Thinking Outside The Teacher's Box

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Introduction

The term 'thinking outside the box' is generally associated with innovation and problem solving in business and management. Often, the phrase is used by higher-level management when it is felt that the quality of solutions or ideas is below standard or that solutions are not being found to ongoing problems. It also comes from people working in teams who feel that the contribution of others is not helping to find new and original solutions to the challenges they face. These feelings both stem from and lead to frustration, which in itself is difficult to deal with. The notion 'thinking outside the box' is far more than just another management cliche.

Inside the box

All educators feel trapped from time to time. This feeling is an inevitable consequence of working within an institution and the realisation that institutionalisation does not necessarily equate with safety or security, and certainly not with progress. A teacher's career moves in waves or a series of plateaux interspersed with periods of stagnation which are sometimes interpreted as stability.

Thinking inside the box means accepting the status quo as defined by the natures of both the profession and the institution. Even highly creative teachers can become both stale and frustrated. The resulting apathy and indifference can turn an innovator into an in-the-box thinker. Teachers who work within conservative systems which are slow to change, who suffer from top-down management structures and lack of reward, and who have reached an apparent career plateau are particularly susceptible to a loss of creativity and drive. We have all resorted to defensive tactics ('I can't do that in my classroom') in order to preserve the status quo. Managers and administrators are as guilty as teachers, often perceiving change as a threat to their positions. Self-preservation and perpetuation rather than risk-taking become the name of the game.

In-the-box thinkers are easily recognised by an inability to place value on ideas and to devote time and effort to turning immediate solutions into good long-term solutions, often manifest in a permanent state of crisis management. There is an innate resistance to the notion that mediocrity can be turned into excellence. In-the-box thinkers are particularly skilled at killing ideas and creativity with a 'that'll never work' or 'it's too risky' attitude, which inevitably drains the enthusiasm and passion of innovative thinkers on the same team. In-the-box thinkers also believe that every problem needs only one solution. The question becomes 'what's the answer?' rather than 'what are the potential solutions?' Alternatives tend to cause complications and apparent time wasting.

Outside the box

Thinking outside the box may best be summarised by the assertion 'When you think outside the box, the box goes away.'

Thinking outside the box is *not* synonymous with lateral thinking, the De Bono school of alternative explanation, or any of the currently fashionable models of management decision making, which are frameworks for analysis, planning and projection rather than alternative problem-solving psychologies. However, professionals who adopt or experiment with thought and logic processes are at least aware that they are inside the box and need to get out. Very often, out-of-the box thinking is the enforced product of leadership strategies, which make life in the old box so uncomfortable that, getting out is the only option. Progress therefore lies in the hands of those willing and able to do so.

For many, the problem with outside-the-box thinking is that it involves the recognition and management of emotions as well as the more obvious attributes of creativity, mental agility and even courage. Thinking outside the box is not easy since it involves leaving the psychological comfort zone, becoming open to new ways of seeing the world, and being willing to explore. It involves the discarding of character armour and a personal 'glasnost'. Emotional management requires the ability to balance powerful lower frequency emotions such as fear and anger with subtler high frequency emotions. The product of emotional balance should produce the acceptance of notions such as patience, nurturing and support as components of an overall attitude towards ideas and solutions. Outside-the-box thinking thus involves a number of different intelligences including emotional intelligence. Action is as important as thought in that the out-of-the-box thinkers, of necessity, put into practice some or all of the following emotionally discomforting strategies:

- Questioning the status quo
- Breaking free of routine
- Stepping out of their shoes
- Challenging assumptions
- Solving problems creatively
- Reframing questions
- Managing creativity
- Turning failure into opportunity

On an individual level, implementing these strategies requires personal attributes that include:

- Willingness to take new perspectives on day-to-day work.
- Openness to doing different things and to doing things differently.
- Focusing on the value of finding new ideas and acting on them.
- Striving to create value in new ways.
- Listening to others.
- Encouraging, supporting and respecting others when they come up with new ideas.

