

# ***Beyond Methods:***

*Macrostrategies for  
Language Teaching*

B. KUMARAVADIVELU

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*Dedicated with gratitude to the memory of my father*

**தந்தை மகற்கு ஆற்றும் நன்றி அவையத்து  
முந்தி யிருக்கச் செயல்**

A father earns the gratitude of his children  
by nurturing them to be preeminent  
in the Assembly of the Learned.

*(Thirukural, verse 67, circa 100 A.D.)*

# **C o n t e n t s**

	<b>Acknowledgments</b>	ix
	<b>Introduction</b>	1
Chapter 1	<b>Conceptualizing teaching acts</b>	5
Chapter 2	<b>Understanding postmethod pedagogy</b>	23
Chapter 3	<b>Maximizing learning opportunities</b>	44
Chapter 4	<b>Minimizing perceptual mismatches</b>	77
Chapter 5	<b>Facilitating negotiated interaction</b>	101
Chapter 6	<b>Promoting learner autonomy</b>	131
Chapter 7	<b>Fostering language awareness</b>	156
Chapter 8	<b>Activating intuitive heuristics</b>	176
Chapter 9	<b>Contextualizing linguistic input</b>	204
Chapter 10	<b>Integrating language skills</b>	225
Chapter 11	<b>Ensuring social relevance</b>	239
Chapter 12	<b>Raising cultural consciousness</b>	267
Chapter 13	<b>Monitoring teaching acts</b>	286
	<b>Afterword</b>	316
	<b>References</b>	319
	<b>Index</b>	331

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## ***Beyond Methods***

# ***Introduction***

“It is not instruction,” said Ralph Waldo Emerson, “but provocation that I can most accept from another soul.” What I have attempted to offer in this book is not instruction but provocation, though provocation of the positive kind. I have tried to

- stimulate the critical thought processes of those involved in second and foreign language (L2) learning, teaching, and teacher education;
- spur them to self-reflective action that is firmly grounded in a situational understanding of their own learning and teaching environment, and
- urge them to go beyond the limited, and limiting, concept of method and consider the challenges and opportunities of an emerging postmethod era in language teaching.

## **What This Book Is About**

This book is about language teaching in a postmethod era. It reflects the heightened awareness that the L2 profession witnessed during the waning years of the twentieth century:

- an awareness that there is no best method out there ready and waiting to be discovered;
- an awareness that the artificially created dichotomy between theory and practice has been more harmful than helpful for teachers;
- an awareness that teacher education models that merely transmit a body of interested knowledge do not produce effective teaching professionals; and

- an awareness that teacher beliefs, teacher reasoning, and teacher cognition play a crucial role in shaping and reshaping the content and character of the practice of everyday teaching.

To shape the practice of everyday teaching, teachers need to have a holistic understanding of what happens in their classroom. They need to systematically observe their teaching, interpret their classroom events, evaluate their outcomes, identify problems, find solutions, and try them out to see once again what works and what doesn't. In other words, they have to become strategic thinkers as well as strategic practitioners. As strategic thinkers, they need to reflect on the specific needs, wants, situations, and processes of learning and teaching. As strategic practitioners, they need to develop knowledge and skills necessary to self-observe, self-analyze, and self-evaluate their own teaching acts.

To help teachers become strategic thinkers and strategic practitioners, I present in this book a macrostrategic framework consisting of ten macrostrategies derived from theoretical, empirical, and experiential knowledge of L2 learning, teaching, and teacher education. The framework represents a synthesis of useful and usable insights derived from various disciplines including psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, cognitive psychology, second language acquisition, and critical pedagogy. It has the potential to transcend the limitations of the concept of method and empower teachers with the knowledge, skill, attitude, and autonomy necessary to devise for themselves a systematic, coherent, and relevant theory of practice.

## **How the Book Is Organized**

The book consists of thirteen chapters. The first deals with the concept of teaching in general and the second with the concept of post-method pedagogy in particular. Thus, these two chapters lay the philosophical and conceptual foundation needed to make sense of what follows. The last chapter pulls together ideas from different chapters, and offers a classroom observational scheme that can be used by teachers to monitor how well they theorize what they practice, and to practice what they theorize.

Each of the ten intervening chapters focuses on individual macrostrategies. They all follow the same format with three broad sections: macrostrategy, microstrategies, and exploratory projects:

- the macrostrategy section provides theoretical, empirical, and experiential rationale underpinning a particular macrostrategy;
- the microstrategies section provides sample microstrategies that illustrate how to realize the goals of the particular macrostrategy in a classroom situation; and
- the exploratory projects section provides detailed guidelines for teachers to conduct their own situated teacher research aimed at generating new ideas for realizing the goals of a particular macrostrategy in their specific learning and teaching context.

All the chapters have built-in reflective tasks that encourage readers to pause at crucial points along the text and think critically about the issues in light of their own personal as well as professional experience. In addition to these reflective tasks, several chapters contain authentic classroom interactional data that illustrate the issues raised and the suggestions made.

## How to Use the Book

The chapters in the book need not be read and used sequentially. Each is written as a self-contained unit and, therefore, can be used separately. It would, however, be beneficial to start with the first two chapters to understand the rationale behind the macrostrategic framework. The next ten chapters on specific macrostrategies can be read in any order although, as will become clear, certain macrostrategies closely relate to each other to form a meaningful cluster. The last chapter shows how the framework can be used for monitoring classroom aims and activities. Similarly, the reflective tasks and the exploratory projects can be carried out selectively depending on teachers' experience and their perceived needs.

Regardless of the sequence in which the book is read and used, it is worthwhile to keep its primary purpose in mind: to facilitate the growth and development of teachers' own theory of practice. This is not a recipe book with ready-made solutions for recurring problems. Rather, it is designed to give teachers broad guiding principles to assist them in the construction of their own context-specific postmethod pedagogy. Readers will quickly recognize that neither the suggested microstrategies nor the proposed projects can be used without suitably modifying them to meet the linguistic, conceptual, and communicative capacities of a given group of learners.

Because this is not a recipe book, it does not specify any one particular way of “doing” the teaching. To do so, I believe, is to diminish the complexity of teaching as well as the capacity of teachers. Using their own language learning and teaching experience as a personal knowledge base, the theoretical insights on macrostrategies as a professional knowledge base, the suggested microstrategies as illustrative examples, and the exploratory projects as investigative tools, teachers should be able to develop their own distinct way of teaching. In their attempt to become self-directed individuals, teachers may follow the same operating principles discussed in this book, but the style and substance of the theory of practice they eventually derive will be quite different.

## CHAPTER 1

# *Conceptualizing Teaching Acts*

To teach is to be full of hope.

—LARRY CUBAN, 1989, p. 249

We often hear educators say that teaching is both an art and a science. I take this to mean that teaching is basically a subjective activity carried out in an organized way. In fact, there are educators who believe that teaching lacks a unified or a commonly shared set of rules, and as such cannot even be considered a discipline. As Donald Freeman points out,

when we speak of people “teaching a discipline” such as math or biology, we are separating the knowledge or content from the activity or the teaching. These traces of activity that teachers accumulate through the doing of teaching are not seen as knowledge; they are referred to as experience. Experience is the only real reference point teachers share: experiences as students that influence their views of teaching, experiences in professional preparation, experience as members of society. This motley and diverse base of experience unites people who teach, but it does not constitute a disciplinary community.

(Freeman, 1998, p.10)

It is this motley and diverse base of experience that makes teaching challenging as well as engaging, fulfilling as well as frustrating.

It is no wonder that diverse experiences lead to diverse perceptions about teaching. In his inspiring book *The Call to Teach* David Hansen characterizes teaching as a vocation. Recalling its Latin root *vocare*, meaning “to call,” he explains vocation as a summons or bidding to be of service. According to him, teaching as a vocation “comprises a form of public service to others that at the same time provides the individual a sense of identity and personal fulfillment” (Hansen, 1995, p. 2). He compares the language of vocation with the

language that goes with other terms that are used to characterize teaching: job, work, career, occupation, and profession. For Hansen,

- a *job* is an activity that provides sustenance or survival. It comprises highly repetitive tasks that are not defined and developed by those performing them.
- *vocation* goes well beyond sustenance and survival; it guarantees personal autonomy and personal significance.
- *work* may ensure personal autonomy and can therefore yield genuine personal meaning but, unlike vocation, it need not imply being of service to others.
- a *career* describes a long-term involvement in a particular activity but differs from vocation in similar ways that job and work do, that is, it need not provide personal fulfillment, a sense of identity, nor a public service.
- an *occupation* is an endeavor harbored within a society's economic, social, and political system, but persons can have occupations that do not entail a sense of calling in the same way vocations do.
- a *profession* broadens the idea of an occupation by emphasizing the expertise and the social contribution that persons in an occupation render to society. However, profession differs from vocation in two important ways. First, persons can conduct themselves professionally but not regard the work as a calling, and can derive their sense of identity and personal fulfillment elsewhere. Second, perks such as public recognition and rewards normally associated with professions run counter to personal and moral dimensions of vocations.

