



Toward a Postmethod Pedagogy

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As a consequence of repeatedly articulated dissatisfaction with the limitations of the concept of *method* and the transmission model of teacher education, the L2 profession is faced with an imperative need to construct a postmethod pedagogy. In this article, I conceptualize the parameters of a postmethod pedagogy, offer suggestions for implementing it, and then raise questions and concerns that might come up in implementing it. Visualizing a three-dimensional system consisting of the parameters of particularity, practicality, and possibility, I argue that a postmethod pedagogy must (a) facilitate the advancement of a context-sensitive language education based on a true understanding of local linguistic, sociocultural, and political particularities; (b) rupture the reified role relationship between theorists and practitioners by enabling teachers to construct their own theory of practice; and (c) tap the sociopolitical consciousness that participants bring with them in order to aid their quest for identity formation and social transformation. Treating learners, teachers, and teacher educators as coexplorers, I discuss their roles and functions in a postmethod pedagogy. I conclude by raising the prospect of replacing the limited concept of method with the three pedagogic parameters of particularity, practicality, and possibility as organizing principles for L2 teaching and teacher education.

The 1990s witnessed a rare congruence of refreshingly new ideas that can fundamentally restructure second/foreign language teaching and teacher education. Among them are two mutually informing currents of thought: One emphasizes the need to go beyond the limitations of the concept of method with a call to find an alternative way of designing effective teaching strategies (Clarke, 1994; Kumaravadivelu, 1994; Prabhu, 1990), and another emphasizes the need to go beyond the limitations of the transmission model of teacher education with a call to find an alternative way of creating efficient teaching professionals (Freeman & Johnson, 1998; Johnson, 2000; Woods, 1996). The result has been a greater awareness of issues such as teacher beliefs, teacher reasoning, and teacher cognition. A common thread that runs through



the works cited above is a long-felt dissatisfaction with the concept of *method* as the organizing principle for L2 teaching and teacher education. These works can therefore be seen as heralding the development of what might be called a *postmethod pedagogy*.

Continuing and consolidating the recent explorations, and taking my *TESOL Quarterly* article on the postmethod condition (Kumaravadivelu, 1994) as a point of departure, in this article I attempt to provide the fundamentals of a postmethod pedagogy. In the first section, I conceptualize the parameters of a postmethod pedagogy. In the second, I offer suggestions for actualizing it in terms of the anticipated roles and functions of learners, teachers, and teacher educators. In the third, I problematize it by raising questions and concerns that might come up in the process of actualizing it. I conclude by raising the prospect of the parameters of a postmethod pedagogy replacing the concept of method as an organizing principle for L2 learning, teaching, and teacher education.

CONCEPTUALIZING POSTMETHOD PEDAGOGY

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 historical, political, and sociocultural experiences that directly or indirectly influence L2 education. Within such a broad-based definition, I visualize a postmethod pedagogy as a three-dimensional system consisting of three pedagogic parameters: particularity, practicality, and possibility. I discuss below the salient features of each of these parameters, indicating how they interweave and interact with each other.

A Pedagogy of Particularity

First and foremost, any postmethod pedagogy has to be a pedagogy of particularity. That is to say, 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. A pedagogy of particularity, then, is antithetical to the notion that there can be one set of pedagogic aims and objectives realizable through one set of pedagogic principles and procedures. At its core, the idea of pedagogic particularity is consistent with the hermeneutic perspective of *situational understanding* (Elliott, 1993), which claims that a meaningful pedagogy cannot be constructed without a holistic interpretation of particular situations and



that it cannot be improved without a general improvement of those particular situations.

All pedagogy, like all politics, is local. To ignore local exigencies is to ignore lived experiences. Pedagogies that ignore lived experiences will ultimately prove to be “so disturbing for those affected by them—so threatening to their belief systems—that hostility is aroused and learning becomes impossible” (Coleman, 1996, p. 11). A case in point is the sense of disillusionment that accompanied the spread of communicative language teaching. From South Africa, Chick (1996) wonders whether “our choice of communicative language teaching as a goal was possibly a sort of naive ethnocentrism prompted by the thought that what is good for Europe or the USA had to be good for KwaZulu” (p. 22). From Pakistan, Shamim (1996) reports that her attempt to introduce communicative language teaching into her classroom met with a great deal of resistance from her learners, making her “terribly exhausted” and leading her to realize that, by introducing this methodology, she was actually “creating psychological barriers to learning” (p. 109). From India, Tickoo (1996) points out that even locally initiated pedagogic innovations have failed because they merely tinkered with the methodological framework inherited from abroad, without fully taking into account local linguistic, sociocultural, and political particularities.

