Chapter VII: Recommendations and Further Research

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RECOMMENDATION AND FURTHER RESEARCH
In this chapter the investigator, on the basis of her studies, makes recommendations to syllabus designers, text-book writers and materials producers, teachers, supervisors, inspectors, headmasters, paper setters and examiners.

Stephen Tunnicliffe, writer and a liberalist in his book 'Poetry Experience' (1984), says that poetry is an area which is frequently neglected in English teaching because it is potentially full of pitfalls for the unwary teacher. He argues that reading, writing and speaking poetry should form a central part of the English curriculum and that together they have a vital role to play in the children's language experience affecting not only their English skills but also the effectiveness of their response to the whole education process.

The investigator's attempt has been that of restoring the poetry experience to its rightful place in the teaching of English. The average English teacher who refuses to accept this central role of the poetic in language perhaps fail in his task.

In general, the so called 'qualified' (trained), teacher is unaware of the proper place and functions of poetry. Since there is not much room at present for teaching poetry in the
teacher education set up. Our teaching of poetry should be
directed towards lifting it out of its academic niche or literary
feathered into the world of our pupils and our own experience.
Thus the teaching of poetry becomes poetry experience
(Tunnicliffe, 1984).

7.1 For the Syllabus designers/framers

Under the revised policy of the Gujarat Government,
English is to be taught as an optional - third language - subject
from class V to class VII. This is implemented from June 1982.
However, English continues to be taught as compulsory language in
classes VII and IX at the Secondary School stage. English as a
language and as a school subject has a peculiar position in the
sense that with the revised policy it becomes an optional subject
from class V through class VII; a compulsory subject for class
VIII and IX and again an optional subject for class X at the High
School Stage and for the whole of the Higher Secondary Stage.

7.1.1 Objectives of Teaching English at standards-XII and XII

The objectives are as follows:

1. The student develops the ability to read English
   with ease and comprehension.

2. Develops the ability to write English correctly.
3. The ability to understand English, spoken at normal conversational speed.

4. The ability to speak English intelligibly.

5. Develops the ability to translate material from his mother-tongue into English.

6. The ability to enjoy simple poems.

7.1.2 Competence specification under number six are

a. Recites poems with proper rhythm and intonation.

b. Enjoys reading poems aloud.

c. Grasps the theme of the poem.

d. Memorizes lines that interest him.

7.1.3 Content specifications

Short, simple poems.

7.1.4 Investigator’s remarks

One of the objectives of teaching English at the +2 level is, 'the ability to enjoy simple poems'. The term simple is a very vague term. It has not been defined. Simple poems could include anything from rhymes to lyrics. The investigator is also of the opinion that the poems in the text are really not very
appealing to the students. The investigator is of the opinion that the syllabus framers should modify the objectives and give clear cut directives to the text-book writers. The investigator feels that the poems selected should be modern having universal themes and those that would be within the range of their experience.
7.2 For the text-book writers and materials producers

The investigator while making the study found that students do not really relate themselves to the poems prescribed in the curriculum, and the choice is arbitrary. Regarding selections, Alan Maley and Sandra Moulding in their book, Poem into Poem (1985) say that if poems are carefully selected, they can open up themes which are common to us all irrespective of our cultural background. Such poems can act as powerful stimuli to the students’ own reflective thinking which will lead to more mature and fruitful group discussions.

The selection of the poem is complex and difficult. One obvious difficulty here is that most of the time it is not the teachers who make the selection. The selection is made by a higher authority, often regardless of its suitability to the learners. Very often it reflects a taste or preference, which might be quite inappropriate to either the language competence or the literary sophistication of the learners.

7.2.1 Factors for selection

- General availability of the text.

- The text should provide a representative selection of the literature as a whole. A selection that is too narrowly
Based has a greater risk of not appealing and thereby discouraging the learner from reading further.

Selection restricted by syllabus or examining body versus free selection of whatever the teacher decides is appropriate.

In theory this is not contentious. Free selection is desirable, the teacher then chooses items which are appealing to the learners.

On the other hand conservative examining bodies prefer established classics which they have accepted as deserving the attention of all learners.

Most teachers too hold on to known and established works.

Fairly frequent change and the inclusion of non-canonical text is recommended.

Related to the country or culture of the reader versus unrelated to the culture of the reader.

The setting, the experience described and the emotional and physical behaviour in the literature should not be totally alien to students; and if they are at least partially alien, then the gap must be bridged by good teaching and the
power of the students imagination.

Poems should not be the fossilized droppings of another age, included for vaguely felt reasons of historical competence.

If the poems are related to country or culture of the learner one can avoid many of the cultural difficulties which are real and numerous.