Hansen believes that it is the language of vocation that “brings us closer to what many teachers do, and why they do it, than does the language of job, work, occupation or profession” (ibid., p. 8).

As these terms clearly show, “the doing of teaching” defies classification. The goal of teaching, however, seems to be rather obvious. Teaching is aimed at creating optimal conditions for desired learning to take place in as short a time as possible. Even such a seemingly simple statement hides a troublesome correlation: a cause-effect relationship between teaching and learning. That is, the statement is based on the assumption that teaching actually causes learning to occur. Does it, really? We know by experiential knowledge that teaching does not have to automatically lead to learning; conversely, learning can very well take place in the absence of teach-

ing. The entire edifice of education, however, is constructed on the foundation that teaching can contribute to accelerated and accomplished learning.

The overall process of education certainly involves several players—educational administrators, policy makers, curriculum planners, teacher educators, textbook writers, and others—each constituting an important link in the educational chain. However, the players who have a direct bearing on shaping and reshaping the desired learning outcome are the classroom teachers. This is not very different from saying that the success or failure of a theatrical production depends largely on the histrionic talent of the actors who actually appear on the stage. It is true that several individuals have worked hard behind the scenes to make that production possible: the director, the scriptwriter, and the production manager, to name a few. But if the actors do not perform well on the stage, and if they are not able to connect with the audience, then all the behind-the-scenes activities will come to naught.

In fact, the educational role played by teachers in the classroom is much more demanding and daunting than the theatrical role played by actors on the stage for the simple reason that the failure of an educational enterprise has more far-reaching consequences for an individual or for a nation than the failure of a theatrical production. Such is the significance of the teacher. Nevertheless, there is very little consensus about the precise role the teacher is expected to play.

## **The Role of the Teacher**

The role of the teacher has been a perennial topic of discussion in the field of general education as well as in language education. Unable to precisely pin down the role and function of the teacher, the teaching profession has grappled with a multitude of metaphors. The teacher has been variously referred to as an artist and an architect; a scientist and a psychologist; a manager and a mentor; a controller and a counselor; a sage on the stage; a guide on the side; and more. There is merit in each of these metaphors. Each of them captures the teacher's role partially but none of them fully.

Instead of delving deep into the familiar metaphors, I believe it is much more beneficial to view the historical role and function of classroom teachers to understand how the concept of teacher role has developed over the years, and how that development has shaped

the nature and scope of institutionalized education. From a historical perspective, one can glean from the current literature on general education and language teaching at least three strands of thought: (a) teachers as passive technicians, (b) teachers as reflective practitioners, and (c) teachers as transformative intellectuals.

### *Teachers as Passive Technicians*

The basic tenets of the concept of teachers as technicians can be partly traced to the behavioral school of psychology that emphasized the importance of empirical verification. In the behavioral tradition, the primary focus of teaching and teacher education is content knowledge that consisted mostly of a verified and verifiable set of facts and clearly articulated rules. Content knowledge is broken into easily manageable discrete items and presented to the teacher in what might be called *teacher-proof* packages. Teachers and their teaching methods are not considered very important because their effectiveness cannot be empirically proved beyond doubt. Therefore, teacher education programs concentrate more on the *education* part than on the *teacher* part. Such a view came to be known as the *technicist* view of teaching and teacher education.

The primacy of empirical verification and content knowledge associated with the technicist view of teaching overwhelmingly privileges one group of participants in the educational chain—professional experts! They are the ones who create and contribute to the professional knowledge base that constitutes the cornerstone of teacher education programs. Classroom teachers are assigned the role of passive technicians who learn a battery of content knowledge generally agreed upon in the field and pass it on to successive generations of students. They are viewed largely as apprentices whose success is measured in terms of how closely they adhere to the professional knowledge base, and how effectively they transmit that knowledge base to students.

In this technicist or transmission approach, the teacher's primary role in the classroom is to function like a conduit, channeling the flow of information from one end of the educational spectrum (i.e., the expert) to the other (i.e., the learner) without significantly altering the content of information. The primary goal of such an activity, of course, is to promote student comprehension of content knowledge. In attempting to achieve that goal, teachers are con-

strained to operate from handed-down fixed, pedagogic assumptions and to seldom seriously question their validity or relevance to specific learning and teaching contexts. If any context-specific learning and teaching problem arises, they are supposed to turn once again to the established professional knowledge base and search for a formula to fix it by themselves.

Viewing teachers as passive technicians is traditional and is still in vogue in many parts of the world. It might even be said, with some justification, that the technician view provides a safe and secure environment for those teachers who may not have the ability, the resources, or the willingness to explore self-initiated, innovative teaching strategies. The technician approach to teaching and teacher education is clearly characterized by a rigid role relationship between theorists and teachers: theorists conceive and construct knowledge, teachers understand and implement knowledge. Creation of new knowledge or a new theory is not the domain of teachers; their task is to execute what is prescribed for them.

Such an outlook inevitably leads to the disempowerment of teachers whose classroom behavior is mostly confined to received knowledge rather than lived experience. That is why the technician approach is considered “so passive, so unchallenging, so boring that teachers often lose their sense of wonder and excitement about learning to teach” (Kincheloe, 1993, p. 204). The concept of reflective teaching evolved partly as a reaction to the fixed assumptions and frozen beliefs of the technician view of teaching.

---

### ***Reflective task 1.1***

What are the advantages and disadvantages of the role and function of teachers as passive technicians? Think about some of your own teachers whom you might call technicians. What aspect of their teaching did you like most? Least? Is there any aspect of technician orientation that you think is relevant in your specific learning and teaching context?

---

### *Teachers as Reflective Practitioners*

While there has recently been a renewed interest in the theory and practice of reflective teaching, the idea of teachers as reflective prac-

tioners is nothing new. It was originally proposed by educational philosopher John Dewey in the early twentieth century. He has articulated his seminal thoughts on reflective teaching in several of his books, particularly in *How We Think* (1933). In a nutshell, Dewey makes a distinction between action that is routine and action that is reflective. Routine action is guided primarily by an uncritical belief in tradition, and an unflinching obedience to authority, whereas reflective action is prompted by a conscious and cautious “consideration of any belief or practice in light of the grounds that support it and the further consequences to which it leads” (Dewey, 1933, p. 4).

In the Deweyan view, teaching is seen not just as a series of predetermined and presequenced procedures but as a context-sensitive action grounded in intellectual thought. Teachers are seen not as passive transmitters of received knowledge but as problem-solvers possessing “the ability to look back critically and imaginatively, to do cause-effect thinking, to derive explanatory principles, to do task analysis, also to look forward, and to do anticipatory planning” (ibid., p. 13). Reflective teaching, then, is a holistic approach that emphasizes creativity, artistry, and context sensitivity.

Exactly half a century after the publication of Dewey’s book came further thoughts on reflective teaching. In 1983, Don Schon published a book titled *The Reflective Practitioner* in which he expands Dewey’s concept of reflection. He shows how teachers, through their informed involvement in the principles, practices, and processes of classroom instruction, can bring about fresh and fruitful perspectives to the complexities of teaching that cannot be matched by experts who are far removed from classroom realities. He distinguishes between two interlocking frames of reflection: reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action.

Reflection-on-action can occur before and after a lesson, as teachers plan for a lesson and then evaluate the effectiveness of their teaching acts afterward. Reflection-in-action, on the other hand, occurs during the teaching act when teachers monitor their ongoing performance, attempting to locate unexpected problems on the spot and then adjusting their teaching instantaneously. Schon rightly argues that it is the teachers’ own reflection-in/on-action, and not an undue reliance on professional experts, that will help them identify and meet the challenges they face in their everyday practice of teaching.

Because the term *reflective teaching* has been used so widely, its

meaning has become rather diffused. Concerned that the essence of the concept might get diluted even further, Kenneth Zeichner and Daniel Liston thought it fit to talk about what it is that will *not* make a teacher a reflective practitioner. In their 1996 book *Reflective Teaching: An Introduction*, they caution that “not all thinking about teaching constitutes reflective teaching. If a teacher never questions the goals and the values that guide his or her work, the context in which he or she teaches, or never examines his or her assumptions, then it is our belief that this individual is not engaged in reflective teaching” (Zeichner and Liston, 1996, p. 1).

They then go on to summarize what they consider to be the role of a reflective practitioner. According to them, a reflective practitioner

- “examines, frames, and attempts to solve the dilemmas of classroom practice;
- is aware of and questions the assumptions and values he or she brings to teaching;
- is attentive to the institutional and cultural contexts in which he or she teaches;
- takes part in curriculum development and is involved in school change efforts; and
- takes responsibility for his or her own professional development” (ibid., p. 6).

