PROCEDURES AND TOOLS
Chapter III: Procedures and Tools

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Chapter - III
Procedures and Tools

In this chapter the investigator makes a survey of the present practices in the schools with the help of questionnaires and check list. The teachers’ responses are dealt in relation to this. The investigator also discusses the rationale of the materials and the nature of the tasks.

The rationale of the course was derived from the available literature on the teaching of poetry and mainly from the guidelines provided by Brumfit and Alan Maley for the students in India.

Based on this, the investigator designed a course which has the following features:

(i) Tasks and activities which provide opportunities for the learners to 'interact' with the poem, to 'feel' the poem, to come out with a 'personal response' to the poem, and to give their own judgement of the poem.

(ii) A set of strategies which are process-based to involve the students in the process of 'meaning making'.

(The students in the process of 'meaning making').
The investigator tried out the materials and the techniques in six higher secondary schools in different districts of Gujarat. Each try-out was in the form of activities, discussion, pair work and poetry work-shops.

The controlled and the experimental groups were formed by administering a levelling test. Each group was then given a pre-test, the scores of which would be compared to the results of the post-test to determine the final results.

After determining the result of the pre-test the materials were tried out in both the groups i.e. the controlled and the experimental. The material in the controlled group was handled in the traditional way. In the experimental group the materials were tried out using new techniques and strategies.

Due to the constraints of time, the investigator was able to work with the controlled group only in two schools.

After a period of four weeks, a post-test was administered to both the groups. the results of which were compared to the pre-test.

3.1 Survey of the present practices

To study the present practices and classroom procedures in teaching poetry, the investigator conducted a survey through a
questionnaire and observation of poetry lessons. The detailed analysis of the responses is presented in chapter one.

English literature teaching in India doesn't seem to have much of dynamisms, there is little interest in innovations and the quest for underlying principles is not in sight. Things more or less have remained the same in teaching. The teaching approach practiced for the native speaker is used by our teachers, without trying to find out whether it is appropriate for our conditions and students. "And this approach is heavily protected against the influence of language study and language teaching" (Widdowson, 1985).

Literature teaching is concerned with 'study' not 'learning'. According to Widdowson, study means, "inquiry without implication of performance, the pursuit of knowledge about something...." "Learning is getting to know how to do something as an involved first person performer (Widdowson, 1985).

Literature teaching today is concerned with 'study', so that students are expected to make critical appreciation about some literary works on the supposition that they have learned how to read them. In fact, our students do not know how to read them, and therefore they find this difficult to do. The obvious solution is to teach them how to read a piece of literature. Instead of doing this, our teachers take the shortest route of
providing ready made material to the students. This is done by giving them paraphrases, summary, explanation line by line, translations and tailored questions and answers! It is a time saving device both for teachers and students. Teachers do not have to prepare and the students do not have to read the actual texts. This procedure has resulted in a proliferation of guides and notes in the bazaar. "In a sense, they learn to perform without competence" (Widdowson, 1985).

3.2 Teacher's responses

The investigator also studied how the teachers perceive the teaching of poetry at the +2 level. For this an opinionnaire was given to a group of fifty teachers randomly selected from ten districts of Gujarat. The analysis of the report is given in detail in chapter I.

The investigator's observation of poetry lessons supports some of the above mentioned responses. However this direct observation of actual classroom teaching indicates the following main features of the teaching of poetry in our schools:

- Almost all the teachers whose lessons were observed gave the summary of the poem in L1.

- The meanings of the words were given in L1.
- The explanations of the poem line by line was given in Li.

- Rarely were questions asked, and those asked were of the factual type.

- Students were not encouraged to give their personal observations on the poem or to evaluate it. Most teachers were satisfied with only the surface level processing of the poem.

3.3 Review of literature

The rationale of the course was derived from the literature on the teaching of poetry, and mainly from the guidelines provided by Brumfit and Alan Maley for the learners in India (1989). According to Brumfit the learners should consider the situation and the experience described; they should also consider how the writer has tried to communicate this experience. In other words, he recognizes the MEANS the poet has used for communicating. The learner should imitate, alter or write their own poems.

Maley focuses on the creative use of language. He provides opportunities for the learner to handle phrases and words in a creative manner and inspires them to participate in the process of writing a poem.
According to Brumfit, "there is no 'method' of teaching poetry. Each class, each poem, and each teacher will find a different procedure". It has to be spontaneous. However, he does provide guidelines.

A poem is not a translation, or even a comprehension exercise. Individual words do not need to be defined if the general sense is clear.