Contemporary / 'modern' in terms of literary classification versus (a) not modern, but with no textual difficulties. (b) not modern; features of language markedly different from present day English.

The implication is that modern literature is closer to the pattern, idioms and discourage style of the language which the student has acquired as language learner. This is true more of other forms than for poetry. The difficulty with poetry is its 'message' rather than language.

There is much literature, which is not modern, and yet has few difficulties of language, conversely there is much literature of the earlier period though appealing, is not suitable, because of the language.
- Lengthy text versus short text.
- Complete work versus extracts from longer poems.
- Selected for theme or subject matter (i.e. youth, death etc.) versus selected for genre: poem; sonnet, lyrics etc.; novels, short story.

In text selection it is difficult to reconcile all the above points. Where choice is possible, the committee is advised to take into account the potential appeal of the text to the learner.

7.2.2 Age factor

Another important factor that needs to be taken into account is the age factor. Students at the higher secondary level are at an awkward age that is fifteen plus.

The students here are at their truculent, unpredictable and awkward phase of growth and development. They are just beginning to develop self-awareness. This entails a greater responsibility on the text-book writers who ought to be more careful and responsive to the needs of students.

Choice of poems should be considered within three broad age groups; 11 to 13, 13 to 15 and 14 to 16+. 
11 to 13 year olds: Respond strongly to rhythmic and patterned elements in poetry, so that it is useful to pinpoint poems one knows from experience.

The criteria for story poems, as for more reflective ones, must always be the accessibility of the concepts to eleven and twelve year olds. Should ask the question: Can they understand someone (often an animal) thinking or feeling like this, without needing a 'teacher's explanation?

Finally, a poem with a vivid or dramatic images can be thought of for this age group. For e.g. Shepherd's Hut by Edward Thomas; The listeners by Walter de la Mare; A Small Dragon by Brain Pattern.

13 to 15 year olds: This age group is a difficult one. When adults say that they were 'put off by poetry for life', while at school, they are often referring to unfortunate or insensitive attempts of poetry teaching during these years.

One source of such fortunate experience is the tendency of exasperated and overworked teachers to use Draconian and indiscriminate punishments in their efforts to impose 'discipline' or them. These punishments many times takes the form of writing out the poem several times, or learning by heart the poem studied, or being put out of the class, to learn it - these are hardly any ways to encourage a favourable response to poetry.
Many of the tensions associated with puberty are linked with inarticulateness; they do not have enough words to be able to formulate or express most of what they are feeling so intensely or chaotically.

Poetry of the past is often too remote in its language forms for its ideas to be understood; as a result it merely puts another obstacle to expression. Poetry of their own age often illuminates their own feelings and therefore releases energies that can find a controlled outlet in the English classroom.

Again there is less temptation to lay down the law about a poem's or a poet's quality when it—or he/she has not had to stand the test of time.

Another reason for selecting poems of our time with this age group is the language.

Children of this age group enjoy poems about younger children; it reinforces their own sense of growing into the adult world, from where one looks back at the childhood with a certain detachment and at the same time allows them to indulge their nostalgic feelings for their own so recent childhood without betraying themselves.
Children of this age group are often inhibited from exposing their feeling directly and therefore from responding directly to poems. Animals can often be mediator allowing them to express feelings more openly.

There is wealth of animal poems, but selection needs to be done with care. It is helpful to have a strong relationship established or explored in the poem between animal and human.

14 to 16 years old: What has been said for the above age group also applies to this group, as there is an overlap in age. In this age group one becomes aware of differences that need to be catered for in the choice of poems. Many students are just beginning to develop self awareness.

7.2.3 Girls versus boys

Poems selected should suit the taste of boys and girls. The selection committee should remember that girls prefer sentimental, romantic imaginative poems, while boys prefer poems that deal with sports, adventure, sea and heroic deeds.

7.2.4 Categories: The Range of Poetry: a suggested frame

Poetry cannot fall into clear cut compartments, nor fall into a simple scale graduated from 'excellent' or 'first rate' through 'mediocre' to downright bad.
In teaching poetry it is helpful to have some broad categories in one's mind, so that one can first decide what kind of poem is needed for the work envisaged, then select within that category the best poem or poems available. No one classification can be final.

Within each category poems can be classified as

a) serious
b) light
c) popular / instant

1. Poems concerned with subjective or individual response / feelings / state of mind / reflective / contemplative.

2. Descriptive, without personal involvement

   a) of landscapes, things, etc.
   b) of people

3. Story poems

   a) particular incidents or episodes,
   b) sequence of events

4. Dramatic poems, concentrating on interplay or interaction of characters.

5. 'Adopted voice': poems, e.g. MacNiece Prayer Before Birth.