By delineating these five roles, Zeichner and Liston make it clear that learning to teach does not end with obtaining a diploma or a degree in teacher education but is an ongoing process throughout one’s teaching career. Reflective teachers constantly attempt to maximize their learning potential and that of their learners through classroom-oriented action research and problem-solving activities.

While the concept of teachers as reflective practitioners has been around for quite some time in the field of general education, it has only recently started percolating in the domain of language teaching. In *Training Foreign Language Teachers: A Reflective Approach* (1991), Michael Wallace offers ways in which a reflective approach can be applied to many areas of teacher development, including classroom observation, microteaching, and teacher education. In a book titled *Reflective Teaching in Second Language Classrooms* (1994), Jack Richards and Charles Lockhart introduce sec-

ond language teachers to ways of exploring and reflecting upon their classroom experiences, using a carefully structured approach to self-observation and self-evaluation.

These initial efforts to spread the values of reflective teaching among second and foreign language teachers have been further strengthened by Donald Freeman and Karen Johnson. In his book *Doing Teacher Research: From Inquiry to Understanding* (1998), Freeman demonstrates how practicing teachers can transform their classroom work by doing what he calls teacher research. He provides a teacher-research cycle mapping out the steps and skills associated with each part of the research process. In a similar vein, Johnson, in her book *Understanding Language Teaching: Reasoning in Action* (1999), examines how “reasoning teaching represents the complex ways in which teachers conceptualize, construct explanations for, and respond to the social interactions and shared meanings that exist within and among teachers, students, parents, and administrators, both inside and outside the classroom” (p. 1).

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### **Reflective task 1.2**

Consider the true meaning of being a reflective practitioner in a specific learning and teaching context. What are the obstacles you may face in carrying out the responsibilities of a reflective teacher? And how might you overcome them?

---

The concept of teachers as reflective practitioners is clearly a vast improvement over the limited and limiting concept of teachers as passive technicians. However, the reflective movement has at least three serious shortcomings:

- First, by focusing on the role of the teacher and the teacher alone, the reflective movement tends to treat reflection as an introspective process involving a teacher and his or her reflective capacity, and not as an interactive process involving the teacher and a host of others: learners, colleagues, planners, and administrators.
- Second, the movement has focused on what the teachers do in the classroom and has not paid adequate attention to the socio-political factors that shape and reshape a teacher’s reflective practice.

- Third, in spite of its expressed dislike for the teachers' excessive reliance on established professional wisdom, the movement contributed very little to change it.

Out of these and other concerns has emerged the concept of teachers as transformative intellectuals.

### *Teachers as Transformative Intellectuals*

The idea of teachers as transformative intellectuals is derived mainly from the works of a particular group of educationists called critical pedagogists. They include general educationists such as Henry Giroux (1988), Peter McLaren (1995), and Roger Simon (1987), and language teaching professionals such as Elsa Auerbach (1995), Sarah Benesch (2001), and Alastair Pennycook (2001). All of them are heavily influenced by the educational philosophy of the Brazilian thinker Paulo Freire. Through a quarter century of writings ranging from *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1972) to *Pedagogy of the Heart*, published posthumously in 1998, Freire tirelessly espoused the cause of sociopolitical emancipation and individual empowerment through the democratic process of education.

Following Freire's philosophy, critical pedagogists believe that pedagogy, any pedagogy, is embedded in relations of power and dominance, and is employed to create and sustain social inequalities. For them, schools and colleges are not simply instructional sites; they are, in fact, "cultural arenas where heterogeneous ideological, discursive, and social forms collide in an unremitting struggle for dominance" (McLaren, 1995, p. 30). Classroom reality is socially constructed and historically determined. What is therefore required to challenge the social and historical forces is a pedagogy that empowers teachers and learners. Such a pedagogy would take seriously the lived experiences that teachers and learners bring to the educational setting.

Critical pedagogists view teachers as "professionals who are able and willing to reflect upon the ideological principles that inform their practice, who connect pedagogical theory and practice to wider social issues, and who work together to share ideas, exercise power over the conditions of their labor, and embody in their teaching a vision of a better and more humane life" (Giroux and McLaren, 1989, p. xxiii). In order to reflect such a radical role assigned to teachers, Giroux characterized them as "transformative

intellectuals.” In his 1988 book *Teachers as Intellectuals: Toward a Critical Pedagogy of Learning*, Giroux points to “the role that teachers and administrators might play as transformative intellectuals who develop counterhegemonic pedagogies that not only empower students by giving them the knowledge and social skills they will need to be able to function in the larger society as critical agents, but also educate them for transformative action” (Giroux, 1988, p. xxxiii).

By requiring teachers to be sociopolitically conscious and to be assertive in acting upon their sociopolitical consciousness, the concept of teachers as transformative intellectuals stretches their role beyond the borders of the classroom. As transformative intellectuals, teachers are engaged in a dual task: they strive not only for educational advancement but also for personal transformation.

To achieve educational advancement, they try to organize themselves as a community of educators dedicated to the creation and implementation of forms of knowledge that are relevant to their specific contexts and to construct curricula and syllabi around their own and their students’ needs, wants, and situations. Such a task makes it imperative for them to maximize sociopolitical awareness among their learners using consciousness-raising, problem-posing activities.

To achieve personal transformation, they try to educate themselves and their students about various forms of inequality and injustice in the wider society and to address and redress them in purposeful and peaceful ways. The dual role, thus, requires teachers to view pedagogy not merely as a mechanism for maximizing learning opportunities in the classroom but also as a means for transforming life in and outside the classroom.

What exactly do transformative teachers do? Using a related term, postformal teachers, to refer to teachers as transformative intellectuals, Joe Kincheloe (1993, pp. 201–3) summarizes their teaching as:

- *inquiry oriented*: teachers cultivate and extend research skills that help them and their students to explore problems they themselves have posed about life in and outside the classroom;
- *socially contextualized*: aware of the sociohistorical context and the power dimensions that have helped shape it, teachers always monitor and respond to its effect on themselves, their students, and the social fabric;

- *grounded on a commitment to world making*: teachers realize that appropriate knowledge is something that is produced by interaction of teacher and student in a given context, and act on that realization;
- *dedicated to an art of improvisation*: teachers recognize that they operate in classroom conditions of uncertainty and uniqueness and therefore are able and willing to improvise their lesson plans and instructional procedures;
- *dedicated to the cultivation of situated participations*: teachers promote student discussion in class by situating the class in the words, concerns, and experience of the students;
- *extended by a concern with critical self- and social-reflection*: teachers conceptualize classroom techniques that encourage introspection and self-reflection;
- *shaped by a commitment to democratic self-directed education*: teachers consider ways of helping themselves and their students gain a sense of ownership of their own education;
- *steeped in a sensitivity by pluralism*: familiarize themselves with the linguistic and cultural diversity of their student population and conceptualize multiple perspectives on issues that matter to them and to their students;
- *committed to action*: teachers come to see thinking as a first step to action and continually design plans of action to carry out their critical thoughts; and
- *concerned with the affective dimension of human beings*: teachers think in terms of developing both the emotional and logical sides of their students and themselves.

---

### **Reflective task 1.3**

What are the implications of becoming/being a transformative intellectual? For what reasons would you support or oppose the expanded role that teachers as transformative intellectuals are expected to play? To what extent do teacher education programs with which you are familiar prepare student teachers to become transformative intellectuals—in terms of imparting necessary knowledge, skill, and attitude?

---

The three perspectives on the role and function of teachers—as passive technicians, as reflective practitioners, and as transforma-

tive intellectuals—have evolved over time and have overlapping characteristics. Table 1.1 provides a summary of salient features that clearly illustrate the overlap.

Table 1.1 The Roles of the Teacher: a summary

	Teachers as passive technicians	Teachers as reflective practitioners	Teachers as transformative intellectuals
Primary role of teacher	conduit	facilitator	change agent
Primary source of knowledge	professional knowledge + empirical research by experts	professional knowledge + teacher's personal knowledge + guided action research by teachers	professional knowledge + teacher's personal knowledge + self-exploratory research by teachers
Primary goal of teaching	maximizing content knowledge through prescribed activities	all above + maximizing learning potential through problem-solving activities	all above + maximizing sociopolitical awareness through problem-posing activities
Primary orientation to teaching	discrete approach, anchored in the discipline	integrated approach, anchored in the classroom	holistic approach, anchored in the society
Primary players in the teaching process (in rank order)	experts + teachers	teachers + experts + learners	teachers + learners + experts + community activists

The overlapping and expanding characteristics of teacher roles can be related in terms of a hierarchy as well, as shown in Fig. 1.1. This hierarchy is interpreted to mean that teachers' role as transformative intellectuals includes some of the characteristics of teachers'

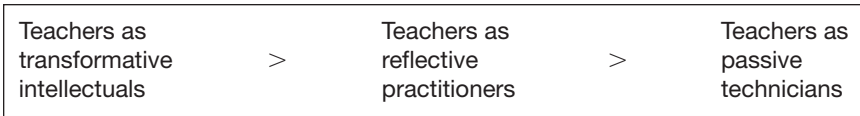


Figure 1.1 A hierarchy of teacher roles

role as reflective practitioners, which in turn include some of the characteristics of teachers’ role as passive technicians.

