'English hasn't really got much grammar' is worth examining.

If we compare English with Latin, as many teachers of English tend to do, we notice one sense in which English certainly has much less 'grammar' than Latin – the sense of changes within individual words used to convey meaning. There are quite a lot of these in English but they are comparatively easy to learn. What the linguists sometimes call the *accidence* of English, that is these changes within the words themselves – as for example in English verb forms 'write, wrote, writing, written' – is relatively simple. But the *syntax* of English is not simple. If the word syntax puzzles you, think simply of 'word order' – the way words are placed next to one another in English to form acceptable phrases and sentences. *Word order* in English is important and complicated. An example may help to make that clearer. An English couple living in East Africa wished to sell their piano. Their name was Cook and they lived at a place called Mbarara. Not wishing to spend too much money on advertising, they inserted in the local newspaper, an advertisement which was clear but brief. It was included in the 'For Sale' column of the paper and it read simply:

'Piano. Apply Cook, Box 16, Mbarara'

A few days later they had a letter which began:
Dear Mr and Mrs Piano, I am very good cook and would like to come and work for you in Mbarara."

This, if we think carefully about it, shows us amongst other things that word order in English is extremely important and that it is not the same as the word order in Runyankole which was the first language of the man who wrote the letter. English does have an important and difficult grammar. But teachers who know and use the language well as their first language tend not to notice it. A useful, though by no means complete, definition of the grammar of any language is that it is the summary of the ways in which the words and structures of the language are grouped together to convey meaning. And of course, teachers of English are teaching that all the time, whether they intend to or not.

Many of us were taught the grammar of English as if it were a set of rules. Isaac Watts wrote about 'rules and observations'. In doing so, he showed, more than two hundred years ago, the kind of honesty and common-sense which is missing from too many of our language lessons today. Those of us who teach English are teaching a living, changing language and we must observe it very carefully and try to teach the most effective forms of the language that we really hear and read. Too often we fail to do this. Let us examine, for example, two things which the author - and probably very many of his readers - learnt at school. The first was that a sentence was 'a group of words in English expressing one complete thought'. Teachers teach this even today and pupils accept it. Yet consider the following sentence:

'All the intelligent, well-paid and enthusiastic teachers of English who are reading this book and whose attention may have started to wander already during the course of this chapter on a rather difficult subject, have perhaps become interested again at this point because they are wondering what particular all-embracing definition of a sentence the author is going to produce for them to replace the unsatisfactory one which he has just criticized.'

To anyone who can read English that sentence conveys a number of complete thoughts. It is true that they are closely related to one another and that it is possible to pick out one which may be rather more important than the others. But what should be clear from this example is that the particular grammatical mechanism which we call a sentence in English has nothing to do with expressing one thought only. A second commonly taught fallacy is that the passive use of the verb in English should be avoided if possible, because the active use is preferable. No less a scholar than Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, the first professor of English in the University of Cambridge wrote such advice
in a series of lectures published as a book called *The Art of Writing* (though in fairness to him, we should note that he was trying to expose the absurdities of much ‘official’ English in which writers almost always chose the passive simply because it tends to be longer). Yet any teacher or pupil who will examine the English language honestly and record his ‘observations’ will realize that the passive has been invented by users of English for a purpose. There are many good reasons for using the passive of the verb and three of them are – as for example in the sentence: ‘A window has been broken’ – when we do not know who has done the action; when we do not care who has done the action; when we positively wish to conceal who has done the action.

Too many teachers of English in the past have given faulty definitions of sentences and wrong advice about the use of the passive. Incidentally the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* provides a realistic and accurate answer to the question ‘What is a sentence?’:

‘That portion of language in speech or writing which occurs between two full-stops.’

And if this strikes the reader as not a very useful answer the reason is that the question ‘What is a sentence?’ is not a very useful question. A much more useful question might be ‘How do we make statements, questions and exclamations in English?’ Part of this chapter will be devoted to suggesting one way in which this useful question might be answered.

All teachers of English as a second language would do well to follow the example of an English lady who had rather a short temper and a very quick tongue. She was anxious to keep both in check and very much wanted to cure herself of the habit of saying hasty, hurtful things to people. So she wrote a large notice and put it on the mantelpiece in her sitting-room. Whenever she was tempted to make a hasty judgement, she glanced towards it and read the words ‘Is it kind? Is it true? Is it necessary?’ As teachers of English, and particularly as teachers of grammar, we need a similar notice. Before we decide to teach or comment on any point of English grammar for our pupils, we should ask ourselves ‘Is it true? Is it intelligible? Is it necessary?’ If we will do this conscientiously, we will find that there are not many of the so-called rules of English grammar which will stand up to all three of these tests. And unless what we are teaching is true, unless it can be expressed in words that our pupils can fully understand, and unless they are really going to use and apply it, we should not teach it. If we do we shall be guilty of what the philosopher A. N. Whitehead warns us is one of the most harmful of teaching habits – the teaching of ‘inert ideas’.

These three criteria then – Truth, Intelligibility, Necessity – can be
used to test the value of any individual grammatical item which we are thinking of teaching. But we ought first to be clear what we mean by teaching and learning English grammar in a second language situation. When we talk about the teaching of grammar we can distinguish at least three levels. At the first stage, which corresponds very closely with the conditions for learning a first language which Professor Gatenby outlined, the pupils are not aware at all that they are learning the grammar of the language. They are, in fact, assimilating the correct patterns of language without knowing that they are doing so. The teacher introduces a common pattern, such as for example:

'This is my desk.'
'This is my table.'
'This is my chalkboard duster.'
or:
'That's the map on the wall at the back of the room.'
'That's a picture on the board at the front of the class.'

and provides several examples of the pattern in situations which really happen and which the class can understand. The pupils then provide other examples of the pattern, perhaps working round the class and making use of different things which are actually in the classroom or which they can imagine might be in the room. Nothing is said about the structure of the pattern. It is not analysed in any way. Nobody talks about the language or uses any complicated terms about it, such as 'subject', 'predicate', 'noun clause' or anything of the sort. Everybody, teacher and pupils alike, just talks the language. This method is the business of the primary school and is the way in which our secondary school children should have been taught for their first year or two of English language learning. Unfortunately, as we have admitted in Chapter I, we can be fairly certain that they have not been taught in this way in most of the English-speaking countries of Africa. It is this certainty that makes the second stage of grammar teaching so important.

This second stage we can call 'remedial grammar'. The pupils have spent a long time learning their mistakes, learning incorrect and unacceptable grammatical combinations of words. We have to help them to unlearn them. At this level, the skilful teacher first tries to find out why the mistakes have taken place. He then devises drills to emphasize the correct pattern which should be used and if he can, gets the pupils to deduce the pattern (and even occasionally a 'rule') from the evidence of a large number of examples. So the pupils are helped to distinguish between known patterns which they may confuse, and to avoid the worst effects of the 'interference' of their own first language. The more
effectively the first stage of grammar teaching has been conducted in
the primary school, the less need there will be in the secondary school
for stage two to be used at all.

The third stage, which in a second language situation is often not
attempted in a secondary school at all but rather in the teacher-
training college or university, is the conscious study and systematization
of what is known about the way the language works. It is this stage of
grammar teaching that Sweet was thinking of when he said that we
could not really know the grammar of a language until we knew the
language. Knowing what we do of the conditions of primary education
in most African countries, we must agree that stages one and two are the
business of the secondary school teacher of English. But we shall suggest
below that, if a teacher is prepared to learn the grammar of English
thoroughly, and choose his books carefully, he can introduce stage three
even in the lower forms of a secondary school and help his pupils
enormously by doing so.

So far, then, we have suggested that any rule or observation which the
teacher makes about the grammar of English should be true, intelligible
and necessary to our school pupils. We will now go on to prepare six
guiding principles for grammar teaching. We do not want the reader to
accept these just because they occur in a book on the teaching of
English as a second language. We want him to test them for himself
against our three criteria and against his own experience of teaching the
language. These six guiding principles are drawn from the author’s
own experience, but that experience is itself very limited compared with the
combined experience of all the readers of this book. No language teacher should
feel that he must submit to anyone else’s methods of teaching merely on
the grounds that the other teacher has had ‘more experience’ than
himself. So consider the six principles but do not accept them uncritically.

1. Remember that hardly any children and not many adults can
understand abstractions. It is not very helpful to begin with a state-
ment of a grammatical principle. We need to begin with language – and plenty of it. After the pupils have listened to it, try to guide
them to deduce the pattern that we want them to use from the examples
of it which we have presented. If, for example, a pupil says or
writes ‘I have been in Lagos since six years’ it is not much use for
the teacher to explain – what is perfectly true – that ‘since’ should
be used with a ‘point of time’ while ‘for’ is the word we combine
with a ‘length of time’. Most adults would have to think about this
explanation before they accepted it. Few young children would
understand it at all. So a better way to deal with this mistake is
first of all to identify it by suggesting that the pupil should say not
TEACHING ENGLISH GRAMMAR

‘since six years’ but ‘for six years’ and then given an example of the correct use of since. An easy way to do this would be to combine the two in one sentence and say ‘If you have been in Ghana for six years, you must have been here since 1964’, or whatever is the appropriate year. The next step is for the teacher to give more examples of ‘since’ and ‘for’ then get the class to make up their own examples so that everybody listens to as many as twenty or thirty correct usages of these two words. Then the teacher can either leave it at that, which is stage one – the unconscious assimilation of the correct pattern – or if he believes the class is ready for it, he can go a little further and ask them if they can work out a ‘rule’ from the examples that have been presented. But we must always bear in mind that the rule or the abstraction – for this is what it is – is less important than being able to work the construction correctly.

2. In dealing with the teaching of grammar as with every other aspect of language teaching, it is meaning which matters most. We are trying to teach children to communicate effectively and we should not give attention to grammatical points unless they are interfering with the accurate communication of meaning. Sir Winston Churchill recalls that in his first Latin lesson, what exasperated and puzzled him was that he was required to learn parts of a Latin noun declension which had no meaning. He knew it was meaningless, his teacher knew it was meaningless, but both were expected to pretend that it was useful. Unlike Churchill’s teacher we should try to remember that we are not teaching grammar as an intellectual exercise. We are teaching it so that our pupils may become more skilful users of the English language in speech and writing.

3. We must remember that, in one way at least, learning grammar is like learning carpentry: to be able to name the tools is not the same thing as to be able to use them, and it is not nearly as useful or interesting. It does not help a pupil at all to be able to state that some verbs must be followed by the infinitive and others by the gerund, if he still says ‘I enjoy to play football,’ instead of ‘I enjoy playing football’. We should concentrate on teaching our pupils how to use the structures of English correctly rather than how to label them. We should use only such grammatical terminology as is necessary, though we shall certainly have to use some.

4. We may extend our comparison between learning grammar and learning carpentry and remind ourselves that though it can be both instructive and enjoyable to learn how to dismantle a complicated tool, it is much more useful and rewarding to be able to use it skilfully for the job for which it was designed. So, when we teach grammar we should remember that to be able to analyse structures will not be as useful to our pupils as to be able to synthesize – that is to build up – their own structures. It may be that a very few of them will subsequently become advanced students of the language
and even teachers of it. But most of them just want to use it well. To help them to do this should be the aim of every grammar lesson. In the same chapter of his autobiography to which we have already referred, Sir Winston Churchill claimed that he owed some of his skill as a writer to the fact that, at secondary school, he was not considered bright enough to learn Latin or Greek. He was set instead to concentrate on English, in which many of his lessons consisted of sentence analysis. His praise of his teacher is generous but may be misguided. Thousands of pupils in English schools during the last hundred years have spent hours during English lessons analysing sentences. Many of them may actually have enjoyed it but there does not seem to be any evidence that it helped them to write or speak English any better. In assessing the effects of sentence analysis on his own writing, Sir Winston overlooks the important fact that before he began his secondary education, he already knew the English language thoroughly and could use it, as most twelve-year-old English boys can, with consistent clarity and accuracy.

5. If we are to teach the grammar of English realistically and truthfully, then we must, as soon as possible, help our pupils to understand the concept of idiom in language. It is central but neglected. Too few secondary school pupils have ever had suggested to them the vital truth that all languages are different in the total means which they employ to convey meaning. Even trained and experienced teachers of English in Africa often tend to place too much emphasis on the ‘interference’ of the pupils first language with their learning of English. We need to remember from time to time that one of the strengths of our position is that our pupils have already mastered one language completely – their own African language. So if we encourage them to compare a number of important features of English with corresponding features, or the absence of them, in their own language, they will understand easily enough what we are doing. Idiom is among the features which our pupils can grasp if we will take the trouble to explain it.

Greetings in different languages offer a good opportunity. In all recorded human languages there exists some mechanism for expressing interest in another person’s health and general well-being. But this interest is certainly not always expressed in the same way. For example the standard morning greeting in Luganda is ‘Wasuuse otyaano’. This is a perfectly polite greeting to which there is a formal reply. Yet if an Englishman were to ask after the health of a friend in a literal translation of the Luganda words ‘How did you spend the night?’ he would certainly be thought unduly inquisitive and possibly rather rude. When we are leaving a French-speaking friend, we hope to meet again some time, we say ‘Au revoir’. If we were to say to an Englishman when
we left him ‘Oh well, to the seeing again’ he would think us distinctly odd. It is important to point out these differences in the forms of expression of different languages because this is exactly what idiom is: a way of expressing a common thought or idea which is peculiar to one language. The author has usually found that when he has spent part of a lesson explaining the concept of idiom pupils have wanted to know why different languages do these things in different ways. This question gives the teacher of English a good chance to reveal both his own limitations and the limitations of language study. We cannot answer ‘Why?’ questions about language. We can only answer ‘How?’ questions. Nobody really knows why Englishmen greet each other with the curious words ‘How do you do?’ or why the most acceptable answer to that question should be the return of the very question itself. Nobody knows why and it does not really matter. What matters is How – how do we greet correctly in English? This is what our pupils need to know and the grammar that we teach them should take the form of a continuous and systematic stream of answers to their question ‘How do you say it in English?’

6. The grammar of English cannot be successfully taught to children who are learning English as a second language from course books and grammar books which were written for English-speaking children. There are dozens of such course books available and too many African schools are equipped with them. This is largely because expatriate teachers have found it easier to continue teaching English through the textbooks that they have got to know. These books cannot help us with our job in a second language situation because they assume a knowledge of the language that our pupils do not have. We shall have more to say below on the choice of course books in English, because with the supply of teachers so critically low in so many African countries, the course book often assumes an unusually important role in the teaching of English.

Here then are six guide lines on the teaching of grammar for teachers of English to examine. In his summarizing chapter in his book Teaching English Grammar Professor Gurrey suggests three additions: that we should avoid any suggestions that grammatical categories are watertight; that our method of approaching grammatical problems should always be an inquiring method, so that pupils themselves search for solutions and investigate, experiment and discuss them; and that this implies that the teacher must keep an open mind and not be surprised or embarrassed when pupils produce surprising facts about language which have never occurred to him before.

So much for general lines of approach to the teaching of grammar.
Now let us consider more specifically the problems which face a new teacher who has taken over the English in a first-year secondary school class and has to work out a detailed method for the teaching of grammar. His first problem, as we have already suggested in the chapters on reading and writing, and will stress again in the chapter on speech, is to get a flow of language going, in and out of the classroom. The next step is to assess the quality of this flow of language. The teacher begins to keep notes of the main areas of grammatical uncertainty among his pupils and lists the mistakes they make in speech and writing. Within a month or two he has a record of roughly what is going wrong with his pupils’ attempts to speak and write grammatical English. He has two more steps to take before he is equipped to begin the task of teaching English grammar thoroughly. These two steps are both easier for the teacher for whom English is a second language than they are for the native English-speaking teacher. The first of them, and therefore the third stage in the total process, is a careful but not necessarily long study of the structure of the first language or languages of the pupils he is teaching. It is best but not essential for the teacher to learn the language so that he can speak it and, if possible, write it as well. But a conscientious teacher can do a great deal by spending some hours looking through a grammar of the language, noting its peculiarities of pronunciation (of which we shall say more in our next chapter) and paying particular attention to the structural qualities of the language which are different from those of English. In short, we are asking the teacher to do as careful a comparative analysis of the first language as he is capable of. This analysis will be all the more thorough and interesting to the teacher if, in preparation for it, he has read Robert Lado’s book *Linguistics across Cultures* and particularly Chapter 3, ‘How to compare two Grammatical Structures’.

The fourth stage of preparation for good teaching of English grammar, and by far the most difficult and drawn-out stage for the native English language speaker, is to actually learn, for the first time, what the grammar of English is and how it functions. Once again, we must remind ourselves, as we did at the beginning of the chapter, that this learning of the grammar of English must result in the kind of knowledge which enables the teacher to explain how the grammar works. It is not enough just to be able to manipulate it. This fourth stage is painful, demanding and never-ending, and it is not surprising therefore that few expatriate teachers of English in Africa get very far with it. Unfortunately, like the problem of vocabulary which we outlined in Chapter 3, the effects of the teachers’ failure to learn the grammar of English thoroughly are by no means obvious. Yet the importance of them will be brought home to
us if we consider, for example, the crucial difference between being able to manipulate without making any mistakes all the English verbs with which 'not' can be abbreviated to 'n't', and being able to teach a pupil to manipulate them correctly after he has for a long time been making mistakes with them. Such mistakes, incidentally, are often based on highly intelligent use of analogy, one of the most powerful influences in language, the comparison of one language situation with another and the attempt, therefore, to use new language constituents in patterns which we know to be correct with other constituents. 'I'd better go now, better’n’t I?' is an example of such an intelligent but false analogy. If the teacher is to give any consistent guidance on this problem beyond merely correcting every mistake as it arises, he must know how many such verbs there are in English, exactly how they function with the abbreviated form of 'not', and how important they are whenever English speakers are trying in ordinary conversation to say 'yes', 'no' or to ask a question.

Any teacher who has read to the end of that last sentence and realized with dismay that he does not know the answer to any of these questions, need not despair. The information he needs is set out briefly and clearly on pages XII and XIII of the already strongly recommended Advanced Learner's Dictionary. On these pages, he will find A. S. Hornby's section on the Anomalous Finites, a table of their various forms and notes on how they are used.

Having struggled on this far, he may be inclined to say 'Oh dear, this chapter is going to turn out like all the other chapters I've ever read on the teaching of grammar - full of complicated terms which I have never met before, have never found any need of and don't understand.' But there is no need to worry about Hornby's term 'Anomalous Finite'. It is in fact a useful and precise term but no teacher is obliged to use it. Hornby himself has often introduced these verbs and their correct use to young primary school children, describing them clearly and aptly, with the aid of chalkboard demonstration, as 'the friends of "not"' - friends of 'not' because they get as close to the word 'not' as they possibly can.

Having set a series of heavy tasks for the teacher who is determined to teach English grammar effectively, this is perhaps a good point at which to remind ourselves of one of the principles we laid down in our first chapter. No good teacher pretends to know everything. Certainly not the very best teacher can know the answers to all the problems of English grammar and we are not suggesting that the teacher should try to. He should, on the contrary, as was also suggested in Chapter 1 and throughout this book, get his pupils to accept as much of the responsibility as
possible for teaching themselves the grammar of English. This means that they must use good reference books. As we have already said in our chapter on writing skills, the Advanced Learner's Dictionary is, to some extent, a grammar of English. It provides guidance on noun and verb patterns, the use of idioms, the use of structural words and qualifying words for example. But if a teacher of English is going to expect his pupils to teach themselves from this dictionary he must appreciate that it is a highly specialized learning tool with a very careful set of instructions. These are contained in a thirty-page introduction which the teacher must himself know well so that he can pass on its instructions and amplify them where necessary. There is a useful little book which will do much of this work for him: Word Function and Dictionary Use by Neil Osman is a concise and helpful guide to the use of the Advanced Learner's Dictionary. Another important reference book for pupils and teacher, to accompany the dictionary, is A. S. Hornby's own Guide to Patterns and Usage in English. This follows the introduction to the dictionary fairly closely but adds a great deal more useful information and plenty of examples on the verb patterns, noun patterns, use of the anomalous finites, etc. With the dictionary, Hornby's Guide and Stannard Allen's Living English Structure for Schools or one of the other structure books recommended in Chapter 5, the secondary school pupil is well equipped with reference tools for the learning of English grammar. He must then be shown very thoroughly by the teacher how to use these books on his own.

The teacher also needs A. S. Hornby's The Teaching of Structural Words and Sentence Patterns, published in four volumes. These books are full of most useful suggestions for the situational presentation of structures. Other excellent sources of structural exercises in contexts are L. A. Hill's three books: An Elementary Refresher Course, An Intermediate Refresher Course, and An Advanced Refresher Course. He should also acquire and get to know some of the books of examples of English structures: F. G. French's English in Tables, was one of the first of these, and H. V. George's 101 Substitution Tables and M. A. Tatham's English Structure Manipulation Drills are two of the most recent. The advantage of these books, apart from the way in which they supplement the grammatical information of the others we have recommended, is that they provide plenty of examples ready to hand. Every teacher of English knows how difficult it can be to think up examples of structures in class and how much time it takes to prepare sets of examples beforehand.

It is easy to talk about instructing pupils in the use of these reference books but it would be realistic to note here that it may well take a class most of its first year in the secondary school to become familiar with the
Advanced Learner's Dictionary. The teacher himself should use the dictionary frequently in front of his class. Let us consider a typical example: An extensive reading lesson is in full swing. The class is reading a simplified version of Tom Brown's Schooldays and the questioning is beginning to go with a swing. Suddenly and unexpectedly, a student asks a spontaneous question. 'Please, sir, will you explain us this rugby game?' In assessing this situation, let us note immediately as one of the most important principles of grammar teaching that the teacher will probably not correct this structure at all then and there. This is an extensive reading lesson and he is concerned with the understanding of what happens in Tom Brown's Schooldays. In the early stages of secondary education in Africa, it is tempting but disastrous to make almost every lesson a formal grammar lesson – there seems to be so much to be put right. In this situation, confronted with this particular mistake, the teacher might do best just to make a brief note of it. (It is a good idea for a teacher of English to keep on his desk a small jotter in which, quite casually and unobtrusively, he can note during the English lessons errors and teaching points to which he wishes to give attention in later lessons.) Having made his note, he goes on to explain the rugby match as he was asked to do. It is important because it has provoked a spontaneous question and it may very well get a good flow of talk going, particularly if the teacher gets the pupils discussing nineteenth century rugby football in comparison with their own game of soccer. But in a later lesson during the same week, the teacher will refer to this mistake along with other common errors. He has had time to think about it and to use his Advanced Learner's Dictionary. In dealing with this and with any other grammatical problem, there are three definite stages. First, the teacher must discover what has caused the difficulty or error. Secondly, he must establish what is the correct pattern or structure. Thirdly, he needs to find plenty of examples of the correct use of the pattern for the class to practice.

