

LANGUAGE TEACHING: STATE OF THE ART

By

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ABSTRACT

In its life-time, the profession of language teaching has undergone many changes. Early attempts at language teaching almost entirely lacked a theory base. In the 20th century, however, two sets of language teaching methods emerged; the first set borrowed theories from psychology, linguistics, and sociolinguistics whereas the second set was based on individual philosophies of method developers. Late in the twentieth century, an attempt on the part of some pedagogists to evaluate the different methods of language teaching resulted in the validity of language teaching methods being called into question. As a result, the question of how the profession of language pedagogy should be approached called into attention such notions as teacher plausibility, autonomy, and reflectivity as well as learner plausibility and autonomy. The result of such an expanded perspective was the introduction of effective and reflective teaching ideologies of the seventies and eighties. In 1994, an attempt at finding an alternative to methods instead of an alternative method culminated in the introduction of the post method era. The present paper tries to provide the reader with a brief account of these trends.

Keywords: Method, Reflective Teaching, Effective Teaching, Post-method Condition, Language Teaching, Methodology, Language Pedagogy.

INTRODUCTION

A long time ago, before the birth of Jesus Christ, a number of outstanding people started to teach different sciences including language. Perhaps the famous Chinese philosopher, Confucius (551-479 BC) can be called the father of teaching. From the time of Confucius up to the early years of the twentieth century, language teaching lingered on uninformed by any scientifically-established learning theory. With the upsurge of interest in psychology, however, learning theories proposed by psychologists began to inform any teaching practice. As a result, language teaching practices were ever more increasingly based on psychological learning theories.

The first steps towards making language teaching scientific were taken in the twentieth century. In the first half of the twentieth century, the proposal of the notion of method shed new lights on the processes of language teaching (called methods). Structural syllabuses were designed and implemented in this profession. Later in the twentieth century, however, new psychological and linguistic findings resulted in an upsurge of interest in notional syllabuses; a move away from the notion of method led to

considerations beyond language teaching methods. These considerations gave birth to three issues: effective teaching, reflective teaching, and the post-method condition.

1. The Method Era

As one of the key figures in the field of language pedagogy, Mackey (1950) wrote an article entitled "The meaning of method." In this article, he draws on the most important problem in the field of language teaching, and asserts that after centuries of language teaching, no systematic reference to this body of knowledge exists. The problem, he argues is that much of the field of language method has become a matter of opinion rather than of fact.

In an attempt to look at method sensibly, Mackey sets out to specify a number of features for any method. According to Mackey (1950), all teaching, whether good or bad, should include some sort of selection, some gradation, and presentation. Selection is vital for the fact that it is impossible to teach the whole of a field of knowledge; gradation should be undertaken because it is impossible to teach all the selected materials at once; presentation makes it possible to communicate concepts

interpersonally.

Before deciding what to select, grade, and present, one should necessarily know something about the material. This has to do with the source from which we select. In the case of language teaching, the source of selection, according to Mackey, is nothing but the linguistic system. As such, an analysis of this system seems inevitable. However, as soon as we begin to analyze a language, we realize that it is not a single system but a multitude of systems. Mackey summarizes these systems into four categories: the system of sounds (or phonology), the system of forms (or morphology), the system of structures (or syntax), and the system of meaning (or semantics). These four systems, when taken together, comprise the materials from which we should select.

An analysis of these systems—a linguistic analysis—results in an understanding of:

- the sounds of the language;
- the significant sounds;
- the sound combinations and change;
- the significant forms;
- the form combinations;
- the order of forms; and
- how forms and their order pattern our experience through units of meaning.

The analysis of the system of language will take us nowhere unless the result is a synthesis of all systems of language into meaningful utterances. Therefore, language learning should not only include selection, gradation, and presentation, but also habit formation. Selection tells us what is to be taught, how much of it is to be taught, and how all the linguistic items are selected on the basis of such criteria as frequency, usefulness and teachability.

Grading, on the other hand, is a two-fold process. It, first of all, tells us what comes before what. Gradation also tells us how much of what comes before what. Presentation, as the third important step in methods development, tells us about the linguistic aspect of methods as well as the techniques required for the presentation of the selected materials. With a careful consideration of these three points, the language teacher should guarantee habit

formation (i.e. the method should make language a habit).

