Chapter VI

Concluding Observations

At the end of the day, we can only say

*no two student speak the same language but not a different tongue...*

And who decides which is the right one...

*no text is understood the same way though it is the same one...*

The curriculum for the many is not for any one

To cast them as the same one

The curriculum gets undone...

6.1 Review of Documents: Findings

**Radhakrishnan Commission** (1948-49) was an important but transit document making the articulations of an independent Indian education 'visible'. Hence, the invocation of democratic aspiration was the prime force of this document. But because it was limited to viewing education at the university level, the invocations remained at a more rhetorical level when viewed from the ground level, such as an undergraduate college like ours.

The cause of post-independent education was solemnized in **Kothari Commission** (1964-66): 'the nation is being made in the classroom'. Wily nily into the language classroom today the repositionings were
conspicuously different. The very temper and weave of classrooms had changed. Not only in terms of physical character, but also in terms of general leavening. The older curriculum ideologues catering to a fairly well known public school clientele encountered very uncompromising storylines today. The presence of large number of first generation learners, cast differently in every sense of the term, triggered the pressing issue of curriculum relevance to disproportionate dimensions just when the admissions in very specific institutional contexts were being tightened on the basis of English proficiency.

From the Kothari Commission to 1976, the educational scenario had changed significantly. The Syllabus Reform in English, 1976 saw the concept of 'communicative competence' being inserted into English language teaching set ups in a big way. This brought in a major change in separating literature studies from the language teaching curriculum. In a way this change was indeed radical as it was able to identify a large number of 'different' learners with different needs and goals. This gave an impetus to the instituting of several language learning institutes, which also included in its ambit the modern Indian languages as well. In fact, for the first time education seemed to be represented and debated by teachers with the hope that the ground level realities were going to be more democratically visible.
Heterogeneity, however had not been adequately conceptualised in the Syllabus Reform in English to encounter this problem in any realistic way when it did arrive in a massively in the 70s. On a closer look, the integrated approach of the **Curriculum Development Report, 1989** emerging with its encounter with heterogeneity and diversity seemed to incorporate much of the action plan recommended by the Syllabus Reform in English, 1976. Syllabus Reform in English was able to evolve an open-ended learner schedule in the courses and proposed a dynamic model for curriculum improvement, J. Tharu: 1976. It was able to invoke the Vygotskian principle, of a much more viable and emerging set of capabilities to accommodate not only the different learner but where such a learner has more choices and can actually proceed on a different and alternative route, as is happening in some of the PG Courses in the country like the cafeteria system of opting for courses. However, such changes have not been available at the undergraduate level where larger number of students actually access education. This poly-level course model assumes calls for configuring evaluation schemes. Departures in the course conceptualizations in themselves are contributions, and they challenge the status quo. In this sense, the Curriculum Development report has taken a commendable step towards this cause of learning to change. If third worldism is brutally perpetuated then it is in the way we have conceptualized evaluation. Not as a largely enabling process.
6.2 The Implications on a English Classroom in Darjeeling

What is happening and what are the problems?

The presence of a large number of first generation learners, cast differently in every sense of term, has triggered off the pressing issue of curriculum relevance to disproportionate dimensions just when the admissions in very specific institutional contexts are being tightened on the basis of English proficiency. At the same time, selective college admissions have complicated the democratic principles of access to education. The culturally different learner seems to be the most affected in this respect. This will be seen why because we admit those who have claims to language that match ours then students will come with standards *a priori*. Learning has become more a convention rather than dialogue and growth. Ideologically, the culturally different learner becomes linguistically disadvantaged. Therefore, this framework translates ‘communicative competence’ as ‘culture capital’. It is seen that undergraduate institutions are generally concerned with how best to maintain these borders. Within this mode of thinking, education is being conceptualized as a rare commodity and not as a fundamental human right enshrined in the constitution.

Another problem that is often to be seen in the corridor of these institutions is the discussion on the fall of standards, and these discussions follow well-known routes. The way we discuss the fall of standards as if the present is completely disconnected from the past. We talk of standards in comparison
with the past nostalgically romanticizing/celebrating a mythical past of ‘better
times’ that had standards. This line of argument deflects attention from the
pressing problems of the present that can direct the discussion usefully.
Introducing a false dichotomy to the argument of *then and now, this and that,*
either or, has grave implications for pedagogical praxis.