Let us look again at the grammatical mistake from the extensive reading lesson. 'Please sir, will you explain us the rugby match?' What caused this one? The pupil has confused the verb patterns of 'explain' with those of verbs like 'give', 'sell' and 'lend'. These last three verbs can be used either with 'us' as in 'Lend us the book', 'Give us a key' or with 'to us'; 'Lend the book to us', 'Give the key to us'. 'Explain' on the other hand can only be used correctly with 'to us'. (Teachers will note that the difference has been explained without the use of any grammatical terminology; we do not have to refer to 'prepositions' or to 'indirect objects' though it may be easier to do so to an audience which we are quite sure is familiar with these terms. They are not essential for
a lower secondary school audience.) If a teacher cannot immediately work out this distinction and confusion for himself, he can at least work back to it from the second stage ‘What is the correct form’ by looking up ‘explain’ in the Advanced Learner’s Dictionary. Here, in the brief form of figures, he will be told what are the limits of the patterns with which ‘explain’ can be correctly used. We will not set them out here because any teacher who is reading this chapter and seriously wants to improve his teaching of English grammar will now go and look up the entry in the Advanced Learner’s Dictionary. The final stage, as we have said, is to drill the correct pattern. The table in the dictionary will provide the teacher with a number of examples. Remember that it may be necessary to explain to your class how a substitution table works by setting such a table out on the chalkboard. In case any readers are not familiar with such tables here is a table of verb usage from the Advanced Learner’s Dictionary, followed by a substitution table, which helps to explain the use of ‘explain’.

**GROUP C**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject x Verb</th>
<th>Direct Object</th>
<th>Prep.</th>
<th>Prepositional Object</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thank you</td>
<td>for</td>
<td>your kind help.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask him for</td>
<td>that.</td>
<td>some more.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compare this with</td>
<td>that.</td>
<td>being late.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They punished him for</td>
<td>his success.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congratulate him on</td>
<td>the dog.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t throw stones at</td>
<td>coming?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What prevented you from</td>
<td>what you already have.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Add this to</td>
<td>him</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I explained my to</td>
<td>him</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protect us from</td>
<td>the enemy.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All of us explained the problem to him.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They are explaining the question to them.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The teachers are going to explain it to her.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some of them are going to explain the difficulty to her</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The two boys are going to explain the situation to her.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The pupil needs to know that he can take any item from any column working across the table and form a grammatically correct sentence,
though not necessarily a very sensible one. Having shown the pupils
the example in the dictionary, the teacher can then add a few more on
the chalkboard. Then, providing some stimulus for the pupils by holding
up various objects – a book, a geometrical instrument, a cigarette
lighter for example – he can get the pupils to make up examples of the
structure ‘Please will you explain to me how . . .?’

The pupils have then had:
1. An explanation of what has gone wrong with the grammar.
2. A presentation of the correct grammatical pattern.
3. Plenty of correct grammatical practice.

There is a good chance now that the correct form of the verb patterns
for ‘explain’ will be remembered. We can sum up the teaching method
very briefly from this.
1. Diagnose the error.
2. Correct it.
3. Drill the correct pattern.

To illustrate the importance of the first stage, \textit{diagnosing the error}, let
us imagine that our pupil, in the extensive reading lesson, went a little
further. ‘Please will you explain us the rugby game? It is very difficulty
to understand.’ It would be easy and understandable for the inexperienced
teacher to assume that this second error was also a grammatical one,
the pupil having used a noun form instead of an adjective. But if the
teacher has followed all four stages of the preparation recommended
above and has learned something about the sounds of the first language,
he may very well find, particularly if he is teaching pupils in Eastern
Africa, that the use of ‘difficulty’ arises from the peculiarity of the
spoken form of the pupil’s own language. We shall say more of this in
our next chapter, but it is enough to note for the moment that most
Bantu languages have only open syllables, and therefore there is always
a tendency to follow a consonant or group of consonants in English by a
vowel – the ‘intrusive’ vowel as it is sometimes called. The pupil tends
to say ‘difficulty’ for ‘difficult’; he soon comes to write it as well.

Any teacher who is prepared to work at the grammar of English and
to use the right reference books can do much by this method. But even
more effective, alongside it, is \textit{a systematic outline of the structure of English},
that is the true grammar of the language. This can be planned by all
the English-teaching staff and taught during the first two or three
years of the course. Again, the purpose of such a systematic outline
must be made clear to pupils. It is not a study of the grammatical
system of the language for its own sake. It is an account of how English
is being most effectively used at present and therefore of how second language learners should use it in order to convey meaning clearly and precisely. With this method the teacher is not waiting for mistakes to happen. He is following a sequence similar to the ‘Diagnose, Correct, Drill’ sequence, but he is trying to improve on this sequence.

Readers will recall that earlier in the chapter we suggested that the teacher who has met a new class should begin to take notes, not only on individual mistakes, but also on areas of apparent difficulty and confusion. It is now that his notes on these areas of difficulty will be useful. Having identified for the class the particular area of difficulty, he then establishes the correct and acceptable forms and gives the pupils plenty of practice; in other words the sequence now is:

1. Anticipate the error.
2. Explain and emphasize the correct pattern.
3. Drill it in.

As usual the teacher should explain to his pupils why he is working like this, and encourage them to take an interest not just in individual mistakes and how to cure them but in learning the whole grammatical system. And he must learn it himself, working out as much as he can before he teaches, but also discovering much along with his pupils during lessons.

Again, we must remind ourselves that we are dealing with a living language. The grammatical system of English is not closed and complete. Professor Randolph Quirk’s research team is still investigating the grammatical system of English in a survey of contemporary English usage. In fact, Professor Quirk’s most popular writings on the English language – his two books *The Use of English*²² and *The Teaching of English*²³ – make an excellent starting point for the teacher who wishes to go further in understanding the systems of English grammar. In his chapter in *The Teaching of English* called ‘English Language and the Structural Approach’²⁴ he sympathizes with classroom teachers who for many years had to listen to linguists condemning the old grammar and offering nothing but general principles in its place. He agrees with James Sledd’s comment that linguists have found it easy to show the absurdity of much of the grammar that is still taught but, until recently, had not managed to provide any of the better text books which were necessary to convince teachers that English grammar can in fact be codified in a way that is true, intelligible and necessary.

We are now beginning to get such textbooks. N. Osman’s *Modern English*,²⁵ H. W. Whitehall’s *Structural Essentials of English*,²⁶ and W. H. Mittins *A Grammar of Modern English*²⁷ are three of them. These are
written at different levels and intended for different readers. Osman is setting out basic English grammar for adult learners of English as a second language. Whitehall writes mainly for teachers and students of English composition, while Mittins has produced a grammar with exercises primarily intended for the upper forms of grammar schools in England. He says in his introduction that he has tried to write an interim textbook incorporating as many accurate findings about the grammar of English as are available and relevant, pending the completion of Professor Quirk’s survey. Mittins assumes that a realistic study of the grammatical structures of modern English will help the users of the language to communicate in it more effectively and exactly than they otherwise could. These three books are all short and unpretentious. They use only such grammatical terms as their authors think essential, and they explain these carefully. They have one other important quality in common.

They all use *speech forms* as models. This makes them fundamentally different from many of the older English grammars from which readers of this book were probably taught at school. They therefore acknowledge, for example, that stress and intonation are important parts of the grammar of English. Before he proceeds to his analysis of English sentence patterns, Mittins devotes three short chapters to the stress, intonation and ‘transition’ of English speech patterns.28 We shall have more to say in our next chapter on the importance of stress and intonation in the learning and teaching of English. It is worth noting now, however, that if we admit stress and intonation – as we must – to be important parts of English grammar, then we demonstrate clearly the pointlessness of trying to define an English sentence, and the virtual impossibility of doing so. Consider the following words: *There is a man walking across the garden* . . . Whether or not these words form a sentence in English will depend entirely on the tone of the last syllable. If the tone makes clear that the speaker has either been interrupted or has not yet finished what he wants to say about the man walking across the garden, then clearly the words do not make a sentence. Equally clearly it is possible for them to do so. So the *Oxford English Dictionary* definition which we quoted earlier in the chapter was perhaps not as foolish as it at first seemed.

These three recent grammarians also follow the second guiding principle which we set out earlier in this chapter: that, in the teaching of grammar, meaning matters most. They therefore stress the importance of *context* in conveying meaning. The context of any group of words is also part of its grammar. Mittins considers the simple English word ‘lift’ and the variety of meanings which it can have in different situations.
Here then are three good books from which the teacher of English can learn his grammar. He can also learn much from a good school course textbook and fortunately in the last few years several of these have been produced. In 1961, Professor Peter Strevens, in a paper called 'Factors in the reform of English teaching in Africa' appealed for the production of special kinds of books.

'There is a distinction to be made between "generalized" and "regionalized" courses. A great many textbooks of English and French describe a metropolitan form of the language and make no attempt to cater for the special difficulties of learners in particular areas. These are "generalized" courses, and they have their value. Nevertheless, "regionalized" courses, prepared in the light of the recurrent difficulties and errors experienced by speakers of a particular language, are preferable in almost every way. In addition to being based on a comparison of linguistic features, they should also be based on a comparison of cultural features – and this should mean something more than the simple replacement of "John" by "Kofi", for example.'

Linguists and language teachers have responded to this need and three recent regional courses for learners of English as a second language are particularly worth noting. They are: Practical English by P. A. Ogundipe and P. S. Tregidgo published in five books and intended for West African pupils, mainly in Nigeria and Ghana; Patterns and Skills in English, by J. A. Bright published in four volumes for East African pupils; and Foundation Secondary English by B. MacAdam, of which two volumes are so far available, intended for English learners in Malawi and suitable also for secondary school pupils in Zambia and Rhodesia. These three courses are all written by experienced secondary school teachers who have also had some linguistic training. None of them is the perfect English textbook – such a book will probably never be written – and they are all easy enough to criticize. But their authors are aware of this and Bright, in his introduction appeals to teachers to test the book and send in suggestions and information to help the publishers to produce whatever aids or changes are needed to make the course more effective. Teachers need to bear the obvious imperfections of these books in mind as they discover them, and to remember also that every textbook is a generalization from experience with a number of different classes. No textbook will therefore be suited exactly to the needs of any one particular class. Any teacher who is thinking for himself and trying to plan courses to meet the needs of his own particular pupils should select from his course book, however well satisfied he may be with its general quality. But as we hinted earlier in the chapter, African
countries do need good course books in the present teaching situation. A good course book can give some of the essential continuity in teaching which our present staffing situations cannot provide. The author has known classes in African schools taught by as many as six teachers of English in one year. Yet the pupils' work in English has not suffered unduly because their English course book has provided a good basic structure. Also (senior English teachers please note) each teacher left behind for his successor short but accurate notes of what he had covered during his time with the class.

We suggested earlier in the chapter that the big grammatical question should be 'How do we make sentences in English?' These three course books try to answer that question methodically with explanations and examples of statement patterns, question patterns, command patterns and exclamation patterns in English. In every chapter the explanations and examples of the patterns are followed by sensible exercises and opportunities for 'situational' composition. Any teacher who has read through one of the grammars by Osman, Whitehall or Mittins recommended above, and who will then read straight through one of these three English courses, will find the essentials of the grammar which he himself is trying to master, set out in a suitable sequence for teaching. The course books and grammars mentioned do not all deal with the sentence patterns in the same order, neither do they all number them. Set out below are tables of sentence patterns from the Advanced Learner's Dictionary.

**SUMMARY OF VERB PATTERNS**

Patterns 1 to 19 indicate what are usually called *transitive* uses of verbs. Patterns 20 to 25 indicate what are usually called *intransitive* uses.

The term *conjunctive* is used in this list for the interrogative adverbs and pronouns (how, what, when where, who, whom, whose, why) and the conjunctions whether and if (when this is used for whether) when they introduce dependent clauses or infinitive phrases.

- VP. 1 ... Vb × Direct Object.
- VP. 2 ... Vb × *(not) to* × Infinitive, etc.
- VP. 3 ... Vb × Noun or Pronoun × *(not) to* × Infinitive, etc.
- VP. 4 ... Vb × Noun or Pronoun × *(to be)* × Complement.
- VP. 5 ... Vb × Noun or Pronoun × Infinitive, etc.
- VP. 6 ... Vb × Noun or Pronoun × Present Participle.
- VP. 7 ... Vb × Object × Adjective.
- VP. 8 ... Vb × Object × Noun.
- VP. 9 ... Vb × Object × Past Participle.
- VP.10 ... Vb × Object × Adverb or Adverbial Phrase, etc.
And from Bright’s *Patterns and Skills in English* part 1:

**ACTIVE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S.P.1</th>
<th>S</th>
<th>+ V</th>
<th>Birds sing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S.P.2</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>+ V</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Birds</td>
<td>build</td>
<td>nests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>look at</td>
<td>the eggs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.P.3</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>+ V</td>
<td>I.O.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>He</td>
<td>gave</td>
<td>the boy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>He</td>
<td>bought</td>
<td>the girl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.P.3T</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>+ V</td>
<td>D.O.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>He</td>
<td>gave</td>
<td>a shilling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>He</td>
<td>bought</td>
<td>a flock</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.P.6T</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>+ V</td>
<td>D.O.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>His father</td>
<td>made</td>
<td>OCN</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Tom</td>
<td>considers</td>
<td>OCN</td>
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<tr>
<td>S.P.7T</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>+ V</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Tom</td>
<td>considers</td>
<td>OC.ADJ</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Tom</td>
<td>looks</td>
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<td>S.P.4</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>+ LV</td>
<td>OCN</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>became</td>
<td>his wife</td>
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<td>It</td>
<td>seems</td>
<td>a shame</td>
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<td>S.P.5</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>+ LV</td>
<td>OC.ADJ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tom</td>
<td>looks</td>
<td>happy</td>
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<td></td>
<td>She</td>
<td>got</td>
<td>angry</td>
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The differences will be obvious but it does not matter whether the teacher chooses to use the pattern system of Hornby, Bright, or Roberts or any other grammarian. What matters is that he should follow the sequence of patterns through methodically and link them with speech and writing, as the three course books which we have mentioned certainly do. In textbooks, as in every other aspect of grammar teaching, it is the opportunity to use the language that matters, not instructions on how to label it.

The books recommended above will give the teacher ample guidance both in familiarizing himself with the true grammar of English and with arranging teaching items in a suitable sequence. Finally, we must stress the importance of linking the teaching of grammatical items closely with known vocabulary. In our third chapter we distinguished between receptive and reproductive vocabularies and suggested that the teacher should spend time teaching the meaning of words only if they were required for reproductive purposes. We should use a similar standard for the teaching of grammatical items and should teach, in detail, only the grammar which our pupils will need to use. H. E. Palmer's little book *A Grammar*
of English Words is in itself a useful example of this. And Michael West the final editor of the General Service List of English Words reminds us also of the very close connection between grammar and vocabulary when he suggests as a definition of grammar that it is 'the concealed liabilities of a vocabulary'. Just as in discussing vocabulary we emphasized the importance of accurate grading, so in the teaching of grammar it is hardly possible to over-emphasize the need to progress slowly and thoroughly. For, as West has said 'The cure for bad grammar is not more grammar but short advances within a graded and controlled vocabulary, followed by long plateaux of assimilation.'

NOTES AND REFERENCES

The most important thing to be said about English speech in African schools is that there is not enough of it going on. For the six or seven years of their primary education our pupils were probably not encouraged to talk English freely inside the classroom and were not equipped to do so outside the classroom. By talking freely we mean talking because they had something they really wanted to say to someone who they thought really wanted to listen to them. And as we suggested in Chapter 1, too few primary teachers believe that their children have anything to say that is worth listening to. So while pupils are encouraged to respond to the teachers' questions, they are not encouraged to ask questions nor to speak or think for themselves. Our pupils therefore enter secondary school quite unaccustomed to informal English conversation. In many secondary schools the old primary school attitudes still persist or are replaced by the equally narrow view that there is no time for English conversation in the syllabus because the examinations do not test it. Some secondary schools do what they can to encourage their pupils to express themselves freely. But many university teachers in Africa will bear witness that the problem of easy and relaxed communication, far from being solved in the secondary school, often persists into the university course and beyond.

One of the first tasks, therefore, for the teacher of English who wishes to give some attention to his pupils' speech, is actually to get them talking. He will encourage informal discussion in the classroom. Some methods of doing this have already been mentioned in the chapters on Reading and Writing and more will be dealt with in the chapter on Drama. For we can apply the same general principle to speaking as we did to writing: fluency must come before correctness, if we are forced to choose between them, though the skilful language teacher will ensure that both are, in fact, fostered at the same time. Again, as with writing, the teacher of English, in encouraging the flow of conversation, should direct it as skilfully as he can towards topics and situations which pupils are equipped to discuss with enthusiasm and interest and also with some degree of correctness. For primary school standards of speech are
often very low, and there is some danger that free conversation at the early secondary school stages will only further ingrain faulty speech habits. H. E. Palmer has put the problem well:

'This form of work (normal conversation) can only be used with profit with advanced students. As a means of correcting bad linguistic habits, it is worse then useless, for it would merely fix or deepen the vicious tendencies of the student. It is by continually making mistakes that we form the habit of making mistakes, and if we encourage the student to use normal conversation before he has been drilled into good habits, we cause him to be a fluent speaker of 'pidgin'.

But we must guard against being so addicted to speech drills in order to correct pronunciation that we forget that the whole purpose of teaching speech is to enable people to speak fluently. In a very useful school textbook Better Spoken English, Geoffrey Barnard follows each set of speech drills on particular points of pronunciation with a long reading or conversation passage to encourage fluency. He stresses, in his introduction, that to be able to command long flowing sentences with confidence is something which needs a great deal of practice which few teachers think of providing. (Incidentally, Barnard’s book, like several others which we shall recommend in this chapter, has been completely recorded on tape to provide teachers and pupils with a really accurate model for all the exercises which it contains.)

As we stressed in our first chapter, our secondary school pupils may well have spent their seven years of primary education listening to bad speech models and learning mistakes. Now their best language learning years are behind them so, in speech work, as in other language activities the first responsibility of the teacher of English language in a secondary school is to recognize the limitations of this situation and to set realistic speech targets for his pupils. Improving the quality of English speech for pupils who have acquired set habits over a long period of time, is hard work. There will be much in our pupils’ speech which cannot be improved without a quite disproportionate effort. If we are to set them realistic targets, the first question we need to consider is what kind of English are we aiming at?

One fairly obvious answer is that we are trying to equip them with a standard of pronunciation which will enable them to be internationally intelligible. If we cannot do that then there is little point in going on teaching English. It is because it is an international language that we are teaching it. But this is not the same thing as saying that we are aiming at a definite ‘received pronunciation’ in English, if such a pronunciation can any longer be defined. Professor J. R. Firth suggested many years ago that teachers of English as a second language
should aim at fostering 'educated English', about which he had this to say:

'By educated English we must not understand standard English. Educated English shows a wide range of permissible variations. Speakers of this kind of English do not necessarily submerge all signs of social or geographical origin. Their accent is often unmistakably local or characteristic of a class. Educated English is spoken by all classes of people all over the English-speaking world. This is the only kind of English that has the remotest chance of universality even in Great Britain itself... A safer definition of standard English is the purely negative one. Standard speech, according to this view, is "that form of carefully spoken English which will appear to the majority of educated people as entirely free from unusual features".'

Professor Firth's negative definition gives the teacher of English a reasonable target to aim at but not a very precise one. Yet anyone who has taught in Africa for any length of time will acknowledge that, with a few notable exceptions, the English of African speakers has certainly peculiar characteristics which clearly distinguishes it from the English of England and America. As teachers of English in Africa should we care about this and should we try to rectify it? In his little book *Spoken Language*, a basic text for teachers of English as a second language, Professor Peter Streuens suggests some of the questions which may well pass through the mind of the young African speaker of English as a second language, pondering that he sometimes finds it more difficult to make himself understood to an Englishman than other Englishmen do.

'The questions which naturally flow from observations of this sort go something like this: Why don't I speak English like the Englishman? If I did speak it like an Englishman, just like the Chief's son who went to England, would my friends think my speech was affected? Why do Africans from the next territory speak differently from me? What is there about my form of English which is different from an Englishman's form? Does it matter from my point of view or anybody else's that this difference exists? Is it in some way an indication of inferiority connected with my being African?

'All these questions deserve to be answered. They should have been answered automatically in the course of his studies at school, but they never are.'

We shall try to answer some of these questions in the rest of this chapter. But one point of policy for the language teacher can be firmly stated at this point, in reply to the question 'What kind of English?' Certainly there are African varieties of English and certainly there will
continue to be. But experience suggests that the teacher of English speech must set his targets higher than the achievement of an African variety of English. For in teaching speech, as in almost any other human activity, we tend to fall below the targets that we set ourselves. There is a danger that if we fall below an acceptable African variant of English we shall fall below a minimum acceptable standard and produce English which is not internationally intelligible.

Let us assume that our English teacher has struck up an easy and relaxed relationship with his first-year class, and has managed to get some flow of conversation moving. He has encouraged his pupils to speak up clearly and boldly by using the argument suggested in our first chapter that since we are all working together, it is important that everyone in the class should hear what everyone else has to say. Such a teacher has already made good progress. The next question is how can he set about improving the quality of his pupils' speech? The basic method is similar to that of teaching grammar:

1. Diagnose the mistake or area of difficulty.
2. Provide a model.
3. Then drill and practise the correct pattern.

As in the teaching of grammar, each stage has serious implications for the teacher.

No teacher can begin to diagnose speech mistakes until he has some idea of what are the main causes of his pupils' speech mistakes. It is not enough just to blame the primary school and to resign ourselves to the fact that our secondary school pupils speak unacceptable English because they have listened to bad models. There is no doubt that one of the most powerful influences on the English speech of the second language learner is the pronunciation system of his own first language. We can accept as an important teaching principle that: wherever the 'target language' (and in our case this is English) either makes distinctions which the first language does not make or fails to make distinctions which the first language does make, then the second language learner will find it extremely difficult even to hear these distinctions, let alone to reproduce them. The American linguist, Edward Sapir put the problem clearly in his classic study Language.

'The feeling that the average speaker has of his language is that it is built up, accoustically speaking, from a comparatively small number of distinct sounds, each of which is rather accurately provided for in the current alphabet by one letter, or, in a few cases, by two or more alternative letters. As for the languages of foreigners, he generally feels that aside from a few striking differences that cannot escape even the uncritical ear, the sounds they use are the same as those he
is familiar with, but that there is a mysterious accent to the foreign languages, a certain unanalysed character, apart from the sounds as such, that gives them their air of strangeness. This naive feeling is largely illusory on both scores.\(^5\)

The fact is, as we have stressed in our chapter on writing, that languages are different. Therefore one of the first jobs for a teacher of speech is to find out as much as he can about the pronunciation system of his pupils' first language and compare it with that of English. How can he do this? First of all, by spending a few hours studying a grammar of the language which will provide him at least with some basic information on its phonology. If he feels that he has neither the time nor the talent to learn the language himself, a useful next step is to talk to an educated and fluent speaker of the language, who is also a good speaker of English, about the difficulties he encounters in moving from one language to the other. It is particularly useful to talk, if possible, to experienced African teachers who speak English but also have the pupils' mother tongue as their first language. (This advice applies just as usefully to the African teacher posted from one language area to another in a large multi-lingual African country such as Nigeria or Zambia, as it does to the expatriate teacher coming from a European or American background to teach English in Africa for the first time. It was in one such conversation with an African teacher of English that the author had impressed upon him the importance of using a phonetic script for the teaching of English, of which we shall have more to say below.)