An interesting and intriguing aspect of particularity is that it is not a thing out there to be searched and rescued. Nor is it a chimera that lives in the fantasy world of fertile imagination, unreal and unrealized. Particularity, as Becker (1986) succinctly puts it,

is not something we begin with; particularity is something we arrive at, by repeating. Particularity is something we learn. We don't distinguish birds until we learn their names and hear their songs. Up to that point we hear “bird” around us and then we begin to pick up their particularity along with the language. Particularity is something we achieve. (p. 29)

From a pedagogic point of view, particularity is at once a goal and a process. One simultaneously works *for* and *through* particularity. It is a progressive advancement of means and ends. That is to say, it is the critical awareness of local exigencies that trigger the exploration and achievement of a pedagogy of particularity. 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 does not. Such a continual cycle of observation, reflection, and action is a prerequisite for the development of context-sensitive pedagogic knowledge. To appropriate and extend Becker's (1986) analogy, the generic professional knowledge teachers gain from teacher education programs can help them



hear “bird” around them, but it is their lived experience in the classroom and their pursuit of a pedagogy of particularity that will help them distinguish birds, learn their names, and hear their songs. In other words, context-sensitive pedagogic knowledge can emerge only from the practice of particularity. Because the particular is so deeply embedded in the practical, and cannot be achieved or understood without it, a pedagogy of particularity becomes in essence a pedagogy of practicality as well.

A Pedagogy of Practicality

A pedagogy of practicality does not pertain merely to the everyday practice of classroom teaching. It pertains to a much larger issue that has a direct impact on the practice of classroom teaching, namely, the relationship between theory and practice. General educationists (e.g., Elliott, 1991) have long recognized the harmful effect of the theory/practice dichotomy. They affirm that theory and practice mutually inform, and together constitute, a dialectical praxis, an affirmation that has recently influenced L2 teaching and teacher education as well (e.g., Freeman, 1998).

One of the ways by which educationists have addressed the theory/practice dichotomy is by positing a distinction between professional theories and personal theories. According to O’Hanlon (1993), professional theories are those that are generated by experts and are generally transmitted from centers of higher learning. Personal theories, on the other hand, are those that teachers develop by interpreting and applying professional theories in practical situations while they are on the job. Although this distinction sounds eminently sensible, in reality the expert-generated professional theories are often valued whereas the teacher-generated personal theories are often ignored. Evidently, in a well-meaning attempt to cross the borders between theory and practice, yet another line of demarcation has been drawn, this time between theorists’ theory and teachers’ theory.

This distinction between theorists’ theory and teachers’ theory has, in part, influenced the emphasis on reflective teaching and action research. “The fundamental aim of action research,” as Elliott (1991) makes crystal clear, “is to improve practice rather than to produce knowledge” (p. 49). The suggestion that teachers should construct their personal theories by testing, interpreting, and judging the usefulness of professional theories proposed by experts creates only a narrow space for teachers to function fruitfully as reflective individuals. Indeed, this suggestion leaves very little room for self-conceptualization and self-construction of pedagogic knowledge, because teachers are treated

merely as implementors of professional theories (for similar views, see Giroux, 1988; Kincheloe, 1993). This realization has recently led to some soul-searching among educationists. Zeichner (1996), one of the pioneering advocates of reflective teaching and action research, has some sobering thoughts on their limitations:

Despite the lofty rhetoric surrounding efforts to help teachers become more reflective, in reality reflective teacher education has done very little to foster genuine teacher development and to enhance teachers' roles in educational reform. Instead, an illusion of teacher development has often been created that has maintained in more subtle ways the subservient position of the teacher. (p. 201)

A pedagogy of practicality, as I visualize it, seeks to overcome some of the deficiencies inherent in the theory-versus-practice, theorists'-theory-versus-teachers'-theory dichotomies by encouraging and enabling teachers themselves to theorize from their practice and practice what they theorize (Kumaravadivelu, 1999b). If context-sensitive pedagogic knowledge has to emerge from teachers and their practice of everyday teaching, then they ought to be assisted in becoming autonomous individuals. This objective cannot be achieved simply by asking teachers to put into practice theories conceived and constructed by others. It can be achieved only by helping teachers develop the knowledge and skill, attitude, and autonomy necessary to construct their own context-sensitive pedagogic knowledge that will make their practice of everyday teaching a worthwhile endeavor.

In short, a pedagogy of practicality aims for a teacher-generated theory of practice. This assertion is premised on a rather simple and straightforward proposition: No theory of practice can be 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. A theory of practice is conceived when, to paraphrase van Manen (1991), there is a union of action and thought or, more precisely, when there is action in thought and thought in action. It is the result of what he has called *pedagogical thoughtfulness*. In the context of deriving a theory of practice, pedagogical thoughtfulness simultaneously feeds and is fed by reflective capabilities of teachers that enable them to understand and identify problems, analyze and assess information, consider and evaluate alternatives, and then choose the best available alternative, which is then subjected to further critical appraisal. In this sense, a theory of practice is "an on-going, living, working theory" (Chambers, 1992, p. 13) involving 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. Such an awareness has been variously referred to as the teacher's *conception of practice* (Freeman, 1996), *sense of plausibility* (Prabhu, 1990), or *beliefs and assumptions* (Woods, 1996). Hargreaves (1994) has called it *the ethic of practicality*—a phrase he uses to refer to the teacher's

powerful sense of what works and what doesn't; of which changes will go and which will not—not in the abstract, or even as a general rule, but for *this* teacher in *this* context. In this simple yet deeply influential sense of practicality among teachers is the distillation of complex and potent combinations of purpose, person, politics and workplace constraints. (p. 12)

Nearly a quarter century ago, van Manen (1977) called this awareness simply *sense making*.