Paradigm Crises

For many, the catalyst for the shift from in-the-box to out-of-the-box thinking is a paradigm crisis - the realisation that the box is self-imposed rather than external and that there is an immediate need to remove perceptual and cognitive limitations imposed by ones own knowledge structures. Under these circumstances, the willingness to discard old, familiar and comfortable paradigms is fundamental to reaching outside the box in order to make progress. Our existing paradigms are both external and internal, shared and individual. They are our model of the world, and constitute our personal sense of order. The crisis occurs when we have to challenge or reformulate that sense of order, an action which has the potential to create a personal chaos and a sense of total insecurity. The crisis is only over when a balance between order and chaos is achieved, leading to a series of new or improved abilities:

- Improvising within a given structure
- Balancing order and creative disorganisation.
- Creating and guiding an innovation structure
- Channelling improvisation

The ability to deal with a personal paradigm crisis involves all five major characteristics of emotional intelligence:

- Self-awareness - knowing, recognising and discriminating between your emotions.
- Mood management - managing feelings and reacting appropriately to situations.
- Self-motivation - despite feelings of self-doubt, inertia, and impulsiveness.
- Empathy - recognising feelings in others and relating to their verbal and nonverbal cues.
- Managing relationships - handling interpersonal interaction, conflict and negotiation.

The link between what may be seen as personality-management and education comes from research in brain-based learning which suggests that emotional intelligence is fundamental to effective learning and that the critical element for a learner's success is an understanding of how to learn. Understanding how to learn involves deeper skills than a mastery of study skills, the key components of this understanding being identified as:

- Emotional stability
- Confidence
- Curiosity
- Intentionality
- Self-control
- Relatedness
- Capacity to communicate
- Ability to cooperate

Emotional intelligence, emotional health and an understanding of the learning process are clearly related. We might conclude, therefore, that a good learner is able to think outside the box, and that since teachers are, by definition, also learners, that good teachers are out-of-the-box thinkers.

Schools of thought in ELT

It is clear that, perhaps because of its loose (and sometimes questionable) professional structure, current ELT practice is the product of a combination of in-the-box and out-of-the box thinking. An example of this is the integrated syllabus which typifies many current course books and is the product of attempts to integrate language with skills, content with language, and old with new methodologies.
ELT methodology has plateaued over the last decade, resulting in out-of-the-box thinking by those who are bored, who need an alternative and wish to contribute to progress, and those who are required to adjust to imposed change or need to make a living out of new ideas. Five main strains of thinking have emerged as a result.

Alternative
Alternative thinking has challenged the paradigms associated with both language and lesson structure and format. The lexical approach and task-based learning are products such paradigmatic confrontations, as are considerations of other aspects of communication such as paralinguistics which need to be taught, like phonology, alongside structures, lexis and skills. As is often the case, however, those who challenge the norm sit on the fringes with only ardent devotees becoming full practitioners, the mainstream absorbing manageable portions of new methodologies into the blandness that is eclecticism.

Interdisciplinary
Interdisciplinary thinkers recognise that the way forward in ELT may not lie within ELT itself, and is a good example of how thinking outside the box often leads us to invade other people's boxes. Brain-based learning and its derivatives such as multiple intelligences, VAK and NLP are founded in neurology and neuropsychology, while recent focuses on critical thinking, higher order thinking skills are based on existing theory regarding internalisation and externalisation processes in learning. Interdisciplinary thinking overlaps with globalism in the area of cross-curricular teaching, manifest in the diverse and ever increasing number of content and language integrated learning projects being carried out worldwide.

Retro
The 'retro' school of thought delves into the psychology of learning, particularly the cognitive and constructivist perspectives, and has incorporated terms such as collaborative learning, generative learning, problem-based learning, discovery learning and active learning into ELT terminology. Those teachers old enough to remember the Nuffield Science Project of the 1960s will know that this is nothing new. Nevertheless, education has a past which lies outside the current box. Meanwhile, there has been renewed interest in some of the earlier fringe methodologies such as suggestopedia, a general acceptance of translation as a teaching tool, and a revival of interest in the teaching of grammar, though these may been considered retrograde steps rather than out-of-the-box progressions.

Global
The globalists look to the macro scale trends that are likely to dictate our futures. Uppermost of these is probably Europeanisation and the Council of Europe's vision of a multilingual Europe, the 4Cs Curriculum and standardisation projects such as the Common European Framework. The effects of these incentives are seen in developments in testing, but also in a variety of content and language integrated learning projects that may ultimately change the face of school and university based language teaching completely. Other issues include the shift towards ESL rather than EFL approaches brought about by the need for literacy amongst refugee and immigrant populations, and the lack of both an interface and irregular professional standards in and between the state and private ELT sectors. Such inconsistency is