Teachers will find useful guidance on the kinds of comparisons between languages to watch out for in J. D. O'Connor's valuable little book *Better English Pronunciation*,\(^6\) while Christophersen's *An English Phonetics Course*\(^7\) provides specific information on West African languages and English. These are two good books for teachers because they convey much essential information in a clear and unpretentious way and do not assume a detailed knowledge of linguistic terms. The regional English course books referred to in Chapter 6 also provide useful sequences of exercises on the most common speech difficulties, related to the interference of the first language in the regions for which they were written. They tend however to place emphasis, too heavily and too early, on vowel sounds, of which we shall have more to say below. Teachers who feel ready to attempt a more detailed comparative analysis of the first language and English will find useful guidance in Robert Lado's *Linguistics Across Cultures* the second chapter of which explains how to compare two sound systems.\(^8\)

What kind of information about the pupils' first language will be
most useful to the teacher? Here is a brief statement of some of the most important characteristics of the main languages of Zambia to indicate the kind of language characteristics that the teacher should set himself to discover:

Firstly, the rhythm and stress of the Bantu languages of Zambia differ greatly from those of English. There is an almost equal stress on all the syllables of the word with a slight tendency to stress the penultimate syllable heavily. In English, by contrast, there is nearly always a strong stress on one syllable and often secondary lesser stresses on other syllables. Intonation tends to cause rather less difficulty since the Bantu languages are all, to some extent, tonal. African learners of English as a second language therefore tend to pick up the tone patterns fairly easily. There are some important consonant differences, the first of which is that in the Bantu languages of Zambia, no syllable, and therefore no word, ever ends with a consonant. This makes it difficult for pupils to pronounce final consonants in English as clearly as they need to be able to do. We must bear in mind that a change of final consonant in an English word often brings about a complete change of meaning, as for example in the English words ‘loaf’ and ‘load’, ‘bead’ and ‘beat’, and ‘pat’ and ‘pad’. Some of the Bantu languages make no distinction between the consonants ‘l’ and ‘r’, between ‘f’ and ‘v’ and between ‘s’ and ‘z’. Since these consonants often carry distinctions of meanings in English words, they need to be watched carefully. Similarly in three of the main Zambian languages the sounds of ‘p’, ‘t’ and ‘k’ are not aspirated (that is, followed by a short puff of breath, as if saying the letter ‘h’ immediately after them) as they are in English. There is therefore a tendency for the Zambian speaker to confuse both the understanding and the pronunciation of pairs such as ‘pit’ and ‘bit’, ‘cat’ and ‘cab’, and ‘leak’ and ‘league’. Other Zambian languages do not have the sound of ‘h’ at all and therefore, first language speakers of these languages tend to ‘drop’ their ‘hs’ when speaking English, which is, of course, not socially acceptable. The sound combination ‘th’ is also uncommon in Zambian languages, and therefore causes difficulty in English.

There are, at most, seven different vowel sounds in the Bantu languages compared with at least twenty-one in English. The following pairs of words indicate the vowel sounds which are most commonly confused by Zambians speaking and listening to English.

beat - bit
men - main
men - man
mad - mud
cat - cart
Perhaps most important of all, and for the reason mentioned above in the comments on stress on Bantu languages, the Bantu speaker tends to be unaware of the extremely important 'neutral vowel' in English, the unstressed sound.

This is a simple and by no means exhaustive analysis of the main differences between the speech characteristics of Bantu languages and those of English. Yet, equipped with even such a sketchy knowledge as this, the teacher of English as a second language can do a great deal to improve the speech of his second language English learners.

The first stage in the teaching procedure then, is to find out about the first language. The second is to provide a model for English speech. In this connection we need to remember as teachers of English as a second language that we ourselves are the most important model on which our pupils will base their speech. However much we may explain or exhort, our own speech will be one of the most powerful influences upon the speech of our pupils. The most alert and able pupils will imitate their teachers most closely. (On the university campus on which the author is at present working, it is possible to detect undergraduates who received their primary or secondary education in schools run by Church of Scotland missionaries or American volunteer teachers.) Our pupils, then, will certainly not be better than their models. For the teacher, the implications of this fact are three. First he must get to know as well as possible peculiarities and characteristics of English pronunciation. (And as we said in the chapter on grammar by 'know' we mean be able to rationalize and explain, not merely be able to manipulate.) A good English pronouncing dictionary such as the one by Daniel Jones can be of considerable help to a teacher here but even the limited guidance on English pronunciation provided in the Advanced Learner's Dictionary is a step in the right direction. It is not essential for a teacher to go to the more forbidding advanced analyses of English pronunciation, for there are a number of simple textbooks intended for learners of English as a second language which point out clearly and methodically the important aspects of English pronunciation. Particularly worth noting for this purpose are J. D. O'Connor's Better English Pronunciation which we have already recommended, J. L. Trim's English Pronunciation Illustrated and P. A. D. McCarthy's A Practice Book of English Speech.

Secondly the teacher must become aware, through judicious use of
the tape recorder and through inviting the comments of his colleagues on his own performance, of his own speech defects and peculiarities. He should then obviously try to remedy the defects, but - acknowledging the modern acceptability of various English accents - he should merely be aware of the peculiarities. It is, for example, unwise for a broad Scots or Yorkshire or West Country speaker to try to change his own accent completely. As long as he is consistent and his pronunciation of English is careful, it is more useful and realistic for him just to be aware of the peculiarities, particularly in vowel sounds, of his own regional accent.

In this connection one of the author's most disconcerting educational experiences has been to attend meetings of Cambridge University School Certificate Oral English examination panels. There he has listened to groups of examiners, many displaying prominent accents from all parts of the Commonwealth, solemnly discussing and assessing the quality of the vowel sounds of their African pupils, and comparing them with the sounds of a so-called 'received pronunciation' which they themselves are quite incapable of producing.

Having come to understand English pronunciation and recognize the deficiencies of the model which he himself can provide, the teacher's third responsibility is to provide other better models than himself. One fruitful source of such models is the taped material provided with a number of the textbooks recommended in this chapter, for example, those by Barnard, Stannard Allen, McCarthy and Kingdon. Another good source of model speech material is provided by the tapes and records of plays, poems and prose extracts, which are now produced by several commercial record companies in considerable quantities and can often be borrowed by secondary schools from the local branch of the British Council. It is also extremely effective - partly to show that good English speech is everybody's business - for the teacher of English to get his colleagues on the staff who teach other subjects but whose English speech is good, to assist him in making tapes to use for drama, and for remedial speech activities.

So far then we have considered diagnosing the causes of speech defects and providing models. As with the teaching of grammar, the third stage of the teaching process is drill and practice. Here the teacher of English and his pupils will need a textbook for speech work, to supplement the material provided in the regional course book which he may have selected. Barnard's Better Spoken English already recommended and W. Stannard Allen's Living English Speech are two well-tried and effective textbooks, and more are coming on to the market each year. These two books provide abundant drills in English phrases, sentences and long passages of colloquial speech.
course books in English assume nowadays that the teacher will teach his pupils the phonetic script. Some years ago David Abercrombie pointed out that it was important for teachers not to confuse the science of phonetics with phonetic transcription.\(^{13}\) He noted that it was possible to teach pronunciation without making use of phonetic transcription and that it was also possible, and unfortunately quite common, for teachers to use phonetic symbols without succeeding in teaching pronunciation. Whilst all this is true, the most powerful argument in favour of using phonetic transcription is that it is an extremely effective tool for recording in writing precisely the sound we wish our students either to hear or reproduce. By ignoring the phonetic alphabet merely for want of a few hours' work by himself and his pupils, the teacher of English as a second language is handicapping himself quite unnecessarily. Once our pupils know the phonetic alphabet we can write down what they say, or get them to write it. They can then check their own pronunciation against the transcriptions offered in the dictionaries which we have already recommended, particularly the Advanced Learner's Dictionary. Equally valuable is the skilful use of a tape recorder so that pupils can hear again and again exactly what they are saying. For in the teaching of speech, listening is more than half the battle. The greatest difficulty is to hear the differences between the sounds of our own first language and the sounds of the target language. Once we can hear the distinctions, we can either reproduce them or avoid them, whichever is required. Young African pupils are usually good mimics and once they can hear clearly what the teacher wants them to say, they are quickly able to reproduce it. Therefore much of the essential speech work in the secondary school consists of listening.

Early in this chapter we insisted that the teacher of speech must set realistic targets for his pupils. Let us now be more specific. What particular aspects of English speech should the teacher of English as a second language work at? The simple and general answer is that he should work at:

1. What most gets in the way of understanding.
2. What his pupils can most easily improve.

Here it is important for the teacher to distinguish between differences in sound between the first and second language which affect meaning and those which, though equally noticeable as distinctions of sound, do not affect meaning. In his valuable book *Teaching and Learning English as a Foreign Language* the late Professor Fries put the point well. He distinguished between phonetic differences which can certainly be heard but do not affect meaning, and phonemic differences which do affect the
meaning and are therefore much more important to the teacher and learner of the language.

'When one tries to estimate the actual number of distinguishable differences of sound that the human apparatus can make, as the sounds appear in the many languages, one finds that number running into thousands. In each language there are hundreds. And yet the native speaker in the feeling that his language is built up of only a small number of distinct sounds, is right in a way. Although the actual number of differences of sound in a language is great, the number of distinctive sound features which a language uses to distinguish meanings is very limited. For example, the word “race” is distinguished in sound from the word “raise” only by the buzzing that accompanies the last sound in the second word “raise”, as contrasted with the hissing of the last sound of the first word “race”. The word “beat” is distinguished in sound from the word “bit” solely by the differing quality of the vowel sounds standing between the “b” and the “t”. Thus when two separate words differ by one sound only the sounds that differ are distinctive sound units. Distinctive sound units of this kind, sound features that constitute the sole difference of sound between separate words that thus occur in contrast are, in any language, comparatively few, usually from twenty to fifty. In American English there are approximately twenty-four such contrasting sound units of a consonant nature, eleven vowels and three diphthongs, thirty-eight in all.

'On the other hand, sound differences that never constitute the sole contrasting feature are non-distinctive. The “k” sound of “kill” is clearly different from the “c” sound of “call” in that the second is made with the base of the tongue touching the roof of the mouth farther back than when making the “k” sound of “kill”. But this phonetic difference is never used in English as the sole contrasting feature to distinguish separate words . . .”

It is the few differences that are used in contrast to distinguish separate words that are called the phonemes of the language. Thus a language will have many phonetic differences that are not phonemic. This distinction between the pronunciation peculiarities of English which affect meaning and those which do not, is extremely important to the teacher. It may be compared with the distinction we have already made in connection with vocabulary (Chapter 2) and grammar (Chapter 6) between teaching for receptive and reproductive use. It may be of academic interest to a teacher to delay for a few moments on the difference in quality between two ‘k’ sounds in English, but it is certainly not important for the pupils’ reproductive use. It should therefore not be delayed upon.
What is it then that most interferes with the understanding of English speech? To what should the second language learner and teacher give closest attention? There is a clear and firm order of priorities here:

1. Stress.
2. Intonation.
3. Consonants.
4. Vowels.

We are fortunate that this order of priorities fulfils also our second condition. It also represents the order in which pronunciation in English can most easily be improved. Yet all over Africa during the last thirty years, even today, teachers of English as a second language reverse this order of priorities and start their pupils with drills on vowel sounds. This is a large part of the reason why so much teaching of English speech is unsuccessful. Teachers do not begin with what Abercrombie has called the 'limited goal'. In fact, they seem to assume that everything can be put right and they tend to start with the most difficult and least important aspects of pronunciation. The reader may be inclined to reply that since we have at least offered the vowels some priority, it may not matter all that much, which order the teacher takes the points in. But the truth is that the order of priorities we have recommended relates closely to the principle, which we enunciated in our first chapter and have been trying to illustrate throughout this book, of fostering confidence in our pupils. It is extremely difficult, for the reasons which we set out in our brief analysis of the Bantu languages, for an African speaker who has already been learning English for seven or eight years to improve the quality of his vowel sounds. It demands a tremendous amount of effort over a considerable period of time – months and years rather than weeks. If a teacher spends a period a week working at vowel sounds, his pupils are unlikely to detect any improvement at all for many weeks in their ability to produce correct vowel sounds in the normal flow of English speech. They may well become demoralized and conclude that they cannot improve their English speech noticeably. Improvements in stress on the other hand can be affected in a relatively short time. Therefore even if they were not actually more important in the communication of meaning than distinctions of vowel quality they would be much more encouraging aspects of pronunciation for our pupils to work upon.

We must now consider these four major topics – stress, intonation, consonants and vowels in some detail. Readers of this book will be advised to make use of some excellent audio-visual aids on this subject.
which should be fairly accessible to them. These are some of the films in
two series of twelve films on the teaching of English as a second language
made by the British Broadcasting Corporation in association with the
British Council. Of the total of twenty-four films, five are on the
teaching of speech and all five are excellently presented by Mr J. D.
O'Connor, whose book has already been recommended. In the films,
Mr O'Connor offers clear and practical advice on classroom experience
and extracts from actual lessons. He explains and endorses the order of
priorities which we have listed above. Teachers, and particularly tutors
in colleges of education, should try to borrow copies of these films and
the two small handbooks which accompany them. To do so they
should contact the nearest branch of the British Council.

1. Stress
Stress in language is the force, volume, or emphasis with which a
word or syllable is pronounced. The sum total of the stresses in a
sentence or paragraph constitute its rhythm. Teachers should
therefore note that when speech experts interchange the terms
'stress' and 'rhythm', it is because rhythm is stress considered
in the normal flow of speech. Every language has a rhythm of its own
which is different from the rhythm of any other language. In the English
language, rhythm is one of the most important mechanisms by
which we convey meaning. In spoken English there are definite strong
and weak stresses, whereas for example, in Luganda and Swahili,
stress is much more uniform. Hindi shows less variation of stress
than English and therefore Hindi speakers of English as a second
language tend to make all vowels shorter, and they occasionally
stress English syllables quite arbitrarily and quite wrongly. One of
the author's own first experiences of Indian English occurred on
the cricket field. One of his team-mates in a club which he had
just joined produced by way of greeting the following generous
but totally misleading sentiment: 'You 'are playing for 'some
counties in England, 'isn't it?' This sentence (stressed in the way
indicated by the stress marks provided here according to the
system used in the Advanced Learner's Dictionary) was completely
unintelligible to the author. After two or three attempts to obtain
more enlightenment, he eventually took refuge in the polite
noises indicating general approval and agreement that can so
easily be made in English conversation. He thereby left his Indian
cricketing friend with an impression that was totally false. Anyone
familiar with the structure of English cricket will realize that
what the cricketer was trying to say was: 'I suppose you play
cricket for one of the counties in England, do you?' Now even
though the grammar of the sentence which he constructed was
wrong in almost every detail, it was not the grammar that stood in the
way of understanding. If the sentence had been correctly stressed, constructed exactly as it was, it would have been quite intelligible, though one would have noticed that it was an incorrectly constructed English sentence. Here, then, is a simple example of a situation in which wrong stressing completely confused the meaning which the speaker intended to convey.

It would not have helped that speaker, nor does it help any other learner of English as a second language to be given practice in the stressing of single words. It is here perhaps that the use of the term 'rhythm' serves as a most effective reminder. For in teaching stress we must give our pupils plenty of practice in the use of stresses in fluent, continuous passages of English. Songs and rhymes make good practice material here and Barnard's little book, for example, provides numerous samples of rhythm practice in the form of songs and rhymes. Three particular characteristics of English rhythm need special attention. Firstly the fact that individual words have stressed and unstressed syllables. Secondly that in English phrases and sentences some words are stressed and others unstressed. (In this connection it is important to note and work on the rhythms of English structural words which are so often unstressed. For example, in the sentence 'We are 'studying the pronunci'ation of 'English.') Thirdly, the length of syllables is closely related to the stress which we apply to them. Teachers will find plenty of material, and plenty of justification for starting on stress, in the books by O'Connor, Barnard and Stannard Allen which we have already mentioned. Indeed, Stannard Allen believes so strongly in the importance of stress and intonation that his little book Living English Speech consists entirely of drills and examples of these two aspects of English speech.

2. Intonation

Intonation is the tune of English. It is very closely related to the stress or rhythm. In another useful book for teachers and pupils English Intonation Practice, R. Kingdon provides the following clear justification for attending to intonation and stress before the pronunciation of individual sounds.

'There is a practical reason why it is advisable to pay more attention to intonation than pronunciation. The sounds of English as it is pronounced by different speakers and in different dialects vary within wide limits, so the foreign learner has a certain latitude in this field, but in most dialects, stress and intonation conform fairly closely to the same pattern. It is true that in some dialects the intonation differs from the accepted standard, but such variations seldom conflict with the natural rhythms of the language and are well enough known to native speakers to cause no difficulty in comprehension. On the other
hand the foreign students’ stress and intonation will usually conflict violently with any native system and will, by altering the rhythm of the language, render his speech largely unintelligible.19

If therefore we can help our pupils to improve the stress and intonation of their speech, they will have gone a long way towards achieving that complete intelligibility which must be our target for them. As with the teaching of stress and rhythm, songs, rhymes and jingles make useful practice material. Choral speaking of verse and prose can also be effective in encouraging unself-conscious participation in intonation exercises. (See Chapter 8 on Drama.) It is simplest and most effective to think in terms of two basic tunes in English – the rising tune and the falling tune – though as Kingdon and others explain, there is, in fact, rather more to English intonation than this. Kingdon records numerous examples of what he calls ‘simple’ and ‘compound’ tunes.20 But in the early stages of intonation practice for pupils learning English as a second language, the important thing to emphasize is the social effects that result from destroying meaning by choosing the wrong tune. Distinctions between questions and statement tones are obvious. Differences between interest and apathy, approval and disapproval are less obvious but much more powerful. Consider how changes of intonation can affect for example:

‘Where are you going?’
‘Did you paint that picture?’

Inexpert foreign speakers of English can, through faulty intonation alone, make almost nonsense of a sequence like:

‘Look at that tape recorder at the back of the classroom.’
‘That’s not a tape recorder.’
‘What is it then?’
‘It’s an overhead projector.’

In Better English Pronunciation, O’Connor suggests twenty-four rules for using the tunes of English and he gives plenty of examples of them.21 In addition to his book and Kingdon’s, V. Cook’s Active Intonation22 (with five illustrative tapes) is worth noting, as is L. A. Hill’s Stress and Intonation, Step by Step,23 a practice book with teachers of English as a second language very much in mind. Correct intonation is very important for all teachers – not just teachers of language – in their own work. We are so familiar with the meaning of ‘monotonous’ as ‘boring’ that we do not often enough remember its literal meaning – ‘all on one tone’.

3. The consonants
If a good reader of English reads aloud almost any English sentence, and then reads it aloud again, changing every vowel sound
in it either to another vowel sound or to the unstressed ‘neutral vowel’, a practised and sensitive English listener will probably still interpret the same meaning from the second, deliberately inaccurate reading. If, on the other hand, a reader takes the same sentence and changes even half the consonants, it will become complete nonsense, unintelligible to even the most skilful listener. We have already mentioned some of the consonants which tend to be confused by African speakers of English. Among them were the pairs ‘p’ and ‘f’ and ‘l’ and ‘r’. English teachers in parts of the Southern Sudan have been known to order ‘pish cakes and coppee’ for their breakfast and actually get what they wanted, whilst East Africans recount with glee the story of the young air hostess at an East African airport who said farewell to her passengers with the memorable words ‘Ladies and gentlemen, we hope you have enjoyed your fright. We hope to have the pleasure of frying you again some time.’ These are ‘phonemic’ distinctions which cannot be contravened without risk of serious misunderstandings. In some forms of Arabic the distinction between ‘s’ and ‘th’ causes difficulty whilst in other African languages the difference between voiced and unvoiced pairs, for example between ‘s’ and ‘z’, and between ‘t’ and ‘d’ interfere seriously with effective communication. O’Connor, Christoffersen and Barnard all provide useful guidance on consonant sounds but G. F. Arnold and A. C. Gimson in their English Pronunciation Practice deal exclusively with vowel and consonant confusion and provide a wide range of different drills. Julian Pring’s Colloquial English Pronunciation is another useful book suitable for upper secondary pupils, and supplemented by gramophone records to provide exact models.

The teacher needs to have plenty of examples easily available but it is even more important for him to be able to give his pupils some help in actually producing the sounds. To do this he must, as Christoffersen and O’Connor point out, know something about the speech organs and how we use them. He should also be able to demonstrate to pupils with the aid of a mirror. To take a simple example, pupils who have trouble with the distinction between ‘p’ and ‘f’ can practice with a mirror the two words ‘pish’ and ‘fish’ and see for themselves exactly what the lower lip and teeth have to do to distinguish between these two sounds clearly.

Practice on individual words makes a good start but the process of correcting serious speech defects can only be completed with plenty of practice in enunciating sounds in the normal flow of colloquial conversation, and in suitably prepared reading practice.

4. The vowels

Probably the most important point of pronunciation concerning
the vowels is that correct English speech often does not give vowels their full quality. This takes us back to our starting point, English stress and to the fact that many words in English sentences are unstressed. There is a natural tendency for all such vowels to become the English ‘neutral’ or unstressed vowel. This is extremely important in the normal flow of English speech and it is because it is not well taught that so much educated African conversation tends to sound stilted and formal. The teacher must teach the normal stress and intonation patterns of English conversation. If, for example, he is teaching the possessive adjectives ‘his’ and ‘her’ he may at first demonstrate the meaning to the class by stressing the adjective – ‘that’s his desk’, ‘that’s her book’, ‘that’s my blackboard’, ‘that’s your timetable’. But as soon as the meaning is established, it is most important for him to continue to practise the relevant phrases and sentences with the stress, as in normal conversation, on the content words and with the possessive adjectives unstressed. The final stage in the procedure – which would probably be reserved for a later lesson – is to explain under what circumstances the possessive adjectives would be stressed or differently intoned.

So we come at last, low down in our scale of priorities, to one of the most frequently taught speech exercises in African schools, the use of ‘minimal pairs’ of words, to demonstrate the distinction between vowel sounds. We gave some examples of this in our brief analysis of Zambian language difficulties. Certainly it can be a useful exercise, but it is just as certainly not high priority. Let us take a simple and perhaps the most commonly quoted example. Bantu language speakers find the short vowel sound in words like ‘ship’, ‘hit’ and ‘lid’ very difficult to say because the nearest vowel in their own languages is very much nearer to the long sound in ‘sheep’, ‘heat’, and ‘lead’. When we have made some progress with stress, intonation and consonant value, it is worth drawing our pupils’ attention to this vowel distinction. But work on these minimal pairs is very hard work. It may be a long time before a pupil can detect any improvement. If he has been consistently making the sound ‘sheep’ instead of ‘ship’ during seven or eight years of attempted English conversation, he will find it extremely difficult to correct this sound. A teacher is likely to induce some improvement in the pupil’s vowel sounds only after many hours of practice with a tape recorder, on both individual items and the normal flow of conversational speech. Nor, as we have suggested in our section on consonants, are the vowel sounds phonemically speaking, a high priority. If the consonants are correct the vowels between them may be quite inaccurate yet the meaning of the speech can still be conveyed. So, although it must certainly be given some careful attention vowel quality is a low priority; there are too many other
things which affect the understanding of English speech more fundamentally. We have already mentioned the useful vowel drills provided in Arnold and Gimson’s *English Pronunciation Practice*. P. A. D. MacCarthy’s *Practice Book of English Speech* also offers excellent teaching material for vowel distinctions.

