CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

5.0. Introduction

Textbook writing is the result of "the shared competencies between author and publisher. It tends to be the case that the author’s convictions are academic convictions and the publisher’s are commercial convictions. Therefore that’s where there is conflict and success is measured in terms of sales. This will mean the publisher’s instinct about the market was right and there was enough for reconciliation between the author’s academic perception and the publisher’s commercial. And in order to reconcile the creative with the commercial the conflict has to be productive" (Prabhu 2003). This study tries to understand the difference between productive and non-productive conflict and how the relationship between the two protagonists affects the status quo. This chapter summarises the investigations and findings, recommends ways in which the creative could synergise with the commercial, highlights the limitations of the study and finally, sets the tone for further research in the area.

5.1. Summary of the Investigations and Findings

Analysing an anomaly in author-publisher relations has been the preoccupation of this study. Theoretical and empirical evidence confirm the hunch that authors and publishers have to iron out the discrepancies that hound their association. The author is the creator, the artist. The canvas he works on is
language and his tools are words. His artistic expression is embodied in the manner in which language is presented to the learner in order to motivate him to learn. Likewise, the publisher is in the business of selling ideas — a most noble and honourable vocation. This process is however marred by several constraints, some big, some not so big.

The starting point for the investigations was a simple — ‘how it is.’ That is, by studying the relationship as it existed, by the end of the investigations one would have a clear idea of ‘how it should be.’ Data collection included surveying the existing literature for information on the subject. This was followed up by case studies of twelve eminent and highly experienced authors and editor-publishers. These were the combined findings from both sources: Materials writing, according to several eminent practitioners, is creativity amidst constraints because it has to take into consideration several variables and decisions, some even contradictory. And given the multi-cultural and multi-linguistic texture of second language learners in India, “a perfect textbook is an ideal and an ‘endless effort to satisfy different sets of criteria.” (Tickoo 39). The most crucial of these variables included a pre-determined syllabus, learner competence, teacher awareness, socio-political sensitivities, market readiness and saleability. Authors had to work on the paradigm of a highly controlled, extremely artificial system and still produce books that sold. The publisher, on the other hand, having invested huge sums of money had to make a viable business out of it — especially the moral tug-of-war between the
academic value of a book as against its commercial viability. As publishing is highly specialized, a lot of careful planning and market analysis precede the commissioning of a book. Both stakeholders, it appeared, had mutual grievances, but more importantly, took them in their stride and continued to write and sell textbooks.

5.2. Conclusions

The following conclusions were arrived at as the study progressed.

1. The author was not a victim of publisher hostility. The relationship between the two was determined to a very large extent by who held who in what esteem. In other words, it was a business relationship with strong interpersonal bonding.

2. Occupational hazards or several diverse, contradictory and dichotomous issues had a bearing on the interface. Starting with academic merit versus commercial feasibility, the list is long — teaching experience vs. writing experience, publishing wisdom vs. author’s experience; syllabus requirements vs. learner needs, teacher needs vs. learner needs; innovation vs. convention and time vs. quality. Managing and controlling these constraints effectively meant the author and the publisher had to compromise on ideals without unduly watering down their individual perceptions. Negotiation, co-operation, conciliation and finding a
middle path, and avoiding confrontation were necessary for the smooth conduct of the interface.

3. Conflict was inevitable given the nature of the interaction, but it was acceptable as long as it was productive. That is, the textbook, the by-product of that conflict, had to be effective as a classroom tool as well as a marketable commodity. All energies had to be directed towards achieving that twin goal.

4. The author and publisher are not free agents. Several external parameters have to be taken into consideration when discussing the reasons authors and publishers behave the way they do. Starting with the boards of studies or textbook committees who wield a tremendous amount of clout in the decision making process, the competition from fellow publishers which is acute in private publishing, the problem of author fidelity, a market scenario that is fluid and not clearly defined, the comparatively short shelf life of teaching materials — all these have a bearing on the interface and the individuals within it.