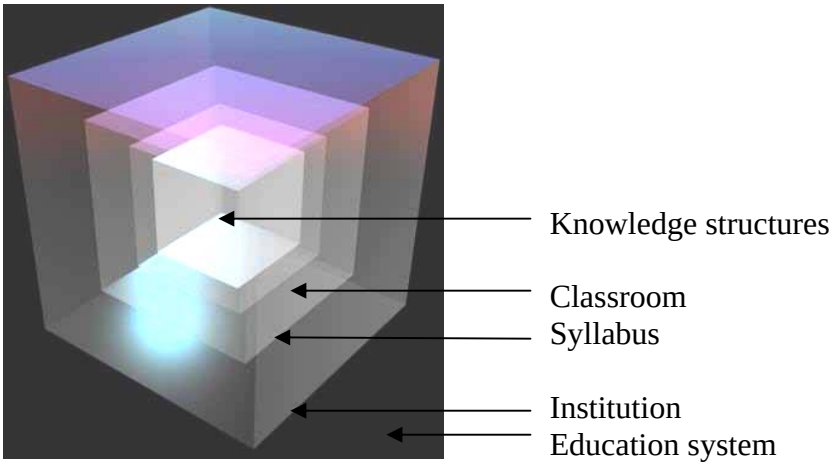
only beginning to be addressed by organisations such as EAQUALS in Europe and TESOL Law in the United States.

Reformist

The reformists take a broader perspective on education. Reforms in subject matter standards, curriculum content, and methodology increasingly aspire toward more ambitious student outcomes such as 'authentic achievement', which requires a fundamental change in the nature of students' intellectual tasks and teacher-student interaction. These reforms constitute a departure from existing views of curriculum, from textbook-centred and rote learning, and from knowledge-based testing. They demand a greater facility among teachers for integrating content, and for organising students' opportunities to learn. The Council of Europe's European Framework for Languages encapsulates this philosophy. However, such reforms are often presented at a time when teachers are also being asked to consider their approaches as prescribed by new state curricula, standardised testing systems, university entrance requirements, textbook design and so on. Meanwhile, reforms aimed at "critical thinking" are diametrically opposed to basic skill reforms that are part of many national curricula. Other areas of reform include the provision of equal opportunity for learning among an increasingly diverse student body, and the professionalisation of teaching.

What is perhaps common to all these schools of thought is that if change is to be effected, it cannot be done well piecemeal, or successfully if attempted only in isolated classrooms. Change aspires to the transformation of whole systems into educationally and emotionally rich communities of learners. This suggests quite a different organisation of learning opportunity than one that supplies teachers with measured increments in knowledge and skill (methodology) from a known pool of apparently effective classroom practices.

Reflections on the teacher's box



The teacher's box is multi-layered, offering many constraints and frustrations. Many ELT practitioners prefer to discard the outer, institutional layers in order to confront the issues posed by their teaching or training environment and their existing knowledge structures. These practitioners are often found working freelance or having loose attachments to institutions, thus gaining the freedom to explore personal and professional development and the opportunity to indulge in teaching, training, writing and consultancy in order to add

variety to their experience. The opportunity cost to these professionals lies in the loss of the protection that some good institutions offer, the lack of an imposed routine and the consequent need for constant self-motivation.
The majority of teachers are constrained by their own existing knowledge structures, working within the boundaries of limited, imposed methodologies and safe within those boundaries providing that their colleagues are working in the same way and that the institution is satisfied with their results. Nevertheless, the resulting lack of direction and progress often leads to dissatisfaction and boredom, and to an institution which is typified by competition, criticism and complaint, the complete antithesis, in fact, of 'the learning institution.' Whilst teachers thus impose their own restrictions, there are external factors to which they are required to respond.

The system
'The system' is, of course, both the ultimate excuse and the universal panacea. When blame is to be apportioned, often the standard response is 'it's nobody's fault; it's the system.' However, the education system is largely made up of people who are, or who have been, teachers themselves. As a whole or as a collection of individuals, the system is bound by social, political and economic constraints together with elements of tradition. Responses to external pressure range from inertia to radical reformism, both of which pose problems for the teacher. Inertia within a system or an institution challenges the individual teacher to look elsewhere for self and professional development, though this in itself may stimulate inter-regional and international exchange via new technological vehicles. Reforms, both singly or in combination, present complex challenges to teachers as individuals and as members of a wider professional community. The test of a teacher's willingness to develop depends on their capacity to engage in the kinds of study, investigation, and experimentation required to understand and undertake multiple challenges and to grasp the relationships among them.

The institution
Teachers are confronted by a formidable range of institutional level factors that limit their scope for responding to their own and their learners' wants and needs. Immediate constraints include:

- Competing school priorities and initiatives. Limited preparation time as a consequence of new demands on their time.
- Internal and external examination and coursework requirements.
- Teachers' other responsibilities such as administrative duties.
- Sharing responsibility for classes with another teacher.