According to Shastri, "a course in literature should provide opportunities for pupils to make first hand responses to literary works".

Based on the guidelines, the investigator designed a course which has the following features:

(i) Tasks and activities for the learners' to 'interact' with the poem, to 'feel' the poem, and to come out with a 'personal response' to the poem and to give their own judgement of the poem.

(ii) A set of strategies which are process-based to involve the students in the process of 'meaning making'.

(iii) Activities to enable the students to play with words and phrases and to complete lines using their own imagination.
3.4 Preparation of materials

The students in our schools do not seem to have much interest, no motivation to read poetry. They have a negative attitude towards poetry. This is because of the present day teaching practices, and having to face poems that are challenging linguistically.

Poems are often selected from the classics or writers the selectors are familiar with. In either case the interest of the students are not taken into consideration.

The purpose of the task was to stimulate an interest in the poems. In order to achieve this aim of equipping students with the ability and the desire to read poems, the investigator selected ten poems with different tasks.

The poems selected represent different ages and forms. The investigator's aim has been to make poetry accessible to students of higher secondary to make it possible for them to read and enjoy it, and also to help them writing it.

Poetry gives a better sense of the rhythms and melodies of the language. It enhances the learners' feel of the language by drawing attention to the words, their weight and quality, shapes and sounds.
The poems that the investigator has selected have themes which are common to all of us. The investigator felt that they could "act as a powerful stimulus to the students' own reflective thinking, which will lead to more mature and fruitful group discussion" (Poem into Poem, 1985).

In Poem-centered activities the learner can make a strong 'personal investment' because they touch upon non-trivial areas of experience. "This personal investment, combined with the interaction which necessarily follows from the group work is a powerful factor in language learning" (Poem into Poem, 1985).

Poetry generates awe, revulsion; one reason may be the way it is taught. If we want our students to be interested in poetry, one has to remove this clout. "Poetry must be seen both by learners and teachers as something concrete, useful and relevant" (Poem into Poem, 1985).

The investigator selected poems that were related to common areas of human experience: love, beauty, humour, nature, animals and so on. Every poem contains three major types of activity:

1. Framing and focusing on the theme (warming up);
2. Activities to give access to the poems themselves (reading); and to promote personal responses
3. Writing.

This approach has been taken from Alan Maley and Sandra Moulding's, Poem into Poem (1985) and adapted to suit the needs of the students.

Warming up:

Here the investigator has tried to lead the students to the theme of the poems they will be reading, and specially to relate their personal experience to them. A number of activities have been suggested as warming up activities. The investigator has taken a few of them and adapted them to suit her needs.

Suggested activities
- listening to recorded interviews, and taking detailed notes;
- brain-storming their associations with the themes;
- writing definitions of words and checking from a dictionary or thesaurus;
- comparing traditional English rhymes with those of one's own culture;
- reading brief prose extracts on the same theme and discussing them;
- reading a text on the theme, agreeing or disagreeing;
- interpreting pictures;
drawing pictures, e.g. of early memories;
writing out and discussing personal experiences related to the theme;

Reading poems:
The aim here is to deal with difficulties of vocabulary and of interpretation, and to draw their attention, where it is relevant, to special features such as rhyme, sounds, and words.

Suggested activities:
- giving a gloss of the meaning of culturally obscure or difficult vocabulary or expression;
- deducing meaning from the context;
- completing a paraphrase of a poem (cloze-style);
- choosing the best paraphrase of two or three given;
- improving on a given paraphrase;
- noting the sequence of events in a poem;
- drawing attention to recurring linguistic patterns, rhyme schemes, rhythm, etc.;
- finding major similarities / differences between poems;
- framing questions to the poet or the 'I' of the poem;
- deducing the identify of the speaker in a poem;
- deducing the attitudes of the poet or 'I' in a poem;
- transformation of a poem into 'everyday' study;
- re-writing a poem to show its reverse face;
answering questions which arise from 'problem lines' in a poem;

- searching for associated groups of words;
- discussing preferences for poems.

Writing

The objectives here is "to relieve students of some of the strain of writing by offering models, reducing the quality to be written, and offering the support of peer discussion".