5. Support systems like teacher orientation workshops need to operate simultaneously with publishers-authors so that the full potential of a textbook is exploited. In fact, teacher training courses must include this aspect in the curriculum.
Authors and publishers have to respect each other's territorial integrity and not trespass. The author is the best judge of the book as an academic product, while the publisher is the best judge of what kind of book will sell, the length, the price etc. Meddling is the chief cause of discontent and acrimony.

Good sales (and profit) are a point of concurrence for author and publisher and while the publisher is product oriented, the author is process oriented. Both converge to create the textbook.

Ideology is one of the most pernickety issues in textbook writing and the sensitive areas relate to socio-political, religious, economic and gender bias, sexual stereotyping, violence and cruelty, ethnic jokes, and offending anyone or any group of people. This is understandable given the highly volatile nature of these issues in contemporary Indian society, and publishers exercise a lot of caution, sometimes bordering on pusillanimity. However, publishers also cannot assume that they are custodians of social awareness. The conflict with authors arises when they are asked to compromise on the literary and academic merit of the text for the sake of being politically correct or didactically acceptable. At the end of the day both should take a call on whether they should present things as they 'are' or as they 'should be.'
9. The editor's is the most crucial role in the interface and he should avoid over-zealous intervention in the manuscript. He is the bridge between the author and publisher and has to balance and iron out the sharp edges in the relationship. In fact the editor's is the most responsible job in textbook publishing. Apart from infusing the required format which is a very clinical operation, the onus of taking the manuscript from conception to completion lies with the editor. And even though he represents the publishing house and its values, he should be sensitive to the legitimate constraints of the author and be more of a friend than a critic.

10. Professionalism is vital in both areas of materials production — writing and publishing. Textbook writers have to be trained on format, gradation, level, cohesiveness and the importance of using Standard English, given the fact that language with errors and slips has a longstanding effect on the learners. Similarly, publishers should start with a blue print of the textbook with concrete guidelines drawn in advance. This should include all aspects of the textbook starting with its structure, content, author selection, ideological leaning, market (teacher-learner) readiness and marketing strategy. This would ensure that there is no last minute groping and the work will be standardised. Also investing in a resource centre which contains all necessary materials —
books, journals, CD-ROMS — for authors to readily use would greatly reduce the time spent in scouting for appropriate content.

11. Textbook production must be undertaken as a moral and sacred duty because the power the textbook wields over young, impressionable minds is phenomenal. A well written, responsible textbook is not difficult to create.

12. Given the increase in the numbers supporting the abolition of the textbook from language learning since it perpetuates the use of a very artificial language, and also keeping in mind the strong practical and ideological factors which justify the use of the textbook, textbooks should be used only for language practice, as supporting material and as a homework tool.

5.3. Recommendations

The study recommends that authors and publishers carefully examine potentially volatile situations before starting an assignment. Certain parameters are provided as a point of reference. These include:

1. Negotiation: The terms and conditions in the agreement have to be negotiated and clarified by author and publisher well before embarking on an assignment. All too often the author is ignorant of the publishing business and fails to press his points. This could lead to unsavoury altercations at a later stage. If the author is
completely aware of what is expected of him and what he expects from the publisher it is more of less smooth sailing for both. Complete transparency has to be adopted.

2. Uniformity: The quality of textbooks has to be standardized. A regulatory body can be created to keep a tab on the quality of textbooks produced and ensure that textbooks published in India meet international quality standards.

3. Professionalism: Streamlining the entire process of materials production by infusing it with a professional touch is essential. The plan should be clear and rigid guidelines have to be drawn before launching a textbook. The publisher should be both conscious and aware of what he is dealing with. There should be no groping for knowledge or grappling with the how and the what of publishing. A blue print is imperative. Also, the editing process has to be carried out with a lot of maturity and only experts should be allowed to ‘fine tune’ manuscripts. Proof reading can be undertaken by trainees.

