**3c Page 39 READING TEXT**

Upper Intermediate Student’s Book

Life

One size doesn’t fit all

Even if the term ‘appropriate technology’ is a relatively new one, the concept certainly isn’t. In the 1930s Mahatma Gandhi claimed that the advanced technology used by western industrialised nations did not represent the right route to progress for his homeland, India. His favourite machines were the sewing machine, a device invented ‘out of love’, he said, and the bicycle, a means of transport that he used all his life. He wanted the poor villagers of India to use technology in a way that empowered them and helped them to become self-reliant.

This was also the philosophy promoted by E.F. Schumacher in his famous book *Small is Beautiful*, published in the 1970s, which called for ‘intermediate technology’ solutions. Do not start with technology and see what it can do for people, he argued. Instead, ‘find out what people are doing and then help them to do it better’. According to Schumacher, it did not matter whether the technological answers to people’s needs were simple or sophisticated. What was important was that solutions were long-term, practical and above all firmly in the hands of the people who used them.

More recently the term ‘appropriate technology’ has come to mean not just technology which is suited to the needs and capabilities of the user, but technology that takes particular account of environmental, ethical and cultural considerations. That is clearly a much more difficult thing to achieve. Often it is found in rural communities in developing or less industrialised countries. For example, solar-powered lamps that bring light to areas with no electricity and water purifiers that work simply by the action of sucking through a straw. But the principle of appropriate technology does not only apply to developing countries. It also has its place in the developed world.

For example, a Swedish state-owned company, Jernhuset, has found a way to harness the energy produced by the 250,000 bodies rushing through Stockholm’s central train station each day. The body heat is absorbed by the building’s ventilation system, then used to warm up water that is pumped through pipes over to the new office building nearby. It’s old technology – a system of pipes, water and pumps – but used in a new way. It is expected to bring down central heating costs in the building by up to twenty per cent.

Wherever it is deployed, there is no guarantee, however, that so-called ‘appropriate technology’ will in fact be appropriate. After some visiting engineers observed how labour-intensive and slow it was for the women of a Guatemalan village to shell corn by hand, they designed a simple mechanical device to do the job more quickly. The new device certainly saved time, but after a few weeks the women returned to the old manual method. Why? Because they valued the time they spent hand-shelling: it enabled them to chat and exchange news with each other.

In another case, in Malawi, a local entrepreneur was encouraged to manufacture super-efficient wood-burning stoves under licence to sell to local villagers. Burning wood in a traditional open fire, which is a common method of cooking food in the developing world, is responsible for 10–20% of all global CO2 emissions, so this seemed to be an excellent scheme. However the local entrepreneur was so successful that he went out and bought himself a whole fleet of gas-guzzling cars. ‘We haven’t worked out the CO2 implications of that yet,’ said a spokesman from the organisation that promoted the scheme.

Life