Teachers' sense making 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. This seemingly instinctive and idiosyncratic nature of teachers' sense making disguises the fact that it is formed and re-formed 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, a pedagogy of practicality metamorphoses into a pedagogy of possibility.

A Pedagogy of Possibility

The idea of a pedagogy of possibility is derived mainly from the works of the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire. General educationists such as Simon (1988) and Giroux (1988), and TESOL practitioners such as Auerbach (1995) and Benesch (2001), take the position that pedagogy, any pedagogy, is implicated in relations of power and dominance, and is implemented to create and sustain social inequalities. Acknowledging and highlighting students' and teachers' subject positions—that is, their class, race, gender, and ethnicity—these authors encourage students and teachers to question the status quo that keeps them subjugated. They advocate a pedagogy of possibility that empowers participants and point



to “the need to develop theories, forms of knowledge, and social practices that *work with* the experiences that people bring to the pedagogical setting” (Giroux, 1988, p. 134).

The experiences participants bring to the pedagogical setting are shaped not just by the learning/teaching episodes they have encountered in the past but also by the broader social, economic, and political environment in which they have grown up. These experiences have the potential to alter pedagogic practices in ways unintended and unexpected by policy planners, curriculum designers, or textbook producers. For instance, Canagarajah (1999) reports how Tamil students of English in civil war-torn Sri Lanka offered resistance to Western representations of English language and culture and how they, motivated by their own cultural and historical backgrounds, appropriated the language and used it on their own terms according to their own aspirations, needs, and values. He reports how the Tamil students, through marginal comments and graphics, actually reframed, reinterpreted, and rewrote the content of their ESL textbooks, written and produced by Anglo-American authors. The students’ resistance, Canagarajah concludes, suggests “the strategic ways by which discourses may be negotiated, intimating the resilient ability of human subjects to creatively fashion a voice for themselves from amidst the deafening channels of domination” (p. 197).

Similarly, analyzing L2 classroom data in terms of the ideology and structures of apartheid South Africa, Chick (1996) found that classroom talk represented “styles consistent with norms of interaction which teachers and students constituted as a means of avoiding the oppressive and demeaning constraints of apartheid educational systems” (p. 37). Unpublished reports from Palestine (Lamice Abdulla, personal communication, October 19, 1999) indicate how the teaching of English in the secondary schools of the West Bank and Gaza during the *intifada* movement conditioned and constrained classroom events. Although the Sri Lankan, South African, and Palestinian cases may be considered by some as extreme examples of classroom life imitating the sociopolitical turmoil outside the class, there are numerous instances when race, gender, class, and other variables directly or indirectly influence the content and character of classroom input and interaction (see Benesch, 2001).

In the process of sensitizing itself to the prevailing sociopolitical reality, a pedagogy 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 Weedon (1987) 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” (p. 21). This is even more applicable to L2 education, which brings languages and cultures in contact. That this contact results in identity conflicts has been convincingly brought out by Norton’s (2000) study of immigrant women in Canada. “The historically and socially constructed identity of learners,” Norton observes, “influences the subject position they take up in the language classroom and the relationship they establish with the language teacher” (p. 142). In a sense, the classroom behavior of the Sri Lankan, South African, and Palestinian students mentioned earlier is an unmistakable manifestation of their struggle to preserve and protect their individual and collective identity.

What follows from the above discussion is that language teachers can ill afford to ignore the sociocultural reality that influences identity formation in the classroom, nor can they afford to separate the linguistic needs of learners from their social needs. In other words, language teachers cannot hope to fully satisfy their pedagogic obligations without at the same time satisfying their social obligations. They will be able to reconcile these seemingly competing forces if they “achieve a deepening awareness both of the sociocultural reality that shapes their lives and of their capacity to transform that reality” (van Manen, 1977, p. 222). Such a deepening awareness has a built-in quality that transforms the life of the person who adopts it. Studies by Clandinin, Davies, Hogan, and Kennard (1993) attest to this self-transforming phenomenon:

As we worked together we talked about ways of seeing new possibility in our practices as teachers, as teacher educators, and with children in our classroom. As we saw possibilities in our professional lives we also came to see new possibilities in our personal lives. (p. 209)

Summary

In 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. As a pedagogy of particularity, postmethod pedagogy rejects the advocacy of a predetermined set of generic principles and procedures aimed at realizing a predetermined set of generic aims and objectives. Instead, it 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. As a pedagogy of practicality, postmethod pedagogy rejects the artificial dichotomy between theorists who have been assigned the role of producers of knowledge and teachers who have been assigned the role of consumers of knowledge. Instead, it seeks to rupture



such a reified role relationship by enabling and encouraging teachers to theorize from their practice and practice what they theorize. As a pedagogy of possibility, postmethod pedagogy rejects the narrow view of language education that confines itself to the linguistic functional elements that obtain inside the classroom. Instead, it seeks to branch out 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. The boundaries of the particular, the practical, and the possible are inevitably blurred. They interweave and interact with each other in a synergistic relationship in which the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

If one assumes 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 a crucial question presents itself: What needs to be done in order to begin to actualize such a pedagogy? I address this and other related questions in the following section.