Despite teachers' perceived educational values, institutional and subject constraints, constraints inherent in the current classroom teaching system, together with increasing demands being made on teachers in their classrooms, not least in the form of external prescriptions for the curriculum or for examination and testing requirements, make it unlikely that teachers will depart from their current classroom practice. Demands on teachers are implemented by administrators and managers who are prone to respond to pressures from higher authorities rather than the wants and needs of teachers, while in many cultures, teachers suffer from top-down management structures and managers who are by nature, experience and training, inappropriate to their positions. In the private sector, where money and education meet only at the point of quality, there remains a limited realisation that investment includes the ongoing development and enrichment of the labour force.

The curriculum/syllabus

Teachers' and learners' perceptions of what is possible in a subject area do not always conform to the skills and competencies listed in curriculum prescriptions. This is often evident in the tension arising from student's requests to engage with language more expressively on the one hand and their teacher's need to allocate classroom time to written work with a focus on formal grammar and lexis. Despite the fact that the language classroom offers many opportunities for talking about teaching and learning, teachers tend to report that the prospects for developing a more consultative approach are significantly diminished by increasing demands for improved performance on attainment tests. Time, which could most profitably be spent gaining feedback on tasks or even on doing tasks themselves, is often spent extending knowledge, sometimes of intricate and marginal structures and lexis that are never activated, particularly in monolingual situations. Regular attainment testing also imposes constraints in terms of time, inflexibility, and adherence to a syllabus, which is designed to be testable, and often linked to prescribed materials.

The classroom

The classroom is the most obvious teacher's box, and rather than escape from it, possibly the best tactic is to make it ones own by judicious use of the two dimensional and three dimensional spaces it offers together with the furnishings, teaching aids and equipment available. The walls of the classroom are one of the best metaphors for the teacher's box. These walls may be seen as threefold, and equally applicable to learners, teachers, and the differences between them:

Psychological	Socio-psychological	Socio-physical
Inner conflicts/confidence	Economic/cultural	Smells/sounds/sights
Family arguments/pressures	differences	Furniture/spaces
Money/health/time problems	Gender balance/issues	School rules & regulations
Emotions/experiences/ fears	Teacher's & learners'	Motivation/purpose/goals
Personal successes/failures	mannerisms/methods	Masks/insincerity/trust
Political/religious pressures	Physical	Classroom language
	appearance/popularity	

These walls are essentially about insecurity and fear of losing control from the teacher's point of view, and about insecurity and fear of accepting responsibility from the learners' angle. Breaking down the walls involves commitment to a positive learning environment typified by empathy, sensitivity, honesty, patience, motivation, variety, tolerance, support and other attitudinal factors well documented by adherents to humanistic language teaching. The assured teacher has the confidence to tell the learners what they are doing and why they are doing it. The assured learner has the right to ask the question 'why?' without fear of reproach or repercussion.

Classrooms contain learners, and far from being a constraint, the learners often provide the motivation for the teacher to find new and more effective ways of teaching and facilitating learning. Whether teaching is geared towards a prescribed syllabus or an attainment test, it also provides a bridge to the outside world and life after the classroom. Hence, whatever the immediate goal, one step out of the box is to strive for learner autonomy. It has been argued that teacher autonomy is a precondition for learner autonomy, but at best the two go hand in hand. A case in point might be that of materials preparation:

- The teacher uses materials from a book.
- The teacher uses tried and tested materials provided by a trainer.
- The teacher uses materials he/she has prepared him/herself.

- The teacher and the learners prepare materials together.

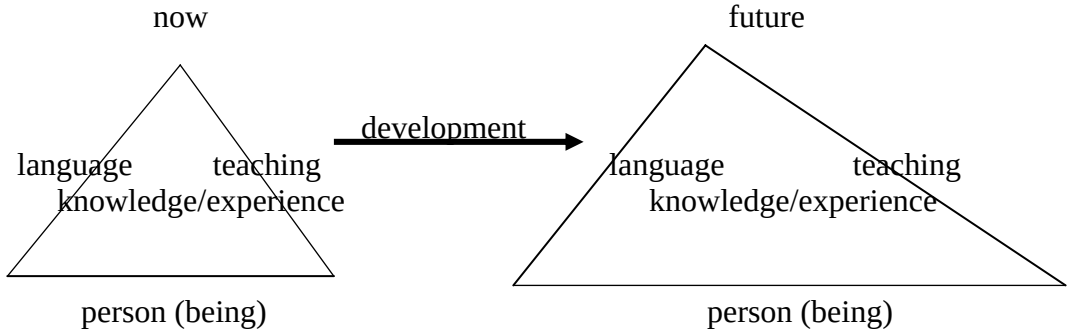
The benefits of personalisation and student generated materials and activities are well known; yet the safety and security of the tried and tested, albeit for a global market, leads to an inertia which is hard to overcome. The sight of a teacher pacing the classroom holding on to a coursebook like a lifebelt is a common sight, symptomatic of the fear of letting go.

