

Where do we go from here?

— Recent Trends in Foreign Language Teaching and Professional Development —

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1. Introduction

As foreign language teachers, we are aware of the need for professional development and, by implication, the need to improve our teaching approaches as well as our understanding of both the language learning process and language learners themselves. The hope is that such development will help create a language-learning classroom that is more conducive to language acquisition, and ultimately achieve what Willis and Willis (2009:3) believe to be “the aim of language teaching worldwide”, that is “to enable learners to use the language they have learned in school or college to communicate confidently and effectively with other users of English in the world outside”.

Such goals sound fine in principle, but it is less clear how one might achieve such professional development and become more effective language teachers. Tsui (2007:1053) identifies several stages in the process of teachers’ professional development. If we manage to successfully negotiate the “survival” stage at the beginning of our teaching careers we then enter a period of “stabilization”.

This phase is marked by a move away from concerns about self to concerns about instruction and the impact of their instructions on students. In other words, teachers’ focus changes from self to students. Instead of asking questions about how well they are doing, they ask questions about how well the students are doing. Instead of putting the blame on themselves for a lesson that did not go well, they think about what are the possible factors which have contributed to the problematic lesson.

At this stage, then, teachers are striving to develop themselves professionally, and searching for ways to enable their students to become better language learners. There often follows a period of experimentation and innovation, when teachers enter the “renewal stage”. This stage appears to be crucial in terms of a teacher’s development, however, it is also fraught with difficulties. Even experienced teachers can become easily frustrated and disillusioned, leading to a more conservative approach marked by skepticism and a resistance to change. So, where can teachers seeking to develop professionally look for guidance if they avoid becoming frustrated and

disillusioned with their attempts to develop?

In order to see what guidance current research can give, it is important to first look back to see the advancements made in second language teaching over the last 100 years, as well as looking to second language research. This might help identify areas that will lead to a better understanding of the important issues in second language learning, and teacher development. Following that, a thorough analysis of the current research may enable us to identify methods and approaches which can help teachers avoid the pitfalls of stagnation and conservatism that can seriously hinder professional development.

2. A century of changing styles and approaches

If one is to look back over the history of language teaching, the last century has been marked by the coming and going of various trends in methods and approaches towards the teaching and learning of languages. Teachers are constantly striving to improve their teaching, and to find the most effective ways of helping learners acquire the target language. At the same time learners are also searching for ways to improve their learning skills. This search for ever better ways to teach and learn languages has often led to the adoption of new approaches and methods. Each decade or so has seen the arrival of new methodologies, with each new approach or method promising to produce superior results before being consigned to history by the next method to come along the production line. Richards and Rodgers (2001:244) describe this period as the "era of so-called designer or brand-name methods; that is, packaged solutions that can be described and marketed for use anywhere in the world." They go on to summarize the different trends in language teaching seen over the past 100 years:

The Direct Method was enthusiastically embraced in the early part of the twentieth century as an improvement over Grammar Translation. In the 1950's the Audiolingual Method was thought to provide a way forward, incorporating the latest insights from the sciences of linguistics and psychology. As the Audiolingual Method began to fade in the 1970's, particularly in the United States, a variety of guru-led methods emerged to fill the vacuum created by the discrediting of Audiolingualism, such as the Silent Way, Total Physical Response, and Suggestopedia. While these had declined substantially by the 1990's, new "breakthroughs" continue to be announced from time to time, such as Task-Based Instruction, Neurolinguistic Programming, and Multiple Intelligences, and these attract varying levels of support.

Indeed, the last 20 years have again seen a definite shift from the dominant language teaching

theory of the 1970's and 1980's, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), towards Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT). Where once the term *communicative* seemed omnipresent in the field of language teaching pedagogy, in recent times the term *task* has started to take precedence. It is not clear, however, whether TBLT can truly be called a new method or merely a new branch of CLT, with TBLT incorporating the communicative framework of CLT (Willis and Willis, 2009).