ACTUALIZING POSTMETHOD PEDAGOGY

The very nature of a postmethod pedagogy with its emphasis on context sensitivity demands that various participants actualize it variously to suit various necessities. Indeed, trying to fabricate a monolithic matrix of methods for the purpose of actualizing a postmethod pedagogy will be futile. However, it should be feasible and indeed desirable to chart a broad road map that indicates the path the actualization process might profitably take. I attempt to visualize such a road map in terms of the anticipated roles of learners, teachers, and teacher educators. I focus on these three groups of fellow travelers not merely because they embark upon a common journey toward a common destination, but also because postmethod pedagogy demands a re-visioning of their roles as postmethod practitioners.

The Postmethod Learner

The postmethod learner is an autonomous learner. The literature on learner autonomy has so far provided two interrelated aspects of autonomy: academic autonomy and social autonomy. Academic autonomy is related to learning. Learning becomes autonomous when learners are willing and able to take charge of their own learning (Holec, 1988). Taking charge has mostly meant teachers giving learners a set of

cognitive, metacognitive, and affective techniques that they can use for successful learning. Research on this aspect of learner autonomy has produced taxonomies of learning strategies (e.g., Oxford, 1990) and learning styles (e.g., Reid, 1998) as well as user-friendly manuals (e.g., Chamot, Bernhard, El-Dinary, & Robbins, 1999). They have been found useful in making learners more active participants in their language learning while at the same time making teachers more sensitive to learner diversity and learning difficulties. Efforts have also been made to plan and implement learner training for language learners and teachers (Ellis & Sinclair, 1989; Scharle & Szabo, 2000; Wenden, 1991).

The wealth of information now available on learning strategies and styles opens up opportunities for learners to monitor their learning process and maximize their learning potential. With the help of their teachers and their peers, postmethod learners can exploit some of these opportunities with a view to

- identifying their learning strategies and styles by administering, or having administered, select portions of strategy inventories and style surveys, and by writing their own language learning histories
- stretching their strategies and styles by incorporating some of those employed by successful language learners (For example, if some learners are global in their learning style, they might have to develop strategies that are associated with the analytic learning style, such as breaking down words and sentences in order to find meaning.)
- evaluating their ongoing learning outcomes by monitoring language learning progress through personal journal writings in addition to taking regular class tests and other standardized tests
- reaching out for opportunities for additional language reception or production beyond what they get in the classroom, for example, through library resources and learning centers

Unlike academic autonomy, which is mostly intrapersonal, social autonomy is interpersonal and is related to learners' ability and willingness to function effectively as cooperative members of a classroom community. It refers to "the fact that among the strategies and activities associated with increasing metacognitive awareness and learning management skills are some that involve interaction with others" (Broady & Kenning, 1996, p. 16). Learners can attempt to develop their social autonomy by, for instance,

- seeking their teachers' intervention to get adequate feedback on areas of difficulty and to solve problems. Learners do this through dialogues and conversations in and outside the class.
- collaborating with other learners to pool information on a specific project they are working on. Learners do this by forming small



groups, dividing the responsibilities of consulting reference materials (e.g., dictionaries and encyclopedias) to collect information, and sharing it with the group.

- taking advantage of opportunities to communicate with competent speakers of the language. Learners can achieve this by participating in social and cultural events, and engaging in conversations with other participants.

These activities contribute to at least two noteworthy skills: Learners gain a sense of responsibility for aiding their own learning and that of their peers, and they develop a degree of sensitivity and understanding toward other learners who may be more or less competent than they themselves are.

Although academic autonomy and social autonomy undoubtedly offer useful pathways for learners to realize their learning potential, a third aspect of learner autonomy is necessary to capture the essence of the postmethod learner: liberatory autonomy. If academic autonomy enables learners to be effective learners, and social autonomy encourages them to be collaborative partners, liberatory autonomy empowers them to be critical thinkers. Thus, liberatory autonomy goes much further than the other two aspects of learner autonomy by actively seeking to help learners recognize sociopolitical impediments to realization of their full human potential and by providing them with the intellectual tools necessary to overcome those impediments. The sociopolitical impediments may sometimes take the form of overt political oppression, as experienced and expressed by the Sri Lankan, South African, and Palestinian students referred to earlier, or take subtle forms of discrimination based on race or religion, class or color, gender or sexual orientation.