Knowledge structures

The inner box of existing knowledge structures is, for most teachers, the most difficult to reach outside since it inevitably includes not only training and experience but also knowledge of the self. The self and the teaching self are not the same thing, whether one believes that the teaching personality is a genetic trait or not, since the teaching self comprises elements of the three currently accepted models of teacher development: craft, science and reflective. One would hope that on the developmental curve, experience and acquired knowledge gradually make way for reflection, though given that language teaching is prone to methodological and technological innovation, learning continues for those who wish to keep pace. The danger lies in the over reliance on the craft model, particularly in cultures in which teachers are seen as role models to be emulated. In such situations, whatever training and development is implemented, it is often the case that teachers revert to the models provided by their own teachers, assuming, rightly or wrongly, that this will bring them the same status and esteem.

Ways out of the box

Ways out of the teacher's box might be seen as the interrelationship between self-development (professional development) and development of the self (personal development):



Self-development

Self-development is seen here as professional development (teacher education), which may be imposed or self-actuated, individual or collective, face-to-face or by distance learning. Richards and Farrell have listed ten conventional modes of teacher education:

- workshops
- self monitoring
- teacher support groups
- keeping a journal
- peer observation
- teaching portfolios
- case studies
- peer coaching
- team teaching
- action research

What is interesting about the list of ten is that nearly all are self-actuating, may be extended collectively under the banner of collegial development, and require only facilitation by a teacher educator and co-operation from the institution. What the list assumes, what the terms 'teacher education' and 'teacher development' assume, and indeed what most teachers assume, is that the teachers already know how to teach. There is little prescribed training or retraining in such forms as seminars, short courses, INSET, higher-level qualifications or more formal ongoing observation and feedback.

Perhaps what the list represents is the desirable end of the development continuum at which teachers are willing to manage their own development, requiring only the tools and procedures from trainers or resource materials. Alternatively, development may be seen as two parallel continua, one consisting of ongoing training, the other moving towards autonomy. Perhaps the most important consideration is the distinction between what is imposed and undesirable, what is imposed but desirable, and what is self-actuated.

Outside the constraints of imposition and the immediate institution, lies the notion of distance and virtual teaching learning and training. The effect of technology in overcoming the constraints of distance and geographic isolation are undeniable, but the effectiveness of distance learning has yet to be measured. ICT (Information and Communications Technologies) is about, and only about, information and communication. Teachers working in remote areas, in inward-looking institutions, or in isolation may benefit from the rich sources of information available and the speed communication. Relationships may be formed, collegial interaction may tale place, research may be carried out and inter-institutional bonds may be fostered. ICT is a tool for community building, not necessarily learning, and certainly not teaching or training, where teaching is defined as something more than the diffusion of information and the facilitation of learning through task-setting.

The bridge between self development and development of the self is more than adequately represented by reflective practice, probably the most subjective of modes of teacher education, but in many ways the most vital, since reflection is central to the current models of teacher development and to teachers' ongoing appraisal of their work. The subjectivity originates in a lack of definition of reflection, though most descriptions of the process are based on four variables:

- The moment of reflection
- The content of reflection
- The mode and speed of reflection
- The level of reflection

Reflection is a personal process, and the choice of reflective practice much dependent on the individual. Even so, reflection needs to be guided, facilitated and contextualised. Suggestions for circumstances conducive to reflection are:

- Participating in language learning experiences. Teachers are also learners, and need to be put in the position of the learner in order to maintain contact with the learning process and the range of learner mentalities and styles.
- Remembering past experiences. All teachers possess experience of learning which can be applied to current situations.
- Carrying out action research or exploratory teaching. Some teachers prefer more scientific means of evaluating their teaching and the consequent learning outcomes.

- Collaboration. Reflection need not be a solitary activity. It is often best done with colleagues and through counselling and observation and feedback from peers and mentors. Feedback from learners is also an invaluable aid to reflection. E-mail, chat rooms and web logs may assist distance collaboration.