It sets into motion two ideologies:

1. Striking ‘anti-intellectual’ stances and therefore, a specious kind of ‘pro-
learner’ praxis reducing the role of a teacher into a therapist. So that
sentimentalizing rather than sensitizing becomes a part of praxis.

2. The remediation ideology that continues to view education as a
‘corrective’ process found in the functional literacy programmes.

Therefore, reverting to the past at the cost of the present and simultaneously
favouring the cause of a one-language thesis would open the debate for
purposes of manipulation.

Even when the policy documents propose to promote the cause of
‘communicative competence’ along the lines of the three-language policy,
the events on the ground do not vouch democratic principles of change. In
the local context of an undergraduate college like ours, there is a record visibility of girl entrants mostly in the SC/ST category. However, experience shows that they get debarred from democratic access to some of the more sought after specializations like English, supposedly on the count of 'grammaticality' and 'correctness'. And all this is being enacted on a daily basis as English becomes a compulsory subject. But the reasons and explanations provided are not so palpable.

Consequently, the messy jostle of texts in contexts and texts and contexts pitch our alarms on to decontextualized discussions. The language problem is set in a language that is capable of ignoring the discourse features of place, identity, caste, gender on which it is nurtured. The urgent issues get waylaid in the process as tensions keep mounting. We are generally overwhelmed by the ideology of 'communicative competence'. Unwittingly, the mandates and agendas of the new educational policy seem severely ill equipped to address the upcoming question of multicultural education.

But at these riddled crossroads we cannot afford to undermine the commitment to communicative competence as unfit educational agenda, nor deal with it in terms of a moral issue as 'good' or 'bad'. The need of the hour is looking at the ground reality in a more nuanced way that lends pliancy and direction to the strategies we may need to adopt in specific educational contexts for the prospects of relevance and change.
We must not forget that we have been trained to read policy documents as a body of transparent edicts to be retrieved at face value anytime. But all the while, our experience substantiated by a critical reading of the educational scenario provides a contrary view. Official documents reassert the bilingual measures based on a fairly safe, predictable mode of bilingualism washed clean and steering clear of hidden cultural biases in the dominant or standard communicative system. No doubt, bilingualism in institutional set ups is subject to individual institutional policies. Wherever bilingual policies are known to exist they operate largely at a rhetorical level. Education sometimes parades as a charade. The dislocations are so bizarre that the real and unreal become difficult to distinguish. This dilemma is hard to escape as it underlines our lives and conditions our praxis. This search for epistemological reality becomes an ontological one.

A quick look at how we generally account for factors regulating institutional patterns will help us to understand how we look at the dilemmas:

- Why isn’t there a wider currency of the regional language within the larger English medium set up?

- What accounts for the largest non-English Medium and non-Nepali staff even when is the only minority college in the hills?

- Despite the rise of honours students in English, why has the teaching of English been kept to its basic aspect of ‘grammacality’ and ‘correctness’?
Does the conventional teaching and learning patterns that regulate classroom interaction give rise to a problem?

Much depends on how we will read this disclosure - as an interweaving of texts hard to separate or unrelated sets of issues to be tackled in isolation. But what is more relevant for us is that if this upcoming /rising feature is a more common contemporary sample rather than an exception then it has possibilities of providing us with a rich resource for change. But most of the time we treat them as 'too messy' and prefer to forget about them. Placing ourselves in the midst of these changed equations can we hope to work out a more realistic or possible version of change?

Practising bilingualism on the ground show that even notionally, such practices are not only non-existent but also definitely discouraged in classrooms. Particularly in college set ups like ours where it is basically an English medium college. Bilingualism is condemned as it sees the mother tongue use in the English class as leading to the fall of standards. The fact remains, even if today English has become an Indian language the teaching of English in Darjeeling, particularly a set up like ours, St. Joseph’s College and Loreto College, Darjeeling will never tolerate the teaching of it in the regional language. In this matter, ideological biases are more pronounced rather than any expanded sense of linguistic justice. And therefore, a general tendency to invisibilize, trivialize or ignore
the problem of participation in the classroom. Of course, this has always been a very thorny issue pitting us along paths of parochialism. And this problem is not restricted to one college alone only the colouring varies from region to region. Howsoever, the demand for education is on the rise where different categories of students are knocking on our doors putting the existing educational agendas under siege. The problem of democratic education demands critical attention if we are to continue operating as educators - to relook, rethink and reconfigure the scenario.