More than any other educational enterprise, language pedagogy in which almost any topic potentially constitutes the content of classroom activity offers ample opportunities for experimenting with liberatory autonomy. Teachers can promote meaningful liberatory autonomy in the language classroom by

- encouraging learners to assume, with the help of their teachers, the role of miniethnographers so that they can investigate and understand how language rules and language use are socially structured, and also explore whose interests these rules serve
- asking learners to write diaries or journal entries about issues that directly engage their sense of who they are and how they relate to the social world, and continually reflect on their observations and the observations of their peers



- helping them form learning communities where learners develop into unified, socially cohesive, mutually supportive groups seeking self-awareness and self-improvement
- providing opportunities for learners to explore the unlimited possibilities offered by on-line services on the World Wide Web and bringing back to the class their own topics for discussion and their own perspectives on those topics

The suggestions sketched above, and several others that are implicit in the professional literature, can easily be modified and made more relevant to suit the instructional aims/activities and institutional constraints/resources of various learning/teaching contexts. They may be treated as foundations for promoting a full range of academic, social, and liberatory autonomy for the benefit of the learner. Taken together, these three aspects of autonomy promise the development of the overall academic ability, intellectual competence, social consciousness, and mental attitude necessary for learners to avail themselves of opportunities and overcome challenges both in and outside the classroom. Clearly, learners working alone cannot attain such a far-reaching goal; they need the willing cooperation of all others who directly or indirectly shape their educational endeavor, particularly that of their teachers. Autonomous learners deserve autonomous teachers.

The Postmethod Teacher

The postmethod teacher, like the postmethod learner, is an autonomous individual. Teacher autonomy in this context entails a reasonable degree of competence and confidence on the part of teachers to want to build and implement their own theory of practice that is responsive to the particularities of their educational contexts and receptive to the possibilities of their sociopolitical conditions. Such competence and confidence can evolve only if teachers have the desire and the determination to acquire and assert a fair degree of autonomy in pedagogic decision making. Teacher autonomy is so central that it can be seen as defining the heart of postmethod pedagogy.

Teacher autonomy is shaped by a professional and personal knowledge base that has evolved through formal and informal channels of educational experience. In the field of L2 education, most teachers enter into the realm of professional knowledge by and large through a “methods” package. That is, they learn that the supposedly objective knowledge of language learning and teaching has been inextricably linked to a particular method, which, in turn, is linked to a particular school of thought in psychology, linguistics, and other related disci-



plines. When they begin to teach, however, they quickly recognize the need to break away from such a constraining concept of method. In order to do that, they have to rely increasingly on their personal knowledge of learning and teaching. Personal knowledge “does not simply entail behavioral knowledge of how to do particular things in the classroom; it involves a cognitive dimension that links thought with activity, centering on the context-embedded, interpretive process of knowing what to do” (Freeman, 1996, p. 99). It does not develop instantly before one’s peering eyes, as a film develops in an instant camera. It evolves over time, through determined effort. Under these circumstances, it is evident that teachers can become autonomous only to the extent they are willing and able to embark on a continual process of self-development.

There has recently been a systematic effort to investigate the complex process of teacher knowledge during and after formal teacher education. It is a sign of the times that the TESOL profession has benefited from the publication in the course of a single calendar year of five useful volumes on issues related to teacher knowledge. In a significant contribution, Woods (1996) explores how teachers interpret and evaluate the events, activities, and interactions that occur in the teaching process, and how these interpretations and evaluations feed back into teachers’ subsequent planning, thereby enriching their teaching performance and enhancing their intellectual competence. Whereas the volume edited by Freeman and Richards (1996) unfolds the thinking and learning processes teachers employ as they learn to teach, the one edited by Bailey and Nunan (1996) brings out the teachers’ voices, which have been rarely articulated or heard before. In another edited volume, Nunan and Lamb (1996) attempt to help teachers become self-directed individuals in order to take effective control of the teaching and learning processes in their classrooms. Finally, van Lier (1996) offers a framework for pedagogical interaction in terms of teachers’ awareness, autonomy, and authenticity.

Although it is highly satisfying to see this robust beginning to the effort to understand teachers’ articulated encounters with certain aspects of particularity and practicality, teachers must be encouraged and empowered to embrace aspects of possibility as well. Otherwise, teacher self-development will remain sociopolitically naive. Such naiveté commonly occurs, as Hargreaves (1994) wisely warns,

when teachers are encouraged to reflect on their personal biographies without also connecting them to broader histories of which they are a part; or when they are asked to reflect on their personal images of teaching and learning without also theorizing the conditions which gave rise to those images and the consequences which follow from them. (p. 74)



He goes on to argue, quite rightly, that when divorced from its surrounding social and political contexts, teachers' personal knowledge can quickly turn into "parochial knowledge" (p. 74).

In light of the above discussion, it is reasonable to ask questions such as these: How do postmethod teachers pursue professional development involving the triple pedagogic parameters of particularity, practicality, and possibility? How do they theorize from practice and practice what they theorize? One possible answer is that they do so through teacher research. Teacher research is initiated and implemented by practicing teachers motivated mainly by their own desire to self-explore and self-improve.