These, in order of importance, are the main aspects of correct English speech which most deserve the teacher’s and the pupils’ attention. A keen teacher will naturally be anxious to produce a high standard of speech among his pupils, but he must proceed with restraint. We have suggested in our short section on vowel sounds that improvement in vowel quality is particularly difficult to achieve. After six or seven years of bad speech training, there are few speech improvements which come easily. The teacher must remember that speech work is, on the whole, hard work and easily becomes boring. A whole speech lesson of forty or forty-five minutes needs careful planning particularly if it is to contain a large number of drills and exercises. Teachers will find it more effective to do much of their speech work in spells of not more than ten minutes at the beginning or end of English lessons. Even a two or three minute period is not too short to be effective. In fact, ‘little and often’ should be the speech teacher’s motto.

If we are to give our pupils confidence our speech work should give them some sense of progress and success as early as possible. If we are to avoid boredom, then it must also be made as enjoyable as possible. All speech work should be closely related to real-life activities. Where there must be drills, they are best done in the form of speech games. In the early stages much of the pupils’ speech will have to be recorded so that they can hear and be convinced of what they actually do say. But as soon as possible recording should be used for entertainment as well as instruction. A class will enjoy, and learn from, preparing a play for radio, especially if it is to be listened to by another class or – if it is really well done – by the whole school. Another good incentive is to invite a class to prepare an informative tape for another school, perhaps in the same country, or, better still, overseas. This kind of exchange programme is not only good for relationships between different tribes and races, it is good for speech as well. We shall have more to say about class and school plays in our next chapter, and also about puppet theatres which provide enjoyable opportunities for clear and purposeful speech. Verse and prose speaking festivals should also be organized at both class and school level, and once a reasonable general standard has been achieved, there is no reason, in spite of our comments in Chapter 1, why some element of competition, preferably between ‘houses’ rather than individuals, should not be introduced.
In spite of all that a skilful and enthusiastic teacher can do in the classroom to improve the quality of English speech, the first language will remain a very powerful influence. Some thought needs to be given therefore to how much time pupils spend speaking their own first language outside the classroom during the normal school week. In pre-independent Africa, English-speaking rules were not uncommon features of some boarding schools. The pupils were permitted to speak their own language only during certain short periods of the day or week. In the early stages, there was little doubt that these rules were effective although, of course, in the last resort, it is quite impossible to enforce an English speaking rule. But as political awareness grew, such rules became more and more resented and therefore less and less effective and, shortly before or at Independence, most schools gave them up. In one school where the author taught, the prefects came to the headmaster about six months after the 'English-Speaking Rule' had been revoked and said that the school had asked them to petition the staff for its reintroduction. They said that there was a general feeling that the standard of English in the school was declining and that the pupils did not feel strong enough themselves to practise their English as often as they should. They wanted the 'pressure' of a popular and self-imposed 'rule' to be reintroduced. The rule was indeed reintroduced and is still in force — at the request of the pupils who have devised their own house 'sanctions' against pupils who break it.

This remarkable incident illustrates an important principle. What is needed in a school above all is an awareness of the importance of speaking English. No enforced English-speaking rule will be successful in an independent African country. But where pupils can be made aware, through intelligent teaching, of the importance of continual practice they may well become responsible enough to inflict this practice upon themselves and perhaps to request a similar English-speaking rule. Once a school community seems to have reached a certain level of maturity this proposal is at least worth discussing; but it is best for the first moves to come from the pupils.

Any teacher of English reading this chapter who has had some experience of teaching English as a second language will be wondering where he is going to find time for all the activities proposed here. And certainly this is difficult. A teacher of English who has ten periods a week with his classes will be lucky, under the pressures of the normal secondary school, if he can find the equivalent of one whole period — preferably split up into shorter sessions — for formal speech training. But if we recall again the situation in the primary schools from which our secondary school pupils have come, we will admit that the listening
and speaking stage of language learning which should have been the
pre-occupation of the primary school has not been well done. It must
therefore be done again as effectively as possible in the secondary school.
This is worth explaining to young secondary school pupils. They will
work all the better at speech activities which may be strange and new
to them if they understand that their teachers are linking these activities to
the reading and writing activities which are more obviously useful to them in the
external examination which they must pass. But certainly we must find time, for
if we neglect the teaching of speech, we are neglecting one of the funda-
mental purposes for which we are teaching English. Let P. A. D. MacCarthy, an experienced teacher of speech, have the last word on
this:

It will be obvious that a fundamental element in the situation is time
in which to undertake the work. If pronunciation is to be taught,
time must be found for it. And to neglect the manner of speaking a
language - its pronunciation that is - can only produce a lop-sided
course of language study as lop-sided as if one was to neglect its
spelling or its grammar.29

NOTES AND REFERENCES

For further information on tapes, records and films for the teaching of speech see the catalogues of the British Council's English-Teaching Information Centre, and the Centre for Information on Language Teaching.
18. View and Teach - Series 1. Film 10. Rhythms of English Speech O'Connor, J. D.
26. View and Teach - Series 2. Film No. 22. Teaching the consonants, O'Connor J. D.
CHAPTER 8

Drama

Some readers may have been surprised not to have found more on drama in the last chapter, on speech. They may wonder why there should be a separate chapter devoted to drama in a book aimed at improving the teaching of English as a second language in African schools. There’s not much time for speech; won’t there be even less for drama in the average secondary school?

‘Speech and Drama’ is a phrase which comes readily to the teacher’s tongue. Too readily in fact. There are too many books on the teaching of English which deal with the subjects of speech and drama as if they were inseparable parts of the same aspect of language-teaching. This is unfortunate. There is much more to the experience of even staged drama than just speech. In a book already recommended in a previous chapter, English Literature: An Interpretation for Students Abroad, Laurence Lerner stresses this point.

Drama is a composite art: it does more than one thing at a time. When we see a good production of a good play, our satisfaction results from two things: the language, and the spectacle. The language — what the actors say — is the more important: but the appearance of the stage, the design of the scenery, the grouping of the actors, and above all their mime (their use of the human body): these are essential parts of drama.¹

This takes the classroom teacher of English a step in the right direction but there is more to the experience of drama in school — ‘Child Drama’ as Peter Slade calls it² — than this. Lerner, in the chapter which our quotation introduces, is primarily concerned with theatre; as teachers of English we are not.

We have already noted that speech is a form of behaviour. Drama is another, more inclusive form. Drama is doing. It is not primarily a means of learning or practising speech. It is a means to personal growth and self-expression. It is human beings playing at being other human beings. (Occasionally they play at being animals or even gods.) As any well-trained or experienced primary school teacher knows, there is nothing at all frivolous
or irrelevant about playing. Through this complex experience of playing at being other human beings, men and women, boys and girls can become more aware of all that is involved in being a human being – in being themselves, in being other people.

In real life, outside the classroom, this experience begins very early. It begins in children’s games. While the notes for this chapter were being drafted, the author’s small daughter aged seven, strongly objecting because he had declined, in the middle of drafting the chapter, to help her with her stamp album, rushed off to the kitchen screaming. There was silence for a few moments. The next thing that could be heard was her voice carefully announcing the prices of various articles for sale ‘on her stall’. The previous afternoon, the family had all been to a fete in the grounds of her school. Her imagination had obviously been captured by the various stalls selling all kinds of provisions, clothes, toys, books, jumble and anything else that could raise money. She had conceived a new ambition: to be a stall-holder and sell things. Through a crack in the door the author was able to see enough to discover how her attention had been captured, and diverted from her stamp album. In the kitchen she had found two paper-lace plate covers – the sort used in cake shops. These, laid out on the kitchen working surface which looked quite like a shop counter, and combined with the discovery that there was enough space behind the door for her to squeeze behind the side of the working surface and appear to be ‘serving’ at her ‘counter’ were enough to start a completely new game and a totally engrossing piece of Child Drama – in the sense of the term which will occupy us most in this chapter.

Parents can see their own children having similar experiences almost every day of their lives. A recent or even a long past event suddenly takes a hold on the imagination as a result of the slightest suggestion. A word, an incident, a particular object – any of these may start off a long period of concentrated dramatization. Holbrook and others³ have noted how stark and realistic children’s games often are. In their games they often try to come to terms with the things that disturb them most – with fear, hatred, violence, love, jealousy, to name only a few of the most powerful human experiences. There is an immediate lesson to teachers here: children in their own games are willing and eager to come to grips with the harshest and most disturbing realities of life. Yet we patronize them absurdly by serving up to them as ‘drama’ in our schools so much of the triviality and irrelevance contained between the covers of most books of ‘plays for schools’. When children are ready for the scripted play they both like and deserve strong stuff.

So drama begins young in real life. It should also begin young in
school. But in African primary schools it seldom does. Most African children (because of the circumstances of their childhood), have had far less opportunity for imaginative play before they go to school than European children. Then, as we have already stressed many times in this book, education in our African primary schools is, from the start, a serious business. It is competitive and examinations dominate its course. In drama, as in every other aspect of language teaching, there should be a wide basic experience gained at primary school; but our pupils, entering African secondary schools have probably never had it.

Generalization is always dangerous and the teacher will find it worth his while to find out as much as he can about the dramatic experiences of his pupils in primary schools. The author, on one occasion, discovered – accidentally and much too late – a film of a remarkable piece of African primary school drama in which some of his own pupils had taken part. In a little unprivileged primary school at the foot of a mountain in Eastern Uganda, two whole classes of primary school children worked most of the term in the open air, with their mountain as a 'back cloth' and dramatized the Kiganda legend of how the Flame Tree had come to their country. They had done it largely for fun and also for the reasons for which we shall recommend drama in this chapter. Their teacher had recognized these reasons intuitively even though she probably would not have been able to articulate all of them. Eventually they did it again for a small local audience. Many of its members were so impressed that the play was done yet again – still in the open air for a larger audience and subsequently filmed by the local Information Service, as an event of some importance, which it certainly was. Any children taking part in this remarkable production had had a formative and memorable experience of school drama and one which the author would have profited greatly from knowing about when he was planning their dramatic work in their early secondary school days.

The experts in child drama – and we shall quote from several of them in this chapter – seem agreed that there should be definite stages in the growth of dramatic experience. Drama is not the same thing as theatre, and the staged play with an audience is a late development in individual dramatic growth and by no means an essential one. Six steps most frequently cited are: play; mime; mime with a little dialogue improvised; unscripted improvisation with action and full speech; improvisation leading to a script for rehearsed performance; and finally the formal staged play.

We shall have something to say at the end of this chapter about the reading of plays. But far too many secondary school teachers seem to assume that in a busy examination-orientated secondary school, play
reading is the only dramatic activity for which there is time. This chapter is not about reading. It is not, essentially, about plays. Drama is a total experience. Among the elements which comprise it are individual movement, group movement, music, song, spectacle and speech. Each of these contributes to the total experience. The teacher of English will be, understandably, much concerned with the element of speech, but he will deprive himself and his pupils of most valuable experience and growth if he neglects the other elements. If they are not given full scope in English no other school subject is likely to attend to them at all.

Drama offers the English teacher and his pupils tremendous opportunities for the development of individual confidence and of a sense of community. (We do not mean community merely in the sense in which 'the school play' is a team effort. School plays are not important, though, as we shall stress later they can be valuable activities as long as they are not treated as the school's annual opportunity for showing off in front of visitors.) The kind of dramatic activities we have in mind in this chapter affect much of what is contributed to ordinary lessons. In fact they can change the whole relationship of pupils to the teacher who, in dramatic work, becomes one of the group. Any teacher who is prepared to take drama at school seriously — and seriously does not mean unhumourously — will enter with his pupils into all the activities it embraces. He will work towards the kind of teaching method which John Dixon has well summarized. This is at a point in his book at which he is stressing the fundamental difference between on the one hand the two approaches towards English teaching which emphasize solely either 'language skills' or 'the cultural heritage' and, on the other, the approach which the very title of his book describes so aptly — *Growth through English*:

Both the skills and the heritage approach emphasize the teacher as authority, the class as recipients of instruction. Working on a developmental approach with activities such as we propose, the teacher has a complex relationship with his pupils. Pupils learn to take on their own tasks within a framework of choice that the teacher introduces and helps them develop. Sometimes a pupil works alone. Teachers spend more time planning initial experiences that suggest a branching programme of group or individual work: the class is called together at times when this seems appropriate — because they all need to share something. Oral, dramatic and written presentations by groups or by the whole class serve as focal points in long-term pieces of work; the class assesses what has been achieved (looking it over and discussing what more might be tried). Simple marking or grading becomes irrelevant. What counts is recognition of one's part in a group achievement, or one's individual contribution to a class
presentation (maybe in wall displays or on tape). In the class dialogue, individuals realize when they have said something of value to the others: taken together these contributions amount to a collaborative learning of language and of what it makes of experience. Competition for marks or places becomes irrelevant: groups may compete occasionally but in general their work is complementary rather than simply parallel, and the effort is collaborative. So changes in the central activities of the English classroom imply changes in the relations of teacher to pupil, of one pupil to another, and of group work to class-work.

All this sounds splendidly idealistic but what about the realities of the secondary school situation in Africa? Is it not true that pupils are likely to resist the introduction of dramatic activities because they think them 'a waste of time'? They have not been used to enjoying themselves, or to moving freely in the classroom, on a stage or in the open air, or to being encouraged to speak, or to being released from the bondage of those reading and writing skills which occupy almost the whole of the secondary school curriculum. They are likely to object to the introduction of drama as much as to being expected to produce their own notes or to think for themselves. Teachers may take some consolation from the knowledge that it is never easy for a teacher to withdraw from the traditional pose as the source of all knowledge and to become one of a team working together. But that this is at present being done all over the world, where English is being best taught, is suggested in Frank Whitehead's study of the historical development of the teaching of English, The Disappearing Dais.

Certainly there will be difficulties in introducing dramatic activities into African secondary schools. Here are two useful tactics to help the teacher to overcome them. The first is to catch his pupils young - preferably at the beginning of their first year. They will not, at this stage, know what to expect of secondary education and therefore will be neither surprised nor put out if drama becomes an important activity. The second is, having established dramatic activity in the first year classes, to cater at first for the rest of the school with a drama club - an optional activity, to be taken up by choice in the pupils' spare time. As soon as the drama club gains some support in the school it will be much easier to bring drama gradually into the senior classrooms as well. But even the enthusiastic and able teacher cannot expect to change the school's attitude overnight. It may take two or three years to establish a climate of opinion in which pupils and staff are prepared to give drama a chance to prove itself valuable.

How does the teacher start in the first form of the secondary school?
We mentioned earlier the definite stages in which the experts suggest dramatic experience should be developed. Here is a modified form of that sequence of activities, which the author has found successful in African secondary schools. The stages are:

1. Mime, developing out of a precise description attempted during composition lessons.
2. Free imaginative miming, with a little simple dialogue as a form of imaginative composition.
3. Scripting some of the scenes attempted in Stage 2 and presenting them in class. Also dramatizing scenes from novels, poems and short stories studied.
4. Acting scenes or excerpts from worthwhile plays in class.
5. One-act or full-length plays, produced for the whole school or for an outside audience.

In *Education through English*, already recommended, Eva Engholm quotes an interesting example of the first situation. A class was grappling with one of the School Certificate English exercises requiring the joining of a series of simple sentences into a more complex paragraph. The sequence in question described how a father had packed his children's clothes and toys into a trunk for travelling and was unable to close the lid. He got his youngest daughter to sit on the lid and was struggling with the lock when his wife called him out of the room. Only a physical demonstration with an actual trunk and an actual pupil sitting on the lid to try to press it down so that the teacher could lock it, was enough to help the class to understand the sequence of events which had taken place. Any teacher of English who is mounting a reading programme on the lines described in Chapter 4, and who has achieved the kind of relationship with his class which encourages them to ask questions on things they do not understand, will always have plenty of situations or chains of events which need explanation. Often they can be most easily explained by mime or simple acting, in front of the class.

The author was recently presented with a powerful example of the value of mime during a mathematics lesson taught by one of his students. The pupils were confronted with one of these unlikely but time-honoured problems about a cyclist who sets out from a Point A at a given speed and a motorist who sets out from a Point B at a given different speed; they meet at Point C. Given the time at which they left and the time at which they met, the pupils were required to calculate the distances they travelled. They were making no progress with this problem in spite of the student-teacher's explanations. Eventually it became clear that what had not struck them was that if the cyclist and the motorist *met* then both their journeys were over and they had taken
precisely the same time. It was not until the action of meeting was demonstrated – at first, unsuccessfully, by two boys walking from different ends of the classroom and sidling past each other and then, successfully, by two boys walking at different speeds and colliding – that the class grasped the missing element in the problem. It then became clear that the word meet was being used, not in the sense to which they were most accustomed of 'pass in the street, greet, and pass on' but in the geometrical sense of straight lines meeting and ending. Demonstration – that is acting – explained what a great deal of abstract discussion had failed to explain.

A second, totally different, example is provided by a study of the poem 'Stanley Meets Mutesa' (see Chapter 9). The full force of the long, silent, staring interview with Mutesa was only brought home to the class by the miming of this interview, compared with the miming and acting of two modern interviews, one between a television reporter and a national celebrity, and the other between an imaginary king or president receiving one of his countrymen designated in the National Honours List.

Stage 2 of the sequence is more difficult to put across to a secondary school class because the purpose is not so immediately obvious. Once again, it pays to take the class into our confidence and explain a little of what we believe to be the value of dramatic activities. Pupils may be aware that there is, in their school, a good deal of tension and mental ill-health. It is as well to be frank in such discussions and emphasize that Africa is not alone in this, though the incidence of stomach ulcers and mental unbalance in many African secondary schools is alarming and can hardly be explained away, either by the diet or by the now well appreciated and accepted conflict of two cultures. A teacher who believes the following proposition to be true will find it worth explaining to his classes: because most of us are too intense and occupied with ourselves we need to relax, and to try to understand others by entering imaginatively into their existence. If we do we will not only help ourselves to relax, enjoy life and understand it better. We will also be helping to make a happier class, a happier school community, and a happier world.

In her book Speech and Drama Rose Bruford has this to say about the value of mime for the diffident and under-confident pupil:

Very often when freedom is lacking in speech, it can be encouraged through movement. Many shy, nervous children, who are afraid to speak, are considered stupid, whereas they are really most intelligent and full of feelings. They can be coaxed out of their timidity by mime, and it is most important that the speech teacher should help these
shy ones. The shy child, afraid to speak, can be encouraged in many movements, all tending to give her freedom. She need not know that the movements are to help her speaking, but they will; and while she does them she will enjoy them.

Sometimes there will be a whole class with no one member of it interested in speech. Mime will often give such children the very incentive they need. Very soon they will be eager to add words to these movements, and often they will derive great enjoyment from saying the words as well. This can lead into the making of their own plays, and so connect with written as well as oral English.¹⁰

Peter Slade, writing from over thirty years of experience with school children – many of them disadvantaged or handicapped children – emphasizes the healing and formative effects of drama pursued un-self-consciously and without an audience:

Action takes place all about us, and there is no question of ‘who should act to whom and who should sit and face whom doing what’. It is a virile and exciting experience, in which the teacher’s task is that of a loving ally. And in this drama two important qualities are noticeable, absorption and sincerity. Absorption is being completely wrapped up in what is being done or what one is doing, to the exclusion of all other thoughts, including the awareness of or the desire for an audience. Sincerity is a complete form of honesty in portraying a part, bringing with it an intense feeling of reality and experience, and only fully achieved in the process of acting with absorption.

We should foster these qualities by all the means in our power because they are of extreme importance to the growing individual.¹¹

Teachers will find abundant suggestions for the second and third stages of the dramatic sequence, which we outlined above, in the two books by Slade¹² and in those by Pemberton-Billing and Clegg,¹³ Engholm and Burton.¹⁴ All these books are small and cheap and any teacher who is trying to arouse enthusiasm for drama among his colleagues and pupils, should build up a small staff bookshelf of such valuable materials for the teaching of drama.

Among imaginary situations which the author has found effective as starting points for stages two and three are the following, some of which are based on actual incidents in schools in which he has taught.

(a) School

1. The Headmaster has warned the school about the dangers of drinking. He has threatened expulsion as the punishment. Two pupils, normally well-behaved, and with good school records stagger drunkenly on to rollcall on Sunday afternoon,
The whole school sees them drunk. The Headmaster calls a staff meeting and also requests a prefects' meeting to consider the case and advise the staff. What happens at the meeting and afterwards?

2. Pupils in the school are allowed to borrow library books for the holidays only if all library books are returned by the last week of term for checking. Some valuable reference books are then discovered to be missing. The prefects decide that all school houses and lockers should be searched. The books are found in the lockers of two senior school boys. A house meeting is held to decide what to do.

3. A well-known visiting speaker has been invited to address a school society. He makes a rather poor speech. An unfortunate pupil has then to propose a vote of thanks which must be polite but not so fulsome as to make the audience snigger.

(b) Social

1. You answer the telephone in your imaginary home. The call turns out to be not a call for your father but from a person trying to locate a house which you know well. You try to give clear and uncomplicated directions over the telephone.

2. (Used in a co-educational town day school). You have been invited to the local girls' school dance. Towards the end of the evening you ask a girl for a dance and during the dance ask whether she would allow you to escort her to her home nearby, at the end of the evening.

3. You have bought either some football boots or a new dress from a high-class shop in the city. On examining the purchase at home you find it is slightly damaged. You now have to return it to the shop and ask either for an undamaged article or for your money back.

(c) Employment

1. You have applied for a job and have fixed the time to attend for an interview. The school timetable has been altered unexpectedly and you are now unable to attend at the time arranged. You make the necessary phone call.

2. An Interview for a Job. (In early examples of this the teacher plays the employer. Later on either individual pupils play the employer or a group forms a panel to interview the applicant.)

3. You have not been long in your new job when your workmates try to persuade you to join an unofficial strike for reasons which you think are inadequate. You refuse to do so and an argument begins. What happens next?
Among dramatized readings which have been found successful are parables from the new testament, for example the Good Samaritan and the Unjust Steward; and episodes from *Oliver Twist; Tom Sawyer; Animal Farm; Things Fall Apart; Weep Not, Child* (James Ngugi) and *A Wreath for Udomo* (Peter Abrahams).

Almost as important to the pupils as the experience of taking part in these dramatized incidents is the discussion of them which follows. Each presentation is fully and frankly criticized, with the teacher taking part in the discussion as a member of the group. With practice, the discussion becomes more and more articulate. The pupils gain imaginative insights from each other into how people really do and should behave. So having had the opportunity to express themselves and to organize movement and speech to convey precise meaning, they also have a chance to provide ideas about what really happens in life and what really matters. All this encourages, if it does not actually create, greater tolerance through greater understanding. Particularly in the upper forms a well-organized well-executed drama programme can have a real effect on the quality of school and community life.