6.3 Solutions/ Ways to Circumventing Prescriptions

Change does not happen by simply wanting change. Search for solutions along linguistic parameters in force is very squinted and limited concept of language. Critical perspectives, in this study, have argued the politics behind the treating of language as a tool only. These arguments lend themselves to this enormous problem afflicting public education and provide a lens to think about possible strategies to address the complex issue of change. Rereading the cultural politics of education in the reform agendas today change would have to be sought not only within classrooms but en route classrooms.

In some sense, the concept of participation and communicative competence are usually conflated often serving complementary functions. In most cases, a prescriptive model of participation has prevailed delimiting and defining
students' efforts. The role of education as an instrument of change has been widely acknowledged, but it is beset in contradiction. The usual way of assessing individual performance over time as it winds through a given curriculum are the normed action plans generally in use – a written task is mostly treated as a virtuous act. Communicative competence in an English classroom has dominantly remained with a very clichéd usage.

The Kothari Commission has tokenistically distributed models of student participation. It has also been able to pick on the student union as metaphor for modern democratic institutions. Despite the rhetoric, it presupposes and puts a value to the necessity and power of adult organized collectives to draw on their energies and resources. Meanwhile, it alerts us to other supplementary facts. The government policy by lowering the voting age to eighteen has notionally enhanced the scope in bringing the undergraduate in direct line with mainstream practices of citizenry. For all the rhetoric, a more dynamic concept of student participation is not wholly free of an element of doubt. This trickles down to the level of individual colleges like ours where student forums are conspicuously absent. What has been remarkable is the ways students respond to this constraint and devise ways to get at their own sense of being to their own sense of truth/reality. In the process, borders get erased.

At times, suddenly, the English classroom has been used and has been made to serve as an impromptu student forum. This is when the English
class gets rewritten. And the game gets always gritty. Students we would otherwise dismiss as dumb or 'just not up to the mark' have experienced the urgency of a given situation, deliberated actions, identified issues, selected language acts to communicate to fellow mates leaving a different knit and a different 'curriculum' of 'communicative competence'. If I had at any time refused their request I would have been deprived of an understanding of this expanding sense they invested to competent communication. They lent pliancy to a debate that refused the niceties of grammar and correctness withhold the dialogue but energized the model taking the language classroom to very different destinations. And as I take stock, I sometimes feel we have failed to borrow a pair of new eyes to look at student desires on the ground. In the rush to undo the dross, have we undermined this energetic model of communicative competence present within campuses? With the issue of democratic participation underlining our educational anxieties/concerns what we have taken for granted we must reread with a desire and a passion hitherto thought impossible, thereby, redoing the curriculum.

The resolution of the English Curriculum features two agendas – the role language in the language curriculum, which has presented very contrary ideas about what language is. And finally, what is the relationship of the language curriculum to the overall education goal? What is the concept of change that is unable to incorporate the social project into the English
curriculum? Educational debates generally take for granted that a consensus exists on what language is. Even those that verge on issues of English vs. Vernacular – a divide at best a misconstrual of language and worst as modernization addresses only a part of a larger language debate yet to take off.

This study has attempted to look into a fairly powerful and dominant discourse on what language is that dominates (both formal and non-formal) teaching learning setups and some of the problematic as it impacts curriculum. Installation of the colonial discourse is an instance of the story of the master narrative. Derivatives of such preoccupations reassert themselves in our goals of excellence, achievement, mastery of skills and competence revealing a discourse severely fragile. With the reading writing curriculum on the ground, intertextuality is changing the conventional notions of reading while multiple readings are re-styling texts. In the process we found out that texts are only partial representations of reality. Meaning is perpetually subject to a play of social constraints. A framework of interrogation is the only feature of change by which we retain humanity. The dialogue must go on. As co-partners in a project of reconstruction we have been forced to reinvent ourselves our identities. Nothing is reassuring in such a dialogue.
Epilogue: Desiderata

‘Traveler, there is no road. The road is made as one walks.’ Donaldo Macedo

little voices / impossible desires: who will be who as we end

Macauley's Minutes killed innocent readings drawing the curtain on the humanist project. And what goes by the name of democratic education looks paupered today. Paper tigers are more likely to write the who is who of education in more devastating ways.