Contrary to a common misconception, doing teacher research does not necessarily involve highly sophisticated, statistically laden, variable-controlled experimental studies, for which practicing teachers have neither the time nor the energy. Rather, it involves keeping one's eyes, ears, and mind open in the classroom to see what works and what does not, with what group(s) of learners, and for what reason, and assessing what changes are necessary to make instruction achieve its desired goals. Teachers can conduct teacher research by developing and using investigative capabilities derived from the practices of exploratory research (Allwright, 1993), teacher research cycle (Freeman, 1998), and critical classroom observation (Kumaravadivelu, 1999a, 1999b). More specifically, teachers can begin their inquiry by

- using investigative methods such as questionnaires, surveys, and interviews to gather learner profiles that include information about learning strategies and styles, personal identities and investments, psychological attitudes and anxieties, and sociopolitical concerns and conflicts
- identifying researchable questions that emerge from learner profiles and classroom observation—questions of interest to learners, teachers, or both that range from classroom management to pedagogic pointers to sociopolitical problems
- clustering the identified researchable questions in terms of themes and patterns, and deciding which ones can be explored individually and which ones collectively with learners, peers, or both
- exploring which of the resources learners bring with them can be profitably exploited for learning, teaching, and research purposes, including learners' sociocultural and linguistic knowledge (e.g., exploring how often and under what conditions the much-ignored and much-neglected common L1 can be used as an effective means of learning and teaching even though the mandated methods and materials might proscribe its use)



- finding out to what extent, in carrying out their investigative activities, they can engage in an electronic, Internet-based dialogue with local and distant peers and scholars who may have similar concerns and get useful feedback on their problems and projects
- developing interpretive strategies to observe, analyze, and evaluate their own teaching acts by using a suitable classroom observation framework that is based on a recognition of the potential mismatch between teacher intention and learner interpretation
- determining what basic assumptions about language, learning, and teaching are implied in their original pedagogic formulations, what existing assumptions need to be modified in light of research findings, and what changes in pedagogic formulations are warranted by such modifications

As these suggestions imply, the goal of teacher research and teacher autonomy is “not the easy reproduction of any ready-made package of knowledge but, rather, the continued recreation of personal meaning” (Diamond, 1993, p. 59). Teachers create and re-create personal meaning when they exploit and extend their intuitively held pedagogic beliefs based on their educational histories and personal biographies by conducting more structured and more goal-oriented teacher research based on the parameters of particularity, practicality, and possibility. Most such teacher research is doable if, as far as possible, it is not separate from but is fully integrated with day-to-day teaching and learning. As Allwright (1993) convincingly argues, language teachers and learners are in a privileged position to use class time for investigative purposes as long as the activities are done through the medium of the target language being taught and learned.

The exploratory activities listed above are no more than a general road map to help teachers pursue self-autonomy and self-development. What specific route they have to follow, what treacherous curves they have to negotiate, what institutional speed bumps they have to surmount, and what unexpected detours they have to take will all depend on the “road conditions” they encounter in their day-to-day teaching. But their journey will undoubtedly become less onerous and more joyous if teacher educators can pave the way by laying a strong and stable foundation through their teacher education programs.

The Postmethod Teacher Educator

As is well known by now, most models of teacher education are designed to transmit a set of preselected and presequenced body of knowledge from the teacher educator to the prospective teacher. In this



essentially top-down approach, teacher educators perceive their role to be one of engineering the classroom teaching of student teachers, offering them suggestions on the best way to teach, modeling appropriate teaching behaviors for them, and evaluating their mastery of discrete pedagogic behaviors. Such a transmission model of teacher education is hopelessly inadequate to produce self-directing and self-determining teachers who constitute the backbone of any postmethod pedagogy.

What is needed, then, is a fundamental restructuring of teacher education so that it focuses as much on the *teacher* part of teacher education as on the *education* part of it. One way to accomplish this restructuring is to recognize that prospective teachers embarking on formal teacher education programs bring with them their notion of what constitutes good teaching and what does not, largely based on their prior educational experience as learners and, in some cases, as teachers. Their minds are anything but atheoretical clean slates. It is therefore important to recognize their voices and their visions.

Recognizing prospective teachers' voices and visions means legitimizing their knowledge and experience and incorporating them as an important part of the dialogue between teacher educators and prospective teachers. In other words, the interaction between the teacher educator and the prospective teacher should become dialogic in the Bakhtinian sense (Kumaravadivelu & Bean, 1995). Dialogic discourse facilitates an interaction between meanings, between belief systems, an interaction that produces what Bakhtin (1981) calls *a responsive understanding*. In such a dialogic enterprise, the primary responsibility of the teacher educator is not to provide the teacher with a borrowed voice, however enlightened it may be, but to provide opportunities for the dialogic construction of meaning out of which an identity or voice may emerge. Teacher education must therefore be conceived of not as the experience and interpretation of a predetermined, prescribed pedagogic practice but rather as an ongoing, dialogically constructed entity involving two or more critically reflective interlocutors. When, through a series of dialogic interactions, channels of communication between teacher educators and prospective teachers open up, when prospective teachers actively and freely use the linguistic, cultural, and pedagogic capital they bring with them, and when teacher educators use the student teacher's values, beliefs, and knowledge as an integral part of the learning process, then the entire process of teacher education becomes reflective and rewarding.