7.2.5 Principle of Teachability

Most of the time selection is made on the principle of
'teachability' of the poems. Only poems that can be analyzed for their strenuous language or meaning are selected. This notion is embedded in the examination pattern.

Poems should not be selected with a view to 'comprehension', or other kinds of works, spoken or written.

The sole objective of introducing poetry into the classroom is to engage the sincere attention of the children. Provision should be made for the kind of response that is not definable. For example, Blow, Blow Thou Winter Wind, She Dwelt Among the Untrodden Ways and a few others are not teachable poems, in the usual sense of the term. They can be read, heard, shared, pondered on the performed and read again.

To choose 'unteachable' poems is not to evade difficulties in the poetry class; on the contrary it is to acknowledge that difficulty can only be confronted through personal engagement.

7.2.6 Jean Forrester's Guide

According to the writer if more than 10% of the poem has to be explained, that is if the meaning cannot be elicited by questioning, the poem should not be selected for the class.
7.3 Suggestions / recommendations for the teachers

Success in teaching poetry at the higher secondary level seem to lie in two things.

1. Teachers understanding their students,
2. Teachers acquaintance with poems.

7.3.1 Teachers understanding their students

The teachers must understand the students he teaches, be aware of their lives, thoughts and emotions. His attention must be turned towards them, rather than towards his own taste, his own choice, and his own notions about what students should know. The study of appreciation of poetry cannot be forced. The teacher must be content with the growth.

The teacher is likely to be productive if he develops a confident attitude in the students. This will help the students to see their mistakes and failure as essential stages in the learning process.

7.3.2 Teachers acquaintance with poems

The teacher must be acquainted with many poems. Only the teacher who has read poetry widely and with understanding, appreciation and delight will know the right poem to introduce to the right child at the right time.
7.3.3 Poetry teacher and Methodology

Regarding teaching methodology the investigator feels that the teaching of poetry in many parts of the world and in our own country, has been a teacher-centered process. In other words much of the classroom time is taken up by the teacher. It is a one-way process, TEACHER ----> pupil. The investigator started with the assumption that the student centered process is much more fruitful. It allows students to explore the literary text and invites them to develop their own responses and judgments. This can be achieved by preparing tasks and activities which provide opportunities for learners to 'interact' with the poem.

The investigator in the course of the study has come to the conclusion that there is no one method for teaching poetry. Each class, each poem, and each teacher would find a different procedure. Yet, a few basic points, should be kept in mind.

- a poem is not a translation, exercise or even a comprehension exercise.
- cultural differences should be controlled.
- the teacher should be concerned with what the poem communicates, not with literary history or biography of the poet. Last, but not the least is the teacher’s own enthusiasm. In the teaching of literature enthusiasm is important and it is contagious.
The teacher should not discourage natural conversational dialogue in classroom on any poem. "The teacher's ingenuity will be taxed well enough when direct teaching is dropped, if proper attention is given to the sense of occasion and quality of performance in the classroom" (English studies 11-18, 1983).

The teacher should shift the focus from the text to reader.

The teacher, where possible should make use of audio-visual aids. This can support the actual learning-studying process. These help make ideas and concepts clear. It can increase understanding, retention and motivational aspects.

Teachers should not consider films, film strips, television, radio and tape recorder as recreational activities.

7.3.4 Teacher and Black board work

The investigator from her observation has found that teachers make use of the black-board only to write the words and their meanings. The teacher should try to make her black-board work attractive and useful. One way of doing it is to adopt the strategy of webbing in their classroom for a variety of purposes.

Webbing promotes comprehension, enhances learning, links reading and writing and promotes enjoyment. It is an excellent
strategy to use when one wants to foster enjoyment and appreciation of literature and help become involved with literature as they interact with each other to learn.

Webbing can be used to create a literate environment.
7.4 For the supervisors, Inspectors and Headmasters

7.4.1 Over crowded classroom together with over concentration on the teaching of basic skills, with the exclusion of other areas of the curriculum, hampers the child's learning.

- children need opportunities to apply skills, if they are to learn thoroughly.

- they need an environment in which learning is irresistible, one which motivates them, one in which the process of learning is exciting, and they recognize the need to acquire certain skills in order to participate.

- children learn anything that is meaningful, skills should be related to real situation. Children should be made to think and feel. Both the mind and the heart must be involved.

- students should be encouraged to operate independently. Teachers and parents underestimate their abilities, as a result spoon feed them. Teacher's do not underestimate students, but they take short-cuts; so that they can give tuitions, and earn money.
The supervisors, inspectors and headmasters should see, that learning takes place in the class.