It is useful to treat the three perspectives not as absolute opposites but as relative tendencies, with teachers leaning toward one or the other at different moments. What is crucial to remember, however, is that passive technicians can hardly become transformative intellectuals without a continual process of self-reflection and self-renewal. One major aspect of that process relates to the teachers’ ability and willingness to go beyond the professional theories transmitted to them through formal teacher education programs and try to conceive and construct their own personal theory of teaching. In other words, the process of transformative teaching demands that teachers take a critical look at the dichotomy between theory and practice, between theorists and practitioners.

### Theory and Practice

It is generally agreed that teachers’ classroom practice is directly or indirectly based on some theory whether or not it is explicitly articulated. Teachers may have gained this crucial theoretical knowledge either through professional education, personal experience, robust commonsense, or a combination. In fact, it has been suggested that there is no substantial difference between common sense and theory, particularly in the field of education. Cameron et al. (1992, pp. 18–19), for instance, assert that common sense is different from theory “only by the degree of formality and self-consciousness with which it is invoked. When someone purports to criticize or ‘go beyond’ commonsense, they are not putting theory where previously there was none, but replacing one theory with another.”

That most successful teaching techniques are in one way or another informed by principled theories does not seem to be in dis-

pute. What have become controversial are questions such as what constitutes a theory, who constructs a theory, and whose theory counts as theory. Traditionally, there has been a clearly articulated separation between theory and practice. For instance, in the context of L2 education, theory is generally seen to constitute a set of insights and concepts derived from academic disciplines such as general education, linguistic sciences, second language acquisition, cognitive psychology, and information sciences. These and other allied disciplines provide the theoretical bases necessary for the study of language, language learning, language teaching, and language teacher education.

Practice is seen to constitute a set of teaching and learning strategies indicated by the theorist or the syllabus designer or the materials producer, and adopted or adapted by the teacher and the learner in order to jointly accomplish the stated and unstated goals of language learning and teaching in the classroom. Consequently, there is, as mentioned earlier, a corresponding division of labor between the theorist and the teacher: the theorist conceives and constructs knowledge and the teacher understands and applies that knowledge. Thus, the relationship between the theorist and the teacher is not unlike that of the producer and the consumer of a commercial commodity. Such a division of labor is said to have resulted in the creation of a privileged class of theorists and an underprivileged class of practitioners.

### *Professional Theory and Personal Theory*

Well aware of the harmful effects of the artificial division between theory and practice, general educationists correctly affirm that theory and practice should inform each other, and should therefore constitute a unified whole. Their stand on the theory/practice divide is reflected in a distinction they made between a “professional theory” and a “personal theory” of education. Charles O’Hanlon summarizes the distinction in this way:

A professional theory is a theory which is created and perpetuated within the professional culture. It is a theory which is widely known and understood like the developmental stages of Piaget. Professional theories are generally transmitted via teacher/professional training in colleges, polytechnics and universities. Professional theories form the basis of a shared knowledge and understanding

about the “culture” of teaching and provide the opportunity to develop discourse on the implicit and explicit educational issues raised by these theoretical perspectives . . .

A personal theory, on the other hand, is an individual theory unique to each person, which is individually developed through the experience of putting professional theories to the test in the practical situation. How each person interprets and adapts their previous learning particularly their reading, understanding and identification of professional theories while they are on the job is potentially their own personal theory (O’Hanlon, 1993, pp. 245–6).

Implied in this distinction is the traditional assumption that professional theory belongs to the domain of the theorist and personal theory belongs to the domain of the teacher. Although this approach does not place theory and practice in positions of antithetical polarity, it nevertheless perpetuates the artificial divide between theory and practice and between the theorist’s professional theory and the teacher’s personal theory. Another drawback is that this approach offers only limited possibilities for practicing teachers because they are not empowered to design their personal theories based on their own experiential knowledge; instead, they are encouraged to develop them by understanding, interpreting, and testing the professional theories and ideas constructed by outside experts (Kumaravadivelu, 1999a).

Critical pedagogists have come out strongly against such an approach. They argue that it merely forces teachers to take orders from established theorists and faithfully execute them, thereby leaving very little room for self-conceptualization and self-construction of truly personal theories. They go on to say that supporters of this teacher-as-implementer approach “exhibit ideological naiveté. They are unable to recognize that the act of selecting problems for teachers to research is an ideological act, an act that trivialized the role of the teacher” (Kincheloe, 1993, pp. 185–6). A huge obstacle to the realization of the kind of flexibility and freedom that critical pedagogists advocate is that the artificial dichotomy between the theorist and the teacher has been institutionalized in the teaching community and that most teachers have been trained to accept the dichotomy as something that naturally goes with the territory.

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### Reflective task 1.4

What might be a productive connection between a theorist's professional theory and a teacher's personal theory? Which one, according to you, would be relevant and reliable for your specific learning and teaching context? Is there (or, should there be) a right mix, and if so, what?

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#### *Teacher's Theory of Practice*

Any serious attempt to help teachers construct their own theory of practice requires a re-examination of the idea of theory and theory-making. A distinction that Alexander (1984, 1986) makes between theory as product and theory as process may be useful in this context. Theory as product refers to the content knowledge of one's discipline; whereas, theory as process refers to the intellectual activity (i.e., the thought process) needed to theorize. Appropriately, Alexander uses the term *theorizing* to refer to theory as intellectual activity. Theorizing as an intellectual activity, then, is not confined to theorists alone; it is something teachers should be enabled to do as well.

According to Alexander, a teacher's theory of practice should be based on different types of knowledge: (a) speculative theory (by which he refers to the theory conceptualized by thinkers in the field), (b) the findings of empirical research, and (c) the experiential knowledge of practicing teachers. None of these, however, should be presented as the privileged source of knowledge. He advises teachers to approach their own practice with "principles drawn from the consideration of these different types of knowledge" (Alexander 1986, p. 146), and urges teacher educators "to concentrate less on what teachers should know, and more on how they might think" (ibid., p. 145). In other words, the primary concern of teachers and teacher educators should be the depth of critical thinking rather than the breadth of content knowledge.

Extending Alexander's notion of teacher theorizing, and drawing from research conducted by others, Donald McIntyre (1993) differentiates three levels of theorizing.

- At the first, *technical* level, teacher theorizing is concerned with the effective achievement of short-term, classroom-centered in-

structional goals. In order to achieve that, teachers are content with using ideas generated by outside experts and exercises designed by textbook writers.

- At the second, *practical* level, teacher theorizing is concerned with the assumptions, values, and consequences with which classroom activities are linked. At this level of practical reflectivity, teachers not only articulate their criteria for developing and evaluating their own practice but also engage in extensive theorizing about the nature of their subjects, their students, and learning/teaching processes.
- At the third, *critical* or *emancipatory* level, teacher theorizing is concerned with wider ethical, social, historical, and political issues, including the institutional and societal forces which may constrain the teacher's freedom of action to design an effective theory of practice.

Incidentally, the three levels correspond roughly to the three types of teacher roles—teachers as passive technicians, reflective practitioners, and transformative intellectuals—discussed earlier.

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### ***Reflective task 1.5***

What are the benefits, and who stands to benefit, if teachers become effective producers of their own personal theories? What, in your specific learning and teaching context, are the possibilities and limitations you face if you wish to theorize from your practice?

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## **In Closing**

This chapter has been concerned mainly with the general nature of teaching as a professional activity. Whether teachers characterize their activity as a job or as work, career, occupation, or vocation, they play an unmistakable and unparalleled role in the success of any educational enterprise. Whether they see themselves as passive technicians, reflective practitioners, transformative intellectuals, or as a combination, they are all the time involved in a critical mind engagement. Their success and the satisfaction they derive from it depends to a large extent on the quality of their mind engage-

ment. One way of enhancing the quality of their mind engagement is to recognize the symbiotic relationship between theory, research, and practice, and between professional, personal, and experiential knowledge.

In the next chapter, I shall attempt to relate the general nature of teaching as a professional activity to the emerging concept of post-method pedagogy in the specific field of second and foreign language education.

## CHAPTER 2

# *Understanding Postmethod Pedagogy*

As fashions in language teaching come and go, the teacher in the classroom needs reassurance that there is some bedrock beneath the shifting sands. Once solidly founded on the bedrock, like the sea anemone, the teacher can sway to the rhythms of any tides or currents, without the trauma of being swept away purposelessly.

—WILGA RIVERS, 1992, p. 373

William Mackey, a distinguished professor of language teaching at the University of London and the author of an authoritative book on method, *Language Teaching Analysis*, lamented that the word *method* “means so little and so much” (1965, p. 139). The reason for this, he said, “is not hard to find. It lies in the state and organization of our knowledge of language and language learning. It lies in wilful ignorance of what has been done and said and thought in the past. It lies in the vested interests which methods become. And it lies in the meaning of method” (p. 139). What Mackey said nearly four decades ago is true of today as well.