Mackey, therefore, believes that any method should include some sort of selection, gradation, presentation, and, last but not least, habit formation. This reveals the fact that Mackey's approach towards language is a structural one, and that the content of the syllabus is determined by a detailed linguistic analysis of the language in question.

Richards (1984) is primarily concerned with three important points in relation to methods: the role of language theory, the role of instructional theory, and the implementational factors in methods. According to Richards, all methods could be categorized under one of the two headings: language-centered methods, and learner-centered methods. The former is composed of those methods which are based on a theory of (the nature of human) language. The latter, however, includes methods based on a theory of the learning process.

A further argument is made by Richards on the route of the development of methods. Richards notes that methods are deeply rooted in either a syllabus (i.e. the language content of courses) or an instructional procedure (i.e. classroom techniques). Richards underscores what he means by the use of the term "method" when he says that he uses the term to refer to a language teaching philosophy which contains a standardized set of procedures or principles for teaching a language that are based on a given set of theoretical premises about the nature of language and/or language learning (Richards and Rodgers, 2001).

Methods, as Richards sees them, are attempts at creating opportunities for learners to acquire language. It should, however, be noted that different methods define language differently. A critical survey of the language teaching methods from the turn of the 20th century up to now reveals that, during the 20s and 30s, methods were based on the consensus among methodologists and teachers to move towards the control of vocabulary. People like Ogden (1930), Faucett, West, Palmer, and Thorndike (1936), and West (1953) have all nurtured the so-called structural syllabuses. Palmer's view about grammar is, however, different than the notion of grammar as defined by the traditional Grammar-Translation Method

(GTM) in that his view includes the system underlying the patterns of speech. Building up on the basis of this pedestal, Palmer and Blandford (1939) designed the textbook which they called *A grammar of spoken English*. Their work inspired such scholars as Hornby (1950) and others to develop grammatical syllabuses in 1954. Such a syllabus affords a graded sequence of patterns and structures for courses and course materials. Later, this structural syllabus was associated with a situational approach to contextualizing and practicing syllabus items, thus resulting in what was later called the structural-situational approach.

In the US, even though after several decades, the Applied Linguistic Foundation of Language Teaching led to similar results. This time, Charles Fries and his colleagues (1961) at the University of Michigan produced word lists and substitution tables which served as "frames" for pattern practice. The method resulting from their work was called the Aural-Oral Method (1961).

Even though, in the 60s, Chomsky (1959) made an attack on the structural view of language, it was not until very late in the 70s and 80s that the most serious challenges to the structural syllabuses emerged in the form of notional syllabuses on the one hand (Wilkins, 1976), and ESP movement on the other (Robinson, 1980). Lexico-structural syllabuses argued that, once the basic vocabulary and grammar of the target language had been mastered, the learner would be able to communicate in situations where English was needed for general, unspecified purposes. Wilkins simply redefines the language content of the structural syllabuses, and introduces the following items to them:

- the notions or concepts the learners need to talk about,
- the functional purposes for which language is used,
- the situations in which language would be used, and
- the roles the learners might possibly play.

This redefined lexico-structural syllabus is what Wilkins refers to as the "notional syllabus." Following from Wilkins, the Council of Europe elaborated a now well-known version of the notional syllabus which was called the Threshold Level (Van Ek, and Alexander, 1980). Unlike notional syllabuses,

ESP starts not with an analysis of the linguistic code but with a determination of the learner's communicative needs. In other words, an understanding of the learners communicative needs will outline their linguistic needs in an ESP context.

It is interesting to note that all these approaches (i.e. structural-situational, aural-oral, audiolingual, notional-functional, and ESP) are content-oriented. It is, however, possible to find another developmental route for a number of methods namely, the instructional theory route. An instructional theory has two aspects: a theory of language learning, and a rationale for teaching procedures and techniques. Methods based on an instructional theory are two-dimensional: (a) the psycholinguistic dimension embodies a theory of learning that describes strategies and processes and specifies the conditions necessary for these processes to be effectively implemented for, and utilized by, the learners; (b) the teaching dimension contains an account both of the teaching and learning procedures and of the teacher and/or learner roles in the instructional process. As such, the concept of a notional syllabus is independent of any instructional theory.

