Chapter V

SUMMING UP

In this world of rapid change, the type of intelligence greatly needed is closely related to life. It can be defined as the ability to make successful and rapid adaptation to new situations and to learn from experience.

— J. A. Battle and Robert L. Shannon

5.0 INTRODUCTION

The main aim of English Teaching in India is a practical command of the language. The lecture-based, passive curriculum is still largely prevalent here. It is not simply poor pedagogical practice, but "the teaching model most compatible with promoting the dominant authority in society and with disempowering students" (Freire and Shor 1987 10). Students are told the answers to memorize. Knowledge is handed to them like a corpse—a dead 'body of knowledge'—not a living connection to their reality. Hour after deadly hour and year after dull year, learning is just a chore imposed on students by the droning voice of the official syllabus. The students are taken for granted and not included in the search for a better learning situation with relevant materials. The present study was aimed at taking just one step towards the search for a purposeful and enjoyable learning of English as a second language at the tertiary level in India.

5.1. SUMMARY

While teaching is increasingly becoming student-centred now, an awareness of students' wants and needs can go a long way in helping in the selection of materials in the Indian context where students study English as a compulsory
second language. We offer a tonic to a weak child assuming that the child likes it. But the child is allergic to it and shuns it, not standing its smell. Several attractive methods and containers are tried to make the child drink the tonic but in vain. So, what we should do is to try another brand with a slight modification in the composition, which smells good and is easily palatable. Once the child has started liking the tonic, the child drinks happily as periodically as necessary and becomes healthy enough to stand on its own.

Similarly, when the learners turn away from the very textual material which we thrust compulsorily on them on the assumption that it is good and interesting, the learning process suffers and the output is not realized to the expectation. So, we must try an alternative brand of materials by making them relevant, enjoyable and interesting. The materials should motivate the learner and make him interact with them at the ‘first sight’ itself. Learning results from an interaction between the ‘input’ (materials) and the learners’ ‘investment’ (what the learner brings to bear on these inputs). The first chapter argued for the necessity of finding out appropriate materials of ELT in India now, and consequently premised that such materials could be socially and culturally appropriate to the contemporary Indian context, and conceptually accessible to achieve the main aim of giving the students a minimum language proficiency with the necessary basic skills.

Mostly, editors of textbooks for General English intensive reading lose sight of this aim, or do not have an understanding of the innovations that have taken place in second language teaching in the last few decades. They have certain objectives in mind, and those objectives often do not reflect in their selections which appear to be haphazard and unplanned. As a result, there is a mismatch between their assumptions and realities in the classroom, and their selections which are originally intended to interact with the students tend to create a sense of apathy and alienation among the learners. This point became evident in the
findings of the analysis of 55 textbooks generally prescribed for General English intensive reading. Two things emerged from the evaluation of the materials 'in use' i) the teacher should know what he wants to teach, what kind of learning the students are aiming for, and whether their requirements are taken care of, and ii) the top-down process of prescribing selections is not reflecting the students' wants and needs.

So, an awareness of the students' wants and needs can help the syllabus-frame and materials-writers to move closer to a negotiated syllabus, and choose materials that are relevant, interesting and purposeful. The third chapter analyzed the responses of the students and established the fact that passages might also be selected from non-conventional sources like good journals, magazines and newspapers. The students have also made some insightful suggestions on methodology, and those suggestions have opened up some new areas hitherto untouched by ELT research in India. The criteria for selection of materials for intensive reading formulated earlier in the thesis were fairly reflected in the findings of the needs analysis survey.

On the strength of the survey findings, materials were selected, and their suitability for developing intensive reading skills was experimented through a series of six comprehension tests in the actual classroom condition. The experiment comprised two categories of materials to be involved in a contrastive study for assessing the relative merits of the alternative materials. One consisted of materials selected by the researcher from various sources and the other consisted of materials chosen exclusively from textbooks generally prescribed for intensive reading in Indian universities. The results of the experiment have shown that the degree of performance in the first category is invariably higher than that in the second category.
The better performance of the students in the alternative materials selected for the present study confirmed the hypothesis formulated in the earlier part of the study. It indicates a shift away from overdependence on canonical pieces by established writers towards choosing texts within the reach of the students for whom these materials are meant. After all, the learner should read the text, not the teacher, without too much mediation by the teacher. In addition to ensuring that the topic dealt with in the passages for intensive reading would appeal to the students, we should select texts that would make the students comprehend them and inspire them to read for themselves. The importance of this principle seems to have been borne out by the present study.

5.2 LIMITATIONS

Though poetry and full dramatic texts have also been part of the General English intensive reading materials, they have been excluded from the present study. For instance, Shaw's *Arms and the Man*, and *Pygmalion*, and Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar, As You Like It*, and *King Lear* are some of the drama texts usually prescribed for General English course.