Most of us in the language teaching profession hear and use the term *method* so much and so often that we hardly pause to think about its meaning. In this chapter, I discuss the meaning of method. The discussion is in five parts. In the first part, I attempt to tease out the conceptual as well as terminological confusion surrounding the concept of method. In the second, I describe the limited and limiting nature of method and the widespread dissatisfaction it has created among teachers and teacher educators. In the third, I discuss how a state of heightened awareness about the futility of searching for the best method has resulted in a postmethod condition. Then, I highlight the basic parameters of a postmethod pedagogy that seeks to transcend the limitations of method. Finally, I present the

outlines of a macrostrategic framework that is consistent with the characteristics of a postmethod pedagogy—a framework on which I will elaborate throughout the rest of this book.

## The Concept of Method

A core course in *Theory and Practice of Methods*, with the same or a different title, is an integral part of language teacher education programs all over the world. A survey of 120 teacher education programs in Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) in the United States, for instance, shows that the Methods course functions as the primary vehicle for the development of basic knowledge and skill in the prospective teacher (Grosse, 1991). The survey also shows that specific classroom techniques receive “the greatest amount of attention and time in the methods courses” (p. 32) and that the three books that top the list of textbooks that are widely prescribed for methods classes “deal almost exclusively with specific language teaching methods” (p. 38).

The term *methods*, as currently used in the literature on second and foreign language (L2) teaching, does not refer to what teachers actually do in the classroom; rather, it refers to established methods conceptualized and constructed by experts in the field. The exact number of methods that are commonly used is unclear. A book published in the mid sixties, for instance, provides a list of fifteen “most common” types of methods “still in use in one form or another in various parts of the world” (Mackey, 1965, p. 151). Two books published in the mid eighties (Larsen-Freeman, 1986; and Richards and Rodgers, 1986)—which have long-occupied the top two ranks among the books prescribed for methods classes in the United States—provide, between them, a list of eleven methods that are currently used. They are (in alphabetical order): Audiolingual Method, Communicative Methods, Community Language Learning, Direct Method, Grammar-Translation Method, Natural Approach, Oral Approach, Silent Way, Situational Language Teaching, Suggestopedia, and Total Physical Response.

It would be wrong to assume that these eleven methods provide eleven different paths to language teaching. In fact, there is considerable overlap in their theoretical as well as practical approaches to L2 learning and teaching. Sometimes, as Wilga Rivers (1991, p. 283) rightly points out, what appears to be a radically new method is more

often than not a variant of existing methods presented with “the fresh paint of a new terminology that camouflages their fundamental similarity.” It is therefore useful, for the purpose of analysis and understanding, to cluster these methods in terms of certain identifiable common features. One way of doing that is to classify them as (a) language-centered methods, (b) learner-centered methods, and (c) learning-centered methods (Kumaravadivelu, 1993a).

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### ***Reflective task 2.1***

Individually or with a peer partner, reflect on the meaning of method. Then, try to guess how the meaning of method might be treated in (a) language-centered, (b) learner-centered, and (c) learning-centered methods.

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### *Language-Centered Methods*

Language-centered methods are those that are principally concerned with linguistic forms, also called grammatical structures. These methods (e.g., audiolingual method) seek to provide opportunities for learners to practice preselected, presequenced linguistic structures through form-focused exercises in class. The assumption is that a preoccupation with form will ultimately lead to a mastery of the target language and that learners can draw from this formal repertoire whenever they wish to communicate in the target language outside the class. According to this belief, language development is largely intentional rather than incidental, that is, it takes place through conscious effort as in the case of adult L2 learning and not through unconscious processes as in the case of child L1 acquisition.

Language-centered methods treat language learning as a linear, additive process. That is, they believe language develops primarily in terms of what William Rutherford (1987) calls “accumulated entities.” In practice, a set of grammatical structures and vocabulary items are carefully selected for their potential use and graded from simple to complex. The teacher’s task is to introduce them one at a time and help the learner practice them until the learner internalizes them. Secondly, language-centered methods generally advocate explicit introduction, analysis, and explanation of linguistic systems.

That is, they believe that the linguistic systems are simple enough and that our explanatory power sophisticated enough to provide explicit rules of thumb, and explain them in such a way that the learner can understand and assimilate them.

### *Learner-Centered Methods*

Learner-centered methods are those that are principally concerned with language use and learner needs. These methods (e.g., some versions of communicative methods) seek to provide opportunities for learners to practice preselected, presequenced grammatical structures as well as communicative functions (i.e., speech acts such as apologizing, requesting, etc.) through meaning-focused activities. The assumption is that a preoccupation with both form and function will ultimately lead to target language mastery and that the learners can make use of both formal and functional repertoire to fulfill their communicative needs outside the class. In this approach, as in the case of language-centered methods, language development is considered largely intentional rather than incidental.

Learner-centered methods aim at making language learners grammatically accurate and communicatively fluent. They take into account the learner's real-life language use for social interaction or for academic study, and present necessary linguistic structures in communicative contexts. Proponents of learner-centered methods, like those of language-centered methods, believe in accumulated entities. The one major difference is that in the case of the latter, the accumulated entities represent linguistic structures, and in the case of the former they represent structures plus notions and functions. Furthermore, just as language-centered methods advocate that the linguistic structures of a language could be sequentially presented and explained, learner-centered methods also advocate that each functional category could be matched with one or more linguistic forms and sequentially presented and systematically explained to the learner.

### *Learning-Centered Methods*

Learning-centered methods are those that are principally concerned with learning processes. These methods (e.g., the Natural Approach) seek to provide opportunities for learners to participate in open-ended meaningful interaction through communicative activities or problem-solving tasks in class. The assumption is that a

preoccupation with meaning-making will ultimately lead to grammatical as well as communicative mastery of the language and that learners can learn through the process of communication. In this approach, unlike the other two, language development is considered more incidental than intentional.

According to learning-centered methods, language development is a nonlinear process, and therefore, does not require preselected, presequenced systematic language input but requires the creation of conditions in which learners can engage in meaningful activities in class. Proponents of learning-centered methods believe that language is best learned when the learner's attention is focused on understanding, saying and doing something with language, and not when their attention is focused explicitly on linguistic features. They also hold the view that linguistic systems are too complex to be neatly analyzed, explicitly explained, and sequentially presented to the learner.

In seeking to redress what they consider to be a fundamental flaw that characterizes previous methods, proponents of learning-centered methods attempt to draw insights from the findings of research in second language acquisition. They claim that these insights can inform the theory and practice of language teaching methods. As a result, the changes they advocate relate to all aspects of learning and teaching operations: syllabus design, materials production, classroom teaching, outcomes assessment, and teacher education.

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### ***Reflective task 2.2***

Recall the method of teaching followed by your teacher when you learned an L2 in a formal, classroom context. Was it language-centered, learner-centered, learning-centered, or a combination? Alternatively, if you have been recently teaching an L2, think about how your classroom practices do or do not fit in with these categories of methods.

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It is worthwhile to remember that language-, learner-, and learning-centered methods, in their prototypical version, consist of a *specified* set of theoretical principles and a *specified* set of classroom procedures. Theoretical principles are insights derived from linguistics, second language acquisition, cognitive psychology, information sciences, and other allied disciplines that provide theoretic-

cal bases for the study of language, language learning, and language teaching. Classroom procedures are teaching and learning techniques indicated by the syllabus designer and/or the materials producer, and adopted/adapted by the teacher and the learner in order to jointly accomplish the goals of language learning and teaching in the classroom.

Classroom teachers have always found it difficult to use any of the established methods as designed and delivered to them. In fact, even the authors of the two textbooks on methods widely used in the United States were uneasy about the efficacy of the methods they selected to include in their books, and wisely refrained from recommending any of them for adoption. "Our goal," Richards and Rodgers (1986, p. viii) told their readers, "is to enable teachers to become better informed about the nature, strengths, and weaknesses of methods and approaches so they can better arrive at their own judgments and decisions." Larsen-Freeman (1986, p. 1) went a step further and explicitly warned her readers that "the inclusion of a method in this book should not be construed as an endorsement of that method. What *is* being recommended is that, in the interest of becoming informed about existing choices, you investigate each method" (emphasis as in original).

### *Limitations of the Concept of Method*

The disjunction between method as conceptualized by theorists and method as conducted by teachers is the direct consequence of the inherent limitations of the concept of method itself. First and foremost, methods are based on idealized concepts geared toward idealized contexts. Since language learning and teaching needs, wants, and situations are unpredictably numerous, no idealized method can visualize all the variables in advance in order to provide situation-specific suggestions that practicing teachers sorely need to tackle the challenges they confront every day of their professional lives. As a predominantly top-down exercise, the conception and construction of methods have been largely guided by a one-size-fits-all, cookie-cutter approach that assumes a common clientele with common goals.