This account of instructional theory reveals what Asher (1977), Curran (1976), and Gattegno (1976) have done. They were prompted not by reactions to linguistic and sociolinguistic theories but rather by their personal philosophies of how an individual's learning potential can be maximized. Unlike the syllabus-oriented methods of the past which began with an *a priori* specification of course objectives and syllabus content, in the more recent methods of language teaching, syllabus is an outcome of the instructional procedures—*a posteriori* syllabuses.

2. The Beyond Method Era

In a paper published in 1984, Richards claims that language teaching methods have a secret life. According to Richards (1984), the secrecy of methods has to do with the fact that methods have a life beyond the classroom; the rise and fall of methods depends upon a large variety of factors extrinsic to the method itself. These factors often reflect (1) the fads and fashions of profit-seekers and promoters, and (2) the forces of the intellectual market place.

Besides their descriptive (i.e. orientational) and implementational aspects, methods need to meet the criterion of accountability. Accountability (or evaluation) has an established role in the process of curriculum development. This is the missing element in the development of methods. Besides the selection of a teaching method, curriculum development calls for the realization of other important steps:

Situation Analysis, in which parameters of language development are determined;

Needs Analysis, in which the language needs of the learners are assessed;

Task Analysis, which determines the required linguistic task to be performed by learners together with the communicative and linguistic demands of the task;

Goal Setting, which determines the required linguistic objectives based on the learner's entry level, communicative needs, and program constraints;

Selection of Learning Experience, which determines the procedures for the attainment of objectives; and

Evaluation, which could be both formative versus summative and product-oriented versus process-oriented.

Such a curriculum-based approach to language teaching is known as the Language Program Design. The important issues, then, are not which method to select, but how to develop procedures and instructional activities which will enable program objectives to be attained. This is not a question of choosing a method but of developing methodology. Long (1983) argues that the effectiveness of methods can be evidenced in either of the two ways: absolute effectiveness, and relative effectiveness. The former can be assessed with a survey of the internal structure of the method itself. The latter, however, calls for a comparative survey across different methods. No matter which type of method effectiveness is in focus, a number of issues must be addressed in any evaluation process:

The goals and objectives of the program need to be described, and criterion measures specified;

Once an instructional theory takes the form of a method, with theoretical bases in language and

learning theory and operationalized practices in syllabus design and teaching procedures, claims made at each level of method organization must be regarded as hypotheses awaiting verification or falsification;

The validity of the items contained in the syllabus must be guaranteed.

A point of caution, however, is that most methods, to date, are based on shaky empirical pedestals. It should be underlined that if the methodology of language teaching is to move beyond the domain of speculation and dogma, its practitioners must become more seriously concerned with the issues of accountability and evaluation. This, in turn, means shifting our attention (from methods) towards the relevant facts and procedures of curriculum development.

Such a shift of attention has received a unique name the beyond method era. The beyond method era was the outcome of the tradition prevailing in the method era: the construction of a new method at the expense of the total negation of past methods (c.f., Pennycook, 1989). The characteristics of the beyond method period are three-fold: (a) evaluation of the scope and nature of methods, (b) redistribution of theorizing power among practitioners and theorizers, and (c) learner autonomy and language learning strategies. Beyond method is based on the claim that the notion of good or bad method per se is misguided, and that the search for an inherently best method should be replaced by a search for the ways for the interaction of teachers' and specialists' pedagogic perceptions. All of these claims boil than into what is called teacher plausibility.

The beyond method era was realized in two different forms: (a) effective teaching, and (b) reflective teaching. They are distinguished according to who should be held responsible for theorizing. The proponents of effective teaching suggest that applied linguists should theorize, and that teachers should practice those theories. That is, effective language teaching is the outcome of the cooperation of theorizers and practitioners. The proponents of reflective teaching, on the other hand, suggest that theorizing or, at least, mediation responsibility should be held upon the shoulder of teachers, rather than applied linguists

(Widdowson, 1990; Freeman, 1991). For instance, Widdowson conceives of teaching as a self-conscious research activity which should be done by teachers in order to have effective operational evidence. Further, only teachers can be entitled to act as mediators between theory and practice. Freeman (1991) questions the dependent position of teachers in the conventional concept of method, arguing that the fund of teachers' experience and tacit knowledge about teaching arising from their lives as students should not be overlooked. Teachers' untapped potentiality is also a matter of concern for Richards (1990) and Wallace (1991). They argue for the promotion of teachers' ability to analyze and evaluate their teaching practice and to initiate changes in their classrooms. The two camps within the beyond method era will be discussed in more detail here.