Fresh from the hurly burly of the English classroom, we know that the language education storyline has changed considerably. The little stories with other actors look very different today. Within these very vexy crossroads we are on the threshold of carving a curriculum on the run.

Looking at the Remains of the Day

Empowerment in education as singular discourse is crossed by alarming number of challenges hitherto invisible. And the general feeling of things falling apart writes uniformly across. Chances and hope seem to have withered away. Possibly because we had ourselves tilted omnipotently.
At the turn of the century, we need to ask ourselves, how would we as students and teachers caught between the contradictions of change do?

Perhaps this is where we begin.

Even as a new learning society shrinks the globe, the dilemmas confronting education seem to be getting more complex. With the new world order the chasms will widen further. Even as I write, urban centres witness unprecedented migration where mostly ‘rampant’ illiteracy is reported. And why is this a more or less uniform story? Today, education is a scarce commodity – a luxury that only few can afford as the call for equal education for all swells into a well-meaning rhetoric. Even when education is being articulated/claimed as a fundamental human right?

To Intervene or not to Intervene

Historical, and socio-economic dimensions of failure are becoming so intrinsic to education that the task of change appears daunting.

What would we have to do to break this nexus and address the question of relevance and change, here and now? Would a more plausible approach commit us to a multiple level intervention in various learning contexts?

Before we begin, two issues may throw light in realizing the potential of language in general education and thereby, critical pedagogy. One is the
The 'linguistic turn' that Richard Rorty (1967) talks about, is a turn towards a perceived dominance of language. Not towards language as a separate universe, a structural 'langue', but towards a universe, a 'reality', perceived as dominated, sustained, and in a sense ultimately created by language. It is doubly loaded for those of us in language curriculum.

A structuralist view of language and other sign systems argues that meaning is guaranteed in accordance with the codes and the values assigned them in a particular context. By contrast poststructuralists argue that the meaning is not given but is achieved provisionally through the struggles among a number of potential meanings and signifying practices. Each of these two views leads to two very different pedagogies.

We are already positioned within the first view while the second, more relevant for our concern hitches us to the future. I take issue with the 'structural langue' referred to above. What we need to understand is that for the 'structural langue' to be treated and understood as 'structural langue' has had to be exchanged and mediated in a universe of meanings very different. Lacan (1977) asks in a very different way, can the thing (word) speak for itself? If theoretically it cannot, linguistically we can assume the equality of
all languages, in the sense, this is the precondition of languages? Then what is the reason for this unnatural state? I have a sneaky feeling that looking at language that way has served some more than others. Who has it served? Not civil justice or critical pedagogy? This is clearly seen in how the mother tongue/other tongue controversies devolved. Aug. 7 1990. Mandal set the educated elites on the rampage to fire the national debate...the key issue is how India is to be governed with a mofussil (caste/casted) mind or a modern one. Even the pro-English riots in Primary Education in Bengal of the '90's show nothing more than the power of the urban 'privelegensia' (Javeed Alam: 2000) as the language question gets appropriated.

At the cutting edge of the language question, is as M.Madhave Prasad (1993) very incisively observes, the 'division of labor of languages', which is also the central argument of D.L.Sheth's (1999) 'The Great Language Debate'. This puts a spanner around the Language/ Literature division so prevalent in University courses today. But it also helps us to study the situation more realistically and explain the present impasse. And more importantly, at the end of the day, what we can do about it. This is how I stand to benefit from the baseline of the 'integrated approach' of the Curriculum Development Centre Report,1989.
We have to deschool ourselves from a precondition and a mindset that yearns with a nostalgia of a 'better' past and commit ourselves to a learning present that has changed in so many primary ways.

The intellectual labor capital that English has been assigned accounts for the 'linguistic imperialism' of the English Literature Departments as well. Ironically, this has smothered other languages. Not because the other languages are any way less resourceful but the general political climate, deprived and undernourished it for purposes of encountering India's modernity.

'A different, and in my view, more worthy alternative would be to conceive of the discipline's future in political terms, as consisting of the task of creating the conditions for an effective intellectual engagement with the reality of Indian capitalist culture... the discourse of capitalism as well the critique of capitalist processes have remained outside the range of many of the Indian Languages... deploy the critical resources at its command to throw light on capitalist cultural processes.'(M.Madhave Prasad: 1995)

Where will we begin?