Not anchored in any specific learning and teaching context, and caught up in the whirlwind of fashion, methods tend to wildly drift from one theoretical extreme to the other. At one time, grammatical drills were considered the right way to teach; at another, they were given up in favor of communicative tasks. At one time, explicit error

correction was considered necessary; at another, it was frowned upon. These extreme swings create conditions in which certain aspects of learning and teaching get overly emphasized while certain others are utterly ignored, depending on which way the pendulum swings.

Yet another crucial shortcoming of the concept of method is that it is too inadequate and too limited to satisfactorily explain the complexity of language teaching operations around the world. Concerned primarily and narrowly with classroom instructional strategies, it ignores the fact that the success or failure of classroom instruction depends to a large extent on the unstated and unstable interaction of multiple factors such as teacher cognition, learner perception, societal needs, cultural contexts, political exigencies, economic imperatives, and institutional constraints, all of which are inextricably interwoven.

The limitations of the concept of method gradually led to the realization that “the term method is a label without substance” (Clarke, 1983, p. 109), that it has “diminished rather than enhanced our understanding of language teaching” (Pennycook, 1989, p. 597), and that “language teaching might be better understood and better executed if the concept of method were not to exist at all” (Jarvis, 1991, p. 295). This realization has resulted in a widespread dissatisfaction with the concept of method.

## **Dissatisfaction with Method**

Based on theoretical, experimental, and experiential knowledge, teachers and teacher educators have expressed their dissatisfaction with method in different ways. Studies by Janet Swaffer, Katherine Arens, and Martha Morgan (1982), David Nunan (1987), Michael Legutke and Howard Thomas (1991), Kumaravadivelu (1993b), and others clearly demonstrate that, even as the methodological band played on, practicing teachers have been marching to a different drum. These studies show, collectively and clearly, that

- teachers who are trained in and even swear by a particular method do not conform to its theoretical principles and classroom procedures,
- teachers who claim to follow the same method often use different classroom procedures that are not consistent with the adopted method,

- teachers who claim to follow different methods often use same classroom procedures, and
- over time, teachers develop and follow a carefully delineated task-hierarchy, a weighted sequence of activities not necessarily associated with any established method.

In short, confronted with “the complexity of language, learning, and language learners every day of their working lives in a more direct fashion than any theorist does,” teachers have developed the conviction that “no single perspective on language, no single explanation for learning, and no unitary view of the contributions of language learners will account for what they must grapple with on a daily basis” (Larsen-Freeman, 1990, p. 269).

Justifiable dissatisfaction with established methods inevitably and increasingly led practicing teachers to rely on their intuitive ability and experiential knowledge. As Henry Widdowson (1990, p. 50) observes: “It is quite common to hear teachers say that they do not subscribe to any particular approach or method in their teaching but are ‘eclectic’. They thereby avoid commitment to any current fad that comes up on the whirligig of fashion.” He further asserts that “if by eclecticism is meant the random and expedient use of whatever technique comes most readily to hand, then it has no merit whatever” (p. 50).

While there have been frequent calls for teachers to develop informed or enlightened eclecticism based on their own understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of established methods, teacher education programs seldom make any sustained and systematic effort to develop in prospective teachers the knowledge and skill necessary to be responsibly eclectic. Nor do any of the widely prescribed textbooks for methods courses, to my knowledge, have a chapter titled “Eclectic Method.”

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### ***Reflective task 2.3***

Continuing your thoughts on the previous reflective task, consider whether your teachers (when you learned your L2) or you (if you have recently taught an L2) have followed what might be called an eclectic method. If yes, what actually made the method “eclectic”? And, what are the difficulties in developing an eclectic method?

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The difficulties faced by teachers in developing an enlightened eclectic method are apparent. Stern (1992, p. 11) pointed out some of them: "The weakness of the eclectic position is that it offers no criteria according to which we can determine which is the best theory, nor does it provide any principles by which to include or exclude features which form part of existing theories or practices. The choice is left to the individual's intuitive judgment and is, therefore, too broad and too vague to be satisfactory as a theory in its own right." The net result is that practicing teachers have neither the comfort of a context-sensitive professional theory that they can rely on nor the confidence of a fully developed personal theory that they can build on. Consequently, they find themselves straddling two methodological worlds: one that is imposed on them, and another that is improvised by them.

Teachers' efforts to cope with the limitations of method are matched by teacher educators' attempts to develop images, options, scenarios, tasks, or activities based on a fast-developing knowledge of the processes of second language acquisition and on a growing understanding of the dynamics of classroom learning and teaching. Scholars such as Earl Stevick, Alice Omaggio, and Robert Di Pietro, to name just a few, provided the initial impetus to cope with the limitations of method in a sustained and systematic way, but they all tried to do it within the conceptual confines of methods. Drawing from "a wider range of methods—some old, some new, some widely used, some relatively unknown" (1982, p. 2), Earl Stevick attempted to aid teachers in identifying and evaluating many of the alternatives that are available for their day-to-day work in the classroom.

Alice Omaggio (1986) advocated a proficiency-oriented instruction that focuses on "a hierarchy of priorities set by the instructor or the program planners rather than a 'prepackaged' set of procedures to which everyone is expected to slavishly subscribe" (p. 44). Robert Di Pietro (1987) proposed strategic interaction with scenarios that motivate students "to converse purposefully with each other by casting them in roles in episodes based on or taken from real life" (p. 2).

Several others extended the lead given by the three scholars mentioned above and attempted to nudge the profession away from the concept of method. David Nunan (1989) sought to assign "the search for the one right method to the dustbin" by helping teachers "develop, select, or adapt tasks which are appropriate in terms of

goals, input, activities, roles and settings, and difficulty” (p.2). Dick Allwright investigated and introduced the concept of exploratory teaching that teachers can pursue in their own classroom settings (see, for instance, Allwright and Bailey, 1991). Chiding the profession for its obsession with method, Stern (1992) proposed “teaching strategies” based on intralingual-crosslingual, analytic-experiential, and explicit-implicit dimensions. His comprehensive and coherent approach to language teaching is derived from “flexible sets of concepts which embody any useful lessons we can draw from the history of language teaching but which do not perpetuate the rigidities and dogmatic narrowness of the earlier methods concept” (p. 278).

While scholars such as Allwright, Nunan, and Stern pointed out the pedagogic limitations of the concept of method, others focused on its larger, rather insidious, sociocultural and political agenda. Alastair Pennycook (1989) explained how the concept of method introduces and legitimizes “interested knowledge” that plays an important role in preserving and promoting inequities between the participants in the learning, teaching, and teacher education processes. Educationist Donaldo Macedo (1994, p. 8) called for an “anti-methods pedagogy,” declaring that such a pedagogy “should be informed by critical understanding of the sociocultural context that guides our practices so as to free us from the beaten path of methodological certainties and specialisms.”

Emerging gradually over the years, and accelerating during the last decade, are critical thoughts that question the nature and scope of method, and creative ideas that redefine our understanding of method. Having witnessed how methods go through endless cycles of life, death, and rebirth, the language teaching profession seems to have reached a state of heightened awareness—an awareness that, as long as we remain in the web of method, we will continue to get entangled in an unending search for an unavailable solution; that such a search drives us to continually recycle and repackage the same old ideas; and that nothing short of breaking the cycle can salvage the situation. Out of this awareness has emerged what I have called a “postmethod condition” (Kumaravadivelu, 1994a).

## **Postmethod Condition**

The postmethod condition signifies three interrelated attributes. First and foremost, it signifies a search for an alternative to method

rather than an alternative method. While alternative methods are primarily products of top-down processes, alternatives to method are mainly products of bottom-up processes. In practical terms, this means that, as discussed in Chapter 1, we need to refigure the relationship between the theorizer and the practitioner of language teaching. If the conventional concept of method entitles theorizers to construct professional theories of pedagogy, the postmethod condition empowers practitioners to construct personal theories of practice. If the concept of method authorizes theorizers to centralize pedagogic decision-making, the postmethod condition enables practitioners to generate location-specific, classroom-oriented innovative strategies.

Secondly, the postmethod condition signifies teacher autonomy. The conventional concept of method “overlooks the fund of experience and tacit knowledge about teaching which the teachers already have by virtue of their lives as students” (Freeman, 1991, p. 35). The postmethod condition, however, recognizes the teachers’ potential to know not only how to teach but also how to act autonomously within the academic and administrative constraints imposed by institutions, curricula, and textbooks. It also promotes the ability of teachers to know how to develop a critical approach in order to self-observe, self-analyze, and self-evaluate their own teaching practice with a view to effecting desired changes.

The third attribute of the postmethod condition is principled pragmatism. Unlike eclecticism which is constrained by the conventional concept of method, in the sense that one is supposed to put together practices from different established methods, principled pragmatism is based on the pragmatics of pedagogy where “the relationship between theory and practice, ideas and their actualization, can only be realized within the domain of application, that is, through the immediate activity of teaching” (Widdowson, 1990, p. 30). Principled pragmatism thus focuses on how classroom learning can be shaped and reshaped by teachers as a result of self-observation, self-analysis, and self-evaluation.

