

The problem of correction should be considered. Particularly in English, the variety of approaches possible for any answer makes universally standard correction difficult. Particularly in English, in an essay answer, there is no clear-cut right or wrong. (From a large group of correctors, how many would mark twenty on a given answer, how many 30?) As an example of how difficult it is to ascertain what is actually sought for as an answer, here's another anecdote. It is possible to arrange a trial exam before Easter and to send it to the Department for correction and comment. One year I sent off exams from both levels, and the children and I anxiously awaited the recommendations. We were equally disappointed when virtually the only comment to appear on any answer was "more quotation"! A part-objective, part-problem exam would minimize the possibility of varying marks.

Many teachers are acutely aware of the limitations of the syllabus which guides them. They have banded together in the subject areas to which they belong and the function of these groups is usually twofold: to reassess the ultimate purposes of the subject and accordingly streamline to reconsider content. It is these pressure groups who will probably cause Departmental changes, as happened in the maths program.

As a teacher of English, I was most concerned by the absolute limitations and lack of inherent appeal in the subject matter I was required to teach. Meetings of the Associated Teachers of English began in October of 1964 and have been well attended, indicating an absolute need.

Revitalization of the curriculum in English is requisite. If you are familiar with it then you know that there is a basic selection of passages which are reshuffled at two or three year intervals, with new or different items never being added. I found it illuminating to look through a pre-1922 syllabus; a majority of the authors were still being taught in 1965. I know that the masterpieces are there, but a selection which omits Chaucer, Pope, Joyce and Eliot completely -- and alternates Wordsworth and Coleridge -- cannot claim to be offering the "milestones of literature."

But on another aspect, there could be controversy. Surely one of the purposes of a literature course should be to familiarize the student with the writings of his countrymen, to make him aware of a national heritage that is expressed artistically as well as martially. The Irish writers (not just poets; writers) on the Leaving course in the year I taught numbered four: Yeats, Ledwidge, Moore and Burke. No wonder Edna O'Brien has to be banned, O'Casey branded an Anglo-phile -- if they weren't, schools might have to acknowledge them. Riders to the Sea is included in virtually every high school anthology in this country; how many of my Irish students had ever heard of Synge?

And why must literature be treated as an historical event: drama ended with Shakespeare, poetry with Yeats, prose with Quiller-Couch. How can the student discern much relevance to himself or his world with such an antiquarian approach?

In many ways, the schools reflect the universities. And the course in English literature does not stress modern trends nor Anglo-Irish writers. Imagine the shock when I mentioned Dylan Thomas to my cohort in the teaching of Leaving Certificate English and heard her ask, "Who's he?"

There is a great limitation in the matter of genre, too. Within each literary type, the teacher is restricted: the Shakespearean tragedy marks the bounds of drama -- not one other type, author or century is suggested. But, more important, of the five broad classes of literature -- poetry, drama, essay, novel, short story -- two are completely omitted; in the syllabus, no reference is made to the novel or short story, either generally or specifically.

If the subject is to be in any way valuable in the future, students should be provided with a knowledge of the development of the form, its principal practitioners, the problems which are most suitable to the form, and the manner in which it is approaching contemporary problems.