With this constant shifting and overlapping of trends and methods, as well as the claims and counterclaims associated with the various factions who support one method or another, it is difficult not to feel slightly skeptical when reading claims made by supporters of the latest method that it will solve the problems of language teaching and learning. It can also be confusing for teachers trying to adapt an approach that will be most suited to their own teaching situation. For every piece of research suggesting the efficacy of a certain language teaching method, there is sure to be other research highlighting its limitations. Such claims and counter-claims can be more of a hindrance than a help to the teacher trying to follow the difficult path towards professional development. This confusion about the best method to adopt, or doubt as to whether the very search for the "best" or Holy Grail of language teaching methods is one worth undertaking, has led a move away from the over-reliance on the adoption of 'new and improved' approaches or methods as the best way to facilitate language learning.

3. Criticism of over-reliance on new approaches and methods

Reliance on the use of novel methods or approaches to improve the way languages are taught and learnt has been criticized in recent years for a variety of reasons. One of the principal criticisms is the fact that many of the methods are not in fact based on second language research. An example is Skehan's (1996:18) rejection of the present-practice-produce (P-P-P) lesson model on the basis that research conducted in the fields of linguistics and psychology has shown that concentrating on a particular form does not lead to learning and automatization, and as such is contrary to the principles underpinning the P-P-P theory. The fact that the adoption of particular methods has been seen as an all-purpose solution to all problems in all settings, has also been criticized for not taking into account contextual factors which should form the basis of language program design (Richards and Rodgers 2001:248). As English language teaching has become a global industry, commercial factors play an increasingly important role in the development of new teaching models and approaches. In an attempt to appeal to the largest possible global market, local cultural factors are often ignored. At times it seems that supposed advances in methods are being merchandised in a way akin to the marketing of detergent, each claiming to offer better and

better results, with limited research to back up the often grandiose claims.

Swaffter, Arens and Morgan (1982:249) in their historical overview to their study of the way teachers actually adopt different methods in the classroom have also cast doubt on whether teachers using materials created for a particular method faithfully reflect the philosophies underpinning these methods in practice:

Comparisons of particular methodological sequences have not demonstrated clear, lasting superiority in terms of student performance ... Our assumption was that student performance in any classroom regardless of materials and methodology, would reflect actual teacher practice.

This problem has been highlighted by studies into the classroom practices of teachers who believed there were using CLT in their lessons. Several studies found that the lessons were often not, in practice, communicative (Kumaravadivelu,1993), and were in fact more focused on function than form (Nunan, 1987). In his state-of-the-art essay, Kumaravadivelu (2006a) also drew attention to the body of research, especially in Asia, that points to difficulties faced by both teachers and learners when trying to implement a CLT approach. Dornyei (2009:272) illustrates the inherent problems associated with trying to adopt global methods in an extremely wide variety of teaching situations:

The teaching of foreign languages is a massive worldwide enterprise with a great deal of diversity. Countries, regions, school types, and target languages display immense variation in the actual process of what goes on in the language classroom, and in the light of this heterogeneity it is questionable whether we can talk about any uniform trends, approaches, or methods to characterize the teaching practice of certain periods. ... This indicates that even when the majority of the teaching profession accepts, in theory, the importance of a methodological development, it may be little more than mere lip-service in view of the actual practice on the ground.

Such problems can be further exacerbated when teachers are encouraged to adopt a particular language teaching method into their own classroom situation. This can often be a frustrating experience, producing the feeling that methods have been imposed on them, without due attention paid to individual learning contexts.

Any attempt to improve the way languages are taught and acquired must, therefore, take into account the criticisms levelled at the way new approaches and methods have been accepted and adopted as the most effective means of improving language teaching and learning. It also appears

to be the case that attempts to employ a universally approved method to all teaching situations around the world are fraught with danger. Research clearly suggests that no such “perfect” method exists, and such methods may have been championed more out of a desire for increased international book sales, rather than being based on research findings.

4. The “post methods” era

So where do we go from here? If we have entered what Richards and Rodgers (2001) term the “post methods era”, and Kumaravadivelu (2003) terms the “postmethod condition”, following the recent “requiem for methods” (Brown, 2002:17), what direction can the research give us as we look for the most effective means of teaching or learning a second or foreign language, and what guidance can research provide for professional development? This is clearly a period of some confusion, as highlighted by Grundy (1999) in his complaint that after 30 years as a qualified teacher he still feels confused as to what to do, or more accurately, why he is doing certain things.