Reflection is by nature a dynamic process. It is a thinking process, but not a passive activity, and cannot be imposed at the push of a button. Reflection may lead to the writing of lesson evaluations, research projects or teacher diaries, involving a variety of skills which are shared by learners and teachers. Although the definition of reflective practice may be prone to individualisation, the reflective teacher is easily identified:
'*The teacher is a reflective practitioner who continually evaluates the effects of her/his choices and actions on others (students, parents, and other professionals in the learning community) and who actively seeks out opportunities to grow professionally.'* (College of St. Scholastica, Duluth.)
Reflection, then, is both process and product of teacher education and development.

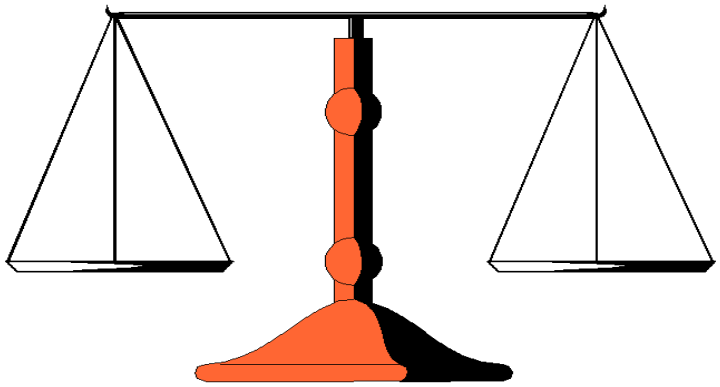
Development of the self
The first step out of the box for many teachers is the development of the confidence as well as the expertise to make informed decisions about their own teaching and learning and to work independently within a given structure. This may involve overcoming constraints such as the coursebook and rigid lesson frameworks such as PPP, and working towards concepts such as preparation and long-term timetabling rather than lesson planning. Later on, constraints imposed by a methodology or approach may be discarded by a move towards or even beyond informed eclecticism. The initial obstacles and the constraint of time might be dealt with by asking some simple questions regarding the pragmatics of the teacher's current mode of practice:

- how much can be done well in the time available?
- what can be left out?
- what can be amalgamated?
- what can be done later?
- what they can do themselves?
- what's left?
- what's the logical order?
- who's going to do what?
- how can we make it interesting, motivating and relevant?

Teachers wishing to move towards autonomy, flexibility and efficient use of time might then also consider the following areas as focuses for improvement:

Before teaching	While teaching	Between teaching
• Maintaining interest, motivation and flow. • Establishing responsibilities - who does what in the classroom. • Prioritising – what and what not to teach, in what order and how to apportion time.	• Integration – language and skills • Testing or teaching – limiting time spent on testing and maximising teching opportunities • Learner training.	• Study skills and self access. • Pre and post tasks. • Mentoring and counselling

Teachers preferring to make gradual changes might prefer to use the concept of balance as a vehicle for analysing their classroom practice and as an agent for change:

Input		Output
Language		Skills
Fluency		Accuracy
Teacher focus		Student focus
Lockstep		Pairs & groups
Receptive		Productive
Guided		Less guided
Standing.....		Sitting.....

Such analysis and decision making is very much part of the development of the teaching self rather than the persona or ego, but it may take personal development to initiate the confidence required to challenge the status quo. For this, the teacher may need to reach outside existing experience into fields such as NLP

NLP and related subjects with their roots in neurology and psychology have their sceptics, but in fact are not far removed from current language learning trends, linking well to brain-based learning, visual, auditory and kinaesthetic learning styles, and multiple intelligences. NLP is also teacher-friendly in that it offers the opportunity to link personal development to the classroom via learner development and consciousness raining activities. Although pure NLP is about the way the brain works and how the brain can be trained for the purpose of betterment (which is often what teachers want), NLP is compatible with current classroom practice in that it is about recognising patterns and is concerned with process rather than product. Furthermore, NLP provides a model of how we communicate with ourselves and each other. Recognition of concepts such as learning through the senses, leading and pacing, creating positive states, mirroring, and the modelling of good practice can only reflect well both on the individual and on teaching, particularly in interpersonal areas such as creating rapport and establishing and maintaining interest, motivation and flow.