A postmethod teacher education program must take into account the importance of recognizing teachers' voices and visions, the imperatives of developing their critical capabilities, and the prudence of achieving both of these through a dialogic construction of meaning. In practical terms, the role of the postmethod teacher educator becomes one of

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- recognizing, and helping student teachers recognize, the inequalities built into the current teacher education programs that treat teacher educators as producers of knowledge and practicing teachers as consumers of knowledge
 - enabling prospective teachers to articulate their voices and visions in an electronic journal in which they record and share with other student teachers in class their evolving personal beliefs, assumptions, and knowledge about language learning and teaching at the beginning, during, and at the end of certain courses in their teacher education program
 - encouraging prospective teachers to think critically so that they may relate their personal knowledge to the professional knowledge they are being exposed to, monitor how each shapes and is shaped by the other, assess how the generic professional knowledge could be modified to suit particular pedagogic needs and wants, and ultimately derive their own personal theory of practice
 - creating conditions for prospective teachers to acquire basic skills in classroom discourse analysis that will help them hypothesize pedagogic principles from their classroom practice and thereby demystify the process of theory construction
 - rechanneling part of their own research agenda to do what Cameron, Frazer, Harvey, Rampton, and Richardson (1993) call *empowering research*, that is, research *with* rather than *on* their teacher learners
 - exposing prospective teachers to a pedagogy of possibility by helping them critically engage authors such as Phillipson (1992), Pennycook (1994), Tollefson (1995), and Canagarajah (1999), who have raised the field's consciousness about the power and politics, ideologies, and inequalities that inform L2 education around the world
 - whenever and wherever chances arise, connecting the generic professional knowledge base available in the professional literature directly and explicitly to the particularities of learning/teaching contexts that prospective teachers are familiar with or the ones in which they plan to work after graduation, thereby pointing out both the strengths and the weaknesses of the professional knowledge base

These suggestions portend that current teacher education programs, if they are to produce self-directing and self-determining teachers, require a fundamental restructuring that transforms an information-oriented system into an inquiry-oriented one. Underlying the concept of academic inquiry is pedagogic exploration.



Postmethod Practitioners as Pedagogic Explorers

Pedagogic exploration is an integral part of postmethod pedagogy. Contrary to the commonly held view that research belongs to the domain of the researcher, postmethod pedagogy considers research as belonging to the multiple domains of learners, teachers, and teacher educators alike. These participants, engaged in the joint accomplishment of learning/teaching operations, ought to be engaged in pedagogic exploration either individually or collaboratively.

Such a formulation of pedagogic exploration opens up concerns about objectivity and generalizability. Objectivity relates to the concern that pedagogic explorers may not have adequate research skills and that therefore their research projects may not turn out to be reliable, valid, or generalizable. As Burton (1988) rightly points out, “the most carefully designed experiment reflects the bias and values of the experimenter. *Someone* had to decide what questions to include and exclude on a survey or what variable to isolate and attend to during an experimental study” (p. 766). Research in social sciences and humanities can hardly be absolutely objective. In fact, philosophers of science such as Feyerabend (1975) would argue that there is no absolute objectivity even in scientific research.

The question of generalizability becomes problematic only if it is approached in its traditional sense of a centralized pedagogic project having implications for a wider sphere of pedagogic activity. As a reviewer of this article pointed out, it is even inappropriate to talk about generalizability in the context of a postmethod pedagogy. Instead, the reviewer suggested the term *particularizability* because, in a postmethod pedagogy, any exploration is by definition context specific and has the capacity, if carried out properly, to produce situated scenarios that are ever-changing and ever-evolving. Besides, as Allwright (1993) maintains, a project that concentrates on locally important research questions can produce individual understandings, and there is “no reason in principle why individual understandings should be incapable of being brought together towards some sort of overall synthesis” (p. 127).

The difficult task facing pedagogic explorers is how to get ready for the kind of research they would like to engage in. All pedagogic explorers, like all informed and inquisitive human beings, do research in a casual way—observing what they do, reflecting on why they do what they do, monitoring its intended and unintended effects, and then modifying their behavior in light of lessons learned. This informal research ability has to be made into a more systematic and sustained activity. Evidently, pedagogic researchers can achieve this in at least two ways: by developing, either through a formal teacher education program



or through self-study, the knowledge and skill necessary to do teacher research in general (see Freeman, 1998) and classroom discourse analysis in particular (see van Lier 1996; Kumaravadivelu, 1999b); and by collaborating with senior and more experienced colleagues and learning the required skills on the job (see Nunan, 1992).