To a certain extent, this confusion seems to stem from second language research, and the subsequent focus on learners' cognitive processes rather the language system, in light of findings that suggested that teaching has a limited effect on what is acquired by the learners (Breen, 1987). It seems that with the current confusion surrounding methods and approaches, and the findings that teaching does not directly lead to learning, we need to look more closely at the conditions that make learning possible, and how, as teachers, we can try and create the best possible environment for learning. Any attempt at professional development must look beyond the mere adoption of the latest approach, and look more deeply at the acquisition process, and what actually takes place when languages are being taught and learnt. Underhill (1992:71) regards the development of self-awareness as key to teacher development, and key to enabling teachers to teach in a way that is “more significant, more worthwhile, more effective, more personally engaging, and more rewarding for both teachers and learners.” This seems to be the aim of most teachers, and Underhill (1992:72) goes on to highlight the way in which practical teacher development can take place:

The kind of change we are concerned with in developing ourselves as teachers concerns people in the process of change and not only changes of organizational or curriculum procedures. Teacher development is no different from personal development, and as such can only be self-initiated, self-directed, and self-evaluated. No one else can do it for us, though other people can be indispensable in helping us do it. Any attempt by me to develop my practice has a number of prerequisites. The first is that I frame my questions in such a way that I open up to

change, rather than close down into my status quo. A second is the growth of a more accurate awareness of what I am doing at the moment and how that affects my learners, my colleagues, and others. A third is an awareness of my learners, and the environment we work in. A fourth is to work on concrete ways of initiating these changes.

This seems to signal a shift from looking without, to the globally endorsed and internationally accepted method of the day, to looking within, paying more attention to our learners' needs, and our contextual settings. This mirrors findings in research into the differences between expert teachers and novice teachers. (Tsui, 2003:29-30):

[E]xpert teachers are much more flexible in planning; they are much more responsive to contextual cues, and much more ready to make changes to their plans accordingly. In other words, it is the way teachers relate to their specific context of work that differentiate the expert from the novice. For expert teachers, the context is very much an integral part of their teaching act, whereas for novice teachers, context is very often taken as something external and ignored.

With this in mind, post-method pedagogy aims on allowing teachers a greater degree of autonomy, freeing teachers from the constraints imposed by strict adherence to method. Kumaravadivelu (2006b), in his detailed examination of the post method era, emphasizes this increased teacher autonomy, envisaging a bottom-up rather top-down approach to foreign language teaching. Kumaravadivelu (2003) provides a framework of macrostrategies or guideline that will help shape teachers own microstrategies based on their particular teaching context. The macrostrategies suggested by Kumaravadivelu are:

- (a) maximize learning opportunities, (b) facilitate negotiated interaction,
- (c) minimize perceptual mismatches, (d) activate intuitive heuristics,
- (e) foster language awareness, (f) contextualize linguistic input,
- (g) integrate language skills, (h) promote learner autonomy,
- (i) ensure social relevance, and (j) raise cultural consciousness.

By devising their own microstrategies based on these macrostrategies, and by critically monitoring their own teaching acts, Kumaravadivelu claims it should be possible to maximize learning potential in the classroom and lead to more relevant teaching practice. Block and Cameroon (2002a:10) also feel that this increased flexibility and autonomy leaves teachers free to make "local assessments of students' strategies for learning rather than by global directives from

remote authorities”.

While some have found the post-method era to be a time of confusion, those who favor moving away from method-based pedagogies argue that it should be seen as liberating. Emphasis is placed on teachers making judgments based on their expertise in their own localized context, and making assessments of students’ needs based on their own experience, rather than the research-based expertise of others. Recognizing the importance of both learners and teachers individual differences in the teaching process is an important element of the post-method pedagogy (Brown, 2002).

This greater freedom and autonomy does not mean, however, that the postmethod condition should be seen as a “laissez-faire approach” (Kumaravadivelu, 2006). With this greater autonomy and greater freedom, comes greater responsibility. If it is the teacher who is at the center of the decision-making process regarding what is going to be taught and how it is going to be taught, then the teacher needs to have greater awareness of the context in which they are teaching, the needs of the students, and to work out strategies that will help students meet those needs.