At stage four – the acting of scenes from plays in class – we specified that the plays should be ‘worthwhile’. Holbrook, Slade and Pemberton-Billing and Clegg offer plenty of suggestions on material, and teachers might also consider some of the plays mentioned below in the final section of this chapter on play readings. But too many of the books of short plays produced specially for the schools are trivial to the point of being worthless. We do not suggest that pupils or teachers can live always at the sublime heights of great literature. What we do suggest is that no teacher should ask his pupils to work on a careful production of a play which is not really worth working on. The author once entered two groups from a school in which he was teaching in a festival of dramatic art. The groups performed a scene from *Richard of Bordeaux* by Gordon Daviot and the whole of *X = O* by John Drinkwater. Both productions had obvious imperfections and the adjudicator did not spare them. But his comment on the choice of plays was important. He said that many of the other productions had been technically superior to those of these two groups but he believed that in thirty years’ time the actors who had carefully prepared these two memorable scenes would still recall, with pleasure and profit, the experience of acting in two plays of permanent value.

The final stage, which many pupils and indeed many schools in Africa may never reach, is the fullscale production before a school and outside audience. As long as we remember that this is not the main purpose of drama, and provided that pupils and staff work together on a
production to avoid certain obvious pitfalls, school plays can be valuable activities. The most obvious danger is exhibitionism – which may be demonstrated equally disastrously by pupils overacting and showing-off, or by staff refusing to allow pupils to take responsibility. Lighting, properties, stage management and other important aspects of the production can all be handled by pupils, rightly guided. Staff should not be afraid to give pupils that responsibility in case the overall effect might not be quite so polished as it would be with a staff-member in charge of every detail. There is also a tendency to expose schoolboy and schoolgirl performers to plays which they are not mature enough to understand or interpret, and a further danger is that pupils will be so over-coached and over-directed by staff producers that all spontaneity and self-expression will have been prevented. A simple but complete answer to this is contained in Peter Slade’s directive to the producer: show your actors what to do but never show them how to do it.\textsuperscript{15} E. J. Burton’s \textit{Drama in Schools}\textsuperscript{16} and J. Fernald’s \textit{The Play Produced}\textsuperscript{17} offer good advice to help both pupils and staff to produce competent and entertaining school plays. For more guidance on the organization of a school production see Bright and McGregor \textit{Teaching English as a Second Language}.\textsuperscript{18}

Perhaps at this point the author might permit himself the luxury of a personal prejudice and suggest that any producer who is anxious to avoid the pitfalls suggested above and who wishes to achieve a successful production rather than a brave attempt should not try to produce Shakespeare’s plays with African pupils learning English as a second language. Certainly these are the greatest plays in English literature. Equally certainly the speaking of Shakespearian verse is a complex and difficult art and it is totally unrealistic to expect advanced learners to perform it even adequately. It may be that one reason why Shakespeare’s plays are performed so often and so unsuitably in African schools is because teachers of English will not look beyond the very limited range of plays written originally in English. To hazard another personal opinion – outside Shakespeare and Shaw there is little English drama that is worth performing in schools and hardly any that is worth studying. But there is plenty of \textit{European Drama in translation} that is admirable for our purpose, as we shall stress below in a brief section on play reading. The best – and the most worthwhile – school play which the author has seen in Africa was a production of the \textit{Antigone} of Sophocles (in the Penguin Translation by H. F. Watling). The force and relevance of the play for modern Africa was made even more emphatic by a simple, completely African setting; authority is as complex a problem for the African political leader today as ever it was for Creon in classical Greece.
We suggested earlier that, both in what teachers do in the classroom and in what they write about the teaching of English, the connection between speech and drama is often over-emphasized. Yet it must be obvious that the connection is a very strong one. Many teachers of English will wish to concern themselves with those dramatic activities which contribute most to improving the quality of their pupils' speech. Two such important activities are creating puppet theatres and preparing 'radio plays' by means of a tape recorder. Children of all ages find puppet theatre fascinating. It provides excellent opportunities for linking dramatic work with other school subjects – art, woodwork, craftwork and music to name the four obvious ones. Secondary pupils enjoy presenting incidents which have been discussed in, for example, history, geography, English literature or religious knowledge lessons in a puppet theatre which they have built themselves. Speech for the puppet theatre has to be both clear and deliberate in order to be heard at all from the depths of the puppet stand. Again there is good advice for the teacher in the recommended books, particularly those by Holbrook and Engholm.

The preparation of a tape for broadcasting, either to the class itself, or, if it is really well done, to the whole school, provides excellent practice in the imaginative production of effects, and also of course in speech. It gives the teacher an opportunity to work on plays written in ordinary colloquial English. The author has himself produced – with his upper secondary pupils learning a great deal in the process from the discussion of every act – 'radio' versions of J. B. Priestley's *Time and the Conways* and *An Inspector Calls*, Shaw's *Pygmalion*, and parts of the Dorothy L. Sayers cycle *A Man Born to Be King*. (The Dorothy Sayers plays are particularly suitable material because they were written specifically for broadcasting.)

Radio is a powerful medium, but we should not neglect an even more powerful one. It is difficult to over-estimate both the cultural value and the dramatic insight which can be brought to young African pupils by good films. Any teacher who is seriously contemplating teaching Shakespeare's plays, for example, should try to borrow a copy of one of the Olivier films. *Henry V* is probably the best to begin with since it captures so much of the atmosphere of the Elizabethan theatre by moving easily between the theatre and the realistic presentation of the scenes in France. Of more recent films of plays those of Anouilh's *Beckett* and Bolt's *A Man for All Seasons* are excellent for school audiences. The film is, after all, the most influential dramatic medium of the twentieth century. Any teacher of English as a second language working
in a school which has electricity and can borrow a projector should try to show his pupils good films.

Finally, and quite differently from all that has gone before, we end with a few brief comments on the reading and studying of plays. This is an important and useful activity but it is subsidiary to drama and not the same thing as it. As with all other forms of reading (see Chapter 4) so with plays: it is essential that pupils should read plenty of them before they study any of them. They should not be restricted to plays written in England, or written originally in English. We have noted that children of all races face the cruelty and harshness of life in their games. Our adolescents are ready from the first year of their secondary course in Africa for carefully chosen adult plays. Sophocles (in the Penguin translation), Molière, Ibsen, Shakespeare, Shaw, Arthur Miller, and Brecht will provide excellent core material for a course in play reading. African pupils should also be reading African plays. Wole Soyinka and John Pepper Clark have already published plays well worth reading and performing in the upper secondary school and more young African writers will be following their example – including our own pupils, if we give them some experience of what has already been achieved. It is important that the teacher should direct attention not to details but to overall themes and meanings. We have a real obligation to teach only plays that we know and like and understand – plays that we genuinely believe to be worth our pupils’ time and attention. As pupils’ interest and experience develops they will want to know more about the development of drama and the theatre. Teachers will find J. L. Styan The Elements of Drama a useful source of simple critical and analytical material. There are also stimulating accounts of many plays of the last hundred years which are well worth teaching, in Raymond Williams’ Drama, from Ibsen to Eliot.

We recommended that plays in colloquial English should be used particularly for recording sessions, but provided the teacher uses his judgement, there is no need for him to steer clear of verse plays for school use. With senior pupils for example, the similarities and differences between Shaw’s St Joan and Eliot’s Murder in the Cathedral may well lead on to some discussion on the strengths and weaknesses of prose and verse as dramatic media. Eliot himself has pronounced provocatively on this subject:

People have tended to think of verse as a restriction upon drama. They think that the emotional range and the realistic truth of drama is limited and circumscribed by verse. People were once content with verse in drama, they say, because they were content with a restricted and artificial range of emotions. Only prose can give the full gamut
of modern feeling, can correspond to actuality. But is not every dramatic representation artificial? And are we not merely deceiving ourselves when we aim at greater and greater realism? Are we not contenting ourselves with appearances instead of insisting upon fundamentals? Has human feeling altered much from Aeschylus to ourselves? I maintain the contrary. I say that prose drama is merely a slight by-product of verse drama. The human soul in intense emotion strives to express itself in verse. It is not for me but for the neurologists to discover why this is so, and why and how feeling and rhythm are related. The tendency, at any rate, of prose drama is to emphasize the ephemeral and superficial; if we want to get at the permanent and universal, we tend to express ourselves in verse.27

Here is a point of view which is important and stimulating enough to be the basis of a year's work in drama with a fairly experienced school class. But properly considered, Eliot's judgement leads us on from drama to the subject of our next chapter.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

6. See Chapter 5: Teaching writing skills, pp. 98 et seq.


Throughout this book we have had two main aims consistently in mind. The first has been to develop the language skills of our pupils. The second, done partly through the first, has been to encourage them to be aware of and take some responsibility for the moral and social problems of their society and, by doing so, to grow towards being mature adult men and women. Poetry can help us to achieve both these aims. For poetry is language used most skilfully. In poetry, men and women have expressed the fullest maturity of the human spirit.

If this is true then it is curious that teachers should ever have to ask the question ‘When and how should we begin teaching poetry in an African secondary school?’ For if poetry is as important as we have suggested, then the teaching – which means the sharing – of it should have begun in our pupils’ early primary years. Some writers of books about teaching English seem to assume that we will have to begin by persuading young African pupils that poetry is not feeble or girlish. This is sometimes one of the first and most difficult tasks in introducing poetry in a secondary school in Europe. But in the author’s experience it is not so in Africa. For example, any teacher who has introduced Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* – on record, film, or print – to embarrassed and sniggering fifteen year olds in an English secondary school, and then attempts the play at a similar level in an African school may notice quite a different reaction. But already we are beside the point. Why begin by trying to persuade young secondary school pupils that poetry is worth reading. Why not begin by getting them to write it? Let us be very clear that by writing poetry we do not mean writing verse. What our young African secondary pupils write for us (see Chapter 5) may very well be rhythmical, as T. S. Eliot’s comment, quoted at the end of our last chapter, reminds us. But it is very unlikely to rhyme, and there is no reason why it should. All we are asking them to do in writing poetry for us is to express themselves as fully and honestly as possible.

Then, as yet another opportunity of getting a flow of conversation going in a classroom, let us get them to talk about what they themselves and their fellow pupils have written. After that, perhaps, let us look at
how someone else has written about similar topics. If a teacher has achieved with his pupils anything like the close and trusting relationship which we have been commending throughout this book, his pupils will write poetry for him. They will write about their real hopes, fears, conflicts and loves. They may write of their fear of witchcraft or of death; of their hope of fame and security for themselves or for their country; of the conflict of their school values with their home values; of that other conflict between their home culture and their ambition to escape from it. They may write of strife and conflict within their family and between races; they may write of friendship and of love, and of the sexual attraction which is such a wonderful and vital part of it.

But they will be trying to do all this in a second language. We should encourage them by showing them that Africans have already done this well. In presenting poems for the consideration and enjoyment of our pupils we should, as always, start from where they are. We can make a good start with a simple poem on an experience which we are fairly sure they will have had. Superstition is common enough in Africa as everywhere else in the world. Here is what a young Nigerian woman wrote about it.¹

SUPERSTITION

I know
that when a grumbling old woman
Is the first thing I meet in the morning
I must rush back to bed
And cover my head.
That wandering sheep on a sultry afternoon
Are really men come from their dark graves
To walk in light
In mortal sight.
That when my left hand or eyelid twitches
Or when an owl hoots from a nearby tree
I should need pluck
It means bad luck
That drink spilled goes to ancestral spirits,
That witches dance in clumps of bananas;
That crumbs must be left in pots and plates
Until the morn
For babes unborn.
That it’s wrong to stand in doorways at dusk
For the ghosts must pass – they have right of way!
That when a hidden root trips me over
Fault’s not in my foot.
It’s an evil root.
That if I sleep with feet towards the door
  I’ll not long be fit
I know it – Yes I know it!

Minji Karibo

The language and thought of this poem is simple. Even with a first-year secondary class there would be little need for explanation. But there would be plenty of scope for discussion, and it would be discussion which would make for awareness and maturity. It would require also exactly these qualities from the teacher, who must be prepared to be perfectly honest about his own superstitions and his views of other peoples’. He should also, even if he were a very articulate person, prepare carefully beforehand, some of the things he wants to say about the poem. He would not necessarily say all of them, for the depth of discussion should always depend very largely on the response of the pupils. With a class which shows both interest and perception towards a poem such as this there is scope for a whole lesson’s discussion; another class, no less intelligent, on another day might be finished with the poem in ten minutes.

Another experience shared between pupils and teacher but much simpler, less personal and less provocative, is the experience of an African storm.

A SUDDEN STORM

The wind howls, the trees sway,
The loose house-top sheets clatter and clang,
The open window shuts with a bang,
    And the sky makes night of day.

    Helter-skelter the parents run,
    Pressed with a thousand minor cares:
    ‘Hey, you there! pack the house-wares!
    And where on earth’s my son?’

    Home skip the little children:
    ‘Where have you been, you naughty boy?’
The child can feel nothing but joy,
    For he loves the approach of rain.

    The streets clear, the houses fill,
The noise gathers as children shout
    To rival the raging wind without,
    And nought that can move is still.
A bright flash! a lighted plain;
Then, from the once-blue heavens,
Accompanied by noise that deafens,
Steadily pours the rain.

Pius Oleghe

This is a good poem to read with a secondary school class after a storm has struck the school compound. We can then all think together about the experience of being caught in an African storm. How well has the poem expressed feelings towards the storm which we can understand and sympathize with? What else might he have mentioned that we have noticed during storms? What in fact catches the eye and the ear when there is a storm on our own school compound? If this subject and the first treatment of it arouse the interest of the class then David Rubadiri's poem *African Thunder Storm* is well worth reading to follow up.

These simple poems can be read in class, with or without the pupils having the text in front of them. There seems little point in arguing whether or not it is more effective for pupils to have printed texts in front of them when a poem is read. The most important point about teaching poetry is to vary the method of teaching it. Sometimes the pupils may have the text, sometimes not. With a variety of methods used there is no reason for boredom in the teaching of poetry, if the level of poems chosen is sensible. For every poem is different and every presentation can be slightly different. But every poem should certainly be read aloud, because poetry is speech. This means practice and careful preparation by the teacher or, as soon as possible, by pupils to whom he delegates the job of introducing the poem. It also gives good opportunity for the use of gramophone records of poetry read by professional readers.

If poetry is speech, it is also song. Folk songs and ballads make an interesting and appealing introduction to poetry for secondary school pupils. In the last few years we have seen a remarkable revival of interest in European folk song. The main reason for this is the appeal of simple, easily intelligible verse which expresses the longings, moods and aspirations of ordinary people. Two useful anthologies are Alan Warner's *English Poems and Ballads*, for which there is an accompanying long-playing record and Paul Edwards' very recent *A Ballad Book for Africa*. From Edwards' book a teacher interested in folk songs might begin with a reading of *Frankie and Johnnie* preferably introduced by a recording of the song, followed perhaps by the Burl Ives recording of *The Big Rock Candy Mountain* which Edwards also includes. There is no need to delay on either of these songs; let discussion of them range:
freely if it comes from the pupils but do not force it. From these two simple stories in verse we might go on to another ballad which tells a story and demonstrates that good poetry, however old, is always contemporary.

EDWARD, EDWARD

'Why does your sword so drop with blood,
Edward, Edward,
Why does your sword so drop with blood,
And why so sad go ye O?'
'O I have killed my hawk so good,
Mother, mother,
O I have killed my hawk so good,
And I had no more but he O.'

'Your hawk's blood was never so red,
Edward, Edward,
Your hawk's blood was never so red,
My dear son I tell thee O.'
'O I have killed my red-roan steed,
Mother, mother,
O I have killed my red-roan steed,
That once was so fair and free O.'

'Your steed was old and ye have got more,
Edward, Edward,
Your steed was old and ye have got more,
Some other grief ye bear O.'
'O I have killed my father dear,
Mother, mother,
O I have killed my father dear,
Alas and woe is me O!'

'And what penance will ye do for that,
Edward, Edward,
And what penance will ye do for that?
My dear son, now tell me O.'
'I'll set my feet in yonder boat,
Mother, mother,
I'll set my feet in yonder boat,
And I'll fare over the sea O.'

'And what will ye do with your towers and your hall,
Edward, Edward,
And what will ye do with your towers and your hall,
That were so fair to see O?'}
'I'll let them stand till they down fall,  
Mother, mother,  
I'll let them stand till they down fall,  
For here never more can I be O.'

'And what will ye leave to your children and wife,  
Edward, Edward,  
And what will ye leave to your children and wife,  
When ye go over the sea O?'

'The world's room, let them beg through life,  
Mother, mother,  
The world's room, let them beg through life,  
For them never more will I see O.'

'And what will ye leave to your own mother dear,  
Edward, Edward,  
And what will ye leave to your own mother dear,  
My dear son, now tell me O?'

'The curse of hell from me shall ye bear.  
Mother, mother,  
The curse of hell from me shall ye bear,  
Such counsels ye gave to me O.'

_Anon_ (slightly modernized)

A few simple visual aids are helpful in the teaching of this poem. Pupils will not be familiar with the appearance of an old Scots castle or Manor house, a hunting hawk or a medieval boat. Illustrations from the Bayeux Tapestry, commonly reproduced in history books, provide good stylized pictures of all these things. If a teacher wishes to underline the contemporary theme of this ballad he might time his reading of it to coincide with a class reading of Achebe's _Things Fall Apart_. For Achebe, in his study of the impact of western ways on Nigerian family devotion is asking the same question as the anonymous author of _Edward, Edward_. What happens when family loyalties break down? In helping pupils to link the old with the new and to appreciate the universal theme of many an old poem, a little imagination from the teacher goes a long way. Achebe is by no means the only African link here; Tom Mboya, the Kenyan politician was tackling the same problem, for contemporary Africa, in his book, _Freedom and After_.

The theme of conflicting loyalties and the breakdown of the family might lead us on naturally to ask the question 'What did happen when Western influence came to Africa?' David Rubadiri has told the story of the immediate impact of the west on one inland African country.
STANLEY MEETS MUTESA

Such a time of it they had;
The heat of the day
The chill of the night
And the mosquitoes that followed.
Such was the time and
They bound for a kingdom.

The thin weary line of carriers
With tattered dirty rags to cover their backs;
The battered bulky chests
That kept on falling off their shaven heads.
Their tempers high and hot
The sun fierce and scorching
With it rose their spirits
With its fall their hopes
As each day sweated their bodies dry and
Flies clung in clumps on their sweat-scented backs.
Such was the march
And the hot season just breaking.

Each day a weary pony dropped,
Left for the vultures on the plains;
Each afternoon a human skeleton collapsed,
Left for the Masai on the plains;
But the march trudged on
Its Khaki leader in front
He the spirit that inspired.
He the light of hope.

Then came the afternoon of a hungry march,
A hot and hungry march it was;
The Nile and the Nyanza
Lay like two twins
Azure across the green countryside.
The march leapt on chaunting
Like young gazelles to a water hole.
Hearts beat faster
Loads felt lighter
As the cool water lapt their sore soft feet.
No more the dread of hungry hyenas
But only tales of valour when
At Mutesa's court fires are lit.
No more the burning heat of the day
But song laughter and dance.
The village looks on behind banana groves,
Children peer behind reed fences.
Such was the welcome
No singing women to chant a welcome
Or drums to greet the white ambassador;
Only a few silent nods from aged faces
And one rumbling drum roll
To summon Mutesa's court to parley
For the country was not sure.

The gate of reeds is flung open,
There is silence
But only a moment's silence
A silence of assessment.
The tall black king steps forward,
He towers over the thin bearded white man
Then grabbing his lean white hand
Manages to whisper
'Mtu Mweupe Karibu'
White man you are welcome.
The gate of polished reed closes behind them
And the west is let in.

David Rubadiri

Extracts from Stanley's own account of the journey make good background material to this poem, which can also be brought alive for the class by showing photographs of Stanley and Mutesa I, and a picture of the Kabaka's Palace and the avenue which led up to it. (There is a good contemporary sketch of this in H. A. Ingrams' book *Uganda*.) The class may be ready now to dwell for a few moments on the detail of some of Rubadiri's images and to question whether or not they are successful. It will also be worth discovering in discussion how far the force of the last line of the poem is appreciated.

With none of the poems which we have suggested so far for use in secondary school classes, does the teacher need to dwell on aspects of poetic technique. Discussion of this must be delayed until pupils have a wider reading experience of English poetry. The teacher can only lead a detailed investigation of the poet's method if he himself is interested in poetic technique and has some understanding of it. Teachers will find helpful advice and information in three books. Laurence Lerner's already recommended *English Literature; An Interpretation for Students Abroad*, has a good chapter on poetry. The two other books are by a Professor of the Teaching of English and a practising poet. These are P. E. Gurrey's *The Appreciation of Poetry* and James Reeves' *Teaching
In the early stages however – which may well mean throughout the first year of a secondary course – we are not concerned with poetic technique in any detail. We are trying to share the appreciation of language well used. The teacher – or even a well-read pupil – may notice that Rubadiri has learned from Eliot’s poem *Journey of the Magi.*

In a chapter on poetry in another book for teachers of English the present author has discussed the presentation of a number of poems by British authors, and suggested one method of presenting Eliot’s poem. It is a fine example of the impact of poetry; for Eliot changes our ideas about this historic journey. We start out with the preconceptions of the popular English Christmas card scene and under the poet’s persuasion we reach a maturer understanding of the realities of the first Christmas Day.

In the teaching of poetry, as in the teaching of grammar, we should *avoid definitions unless we cannot proceed without them.* For example, the time-honoured distinction between ‘simile’ and ‘metaphor’, to which so many of us were introduced early in our secondary school days, is not particularly useful. On the other hand we cannot make much progress in teaching poetry without some consideration of imagery. Yet both the term and the technique can be explained simply: the poet uses one experience which the reader may know to try to explain another which he assumes the reader does not know so well. He says in effect.

‘I can’t tell you exactly how it was but it was like . . .’

Another African poet, Lenrie Peters, gives us a good example in a short compact poem. Again the theme, slightly veiled by the enigmatic title, will be familiar enough to our pupils.

**PARACHUTE**

Parachute men say
The first jump
Takes the breath away
Feet in the air disturbs
Till you get used to it.

Solid ground
Is now where you left it
As you plunge down
Perhaps head first
As you listen to
Your arteries talking
You learn to sustain hope.
Suddenly you are only
holding an open umbrella
In a windy place
As the warm earth
Reaches out to you
Reassures you
The vibrating interim is over

You try to land
Where green grass yields
And carry your pack
Across the fields

The violent arrival
Puts out the joint
Earth has nowhere to go
You are at the starting point

Jumping across worlds
In condensed time
After the awkward fall
We are always at the starting point.