A postmethod pedagogy, like any other innovative practice, imposes an extraordinary degree of responsibility on all the participants, particularly the teacher and the teacher educator. Problematizing such a pedagogy will identify some broad concerns that may arise.

PROBLEMATIZING POSTMETHOD PEDAGOGY

In any educational reform, teachers and teacher educators constitute pivotal change agents. As Kennedy (1999) observes, when teachers wish to change, they have to change not only their methods and materials but also their attitudes and beliefs. Teacher educators function as external change agents whose job is not so much to change the teachers directly but to create the conditions necessary for change. The challenge of change, therefore, is chiefly borne by teachers and teacher educators. According to Diamond (1993), the primary challenge for teachers “is to form and reform their own pedagogical theories and relationships” (p. 42), and the primary challenge for teacher educators “is to help teachers to see themselves capable of imagining and trying alternatives—and eventually as self-directing and self-determining” (p. 52). The essentials of a postmethod pedagogy demand that both teachers and teacher educators successfully meet their primary challenges.

Such a demand raises several questions and concerns, some of which I list below. These questions, and others that perceptive readers may come up with, are indicative of the problematic nature of any pedagogic innovation, more so of one that has the potential, if taken seriously and tried sincerely, to transform the content and character of everyday practice of teaching.

- If a meaningful postmethod pedagogy requires a holistic interpretation of pedagogic particularities, how can appropriate interpretative strategies be identified and made available to postmethod practitioners?
- If pedagogic particularity is at once a goal and a process, in what ways can postmethod practitioners be helped to monitor what they do in the classroom and how it affects learning outcomes?
- If context-sensitive pedagogic knowledge has to emerge from teachers and their practice of everyday teaching, and if they have to be



provided with the tools necessary to construct such knowledge, what exactly are the characteristics of such tools?

- If postmethod practitioners have to learn to cope with competing pulls and pressures representing their professional preparation, their personal beliefs, institutional constraints, learner needs and wants, and so on, how can appropriate coping strategies be identified and made available to them?
- If a pedagogy of possibility is concerned with postmethod practitioners' sensitivity to the broader social, economic, and political environment in which they work, to what extent can teacher preparation programs create such a sensitivity among student teachers?
- If a pedagogy of possibility is also concerned with the individual and group identity of learners in the classroom, what concrete steps can postmethod practitioners take to maintain such identity and at the same time promote the group coherence that is so vital for the accomplishment of pedagogic purposes?
- If postmethod learners have to be autonomous in the academic, social, and liberatory sense, how can they be helped to maximize, monitor, and manage their autonomy for the individual as well as the collective good?
- If a postmethod pedagogy requires that teachers be given a fair amount of freedom and flexibility to make their own pedagogic decisions, what specific demands does such a requirement make on individuals and institutions, and what can be done to help these individuals and institutions meet the challenge of change?
- If teacher research has to extend its domain to include sociopolitical factors that shape classroom aims and activities, what potential theoretical and practical problems are associated with such a research agenda?
- If postmethod learners, teachers, and teacher educators all have active roles to play in the implementation of a postmethod pedagogy, in what ways can these participants collaborate, and how can their differential and possibly conflicting goals be reconciled for the benefit of all?
- If postmethod pedagogy requires meaningful collaboration and cooperation among learners, teachers, and teacher educators, how can L2 professionals identify gaps and biases in their beliefs and assumptions, and in their intentions and interpretations, and how do we reduce those gaps and biases once they are identified?

Clearly, these questions defy simple answers. In fact, answers to questions like these will vary from context to context and from time to time. In that sense, a postmethod pedagogy will always remain a work in progress.



CONCLUSION AS INTRODUCTION

A work in progress hardly facilitates a conclusion. Hence, following the true spirit of an open-ended inquiry presented here, I leave the reader with more food for thought.

The greatest challenge the emerging postmethod pedagogy imposes on the professional community today is to rethink and recast its choice of the organizing principle for language learning, teaching, and teacher education. The concept of method has long been the preferred choice. We as L2 professionals have operated all along with the basic assumption that that path is the only one open to us. We have tinkered with the concept of method now and then but have never given up on the concept itself. It has had a magical hold on us. It has guided the form and function of every conceivable component of L2 pedagogy, including curriculum design, syllabus specifications, materials preparation, instructional strategies, and testing techniques. That a rickety pedagogic pedestal constructed on the shifting sands of the concept of method has stood solidly for such a long time is a reflection more of its magic than of its merit.

In the search for an alternative organizing principle, the pedagogic parameters of particularity, practicality, and possibility deserve serious consideration. I believe that these parameters have the potential to offer the necessary conceptualization and contextualization based on the educational, cultural, social, and political imperatives of language learning, teaching, and teacher education. In addition, they offer a pattern that connects the roles of learners, teachers, and teacher educators, promising a relationship that is symbiotic and a result that is synergistic. The choice of the pedagogic parameters as an organizing principle opens up unlimited opportunities for the emergence of postmethod pedagogies that can truly serve the interests of those they are supposed to serve.

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