2.1 Effective Teaching

Language teaching has taken on two general forms up to now: (a) principled conformity (i.e. method stick-to-effectiveness), and (b) the exploratory teaching process. Whereas in the former approach methods function as the basis for instructional processes in a second language program, in the latter methodology moves beyond methods and focuses partly on exploring the nature of effective classroom teaching and learning.

Method, as defined traditionally, is based on a particular theory of the nature of language and second language learning. They make assumptions about the nature of teaching that are not based on any study of the process of teaching (or what Mackey (1965) calls teaching analysis). The problem with this traditional notion of methods is that, by routinizing the teaching process, they covertly express a static view of teaching. As such, they entail a set of specifications for how teaching should be accomplished. This is where the whole problem of teacher plausibility begins. Ethically speaking, the traditional idea of method reduces teachers to the state of mindless robots programmed to carry out the methodological suggestions they are programmed with. This pack of methodological suggestions includes a set of prescriptions on what teachers and learners should do in the language classroom. Prescriptions for the teacher include what

materials should be presented, and when and how they should be taught; prescriptions for the learners include what approach they should take toward learning.

There are, however, many observations that reveal that teachers seldom conform to methods which they are supposed to be following; they refuse to be the slaves of methods. In other words, teachers in actual practice often fail to reflect the underlying philosophies of methods which they claim to be following (be it a holistic rationalist process-oriented approach, or an atomistic empiricist approach). In this connection, Dunkin and Biddle (1974), and Swaffar et al. (1982) claim that teaching is a dynamic, interactional process in which the teacher's 'method' results from the process of interaction between the teacher, the learners, and the instructional tasks and activities over time. Such an interaction reveals itself as a quite different approach to teaching, one in which teachers are involved in observing and reflecting upon their teaching as well as the learning behaviors of their students; hence, effective teaching and learning. Good (1979) has tried to operationally define the term "effective teaching" by describing it as teaching that produces higher-than-predicted gains on standardized achievement tests. Blum (1984) lists twelve effective classroom practices. Doyle (1977) and Good (1979) list several dimensions of teaching that account for differences between effective and ineffective instruction. They specifically mention such factors as classroom management, structuring, tasks, and grouping.

Effective teaching is claimed to be determined to some extent by the idea of structuring. A lesson reflects the idea of structuring when the teacher's intentions are clear, and when instructional activities are sequenced according to a logic that students can perceive. Teachers also assign activities to attain particular learning objectives. These are called tasks or activity structures. In a discussion of effective teaching, Tikunoff (1985) classifies classroom tasks on the basis of the type of demands they make on the students into three categories: (1) response mode demands (i.e. knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis or synthesis, or evaluation); (2) interactional mode demands (i.e. rules that govern how classroom tasks are accomplished); and (3) task complexity demands (i.e. how

difficult the learner perceives the task to be). Teachers must not only decide on the kind of task but also on the order, pacing, products, learning strategies, and related materials of the task. To this end, they should take 'learner plausibility' and 'language learning strategies' into account (Oxford, 1990). Members of the effective teaching camp argue that learners show autonomy when they undergo instruction and that they react individually despite the centrality of teaching style. As a result, learners' uptake is highly idiosyncratic despite the general assumption that the effect of instruction is somehow uniform for most learners of the class. This idiosyncrasy may be partly attributed to the various strategies learners adopt in the process of language learning. As Richards (1989) argues, what the teacher does is only half of the picture. The other half has to do with what learners do to achieve successful learning strategies. Learner autonomy, coupled with the use of strategies, implies that learners may succeed despite the teacher's method rather than because of it.