4. Indigenisation: “International in quality but national in flavour” should be the principle behind textbook writing and publishing. Shedding the ‘imperial yoke’ and the complex that the best examples of English writing are represented by a G.K. Chesterton
or a Robert Lynd is necessary because the language in the
textbook has to be as close an approximation of the language of
real life as possible. It will also encourage learners to have a
strong sense of linguistic identity. The English classics can be
used as a reference point or for extra reading.

5. Responsibility: Authors and publishers are morally and socially
responsible for what is put into a textbook. This responsibility
should be reflected in the manner in which the textbook handles
touchy and sensitive issues.

5.4. Limitations of the Study

The research was constrained by the following limitations:

1. The ELT textbooks produced by private publishers for Classes IV
   — VII form the focus of this study.

2. Private publishers and the authors who were commissioned by
   them are the pre-occupation of this study. The larger government-
   run publishing corporation was not included in the study.

3. The sample chosen for study was small — six authors and six
   editor/publishers. The sample was confined to well established,
   experienced professionals. A well-rounded picture would have
emerged had the study included the feedback of neophyte authors and smaller, less established publishers.

4. The geographical locale of the study was restricted to the southern states of Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. Inputs from Kerala and the northern states would have made the study more comprehensive.

5. Given the personal nature of the discussion, some respondents felt inhibited to voice their 'uncensored' views.

5.5. Scope for Further Research

This study is the result of an inner disquiet on the nature of author-publisher relations and a genuine desire to understand and perhaps provide a remedy for the 'problem.' It was heartening to discover that the majority stakeholders were not unduly perturbed by this aberration and took it in their stride. However, by adopting the recommendations (5.3) the interface had only to gain from it; the reason being that most of the recommendations were culled from the interview transcripts of the respondents. Future researchers could delve deeper into the following areas that this study could not contain:

1. Analysing an academically and commercially successful textbook and the dynamics of the author-publisher interface in that context – is the book successful because of the successful relationship or vice versa?
2. The state of affairs in government run textbook corporations.

3. The ethics and work methods of 'kanji' or publishers of market or bazaar guides could provide a different picture of the issue.

4. Analysing the role played by the other stakeholders like members of boards of study, education officers, heads of institutions, principals and senior teachers in the selection and prescription of textbooks.

5. The methods publishers adopt to get their books prescribed in a highly competitive and minuscule market.

6. Analyse a sample of textbooks in the market and do a comparative study.

5.6. Conclusion

Learning materials and particularly textbooks have long been recognised as a major determinant of the quality of education in all countries. Research has shown that investment in learning materials produces a greater impact on educational quality than almost any other factor. It is not surprising therefore to discover that most educational projects, and especially those of the World Bank, have a significant component devoted to learning materials. The quality of the learning materials is of the greatest importance and the more the
materials match the educational and cultural context in which they are to be used, the greater should be the increase in learning that takes place. There is however a dilemma in materials production which arises from the interests of the curriculum developers on the one hand and publishers on the other. The resolution of conflict in these interests will influence the quality of the learning materials produced (ioe.ac.uk/curricstud/shorts/actlem/about.htm).

Apart from a few sparks of innovation now and then, the English textbook has remained quite static in its development. And what percentage of innovation actually reaches the grassroots level is worth pondering over. If large-scale revision and restructuring of the language textbook is to take place two people have to commit their energies — the author and the publisher. This includes involving all the stakeholders — policy and decision-makers, editors, teachers and learners in a process of creative collaboration to develop materials, which include the latest innovations of our time. And to make English teaching and learning a motivating, enriching and effective experience for both teachers and learners, language teaching materials should offer users a wide variety of fresh, innovative language learning materials in print, audio CD/CD-ROM, video and web-based formats. And, more importantly, making these materials accessible to all strata of learners must be the larger moral goal.
In the author-publisher interface there are no winners or losers. Both work towards a common goal — second language acquisition of the learner. The best way to achieve this is through co-operation, avoidance of conflict and minimizing unhealthy compromise. Good publishers and committed authors have always realized this and produced textbooks that have stood the test of time.