One way in which teachers can follow principled pragmatism is by developing what Prabhu (1990) calls “a sense of plausibility.” Teachers’ sense of plausibility is their “subjective understanding of the teaching they do” (Prabhu, 1990, p. 172). This subjective understanding may arise from their own experience as learners and teachers, and through professional education and peer consultation. Since

teachers' sense of plausibility is not linked to the concept of method, an important concern is "not whether it implies a good or bad method, but more basically, whether it is active, alive, or operational enough to create a sense of involvement for both the teacher and the student" (Ibid., p. 173).

The three major attributes of the postmethod condition outlined above provide a solid foundation on which the fundamental parameters of a postmethod pedagogy can be conceived and constructed.

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### **Reflective task 2.4**

Pause for a minute and consider what possible criteria a postmethod pedagogy has to meet in order to overcome the limitations of a method-based pedagogy.

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## **Postmethod Pedagogy**

Postmethod pedagogy allows us to go beyond, and overcome the limitations of, method-based pedagogy. Incidentally, I use the term *pedagogy* in a broad sense to include not only issues pertaining to classroom strategies, instructional materials, curricular objectives, and evaluation measures but also a wide range of historiopolitical and sociocultural experiences that directly or indirectly influence L2 education. Within such a broad-based definition, I visualize postmethod pedagogy as a three-dimensional system consisting of pedagogic parameters of particularity, practicality, and possibility. I briefly outline below the salient features of each of these parameters indicating how they interweave and interact with each other (for more details, see Kumaravadivelu, 2001).

### *The Parameter of Particularity*

The parameter of particularity requires that any language pedagogy, to be relevant, must be sensitive to a particular group of teachers teaching a particular group of learners pursuing a particular set of goals within a particular institutional context embedded in a particular sociocultural milieu. The parameter of particularity then is

opposed to the notion that there can be an established method with a generic set of theoretical principles and a generic set of classroom practices.

From a pedagogic point of view, then, particularity is at once a goal and a process. That is to say, one works *for* and *through* particularity at the same time. It is a progressive advancement of means and ends. It is the ability to be sensitive to the local educational, institutional and social contexts in which L2 learning and teaching take place (see Chapter 11 on ensuring social relevance). It starts with practicing teachers, either individually or collectively, observing their teaching acts, evaluating their outcomes, identifying problems, finding solutions, and trying them out to see once again what works and what doesn't (see Chapter 13 on monitoring teaching acts). Such a continual cycle of observation, reflection, and action is a prerequisite for the development of context-sensitive pedagogic theory and practice. Since the particular is so deeply embedded in the practical, and cannot be achieved or understood without it, the parameter of particularity is intertwined with the parameter of practicality as well.

### *The Parameter of Practicality*

The parameter of practicality relates to a much larger issue that directly impacts on the practice of classroom teaching, namely, the relationship between theory and practice that was discussed in Chapter 1. The parameter of practicality entails a teacher-generated theory of practice. It recognizes that no theory of practice can be fully useful and usable unless it is generated through practice. A logical corollary is that it is the practicing teacher who, given adequate tools for exploration, is best suited to produce such a practical theory. The intellectual exercise of attempting to derive a theory of practice enables teachers to understand and identify problems, analyze and assess information, consider and evaluate alternatives, and then choose the best available alternative that is then subjected to further critical appraisal. In this sense, a theory of practice involves continual reflection and action.

If teachers' reflection and action are seen as constituting one side of the practicality coin, their insights and intuition can be seen as constituting the other. Sedimented and solidified through prior and

ongoing encounters with learning and teaching is the teacher's unexplained and sometimes unexplainable awareness of what constitutes good teaching. Teachers' sense-making (van Manen, 1977) of good teaching matures over time as they learn to cope with competing pulls and pressures representing the content and character of professional preparation, personal beliefs, institutional constraints, learner expectations, assessment instruments, and other factors.

The seemingly instinctive and idiosyncratic nature of the teacher's sense-making disguises the fact that it is formed and reformed by the pedagogic factors governing the microcosm of the classroom as well as by the sociopolitical forces emanating from outside. Consequently, sense-making requires that teachers view pedagogy not merely as a mechanism for maximizing learning opportunities in the classroom but also as a means for understanding and transforming possibilities in and outside the classroom. In this sense, the parameter of practicality metamorphoses into the parameter of possibility.

### *The Parameter of Possibility*

The parameter of possibility is derived mainly from the works of critical pedagogists of Freirean persuasion. As discussed in Chapter 1, critical pedagogists take the position that any pedagogy is implicated in relations of power and dominance, and is implemented to create and sustain social inequalities. They call for recognition of learners' and teachers' subject-positions, that is, their class, race, gender, and ethnicity, and for sensitivity toward their impact on education.

In the process of sensitizing itself to the prevailing sociopolitical reality, the parameter of possibility is also concerned with individual identity. More than any other educational enterprise, language education provides its participants with challenges and opportunities for a continual quest for subjectivity and self-identity for, as Weeden (1987, p. 21) points out, "Language is the place where actual and possible forms of social organization and their likely social and political consequences are defined and contested. Yet it is also the place where our sense of ourselves, our subjectivity, is constructed." This is even more applicable to L2 education, which brings languages and cultures in contact (see chapters 11 and 12 for more details).

To sum up this section, I have suggested that one way of conceptualizing a postmethod pedagogy is to look at it three-dimensionally as a pedagogy of particularity, practicality, and possibility. The parameter of particularity seeks to facilitate the advancement of a context-sensitive, location-specific pedagogy that is based on a true understanding of local linguistic, sociocultural, and political particularities. The parameter of practicality seeks to rupture the reified role relationship by enabling and encouraging teachers to theorize from their practice and to practice what they theorize. The parameter of possibility seeks to tap the sociopolitical consciousness that participants bring with them to the classroom so that it can also function as a catalyst for a continual quest for identity formation and social transformation.

Inevitably, the boundaries of the particular, the practical, and the possible are blurred. As Figure 2.1 shows, the characteristics of these parameters overlap. Each one shapes and is shaped by the other. They interweave and interact with each other in a synergic relationship where the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. The result of such a relationship will vary from context to context depending on what the participants bring to bear on it.

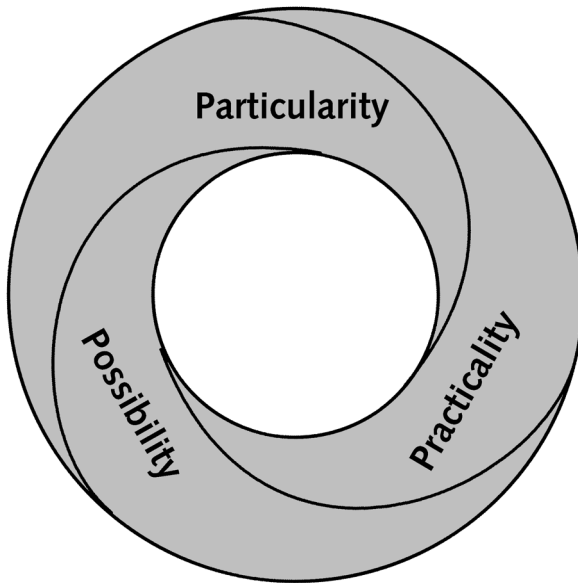


Figure 2.1. Parameters of a postmethod pedagogy

### **Reflective task 2.5**

Do the parameters of particularity, practicality, and possibility seem appropriate to you? If they do, in what way can they guide you in your practice of everyday teaching?

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If we assume that the three pedagogic parameters of particularity, practicality, and possibility have the potential to form the foundation for a postmethod pedagogy, and propel the language teaching profession beyond the limited and limiting concept of method, then we need a coherent framework that can guide us to carry out the salient features of the pedagogy in a classroom context. I present below one such framework—a macrostrategic framework (Kumaravadivelu, 1994a).

### **Macrostrategic Framework**

The macrostrategic framework for language teaching consists of macrostrategies and microstrategies. Macrostrategies are defined as guiding principles derived from historical, theoretical, empirical, and experiential insights related to L2 learning and teaching. A macrostrategy is thus a general plan, a broad guideline based on which teachers will be able to generate their own situation-specific, need-based microstrategies or classroom techniques. In other words, macrostrategies are made operational in the classroom through microstrategies. The suggested macrostrategies and the situated microstrategies can assist L2 teachers as they begin to construct their own theory of practice.

Macrostrategies may be considered theory-neutral as well as method-neutral. Theory-neutral does not mean atheoretical; rather it means that the framework is not constrained by the underlying assumptions of any one particular professional theory of language, language learning, or language teaching. Likewise, method-neutral does not mean methodless; rather it means that the framework is not conditioned by any of the particular set of theoretical principles or classroom procedures normally associated with any of the particular language teaching methods discussed in the early part of this chapter.