It should be noted that an unfortunate outcome of the educational system in most third-world countries is that usually teachers do not urge students to go beyond the response mode of knowledge. Students in these countries are usually held responsible for simply memorizing the subject matter of their courses. As such, they stop at the level of knowledge and take the materials they are exposed to for granted. This results in the students' lack of critical thinking. In other words, such a kind of orientation extinguishes the potential for plausibility in the learners. Anyhow, good teaching appears to be highly task-oriented.

Tikunoff (1983), in relating effective teaching to bilingual classrooms, suggests that three kinds of competencies are needed for Limited English Proficiency (LEP) learners: (a) Participative competence (needed to respond appropriately to class demands); (b) interactional competence (needed for appropriate classroom discourse); and, (c) academic competence (needed for the acquisition of new skills, assimilation of new information, and construction of new concepts). These competencies help the learners to perform three major functions: (1) to decode and understand task expectations as well as new

information; (2) to engage appropriately in completing tasks, with high accuracy; and (3) to obtain accurate feedback with relation to completing tasks accurately (c.f., Tikunoff, 1983: Significant Bilingual Instructional Features (SBIF)). The results of SBIF studies reveal that effective teachers are able to describe clearly what instruction would entail, to operationalize these specifications, and to produce the desired results in terms of student performance. No doubt, effective teaching derives its methodological principles from studying the classroom practices and processes employed by effective teachers. Effective teachers are plausible enough to control and manage the process of teaching, learning, and classroom interaction actively. This plausibility results from their understanding of the teaching and learning processes.

It seems reasonable enough to agree with the proponents of effective teaching on the fact that the other side of the coin of effective teaching is what learners do to achieve effective learning, or learner strategies. Learner strategies include the particular cognitive operations, processes, procedures, and heuristics that learners apply to the task of learning a second language. Effective learners seem to be successful because they have a better understanding of and control over their learning than less successful learners.

In an attempt to describe effective learning, Cohen (cited in Oxford, 1985) lists six strategies used by successful learners:

- Attention enhancing strategies;
- Use of a variety of background sources;
- Oral production tricks;
- Vocabulary learning techniques;
- Reading or text-processing strategies;
- Writing techniques.

Willing (1987) defines strategies as essentially methods employed by the person for processing input language information in such a way as to gain control of it, thus enabling the assimilation of that information by the self. This clearly reflects what is called learner plausibility. The question here is whether learner plausibility is teachable. Wenden (1985) would say "yes." Wenden (1985, p. 7)

argues that “ineffective learners are inactive learners. Their apparent inability to learn is, in fact, due to their not having an appropriate repertoire of learning strategies.”

Another point that deserves attention is that effective teaching does not absolutely contradict the traditional notion of method. In fact, it is not the method that works or fails to work. An effective teacher may find some of the traditional methods, or some parts of methods, useful enough to be incorporated into his classroom practices. What most of the proponents of the effective teaching orthodoxy suggest is that teachers should refrain from being dogmatic in their understanding of language teaching methodology.

2.2 Reflective Teaching

In a discussion of reflective teaching, I should draw the readers' attention to the fact that the eighties might be called the revolutionary era in the field of language teaching. Since the early eighties new approaches to teacher development have been proposed and implemented in classrooms. From among these approaches, the most prominent ones are (a) teacher-as-researcher, (b) clinical supervision, (c) critical pedagogy perspective, and (d) reflective teaching. Reflective teaching, however, has a special place among these approaches. Cruickshank (1984) defines reflective teaching as the teacher's thinking about what happens in classroom lessons, and thinking about alternative means of achieving goals or aims. As such, reflective teaching is a good means of providing the students with “an opportunity to consider the teaching event thoughtfully, analytically, and objectively.” In other words, the major purpose of reflective teaching is to engender good habits of thought.

A second and quite different perspective of reflective teaching has been proposed by Zeichner and Liston (1985). They argue that a reflective teacher is one who assesses the origins, purposes, and consequences of his works at all levels. Van Manen (1977) outlines three levels of reflectivity of which the first is similar to Cruickshank's conception of reflective teaching. The other two levels have been called the practical and critical levels of reflectivity or orientation to inquiry into teaching. Reflective teaching is said to be patterned in such a way as to enable

teachers to develop the pedagogical habits and skills necessary for self-directed growth and towards preparing them to actively participate, individually or collectively, in their making of educational decisions.