Development of the self involves not only motivation and an awareness of the tools available, but also a sense of direction. Teachers as well as learners often require an existing conceptual framework within which to question, prioritise and initiate action. To this end, frameworks for prioritising wants and needs exist from the simplistic to the complex, depending on the teacher's take-off point. As a starting point, perhaps we all need to identify where we currently lie on the cline identified in Theory X and Theory Y (adapted from Douglas McGregor):

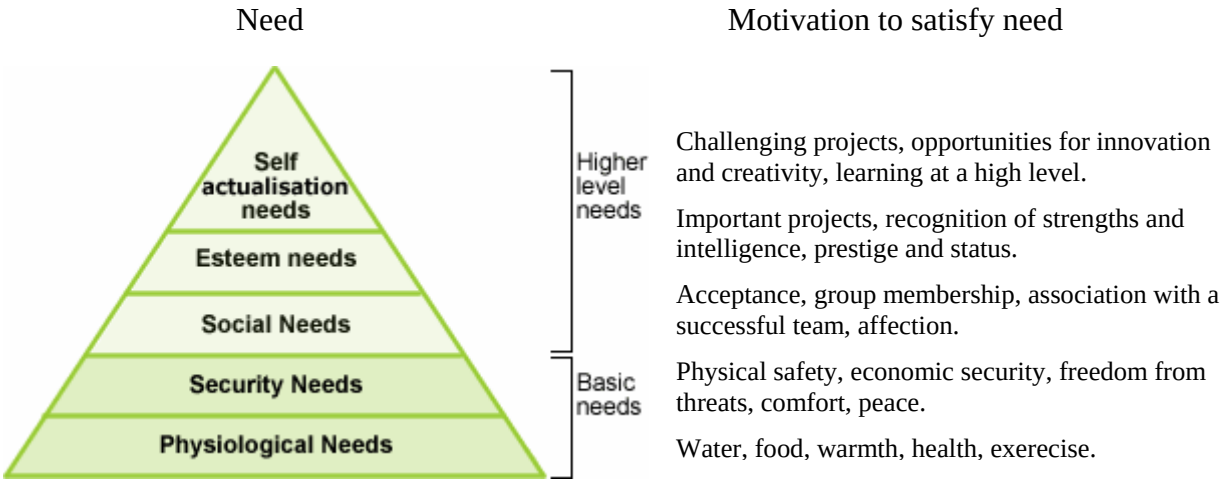
Theory X Assumptions:

- People inherently dislike work.
  People must be coerced or controlled to do work to achieve objectives.
  People prefer to be directed.

Theory Y Assumptions:

- People view work as being as natural as play and rest.
  People will exercise self-direction and -control towards achieving objectives they are committed to.
  People learn to accept and seek responsibility.

Having identified our position on what might be synonymous with the progression from dependence to autonomy, we then need a framework within which to look at the degree of satisfaction we obtain from our profession as part of our lives. Maslow's Hierarchy not only provides a stratification of needs, but also suggests what the institution and the self might provide.



Maslow's Hierarchy (simplified)

Maslow, of course, as a humanist, believed that people continually strive for betterment and the realisation of their potential. For many, the attainment of social needs and/or self-esteem may be enough, but inevitably a paradigm crisis will be encountered at the interface between one level of the hierarchy and another at some point in time. Maslow writes the following of self-actualising people:

- They embrace rather than avoid the facts and realities of the world.
- They are spontaneous.
- They are creative.
- They are interested in solving problems, often the problems of others.
- They feel close to other people, and generally appreciate life.
- They have a system of morality that is fully internalised and independent of external authority.
- They judge others without prejudice, in an objective way.

Challenging projects, opportunities for innovation and creativity and learning at a high level which Maslow recommends to fulfil the needs of the self-actualiser may seemingly be beyond the immediate grasp of many teachers, yet may be available outside the institutional box. Interestingly, the characteristics of self-actualising people might best fit the good educational manager. Maslow's list of motivational factors might also serve as a good checklist for institutions to follow when considering what they might reasonably provide for their employees, and for teachers to follow when considering bottom-up appraisals of their institutions. Maslow lived well before his time in terms of thinking outside the box, and had much to say which is deeply relevant to contemporary learners, teachers and institutions:

- We should teach people to be *authentic.*
- We should teach people to *think beyond their cultural conditioning.*

- We should teach people that a degree of *controls is essential,* and complete disregard for rules is bad.
- We should teach people to spend less time on trifling problems and *get to grips with the serious problems in life.*
- We should teach people to be *good choosers.*

A more recent, and perhaps more appropriate framework for teachers to appraise change, since it deals with overcoming constraints rather than needs, is the TOC (Theory of Constraints) model, borrowed from management theory. TOC and its Thinking Processes involve overcoming resistance to change, the framework being equally suited to a top down challenge to the teacher, a bottom up challenge to the administration, or a self imposed response to a paradigm crisis. The essence of TOC is that in order to move forward, an individual needs to identify and overcome constraints. To this end, TOC may be seen as a complement rather than an alternative to the Maslow model. TOC identifies six layers of resistance to change, stated in simple terms:

Layer 0 "we/I/you don't have a problem."
Layer 1 "you don't understand my/our problem(s)."
Layer 2 "we don't agree/I can't decide on the direction of the solution."
Layer 3 "the solution can't possibly produce the level of results you say/I think it can."
Layer 4 "that solution is going to cause some bad things to happen."
Layer 5 "there are some significant obstacles that prevent the implementation."
Layer 6 unverbalised fear.

Six 'Thinking Processes', each with a primary independent use, are applied to overcome these layers of resistance. Basically, the Thinking Processes involve the rigorous application of cause-effect logic to solve a problem, and are used together to answer three essential questions, which are at the core of TOC, or any problem-solving framework:

1. What to change?
2. Change to what?
3. How to implement the change?

Autonomy

For some time, there has been much talk of teacher empowerment, involving the activation of the teacher's obvious right to be involved in and influence decisions about the teaching and learning process at all levels. This concept, with its socio-political overtones, seems to have been replaced by the more sensible idea of teacher autonomy, autonomous teachers having not only much in parallel with autonomous learners, but also the confidence, ability and mechanisms with which to empower themselves to an influential degree.

Teacher autonomy may have many meanings, but what is clear is that if learner autonomy is about learners *taking control,* then teacher autonomy is about teachers *letting go*. In order to achieve this, the teacher requires the capacity and willingness for:

- Self-directed professional *action*: the sense of having a strong sense of personal responsibility for their teaching, engaging in continuous reflection and analysis, and exercising affective and cognitive control of the teaching process.
- Self-directed professional *development*: an awareness of why, when, where and how pedagogical skills can be acquired.

However, autonomy implies freedom from control by others over both professional action and development. In both the UK and the United States, evidence of teacher autonomy has been declining over the last decade in the face of imposed and uniform staff development programmes based on research on effective teaching, and classroom observations which have become an integral part of imposed teacher evaluations. It is at this point of the evolution of the system, the profession and the institution that the necessary distinction between imposed training and self-directed development has become blurred. Under these circumstances, perhaps a more pragmatic and achievable view of autonomy might include:

- negotiation skills
- institutional knowledge required to address constraints on teaching and learning.
- willingness to confront institutional barriers in socially appropriate ways in order to turn constraints into opportunities for change.
- readiness to engage in lifelong learning to the best of an individual's capacity.
- reflection on the teaching process and environment
- commitment to promoting learner autonomy.

Autonomy is developed through observation, reflection, thoughtful consideration, understanding, experience, and the informed evaluation of alternatives. In many ways it is synonymous with professionalism. Certainly the absence of coercion does not automatically result in autonomy, nor is choice always autonomous. We often make choices because we desire comfort, safety, repetition and familiarity, or because we fear punishment, loss or the unknown. Choices are also made on the basis of unconscious needs, habits, desires, or unthinking situational responses. Autonomy also means the right to make poor choices but as teachers, our primary concern is how our students are responding to our choices and learning to make their own.

Starting Points for Reading

Council of Europe. *A Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*
http://www.culture2.coe.int/portfolio/documents_intro/common_framework.html
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Maslow, A. *Motivation and Personality (3rd edition).* HarperCollins. 1987
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Nuffield Foundation. *Languages: The Next Generation*
http://languages.nuffieldfoundation.org/languages/home/
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Richards J.C. & Farrell T.S.C. *Professional Development For Language Teachers.* Cambridge University Press, 2005
Baker,J. & Rinvolucri , M. *Unlocking Self-expression through NLP*. Delta Publishing, 2005
Sinclair, B. I. McGrath and T. Lamb (eds.) *Learner Autonomy, Teacher Autonomy: Future Directions*. Longman., 2000

The Web

Teachers interested in taking a look outside the box might like to look not only at Humanising Language Teaching: www.hltmag.co.uk , but also at:

European Association for Quality Language Services (EAQUALS): www.eaquals.org
Forum for Across the Curriculum Teaching: www.factworld.info/
Journal of the Imagination in Language Learning and Teaching:
http://www.njcu.edu/cill/journal-index.html
Radical Pedagogy: http://radicalpedagogy.icaap.org/
Society for Effective Affective Learning: www.seal.org.uk
TESOL Law Journal: http://www.tesol-law.com/

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