It is from here we need to begin

If we are to think about language as a potential source for bringing about change in society then we have to stop thinking about this or that language
only. Instead we have to find out how democratically we can strengthen all languages. A solidarity move within all the languages departments would be a critical step towards interpreting contemporary reality. Post modernism is reassuring about the intertextuality of language, education and the political. Recasting ourselves within the central locations of Freirian thought, ‘reading the word in the world’ invests importance to critical pedagogy and enhances the scope of bringing the social agendas to the English curriculum.

It is within English classrooms that the notion of modernity will be diabolically enacted provided we have problematized English. Mobilizing solidarity moves within English/Lang. Lit classrooms will energize democracy along unthought of destinations.

Traditionally assigned spaces will be transgressed, as the humanities in general will question society through language performativity/actions in public space. In the next decades humanities will be witness to more and more border crossings. Our energies need to be there.

Engaging our critical consciousness in doing acts that will by questioning break the myths and prejudices that darken dialogues.

But the task should not overwhelm the desire to materialize the visions of the 21st century.
Propositionals

Plugging on to our strengths.

We have to consider seriously the general freedom enjoyed by the institutions of literature/language - a 'fictive institution that in principle allows one to say everything is no doubt linked to the western idea of democracy, of permitting dissent and opposition, and the principle of freedom of speech and expression'. More than any other educational enterprise, language pedagogy in which almost any topic potentially constitutes the content of the classroom offers ample opportunity for experiencing the liberating by practicing the critical. The problematizing stance that always forces us to question the ethics and politics of what we do.

And most importantly, critical pedagogy offers a way of combining a critique of previously unquestioned practices with concrete ways of introducing change – with a belief in the transformative power of the individual teacher. This also means 'developing the theoretical and practical conditions through which human beings can locate themselves present as agents in the struggle to expand the possibilities of human life and freedom.' (Giroux:1988,p.10-11). This 'language of critique' will enhance the scope of research inquiries in our general English courses as well.
Language has to be thought as volatile space. Keeping within General English education what would this freedom spell for cross-curricular initiatives?

Multilingualism always at work not only in English but all other classrooms is what we have generally ignored. Herein lies the potential for change, the ‘social relevance’ so much a concern of recent language reform. But we have not known how to account for it or relevantly relate to it. Collaborations / partnerships, ‘dialogic space’ is what education is all about. All along, not only in our evaluation criteria but also in the way we have perceived classroom interaction and organized classes in general this has taken the backseat and much of resilience and the focus away.

Fork tongued as we are and admitting the large resource of orality always readily available it is going to direct the range of collaborations/partnerships of the future. This is the dangerous native that is writing back. More so for India with such a large oral population. For those of us in ‘formal setups’/urban settings most of these communicative skills in community participation have either fossilized or expended their energies in expensive designer courses like ‘Business English’. We have only learnt how to live like endangered species.
Healthy quarrels always foreshadow change. It's the problematic not the problem. For exchanges to emerge as constructive change we have to pit dialogic imagination into a responsible future. And if these worlds are to exist we have to abdicate into learning roles. Perhaps more risky, shedding fears, with a more grounded courage, for to be educated is to be more human...

A Pedagogy of Possibility empowers participants and points to "the need to develop theories, forms of knowledge and social practices that work with the experiences that people bring to the pedagogical setting." (Giroux, 1988, p.134)

Let us start small

I cannot know more than I can learn. And if the school has not taught me much what is it that I know?

What I learn I know I can only know from others.

And herein lies the vision of the 21st century. Within these very institutions we have to reinvent ourselves. Taking nothing for granted in our normative criteria. The World Asia Forum's motto: Doubt Everything! Even yourself. For hidden within our institutions will we find the most implicit form of power and repression. Much of it will challenge our professional identities. And perhaps, we will need much of what Father Van calls 'tough love'. Much in the manner of what Bourdieu (1999) has said: 'Through forgetfulness of self, aims at a true conversion of the way we look at life. The welcoming disposition which leads to make the respondents' problems ones own, the
capacity to take that person and understand just as they are in their distinctive necessity, is a sort of intellectual love...which Spinoza held to be the supreme form of knowledge.'

And so, through acting upon the world to reshape it more equitably people also reshape – transform – themselves.

But it is not going to make the stories less easy............

Rewriting is not a chancy game.

'With the head held high and the heart without fear...'

we threaten the beyond

And it is now and here

as we pickle His Master's Voice

with cheer

call

www.educationcourage.india.com

to rewrite the English story