In an attempt to identify what reflective teaching really means, Bartlett (1990) distinguishes between actions and behaviors. He draws on the example of an athlete raising his fist in triumph and a Nazi saluting, and argues that, even though these two persons appear to have behaved in much the same way, their intentions are totally different. Therefore, actions are informed by the intentions they try to fulfill. Reflective teaching, viewed in this context, does not involve some modification of behavior by externally imposed directions or requirements, but requires deliberation and analysis of our ideas about teaching as a form of action based on our own dynamic understanding. In other words, reflective teaching links what we think (or intend) to what we do (or act).

Teaching is interaction in the sense that it involves individuals and groups acting upon each other, reciprocally in actions and responses in an infinite variety of relationships (both verbal and non-verbal, conscious and unconscious, or enduring and casual). Interaction is in fact communication in its inclusive sense in that it functions as a continually emerging process. Therefore, reflective teaching will result in a shared understanding among teachers and learners. The learners will value their practical knowledge and give it priority over scientific knowledge produced by researchers (of teaching). They will also appreciate the strong collegiality inherent in, and stimulated by, reflective teaching. Reflective teaching unfolds in the form of “pedagogy” in the sense that it engages each student whollymind, sense of self, range of interests and interactions with other people in events inside and outside the classroom. Pedagogy addresses both every day experiences and the societal events that influence them.

Reflection can be viewed to have two different meanings; on the one hand, reflection involves the relationship between an individual's thought and action. On the other hand, it involves a relationship between an individual teacher and his membership in a larger collectivity called

society. Because of its dual meaning, reflection has been described as “critical critical.”

A reflective teacher (also called a researcher of teaching) is a person who transcends the technicalities of teaching and thinks beyond the need to improve his instructional techniques. Being reflective draws on the need for asking “what” and “why” questions. In reflecting on what and why questions, we begin to exercise control and open up the possibility of transforming our everyday classroom life. The process of control is called critical reflective teaching. By being critical, a teacher will have the ability to see his actions in relation to the historical, social, and cultural context in which his teaching is actually embedded. Such a teacher will develop himself both individually and collectively (in relation to society). The what and why questions asked by reflective teachers should be systematized into a set of procedures to help others to become critically reflective teachers.

Dewey (1933), in his book *How we think* suggests: (1) that the pupil will have a genuine situation of experience; (2) that a genuine problem develop with this situation as a stimulus to thought; (3) that he possess the information and make the observations needed to deal with it; (4) that suggested solutions occur to him which he shall be responsible for developing in an orderly way; (5) that he have opportunity and occasion to test his ideas by application to make the meaning clear and to discover for himself their validity (p. 174).

The statement made by Dewey reinforces the need to consider a number of principles that guide and inform the process by which teachers can become reflective. These principles include the following:

Teachers must reflect upon issues in the social context where teaching occurs;

Teachers must be interested in the problem to be resolved;

Issues must be derived from the teacher's own experience;

Reflection on the issues involves problem-solving;

Ownership of the identified issue and its solution is vested in the teacher;

Systematic procedures are necessary;

Teacher's experience of teaching should provide information about the issue;

Teacher's ideas must be tested through the practice of teaching;

Tested ideas about teaching must lead to some course of action;

New understandings and redefined practice in teaching should result.

These ten principles unfold reflective teaching in the form of a cycle of activity. Such a cycle would contain the five elements of mapping, informing, contesting, appraising, and acting.

Mapping involves asking questions about what we do as teachers. It involves observation and the collection of evidence about our teaching. What is very important in the mapping phase is that observation must be done by individual teachers (and through the use of personal diaries, learning logs, portfolios, and journals). The teachers approach to the mapping phase should be a descriptive one. The description should delineate teachers' routine and conscious actions in the classroom. Teachers should, for instance, focus on their specific teaching problems which can be improved. In fact, the aim of the mapping phase is to raise teachers' consciousness through writing.