The students have indicated in the questionnaire that poetry does not find favour with the second language learners. It is true that poetic selections are often invested with alien cultural and social implications in addition to connotative aspects infused with European traditions. If the present study had brought these two types of intensive reading materials under its scope, the study would have been sharper and exhaustive but unwieldy and beyond the manageable limit of a research problem.

The alternative materials were either parts of the original materials or portions of the original materials pieced together with an eye on consistency for administering them in the actual classroom condition within thirty minutes for each passage. However, the unity of thought and coherent presentation of details were
ensured for comprehension as far as possible. The administration of original texts in full might require an hour or so for each, and in the normal circumstances, disturbing too many main classes would be practically difficult, and it might be resented both by the teachers belonging to other disciplines concerned and by the students. However, within the constraints of all the practical difficulties, the comprehension tests were smoothly conducted and the natural condition was not in any way affected.

5.3 IMPLICATIONS

The teaching of English as a second language to first year undergraduates is of particular concern because of their need to adjust to the learning environment of higher education. The selection of content taking care to induct students into the language programme, and the clarity of our expectations can contribute to a smooth and successful transition towards realization of the objectives of ELT in India.

Teaching English as a part of the multilingual curriculum in India calls for planning with a sense of realism. Though it is acknowledged that study of language and appreciation of literature must inevitably coexist, study of English as a means of communication and as a tool of understanding one’s area of interest further is a dire necessity, whereas sensitive response to finer aspects of literature is the domain of a few. Any ELT text, prescribed for the student at the collegiate level, concentrates on the development of the language skills.

The students must grow familiar with the devices employed by the writer to express his thoughts with precision, economy and force. Vocabulary is the staple material, figures of speech and phrases and idioms play a subsidiary part. To make all this possible, the student must comprehend what he reads and should learn to express his own ideas in the language. Nuances of meaning are understood when the learner widens the horizons by learning antonyms and
synonyms Short essays on the familiar ideas of the text offer the much needed training for expression. Mastery of language thus depends on an elaborate effort planned with a purpose. The alternative materials experimented with in the study aim modestly at such a preparation for developing intensive reading skills at the tertiary level. The rationale for the selection of materials is to offer what is lively, stimulating and immediately appealing to the students in the contemporary prose.

While it is true that teaching and learning situations can vary to a large extent on one or more of several dimensions, it would be unfortunate if innovations related to real and specific situations were, for that reason, assumed to be of limited relevance. One consequence of such an assumption might be to place too high a value, in terms of range of relevance, on innovation based on abstraction or idealization. A more desirable course would be to assume that "an innovation has relevance beyond the specific situation it is associated with and to examine, for any given situation, at what level of generality such relevance can be established" (Prabhu 1991 3). So what has been done in Pondicherry, a geographically limited area, can definitely apply to other parts of India as well.

Ericson and Ellett (1982 506) point out that our coin of knowledge is not firm generalizations, but is more akin to the good measure of meanings, plausibility. In educational research, as in education as a whole, good judgement should be seen as the prized intellectual capacity. Good judgement will not yield certainty, but it can yield interpretation and analyses far more acute and powerful than even the most skilful application of the empiricist "scientific method". The present study has made a modest attempt that has yielded certain interpretations to be of some help in India where more than thirty million students are being taught English throughout the country, and virtually all the teachers of English are Indians who have learnt English in the same educational system.
Teachers of English at the tertiary level in particular should take trouble to keep their qualifications up-to-date. When it is said, everybody would merely nod and smile, because that means 'carry on as before and do nothing of the kind' if he feels like it. An applied linguistics degree dated, say, 1950 or a language teacher's diploma from 30 years ago may be partly relevant nowadays. But a great deal of responsible thinking and research, and much innovation, some of it remarkably successful, have taken place in recent decades which teachers should be aware of and able accurately and responsibly to discuss.

Younger as well as older teachers stand in need of updating, and illustrated explanation combined with discussion should be the order of the day. "There would be no obligation to agree, and therefore no need for hypocrisy" (Lee 1992: 10). Notwithstanding the constraints and reservations about ELT in India, the intention of the academic planners can be based on the educationally sound principle of proceeding from the known to the unknown, a principle that goes back to Rousseau. So the materials we provide should be used as a springboard for the students to serve their immediate wants and needs and later move on to the study of broader areas of life and greater aspects of human nature.

5.4 SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Curriculum development is an on-going process. The University Grants Commission (UGC) is responsible for developing the curriculum for college courses, both at the undergraduate (UG) and postgraduate (PG) levels. The UGC set up the Curriculum Development Centre (CDC) for developing English curriculum for colleges in 1987 at the CIEFL, Hyderabad. A similar exercise which was carried out in 1977 resulted in new syllabuses for UG and PG courses. The CDC was given the responsibility of reviewing the existing
curriculum and suggesting modifications, if necessary. The 1987 exercise has also resulted in new syllabuses for UG and PG courses.