In order to develop as teachers, then, we need to develop a greater understanding of the localized context and what is going on within the classroom, as well as a greater understanding of how our approach to teaching affects the way our students learn, or feel about the learning process. This being the case, real benefit may be had from conducting small-scale research projects in order to help raise our awareness of what is going on in the classroom. Such projects, and being open to the findings of these projects, can lead to a challenging of the status quo that may be preventing us as teachers from gaining any real and meaningful insights into what is actually taking place in the language classroom. The mere adoption of a new method or curriculum is not sufficient to bring about real change if we do not first consider learners’ needs, our deep-seated beliefs about teaching and learning, and how these beliefs influence our decision-making processes. This trend has resulted in research that has placed the learner at the centre of the research in an effort to gain a clearer picture of how learners view language learning and classroom instruction. It is hoped that changes can then be made that will be of real benefit to language learners by enabling teachers to create the best conditions possible for learning to take place.

5. Learner-centered research

Hilleson (1996:248), in his introduction to a study on second language anxiety, argues in favor of more research into the factors that affect language acquisition when he concludes, "the realization that teaching does not cause learning has led to a growth in the popularity of qualitative, process

orientated research into the conditions that make learning possible." Hilleson (1996) also feels that with curriculum design and pedagogy recognizing the importance of having the learner at the centre of the process, it is only right that research should also be centered on learners.

One of the problems teachers face with this new emphasis on learner-centeredness is the fact that the relationship between what the learners are learning and what the teacher is teaching is by no means clear. There seems to be a very real gap between how the teacher and the learner view the classroom and what takes place therein. In his comparison of learners' preferred classroom activities and teachers' perceptions of what the learners' preferences were, Spratt (1999) found that teachers' perceptions of learners' preferences corresponded in approximately 50% of cases with learners' actual preferences. Spratt (1999:141) feels that "the results have implications for syllabus and materials design and also for classroom practice and studies of teachers' decision-making processes." Clearly, if the gap between how teachers see language lessons, and how learners view them can be narrowed, a more learner-centered approach may be possible. Studies have also reported clear differences of opinion between learners and teachers as to the needs and preferences of learners, and the nature of language and language learning. Kumaravadivelu (1991: 106), in his study of potential sources of mismatch between learners' and teachers' perceptions of the nature, the goals, and the demands of selected language-learning tasks, regards certain mismatches as inevitable, and not always negative.

Greater research into what is actually happening in the classroom, and how the learner views the activities that take place, would seem to be necessary, especially if teachers are going to be given greater degrees of autonomy in syllabus and material design. However such research is not without its difficulties. Allwright (1999a: 11) illustrated the problems that classroom research has faced in the past, when he states that "research in the classroom has typically been highly parasitic, taking up valuable class time and offering little or nothing in return to teachers or to learners. Also "to portray teachers as unquestionably accepting the recommendations of academic researchers is to ignore the ambivalent and often contradictory nature of the relationship between teaching and research". Indeed teachers have seen research findings as having a negative impact on their teaching lives, especially when reforms of teaching methods, or course curricula are made based on academic research with seemingly scant regard the teachers themselves, or their teaching situation.

Taking these criticisms into consideration we must conclude that to be effective, research needs to involve both teachers and learners in the process, and be of benefit to both teachers and learners. In an attempt to address the problems associated with traditional approaches to research in the language classroom, Allwright (2003) proposed what he called *Exploratory Practice*, "based on a perceived need for practitioner research to be *rethought*: to be refocused on

understanding, and ultimately on a concern for the quality of life in the language classroom, for both teachers and learners.” *Exploratory Practice* seeks to provide a framework for teacher development

which proposes the integration of teaching, learning, and research in a way that is relevant to all classroom participants. The fact that teachers and learners pursue their own research agendas while conducting their normal classroom activities is a key feature in this proposal. (Pinto da Silva, 2004:171)

The main difference between *Exploratory Practice* and traditional methods of research seems to be the incorporation of research into the everyday activities of the language classroom, with both teachers and learners seeking to identify *puzzles* that they have encountered in the language classroom. Having teachers and learners identify issues they wish to research themselves, would seem to overcome certain criticisms that in the past teachers have not found research to be relevant to their own teaching context.