The next step in the cycle of reflective teaching is informing. In this stage the teacher will ask such questions as (1) “What is the meaning of my teaching?” and (2) “What did I intend?” of himself. In other words, he turns to look for meanings behind the maps. That is, the teacher revisits his first records his maps adds to them, and makes sense of them. As such, the informing phase provides the teacher with an understanding of the difference between teaching routine and conscious teaching action, and the ability to unmask the principles behind them. The teacher will, therefore, strive for the best possible solution rather than the correct or most certain solution (on the basis of an informed choice).

The contesting phase begins with a consideration of such questions as “How did I come to be this way?” and “How was it possible for my present view of teaching (with

reasons) to have emerged?" This phase involves contesting our ideas and the structures that hold them in place. To this end, we, as teachers, can share our understandings of, and reasons for, teaching in particular ways with our colleagues. This is meant to uncover our assumptive worlds. As we become experienced teachers, we develop our theories of teaching, philosophies of the teaching and learning process, and our histories which contain assumptions about the best ways of teaching. In this phase of contestation, we confront and perhaps begin to dislodge the complex system of reasons (or theory) for our teaching actions—we theorize.

Contestation will unfold to us whether our view of teaching is fraught with contradictions and inconsistencies. If we believe that a given instance of behavior will have positive consequences for some and negative outcomes for others, then we hold an interdependent and dialectical view of behavior or action. Only after a fully-fledged contestation phase shall we proceed to the next phase appraisal.

In the appraisal phase, we set a value for what we do as teachers by asking such questions as "How might I teach differently?" Appraisal is a quest for alternative courses of action. It guarantees our teaching by linking the thinking dimension of reflection with the search for teaching in ways consistent with our new understanding. According to Bartlett (1990), when we search for more participatory styles of goal-based or domestic assessment procedures, we are appraising possible courses of action.

The last phase in the cycle of reflective teaching process is "acting." The question the teacher raises in this phase is "What and how shall I teach now?" In this connection, Paulo Freire (1970) distinguishes between activism and verbalism. Reflection without action is verbalism; action without reflection is activism. Freire claims that verbalism and activism should go hand-in-hand to guarantee the best possible outcome. After mapping, we rearrange our teaching practice, unearth the reasons and assumptions for these actions, subject these reasons to critical scrutiny, appraise alternative courses of action, and then act. As such, becoming reflective forces us to adopt a critical attitude to ourselves as individual second language

teachers, and to challenge our espoused personal beliefs about teaching.

3. The Post-Method Era

The period of insecurity manifested by both the methods of the method era and the ideologies of the beyond method era formally culminated in the post method era or post method condition. In an attempt to account for the post-method condition (Kumaravadivelu, 1994, 2001, 2003). In an attempt to distinguish between the post method era and the foregoing heterodoxies, Kumaravadivelu suggests that the post method paradigm is an attempt at finding *an alternative to method rather than finding an alternative method* (my italics). He draws on the distinction made by Mackey (1965) between method analysis and teaching analysis, and goes on even further to claim that language teaching practitioners have more recently come up with "an awareness that as long as we are caught up in the web of method, we will continue to get entangled in an unending search for an unavailable solution, ... that nothing short of breaking the cycle can salvage the solution" (Kumaravadivelu, 1994, p. 28). In this connection, Kumaravadivelu distinguishes between knowledge-oriented theories of pedagogy (based on the traditional notion of method) and classroom-oriented theories of practice (based on the post-method condition). He outlines the characteristics of the post-method condition in such a way as to signify (1) a search for an alternative to method rather than an alternative method, (2) teacher autonomy, and (3) principled pragmatism.

Kumaravadivelu argues that a need to look beyond the notion of method has emerged out of the inherent contradictions between method as conceptualized by theorists and method as actualized by practitioners. This claim is again far from being scientific. He argues in such a way as to pinpoint the existence of a taken-for-granted sort of hostility between theorizers and practitioners. It seems to be more reasonable to try to encourage both theorizers and practitioners to compromise in more favorable ways. Given the chance of reasonable discussion on points of major controversy, this compromise does not seem to be out of reach.

Teacher autonomy is another pedestal upon which the

post method era stands. The crucial problem with the traditional notion of method, according to the proponents of post-method condition, is an ethical one in the sense that method, as outlined by theorizers, keeps practitioners away from the practice of their potentials. "The post-method condition, however, recognizes the teacher's potentials: teachers know not only how to teach but also know how to act autonomously within the academic and administrative constraints imposed by institutions, curricula, and textbooks" (Kumaravadivelu, 1994, p. 30).