Suggested activities:

- writing group poems on a given theme—one sentence per group member;
- guided writing with opening / closing lines, incomplete lines, etc.;
- using a model imitate, for e.g. limerick, haiku, parody;
- writing a theme word vertically each line of the poem begins with a word which starts with a letter of the vertical word;
- a theme word is chosen; each word must then occur somewhere in the corresponding line of the poem;
- using interviews to arrange a poem;
- using interrogative / relative pronouns as the first word of each line, e.g. how, who, why, etc.'
- using mixed similies / metaphors to build a poem.
The investigator did not directly implement any one of these activities mentioned above. The constraints of time and their lack of sufficient language prevented her from doing so. May be the investigator could try out these activities at a later date.

The materials are all addressed to the students. The initial activities are designed to get an "initial response, involving individual effort, followed by the support of pair or group work" (Poem into Poem, 1985). The activities were designed, so that the students gain confidence in reading, appreciating and writing a few lines of poetry.

The task of literature teaching is to develop a pedagogy which will guide learners/students to read literature for themselves, "as a precondition for subsequent study. By this way literature teaching achieves its educational purpose: to develop a capacity for the understanding and appreciation of literature as a mode of meaning, rather than the accumulation of information and ideas about particular works of literature. Literature today is equated with texts taught at school. This is because our students have never learnt how to read.

The problem were selected and the tasks were designed with a purpose, to force the students unconsciously to read the actual texts for themselves.
The problem with our teaching approaches is that too often "teachers imply that poems are riddles with single solutions, which we, the teachers happen to know...." (Benton and Fox, 1985).

If we want our students' "minds to take a walk around within a poem", then the line by line approach is inappropriate, causing boredom. It is better that they explore a poem, and respond to parts that interest them, and then put the parts together.

Poems should be experienced rather than explained. The job of the teacher then is to cultivate individual and shared responses to the text, not explication line by line.

Place of Poetry in the Curriculum

Poetry occupies a very tiny slot in the time-table. If we look at the time-table we find that it stands for facts, principles, habits of thought - mental disciplines in the narrow sense of the term. Yet the substance of living is, as always was, love, pity, fear, joy grief, awe. "It is with these and through these, that children have to learn to live". Merely mental activity cannot take their place; it can and will interact with them, but the interaction may be utterly sterile in its effect, as life in a university quickly shows. In a poetry lesson,...
children learn to live in the only way there is of learning to live; by living" (Raymond O'Malley, 1969).

"Poetry is a frequently neglected area in English teaching because it is potentially full of pitfalls for the unwary teacher. According to Tunnicliffe, reading, writing and speaking poetry should be an important part of the English curriculum, and together they play an important role in children's language experience. It affects not only their English skills, but the effectiveness of their response to the whole educational process".

Teaching of poetry should be directed towards lifting it out of its academic niche or literary featherbed into the world of our pupils' and our own experience. The teachers of poetry should try to convince the students that poetry is concerned with the actual stuff and substance of the world around us.

Process of Reading

Reading is not as passive a process as we make it to be. It involves the reader in many ways. It involves us in:

- Sharing in the world the writer has created. This occurs as a result of the imaginative leaps we make in order to fit the created world with the world we know.
Relating the experience of the text to experience we ourselves have undergone or can imagine ourselves undergoing. This occurs as a result of an active shuttling back and forth between the 'fictional' world and the 'real' world.

Interpreting what the texts might mean. The literary representation of experience is not a direct one; it is frequently indirect. This forces the reader to take connections, to read between the lines, to seek for explorations and meanings. In literary texts such meanings are rarely stated directly.

Teaching approaches which reinforce the activity and which activate the reader in different ways may be appropriate approaches.

For the students to read, they should see the need to do it. Most school students have grown up in a world dominated by television, magazines, comics and other reading materials. These provide immediate short-term satisfaction, without demanding sustained concentration. Reading literary texts demand concentration for a longer period of time, and it demands hard work from the reader. It demands lots of patience too. This task of encouraging the student to read is difficult and demanding one.
One important principle that the teacher should remember is that the students will be motivated to read if the process of reading is related to them as individuals, that is their own ideas, feelings, opinions and perceptions, they will then relate it to their own experience of the world, and particularly to the society in which they live.

"Students need to be prepared for reading a literary text. The initial preparation should be as concrete and specific as possible. Teachers should try, where possible, to help students to use their own actual experience: (Carter and Lang, 1991).

Teacher-centered classes

Teaching in many parts of the world and in our own country has been and is a teacher-centered process. This is to say the teachers take up much of the time speaking to students. At its best, this process probably motivated the students to go and read more and more. At its worst, teachers created a real aversion to literature among students, who otherwise might have been interested and enjoyed it. The manner of presentation, and the selection of texts failed to arouse the interest and motivation of the students. Another factor that counts is the teachers own enthusiasm. Most of our teachers in the school teach without being really involved. They teach because they have to.
"The greater the invention and enthusiasm of the literature teacher, the greater the likelihood that learners will like, or come to like, the literary text which has been presented, and from there proceed to look at further text and teach themselves to like them too" (Carter and Lang, 1991).