Allwright (2005) goes on to list the main principles of *Exploratory Practice* as follows:

- Put quality of life first
- Work primarily to understand language classroom life
- Involve everybody
- Work to bring people together
- Work for mutual development
- Integrate the work for understanding into classroom practice
- Make the work a continuous enterprise

Exploratory practice also sets out the overriding principles that:

- (a) The quality of life in the language classroom is much more important than instructional efficiency,
- (b) Ensuring our understanding of the quality of classroom life is far more essential than developing ever “improved” teaching methods, and
- (c) Understanding such a quality of life is a social, not an asocial matter.

(Allwright, 2003)

If quality of life in the language classroom is to be placed at the forefront, as the most important

aspect of the foreign language-learning classroom, there do seem to be some areas, such as motivation and anxiety, where it is important that the teacher has clear ideas as to what classroom activities are motivating or stressful for the learners. It would seem likely, for example, that any great mismatches between what the teacher regards as stressful and what the learners regard as stressful would affect language learning in a negative way. If the language classroom is to become more learner-centered, and the quality of life for those learners within the language classroom is to be improved, more research needs to be carried out to find out how learners regard different language learning activities. One area that has become increasingly important in this regard is the role affective factors play in language acquisition.

6. Research into affective factors

As a result of the growth in interest in researching the conditions that help make learning possible, and help language acquisition take place, there has been an increase in the amount of research conducted into affective factors. Anxiety among learners is such a factor: indeed Arnold and Brown (1999:8) state that “anxiety is quite possibly the affective factor that most pervasively obstructs the learning process.” This would appear to be an area of research that could open a window into the minds of learners and help teachers better understand the conditions under which language learning and acquisition can best take place. As such, the last twenty or so years has seen a growing body of research into this area (e.g. Horwitz and Young, 1991; Aida, 1994; MacIntyre and Gardner, 1989, 1991a, 1991b, 1991c; Onwuegbuzie, Bailey, & Daley, 1999) It is, however, one thing to recognize an area that can lead to a greater understanding of the way languages are learnt, and another thing to carry out research into such factors. Researchers have long battled with the idea of how to gain access to a learner’s thoughts and feelings. As Block (1996:168) points out, “the basic idea that a learner’s thoughts are far out of the reach of even the most ingenious teacher or researcher is not new in applied linguistics.” This point is also made by Hilleson (1996:250) in his study of second language anxiety, an area made even more difficult by the complex and emotional nature of the subject:

The way in which human beings learn languages is largely invisible, taking place inside the mind of the language learner, where researchers cannot follow.

The benefits that can be gained from understanding what goes on inside the minds of learners is therefore clear, and with anxiety thought to be a barrier to learning, it is also clear why such a large amount of research has been conducted into this field in recent years. Such research is also

clearly problematic; getting students to provide open and honest answers to questions about anxiety needs time and patience, and above all a group of learners who trust you enough to provide such information. The use of *Exploratory Practice*, as discussed above, may overcome some of the problems associated with classroom research, however bearing such problems in mind, is there another way of getting information about what goes on inside the classroom?

7. Teacher-related research

Although recent years have seen an increase in the amount of research that has placed the learner at the centre of the study, we have seen that there are often problems connected with such research, and in our efforts to encourage learner-centeredness in all aspects of language learning, it should not be forgotten that teachers also play an important role in the learning process. In the post-method era, with teachers having greater autonomy and greater responsibility for what goes on inside the language classroom, it would seem logical to conduct more teacher-related research, to understand how a teacher's experience and background can affect teaching practices. A greater understanding of these issues may help bring about a more flexible approach to teaching and a deeper understanding of the learning process.

Indeed Medgyres (1992: 340) expresses the view that "the road to the learner leads through the teacher and that teacher-related research should therefore be increased." The idea that teacher-related research could help open a window into the minds of learners is an appealing one. We have also seen that in order to bring about professional development it is necessary for teachers to open up to change rather than accept the status quo. This seems especially true of more experienced teachers, and thus the benefit of exposure to a wide range of views and experiences is clear. Teaching can sometimes seem quite a solitary experience, so discussing teaching issues with other teachers, preferably from a wide variety of backgrounds and with varied teaching experiences, could lead to a positive reassessment of teaching approaches. It is also interesting to investigate the impact that teaching background and learning experiences have on teaching practices. Richards and Rodgers (2001) in their discussion of differing approaches to studying teaching in the post-method era, regard a teacher's principles and beliefs as key when investigating what goes on inside the classroom:

All classroom practices reflect teachers' principles and beliefs, and different belief systems among teachers can often explain why teachers conduct their classes in different ways.