Principled pragmatism reveals itself in the form of teacher's sense of plausibility (i.e. *teacher's subjective understanding of the teaching he does*). Teachers' plausibility connotes the involvement of both teachers and students in the learning activity. As such, it is quite reasonable to emphasize the importance of teacher plausibility in language teaching pedagogy. Teacher plausibility should not be interpreted in such a way as to empower the teacher to change language teaching or learning experience to a unidirectional flow of information from the teacher to the learner. It should, on the contrary, entail the teacher's endeavor to assess learner needs, and his attempt to involve learners in learning activities. Principled pragmatism is based on Widdowson's (1990) notion of 'pragmatics of pedagogy' which construes the immediate activity of teaching as the medium through which the relationship between theory and practice can be realized.

Kumaravadivelu (1994) takes the characteristics outlined above as a point of departure to propose a strategic framework for L2 teaching. The framework, Kumaravadivelu claims, is offered not as a dogma for uncritical acceptance but as an option for "critical appraisal in light of new and demanding experience and experimentation in L2 learning and teaching" (p. 32). The post method condition, as Kumaravadivelu delineates it, is a descriptive, open-ended set of options, and an interim plan to be continually modified, expanded, and enriched by classroom teachers. The post method framework suggests that teachers should foster the following ten macrostrategies:

- Maximize learning opportunities.
- Facilitate negotiated interaction.

- Minimize perceptual mismatches.
- Activate intuitive heuristics.
- Foster language awareness.
- Contextualize linguistic input.
- Integrate language skills.
- Promote learner autonomy.
- Raise cultural consciousness.
- Ensure social relevance.

The paradigm of the postmethod condition was later enriched by Kumaravadivelu's (2003) attempt to characterize language teaching in a postmethod era and to provide the fundamentals of the postmethod pedagogy as a three-dimensional system consisting of the pedagogic parameters of particularity, practicality, and possibility (Tajeddin, 2005). The parameter of particularity facilitates the context-sensitive language teaching with a true understanding of local linguistic, sociocultural, and political particularities. Practicality ends the conventional role relationship between theorists and practitioners through empowering teachers to construct their own theory of practice. Possibility is the parameter which allows learners, teachers, and teacher educators to be sociopolitically conscious and to search for identity formation and social transformation.

Conclusion

To conclude this paper, I wish to borrow some terms from geology. The geologic time scale used today breaks the age of the earth into distinct intervals of varying lengths. The longest intervals are eons. Each eon is subdivided into eras. Each era is made up of periods, which are further divided into epochs.

By way of analogy, the age of the field of language pedagogy can be broken into eons, eras, periods, and perhaps epochs. There are two eons: (a) the non-scientific eon, beginning with Confucius and ending with the emergence of the language teaching methods based on structural psychology and linguistics; and (b) the scientific eon, starting with the emergence of the language teaching methods based on structural psychology and linguistics and continuing to the present time. The second eon can be subdivided into three eras: the method era, the

beyond method era, and the post method era.

The non-scientific eon is distinguished from the scientific eon on the grounds that the former lacks a systematic theory base while the latter claims to be systematically based on various theories and ideologies. Within the second eon, the eras are distinguished on the basis of linguistic, sociolinguistic, and psychological theories as well as ideologies and philosophies that inform each era. The method era has witnessed two periods: (a) the period of methods informed by linguistic, psychological, and sociolinguistic theories, and (b) the period of methods informed by the personal philosophies of method developers. Along the same lines, the beyond method era is further subdivided into two periods: (a) the effective teaching period, and (b) the reflective teaching period. In the former, teachers practice what applied linguists suggest; in the latter, teachers theorize and then practice their own theories. The last era within the scientific eon has three distinct features: (1) a search for an alternative to method rather than an alternative method, (2) an emphasis on teacher autonomy, and (3) an attempt at principled pragmatism. Revised in 2003, the postmethod pedagogy is now a three-dimensional system consisting of the pedagogic parameters of particularity, practicality, and possibility.

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