Teachers need to broaden their knowledge and therefore should attend in-service courses. They should not accept new ideas for the sake of new ideas, they should try-out new techniques, and try to find out how far they are feasible in the class.

Teachers can foster effective learning if the organization or management does not dictate but support encourages teaching-learning.

- Group / pair work should be encouraged. It is an effective way of meeting the wide range of needs from the most able to the least able. Group focused learning, the investigator feels should be made a regular part of the teaching strategy.

- Schools, must in their organization and curriculum constantly take account of changes occurring in the real world and the ways in which these changes affect the learning needs of children.

7.4.2 The school should encourage the use of the tape-recorder, over-head projector, audio-tapes. See that
every class has a library, which include collection of three to four dozen slim volumes of poems by single authors.

7.4.3 General suggestions and recommendations

a) students should be given tasks to foster concentration.

b) students should be encouraged to estimate, to analyze, to synthesize and to make judgments. In other words they should be made to think.

c) teachers should work together with a sense of direction and unity of purpose. Teaches should get together for discussing their weakness and strong points. In other words the schools should have clear aims about what children need to learn and what makes teaching purposeful and productive.

d) Teachers should have concern and respect for what each individual child has to offer. They should provide an atmosphere in which it is safe to fail and in which each child is helped to overcome his / her limitations. They have understanding as to why children are not disciplined; they realize
children are bored because the tasks presented do not match the appropriate ability and interest.

Tasks should match the needs of the pupils. Selection of the learning task should be the result of careful analysis by the teacher of the individual attitudes, attainments and operations.

e) The teacher should know the students as individuals in terms of physical, intellectual and emotional developments.

f) Read poems with colleagues - likes and dislikes, stock responses and personal reading habits are usually challenged in this way.

g) Teachers should devote more time to reading poems and thereby become good readers. Children, as a result will have a chance to hear and talk about several poems each week.

h) Teach students to share. And the key to sharing are:

1. performance
2. illustrating favourite pieces
3. public readings
4. dramatization
i) children should be encouraged to write poems.

j) A teacher should not be self confident, unless he knows that the techniques he will use are successful; and he cannot know this until he has first seen other people using them successfully, and then used them successfully.

k) The teacher should not make poems a basis for an exercise on grammatical analysis.

l) Students should not be forced to memorize poems.

7.4.4 View points to emphasize through teaching aids

There are interesting things to hear and see in the poems.

a. Recordings of individuals and verse speaking groups help children to hear successive readings of a poem.

b. A slide or filmstrip showing of a poem. This helps children to discover what is interesting in the poem’s ideas, words and patterns.

7.4.5 Usual kinds of ideas make poetry enjoyable

a. A poem mounted on a poster or bulletin board. Words or lines containing poetic ideas or turns of
thought can be underlined, coloured or can be shown in some other way.

b. On a poster, show a picture (of anything).

e.g. A flower, a baby, youth, an old person, trees, etc. To many people it is just something that you find on plants. But to a poet it might be: Find some poetic lines about the thing and write it on the poster.

Caption: What can you add?

7.4.6 The 'name poetry' includes many different kinds of comparisons

a. Show different kinds of poems
   - long with stanzas
   - short without stanzas
   - with rhyme, without rhyme
   - with regular rhythm, with irregular rhythm
   - humorous / not humorous
   - some that tell a story
   - with long lines / short lines

b. A poster showing different kinds of birds / trees / flowers and several kinds of poems.

Caption: There are many kinds of birds.
There are many kinds of poems.
7.5 For the paper-setters and examiners

As for the evaluation of the students understanding of poetry, the investigator feels that, instead of asking comprehension type of questions on the poem, or asking them to write by heart stanzas from the poem. "We should examine them in skills which they are likely to use when they read poetry outside school. Students should be examined by asking them to comment on an unseen poem."
7.6 For Teacher Educators

1. While preparing the curriculum room should be made for a course in appreciation of poetry.

2. Training colleges taking up extension work should have 'Teaching of Poetry' as part of their inservice programme.

3. The thrust should be on the practical side of teaching poetry.

   Techniques of teaching poetry could be demonstrated by the teacher.

   The teachers should be made to prepare tasks on poems prescribed.

   The tasks could be tried out in the programme itself, and then have a discussion on it.

7.7 Suggestions for further research

1. This kind of work could be taken up at +2 higher level.

2. Such materials could be tried out at the secondary and primary levels (High and low).
3. A comparative study could be taken up to see if they are able to appreciate poetry at the L-1 level and if these basics could be applied to L-2 teaching of poetry.

4. Research work could be taken up at the college level and offer a remedial course in appreciation if poetry.

Research work at any level should be developmental. It should help the students/investigator to gain further insight into appreciating poetry.