8. The effect of learning experience on teaching practice

Just as it is important to examine learners' thought processes and beliefs with regard to language learning, it is also important to recognize the importance of teachers' thought processes in affecting what takes place in the classroom. Clark and Peterson (1986) in a review of studies into teachers' thought processes, and the influence the thought processes have on teacher behavior, come to some interesting conclusions. Richards and Rodgers (2001:252) sum up some of those findings as follows:

- The most resilient or "core" teachers' beliefs are formed on the basis of the teachers' own schooling as young students while observing teachers who taught them. Subsequent teacher education appears not to disturb these early beliefs, not least, perhaps, because it rarely addresses them.
- If teachers actually try out a particular innovation that does not initially conform to their beliefs or principles and the innovation proves helpful or successful, then accommodation of an alternative belief or principle is more plausible than in any other circumstance.
- For the novice teacher, classroom experience and day-to-day interaction with colleagues has the potential; to influence particular relationships among beliefs and principles, and, over time, consolidate the individual's permutation of them. Nevertheless, it seems that greater experience does not lead to greater adaptability in our beliefs, and thereby abandonment of strongly held pedagogical principles. Quite the contrary, in fact. The more experience we have, the more reliant on our "core" principles we have become and less conscious we are doing so.
- Professional development that engages teachers in a direct explanation of their beliefs and principles may provide the opportunity for greater self-awareness through reflection and critical questioning as starting points of later adaptation.
- The teacher's conceptualizations of, for example, language, learning, and teaching are situated within the person's wider belief system concerning issues as human nature, culture, society, education and so on.

A teacher's deep-seated system of beliefs seems to have a profound affect on the approach to the teaching of foreign languages. If we are to effect real change in the classroom, and aid professional development, we must address the issue of attitudes and values seen above. The concentration on methods, approaches and techniques has been criticized, as often the way a teacher employs them may not be true to the underlying values, attitudes or awareness of those practices (Underhill,

1989:250). It would seem logical, therefore, to pay more attention to the core beliefs a teacher holds, as through this self-awareness teachers can hope to develop professionally and become more flexible in their approach to foreign language education. Ignorance of such attitudes and values, whilst paying over-attention to techniques and methods, might lead to the type of stagnation described in Tsui's analysis of the stages of teacher development above. Also, a lack of understanding of the real processes taking place inside the language classroom may severely inhibit real learning from taking place

Doing the same thing with a different awareness seems to make a bigger difference than doing different things with the same awareness. My proposal is that changing techniques while maintaining the same attitudes amounts essentially to more of the same, and that the quantum shift we search for in our ability to facilitate more effective learning lies in a shift at the level of our attitudes, our awareness, and our attention to process (Underhill 1989:260)

It would be of particular interest to research the different learning experiences of native English speaking teachers (NESTs) and non-native English speaking teachers (non-NESTs). The acronyms NEST and non-NEST are used for the purposes of identification of the two groups in Medgyres (1992) study. There is also a fuller debate surrounding the issue of NESTs and non-NESTs, as well as the use of these terms, to be found in this study. The learning backgrounds of these two groups are often very different; as the non-NESTs have studied the subject they are teaching and have achieved an advanced level of proficiency. Having spent considerable time studying English themselves and having reached a high standard of proficiency, they have developed learning strategies, and to a certain extent will have learnt to deal with feelings of anxiety and other barriers to language learning.