Lenrie Peters

An objection to this poem might be that African secondary school pupils will never have seen a parachute. There is not much essential experience here that a few photographs cannot supply. In fact the author had the good fortune to be able to teach this poem to children who had watched parachute jumping taking place over an African city in preparation for the National Military Tattoo. The description and analysis of the physical process is simple enough; it is the symbolic application in the last stanza which will be more difficult. Here, as with the last line of Eliot's great poem, we must have honest class discussion and not insist on a single interpretation. Although Peters has in mind twentieth century Africans trying to bridge the gap between African and Western culture, he may well also have in mind the man of any race, forced bewilderingly every year to re-adjust his sensibility to yet more scientific discoveries which 'enlarge' his universe. With a middle school class which has been encouraged to follow a reading programme somewhat on the lines suggested in Chapter 4, this poem might very well be considered against the background of Mugo Gatheru's *Child of Two Worlds*. With an upper secondary class Peters' poem might well be followed by Abioseh Nicol's *The Meaning of Africa*.19
THE MEANING OF AFRICA

Africa, you were once just a name to me
But now you lie before me with sombre green challenge
To that loud faith for freedom (life more abundant)
Which we once professed shouting
Into the silent listening microphone
Or on an alien platform to a sea
Of white perplexed faces troubled
With secret Imperial guilt; shouting
Of you with a vision euphemistic
As you always appear
To your lonely sons on distant shores.

Then the cold sky and continent would disappear
In a grey mental mist.
And in its stead the hibiscus blooms in shameless scarlet
and the bougainvillea in mauve passion
entwines itself around strong branches
the palm trees stand like tall proud moral women
shaking their plaited locks against the
cool suggestive evening breeze;
the short twilight passes;
the white full moon turns its round gladness
towards the swept open space
between the trees; there will be
dancing tonight; and in my brimming heart
plenty of love and laughter.
Oh, I got tired of the cold northern sun
Of white anxious ghost-like faces
Of crouching over heatless fires
In my lonely bedroom.
The only thing I never tired of
was the persistent kindness
Of you too few unafraid
Of my grave dusky strangeness.

So I came back
Sailing down the Guinea Coast.
Loving the sophistication
Of your brave new cities:
Dakar, Accra, Cotonou,
Lagos, Bathurst and Bissau;
Liberia, Freetown, Libreville,
Freedom is really in the mind.
Go up-country, so they said,
To see the real Africa.
For whomsoever you may be,
That is where you come from.
Go for bush, inside the bush,
You will find your hidden heart,
Your mute ancestral spirit.
So I went, dancing on my way.

Now you lie before me passive
With your unanswering green challenge.
Is this all you are?
This long uneven red road, this occasional succession
Of huddled heaps of four mud walls
And thatched, falling grass roofs
Sometimes ennobled by a thin layer
Of white plaster, and covered with thin
Slanting corrugated zinc.
These patient faces on weather-beaten bodies
Bowing under heavy market loads.
The pedalling cyclist wavering by
On the wrong side of the road,
As if uncertain of his new emancipation.
The squawking chickens, the pregnant she-goats
Lumber awkwardly with fear across the road,
Across the windscreen view of my four-cylinder kit car.

An overloaded lorry speeds madly towards me
Full of produce, passengers, with driver leaning
Out into the swirling dust to pilot his
Swinging obsessed vehicle along,
Beside him on the raised seat his first-class
Passenger, clutching and timid; but he drives on
At so, so many miles per hour, peering out with
Bloodshot eyes, unshaved face and dedicated look;
His motto painted on each side: Sunshine Transport,
We get you there quick, quick. The Lord is my Shepherd.

The red dust settles down on the green leaves.
I know you will not make me want, Lord,
Though I have reddened your green pastures
It is only because I have wanted so much
That I have always been found wanting.
From South and East, and from my West
(The sandy desert holds the North)
We look across a vast continent
And blindly call it ours.
You are not a country, Africa,
You are a concept,
Fashioned in our minds, each to each,
To hide our separate fears,
To dream our separate dreams.
Only those within you who know
Their circumscribed plot,
And till it well with steady plough
Can from that harvest then look up
To the vast blue inside
Of the enamelled bowl of sky
Which covers you and say
‘This is my Africa’ meaning
‘I am content and happy.
I am fulfilled, within,
Without and roundabout
I have gained the little longings
Of my hands, my loins, my heart
And the soul that follows in my shadow.’
I know now that is what you are, Africa:
Happiness, contentment, and fulfilment,
And a small bird singing on a mango tree.

Abioseh Nicol

This is a long poem but not a difficult one. Pupils who read it carefully will deduce that it is the poem of an African who is looking at Africa from a distance – which is what our African pupils must learn to do from time to time. They hear continual talk of ‘African Unity’ and there is much to be said for starting some class discussion on whether or not Africa seems likely ever to become a united continent with a common purpose and common ideals. Achebe’s novel, *A Man of the People* and Peter Abraham’s *A Wreath for Udomo* make good accompanying reading to this poem and so does Nicol’s own collection of short lectures, *Africa – a Subjective View*.22

No teacher should be disturbed about having to handle political themes with secondary school pupils. Poetry is about the realities of life. Anyone teaching in Africa in the second half of the twentieth century must be aware that politics is among the most potent, and deceptive realities of life on this continent. Such a poem as Nicol’s raises questions which no teacher who really wants his pupils to mature will want to avoid; he will not be able to answer all of them. Some of them may be unanswerable. But they are urgent. It is unnecessary and educationally unsound to force political discussion; it will arise easily and naturally from a poem such as this. And the teacher is not looking for agreement in the
discussion. We do not read poetry to agree with the author. We read it to share his experience, to examine it, to set it alongside our own and to become more aware—perhaps truly to grow—as a result. But even if pupils disagree with Nicol’s opinions they will probably agree that he has succeeded in expressing them. This is a poem worth examining a little closer. His images are few and concise:

‘Now you lie before me passive with your unanswering green challenge’

‘And thatched falling grass roofs sometimes ennobled by a thin veneer of white plaster’

‘With driver leaning out into the swirling dust to pilot his swinging obsessed vehicle along’

‘Look up to the vast blue inside of the enamelled bowl of sky which covers you’

Each of these brief images, examined and discussed, leads us towards a conclusion about this particular poet’s language, and about imagery in any poetry. H. Coombes puts the conclusion well in a useful book on the study of literature, *Literature and Criticism*.

In a good writer’s hands, the image, fresh and vivid, is at its fullest used to intensify, to clarify to enrich; a successful image helps to make us feel the writer’s grasp of the object or situation he is dealing with, gives his grasp of it with precision, vividness, force, economy; and to make such an impact on us, its content, the stuff of which it is made, can’t be unduly fantastic and remote from our experience, but must be such that it can be immediately felt by us as belonging in one way or another to the fabric of our own lives. (Familiarity with the content does not of course make the image itself familiar and common; good writers often create surprising images out of the most familiar material.) And as well as having its immediate value, an image may hold within itself something which has associations with other parts of the work to which it belongs—poem or drama or novel so that its use enhances the complex fullness of the whole. A mature Shakespeare play, for example, is rich in such imagery; in such a play the images are not isolated brilliant units; they have of course their astonishing individual attractiveness, but a complete reading (‘complete’ meaning ‘whole’ or ‘full’) will reveal that they are an inseparable part of the play’s total expression.

Coombes follows this passage with an examination of twenty images taken from English drama in verse and from English poetry. The reading of his chapter will certainly help teachers to understand and to explain imagery in English poetry.
These are a few personal selections from the works of recent African poets. Teachers will find plenty more in the two anthologies of African Verse by Reed and Wake, and by Moore and Beier, both of which provide plenty of references to other sources of African poetry in English. The most important thing to be said about the poems reproduced and discussed in this chapter is that no other teacher of English need use them. As with drama, so with poetry: the teacher should teach only what he likes, and believes valuable. He must also understand it well enough to be able to communicate at least some of his own responses to it. We need to be careful not to teach poems which meet all these requirements but which demand experience and knowledge from our pupils which they do not have. Before he had realized this important truth the author taught several unsuccessful lessons to African pupils based on poetry of two of his own favourite writers, Browning and Donne. He learned, the hard way, that an appreciation of Browning demands some acquaintance with the traditions and thought forms of medieval Europe and some understanding of painting; and that the best of Donne's poems demand some knowledge of theological language and thought, and a good deal of experience of precise imagery. These poems needed too much explanation for the pupils to be able to make that encouraging start towards full understanding which is so important in the early stages of poetry reading.

In presenting any poem for the first time teachers should be sparing of explanation. Let the poem speak for itself and be willing to wait for a response from the pupils. Encourage it, with a hint or two, but do not try to force a response. If we want our pupils to enjoy the experience of poetry — and there is no better reason for asking them to spend time on it — we should not spend long on a poem in the early stages of the English course. And, as with every other kind of reading, we should not attempt the close study of a poem with our pupils until they have already had a good deal of poetry-reading experience. Another point of teaching technique which will have been suggested by the comments on the poems discussed is to avoid detailed discussion of poetic form. If we present a variety of forms of poetry to our pupils and are content to pick up a detail here and there from each individual poem, the pupils themselves will eventually make comments on the form of the poems. With experience they will show an awareness of details of technique to which we have not drawn their attention. Many poets have themselves written about the making of poetry. A few have also written about the reading and teaching of it. James Reeves is one of the most helpful and he has this to say on the subject of detailed study:25
In looking at a poem we shall try to see it as a whole; even in examining details we shall try to keep in mind the whole poem, the complete object of which they are only parts. What is the poet trying to say? What is the experience he is trying to communicate? What is the object he is trying to shape out of the unshaped mass of his experience, feelings, and impressions? In what way is it original, unique, valuable? By what means does he achieve or fail to achieve these ends? Content and form, experience and technique, meaning and means – the pattern is a circular one: we could start to examine it at any point. For content determines form and form modifies content. Although it is usually easier and more logical to examine content first, then form, we must keep both in mind simultaneously. In the process of composition the interaction is probably continuous. A poet does not first think what he is going to say and then decide how he is going to say it. Form and content are determined simultaneously.

Lerner too has an interesting section on the choice of poetic form and the relationship between the rhythm and sound of a poem and its meaning. On the second topic he perhaps assumes too much, and he has more detailed comment than seems necessary on English metre. In fact the quotation from T. S. Eliot with which we ended our last chapter makes both a good starting point and a recurrent reminder for enthusiastic teachers of poetry. Eliot says that one of the few things that we know, though we do not know why, is that excitement – the excitement that every poet feels in a different way from any other poet – brings rhythm. But it is no good talking about this to our pupils – we have to show it in action. We might, for example, take the adult theme of racial misunderstanding and introduce our pupils to three African poems on the subject. *Come Away My Love* by Joseph Kariuki, *Telephone Conversation* by Wole Soyinka, and *The Zulu Girl* by Roy Campbell. A skilful reading of these poems followed by some discussion and further readings should guide the pupils slowly towards the conclusion that the different rhythms which the poets use suggest different kinds of excitement – different attitudes. Then, to put it all in perspective and to show that racial misunderstanding is not only an African theme and not only of this decade, we might introduce a different rhythm reflecting a very different tone. W. H. Auden writes of the loneliness and helplessness of Jewish refugees in exile from Germany before the Second World War.

**REFUGEE BLUES**

Say this city has ten million souls,
Some are living in mansions, some are living in holes;
Yet there’s no place for us, my dear, yet there’s no place for us.
Once we had a country and we thought it fair,
Look in the atlas and you'll find it there:
We cannot go there now, my dear, we cannot go there now.

In the village churchyard there grows an old yew,
Every spring it blossoms anew:
Old passports can't do that, my dear, old passports can't do that.

The consul banged the table and said:
'If you've got no passport you're officially dead':
But we are still alive, my dear, but we are still alive.

Went to a committee; they offered me a chair;
Asked me politely to return next year:
But where shall we go today, my dear, but where shall we go today?

Came to a public meeting; the speaker got up and said:
'If we let them in, they will steal our daily bread';
He was talking of you and me my dear, he was talking of you and me.

Thought I heard the thunder rumbling in the sky;
It was Hitler over Europe, saying: 'They must die';
We were in his mind, my dear, we were in his mind.

Saw a poodle in a jacket fastened with a pin,
Saw a door opened and a cat let in:
But they weren't German Jews, my dear, but they weren't German Jews.

Went down the harbour and stood upon the quay,
Saw the fish swimming as if they were free:
Only ten feet away, my dear, only ten feet away.

Walked through a wood, saw the birds in the trees;
They had no politicians and sang at their ease:
They weren't the human race, my dear, they weren't the human race.

Dreamed I saw a building with a thousand floors,
A thousand windows and a thousand doors;
Not one of them was ours, my dear, not one of them was ours.

Stood on a great plain in the falling snow;
Ten thousand soldiers marched to and fro:
Looking for you and me, my dear, looking for you and me.

W. H. Auden

With some poetry-reading experience behind them, and with a brief explanation of the plight of the Jews at this time in European history, middle-school pupils can discover for themselves the emotion of the poet through the simplicity of his language and the relentlessness of his rhythm.
These poems help to tell some of the truth about human misunderstanding and Africa's poets are learning too to face the fact of human hatred which is not always a matter of colour as the Nigerian poet, John Ekwere wrote recently:

Now no more the palefaced strangers
With unhallowed feet
The heritage of our fathers profane;
Now no missioned benevolent despots
Bull-doze an unwilling race;
No more now the foreign hands
On alien chickens prey
But we – on us!

All this may strike the reader as very adult fare. But we need to remember that in our African secondary schools, we are teaching young adults who enter the secondary stage of education at an average age of fifteen. Moreover we are preparing many of them to go immediately into positions of great responsibility in their countries and to take mature and adult decisions on matters which may affect the moral and economic welfare of thousands of their countrymen. They have little chance, as we suggested earlier in this book, to develop moral awareness. In too many other subjects teachers feel, understandably enough, that there is not time to think about moral implications. There are too many facts to be learned and too many examinations to be passed. As teachers of English we have the chance to put this right; we have the best chance of all through poetry.

We have said nothing so far of the problem of vocabulary in teaching poetry. We need to be aware of it for as we have hinted above it is part of the difficulty of teaching such poets as Browning and Donne and certainly Shakespeare. But if we use our common-sense and discretion we do not need to take the General Service List (see Chapter 2) too literally in our teaching of poetry. The Nigerian novelist Achebe has written well about the language which African poets need to choose. In doing so he suggests a standard for the language of the poetry we should choose for secondary school pupils in their early years.

(He) should aim to use an English in a way which brings out his message best without altering the language to the extent that its value as a medium of international exchange will be lost. He should aim at fashioning out an English which is at once universal and able to carry his particular experience. I have in mind here the writer who has something new, something different to say. The nondescript writer has little to tell us anyway, so he might as well tell it in con-
ventional language and get it over with. If I may use an extravagant simile, he is like a man offering a small, nondescript routine sacrifice for which a chick or less will do. A serious writer must look for an animal whose blood can match the power of his offering.33

Our pupils will understand this kind of language, and through exposing them to suitable poems we can help them to recognize the insincerity of what Achebe calls the 'nondescript writer'.

But even if the poetic language we present to them is carefully chosen we shall still have to show them how to read it. Many of the basic reading and study skills described in Chapter 3 apply to the reading of poetry and to every other kind of reading. Again a gifted poet, John Wain, gives us good advice:34

Private, solitary reading, which takes in words through the eye at a fast rate, is obviously very well suited for many kinds of material. Newspaper articles, for example, and the more primitive kinds of fiction, are written to be gulped in this fashion: taken slowly, they become intolerable. But the more meat there is in what we read, the less effective we find this silent skimming. In a novel, for instance, we read fast and silently during long stretches, but at crucial moments - or during important dialogue or memorable description - we slow down to something approaching the speed of the speaking voice. Nobody tells us to do this; we do it because if we are enjoying the story, and imaginatively entering the author's world, we need to savour what he is giving us.

Poetry, however, makes a sterner demand. It insists on being read entirely at this slower pace. To read a poem at the same speed as a newspaper article is simply an impossibility. The words in a poem are not hieroglyphics, intended to convey a meaning to the eye and thence straight into the mind, like traffic signs. They are words in the full sense - sounds, originally coined to apply to objects or notions, and making a substantial part of their impact through sound.

And having learned to read in this way our pupils must, at the same time, be learning to listen. (See Chapter 7.) The value of careful listening to well-chosen records and tapes and radio programmes can hardly be over-emphasized. Such experience is essential to any successful poetry reading programmes.

We have said much about the poets of Africa. What of the poets of England through whom the great reputation of English poetry has been built? Lerner's valuable chapter has already been recommended and it contains good examples of simple incisive literary criticism of poems. (Bear in mind that literary criticism is only a development of what, in
Chapter 4, we called intensive reading.) Lerner and Coombes rightly insist that in sharing the poetry that we enjoy and understand we must encourage our pupils to ask the big questions. We can put them very simply:

Has the poet anything to say?
Is it worth saying?
Has he said it well?
How did he do it?

In teaching poetry it is most important that this last question should come last, for it is by far the most difficult; moreover it is not a question which should be asked too often by a teacher who wants to encourage his pupils to enjoy poetry as well as to understand it.

Our pupils will answer 'Yes' to the second question only if the poet has written of something which is important to them. This does not mean that he must be writing of something with which they have at least some knowledge. The author has, for instance, taught the poems of Wilfred Owen to African pupils who have never seen a rifle, a trench or a soldier in action and have hitherto had no conception at all of the reality of war. The great poet creates, in a few words, an impression of the experience about which he wishes to convey some new truth. A few of Owen's poems, supported with suitable visual material, were enough in themselves to help pupils to understand some of the realities of war which he was condemning. Similarly African pupils can appreciate many of the poems in Housman's *A Shropshire Lad* without ever having seen or read anything of English country life. (One of the easier Hardy novels can convey a great deal of valuable experience here.) They do not need to have shared any of the experiences of Rupert Brooke's *Great Lover* to learn, with him, to look for delight in the ordinary. Neither do they have to understand all the physical details to appreciate the moral significance of a narrative poem. The anonymous ballad, *Edward, Edward* gave us one good example of this and Edwin Muir's poem *The Castle* provides another. F. L. Billows uses a successful method for teaching Muir's poem. He knows it by heart, and recites the first stanza illustrating by chalkboard sketches and physical demonstrations anything which seems to need explanation. He then recites the first two stanzas with further illustration, and proceeds like this right through the poem, eventually reciting the whole thing. The class therefore hears most of the poem several times and is at the same time helped to understand some of the physical details like 'wicket gates' and 'battlements'. Some pupils also begin to memorize parts of the poem which appeal particularly to them. And all this – which is only one
method of presenting the poem – is done without the pupils having the written text before them.

Billows’ method raises an important question. Should pupils have to memorize poetry? The ideal answer to this question is that they should be encouraged to want to memorize the poetry that most appeals to them. This is best done by example. If pupils see the obvious delight with which a teacher recites for them a poem that he loves, they will understand easily enough the value of the exercise. The point takes us back to our first chapter and to Professor Fletcher’s belief that children will undertake drudgery willingly if they see a glimpse of the pleasure which is in store for them at the end of it. Among useful and enjoyable incentives to the learning of poetry are the preparation of tapes, speech and drama festivals, and poetry-reading groups. All these activities may begin with only a handful of pupils, but if they are well planned and enthusiastically led they can have an effect, slowly, throughout the school.

This chapter has not revealed the answer to the question ‘How do we teach poetry?’ It has suggested a basis for one answer. We have discussed only simple poems. What of more complex poems for senior pupils? Every poem is worth teaching which either enlarges our pupils’ experience by introducing them to something totally new, or modifies their experience by helping them to feel and think differently about something they have already known. The enrichment of physical experience through two such different poems as D. H. Lawrence’s *Snake* and Richard Eberhart’s *The Cancer Cells* and the development of emotional experience through two such poems about human love, as Kariuki’s *Come Away My Love* and Elizabeth Jennings’ *One Flesh* can lead our pupils gradually on to the fullest awareness of emotional and physical experience expressed for example in Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* and *King Lear*.

Poetry is important in schools. It is not an ‘optional extra’, to be taught if there is time. Poetry changes us. It enlarges our lives. It explores our experience. And it does it with the full resources of this English language which we are trying to teach. For as Michael Roberts, poet and teacher, has well said, poets are, after all, ‘exploring the possibilities of language’.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

2. Reed, J. and Wake, C. *ibid.* p. 49.
24. Moore, G. and Beier, U. *op. cit.*
32. See Chapters 1 and 4.
34. Wain, J. *op. cit.*, p. 186.
39. For a remarkable example of this see Wavell, A. P. *Other Men's Flowers*. London, Cape, 1944 (revised eds., 1956 and 1963).
42. Wain, J. *op. cit.*, p. 119.
CHAPTER 10

The School Certificate Year

If we can teach a four-year course in African secondary schools along the lines which have been suggested in the previous nine chapters, then our pupils need have no fears about any external School Certificate examination. For they will have acquired not only the language skills which they need but also a measure of the maturity of response which a good School Certificate examination in language or literature should test. During the last five years the School Certificate examinations, particularly those now set by the West African Examination Board and by Cambridge University for East Africa, have become more realistic and useful tests of skill with language. Pupils are, for example, no longer required to name grammatical parts nor to practise clause analysis. Emphasis is much more on the use of language – on the ‘synthetic’ skills of building with language, rather than on the analytic skills of taking apart what other people have constructed with language. If they have been well prepared during four or five years, through a wide variety of interesting and enjoyable reading and writing activities, our pupils will not be defeated by such realistic examinations.

But such a four or five year training is not yet possible in many of our African secondary schools. Many of them have been very quickly built within the last ten years. Throughout their short lives they have been inadequately staffed. In most African countries today expatriate secondary school teachers – who still form a large proportion of secondary school teaching staff – come only on short-term contracts. The ‘turnover’ of staff is disturbingly rapid. We have already quoted this fact in an earlier chapter as one good reason for providing another kind of continuity through the use of good English course books. Where teachers come and go rapidly there is no continuity of administration. Therefore school libraries, form libraries, sets of class readers and reliable class records are not built up as they should be in a school where English is to be successfully taught. In short, many of our African pupils have too many different teachers and not enough different books. So they reach the last year of their secondary school course, the year in which they must sit their School Certificate examina-
tion, unprepared for further studies of any kind and unprepared for the examination.

Yet it is extremely important that they should pass it. For, as we said in our first chapter, although it is no good them passing their examinations if they do not at the same time receive a sound education, it is almost as disastrous, for themselves and their countries if, in spite of receiving a good education, they do not pass their examinations. (Rightly or wrongly, they will be judged in their own countries, and overseas, very largely by their paper qualifications. This is a situation which every dedicated teacher will wish to change. But this does not give us the right to ignore it now.) Here then is a situation which exists in hundreds of African secondary schools: a class of able, but relatively neglected, pupils who have one year left before they take the critical test of the School Certificate. What can we do for them?

Before we suggest a strategy for the English teacher in this extremely difficult situation it seems sensible to say a few more words about that long-term, complete solution to this problem which is really the subject of this whole book. Again and again throughout the book, we have stressed the vital importance of the first year’s work in English. We have suggested that the most gifted and experienced teachers of English should teach the first and second forms. It is precisely because headmasters do not, at present, employ their best teachers of English in this way that we seem so often to meet the emergency situation of the badly educated final year class face to face with the School Certificate. Those of us involved in language education whether as teachers, inspectors or administrators have a responsibility to try to advise our headteachers on this subject. We must help them to understand that if language skills are well taught and practised in the first two years of the secondary course, the next two or three years will, to a large extent, look after themselves. For if the first two years are well taught our pupils will know how to listen, speak, read and write when they enter their third year. They will also have learned to enjoy these skills. We will then not have to do much more than provide the right materials to ensure that they can go on practising and enjoying them. This is not to suggest for a moment that the senior classes can be neglected. What can and must be done is to equip each class in its lower and middle school days to take the final year external examination in its stride. So the long-term solution is that if we can consistently teach English along the lines suggested in this book in the first two years of the secondary school, then the problem of the ill-prepared School Certificate class will gradually disappear. But it is certainly with us at present. The suggestions which follow for tackling it are based on the author’s own experience with badly prepared ‘lower stream’ School
Certificate classes, and on the experiences of student-teachers whom he has helped in similar situations.

