VI. Recapitulation

We began our search with a very practical problem in a real context, that of meeting the demands of a particular group of learners, whose success in acquiring English language would be directly proportionate to their chances of upward mobility in life. In the context of national development too, it is seen as imperative that these learners succeed in the educational enterprise. Caught between the horns of the dilemma, of proclaiming a preferential option for the disadvantaged in response to the signs of the time and of maintaining the standards of excellence, the institutions of higher education appear lost.

It was essential that equality of admission made available to them, should blossom forth as equality of achievement. The envisaged programme, causing them to acquire English had twofold aim; one, that success in English would have a multiplier effect in all other subjects which are taught in the medium of English, and two, that the study itself could serve as a pilot project for a much broader effort at a general educational enhancement.
The term 'disadvantaged' was defined in terms of academic achievement, with reference to a given group of slow learners at St. Joseph's college, Trichy, who were 'at-risk' of stagnating and dropping-out. Though a hypothetical group might have been an easier starting point, in terms of homogeneity and the explanatory power of their common background, it was decided to address ourselves to the concrete problem in the college and the actually academically disadvantaged learners in it. However, a socio-cultural survey reveals that most of the disadvantaged share the following common features: (a) most of them are from a rural background and belong to the unorganised sector, (b) only two belong to the forward castes, (c) the majority of their parents have little or no education, (d) and earn less than Rs. 30,000 per annum, and (e) only four of the families have two or less siblings.

Our search at this stage, was seeking an answer to the question: What ails the disadvantaged learners? This led us to a review of literature on the subject and the explanations offered there were grouped under appropriate labels and subjected to critical evaluation; so were some of the major programmes of
intervention. It emerged from the foregoing analysis that:

a) the socio-cultural factors are broadly responsible for the malaise;

b) but that they are distal factors.

c) proximately they result in leaving certain cognitive and affective capacities in them, dormant.

It was decided that the focus of attention for us is the proximate cause, the concrete result of their socio-cultural disadvantage.

An intervention programme was devised based on the understanding that the said dormant capacities would begin to blossom and the learner would eventually be able to overcome the debilitating effects of the past, when,

a) the learners' self concept is improved,

b) exposure to the target language is maximized,

c) learners interactively construct their own knowledge,
d) the focus is shifting from form to meaning, as in the case of communicative activities,

e) the learners tune their attention to the features of the TL, and when

f) through the process of 'scaffolding' they are encouraged to learn on their own and become conscious of the strategies that are successful.

The study undertaken, with all its limitations proved encouraging. The participants' protocol (a sample is appended, cf. appendix D) reveal that they are gaining confidence and their language shows the beginnings of target-like language. The technique of noticing begins to pay rich dividends. The results of the psychometric analysis too confirms the learners' own perception of their growth and reveals appreciable growth in syntax acquisition. The comparison with the control group, however, appears to blur the claim. But, it is possible that the examination system that unfortunately can make no distinction between memorised and original language has been belittling these learners' efforts at composing their own, not yet
perfect sentences. It remains to be seen, how these learners, for whom the process of self actualisation has been initiated, perform in the English tests of the next two semesters. A comparison with the control group at that point in time, might be more revealing. It remains also to be seen, if the improvement in English has bettered their performance in the other subjects vis-a-vis the control group.

A concrete presentation of the effect of the classroom procedures undertaken, can be had by comparing the entry behaviour of these learners and the surrender value after the intervention programme. We give below excerpts from the compositions of those students whose answers in the diagnostic test is quoted in page 16 of chapter I. The excerpts are from the answers to the free composition question 'Explain how the rivers of Tamilnadu get polluted'.

1. "Today many disease were effected to the man, plans and cattles. The main reason is water pollution. In Tamilnadu state so many industries were present near the river and the lands.
"The rivers were released chemicals. These were mixed with river water. So the river water is polluted in the fishes were poisoning, further river water is mixed with sea. So the sea was polluted."

2. "In Tamilnadu all the rivers are there. This all rivers polluted by factory, hospitals, schools and colleges. How the factory was polluted by the river?

"There were many factory is placed on the river bed. Example - aluminium factory, chemical factory, liquor factory. All this factory effluents were mixed in the river. So the river was polluted. This was affected many peoples, fishes and plants."

3. "In Tamilnadu some rivers came. The Cauvery is a big river. It was very polluted. How it is polluted? many reason can tell. ... Cloth washes and effluent water mixed in the river. Cattles, animals bath in the river. All the town dich water mixed in the river. so Cauvery was very polluted."
4. "In Tamil Nadu had many rivers. Cauvery is main rivers of Tamilnadu. Cauvery rivers were polluted. The main region is The Cauvery river Banks had a many company. ... The next region Trichy city and Thanjavur many city polluted water mixed Cauvery river."

5. "Tamil Nadu rivers are affected in factory and hospital, environment, etc. for example Palakkarai river in Trichy. This river run long distance in Trichy. The government hospital effluents were mixed in the river. Patient bandage cloth and waste medicine sometime human body were sailing in the river."

With reference to the long-term educational enhancement programme, planned in the light of this pilot study, we need to think of four essential components, i.e

(a) the affective component,

(b) learning strategies,

(c) self access laboratories

(d) concept formation, and

(e) subject-specific assistance.
The affective component, it must be confessed was the weakest link in the chain, as far as the present study was concerned. It needs to be thought of in a sustained and systematic manner, based on the techniques of counselling and aimed at improving their self worth.

In fine, the search undertaken has yielded satisfying results and is encouraging that the disadvantaged learners can and will make rapid progress, if appropriate technique are applied by committed teachers in a friendly atmosphere.

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