There is often "a gap between the way teachers and learners 'see' the classroom and all that occurs within it" (Block 1996:168). It seems likely that this gap might be greater between NESTs and their students. Not only is there a cultural gap to bridge, but also the fact that native teachers may never have studied the subject they are teaching, could pose a problem in itself. This seems to be especially pronounced when considering the issue of anxiety in the classroom, as native speakers may not be so sensitive to the stresses learners face when they are expected to carry out classroom activities in a foreign language. Anxiety and reactions to anxiety are also often colored by cultural factors, with the possibility that NESTs are less sensitive to such factors. In his discussion of the various attributes of native English speaking teachers and non-native English speaking teachers, Medgyres (1992) contends that:

Non-NESTS can teach learning strategies more effectively. Non-NESTS have adopted language

learning strategies during their own in degrees of consciousness, in theory they all know more about the employment of these strategies than native colleagues who have simply acquired the English language. Non-NESTS can be more empathetic to the needs and problems of their learners. Since they never cease to be learners of English, they encounter difficulties similar to those of their students, albeit at an obviously higher level. As a rule, this constant struggle makes non-natives more sensitive and understanding.

An important way of discovering more about learning strategies, learners' views with regard to language learning anxiety, and strategies for coping with anxiety would be to interview learners who have reached an advanced level of English through classroom study. For NESTs, perhaps one of the greatest resources available is the knowledge and experience of their non-NEST colleagues. With both NESTs and Non-NESTs often having very different language learning and teaching backgrounds, as well as often having different attitudes to language teaching, joint research into, and a closer understanding of these differences, can only be of benefit. Working to incorporate the ideas and experiences of other teachers into our own teaching approach, though as experienced teachers we may often be reluctant to do so, can help us adapt to a particular teaching context and become more aware of the needs of our students. Each teacher has their own set of skills and insights, combining the skill sets of a greater number of teachers should lead to a more flexible approach, breaking away from the trend towards conservatism that can easily mark the later years of experienced teachers. As more and more emphasis is placed upon the contextual and cultural factors that are at work inside our language classrooms, intercultural and intercontextual exchange between teachers becomes more and more important.

9. Conclusion

While the death of methods may have been greatly exaggerated, without doubt teachers will continue to use various methods and methodologies in their daily teaching, what is clear is that to develop professionally we need to look beyond the adoption of methods and approaches. We must look more deeply into other factors that can lead to a greater understanding of what is taking place inside our own classrooms, and how we can make the classroom a place in which language learning can take place. We must pay attention to what is actually taking place in the classroom, the views of both the teacher and the learners, with the quality of life in the classroom taking precedence over the form of instruction. Only once this learning environment is conducive to learning will real learning take place. Exploratory Practice would seem to be one method that can help teachers become agents of their own development, as well as enabling learners understand

how to improve their own learning strategies. We also need to study the influence that teachers' learning backgrounds have over their attitudes and beliefs. If the first step towards development is self-awareness, a clearer understanding of our decision-making processes may help to facilitate change rather than lead to a fossilization of ideas. Working with other teachers, and other groups of teachers, as well as pooling resources and experiences, may also provide a catalyst to change and self-awareness. Finally, as teachers we need to take advantage of this period of autonomy that places us at the center of teaching and development. We need to be open to change, and actively conduct our own research into how we may best help our language learners in our own particular teaching context. As Murray (2009) succinctly puts it, "at this time, more than ever, flexibility, adaptability and contextual awareness need to be emphasized in TESOL teacher education." By being flexible, adaptable to change, by thinking and acting locally, maybe a global change for the better can be achieved in foreign language education.

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Where do we go from here? —Recent Trends in Foreign Language Teaching and Professional Development—

Tim Woolstencroft

Abstract

This article examines what guidance recent research in the field of foreign language teaching can give teachers who are looking to develop themselves, and their teaching, professionally. After a brief review of the changes that have taken place in foreign and second language teaching over the last hundred years, the article looks at the criticisms that have been aimed at the adoption of new methods and approaches as the best way to make advancements in foreign language teaching. Acknowledging that there has been a recent shift away from method-based pedagogy, and that we may have entered the post-method era, the article goes on to assess what research suggests will fill the vacuum if we are no longer concentrating on method as the main focus for research. The belief that the post-method era will allow teachers greater autonomy, with learner-centered research paying more attention to the quality of life within different classroom contexts, is also examined. The article then looks at potential problems with learner-centered research and how these may be overcome. It concludes with a look at how native English speaking teachers and non-native English speaking teachers working and conducting research together, might lead to a greater understanding of the issues surrounding foreign language teaching, professional development, and the development of the foreign language teaching profession.