There are two essentials in dealing with this problem. The first is confidence and the second is planning. As we noted in our first chapter it is not enough for the teacher to be confident; he must be able to inspire confidence in his class. Children of all ages quickly become confident when they know what they have to do, know how to do it, and know why it is best done in the way that has been suggested to them. The teacher who takes over the School Certificate class will obviously find out as much as he can about their previous experience. He will examine any class records that have been left, he will talk to any teachers who have had contact with the class in previous years, and he will talk to the pupils themselves about their progress. Then, as soon as he has assessed the situation, he will discuss it frankly with the class so that they understand exactly what needs doing. All this can be done without blaming anybody else for the situation which has arisen. From this discussion and from some appraisal of the reading resources of the school, the teacher should be able to find out what the class has read. By immediately setting a first written exercise and marking it quickly he can assess the standard of their written work. His next step should be to explain:

1. That the language skills are all related and all need practising even in this final year.
2. That therefore reading practice is still very important and time must be found for it.
3. That writing is equally important and they will have to do a great deal of it during this year.
4. That they must take responsibility for almost all their own work and improvement. This is their last chance to learn to work as young adults.
5. That the class is going to tackle its problems working together, as a group, not individually.

The first of these points will probably need a good deal of discussion and explanation. Pupils are all too well aware that they are sitting a written examination. So far in their school careers no one has thought the reading of whole books particularly important and it will seem to them that it is now too late to begin acquiring this new skill. The teacher will need confidence, and will also need to produce early evidence of his own industry and planning, if he is to overcome the kind of vocal and reasoned opposition which a School Certificate class is capable of putting up. He will overcome it more easily if he ensures that what is read is used directly in what is written. He should also insist, from the first week of the year’s course, on regular written exercises so that the pupils
have no doubt that he too has the written examination in mind. He needs to explain too, in connection with writing, some of the ideas put forward in Chapter 5 about the repetition of mistakes. School Certificate pupils will not take kindly at first to writing only short pieces. But the teacher should explain that it is important to begin with paragraphs well constructed and correctly written before going back to attempt the long essays at which the pupils will probably have already had too much misguided and premature practice.

Pupils are likely to suspend judgement on the 'taking of responsibility for their own work' until they see what this means in action. But they are likely to enjoy working together, discussing problems and being able to ask questions freely, provided such discussion and questioning leads directly into written work with an obvious bearing on the examination. Two other initial tactics are worth mentioning. However many periods may be available for English — and we would hope that there would be at least ten per week — it is good for both the morale and efficiency of the class if the teacher offers one additional period in his own time, to be arranged out of normal school hours, and to be attended voluntarily. The author's own experience is that such an offer has usually been gratefully accepted by those pupils who have most needed extra time. It has also given all the pupils evidence that the teacher means business and is prepared to work at least as hard as he expects his pupils to.

The second tactic concerns the much discussed problem of School Certificate English Literature. Whatever the school's policy may be on the English Literature paper, in an emergency situation like the one we are discussing in this chapter it is a good idea to persuade as many pupils as possible to offer English Literature in the School Certificate. They are going to have to read a good deal in any case. They might as well read constructively and at the same time not only contribute towards their success in the English Language paper but also collect another School Certificate pass. (One hopes that the English teacher would also have in mind here the moral education of which we spoke in Chapter 1. The books chosen for the English Literature examinations of both the West and East African Examination Boards offer the kind of scope for discussion of moral problems which we have already suggested is most important in the secondary school. This is our pupils' last chance during their school careers to develop some kind of moral awareness through literature. The teacher may or may not decide to present this argument to his pupils; but it is to be hoped that he will be keenly aware of it himself.)

With this much general explanation to the pupils the teacher is ready to start his course in earnest. To raise morale and confidence as high as
possible he should announce the plan for the term’s work during the first week or two. He should make sure to be punctual for all lessons and to return written work quickly. The author has found that the impact upon a demoralized class of returning the first several pieces of written work the next day – and even occasionally on the same afternoon – has been enormous. As a result many pupils have volunteered to do extra work.

But it is suggested still that the course should begin with reading. A good opening is a short session of two or three lessons on study methods, along the lines suggested in Chapter 3. A useful book here, although it is intended for post-School Certificate students, is *On Your Own, A Guide to Study Method* by E. Wright and J. S. Wallwork. The teacher can make some copies of this book available for pupils in either the form or the school library, and can base his lessons on extracts from it and also from the books by Maddox and Fry recommended in Chapter 3. Having quickly laid down some guide-lines for studying, and also for using English reference books, particularly the *Advanced Learner’s Dictionary*, another excellent way of both inspiring confidence and getting useful reading done, is to run a brief reading speed course. This course should spread over the first six or eight weeks of the first term and need not take more than two periods per week. As we mentioned in Chapter 3 the early results of such courses are usually startling and encouraging, particularly for very slow readers. When pupils realize that the teacher has helped them to read much faster, they realize also that he knows his business. They are then more likely to be willing to read, even in this last critical year on the scale that he is recommending to them.

We have already suggested that in improving the written work of the class, it is essential to keep written assignments short in the early weeks of the course. One simple and efficient way of doing this is to concentrate on summarizing. The skills of summarizing are no longer tested, in the School Certificate examinations, within specific word limits. They are tested instead in various more realistic ways, but they still form an important part of the examination, as they do of the everyday use of language in and out of school. A brief account follows of one way of tackling summarizing which the author has used successfully with a number of School Certificate classes.

The teacher first selects about thirty passages for summary. If, as is likely, he is not satisfied with any single book with sufficient passages in it, he mimeographs passages from several different books, as well as a few from past School Certificate papers. Bright and Nicholson’s *English Language for School Certificate* and J. and F. Stoddart’s *English Language for the Certificate Year* contain plenty of suitable passages, as does J. A.
Bright's *Précis Practice for Overseas Students.* (See also the course books recommended in Chapter 7.) The teacher gives a brief description of the purpose and method of summarizing. Five or six periods a week are then set aside for each of the first three weeks of the term, for working on summary. Pupils work in class at their own speed. As soon as a pupil has produced as good a summary as he can manage of a passage, he brings it to the teacher who sits at the front of the class assessing and guiding the work. The brightest pupils may work through all thirty passages in twelve or fifteen lessons. The slowest may only manage a passage each lesson. What matters is that everybody is able to work at his own speed and in a writing situation which fulfils the requirements proposed in Chapter 5 of *reducing to a minimum the opportunity to make mistakes.* If the teacher has chosen suitable passages his pupils will be exposed, for some fifteen hours, to acceptable patterns correctly and persuasively used. If the teacher makes clear—as the examination instructions now do—that the original words of the author are often the best words, and that there is no point in changing them for the sake of change, pupils are likely to produce summaries in reasonably correct English.

Working in this way the author has found that his pupils' ability to write correct English improves noticeably within a few weeks. They are aware of this improvement and gain confidence from it. Here then is a way of getting a lot of purposeful writing done early in the first term without the teacher burdening himself with an impossible load of marking. The teacher should explain to the pupils why he is starting with summarizing instead of with continuous composition. For the pupils will be well aware that the 'essay' carries more marks in the examination. It is extremely effective as well as tactful to consult colleagues teaching other subjects and, with their help, to select as many passages as possible which are either taken from the pupils' textbooks in their other subjects or from suitable relevant background material to, for example, the history, science, and geography being studied for School Certificate. This gives the pupils the agreeable sensation of doing two jobs at once. It also helps to reinforce one of the essential principles proposed in this book: that English services all other subjects, and does so most enjoyably and effectively if English lessons are used for considering, discussing and writing about ideas in any or all of the other school subjects.

Our pupils will only be willing to take more responsibility for their own improvement if, in the early stages of the final year, we make this relatively easy for them to do. We must see that they are equipped with the most useful reference books and, in particular, three that have already been recommended at some length in Chapters 5 and 6: the *Advanced Learner's Dictionary,* Hornby's *A Guide to Patterns and Usage in*
English; and W. Stannard Allen’ Living English Structure. If the teacher will spend a few early lessons, as already recommended, showing pupils how to use these books and explaining in particular to them, the method of the Advanced Learner’s Dictionary and some of the details of Hornby’s introduction, they can soon learn to correct their own grammatical errors. The teacher will then be able to follow the firm advice given in Chapter 5 of never writing correct versions in the margin of the pupils’ books, but rather indicating with a symbol the kind of error that has been made and providing them with a reference to Hornby or Stannard Allen where they will find suitable drills to help them both to correct the mistake and memorize the correct pattern. If the teacher is confident that he himself has a reasonable acquaintance with the structure of English, it is extremely useful, even at this late stage to prepare a sequence of eight or ten lessons during the first term as an overall summary of the basic sentence patterns of the language. Hornby, Whitehall, Mittins, Roberts, Bright, or any of the other books recommended in Chapter 6 will provide adequate guidance here. If the teacher does not feel competent to handle a systematic summary then the least he should do is to guide his class thoroughly through Hornby’s introduction to the Advanced Learner’s Dictionary so that they can use the verb pattern tables efficiently and use the whole book for what it really is — a writer’s dictionary.

Before many weeks have passed it will be essential to move on from summarizing to the practice of continuous writing. Much of the advice given on the teaching of writing skills in Chapter 5 applies to any teaching situation, but we must recognize that in this final year, time is very short. Three points of method are worth considering. The first, already mentioned above, is to make pupils stick to writing simple paragraphs for a few weeks. The teacher should explain that this is both to help them to avoid errors and to give them plenty of practice in paragraph planning and construction. Secondly, it can be very effective to move from paragraphs to relatively short letters. As usual we must provide realistic situations. Many of them can be drawn from school life, because the vocabulary and patterns required will already be well known to the pupils. Following Gurrey’s evidence that pupils write more accurately when they write about what they know and are interested in, teachers will find that even the worst trained School Certificate classes can produce fairly correct English if they are given a chance to express themselves on things they have thought about in their final year at school. Two obvious examples are how much better the school could be run, and what they are going to do when they leave it. Letter-writing provides good controlled practice for compositions of not more than a
foolscap page in length. Moreover most School Certificate examinations give some scope in the composition paper for letter-writing and some students may wish to 'specialize' in this direction. (Since it is so important, in this situation, to provide realistic and purposeful incentives to writing, the reader is referred back to Chapter 5, and the discussion of Gurrey's proposal for a class project on careers available to secondary school leavers.)

The third tactic is a real concession to our emergency situation. The author has sometimes found it best to direct his class from the beginning of the year towards the alternative composition paper which offers the opportunity to write two short compositions rather than one long one. If a class has not had the kind of training in writing recommended in Chapter 5, it is often easier to teach pupils how to write correct, fluent and - to be honest - not particularly imaginative compositions of between 200 and 300 words, rather than the single, longer composition. There is little doubt that the longer composition offers more chance to the pupil to exercise his imagination, and it can therefore be educationally much more valuable. Nevertheless in a difficult situation and with very limited time, we may be willing to make this much concession to the examination.

Whether or not the teacher accepts these three suggestions he should see that, from the beginning of the year, writing practice is geared both to what pupils are reading and to their personal experience. The English Literature set books will offer some scope for writing based on reading, particularly now that more twentieth-century and African writing is being prescribed. The teacher should supply plenty of extracts from African writers - see for example the Heinemann African Writers Series, and Paul Edwards' anthologies West African Narrative, and Through African Eyes. Teachers will also find many useful passages which will lead on to discussion and writing in recent anthologies from Britain, including Reflections by Clements, Dixon and Stratta, Leaving by D. C. Meacham and Response by John Watts.

In a situation where time is very limited, short stories will provide not only valuable reading material, but also excellent incentives to the writing of stories. Four selections worth considering are Pan African Short Stories edited by Neville Denny; Commonwealth Short Stories edited by Brownlee and Rose; Quartet edited by Richard Rive; and the four volumes of People and Diamonds compiled by David Holbrook. There are bound to be many background problems arising from this reading, for our pupils will not have had much previous experience. Teachers will be well advised to get to know P. S. Tregidgo's helpful little book, A Background to English and to see that there are several
copies available 'on reserve' in the school library. Some points will have to be explained by the teacher but it helps both the student's sense of responsibility and his reading if he is referred for background information to the relevant section in Tregidgo, or even to a suitable encyclopaedia.

A few pupils may show some talent for short story writing, and there is usually scope for this in the School Certificate composition papers. In the author's experience, however, it is unwise to leave this option open for all pupils. Those who show ability at it and have had a good deal of practice should be encouraged to look carefully at the short story choices. But the rest of the class should be positively discouraged from taking any notice of them. Many a promising pupil has come to grief in a School Certificate examination because he has been attracted by the title of a story, and, under examination conditions, has made his first attempt at short story writing.

But whichever composition alternative our pupils are to attempt, the teacher must give them plenty of practice in what we may call 'particularizing'. We have referred to this and to the importance of interest in composition, in Chapter 5, but the point is worth developing in detail for the School Certificate class. The examiners persist in setting general and abstract subjects like 'Travel' or 'Crafts of My Country' or 'Progress For Modern Man'. In order to get our pupils to write interestingly on such subjects and to give them confidence, it is worth emphasizing the advantage they have in living in Africa. They have a chance to fascinate their examiners - most of whom will not be African - by writing about something which they themselves have experienced and the examiner has not. Faced with the subject 'Travel' they might write, not about travel in general, but how they actually went by taxi from Nairobi to Mombasa, or by canoe up the Nile or the Zambezi, or by Lake steamer to the ports of three countries on Lake Victoria, or by car to Takoradi Harbour and across the harbour in a tug-boat. Asked to write about 'Crafts of My Country', they should write, not on crafts in general, but (see Chapter 5) how they actually helped to make bark-cloth, or banana fibre, or the hut their family lives in, or palm wine - something which will probably be quite outside the examiner's experience and which, if only reasonably well communicated, he is certain to find interesting.

In bolstering our pupils' confidence this point of interest is worth stressing again and again. There are enough pressures in their education - the very use of the English language is one of the most powerful - leading them to imagine that African culture is necessarily inferior. They need to learn how fascinating African culture and experience can be to people who live outside it. Every year, for example, the secondary schools in Africa which take the teaching of art at all seriously obtain a
number of distinctions in the School Certificate art examination which is far greater, in proportion, than the numbers obtained in any other subjects. One cannot but suspect that this is the result, not so much of the remarkable artistic abilities of school children in Africa, as of the fascination which any non-African examiner must feel towards work which is so strikingly different from what he normally sees. The same can be true of composition in English – the success of the African Writers Series itself is evidence of this truth – if only we will teach our pupils how to take advantage of their exotic situation.

Pupils need practice, then, in turning the abstract or generalized title into an account or a letter or a story that at least draws heavily on their own experience, even if it does not consist entirely of it. Once they have attempted this half a dozen times, and had a sensitive teacher's advice or criticism on each attempt, they will be unlikely to make the fundamental mistake of writing in an abstract or generalized fashion in the examination. That is something which, at this level, only the most gifted pupil can do successfully.

The pupils must do plenty of writing and it must be marked. It is important here to underline a point which we have made in the chapters on writing and on speech. Quantity matters. We must not make correctness seem so important that we prevent our pupils from learning to write well by writing a lot. It may be worth spelling out what we mean by 'a lot of writing' in this final School Certificate year. It has already been suggested that the teacher needs ten lessons a week and would be advised to offer an optional eleventh lesson in his own time. These ten or eleven periods can usefully be divided into five for writing and five or six for reading, though of course, in all of them there is a great deal of listening and speaking going on as well. Once the first battery of summary exercises – thirty or so – has been done, the author has required three written exercises a week – two of which are more or less self-marking – from his pupils for the rest of the year. If this sounds an alarming amount of writing, let us remember that although we talk of a 'school year', by the time we have taken out ten weeks for holidays and another nine or ten weeks to allow for the fact that the School Certificate examination is early in November and that our pupils need at least a week free of teaching before the examinations, we have very little more than thirty teaching weeks left. So what we are proposing, for a seriously under-trained class, is a total of only ninety written exercises in English – apart from practice work, written and corrected in class – before the pupils sit their examination. Supposing each exercise is 400 words long. We need not bother with the exact mathematics but we would still be much less than one-twentieth of the way along Paul Roberts' road to
writing—'to put a million words on paper'. The English teacher will, of course, always be willing to take extra written work if pupils wish to do it. But he should do so only on the condition, which we emphasized in Chapter 5, that the corrections of the last exercise are carefully done before the next one (whether it is required or voluntary) will be looked at.

How will the corrections be done and how can the teacher ensure steady improvement? We have already hinted that he must be careful not to overload himself, and to see that many of the written exercises are corrected by pupils in class with the aid of the textbook. For summaries and essay writing he should also use group marking, and insist that careful proof-reading by the individual pupils should precede it. The method is simple. Each pupil is warned that he should read his work through carefully before he hands it in, correcting all the mistakes he finds and so making sure that the work, when submitted, is as correct as he can make it. Pupils are then divided into small groups—four is a good working number—and they circulate their work among themselves. This gives them a good opportunity to discuss grammatical mistakes and refinements of style and presentation, and to present to the teacher four scripts as correct and fluent as their combined efforts can make them. Teachers will also find it useful to adopt the system of study points recommended in Chapter 5, and to explain to pupils that the marking of written work for a particular week is 'slanted' towards one particular study point. It is essential, of course, to mark every error in each composition at least every third or fourth week. As far as possible pupils will do their own corrections with the help of the reference books provided. In this way most of the revision and reinforcement of grammar will be done, and the need for the teacher to hold regular explanatory sessions on the most common errors, gradually lessens as the year proceeds.

The teacher should, however, bear in mind the particular demands of the individual examinations, especially with reference to grammar. The East African paper, for example, now demands little knowledge of grammatical terminology and no skill in clause analysis. But it does require the recognition of a certain number of grammatical structures through multiple-choice questions on them. The West African examination provides a very large number of such multiple-choice questions on structure, and teachers may find the book, already recommended, by J. and F. Stoddart useful on this topic. Its fourth section on 'Structure' is geared particularly to the demands of the East and West African School Certificate Examinations.

It will be clear to even an inexperienced teacher that in a final year
course taught along these lines comprehension will be going on almost all the time. Formal comprehension will be best done through the careful scrutiny of passages taken from the English literature set books. The books of passages and short stories, mentioned above as stimuli for writing, would also be useful for comprehension work. Some specific practice in the answering of multiple-choice comprehension questions is essential. The course on reading speed in the first few weeks will have given pupils some familiarity with this technique presumably with extracts from the books by Fry, Wainwright, and De Leeuw. There is good further practice material for comprehension through multiple-choice questions in Comprehension for School Certificate by Munby, Thomas and Cooper, and again in English Language for the Certificate Year by J. and F. Stoddart.

The teaching of English literature for School Certificate deserves some attention, and we would ask teachers of English to experiment with and test the following proposition: that in the teaching of literature, provided the books are well chosen, it is actually quicker to teach pupils to understand than to teach them to memorize. In a one year ‘crash’ course such as we are describing there is certainly a lot of leeway to be made up, but there is still no excuse for insisting that the School Certificate books cannot be effectively studied within a single school year (see Chapter 4). Again the teacher must plan his work carefully. He should use as many relevant audio-visual aids as he can get hold of; films – particularly to illustrate Shakespeare – film-strips, records, pictures, and charts can all be valuable aids to understanding and if possible he should try to turn one of the form rooms into an English Room for the School Certificate class. Here the pupils should always be able to find the essential reference books they need, and also frequently changing displays of relevant visual material. Where the School Certificate class is known to be in difficulties there is a strong case for asking the headmaster to make some small concession to normal school discipline. For example, if it is the practice in the school for classes to change rooms for every lesson, the School Certificate class may benefit greatly from being allowed to use a single room as a base. They should be taught as much of their English as possible with the relevant material around them.

In the School Certificate year we still try to study each book as a complete unity and to ask the big, essential questions about it (see Chapter 9). Every teacher of English literature for school certificate should read Laurence Lerner’s English Literature: An Interpretation for Students Abroad and also Robin Mayhead’s Understanding Literature. Copies of these books should be available for pupils and the teacher should draw their attention to particularly helpful chapters. Every
week’s work should be carefully planned and each lesson should give some scope for discussion of the particular passage that has been set for reading in the previous week. Out of the discussion students can be encouraged to make some of their own notes (see Chapter 5) and the discussion should be guided by the teacher towards the writing topic for the week. Pupils’ own notes should be inspected occasionally by the teacher and they should be encouraged to ask for guidance where they need it. They will need help in constructing their notes and two lessons devoted to the kind of guidance outlined in Chapter 5 should be enough to put them on the right lines.

But there is certainly a case in this situation for some mimeographed handouts from the teacher. This is not ‘spoon-feeding’ – it is coming to terms with reality. The author has found in particular that in the first term of the School Certificate year, mimeographed outlines of the plots of set books are extremely helpful to pupils, particularly for example with such confused plots as Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* or Dickens’ *Great Expectations*. We can use the hand-outs as a basis, not only for the understanding of particular plots, but also for a discussion of the importance of literary plots in general somewhat along the lines of Lerner’s discussion in his chapter on ‘The Novel’.

Group work can be effective in the teaching of literature in this year and it can save a great deal of time. Pupils work in small groups and present reports on particular aspects of the books being studied: for example, character sketches of the main characters, or a group presentation of half a dozen context questions. The group work is displayed on boards in the classroom and it is every pupil’s responsibility to read the work of each group carefully.

Weaker pupils may have little time for other reading beyond the School Certificate books and whatever is presented by the teacher in connection with writing. But this should not deter the teacher from organizing a small form library containing other works of the prescribed authors, and other suitable background reading. The brighter and more enthusiastic pupils will find time to read some of these books which may be, for them, the beginnings of that wider reading course which should have started four years before. We are laying foundations late, but not too late.

During the final term of their School Certificate year our pupils need help with examination technique. This should begin with practice at reading what the paper really says. Pupils must learn, for examinations in English and all other subjects, to distinguish between such words as ‘discuss’, ‘evaluate’, ‘compare’ and ‘contrast’. The author has known pupils to fail examinations through such a simple mistake as forgetting
to turn over to see what was on the other side of the paper. There can be few teachers of English who have taught School Certificate classes long in Africa or anywhere else without having had more than one pupil who has failed to give of his best in the examination merely because he did not read carefully what the examiner was asking him to do. Pupils need guidance and practice in planning out the total time allocation for the examination, in quickly planning individual questions, and in proof-reading what they have written. This last is most important and it is worth advising pupils not to leave the reading of their answers until they have completed the whole paper. There often is not time at the end of the examination; there is always time after finishing each individual question.