This means that they must read the text carefully and uninterruptingly. Before going to the teacher, they discuss their responses with their partner or the group.

In a student-centered class, the learners are able to make their own judgments, instead of accepting the judgments of the teacher. This does not mean that the teachers' view is wrong, it only means that the views presented by an authority become more important than the text; but when a student gives his view point, it means that the students have read the text.

In a student-centered class the teacher is not superseded. The teacher has to set up the process, "and possibly indicate features to look for ...." (Carter and Lang, 1991).

In 1987 Inspectors of Schools in England issued a report which criticized the present 'superficial' approach to poetry teaching and urged that pupils should be encouraged to 'read and experience' poetry for themselves.
The press reported it this way: The Inspectors say that the schools should encourage children to explore their 'feel' for poems. Instead of doing this they give them material to pass exams. Libraries are full of such exam-oriented 'crib booklets' children need good anthologies that they can read independently. Poetry can be reviewed, if rote-learning is abolished, and group discussion brought in.

Sample of schools

The investigator worked in six higher secondary schools at the lower level in Gujarat in different districts. The sample selected represented the rural, semi-urban and urban areas of Gujarat. The samples in each school were of mixed abilities.

The investigator worked in the following schools:

1. Ankur Higher Secondary School - Ahmedabad (urban)
2. Pioneer Higher Secondary School - Anand (semi - urban)
3. Swami Vivekanand Vinay Mandir - Junagadh
4. Hindi Higher Secondary - Dahod
5. J.M. Kanya Vidyalaya Higher Secondary - Unjha
6. Sarvajanik Higher Secondary - Nabipur

The investigator worked with standard XI students in all these schools. In each of these schools the investigator worked with two groups: control and experimental. She formed these two
groups by administering the levelling test. Each group consisted of twenty five students.

3.5 Formation of Groups

Levelling Test

The investigator considered it necessary to identify two groups of equal ability for the try-out. For equalizing the groups, a levelling test was administered to a group of fifty students of std. XI, who had English as their subject.

The leveling test, tested them for language, comprehension and writing. The test was of one hour duration. This test was administered in all the six schools where the investigator worked.

Description of the test

The test comprised of four main questions which were again sub-divided.

Q.1a. Complete the following sentences using the appropriate forms of the verbs given in the brackets.

b. Rewrite the following sentences as directed.

c. Fill in the gaps with appropriate connectives from the brackets.

Question number 1 dealt with language. This was to determine their level of language. This was also to
gain insight and help and guide the investigator in her try-outs.

Q.2 Tested their comprehension (for prose)
A passage was given to them in the paper. They had to read it, and answer questions based on it in the space provided. The questions were not all of one type. They were informative and inferential. There were questions testing language. This question tested both the content and language.

Q.3 This question was based on a poem.
The students had to read the poem and answer questions based on it. The poem was a short one. This enabled the investigator to see their level of comprehension in poetry.

Q.4 This was a writing exercise. The students had to write a paragraph on a given topic.
The test was of fifty marks. This test was purely for forming the two groups. The score of the group formed the base for forming and equalizing the groups. Both groups were equal in the sense, that both groups comprised of competent, adequate and capable students. After this procedure of leveling, one group was treated
as the controlled group, while the other was treated as
the experimental group.

3.6 Pre-test

Once the groups were formed, the investigator
administered another test to both the groups separately. The
duration of the test was sixty minutes. This test was basically
in the area of poetry.

'Stopping by the Woods on a Snowy Evening', by Robert
Frost was selected for the pre-test. The investigator kept the
following points in mind while selecting the poem:

- level of difficulty
- language
- content and
- the age

This poem deals with a universal theme and it does not
have cultural overtones.

The test was not in the form of the usual question
answer format. The test had a total of three main questions. The
questions were based on the content, questions to get their
personal response and a question to relate the poem to the actual
world.
Description of the test

Q.I This question was divided into six sub-questions.

a. Dealt with the vocabulary. The students had to match the words with the meaning.

b. True and false exercise. There were five items under this head.

c. Multiple choice. The students had to complete the statements by choosing the most appropriate phrase from those given. There were five items under this.

d. The students had to find out rhyming words to rhyme with a particular word.

e. This had to do with the sounds in the poem. The students were expected to find out four words in stanza three having the /s/ sound. An example was given for this exercise.

f. This sub-question again was divided into three:

a. They had to express their like/dislike about the main idea of the poem.

b. The students had to give their response to words (two in number)

c. They had to mention the line they liked and why they liked.
Question number one took care of the following aspects:
- vocabulary
- content of the poem and
- their response to the poem

Q.II This question was based on grammar/structure that was related to the poem. The student had to fill in blanks using who, whose, whom, where and that. There were five sentences under this.