As far as the curriculum is concerned, the CDC has suggested that there should be a democratic discussion of the new proposal by classroom teachers, materials-producers, teacher-trainers before it is implemented. However, it is unfortunate that nothing has happened in this regard, except in Kerala where a voluntary agency has taken the task of organizing discussions of the new curriculum proposal by teachers of English. There is a strong feeling among English teachers that the UGC should have organized such discussions all over the country.

The new ELT curriculum proposal aims at the development of skills in the learners at different levels of their instruction. It also includes a few radical suggestions such as streaming students according to their entry level competence in English.

"While the idea has been welcomed by a majority of the teachers, they are sceptical about its feasibility, it might, they are afraid, stir up a hornet's nest. Teachers seem to be happy about the objectives fixed for each level, but would like to have more flexibility as far as the teaching materials are concerned" (Bose 1992: 18).

The proposal to stream students will definitely be an administrative problem and also lead to some psychological problems among the students by creating a 'creamy layer' from among the college entrants, though the rationale underlying the proposal are ideally good. The findings of the present study may provide some relief to the ELT planners in India.

Experiments like the present one can be undertaken by teachers in colleges under the jurisdiction of their respective universities across India.
results can be pooled together and discussed by an eminent body of language planners. Such a body may be constituted by the UGC. Based on the outcome, each university can constitute a committee of ELT experts and entrust them with the task of writing or selecting the materials for General English course, rather than leaving it to the Board of Studies that deals with the syllabus of Special English.

The CIEFL, Hyderabad has prepared a package of materials under the general title *Enhch Your English* to be used in 150 hours. The main objective of the course is to prepare the college entrants whose linguistic competence is assumed to be inadequate to pursue their regular courses in English at the undergraduate level. "It aims at developing a take-off level proficiency in reading and writing skills, the focus being on the reading skills though speaking and listening skills are also given due importance" (Inthira and Saraswathi 1995 xiii)

It is a welcome trend but its introduction in the regular academic system has to presuppose certain changes in the General English syllabus. While making those changes, materials for regular second language courses can be selected on the basis of the results emerging from a consolidated report of the findings of the experiments like the present study. Such an effort has already been put into practice at the school level by the Higher Secondary Board of School Education, Tamil Nadu.

The use of video-based lessons in the second language classroom is an area for further research. Roy (1996) of Pondicherry University ELT centre has just completed a study in this area. She conducted an experiment on video-based instructional materials for teaching English as a second language at the Higher Secondary level. One of the findings of her experiment confirms that lessons with alien social and cultural background did not motivate the students
enough even with a video-based approach to language teaching, and they still struggled to comprehend such passages. As an extension of her experiment, materials that are socially and culturally appropriate and conceptually accessible to the contemporary second language learners in India, can be experimented with through a video-based approach at the tertiary level.

Original creative writing in English by Indians is a relatively recent growth, no older than the last one hundred and fifty years. So, it is limited in quantity and variety. But, we can certainly depend upon the resources of Indian writing in English translation which, if properly developed and cultivated, would be quite exhaustive. It could draw upon the creative writing of any age in more than a dozen languages. Centrally sponsored Bodies like Sahitya Akademi has been doing the work of translating good vernacular works. For instance, translations of works by Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai of Kerala, Akilan and Jayakanthan of Tamil Nadu, U R Anantha Murthy of Karnataka and so on are easily available. Materials selected exclusively from such translations can make the learners have a cultural empathy with the people and situations described in them. When translations from Russia, Poland, Germany and the like are used as materials for ELT, good translations from Indian regional languages can largely be used in ELT in India. ELT researchers in India can experiment with such translations to weigh their relative merits against translations from other foreign languages.

5.5 CONCLUSION

It seems ambitious to attempt to study such a complex field as language. Yet we must study it. So we each choose some subdivision of language within some subdiscipline and use it or study it in our own way. "Specialization, then, is one of reducing the confusion that is caused by the magnitude of what we do not know about language and language teaching" (Brown 1988 ix) The present
study has tried in a very limited measure to reduce the confusion. What was stated earlier in the present study and reflected in the survey of students' wants and needs has been experimentally proved in the fourth chapter.

Small examples of local change can lead to larger institutional change. As Chemiss (1991, 393) notes, the women's movement and its consciousness-raising groups, "steadily helped to convert personal and small group change into cultural change, and that may be what ultimately is needed in the area of educational reform as well." If the findings of the present study have some effect on the teachers and the authorities concerned, and help them to be on the march towards a really purposeful language teaching-learning, the present study would serve the purpose.