'Mock' examinations can easily be overdone, but pupils certainly gain confidence from two or three attempts at School Certificate papers under examination conditions. Confidence comes from practice.

It can also come from a sympathetic and intelligent teacher's handling of the last few weeks of the course. When the teacher is sure that the pupils have done their best, and that he has done all he can to prepare them for the examination, it is time to relax a little. The teacher should make sure that the last few exercises he sets are well within the students' capacity, even if they do not represent the highest standards that can be expected in the School Certificate examination. Pupils then go into the examination knowing that their last few exercises were well done and well received by their teacher. There is nothing hypocritical about this. The author spent some years teaching in a school for blind boys. The motto of the school was 'They can because they think they can'. This can be true for all of us. If, in the last few weeks before the examination, we can show our pupils that we believe they have a good chance of success, they are actually more likely to succeed than if we go on driving them and criticising their work until the day before the examination.

The teacher of English who handles a School Certificate class in this situation has two final responsibilities. Both demand some years of work. The first is to do his best to ensure that the external School Certificate examination becomes the kind of examination which he believes is a fair test of his pupils abilities. Most teachers are aware – and if they are not they should read what John Dixon has written and quoted persuasively on the subject – that the examination can, if teachers allow it to, control the curriculum. This chapter has been an attempt to show that even the narrowest of School Certificate examinations can be used as an excuse for good teaching. The East and West African School Certificate Examinations are already moving in the direction in which enthusiastic and enlightened teachers of English want them to move. It is up to every teacher of English to help them on their way (see Appendix 2).
The second responsibility of the teacher who plans this kind of final year course is to try to ensure it is never necessary again. He should keep his headmaster and the whole staff informed of what he has had to do. He should urge the necessity for a planned English syllabus throughout the school with careful attention to both language skills and personal growth, as has been suggested throughout this book. If he has been appointed to teach the School Certificate class it is almost certainly because he is regarded as one of the best teachers of English in the school. He should therefore immediately put in a request to take over responsibility for at least some of the teaching in the first two years. He can then help to lay a good foundation in English which will make all these carefully planned tactics for the final year superfluous.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

APPENDIX 1

Audio-Visual Aids in the Teaching of English

Throughout this book we have been discussing the development of the four language skills of Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing. Two of these are aural skills and the other two mainly visual. The basic material of all our lessons is, of course, language – primarily speech, and we have continually stressed the importance of discussion in the classroom. But we have also sounded warning notes. In Chapter 3 we reminded teachers of how quickly the spoken word is usually forgotten – most of what is said in a lesson or lecture having been forgotten by the pupils within a few hours. In Chapter 5 we suggested that written notes were perhaps the least effective method of storing knowledge.

As language teachers we need to remind ourselves constantly that the most powerful of the senses through which our pupils learn is – sight. We need to couple this reminder with one of the themes of this book – that pupils learn language by using it. ‘If I hear I forget; if I see I understand: if I do, I know!’ This may be a well-worn proverb but it is especially valuable to the language teacher. It reminds him that he must, as often as he can, present visual material which will stimulate that language practice without which fluent mastery of a language cannot be achieved. But he must remember too that his visual material is not a method in itself; it is an aid. However powerful an aid it may be it can never be a substitute for his own skill in presenting and manipulating the language. The teacher has still got to ‘know his stuff’ however sophisticated his aids may be. But his aids can greatly assist his pupils to remember what he teaches.

There is no need for a separate chapter in this book on the subject of audio-visual aids. There are a number of very good, cheap books which cover the subject interestingly and thoroughly. In the preceding ten chapters we have recommended a large number of useful books for teachers of English as a second language, and have suggested that many of them should be bought by secondary schools and located, not in the staff room (from which any member of staff is likely to remove them, with the best of intentions, and never return them) but in a special section of the main school library. Every school should have at least one copy of the six books listed below. All six can be bought for less than £2 sterling, and, properly used, they can transform the quality and effectiveness of English teaching in the school.
These books, along with the articles on audio-visual methods, which appear frequently in *English Language Teaching* (Oxford University Press/British Council, published three times a year), will provide ample detailed guidance. Teachers will want to know what to use, where to get it, and when and how to use it. Here are some practical hints on the most effective audio-visual aids.

A. Aids which can be available in all schools, however remote or short of money.

(i) THE CHALKBOARD

Still more often called the blackboard though nowadays it is not usually black. Probably the most powerful of the simple visual aids, and the easiest to use effectively. Yet many of us ignore or spoil its potential by failing to observe a few simple rules. The first thing to do with a chalkboard is to clean it before the language lesson begins. Few things can be more distracting for pupils than a board full of information from the previous lesson – totally irrelevant to the present lesson, but liable to become interesting as soon as attention begins to wander.

Chalkboard work needs planning and practice. The teacher should spend a few hours – in short spells – practising in an empty classroom and checking to see that his writing and drawing is visible from the very back of the room. We must remember too that it is no good cleaning off other people's irrelevant material if we immediately cover the board with other equally irrelevant material of our own. Whatever we write on the board our pupils will probably have in front of their eyes for the rest of the lesson. As well as being legible it must be intelligible, useful and easily memorable. The only way for even an experienced teacher to achieve this is to plan what the board is going to look like by the end of the lesson. Any really thorough lesson plan either has the items which are to be written on the chalkboard underlined, or else has a separate plan of what is to be written on the board. The teacher should never use the board as a scribbling pad – items, such as spellings of difficult
words, which are written up casually should be removed as soon as they have been used. Ideally the chalkboard at the end of the lesson should reveal the plan of the whole lesson; it should certainly indicate the most important things which have been taught.

The chalkboard is not only for writing on. It is also for drawing. Simple line illustrations can be very helpful to pupils in every aspect of language learning from the explanation of verb patterns to the appreciation of visual imagery in poetry. F. G. French in another small, cheap and useful book, Teaching English as an International Language (Oxford University Press) has a helpful chapter on chalkboard drawing. He includes some basic instruction on the drawing of 'matchstick' figures, and many examples of the illustration of 'action verb' patterns through such figures. He also strongly recommends the use of the chalkboard for building up substitution tables before pupils' eyes, in teaching sentence patterns.

(2) PICTURES
One obvious value of pictures is to brighten up a classroom. This is by no means a frivolous aim. Far too many of our African secondary school classrooms are bare and colourless. They therefore only serve to prolong the cultural deprivation which many of our pupils have suffered throughout a home and primary school life which has offered little stimulus to play or curiosity. Pictures can convey, quickly and accurately a great deal of useful information about a wide range of subjects – including English literature and drama. Language-teaching pictures, if well chosen, provide interesting and appropriate contexts to promote discussion within the limited vocabulary required to talk about the people, objects and scenes depicted. Gurrey in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (Longmans) has some helpful comments on the use of pictures to stimulate guided composition, again within a controlled vocabulary. This is often regarded – as indeed are pictures in general – as suitable only for primary school classes.

But well-chosen pictures can be just as effective with secondary classes. Teachers without any talent for drawing can produce effective copies of pictures they wish to use, with the help of slide projectors, episcopes or overhead projectors; for hints on this see Lee and Coppen, Simple Audio-visual Aids to Foreign Language Teaching. African pupils need help in learning to interpret pictures accurately. Pitt Corder has some good advice on this in The Visual Element in Language Teaching.

(3) THE FLANNELBOARD
Another very powerful but much neglected aid, too often
thought of as only suitable for primary school use. The author has found it most effective in teaching grammatical patterns. Simple substitution of the elements of a clause or sentence is easier – as well as more amusing – to demonstrate on a flannel-board than on a chalkboard. It is worth bearing in mind, if one is inclined to begrudge the time needed to paint, cut and stick the sets of words required, that once prepared they will last for years, with reasonable care. The most immaculate chalkboard work will last for a lesson or two at the most. For advice on construction and use of flannelboards, see Lee and Coppen, and Somaratne, *Aids and Tests in the Teaching of English as a Second Language*.

These three aids can all be made easily available in any secondary school. Used as the recommended books advise they are powerful aids to language learning. We should find ourselves using all three often.

B. Mechanical Aids Requiring Electricity.

(1) RECORDS AND TAPES

The British Council catalogue listed above indicates a very wide range of language teaching materials available on L.P. records and tapes. Transistorized record players and tape-recorders are now available at reasonable prices, enabling even remote schools which do not have a mains electricity supply, to make use of recorded material for language teaching.

The main uses of such material have already been suggested in Chapters 4, 5, 7 and 8 on Reading, Writing, Speech and Drama. As aids to reading, recorded abridgements of novels, recorded anthologies of English prose, and of course the very wide range of poetry (see Chapter 9) recorded both by poets themselves and by professional actors, are invaluable. Records of spoken literature and of music provide excellent stimulus to writing, particularly the more imaginative writing that we can expect from our pupils in the third year of the course and after, provided we have laid a foundation of fluency and correctness along the lines proposed in Chapter 5.

The value of the recorded texts of the recommended books on speech (see Chapter 7) will be apparent to any teacher who has tried to improve the quality of English speech in a second language situation. Listening is the essential foundation for all work in speech. It is important not to use only the professionally recorded material however. Pupils need to hear their own efforts as frequently as possible. Vernon, and Strevens have good advice on the use of the tape-recorder, and even though few teachers can think in terms of language laboratories yet, there is much that will be useful to them in their work with tape recorders, in
Like poetry, drama should, as far as possible, be heard before it is read. The recommended books on Drama (see Chapter 8) provide ample references to the wide range of available recorded material which includes the complete works of Shakespeare. Teachers should write to the main recording companies asking to be kept informed of the latest issues. It is well worth building up a small stock of records in a secondary school – provided they are carefully stored – but it is even more economical to keep in touch with the local office of the British Council. The Council maintains libraries of audio-visual material including records and tapes, in all English-speaking African countries. Records can not only be borrowed, but can also be transferred to tape, which is a much cheaper way of permanently preserving the plays required, than to buy the L.P. records (even if such records are available). This exercise requires tact, and schools should be careful to ensure that they do not infringe any copyright acts by using such recordings for any performances that could be considered 'public'. Many African secondary schools have no chance of arranging for their pupils to see even competent amateur stage productions. The record, tape, and film therefore become a primary source of experience. It is, for example, very much easier to prepare a worthwhile tape-recording of pupils' dramatic performances (see Chapter 8) if they have had the chance to listen to a few professional performances before attempting their own.

(2) RADIO AND TELEVISION
Teachers often take the view that with these two media they are entirely in the hands of the local broadcasting authority. There are two comments worth making on this view. Firstly, if the timing of the programmes offered does not fit in exactly with the timing of the school lessons, then, if the programmes are good, it is well worth modifying the school timetable at various points in the week to accommodate them. Secondly, if the teacher does not think the programmes are good he should not only complain but should also offer to provide better ones. Most of our African broadcasting corporations welcome, and indeed seek, this kind of initiative from teachers. Pitt Corder offers help to teachers who wish to use television in their language teaching (and this should mean all teachers, for we are all aware of the power of this medium in our own lives) in his two books, The Visual Element in Language Teaching, and English Language Teaching and Television (both in the Longmans 'Education Today' series). Access to these powerful media is changing the lives of young Africans all
over the continent, and as teachers we should be considering their impact and how we can guide and use it. For a useful discussion of the situation in Britain, much of which is relevant to Africa, see Nicholas Tucker, *Understanding the Mass Media* (Cambridge University Press, 1966). Tucker suggests attitudes to teaching based on the study of mass media, provides a good deal of basic non-technical information, and also notes specific methods of introducing class-room studies.

(3) **FILMS**

Sound films, film strips and cine-loop films can be powerful language teachers, not just because they utilize the most powerful of the senses, but because children enjoy them so much. Teacher 'control' is sometimes an issue in the employment of sound film; 'The teacher can control the slide or the strip,' it is argued, 'but the film takes over the whole lesson.' There are two answers: If the film is well chosen, then it does not matter if the whole lesson is taken over, for the film will be more effective than the best lesson could be. Furthermore, most film-projectors now carry a stop device which allows the teacher to interrupt both film and sound at any point to interject his own commentary. Again, Pitt Corder and Tucker are well worth reading on the use and impact of film media. The British Council catalogue lists available material and suppliers for films specifically designed to teach English as a second language. For further advice and details on the selection both of equipment and materials there are two important agencies with which teachers should keep in touch:

(i) *The Educational Foundation for Visual Aids*, 33 Queen Anne Street, London, W.1, which issues a comprehensive catalogue, as well as a series of individual subject catalogues of films and filmstrips.

(ii) *The Overseas Visual Aids Centre*. Tavistock House South, Tavistock Square, London, W.C.1, which, as its name implies, deals specially with the problems of education overseas. It produces a wide range of its own lists and publications, and also runs courses for teachers from Commonwealth and other overseas countries.

Film does not represent an 'easy way out' for the teacher. It takes far longer to prepare and set-up a lesson which includes the use of film, than to prepare an orthodox 'chalk and talk' lesson. Nor is film the answer to all our language teaching problems; it is an aid towards the answer. In the books recommended, teachers will find realistic appraisals of the problems and limitations of the use of film, as well as much advice on
how to overcome them. Pitt Corder for instance suggests a few criteria:

Film must therefore do more; it must serve as the starting point of a series of learning activities. A language-teaching film must present enough material of the right sort and in the right way to warrant it being shown to the same class on several occasions. This implies that the learners can bear to see it more than once simply as a film. No pupil is going to learn anything from a film he is bored by. Instead of it being a valuable motivating factor it will be exactly the opposite.

(The Visual Element in Language Teaching - page 71).

The catalogues and institutions mentioned above provide evidence that in the three years since these comments were published, enough new and exciting film material has been produced which fulfils Pitt Corder's criteria and will vastly improve the language teaching of any teacher who will take the time and trouble to use it.

APPENDIX 2

English Language Testing

Whenever a teacher of English - or of any other subject - sets a test, he should remember that he is testing not only his pupils’ learning, but also his own teaching. From our tests and examinations we should discover what our pupils can and cannot do with language. (If the themes of this book have been understood it will be appreciated that we are very little concerned with what our pupils know about language.) This will tell us - if we are prepared to admit it - as much about our own teaching skill and success as about our pupils’ abilities. If a skill has not been well learned, it has probably not been well taught.

We have stressed throughout this book, and particularly in Chapter 4 on Reading, that teachers of English in African secondary schools should be careful not to place too much emphasis on testing, especially in the first two years of the course. Our pupils' primary education has been riddled with testing. Examinations have dominated so much (and we must say again that this is unfortunate but understandable, with the present emphasis on internationally acceptable qualifications all over the world including Africa) that they have probably been tested more than they have been taught. Indeed, many of our primary school
teachers, through no fault of their own, have never learned the essential difference between testing and teaching. In the secondary school course we must try to stress the enjoyment and creativity of language skills. We shall certainly go on testing. But we should do so as unobtrusively as possible, in a relaxed way. Formal tests — not always previously announced — should be known by our pupils to be only a part of the process of continuous assessment of their progress which is going on all the time, alongside the processes of encouragement and improvement which are the teacher's primary concern. Regarded in this way, tests can actually become enjoyable. The Reading Speed tests, with multiple-choice comprehension questions, referred to in Chapters 3 and 10, are good examples of this. But even with such exhilarating and relatively relaxed tests, the pupils need to be continually reminded that it is the intervening language practice that matters most, and not the tests themselves.

In most of the preceding chapters we have stressed the importance of an equal relationship between teacher and pupil, and the value of frank discussion in all aspects of the course. We have suggested that at every possible opportunity the teacher should take pupils into his confidence by explaining the reasons for the methods of teaching and learning that he has chosen for them, and that he should show his confidence in them by making them responsible for their own improvement in language skills. Testing provides as much opportunity for this approach as any other teaching skill. Tests should be a shared experience. The pupils should know and feel that testing is another form of helping. There is no excuse for elevating tests into imposed and mysterious rituals which make competent pupils nervous and nervous pupils petrified. Testing should be a regular, relaxed, varied, and not particularly noticeable feature of the course. A written test can only be a shared experience if the papers are returned to pupils on every occasion and discussed, considerately and thoroughly. One of the most disturbing and inefficient practices of schools and colleges is that of requiring pupils to submit frequent examination papers for which they receive a grade in due course, but which they never see again and have no chance to discuss or learn from. If a pupil does not learn from a test it has been largely wasted. (It is most unlikely that the teacher who does not trouble to return and discuss papers will have bothered to examine them collectively to work out common errors and areas of weakness; in this way the pupils learn nothing useful and neither does the teacher. A set of 'marks' is the sole result of a time-consuming and, for the pupils, a nerve-wracking procedure.)

One of the worst — and least essential — effects of tests, is competition. Most teachers still feel obliged to present examination or test results in the form of percentage marks, or grades, arranged in descending order of merit. We have tried to present, in Chapter 1, a reasonably balanced view of competition in school. It can be valuable, but our African secondary school pupils will already have had more than enough of it —
in competing for places in the upper-primary school, and then for the coveted secondary school bursaries – to last them the rest of their school careers. The School Certificate examination is in no real sense competitive and we need to imbue our secondary pupils, as early as possible with a spirit of co-operation so that they work together towards standards of excellence, in language and in every other school activity.

Too many English language examinations test only the pupils’ knowledge of facts about the language, or their ability to memorize. If we are to teach English along the lines suggested in the preceding chapters then we need tests which will help us to assess the pupils’ skill in using the language and in responding sensitively to language skilfully used. Many teachers rely almost entirely on ‘essay type’ examinations, testing the pupils’ ability to express themselves in continuous writing. Unfortunately they then assess such examinations without any real method but with a reliance on their own sense of ‘quality’ in writing. The arrogant and false assumption which lies behind such procedures as this is that we are all capable of carrying around in our heads an accurate notion of what constitutes 40 per cent success, or C+, or ‘Pass’ standard. ‘Essay’ type papers can be valuable aids to assessing progress, but only if they are carefully and systematically examined.

As teachers of English as a second language we need tests and examinations which are consistently valid, and also practical to administer. We all need help in devising such tests. Expert help is available in the following books:


(This is the standard work on the subject and is written with the teacher of English as a foreign or second language specially in mind. It deals with theories of language learning and testing and has specific chapters on the testing of speech – including listening, intonation, stress and sound quality – control and production of grammatical structures, vocabulary, reading, comprehension, writing, the overall command of the language and cross-cultural understanding. It is not an easy book but is very clearly structured for ease of reference. Every teacher of English as a second language in a secondary school should read it.) Along with Lado’s book every school library should have a copy of each of:


Harris’s is a much shorter book than Lado’s and covers much of the same ground in less detail. For less experienced teachers, it makes a very good introduction to the theory of testing in English, and also has a short and simple section on the statistical analysis of test items. The
chapters in the Oxford Symposium vary in level of difficulty, but include two particularly useful contributions on Spoken English, by G. E. Perren and A. Wilkinson, and an abridgement of a West African examinations report by D. W. Grieve. Gosling’s book deserves to be better known. It is based on research into the Commonwealth Secondary Scholarship examinations in Australia, and offers detailed guidance in the methodical appraisal of continuous composition.

These books will provide teachers with all the detailed guidance they need to construct and to recognize effective language tests. The following suggestions refer to practices which are still common in language examining in Africa, and which should be avoided.

1. To ask pupils to identify or label English structures is not the same as asking them to use them, and not as useful.
2. To ask pupils to define words, is a very exacting test. ‘What does it mean?’ is a hard question and should be used sparingly.
3. To invite pupils to build sentences around single given words is an unrealistic exercise which also invites them to make mistakes. There is no realistic language situation and no sensible incentive to correct or sensitive usage.
4. It is equally unrealistic to present pupils with pairs of words e.g. ‘ingenious’ and ‘ingenuous’ and ask them to distinguish between them. Most pupils would avoid either word. In conversation or writing we use only those words which we need and have mastered. (See Chapter 2 on Receptive and Reproductive Vocabulary.)
5. If we ask pupils to replace the words underlined in the passage by other words which mean the same and which might have been used by the author’, we are penalizing the pupil who has real awareness of shades of meaning, e.g. ‘She moved mincingly to the door.’ A well-read pupil might make no attempt at this (quite rightly, for there is no other word that is exactly right). A less able pupil might substitute ‘in an odd way’ and get half a mark.
6. To ask pupils to summarize passages within precise word-limits is to ask them to do what they will never have to do in life out of school. Rough guides – ‘Summarize in three paragraphs’; ‘Give the gist in about half a page’ do correspond to the kind of summarizing that most literate men and women have to do, either mentally or in writing, very frequently.

Multiple-choice tests are becoming a feature of mass ‘external’ examinations, not merely because they are convenient to mark but also because they focus attention precisely on individual language structures and shades of meaning. The books recommended above and in Chapter 10 will provide some guidance and examples. The following books also contain useful material:

Murphy, M. *Designing Multiple-choice Items for English Language*. Ginn.

In Chapter 10 we suggested that the teacher who was dissatisfied with the School Certificate Examination could change it, if he was prepared to co-operate with other teachers and inspectors to this end. The recent Cambridge University alternative English Language paper for East Africa is evidence of what can be done by enthusiastic teachers and teacher-trainers working through a university Education Department. Grieve's report (see the Oxford Symposium above) suggests useful criteria for the re-appraisal of such examinations. In examining, as in so many other educational activities in Africa, most of us teachers have the privilege of working much nearer to the sources of administrative influence than we might in more highly developed countries. We must take the chances that we are offered, not to grumble about examinations but to provide better ones.

**APPENDIX 3**

**Recommended Reading**

The notes and references for each chapter offer detailed guidance on further reading in each of the chapter topics. Many teachers with limited time available for reading might welcome more specific guidance on what to read first. The following short list consists of books which teachers will find worth buying for frequent reference. They are nearly all cheap and easily available, and many provide further reading suggestions. Books with full bibliographies are marked *.

**General Language Teaching Method:**

Engholm, E. *Education through English*. Cambridge University Press.
Tiffen, B. *A language in common*. Longmans.
Teaching Literature, Poetry and Drama:

Holbrook, D. *English for the rejected.* Cambridge University Press.
Lerner, L. *English literature: an interpretation for students abroad.* Oxford University Press.
Reeves, J. *Teaching poetry.* Heinemann Educational Books.
Slade, P. *An introduction to child drama.* University of London Press.

Teaching Speech:

Christophersen, P. *An English phonetics course.* Longmans.
McCarthy, P. A. *English pronunciation.* Heffer.
Strevens, P. D. *Spoken language.* Longmans.

Teachers should be sure that their schools subscribe to *English Language Teaching*, published three times yearly by the Oxford University Press, and should ensure that their schools have copies of the two volumes of *English Language Teaching Selections* edited by W. R. Lee (Oxford University Press, 1966).

Teachers who have read a representative selection of these books and others recommended in the references to individual chapters, might like to try the following somewhat more technical and difficult works:

Doob, L. *Communication in Africa.* Yale University Press.
Firth, J. R. *The tongues of men, and speech.* Oxford University Press.
Halliday, M., McIntosh, A. and Strevens, P. *The linguistic sciences and language teaching.* Longmans.
Mackey, W. F. *Language teaching analysis.* (Excellent bibliography.) Longmans.
Robins, R. H. *General linguistics.* Longmans.
Strevens, P. D. *Papers on language and language teaching.* Oxford University Press.