Q.III Here the students had to write a paragraph on a topic that was connected or related to the theme of the poem. The frame for writing the paragraph was given.

The pre-test had the weightage of fifty marks. It was necessary to give this test, because the scores of this test would be recorded for comparing and contrasting the scores with those of the post-test. The scores would be compared and contrasted within the same group and with the other group to arrive at the final result.

3.7 Controlled group

The controlled group comprised of twenty five to thirty students. The make up of this group was the same as that of the experimental group.
The poems in the controlled group were presented in the traditional way. The teacher read the poem, gave the meanings of the words in L-1, explained it line by line in L-1 and then gave the summary. In some cases the students were told about the poet. The approach was totally teacher-centered.

The teacher was not in a position to work with all the control groups.

3.8 Treatment given to the Experimental Group

This group like the controlled group comprised of twenty to thirty students. The make up of this group was the same as that of the control group.

The investigator worked for four weeks with each group. The poems used were the same for the two groups; controlled and experimental, yet the approach adopted was different. The aim was to make the students read the poems with a purpose. Every poem was task based.

The approach adopted here is taken from Alan Maley and Sandra Moulding's, 'Poem into Poem'. Warming up, Reading and Writing. This approach was student-centered. The students had the opportunity to read, to give their response and judgement. They were able to discuss it with their partner/group, before they expressed it before the whole class.
This try-out proved to be quite fruitful and worthwhile, inspite of the limitation of language on the part of the students. Inspite of this limitation, the students were very enthusiastic and interested. The inhibition that they had in the beginning disappeared.

3.9 Post-test

The post-test was administered to both the groups after a period of four weeks. The objective of the test was to see the effects of the material, and the approach on the experimental group. To see if there was any improvement in their reading and dealing with the poem as a result of this try-out.

The post-test was of sixty minutes duration. The post-test comprised of three main questions which were again subdivided.

Description of the Test

Q.1 This question was divided into seven sub-questions.

a. The students had to supply the two missing words in the first stanza.

b. This part of the question deals with the vocabulary of the poem. The students had to match the words with the meanings given.
This was a true and false exercise. There were five items under it.

Multiple choice questions were given and they had to complete the statements choosing the appropriate option.

This question was related to sounds. The students had to give two unpleasant words having the /d/ sound.

This question asked them to describe the effect of the repetition of the /d/ sound.

This sub-question was further divided into three.

a. In two sentences they had to give their reasons for liking the main idea of the poem.

b. The students were expected to give two words they liked and two reasons for limiting their use.

c. The students had to give the best line they liked and the reason for liking it.

Question number one was of an objective type and yet to answer it they had to read the poem. It also required of them to give their response to it.

This question was a grammar question. The item chosen had some relation with the poem.

Here they had to write a paragraph on a topic that was based on the poem. This was to help them see the relation between the poem and reality. A frame was
provided to help them write the paragraph.

This test has fulfilled the objective, that students should read poems and learn to give their own responses not somebody else's to an unknown poem.

Constraints

The investigator had to work under constraints of time. It was possible to work only in the months of November, December and January. The reasons for not being able to work at other times are various. Some of the reasons are as follows:

- schools reopened late
- strikes and riots
- the investigator's own schedule of work and responsibilities
- completing the syllabus and examination
- unforeseen events.

Working in the above mentioned months again was not without problems. These months are usually cricket months which affects the general attendance in the schools. It is difficult to keep the students in class, specially if India is playing.
In the initial stages the investigator had to spend some time gaining their confidence, getting them used to working in a way different from what they were used to, and also getting them used to the English language.

The students in all the schools were co-operative, and they did what was expected of them. They realized the importance of having a dictionary with them.

The myth that we cannot get students interested in poetry due to their lack of language is shattered. The investigator is of the opinion that if poems are selected keeping the criteria in mind and if the right approach is adopted and further if the teacher is patient, enthusiastic, understanding and has confidence in herself the students, a lot can be achieved.

Another important factor that should be borne in mind is the age factor.