I list below ten macrostrategies with brief descriptions. Each one will be discussed in detail in subsequent chapters. These macrostrategies are couched in imperative terms only to connote their operational character. The choice of action verbs over static nouns to frame these macrostrategies should not therefore be misconstrued as an attempt to convey any prescriptive quality or frozen finality. The macrostrategies are:

- *Maximize learning opportunities*: This macrostrategy envisages teaching as a process of creating and utilizing learning opportunities, a process in which teachers strike a balance between their role as managers of teaching acts and their role as mediators of learning acts;
- *Minimize perceptual mismatches*: This macrostrategy emphasizes the recognition of potential perceptual mismatches between intentions and interpretations of the learner, the teacher, and the teacher educator;
- *Facilitate negotiated interaction*: This macrostrategy refers to meaningful learner-learner, learner-teacher classroom interaction in which learners are entitled and encouraged to initiate topic and talk, not just react and respond;
- *Promote learner autonomy*: This macrostrategy involves helping learners learn how to learn, equipping them with the means necessary to self-direct and self-monitor their own learning;
- *Foster language awareness*: This macrostrategy refers to any attempt to draw learners' attention to the formal and functional properties of their L2 in order to increase the degree of explicitness required to promote L2 learning;
- *Activate intuitive heuristics*: This macrostrategy highlights the importance of providing rich textual data so that learners can infer and internalize underlying rules governing grammatical usage and communicative use;
- *Contextualize linguistic input*: This macrostrategy highlights how language usage and use are shaped by linguistic, extralinguistic, situational, and extrasituational contexts;
- *Integrate language skills*: This macrostrategy refers to the need to holistically integrate language skills traditionally separated and sequenced as listening, speaking, reading, and writing;
- *Ensure social relevance*: This macrostrategy refers to the need for teachers to be sensitive to the societal, political, economic, and educational environment in which L2 learning and teaching take place; and

- *Raise cultural consciousness*: This macrostrategy emphasizes the need to treat learners as cultural informants so that they are encouraged to engage in a process of classroom participation that puts a premium on their power/knowledge.

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### **Reflective task 2.6**

Individually or with a peer partner, go over the list of macrostrategies again. Which ones already inform your day-to-day teaching? Which ones are not relevant to your learning/teaching context? Based on your professional and experiential knowledge, can you add to this list of macrostrategies?

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The basic insights for the macrostrategic framework are drawn mostly from theoretical, empirical, and experiential knowledge grounded in classroom-oriented research. The classroom research perspective adopted here is governed by the belief that a pedagogic framework must emerge from classroom experience and experimentation. It is also motivated by the fact that a solid body of classroom research findings is available for careful consideration and judicious application. It should, however, be recognized that the classroom research path is by no means the only path that has the potential to lead to the construction of a pedagogic framework. There may very well be other, equally valid paths one can take.

Whatever orientation one pursues, what should be remembered is that practicing and prospective teachers need a framework that can enable them to develop the knowledge, skill, attitude, and autonomy necessary to devise for themselves a systematic, coherent, and relevant personal theory of practice that is informed by the parameters of particularity, practicality, and possibility. While the purpose of such a framework is to help teachers become autonomous decision-makers, it should, without denying the value of individual autonomy, provide adequate conceptual underpinnings based on current theoretical, empirical, and experiential insights so that their teaching act may come about in a principled fashion.

The parameters of particularity, practicality, and possibility along with the suggested macrostrategies constitute the operating principles that can guide practicing teachers in their effort to construct their own situation-specific pedagogic knowledge in the emerging

postmethod era. How these operating principles are interconnected and mutually reinforcing can be pictorially represented in the form of a wheel.

As Figure 2.2 shows, the parameters of particularity, practicality, and possibility function as the axle that connects and holds the center of the pedagogic wheel. The macrostrategies function as spokes that join the pedagogic wheel to its center thereby giving the wheel its stability and strength. The outer rim stands for language learning and language teaching. There are, of course, hidden or unknown wheels within wheels—individual, institutional, social, and cultural factors—that influence language learning, language teaching, and language use in a given communicative situation.

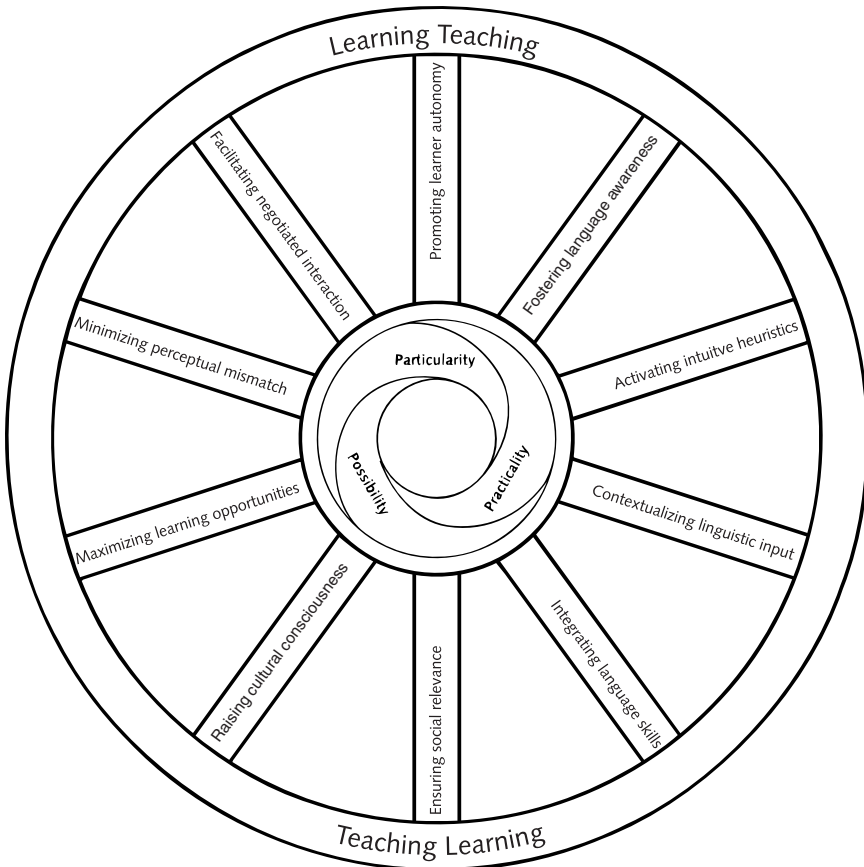


Figure 2.2. The Pedagogic Wheel

What the pedagogic wheel also indicates is that the ten macrostrategies are typically in a systemic relationship, supporting one another. That is to say, a particular macrostrategy is connected with and is related to a cluster of other macrostrategies. For instance, as will become clear in the following pages, there may be a single exercise or a task that can facilitate negotiated interaction, activate intuitive heuristics, foster language awareness, and raise cultural consciousness all at once. Clustering of macrostrategies may be useful depending on specific teaching objectives for a given day of instruction. When teachers have an opportunity to process and practice their teaching through a variety of macrostrategies, they will discover how they all hang together.

## **In Closing**

There are at least three broad, overlapping strands of thought that emerge from what we have discussed so far. First, the traditional concept of method with its generic set of theoretical principles and classroom techniques offers only a limited and limiting perspective on language learning and teaching. Second, learning and teaching needs, wants, and situations are unpredictably numerous. Therefore, current models of teacher education programs can hardly prepare teachers to tackle all these unpredictable needs, wants, and situations. Third, the primary task of in-service and pre-service teacher education programs is to create conditions for present and prospective teachers to acquire the necessary knowledge, skill, authority, and autonomy to construct their own personal pedagogic knowledge. Thus, there is an imperative need to move away from a method-based pedagogy to a postmethod pedagogy.

One possible way of conceptualizing and constructing a postmethod pedagogy is to be sensitive to the parameters of particularity, practicality, and possibility, which can be incorporated in the macrostrategic framework. The framework, then, seeks to transform classroom practitioners into strategic thinkers, strategic teachers, and strategic explorers who channel their time and effort in order to

- reflect on the specific needs, wants, situations, and processes of learning and teaching;
- stretch their knowledge, skill, and attitude to stay informed and involved;

- design and use appropriate microstrategies to maximize learning potential in the classroom; and
- monitor and evaluate their ability to react to myriad situations in meaningful ways.

In short, the framework seeks to provide a possible mechanism for classroom teachers to begin to theorize from their practice and practice what they theorize.

In the next ten chapters, I discuss the macrostrategic framework in greater detail, providing theoretical, empirical, and experiential support for each of the ten macrostrategies. I also provide illustrative microstrategies and exploratory projects to show how a particular macrostrategy can be implemented in a classroom situation. In the final chapter, I demonstrate how the macrostrategic framework can be used by teachers to self-observe, self-analyze, and self-evaluate their own teaching acts.